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Understanding the Racial Identity Development of Multiracial Young Adults Through their Family, Social, and Environment Experiences

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Understanding the Racial Identity Development of Multiracial Young Adults Through Their family, Social, and Environment Experiences

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This study explored the development of healthy racial identity in multiracial young adults. The design of the study was qualitative with a constructivist epistemology, and data were analyzed via the grounded theory methods of constant comparative analysis. The conceptual frameworks grounding the study were Symbolic Interaction theory, identity theory, and racial identity theory. The sample of 15 participants was drawn from a larger non-random purposive sample by their scoring in the "ethnic identity achieved" range on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The researcher engaged the participants in one to two hour face-to-face semi structured interviews in which she explored their lived experiences to understand their perspectives of the process of developing a healthy multiracial identity and to understand their ability to *border cross*. Border crossings are strategies used by individuals in their daily interactions with others and within the environment of multiple groups. They include having the ability to carry multiple racial and or ethnic perspectives simultaneously, and being able to shift one's racial identity with regards to the situational context or the environment (Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1996). From the analysis of the interview data 119 categories emerged that were collapsed into eight subcategories and ultimately three core categories. From the core categories, three themes emerged: (1) an early supportive environment provided a stable foundation that allowed participants the opportunity to figure out who they are; (2) a strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question from

others, “What are you?”; *and*, (3) Those with a healthy multiracial identity have developed the capacity to travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of people. Participants appreciated and integrated their racial heritages. They embraced the uniqueness of being multiracial, continued to explore their racial identity, and as a result developed a whole and integrated healthy multiracial identity.

Signature page

This dissertation by Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in social work approved by Barbara P. Early, Ph.D., as director, and by Karlynn BrintzenhofeSzoc, Ph.D., and Barbara A. Soniat, Ph.D. as readers.

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Barbara P. Early, Ph.D., Director

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Karlynn BrintenhofeSzoc, Ph.D., Reader

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Dedication

To my children, Nicole-Marie, Jessica, and Joshua-David, and to my husband, David.

To Christopher West who over 30 years ago taught me about my future before I even knew what it would turn out to be.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The United States is a diverse country, and in recent years the number of multiracial people in the United States is steadily increasing (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003) "The term *multiracial* refers to people who identify with two or more racial heritages" (Root, 1992, p. xi). It is reported that people of multiracial backgrounds represent one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). According to the 2010 Census, 2.4% of the population classified themselves as belonging to two or more races (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). The 2010 Census reported that among American children, 4.2 million children were identified as being multiracial. This statistic makes multiracial youth the fasted growing youth population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Despite this increasing trend, there is insufficient research regarding the lived experience of multiracial individuals (Bracey, Bamaca & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Collins, 2001; Root, 1992). For a significant portion of the twentieth century, multiracial individuals were not represented in research studies (Hermann, 2004; Miville et. al., 2005; Phinney, 1990; Root, 1992). This occurred partly because multiracial individuals were rarely given the opportunity to identify their racial heritage on questionnaires, and because researchers generally categorized multiracial participants as belonging to single race minority categories (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996).

Another contributing factor to the lack of research regarding multiracial individuals is the complex issue of race classification within the country. The United States has had a long history of racism and discrimination, and this history has significantly impacted multiracial people (Miville et al., 2005; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992, 1996). Brunsma (2005) suggests that

multiracial people have always caused concern in the United States because of the "challenge they pose to the racial order" (p. 1132). Several classification systems were established that were aimed at dividing and conquering diversity and difference within the social structure of society while at the same time preserving white privilege. The Great Chain of Being, the rule of hypodescent, and the U. S. Census all fit into this category. The Great Chain of Being is an ancient theory used to describe the hierarchical order of species. This system places God at the top and plants and minerals on the bottom. It is speculated that this system was used among European-American leaders as the United States was developing its social structure.

The Great Chain of Being allowed European-American leaders to fabricate "the cultural/behavioral characteristics associated with each 'race', linking superior traits with Europeans and negative and inferior ones to blacks and Indians. Numerous arbitrary and fictitious beliefs about the different peoples were institutionalized and deeply embedded in American thought" (American Anthropology Association, 2005). The rule of hypodescent, sometimes referred to as "the one drop rule", declared that anyone having "one drop" of non white blood was not purely white and was assigned a minority status. It was a structure established to keep the races separate. The U.S. Census is a system which uses classifications such as race, language, and socioeconomic status to track, identify and categorize people.

Furthermore, anti-miscegenation laws, which forbade marriages between people of different races, had been the country's means of attempting to maintain racial purity and racial separateness, until the laws were ruled unconstitutional in 1967 (Bracey et al., 2004; Brunsma, 2005; Collins, 2000; Miville et al., 2005; Phinney, 1990). Despite these efforts to keep the races separate, multiracial individuals have always been a part of the American

population. Much of the data collected on multiracial individuals is predominantly quantitative and does not offer the rich and detailed information that often is available in qualitative studies. During the primary phase of multiracial identity research there were very few published empirical studies that exceeded samples over 50, and most of the studies conducted occurred within small university-based populations using snowball sampling (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001).

Often research literature regarding multiracial people has reflected the political atmosphere of the country and as a result much of the research regarding multiracial individuals has undergone a significant transformation over the past century (Renn, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Early social science literature regarding racial differences (Park, 1928; Stonequest, 1937) portrayed multiracial individuals as less than pure and problematic. Some of the first theories regarding multiracial identity were developed largely based on racism, and the theories postulated that people of mixed racial heritage as being deficient, confused, and having incomplete identities (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Identity Development in Multiracial Individuals

Identity development is a major process during various stages of human development but is of particular importance in successful adolescent development (Erikson, 1968; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Marcia, 1980). Who am I? What do others think about me? and Where do I fit in?, are questions that individuals ask themselves at one time or another in their lives as they interact with other people and within the environment. On a daily basis people are presented with an abundance of stimuli that provide them with information about themselves, about others, and about the world. How people process the

information they receive from others and from the environment can have a significant impact on identity formation (Blumer, 1969; Erikson, 1968).

For multiracial individuals, these same questions, Who am I?, What do others think of me?, and Where do I fit in?- can be, and often are, more complex than for members of monoracial heritage. Multiracial people do not fit comfortably into single race categories. Additionally, it has been suggested that life experiences such as family dynamics, racial and ethnic diversity of neighborhood, racial diversity of school, and socio-economic status all contribute, and contribute differently, to identity development in multiracial individuals (Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992, 1996, 1998).

> "Racial and ethnic identities are essential parts of the psychological profile of any individual who is a member of a racially or ethnically heterogeneous society such as the United States. Understanding the process by which individuals develop racial and ethnic identities is therefore an important part of understanding the total person" (Root, 1992, p. 25).

Multiracial identity development is a complex, multidimensional, and fluid process and identity development within and among this population is varied (Kerwin et. al., 1993; Kich, 1992; Root, 1992, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004). Developing a strong multiracial identity involves intricate processes in which individuals must assimilate information from two or more different racial groups (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996). A major challenge of identity development for multiracial individuals in the United States involves the process of defining themselves in a country which has a long history of racial discrimination. Simultaneously, multiracial individuals must define themselves within that

the same system which also has a history of institutional racism, and which conceptualizes race in an extremely inflexible manner, attaching different values to the various races within the system (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003).

Current research suggests that the development of a racial identity is crucial to a healthy psychosocial development in multiracial individuals (Collins, 2000`; Jourdan, 20 06; Kerwin et al., 1993; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004). Additionally, multiracial and multiethnic identity models suggest that developing a multiracial identity may contribute to resolving problems of belonging, exclusion, negotiating multiple reference groups and identity confusion, all which are often present when traditional single race identity models are used with multiracial individuals (Suyemoto, 2004). Racial discrimination, feelings of exclusion, and ambiguity can have a significant impact on multiracial individual's identity development (Kerwin et al., 1993; McDowell, et al.; 2005; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992; 1996). And furthermore, developing a multiracial identity can contribute to a positive self-esteem (Binning, Unzueta, Hou & Molina, 2009; Coleman & Carter, 2007).

Background of Multiracial Identity Research

The first researchers to examine multiracial identity (Park, 1928; Stonequest, 1937) developed the "Marginal Man model". This model employed a deficit or problematic approach using the pathology in Black families as its focus. Stonequist (1937) who was a student of Park incorporated quantitative measures to compare Black minority samples to White majority samples using the White majority sample as the reference point for comparisons between the groups. Multiracial identity was viewed as incomplete and

multiracial individuals were viewed as being associated with both worlds but not totally belonging to either (Poston, 2001; Root, 1996). The Marginal Man model suggested that persons with marginal identities, those whose identities straddled the clear lines of specific racial groups, were predisposed to rejection, isolation and stigmatization from the majority group, from other minority groups in society, and also from the minority group to which they belonged. For example, multiracial individuals with Asian and White heritage in the United States not only experience discrimination and rejection from the dominant White culture but they may also experience discrimination from the Asian community (Root, 1996).

After Stonequist's model (1937) depicted multiracial individuals as having marginal identities and being people who did not really fit neatly into any racial or social group there was an absence of research and or models aimed at understanding the unique experience of having dual or multiple racial heritages. The norm belief within the social science community was that persons with dual or multiple heritages lead tragic lives and held marginal positions within their single raced groups. Having marginal status was perceived as having negative psychological consequences for multiracial persons (Poston, 1990; Quillan & Redd, 2009; Root, 1996). It was not until the last few decades of the twentieth century that researchers (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1995; Parham, 1989) began exploring racial identity and included multiracial individuals in their studies and other scholars (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1989; Gibbs, 1987; Hall, 1992; Jacobs, 1977; Phinney, 1989; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990) began conducting research with the specific intent of studying multiracial identity development.

Cross (1971) developed one of the most widely recognized and referenced models of African- American identity development, The Cross Model of Nigrescence, which proposes a five stage identity development process for African-Americans. Parham (1989) built upon Cross's model and introduced the lifespan perspective to racial identity development in African-Americans. He expanded Cross's model by suggested that identity development for African-Americans begins in late adolescence and early adulthood and progresses through mid- life and into late adulthood (Richardson, et al., as cited in Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2010). Helms (1995) developed a model in which African- American identity statuses are achieved as individuals form schemas regarding racial awareness within the environment. Her model gives precedence to a person's subjective experience regarding racial identity development (Helms, 1995; Richardson, et al., as cited in Ponterotto et al., 2010). Although each of these models provided significant advancement in the study of racial identity development it is supposed that these models attempted to account for information regarding multiracial individuals by designating multiracial individuals as minorities, and by placing them in single race categories (Collins, 2001; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992). This method of categorization did not recognize the uniqueness of a person having dual or multiple heritages and did not capture the multidimensional aspects of multiracial identity (Collins, 2001; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992).

During the 1970s, the country was experiencing a change in political atmosphere and the civil rights era had issued in a sense of racial pride. There was a significant change in the perspective that researchers used to study multiracial individuals (Collins, 2001; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). There was also an increase in the number of researchers with "mixed

heritage studying biracial identity and their influence contributed to a transformation in the perspective taken toward understanding multiracial identity" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 571).

Jacobs (1977) conducted influential research in which 10 biracial Black-White children and their parents were interviewed and tested. The parents were interviewed by a biracial couple and the children were interviewed and tested regarding their racial identity. The feature of this research was a doll play instrument designed to explore racial identity dimensions of the biracial children. This instrument was significantly more advanced than previous models and methods used to explore racial identity in minority children. "Four factors emerged that were crucial in understanding the racial identity development of biracial children: (a) constancy of color, (b) internalization of an interracial label, (c) racial ambivalence, and (d) perceptions and distortions in self- and family identifications" (Jacobs, In Root, 1992, p. 200). Jacobs' research provided a brand new direction towards the concepts, methodology and focus used in multiracial identity research. His study also provided seminal information regarding ego identity, racial development, and the impact of family, peers, and environment on multiracial individuals. An important element to this study was the focus on the emotional and cognitive foundation of a multiracial individual's ability to internalize and own an interracial label (Collins, 2000).

After Jacobs' (1977) study researchers (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989, Gibbs, 1987; Hall, 1980; Nakashima, 1988; Poston, 1990; Stephan, 1991; Stephan & Stephan, 1989; Root, 1990) began conducting research that focused on the psychosocial, sociological and environmental aspects of having dual and or multiple racial heritages. A few of these studies are relevant to the research question of this particular research. Gibbs' model (1987)

identifies five areas of conflict for multiracial adolescents; dual racial heritage, social marginality, sexuality and impulse control, autonomy from parents, and educational and career aspirations. Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1989) developed the Racial/Cultural Identity Model which suggests five stages of identity development for racial and ethnic populations. The stages include conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integration awareness and trace identity development. And Hall's (1980) research examined the racial identity choices made by Black-Japanese multiracial individuals and explored environmental factors which may have contributed to the participants' selected choices. These models and others that followed offered a new approach to examining multiracial identity. Some scholars (Brunsma, 2005, Collins, 2001; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992; Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Thornton, 1996) hypothesize that earlier approaches, assumed that monoracial and multiracial individuals were equivalent to one another, and often compared multiracial individuals to monracial individuals when conducting research. It soon became apparent that equivalent or comparison approaches were inadequate for describing ethnic and racial identity development in multiracial individuals which sequentially encouraged a new era of multiracial identity research (Brunsma, 2001, Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002; Kich, 1992; Phinney, 1989, 1990; Poston, 1990; Renn 2003; Root, 1990).

Phinney's seminal research (1989) regarding the development of an ethnic identity proposed that all members of various ethnic groups progress through three stages of ethnic identity; (a) an unexamined ethnic identity in which individuals have an unexamined positive or negative views of their ethnic heritage or group; (b) ethnic identity search (or exploration) in which individuals begin to search what it means for them to be a member of a particular

ethnic group, and (c) achieved ethnic identity in which individuals have explored their ethnic heritage and ethnic group membership and are connected to the meaning of ethnicity in their life (Phinney, 1989; also see French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Phinney suggested that the development of an achieved ethnic identity may contribute to a healthy psychosocial identity in ethnic and racial minorities. Phinney's ethnic identity model was conceived by integrating Erikson's (1968) developmental model; Marcia's (1980) statuses model; and Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory; and her research is supported by subsequent research that incorporates several components of racial and ethnic identity development that is pertinent to racial identity development in multiracial individuals.

Newer models such as, Poston's (1990) five stage model of biracial development, 1) Personal Identity, 2) Choice of Group categorization, 3) Enmeshment/Denial, 4) Appreciation, and 5) Integration, which describes the process of integrating two heritages; Kich's (Kich,1992) three stage biracial identity development, 1) Awareness of Differentness and Dissonance, 2) Struggle for Acceptance, and 3) Self- Acceptance and Assertion of an Interracial Identity; Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) racial awareness model, which highlights the establishment of a public and private identity for multiracial individuals; Hall's (1992) Life Span identity model which captures racial identity development during one's life span; and Root's (1990) Ecological model which incorporates the person in relationship to his or her environment, are more proficient at addressing the salient aspects of multiracial identity (Brunsma, 2005; Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2008; Root, 1992).

There is burgeoning literature regarding multiracial identity (Collins, 2000; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2005; Hall, 1992; Herman, 2004; Miville et al., 2005; Phinney & Alpuria,

1996; Root, 1992, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004). This research suggests that often multiracial individuals possess multiple, and sometimes simultaneous, racial and or ethnic identities, and that the multiple identities may help multiracial individuals negotiate different psychological and environmental social situations. Root (1990) advances perceptions about multiracial identity suggesting that these multiple and simultaneous identities may be situational and that individuals have the capability of changing their identities throughout the life span (Root, 1998). Establishing a multiracial identity is extremely complex and challenging; and developing a strong multiracial identity involves intricate processes in which individuals must assimilate information from two or more different racial groups (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996). Subsequently, the development of a healthy racial identity is crucial to healthy psychological development in multiracial individuals (Collins, 2001; Jourdan, 2006; Kerwin et al., 1993).

The current trend in multiracial identity research approaches multiracial identity development as a fluid multidimensional process that changes throughout the life span (Brunsma, 2005; Hall, 2002; Root, 1992, 1996). The primary strength of multiracial identity research is that it, addresses significant issues of a unique diverse population that, as mentioned previously, was virtually ignored in social science literature prior to the 1970s (Collins, 2000; Hermann, 2004; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992).

Interest in the Issue

This researcher has developed a special interest in multiracial identity development for both professional and personal reasons. As a clinical intern in graduate school the researcher was enrolled in a two year clinical program which emphasized the impact of race

within American society and throughout the world. Participants in the clinical training program completed an intensive self-awareness program which helped them actualize the impact of race in their personal lives. This researcher was able to develop a passionate awareness of the significance of race, ethnicity, and culture in her life. The researcher's professional development includes providing diversity workshops with a focus on race and ethnicity and their affect on identity development.

Personally, the researcher is married and is part of an interracial couple. She and her husband are the biological parents of three multiracial teenagers. Her extensive work regarding race and ethnicity and its impact on personal and social identity development combined with life experiences, such as the plethora of questions and statements she, her spouse, and their children experience regarding the children's heritage, prompted interest in the topic of multiracial identity. Specifically, the ubiquitous question of "what are you?" and statements such as "you cannot be both"; and the apparent determination of others to have the researcher's children choose one race or the other, have continually provided discussion topics to the family's interminable conversations about multiracial families. Additionally, when the researcher began researching multiracial identity for a graduate school assignment she was astonished by the lack of literature regarding this topic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding the unique process of establishing a strong multiracial identity from a dual or multiple perspectives through the examination of the personal accounts of multiracial young adults. It explored the question:

What is the lived experience of multiracial young adults aged 18 to 30, which has contributed to a strong multiracial identity?

Developing a strong multiracial identity involves intricate processes in which individuals must assimilate information from two different racial groups (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1996). It is suggested that, a major challenge of identity development for multiracial individuals involves the process of defining themselves in a country which has a long history of racial discrimination, along with a history of defined boundaries between and among different racial groups (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996). "Storytelling is a fundamental human way of giving meaning to experience", subsequently, "we shape our world and ourselves by telling stories" (Padgett, 2004, p. 254). By examining the stories of multiracial individuals the researcher aimed to acquire a better understanding of the process of developing a strong multiracial identity.

The development of a strong racial identity occurs within a social context (Phinney, 2004; Root, 1992, 1996). Symbolic Interaction theory posits that the self and identity develop by using shared symbols that emerge through daily interactions with others in a shared community or society. Actions and interactions are shaped by shared interpretations of situations (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The cultural context for the development of self and identity in multiracial individuals can be extremely complex. In contrast to individuals who identify with one race multiracial individuals have the additional task of identifying with parents from two or more different races in order to develop an identity. A major concept of symbolic interaction theory is that the self is viewed as a social being that experiences

constant growth and change as it interacts within the environment. Through constant interaction with the environment and by using shared symbols within a community the identity of the individual begins to emerge (Blumer, 1969). Experiences such as family dynamics, ethnicity of neighborhood, racial diversity of school and socio-economic status all contribute, and contribute differently, to identity development in multiracial individuals (Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Root, 1992, 1996, 1998).

The specific aim of this study was to study a segment of the multiracial population, young adults aged 18 to 30, in which little literature exist, in order to explore how the psychological, sociological, and environmental life experiences contributed to the development of a strong multiracial identity. Research suggests that the establishment of a healthy racial identity can lead to increased self-esteem and psychological well being in multiracial individuals (Binning, Unzueta, Hou & Molina, 2009; Coleman & Carter, 2007; Collins, 2001; Hall, 1992; Jourdan, 2006; Kerwin et al., 1993; Phinney, 1990, Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004; Suzi-Crumly & Hyers, 2004, Zack, 1996).

The researcher chose a qualitative design and utilized grounded theory methods of analysis because there is limited information regarding the lived experiences of multiracial individuals, and because qualitative research studies offer rich and detailed information about the research subject that cannot be elaborated in quantitative studies. Padgett (1998) posits that qualitative research captures and provides information concerning “the lived experiences from the perspectives of those who live it and create meaning from it” (p. 8). Additionally, Padgett suggests that researchers often choose qualitative research in circumstances in which

the researcher wishes to explore a topic about which little is known and is exploring a topic of emotional sensitivity and depth (Padgett, 1998).

Multiracial identity development can be an extremely sensitive issue for some multiracial individuals and a major challenge due in part to some of the concerns previously mentioned. It is essential for professional social workers to become knowledgeable of the issues related to multiracial identity development. Subsequently, it is appropriate for professional social workers to provide additional information to the knowledge base regarding the experience of establishing a multiracial identity, and to provide that information from the perspective of multiracial individuals.

Significance of this Study to Social Work

The increase in multiracial persons in the United States coupled with a lack of literature regarding multiracial identity development highlights the need for additional research regarding this topic. Many of the studies regarding multiracial individuals research adolescent populations but do not provide information regarding the type of young adults the adolescents become (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This study explored the lived experience of multiracial young adults 18 to 30 years of age and contributes to the social work knowledge base regarding racial identity development. Subsequently, in addition to providing information concerning the developmental process of establishing a healthy multiracial identity this study provides information that can assist professional social workers who have multiracial young adults among their client populations.

As reviewed above, it is only within the past few decades that scholars began researching identity development in multiracial individuals. There is an increasing interest in

this topic however; additional research is needed to fully capture the varied experiences of multiracial individuals and multiracial identity development. Chapter one provided a historic outline of multiracial identity research highlighting how the political atmosphere of the United States often shaped the direction of scholarly inquiry. Currently, the country is amidst of political and racial change. The United States recently elected a biracial president who is of Kenyan and European-American descent. There is an increase in interracial families and an increase in multiracial children born in the United States (Bracey et al, 2004; Collins, 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992; Shih, 2009; U.S. Census, 2010). The face of America is literally and figuratively changing. Professional social workers and other helping professions must be able to address these changes, as it is probable that they will experience an increase in multiracial individuals in their client populations.

The following chapter includes a review of the existing literature regarding multiracial identity development and incorporates the theoretical literature which guided the study and informed the research question. Chapter three details the research methodology employed to complete the study. Chapter four presents participants' personal accounts of lived experiences and research findings, and chapter five provides the summary and conclusions of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The current trend in multiracial identity research approaches identity development for the unique population of multiracial individuals as a fluid multidimensional process that changes throughout the life span (Brunsma, 2005; Hall, 2002; Root, 1992). However, to comprehend the complexity of multiracial identity development it is necessary to have a firm understanding of identity development in general. This literature review commences with Erikson's identity theory and includes a progression of identity theories and models that lead to the current trend in multiracial identity research. Included within this chapter is information regarding how theories and models provided explanations concerning the underpinnings of multiracial identity development, and guided the research question: What is the lived experience of multiracial young adults aged 18 to 30, which has contributed to a strong multiracial identity?

The theoretical framework which guided this study is Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interaction theory posits that the self and identity develop by using shared symbols that emerge through daily interactions with others in a shared community or society and that all individuals experience an ever changing identity based on continual social interactions within society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1937). For multiracial individuals the development of self and identity can be extremely complex. As early as the 1960s, Erikson emphasized that a major task of identity formation includes the internalizing of beliefs, values, and relationships in order to define the self within a cultural context (Erikson, 1968). In addition to what might be considered standard identity development, multiracial individuals have the additional task of identifying with parents from two different races, and with communities that are racially or ethnically different from each other in order to develop a "self concept"

and identity. The multiracial person has two or more communities or societies in which he or she may be connected for social interactions and within these dual or multiple communities there can be an extensive, multitude of people with whom to interact. Additionally, the symbols and the meanings attached to the symbols used for interaction in the various environments may perhaps be significantly different. One can perceive how challenging and daunting the task of developing a strong multiracial identity might be for multiracial individuals.

There are five central tenets of symbolic interaction theory, 1) the role of social interaction, 2) the role of thinking, 3) the role of definition, 4) the role of the present, and 5) the role of the active human being (Blumer, 1969). The first tenet of Symbolic Interaction theory perceives communities of consisting of active participants who engage and interact with each other. By interacting with each other, individuals and communities are in a process of constant change and evolution. These interactions are dynamic, and as individuals interact back and forth, a more dynamic and active individual emerges rather than the same individual repeatedly interacting within the environment (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004).

The second tenet suggests that an individual's interactions are influenced by his or her thinking. The role of thinking is extremely important in Symbolic Interaction theory. The internal process of thinking has significant impact on everything that people do. A person's actions are in accordance with how he or she is thinking in specific situations, and a person's thinking is often influenced to some extent by interactions with others. However the thinking which occurs within one's self is very important. Third, as people interact within the environment, situations are not immediately understood. However, as different

situations unfold, people attempt to understand the circumstances of the situations. As people begin to understand situations, they attach meaning to and define the situations, and after a situation is defined and is given a meaning, an individual acts accordingly. The definitions that are formed and assigned to certain situations are a result of interactions with others and interactions within ourselves.

The fourth tenet of symbolic interaction theory suggests that, when a person takes action, he or she does so because of his or her present situation. Personal actions depend on how a situation is defined at that particular moment, what the individual thinks at that particular moment, and the interaction that is occurring at that particular moment. A person's past may enter into the situation if he or she thinks about it; however it is redefined in the present to deal with the current situation (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004). The fifth tenet of Symbolic Interaction is that people are active. Everything that is done is done with regards to interaction with the environment, interaction with the self, or with interactions with others within the environment. A person becomes who he or she is by interacting, by thinking about the interacting, by defining the interacting, by applying past thoughts to current situations, and by making decisions in the present based on factors in the immediate situation (Charon, 2004).

The main concept one should understand about symbolic interaction theory is that in addition to the distinct character of interaction between and among human beings, people interpret and define other's actions and in turn give meaning to one another's actions (Blumer, 1969). The personal meaning that is attached to the interactions contributes to a person's identity. Having a clear understanding of these five tenets of symbolic interaction

theory, one can perceive how this theory is appropriate to address identity development and in particular multiracial identity development. Identity development for multiracial individuals is complex. Like most individuals, multiracial individuals shape their identity within social interactions in the family and in the community environment. However, racial identity is also affected by the larger social environment, and racial identity may be significantly affected by greater social forces such as preconceived notions about race and institutional racism.

An individual starts to define him or herself from childhood through the various interactions within society. Other people in society often label and define a person to himself or herself. Through this process, the interaction, a person becomes an "object" to himself or herself (Blumer, 1969). A multiracial person may come to view himself or herself as, daddy's cutie pie, a combination of mommy and daddy, or the better of two worlds, due to labels he or she receives from his or her parents. However, that same person may also view the self "object" as, the part-Asian part-White- kid, half-breed, or as my biracial buddy, because these are the labels he or she has been assigned by peers. Because of the nature of social interaction and because the self "object" is social, the self constantly changes because it is continually defined and redefined in social interaction. The development of self is a process rather than a conclusion.

As one matures the process of defining the self becomes easier, regardless of racial identity; however the task of self identity and self perception may continue to be complicated for multiracial individuals. This may be attributable to multiple, positive and negative labels and definitions aimed at multiracial individuals due to their racial identity or what others

perceive as their racial identity. The positive and nurturing labels that a multiracial person receives in social interactions with families and friends regarding his or her racial identity may be counterbalanced by negative racial labels received in other social interactions.

Symbolic interaction theory views the self identity as something that builds up over time, consisting of meaning given to social interaction with others within the environment, and influenced and impacted by shared symbols within a communities and society. People tend to view themselves in relations to other and may find a sense of belonging and pride in identifying with others who share similar experiences (Phinney 1992; Root, 1992; Tatum, 1996). A person may choose to identify with a group because of judgments he or she has towards a particular group. That same person may make self judgments based on a particular groups' perception of them, as well as self judgments based on being a member of a certain group (Cross, 1971; Erikson, 1968; Herman, 2004). A multiracial individual's social environment clearly has an impact on his or her racial classification. Choosing which group or groups to identify with occurs within social context and people formulate their self-perceptions and identity in relation to social groups (Herman, 2004; Phinney, Chavira, & Tate, 1992). This may also be true with respect to choosing which racial group or groups with which to identify. In symbolic interaction theory not only do the judgments of others affect ones self-judgment but one's perception of the other's judgment affects self-judgment. The multiracial individual who may be forced to choose which race to belong to, because he or she may not be totally accepted by one group or another (Hall, 2001; Herman, 2004) can shield himself or herself from harmful judgments and perceptions, from self and others by "thinking" and being selective about the judgments and perceptions. A person may choose

what judgments and perceptions to incorporate into the self-concept, by paying attention to some perceptions while ignoring others.

The power to communicate, self-perceive, and self-control are products of the mind, and when a person engages in interactions with others, he or she is engaging in mind action. Thoughts and personal perceptions help a person understand him or herself in relation to others and in relation to the environment. Symbolic interaction is a broad theory that suggests that the continual process of self communicating, social interaction and making meaning of social interaction with others and within our environment assists individuals in defining and redefining their self-concept and identity (Blumer, 1969). Identity development theories and models narrow the focus on the process by which multiracial individuals complete this process.

Identity Development Theories and Models

Erikson's theory of psychosocial identity development. The exploration of identity development has included examining the psychological, social, and cultural context in which identity is formed (Schwartz, 2001). It is believed that identity formation is a lifelong process (Erikson, 1950; Macia,1980) and debates within the social science literature regarding which psychological, sociological, and cultural aspects have the greatest impact on a person's identity formation have continued throughout social science literature ever since Erikson (1950) published his theoretical ideology regarding identity (Schwartz, 2001).

Building upon Freud's theoretical base Erikson extended ideas about human development and identity to include principles with less emphasis on psychosexual development and by placing more prominence on the healthy and adaptive qualities of the

ego (Schwartz, 2001). Erikson believed that the ego was extremely important in helping an individual negotiate the environment and to master psychological tasks (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Schwartz, 2001). His theory of psychosocial development was the first to describe identity development as a process which occurred throughout the life span. Erikson postulated that the formation of a positive identity is an important developmental task which is manifested by the ability to integrate different aspects of the self and to "arrive at a sense of personal sameness and continuity across time and context" (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, p. 1012). Although Erikson believed identity development to be a lifelong process, he suggested that it was during the critical developmental periods of adolescence and young adulthood that a person commences the process of identity integration (Erikson, 1968; Schwartz, 2001; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Erikson included both the intrapsychic focus of psychology and the environmental focus of psychology in the development of his theory (Schwartz, 2001). His theory is similar to professional social work's Person in the Environment perspective, which embraces the biological, psychological, social, spiritual, and environmental aspects of human development. The importance of this aspect of Erikson's theory, and professional social work's perspective, is that one must attempt to explore the entirety of a person including his or her surroundings to better understand the whole person and to make a comprehensive assessment which is crucial to treatment and intervention.

In his classic book *Childhood and Society* (1950) Erikson outlined the process in which an individual progresses through the stages of development. He believed that the psychological development of personality and identity to be a process which unfolds as individuals adapt to and interact with their social worlds. In the developmental model, the

Eight Ages of Man, Erikson placed emphasis on the social context of development. During each stage of psychosocial identity development a person is confronted with a crisis in which the ego must find a balance between two polar opposites. Erikson presumed that a person must experience both extremes of the conflict while learning how to adapt to the particular conflict of the stage in order to advance to the next stage. If an individual is successful in resolving the conflict then the positive pole of the stage becomes the stronger part of the ego and aids healthy identity development in subsequent stages. Each stage of development is dependent on successful resolution of the conflict in the previous stage (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Schwartz, 2001).

The hallmark of Erikson's theory is ego-identity which occurs during stage five, Identity versus Identity Confusion. Erikson believed that it is during adolescence that one begins exploring identity rather intently (Erikson, 1968; Macia, 1980). During this stage a person begins forming "self-selected" preferences on issues such as peer groups, same-sex and opposite-sex friends, religious beliefs, career paths, and purpose in life (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Schwartz, 2001). According to Erikson (1968), one of the central tasks during adolescence is the development of a stable identity. The process of forming a stable identity requires an adolescent to complete a series of developmental tasks which include establishing an identity that is autonomous from ones parents, choosing a career, deciding on sexual preference, and developing a sense of uniqueness by comparing and contrasting one's self to others (Deters, 1997; Erikson, 1950, 1968; Herman, 2004). Erikson believed that the quality of identity varied from culture to culture but that accomplishing the task of identity development has common elements in all cultures (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson depicted identity as being a continuum between two polar opposites. One end of the pole is the ego syntonic pole where identity synthesis occurs and the other pole is the ego dsytonic pole where identity confusion occurs (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Shwartz, 2001). Schwartz (2001), describes "Identity synthesis as the reworking of childhood and contemporaneous identifications into a larger, self-determined set of self-identified ideas, whereas identity confusion represents an inability to develop a workable set of ideas on which to base adult identity" (p. 9). Erikson (1980) describes four angles that one uses to observe ego identity, a conscious sense of individual identity, an unconscious identity striving for continuity of personal character, the silent undertakings of ego synthesis, and maintaining connections with a group's ideas and identity solidarity. The four angles of identity are organized into three levels according to how each angle is ingrained into the self and context (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Schwartz, 2001). At the most basic level is ego identity in which an individual's most basic and fundamental beliefs about him or herself are represented. These thoughts are assumed to be private and sometimes unconscious. Personal identity is believed to occur at the intersection of self and context. It includes values, goals, sexual preference, world views and beliefs that one shows to others. Personal identity also includes aspects of the self that highlights uniqueness of an individual distinguishing him or her from other people (Erikson, 1980; Schwartz, 2001). Erikson described Social identity as a sense of connectedness to a group, sharing similar values and ideas with a particular group, and the integration of these various aspects into ones sense of self by belonging to a particular group (Erikson, 1980).

These three levels were of particular interest to this study and to the overall study of multiracial identity development because the levels examine how a person's identity is constructed within the context of interactions with others. The levels also place emphasis on the importance of group and belonging. A sense of belonging is reported as being advantageous to identity development in ethnic and racial minorities (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Identity Status Model. Building upon Erikson's theory of development Marcia (1966) postulated that identity development for adolescents was principally determined by choices and commitments made regarding personal and social traits. Marcia's Identity Status model focuses on the extent that an adolescent explores and commits to career choice, religious beliefs, sexual preference and relationships. Marcia is perhaps the first scholar to make a distinction regarding ethnicity. Marcia believed that there are four statuses associated with identity development, Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium, and Achievement. Each of the four statuses is defined by the presence or absence of a decision-making period and the degree of commitment in the areas of occupation and ideology. Individuals in the diffused status of identity development have neither explored the meaning of their identity nor committed a meaning of their identity. Individuals in the foreclosed status have committed to a meaning of their identity based on the influences of significant others, such as their parents, without engaging in any exploration. In the moratorium status individuals are thought to be in the process of actively exploring the meaning of their identity but have not committed to a specific definition of their identity. Individuals who have engaged in the exploration process and have committed to a specific definition of the meaning of their

identity are considered to be in the achieved status. Marcia (1980) perceived individuals who reached the achieved status to be strong, self-directed, and highly adaptive people. When a person reaches identity achievement he or she has established a set of personal values and beliefs which contribute to a self-concept. A person's identity can be expanded and further defined throughout adulthood however; the foundation is well established during adolescence (Marcia, 2002).

Identity achievement is attained after a period of personal exploration followed by the establishment of personal commitment to values and concepts to which a person adheres (Marcia, 1980). Identity achievement is also believed to be the most mature status due to its association with "balanced thinking, effective decision-making, and deep interpersonal relationships" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 12). Identity achieved individuals are thought to have completed the most identity work in each of the four statuses (Marcia, 1980, 2002).

As Marcia's identity development model gained prominence different domains were added. Domains are used to describe individuals at the personality level and in content areas such as politics, dating, friendships, and sex roles. According to Grotevant (1992, 1993), it is assumed that a person's identity may function differently across diverse domains and differently within individual domains. It is also assumed that the function of a person's identity across and within domains is different than a person's identity at the overall level. It appears that as one's identity is established and becomes more stable one is capable of adapting his or her identity so that it is a good fit within different domains. As different scholars began applying Marcia's identity status model to the study of identity development

each selected and applied those domains which he or she considered pertinent to the spectrum of study regarding identity development.

More than a decade after the first domains were added to Marcia's model additional domains such as values, philosophical lifestyle, family, and recreation were added (Schwartz, 2001). The inclusion of these domains appear to be instrumental in the development of early ethnic and racial identity theories used to explain the difference and complexity of identity development for racial and ethnic minorities.

Identity control model and developmental social identity model. Several models that followed the Identity Status model addressed issues that many thought were lacking in Marcia's theory. Two models in particular, the Identity control model (Powers, 1973) and Developmental social psychology of identity model (Adams, 1986, in Adams & Marshall, 1996) address subject matter which is essential to identity development of racial and ethnic minorities. The Identity Control model addresses ego and social identity by "assimilating ego identity with the constant task of forming and revising one's identity" (Scwartz, 2001, p. 20). Significant to this model is the emphasis on both the interpersonal and intrapsychic mechanisms which are fundamental for identity change. The model examines the interpersonal interactions between an individual and others, and between and individual and the environment. Emphasis is placed on the social context and environmental context in which identity develops. The constant feedback that one receives regarding his or her identity may be positive or negative and it is thought that congruence or incongruence between an individual's ego identity, or personal identity, and the feedback that he or she receives from others and the environment can affect his or her self perception (Kerpelman,

Pittman, & Lamke, 1997; Schwartz, 2001). Reaction, opinion, and response from the social environment are presumed to increase or decrease the exploration process of identity development (Kerpelman, et al., Schwartz, 2001). If one's personal perception is consistent with information and response received from the social environment then it is unlikely identity exploration will occur. Conversely, if the reaction and response from significant others and the environment is negative or incongruent with one's personal perception, then it is highly likely that one will continue the exploration process (Schwartz, 2001).

As mentioned previously, the Identity Control model places prominence on the context of interpersonal relationships (Kerpelman, et al., 1997). Relationships with significant others such as parents, close friends, spouses and partners often provide essential identity information vital to personal identity development. Such relationships provide what Kerpelman et al., (1997) refer to as "identity-relevant feedback" and are possibly more important than information received from less significant relationships and within one's environment. Consequently, identity- relevant feedback may be essential to identity development in multiracial individuals as it is proposed that interpersonal relationships with significant others, and social interaction within the environment are integral components of identity development for multiracial persons (Phinney & Allipuria, 1996; Root, 1992, 1996, 1998; Sheets, 2004; Wardle, 2004).

Developmental social psychology model. The Developmental Social Psychology model is considered to be an expansion of Erikson's Identity theory. This model developed by Adams has a multidimensional approach and, like the Identity Control model, explores identity development within the social context (Adams, Dyk & Bennion, 1987; Schwartz,

2001). This model suggests that both micro interactions and macro interactions influence identity development. Adams suggests that the processes of one developing a personal identity and a social identity is complicated and may at times be incompatible (Adams & Marshall, 1996). The model's person-in –context perspective includes the personal and social aspects of a person's identity development and expands upon Erkison's theory to also include cultural factors. The person-in-context perspective is also very similar to professional social work's "person-in-environment" in which emphasis is placed on the individual within his or her biological, psychological, social, and spiritual context. As stated previously, by examining the multidimensional aspects of a person's life professionals can achieve a comprehensive understanding of an individual and his or her identity.

This model proposes that the social context is separated into a micro context and a macro context. The micro context includes interpersonal interactions and relationships in which a person's identity is directly affected by dialog and other direct contacts. The macro context refers to the larger societal structures, both social and cultural in which a person's identity is shaped. This consists of cultural norms and beliefs which are passed from one generation to the next. "The effects of the macro context are implemented through micro contexts, as in cultural norms being taught to children by their parents (Schwartz, 2001, p. 37).

Adams perceived identity development to be a process comprised of two balancing components, differentiation and integration, which together help an individual establish a personal identity. Differentiation is the process in which one asserts his or her unique characteristics separate from others and integration is the process of becoming part of the

larger social context. This can include joining a group, becoming part of a community, connecting with family, religion, and other societal norms (Adams, 1996; Schwartz, 2001). The differential and integration process is similar to the identity formation which scholars (Cross, 1971; Parham, 1989; Phinney, 1990) believe racial and ethnic minorities, and other scholars (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2005; Hall, 1990; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1993; Root, 1996; Sahnchez & Garcia, 2009) believe multiracial individuals may experience during the process of their racial and or ethnic identity development.

The differentiation process is associated with individuation, perhaps the assertion that "this is who I am". The integration process is associated with the desire of belonging and connectedness to others, for example "this is my family of which I am part", "these are my friends we are a group". "It has been noted that although differentiation and integration appear to be contrasting or conflicting processes it is the balance and interaction between the two processes that may contribute to the development of a healthy identity" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 37). With respect to racial and ethnic identity development research suggests that the development of a racial identity is crucial to a healthy psychosocial development in multiracial individuals (Collins, 2001; Jourdan, 2006; Kerwin et al., 1993; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004).

Brunsma and Rockquemore (2001), report that multiracial individuals make choices about their identity in specific cultural contexts and that these decisions are influenced by an individual's assumption of how others distinguish his or her appearance. Hermann (2004) suggest that regardless of one's appearance or personal preference, "an individual's social environment clearly has an impact on racial classification and on individual racial

classification" (p. 733). Often multiracial individuals develop a private identity one that is only revealed in intimate social situations in which one feels safe the micro context, and a social identity, the identity that is revealed in larger more distant social and cultural situations, the macro context. Reaction, feedback, and response from others and from the environment impact a person's identity development. Brunsma and Rockquemore (2005), Erikson (1968), and Phinney, (1990), suggest that social and cultural contexts may present circumstances in which there are inconsistencies between one's personal identity and one's social identity and that an individual will most likely need to address the differences at some point. The strength of one's personal identity may make this process easier (Phinney & Allipuria, 1996). Personal identity can include racial and or ethnic identity and a person's racial identity and ethnic identity are a significant part of one's personal and social identity (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006).

Defining Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic identity has captured the attention of social science scholars with race and ethnicity being some of the most frequently studied subjects among persons of color (Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006). The concepts of race and ethnicity are extremely complex to define and frame within the social political context of the United States, researchers often have conflicting ideas about the definition of each, and the terms are often used interchangeably (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Race in the United States is embedded in virtually every facet of the country's history and achievements, and although there is much support that race has no scientific foundation (American Association of Anthropology, 2005) the United States incorporates a race based system to assign identities to a people

regardless of their national and continental origins (Richardson et. al, 2010). According to some scholars (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990, Parham, 1989; Richardson et al., 2010) racism is so prevalent within the American system that it is thought to shape and impact the identity of African-Americans with such strength that other possible aspects of African-American identity are over shadowed.

Race often defines a group or groups of people who are assumed to share physical characteristics such skin color, facial features, hair texture and other hereditary (Cokely, 2007; Pinderhughes, 1989). When race is described in biological terms people are grouped together by gene pools, physical features and character qualities. This racial classification system was established by Europeans to group people hierarchically based on their perceptions of physical ability, intellectual ability, and moral quality. Caucasians were assigned the highest value, followed by Asians, Native Americans and Africans at the bottom (Spickard, 1992). Over time, particularly in the United States, race has acquired social meanings in which the different physical characteristics among the races have been used for stereotyping and "status assignment with the social system". The status structure which is based on skin color developed into a complex social structure which promotes a power differential between Whites and people of color (Pinderhughes, 1989). On the other hand, more contemporary scholars have challenged the notion of race as a biological concept and suggest that race is a social construct (Helms, 1990, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Ethnicity refers to a connectedness based on traditions such as religion, nationality, history, and cultural traits such as language, beliefs, values, music, food, and dress (Cokely, 2007; Pinderhughes, 1989). Definitions of ethnicity tend to range from broad to narrow in

scope. When broad definitions of ethnicity are used definitions often include biophysical traits and cultural characteristics. According to Cokely (2007) when biophysical traits are used ethnicity and race are being used interchangeably. He further notes that researchers (Helms, 1993; Smedley, 1999) argue that biophysical traits should not be included in the definition of ethnicity due to the fact that individuals can share similar physical traits but be members of different ethnic groups (e.g. African-Americans, Puerto Rico, and some individuals of Middle Eastern descent (p. 223). Cokely (2007) provides an excellent definition of ethnic identity based on Phinney's seminal work (1989) regarding ethnic identity development. Ethnic identity is defined as "the subjective sense of ethnic group membership that involves self-labeling, sense of belonging, preference for the group, positive evaluation of the ethnic group, ethnic knowledge, and involvement in ethnic group activities" (p. 225).

Ethnic identity is considered to be a multidimensional social construct (Phinney, 1990). It is developmental, contextual and dynamic simultaneously (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Ethnic identity refers to a sense of self and incorporates a shared sense of identity with others who belong to the same ethnic group. It is an important factor to an individual's well being and the importance one places on group membership can lead to positive attitudes associated with belonging to a particular group (Phinney, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). "A person's ethnicity is not chosen rather it is determined at birth, or 'assigned' to an individual by others based on ethnic background or phenotype (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 275). Individuals make choices regarding their ethnic identity, and in particular make decisions concerning how they embrace their ethnic heritage and the emphasis and meaning that is

attributed to group membership. Frequently ethnic identity is the considered to be the structure in which individuals identify "consciously or unconsciously with those whom they feel a common bond because of similar traditions, behaviors, and beliefs (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999).

The process of developing an ethnic identity occurs over time and includes the sense of oneself as belonging to an ethnic group, and the establishment of attitudes and understandings associated with belonging to a particular group (Phinney, 1989). Ethnic identity begins during childhood and is assumed to undergo major developmental changes during adolescence and young adulthood when a person begins the processes of exploration and commitment (Phinney, 1989, 1993). According to Phinney (1992) having a positive sense of ethnic group membership is highly correlated with ethnic identity achievement.

Much of the literature regarding ethnic identity is based on a combination of Erkison's ego identity development (1968) and group identity by social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1986). According to Tajfel and Turner, (1986) a person's strong sense of connectedness to a group includes being comfortable with his or her ethnicity and having positive feelings about belonging to that particular group. In literature on group identity the term private regard has been used to describe positive in-group attitudes. It is thought that the formation of an achieved ethnic identity which includes learning about one's ethnic group and making commitment and connection to the group leads to and fosters the rejections of negative views based on stereotypes.

Racial identity is both an individual and collective construction. In literature on group identity the term private regard has been used to describe positive feelings about

oneself and to describe positive in-group attitudes. Having positive attitudes about one's group and about oneself as a member of a particular group is extremely important because often members of racial minority groups have been subject to discriminatory practices which can lead to negative feelings about being a member of a certain group. In addition one's individual racial identity, racial identity can also be defied as the "collective identity" that a group of people have been socialized to regard themselves (Helms & Cokley, 1999). Group identity is based on several social and environmental factors. It is thought to integrate historical perspectives, life experiences and sociocultural experiences of a group. Most importantly it has been identified in literature to be an important psychological variable (Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Helms & Cokely, 1999). Cokely (2007) suggests that when researchers are interesting in studying how people regard themselves and construct their identities with respect to a racialized society it is more appropriate to use racial identity as opposed to ethnic identity. For the purposes of this study, racial identity is defined as an individual's subjective incorporation of various aspects of his or her racial heritage, ethnic heritage, and social environment to establish a definition of self as a racial individual.

In this study, the process of racial identity development is based on Phinney's ethnic identity development model as applied to racial groups. Because this research was interested in how multiracial individuals construct their identities in a society that has strong opinions regarding race and specific ideas concerning racial categories, this study focused on racial identity development of multiracial individuals as conceptualized by Phinney's ethnic identity model and operationalized by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). Based on Erikson's ego identity development and Marcia's Identity Status models Phinney

(1989) proposed an ethnic identity model that could be used with all ethnic groups. Phinney's model posits that individuals progress through three phases of ethnic identity, unexamined ethnicity, ethnic identity search/moratorium, and achieved ethnic identity. During the unexamined phase an individual has not yet begun exploring his or her ethnicity and they have unexamined positive or negative views of their ethnic group. During the ethnic search/ moratorium stage an individual may have begun exploring different aspects of his or her ethnicity exploring what it means to be a member of a particular group. In the achieved ethnic identity phase individuals have explored their ethnic group membership and have a good understanding of the meaning of ethnicity in their life (French, Allen & Seidman, 2006). They have a sense of connectedness with a particular group and through the processes of exploration and affirmation individuals can establish an ethnic identity.

It is believed that most individuals experience an identity formation process but that this process may be different for members of racial minority groups in part due to the racial hierarchy and social structure of the United States. Concerned that the major identity theories did not address the unique experiences of various racial groups within the United States scholars began researching the identity development process distinctive to racial minority groups in order to describe and assess the identity process associated with being a member of a particular racial group. Group identity is based on life experiences, historical perspectives, and sociocultural experiences of a group. Literature has identified group identity as important to healthy psychological development (Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Helms, 1995). It has also been acknowledged that group identity with respect to racial classification is salient.

Models of Racial Identity Development

Several scholars (Cross, 1971; Gibbs, 1987; Kich, 1992; Parham & Helms, 1991; Phinney, 1990; Ponterroto & Kerwin 1993; Poston, 1992; Root, 1990) were some of the first to embrace ethnicity and race as domains related to psychosocial identity development. These scholars believed that traditional identity theory lacked a comprehensive depiction of the complex nature of racial and or ethnic identity development. Additionally, these researchers alleged that by not addressing an individual's racial or ethnic heritage a significant aspect of one's identity is omitted.

For those individuals who are not members of the prominent or majority culture group, in the United States this includes African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native-Americans and recent immigrants from non European countries, the process of defining oneself often includes the relation and connection to ones' ethnic and racial group as well as the relation and connection to the majority culture group. Racial and ethnic minorities often must choose whether to identify primarily with their smaller "minority" group culture, assimilate and adopt the majority group's culture, or embrace aspects of both groups' cultures (Phinney, 1990; Root, 1992). Many members of "minority" groups may have a personal identity, one that is shared in the intimacy of one's racial or ethnic group, neighborhood or community and a broader social less intimate identity that embraces certain parts of the larger dominate culture. It is supposed that the identity development process for these individuals can be extremely complicated (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2005; Phinney & Alupuria, 1996; Root, 1992).

The process of choosing, adapting or "blending" one's identity is also a prominent issue for multiracial individuals (Bowles, 1993; Coleman & Carter, 2007; Gibbs, 1987; Root, 1992, 1996). Herman (2004) discusses that one of the challenges multiracial individuals face when trying to differentiate from others in order to establish a self identity is the lack of options for them to include all of their racial identities in a description of their identity. She states that much of this is attributed to the country's previous "social norm" of hypodescent. Hypodescent, also known as the "one drop rule", is associated with the country's concerns with racial purity. Historically, any individual having one drop of "non-white" blood has been assigned a minority status. For multiracial individuals this often meant being assigned to monoracial categories, given a non-white minority status, and not being provided with an opportunity to define oneself using all aspects of one's racial heritage.

Multiracial persons may have difficulty differentiating their identity because others try to define and or systematically assign them an identity based on societal ideologies about race. This issue may be a contributing factor in research in which some multiracial individuals have reported changing their racially identity in order to adapt to different social situations (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Root, 1996). Additionally, Herman notes that it is extremely "challenging to study a moving target" and emphasizes as many scholars have, (Brumsma & Rockquemore, 2001, Coleman & Carter, 2007; Gibbs, 1997; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2001; Root, 1992, 1996) that "racial identity changes over time and across contexts for multiracial youth" (Herman, 2004, p. 743).

Racial identity is one of the most frequently researched topics concerning the psychological experiences of African-Americans. Early researchers viewed African-

American racial identity within the framework of oppression and subordination providing modest or slight information regarding the importance of culture. This approach is referred to by Gaines & Reed (1995) as the mainstream approach (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). During the 1960s African-American scholars took the lead in exploring African-American racial identity by redefining the unique characteristics of identity for this particular group of people. Included in these new models was the emphasis on the impact of oppression, the importance of cultural experiences, and the significance of the family socialization processes (French et al., 2006; Sellers et al., 1998). These models are referred to as the underground models (Gaines & Reed, 1995).

Cross's model of Nigrescence. Cross (1971, 1978, 1995) developed one of the most widely recognized and referenced models of African American identity development. Cross's model of Nigrescence is a five-stage model in which African-American individuals progress from self-hatred to self-love (French et. al., 2006). The five stages of this mode which are, pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, emersion, and internalization, describe the process of racial identity that African-Americans experience as they develop a psychologically healthy Black identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Since its inception the five stages of Cross's model have been condensed to four stages. Nigrescence is a French term which means "to become black", and when it originated it was used to define the adult identity conversion of African-Americans Individuals (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Cross (1995) describes Nigrescence as a resocializing experience in which African-Americans transform from a pre-existing identity that is non-Afrocentric to an identity that is Afrocentric.

The pre-encounter stage is characterized by two main themes Assimilation and Anti-Black. During this stage individual's attitudes about race range from low salience or race neutrality to anti-Black. Those individuals having low salience views or assimilation views tend to operate from a "pro-American point of view" about race (Richardson, Bethea, Hayling, & Williams-Taylor, 2010). Pre-encounter individuals do not deny being Black, however they do not think that race plays a significant role in their daily life. Pre-encounter individuals attribute their happiness and well-being to religious beliefs and values, lifestyle, social status, and education. As long as their attitudes provide a sense of fulfillment there is no need for an identity change that has an African focus point (Cross, 1995). To the other extreme some pre-encounter persons possess an anti-Black identity and are described as being miseducated about the African-American community, believing negative stereotypes about African- Americans and possessing self-hatred ideas about being black (Richardson et al., 2010). The pre-encounter identity is shaped by a person's early development. It includes the socialization process of family, extended family, school environment, neighborhood, and community. It helps a person feel grounded, meaningful, and in control by making life predictable. The predictability and stability of one's identity during this stage serves as a filter against rapid identity change and processes incoming information so that it fits into a person's understanding of himself or herself (Cross, 1995).

During the encounter stage of Nigrescence an individual is faced with circumstances, both negative and or positive, which can jolt the stability of one's identity. Negative events can be experiencing or witnessing a single or a series of racial incidents such as police brutality, racial slurs, or racial harassment. Positive encounters can include an historic

cultural event, for example the election of President Obama. Cross (1995) describes these incidences as situations that “catch a person off guard”. This process can disrupt or destroy the pre-encounter identity and provides an individual with direction and insight for making changes in his or her worldview on race. The encounter identity involves two steps for change occur, experiencing the encounter and personalizing the encounter (Cross, 1995). It is usually a powerful event that affects an individual causing him or her to challenge personal beliefs about race. The individual then personalizes the experience and makes a conscious decision to alter his or her perception regarding race. Within this process there is usually a negative nature to the encounter which can cause one to become enraged at the information provided by the dominant culture. A person can experience extreme confusion and depression. According to Cross (1995) “It can be a very painful experience to discover that one’s frame of reference, worldview, or value system is “wrong”, ‘incorrect”, dysfunctional”, or, more to the point, “not Black or Afrocentric enough” (Cross, 1995, p. 105).

The Immersion-Emersion stage is marked by a sense of cognitive dissonance. During this stage the individual adopts a new frame of reference while attempting to dismantle the existing pre-encounter identity. This stage has two identities, one that includes intense involvement in black culture and ethnicity and one that includes Anti-White sentiment. Individuals who assume the intense Black involvement elevate all things related to Black culture. Individuals who assume an Anti-White identity denigrate White people and White culture (Richardson et al., 2010). According to Cross (1995), this particular stage addresses the most sensational aspects of Black identity development and “represents the vortex of psychological Nigrescence” (p. 106). A person in this stage is often very anxious and

uncertain about what type of Black person he or she is becoming. Usually in this transitional stage of "in-betweeness" individuals become attracted to symbols of black identity such as hair styles, clothing styles, and language codes. Those who are most uneasy with their personal identity transition are often the ones who exhibit outward signs of their new identity (Cross 1995). As an individual becomes more comfortable with his or her new identity emotions become more stable and he or she is in control of attitudes and intellect regarding his or her new identity. The individual is said to be in the emersion phase of this stage. During this phase there is awareness that the new Black identity is more than symbolic, and that this new identity includes substantive and complex ideology regarding Black or Afrocentric culture. It is important to note that during this highly volatile stage some individuals may experience regression, fixation or stagnation. The intensity of this stage can be extremely frustrating for some persons, and for reasons that are often not clear, cause some to cease their quest for a new Black identity (Cross, 1995).

The fourth stage of Nigrescence is Internalization. There are three identities which African-Americans within the internalization stage, Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist. A person who embraces the Black Nationalist identity focuses on Black community empowerment and all the aspects which pertain to maintaining strength within Black communities. A person who embraces the Biculturalist identity adapts to an identity consisting of two parts, self acceptance and a pluralist perspective which includes other cultural orientations such as gender and sexual orientation. The person who chooses a Multiculturalists identity "embraces an identity that focuses on multiple prominent identities, for example gender, sexual orientation, race, etc." (Richardson et al., 2010, p. 230). During

the final stage Internalization-commitment individuals who have embraced a positive black identity begin working towards establishing positive images and perceptions about African-Americans. They may become committed to alleviated racism within their communities and within society as a whole.

Parham's racial identity model. Parham (1989) is noted for adding a lifespan perspective to racial identity development. He believed that identity development did not cease once an individual progressed through the stages of development rather he suggested racial identity development to be an ongoing process which continues throughout ones adult life (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Parham, 1989; Richarson et al., 2010). Parham extended Cross's model by incorporating three stages of racial identity, late adolescence/early adulthood, midlife, and late adulthood. This model proposes three different ways in which an individual can resolve a racial identity conflict, stagnation, stagewise linear progression, and recycling. The concept of the recycling phase is described as an individual's re-entry into his or her racial identity struggle after experiencing something traumatic, for example violent attack with racial overtones, overt racism at one's place of employment. Parham suggests that the process of racial identity development is non linear and theorizes that African-Americans progress through angry feelings about whites which in turn leads to the development of a positive Black frame of reference. Preferably, this is the path to securing a realistic awareness of one's racial identity and to the development of a biculturalist identity (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Parham specifically associates Black racial identity for African-Americans with social interactions between African-Americans and Whites and postulates that the social interactions are the

basis “that moves individual black identity from the unconscious to the conscious” (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, p. 42). Parham’s model is perceived as helpful in that it provides a continual progression to racial identity development throughout the lifespan. It is perceived as problematic in that it proposes that unavoidable racial difference and conflict as being the primary stimulus for African-American racial identity development (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Helm’s model of racial identity. The Helm’s model places emphasis on the subjective aspects related to racial identity development. Like Marcia (1980) Helm’s model describes identity formation as occurring in statuses. Within each status the Helm’s model explains how individuals display behaviors, attitudes and emotions that are prevalent in more than one state or stage of development. Within the different statuses a person’s perception of racial information is processed and develop into “schemata or behavioral manifestations” of the underlying statuses (Richardson et al., 2010 p. 230). The schemata that an individual develops are extremely important in coping with racial information. They provide a protective factor which in turn contributes to a person’s emotional stability and well being (Helms, 1995; Richardson et al., 2010).

Similar to Cross’s model, the Helm’s model has five statuses, Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion- Emersion, Internalization, and Integrative Awareness. The pre-encounter status is marked by attitudes and behaviors which devalue African-American culture and the Black race. An individual in this status is thought to be lacking unawareness to racial issues in the environment. During the Encounter Status an individual is confused about his or her meshing with the White world and exhibits ambivalence about identifying

with his or her own racial group. There are emotional conflicts about replacing the idealization of White people with positive attributes regarding his or her own racial group. In the Immersion status one begins to idealize his or her own racial group and disparage the dominant White culture. The schemata concerning racial issues are simplistic and dichotomous. The Emersion status is depicted by positive feelings about one's race and a bonding and unity when interacting with other African-Americans. During the Internalization status a person feels a sense of commitment to African-Americans and to African-American culture. He or she also has the ability respond appropriately to the dominant culture and to process intricate racial issues and information. The Integrative Awareness status is the most cognitively sophisticated status allowing "for the most complex racial information processing, as an individual recognizes oppressive practices that dis-empower other racial groups and other cultural groups without abandoning one's own Black identity" (Richardson et al., 2010, p. 231).

Important to Helm's model are the schemas which in each of the statuses help the individual cope with stressful racial information during different situations. A person uses dominant schema to process racial information and interpret a particular situation. If the dominant schema is ineffective then the individual may choose a secondary schema that in the past has been effective for interpreting the situation and providing the individual with coping mechanisms. Significant to Helm's model and her interpretation of racial identity development is that she posits that all racial groups experience racial identity development, albeit each racial group may experience identity development differently.

Each of the above models serves as a template for the multiracial identity models that followed. Each provides the basis for stages of development in which an individual struggles with his or her identity with regards to the dominant race or culture, and each has a final stage or status where an individual arrives at a better understand of his or her racial self. These models present monoracial comparisons between two racial groups. What is lacking is a multidimensional process of racial identity development that captures the dual or multiple heritages of multiracial individuals (Root, 1992, 1996). However, each model is referenced later in the chapter as it relates to multiracial identity development.

Models of Multiracial Identity Development

In the late 1980s Phinney who had done extensive research regarding the social and psychological development of ethnic identity developed the Multigroup Ethnic identity Measure (MEIM). The MEIM was designed to gather information regarding an individual's sense of commitment and belonging to a particular group. Through a series of 12 questions individuals answer questions pertaining to their ethnic identity. Although it was not specifically designed to be used with multiracial individuals the MEIM was one of the first research tools to include a category for, and to give precedence to, individuals whose heritage consisted of two or more ethnic and or racial groups. Through her work Phinney and several colleagues were able to determine that there is a diverse variation in the importance that one attributes to his or her ethnic identity, and that ethnic minority groups attribute greater significance to their ethnic heritage and identity than do members of the dominant majority group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Although Phinney is not credited as being the first scholar to research ethnic and racial identity development her early ethnic identity work and the

development of the MEIM are frequently cited by researchers in the field of racial and ethnic identity. Among these researchers was a group of scholars who at the same time Phinney was developing the MEIM were themselves involved in seminal research regarding multiracial individuals and multiracial identity development.

Root's groundbreaking book *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) provided scholars with a volume of literature specifically aimed at providing a comprehensive exploration of the social, psychological and environmental aspects of being multiracial in the United States. One of the topics addressed in the book is multiracial identity development. Root (1992) suggests that the increase of the multiracial population "is transforming the 'face' of the United States and is causing the country to re-examine how we view ourselves in relation to one another and in particular how we view race" (p. 3). The country's hierarchical racial system is advantageous for some and disastrous for others. According to Root (1992),

The "racial ecology" is complex in a phenotypically heterogeneous society that has imbued physical differences with significant meaning in a convention that benefits selective segments of the society. At a personal level, race is very much in the eye of the beholder; at a political level, race is in the service of economic and social privilege. (p. 4)

The tendency to think simplistically about multifaceted relationships has contributed to a dichotomous system, White-non-White, that is oppressive. This system places multiracial individuals in a precarious position, often in a "neither-nor" status, in which they are forced to choose one of their heritages but denied the opportunity to choose all parts of their heritage Herman, 2004; Root, 1992). Additionally, our simplistic way of

conceptualizing race affects how we think about our social identity. Earlier linear models of identity development failed to portray the true essence of multiracial identity (Miville, 2005; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992). In order to address what some researchers (Hermann, 2004; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992) refer to as an almost non-existent literature regarding multiracial individuals and multiracial identity development, scholars began to develop multidimensional models which are complex, fluid, and allocate for the possibility of a person belonging to two or more racial groups simultaneously (Kich, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterroto, 1993; Poston, 1992; Root, 1992, 1996).

Based on Thorton and Wason's (1995) outline to describe the identity of multiracial people Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) reviewed the history of racial identity theories as they pertain to multiracial individuals. Their findings suggest that the research follows one of three approaches, the problem approach, the equivalent approach, and the variant approach. Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado added the ecological approach which includes the most current research regarding multiracial individuals. Furthermore, it was noted that multiracial individuals with one black parent and one white parent are the dominant sample used in most of the multiracial literature. Blacks and Whites are also thought to have the greatest social distance in the United States and for this reason the above mentioned researchers used Black/White multiracial individuals when providing descriptions of the different research approaches.

The problem approach. The problem approach to multiracial identity views multiracial individuals as not belonging to any racial or social group placing them "in-between" status. Multiracial people were perceived as problematic and as living lives that

were marked by tragedy, dysfunction, and depression. It is believed that the origins of this approach can be traced back to the country's Jim Crow era, a period in our country's history in which certain segments of the United States strictly adhered to a system of racial segregation. Social scientists of this era attempted to explain racial identity development of multiracial people in an oppressive system that is noted for distinct disparaging and inhumane treatment of Africa-Americans. Within this context the rule of hypodescent or the "one drop rule", which stated that anyone having more than one drop of non-White blood was considered to be non-White, was the social rule and the law in many states. As products of this time period racial identity theories tended to represent a problem approach which focused on deficits, social ills, conflicts and negative experiences connected with being a person of multiracial heritage. Assumptions include that claiming a monoracial identity is preferable to multiracial individuals and that the majority of their problems are due to their being "between" the races (Renn, 2004). These theories emphasized the negative aspects such as isolation and rejection, which at that time, multiracial people often experienced from both the dominant and minority groups of society (Rockquemore et al., 2009).

Some of the first theories regarding multiracial identity were developed largely based on racism, and the theories postulated that people of mixed racial heritage were deficient and had incomplete identities (Renn, 2004; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Robert Park's (1928) marginal man is characteristic of the problem approach to multiracial identity theory. While the theory addressed all multiracial people Park suggested that due to the strict color line in the United States multiracial people of Black/White unions must identify themselves as Black. Furthermore, he believed that such individuals were destined to living their lives in "a

permanent state of crisis in which their mental state was marked by turmoil that reflected a deeply racist and eugenic epistemology" (Rockquemore, et al., 2009).

Stoneqist (1937) expanded Park's theory by inferring that multiracial people had an understanding of the conflict between the Black and White races which subsequently caused them to identify with both racial groups. The identification with both groups caused an "internalization of the group conflict as a personal problem (Rockquemore, et al., 2009, p. 16). Stonequist suggests that the multiracial individual or "marginal man" experiences three stages of the life cycle, introduction, crisis, and adjustment. Each stage was alleged to be predictable. During the introduction stage the marginal man experiences the cultures of both parents. This opportunity allows for some assimilation of both cultures. In the crisis stage an individual can experience one or more events triggering a crisis. Stonquist believed that these events presented an individual with the reality of the incompatibility between the two races. The incompatibility and incongruity between the races defined the conflict ridden existence of the marginal man's life. The various crises produce confusion, shock and estrangement, however at some point the marginal man fully understands his social status and adjusts to his place in the social structure (Rockquemore, et al., 2009). For some multiracial persons the adjustment is socialization towards the dominant group. However, with regards to Black/White multiracial people the adjustment towards the dominant group, Whites, was impossible due to the race hierarchy within the country at the time. Stonequist alleged that the Black/White marginal man would become a leader within the Black community, or in the most tragic case become withdrawn and isolated (Rockquemore, et al., 2009; Stonequist, 1937).

The equivalent approach. This approach emerged during the 1960s when researchers began questioning the established thinking regarding people of color. Within the context of the Civil Rights movement scholars readjusted their ideology about Black racial identity development. Proponents of this approach conclude that multiracial people and monoracial people progress through a similar identity processes arriving with similar outcomes (Renn, 2004).

Researchers assumed that Black/White multiracial individuals as being part of the African-American community and thought there was no need to highlight or emphasize differences among members of the multiracial population and the larger African-American population. In fact many of the theories stressed and expected that Black/White multiracial people develop a positive Black identity just like other African-Americans. Rockquemore et al., (2009) note that scholars made the declaration that the majority of African-Americans were racially mixed and because of this fact it was assumed that there was no need to differentiate between people who were racially mixed by parentage, children of interracial families, and those who were racially mixed over several generations, the vast majority of African-Americans. Subsequently, equivalent approached research theories considered it healthy for multiracial individuals to develop a Black identity, and negative mental health issues were regarded as the internalization of racist views (p. 17). Equivalent approach models that were used with multiracial individuals aimed to help the individual understand their racial identity as Black.

Equivalent approach models derive mainly from Erikson's (1968) ego-identity formation. According to Erikson, the central task of adolescence is establishing a stable

identity (1968). It is believed that the process of racial identity development is similar to ego development in that "individuals explore and make various levels of commitment, across various social spaces, over time" (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p, 17). The most well known and frequently tested equivalent theory is Cross's Nigrescence model (1971). Other models include (Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Kerwin et al., 1993).

The variant approach. During the last two decades of the twentieth century a new group of scholars emerged who focused on "conceptualizing the mixed-race population as distinct from any single racial group" (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p, 18). Many of this new generation of researchers were themselves multiracial. Their theoretical perspective was to change and challenge the ideology of multiracial research, and to explain the psychological and sociological process of how multiracial people construct a biracial and or multiracial identity. An import element of identity development for multiracial individuals is how this process can be accomplished while one maintains "a healthy, integrated sense of his or her multiple racial ancestries, cultures, and social locations" (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p, 18).

The variant approach models address some of this researcher's interests and are incorporated into the overall research question of this particular study. One such model Gibbs (1987) focuses on issue of conflicts related to identity. Her two year study of biracial adolescents and their families explored the process by which biracial adolescents negotiated their racial identities and the parents' perception of their adjustment to being raised in an interracial family (Gibbs & Hines, 1992). Gibbs's developed her model based on the coping behaviors and conflict strategies that were exhibited by biracial adolescents in treatment. The model is based on Erikson's psychosocial theory of adolescent development and

addresses five areas of conflict which were are perceived to occur during the process of establishing a biracial identity. Gibb's suggests that development problems may occur when an individual experiences conflicts regarding, 1) dual racial heritage, 2) social marginality, 3) sexuality and impulse management, 4) autonomy from parents, and 5) educational and career aspirations.

Particularly interesting in the research findings which assisted in the development of Gibbs' model were the results of the conflicts regarding racial identity and social marginality. Gibbs found that conflicts related to racial identity usually occurred when an individual failed to integrate the racial and ethnic identities of both parents into a unified identity for themselves (Gibbs & Hines, 1992). With respect to social marginality most of the biracial participants reported being comfortable within their social surroundings and were comfortable with their biracial identity. The majority reported that they experienced positive peer relationships having friends of all races including friends who were biracial. The comprehensive multidimensional design of Gibbs's study allowed her to research the subjects in their homes and provided an opportunity to explore social environment, family dynamics, and neighborhood environment. The factors associated to positive psychosocial development included "intact families, higher socioeconomic status, attending integrated schools, living in integrated neighborhoods, having a multicultural social life, and having open, warm relationships with parents" (Gibbs & Hines, 1992, p. 296).

Gibbs suggests that the challenge for multiracial adolescents includes the ability to "successfully integrate dual racial and/or cultural identifications while also learning how to develop a positive self-concept and sense of competence and "develop the ability to

synthesize their early identifications into a coherent and stable sense of personal identity as well as a positive racial identity" (Rockequemore et al., 2009, p. 18).

Poston biracial identity model. In 1990 Poston developed the Biracial Identity Development Model (BIDM). The BIDM is perhaps the most noted and cited variant approach identity models and was one of the first models suggesting the importance of developing a positive healthy biracial identity (Renn, 2008; Rockquemore et al., 2009). Poston criticized existing developmental models (Cross, 1971, 1987; Morten & Atkinson, 1983) which he felt lacked an accurate account of the experiences of biracial individuals. He proposed a "new and positive model" which more accurately depicted the identity development process for biracial and multiracial individuals. The BIDM has five stages of development 1) Personal Identity, 2) Choice of Group categorization, 3) Enmeshment/Denial, 4) Appreciation, and 5) Integration. At the time his model was first introduced Poston noted that the stages in the BIDM were tentative and were based on limited research gathered from professionals who worked with multiracial persons. Additionally, he suggested that it was helpful to view the stages as changes in what Cross (1987) had described as reference group orientation attitudes experienced by African-Americans in their identity development process.

Individuals in the personal identity stage are young children and have not yet developed a personality that is associated with a particular race. At this level the child's sense of self is independent of race or ethnicity but this does not mean that he or she does not have an awareness of race or ethnicity. At this age an individual's reference group orientation is not yet developed so one's personal identity is usually based on self-esteem and self-worth

which is usually developed and learned from the family. A person's personal identity includes self-esteem, self –worth, and interpersonal competence and thought to be independent of racial categorization (Poston, 1990).

Choice of Group Categorization stage is distinct in that individuals are forced to choose and identify themselves as belonging to one of their racial heritages or choosing a multicultural identity. This stage is thought to be a time of crisis and alienation for the multiracial individual. Status factors, social support factors, and personal factors are thought to contribute to the choice a person makes regarding his or her identity. Status factors may include the status of the parents' ethnic or racial background, neighborhood demographics, and the racial, ethnic, and influence of one's peer group. Social support factors often are shaped by the acceptance of and the participation in other groups' ethnic and cultural activities. Personal factors can include physical appearance, age, knowledge of languages other than English, political involvement and cultural knowledge (Poston, 1990). Often an individual chooses a multicultural identity that encompasses both parents' heritages or chooses a monoracial identity from the dominate or minority group (Poston, 1990; Renn, 2008).

The Enmeshment/Denial stage is marked by guilt and confusion associated with having to choose an identity that does not include all aspects of one's heritage. A person may experience feelings of anger, shame, self-hatred, and a lack of acceptance from one or more different groups. If a multiracial child cannot identify with both parents he or she might have guilty feelings about rejecting the parent with whom he or she does not identify. An example of this is the multiracial adolescent who is scared and ashamed to have friends

meet his or her parent whose racial background is different from the majority of the neighborhood. The same adolescent has the additional burden of feeling guilty and angry about his or her feelings (Poston, 1990). In order to progress through this stage and advance to the next stage the individual must resolve the anger and guilt (Poston, 1990; Renn, 2008). Support from community and from parents is extremely important during this stage as it can help multiracial adolescents resolve anger and guilt issues related to their identity.

Appreciation is the stage where multiracial individuals begin to expand their racial reference group by learning more about all aspects of their background. Individuals may initiate an exploration of a part of their racial heritage that was previously ignored however there is a tendency to identify with one group (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2008). The choice of group with which one chooses to identify is influenced by the factors identified in the earlier choice stage (Poston, 1990).

During the Integration stage individuals incorporate all aspects of their racial heritage and value the importance of a multiracial identity. Individuals continue to explore the uniqueness of each of their racial heritages and develop a whole and integrated identity (Kerwin & Ponterooto, 1995; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2008).

Poston's biracial identity model delineates the difficulties that multiracial individuals often experience in the process of developing a multiracial identity. The model stresses that such experiences are unique to multiracial identity development and contribute to the complexity of forming a multiracial identity. What distinguished Poston's model from other models that existed at the time it first appeared was and is the hallmark of the model which is the culmination of a healthy multiracial identity for multiracial individuals.

Kich model of biracial identity development. Kich's model was developed based on a combination of the findings of his dissertation published in 1982, in which he interviewed Japanese/White adults, included his involvement with multiracial community groups, and included his clinical experience with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Like Poston's model this model emphasizes the development of a healthy multiracial identity. The Kich model suggests that biracial and multiracial individuals experience three stages of identity development but that multiracial identity development is a lifetime process (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992). The three stages of the Kich model are, 1) Awareness of Differentness and Dissonance, 2) Struggle for Acceptance, and 3) Self- Acceptance and Assertion of an Interracial Identity. Kich viewed the identity process for multiracial individuals as "transitions from questionable, sometimes devalued sense of self to one where an interracial self-conception is highly valued and secure. The major development task for the biracial people is to differentiate critically among others' interpretations of them, various pejorative and grandiose labels and mislabels, and their own personal experiences and conceptions of themselves" (Kich, 1992, p. 305). The differentiation process is extremely complex and includes the ability to discern the differences between self perception and others' perceptions. Subsequently, biracial identity development also includes the complex relationship which includes family, community and self. The three stages describe how biracial individuals transition from an identity where one questions him or herself and may have a devalued sense of one's self, to the development of a healthy biracial or multiracial identity in which one has a valued sense of self and a secure identity (Kich, 1992).

Awareness of Differentness and Dissonance occurs between the ages of 3 and 10. During this stage the multiracial person is aware of the differences between self-perceptions and others' perceptions of himself or herself. Regardless of their racial heritage all multiracial individuals experience a sense of being different. According to Kich (1992) being different can be a encouraging experience in the context of a supportive family where the multiracial individual feels safe and secure and in which being biracial is viewed positively. Conversely, when being different is devalued and a source of rejection by others the experience of discord can become an obstacle for multiracial individuals.

During this stage parents play an instrumental role in identity development. Parental behavior and interaction with their multiracial children can help establish the foundation of a positive self-concept and self-esteem (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992). Providing an environment where there is open discussion about race, interracial labels and "multiracial-ness" contributes to the development of a healthy self. By providing a safe atmosphere in which one can discuss feelings about race, ethnicity, and culture parents "plant a seed for subsequent identity resolutions" (Kich, 1992, p. 308). Furthermore, parents' positive modeling, such as valuing all aspects of the multiracial child's heritage, openness to cultural differences, foods, languages etc., contribute to the acceptance of being multiracial. As the multiracial individual struggles to understand his dual or multiple heritages the strong foundation established with the help of a supportive family life helps the multiracial individual as he or she explores explanations for the dissonance he or she may experience. At this point of identity development the multiracial person moves into stage two.

The Struggle for Acceptance stage occurs from age eight through late adolescence, or into young adulthood. During this stage individuals become more involved in with friends, in their school and in their communities. The struggle for acceptance is thought to occur in school settings and within the community (Kich, 1992). The intensity of being different is intensified in school and being the only multiracial child in the classroom often highlights one's difference. The school is often the first place that a multiracial child is confronted with the ubiquitous question "what are you?" This question may be spurred by appearance, name, or another characteristic. Usually individuals in this stage list their parents' identity to describe that they are, for example, my mom is Japanese and my dad is White. Kich (1992) noted that many multiracial individuals desire to be known, however, they may have feelings of shame or anger due to being constantly judged by their differentness.

Again, parental support or uneasiness with being a multiracial family can be crucial in the extent that the multiracial child or adolescent feels isolated from others and embarrassed about his or her multiracial heritage. Though the family is seen as a source of refuge for the multiracial individual during this stage it is also a constant reminder that he or she is different from peers. A very interesting part of this stage is that there is often a tension created by the loyalty to one's parents and the desire to be accepted by friends. This conflict can spur a desire for the multiracial person to keep home separate from school, due in part to the idea that "experiences of dissonance are extremely difficult to resolve during this stage" (Kich, 1992, p. 310). Behaviors that are done naturally at home would never be considered something to be done at school. An example might be eating an ethnic food or participating in a heritage specific event, such as dance or dress (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992).

This might be different from monracial experiences of dissonance in that for the multiracial individual blending in with peers and acceptance from peers is multidimensional. Several factors such race, ethnicity, dress, religion and cultural traditions from dual or multiple references impact the multiracial individual's awareness of his or her being different from the "norm" of American culture. For the multiracial person there might be more of one's self to suppress when gaining acceptance by the larger society.

The struggle of identifying with one parent over the other is another threat to the multiracial person's identity during this stage. The primary struggle or concern for the multiracial individual is a question of loyalty to one of his or her parents. Kich (1992) suggests that an ambivalent relationship is created with parent who most represents the multiracial individual's experience with being different and at the same time the multiracial individual creates an over identification relationship with the other parent. As multiracial individuals progress through this stage there is a constant attempt to integrate the different aspects of themselves and their multiple heritages (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992).

During high school years multiracial individuals experience swift changes and fluctuations in self perception. There is increased activity and changes in peer groups, reference groups, and extended family contacts. Additionally, a multiracial individual may use specific labels to identify himself or herself as he or she becomes aware of the value of his or her parents' heritages and the significant role of their heritages regarding his or her identity. Like monoracial adolescents multiracial individuals may explore several different reference groups to see where they fit in. This process can be an emotional rollercoaster presenting multiracial individuals with both acceptance and rejection experiences. Though

some experiences may be extremely difficult they contribute to the multiracial individual's "heightened ability to negotiate the racial and ethnic mine field" (Kich, 1992, p. 312).

The end of this stage multiracial individuals engage in self –exploration and identity formation in which they begin seeing themselves as different from either parent and their quest is to develop an identity that includes a multiracial label. They may begin to refer to themselves as biracial, multiracial, Amerasian, or bi-ethnic. By owning and accepting this new label the multiracial person identifies with and feels more connected to others who are also multiracial.

The hallmark of stage 3, Self-Acceptance and Assertion of an Interracial Identity, is the ability of the multiracial individual to create and sustain a multiracial identity that is self-determined. This occurs in late adolescence or in the transitions form college to work (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). A person may immerse himself or herself in racial and ethnic heritage, family history, rituals, and cultural customs (Kich, 1992). Multiracial persons realize that not all questions regarding their racial heritage are racists or are a personal attack. As the multiracial person's stability and comfort level increases with his or her "new identity" he or she is better able to act instead of react in situations where questions concern his or her multiracial heritage is concerned. At this point the multiracial person clearly understands that the confusion about their heritage is confusion on the part of the other person and "essentially the confusion of the rest of society about race and ethnicity" (Kich, 1992, p. 315).

Self-acceptance permits multiracial individuals with opportunities to be self expressive, self-determined, and proactive about their identity. Multiracial identity is valued

as the culmination of personal relationships, personal experience and the social meanings that one associates with race, ethnicity and group membership. Being able to declare this is who I am, is a lifelong process which according to Kich (1992) appears to "repeat at different levels of complexity during major crises or transitions throughout the lifespan" (p. 316) and for multiracial individuals it is extremely important that one asserts him or herself with a multiracial identity.

Kerwin-Ponterotto model. The Kerwin -Ponterotto model was developed by combining the similarities among several other models (Jacobs, 1977; Kerwin, 1991; Kerwin et al., 1993; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Stephan, 1992; Williams, 1992). Like other models the Kerwin- Ponterotto model suggests that multiracial identity development is dependent on several personal, psychological, environmental and social factors and that identity resolution for multiracial persons is an individual process (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). For example, different multiracial individuals may identify their public self as African-American, Asian, Latino, while at the same time maintain or "hold a multiracial self-concept" (Ponterotto & Kerwin, 1995, p. 210). The model has five stages based on age groups, Preschool, Entry to School, Preadolescence, College/Young Adulthood, and Adulthood.

During the Preschool stage (up to age 5) racial awareness begins to emerge. Multiracial children have an increased recognition of the similarities and differences in people's physical appearance. It is believed that some multiracial children raised in multiracial families may be cognizant of differences in appearance at an early age due to their early exposure to different racial groups. Conversely, some multiracial children raised

in multiracial families may have little or no awareness of racial differences due in part to their parents' attitudes regarding racial differences (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

As children enter the school setting, Entry to School stage, their world becomes somewhat bigger and their exposure to children from different backgrounds may be greater than that of their neighborhoods. It is often in the school setting where multiracial children first encounter questions about their heritage and where they may be subjected to the question "what are you?" During this stage multiracial children may use certain expressive terms to describe their families in response to such questions. Descriptions may include skin color, hair texture, eye shape or the terms biracial or multiracial. The descriptive terms selected by multiracial children often depends on the type of terminology used by parents and the labels used by families to describe themselves (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). It is probable that there are varying degrees of racial identity development at this stage which can be dependent upon factors such racial and ethnic makeup of the school or other multiracial families within the school setting.

During the Preadolescence stage there is an increased awareness that differences such as physical appearance and language designate one's membership within a certain group. As the multiracial individual matures he or she is more likely to use descriptive terms which categorize people by race, ethnicity, religion, language, or culture instead of terms which categorize individuals solely by physical features. Very important during this stage is the heightened awareness that one's parents belong to distinct racial or ethnic groups. It is natural for this awareness to occur earlier during the multiracial person's racial identity development however, it is believed that the heightened awareness can be triggered by a

significant environmental event, for example an experience involving racism or teasing due to his or her racial heritage.

Adolescence is believed to be the most challenging for multiracial persons. This can be due in large part to developmental factors thought to be characteristic of this age group and societal pressures experienced by teenagers (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). As with other biracial identity models (Poston, 1990) multiracial adolescents may be pressured by peers to choose one racial group over another. This process can be exacerbated by adolescents increased intolerance for things that are different. Not fitting in with a particular group can foster feelings of rejection and isolation. The pressure to choose one group over another may be attributed to a "difficulty in rejecting societal expectations" and "it may be difficult for the biracial adolescent to resist pressure to conform to expectations of others to identify solely with his or her parent of color" (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 212). Pressures to choose may be neutralized by factors not related to race for example, athletic teams, academic abilities, and special interests. Dating during adolescence brings racial issues and racial identity to the forefront. Dating is not particularly a problem for the multiracial adolescent but rather the choice of who a multiracial individual chooses to date may be a problem for others and can prompt unwanted reactions from others, particularly the parents of dating partners (Kerwin & Ponerotto, 1995).

College/Young Adulthood is marked by an increase immersion in one's racial and ethnic background sometimes ensuing in a rejection of other groups. As with other identity models (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) and biracial identity models (Poston, 1990; Root, 1990) the Kerwin-Ponterotto model suggests that multiracial individual is thought to develop

a more secure personal identity after rejecting other reference group identities. As the multiracial young adult becomes more confident in his or her racial identity he or she can easily reject others' expectations and this in turn can lead to an increased acceptance of a multiracial identity. The increased awareness of a multiracial identity may sometimes provide advantages in environmental situations that were once viewed by the multiracial individual as difficult or uncomfortable. The dual and or multi heritage of the multiracial person can provide him or her with perspectives not available to monoracial persons (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992).

Adulthood- Because identity development (Erikson, 1968; Parham, 1989) and multiracial identity development (Poston, 1990, Root, 1992) are both viewed as lifelong processes it believed that there is a continued process of identity development for multiracial individuals. As with monroacial individuals there are various psychological, social, and environmental factors which contribute to the development of racial identity development for multiracial person. During Adulthood the successful resolution of each of the previous stages of the Kerwin-Ponterotto model add to the further exploration and interest in one's multiracial heritage. As one continues to integrate multiple heritages he or she becomes more comfortable with whom he or she is and is able to interact more effectively in different situations and within different communities (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Root's Ecological Approach to Multiracial Identity Development

Among ecological models is one developed by Root. Root (1990, 1992, 1996) suggests a broader conceptualization of multiracial identity development proposing an "ecological metamodel" for understanding multiracial identity development. Ecological

models focus on the context which surrounds identity development instead of focusing on one particular outcome to identity development (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). She posits that having parents who are from different races within a society that is organized by a hierarchical and mutually exclusive racial structure creates a social environment which places multiracial individuals in the borderlands (Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009; Root, 1992, 1996). Root emphasizes that a multitude of factors such as parent's identity, parent's origin of birth, extended family and socialization all contribute to multiracial identity development. Parents' social skills such as temperament, coping, and interaction with the larger community also contribute to multiracial identity development. Root (1996) suggests that multiracial identity development is negotiated using what she terms as border crossings. Border crossings are strategies used in daily interactions with others and within the environment. They include having the ability carry multiple racial and or ethnic perspectives simultaneously; being able to shift one's racial identity with regards to the situational context or the environment; known as situational identity; choosing to assert an independent multiracial identity that is separate from one's family and peers; and having the ability to maintain a monoracial identity when entering different cultural environments (Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1996).

Root's ecological model stands apart from previous models in that it truly encompasses every aspect of racial identity development. It is both a fluid and multidimensional incorporating all the previously discussed identity and racial identity models stages. The model also gives prominence to the significance of gender, class, and the regional history of race which Root (1996, 1998) believes provides filters to the meanings of

different situations and experiences to which people are exposed. Inherited influences such as family names, languages spoken in the home, cultural values, phenotype and sexual orientation, traits, such as parents temperament, coping style, special talents, and social environments, such as school, home, and work also serve as filters in the meaning that one associates with his or her daily experiences (Root, 1996,1998).

The strength of Root's model is that it proposes that there are many ways in which multiracial individuals may identify themselves. Additionally, it suggests that chosen identities may be situational, contextual and that they may change through one's life cycle. Root stresses that the identity that a multiracial individual may hold at any one time may not necessarily coincide with how other people label or identify that particular multiracial individual and suggests that a person's private identity may be different from the public identity that is assumed or validated by others. Root emphasizes that it is important to recognize that "identity development, validation, and transformation are contextually informed by people in situations within which they interpret their interpersonal transactions through political, gendered, and class positions within the region's history of race relations" (Root, 1998, p. 240).

Summary

Models of multiracial identity development, like symbolic interaction theory, propose that identity development is a continual life long process in which a person's identity is formed within the context of environment and by constant interaction with others within one's environment. Personal perception, others' perceptions, social interaction, definition, and meaning making all contribute to the development of racial identity for multiracial

individuals. This research examined multiracial young adults who have a healthy racial identity as defined by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the process of establishing a strong identity from a dual or multiple perspectives through the examination of the personal narratives of multiracial individuals. The researcher was interested in exploring what psychological, social, familial, and environmental factors contribute to the development of a healthy racial identity in multiracial young adults.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research design, its epistemological foundation, and the justification for its choice. It reviews the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Further, the chapter explains methods implemented to enhance rigor and trustworthiness, and it reviews ethical considerations.

Research Design

This research study explored the development of a healthy racial identity in multiracial young adults. Specifically, it sought to answer the research question: What is the lived experience of multiracial young adults aged 18 to 30, which has contributed to a strong multiracial identity? It employed a qualitative design reflecting a constructivist paradigm with the data analyzed via grounded theory methods. Prior to the last few decades of the twentieth century there was limited information regarding the positive aspects of multiracial identity within the social science literature. The lack of research regarding multiracial individuals and their racial identity sparked interest in a new generation of researchers who perceived the multiracial population as being different and distinct from other racial groups. Subsequently, the researchers began conducting research which specifically addressed issues pertaining to multiracial identity development. These research pioneers opened doors to what is becoming a bourgeoning interest in multiracial identity research, and although professionals are beginning to acquire more information about multiracial identity development there are still questions that can only be answered through qualitative methods about this unique population (Bracey et al., 2004; Collins, 2001). Padgett (1988) suggests the use of qualitative methodology in circumstances in which the

research objective includes: the quest of a topic about which little is known, the pursuit of sensitive or emotional information, and or the desire to capture the real life experience of people in order to make meaning of the experience. Each of these circumstances is present in the study of multiracial identity development and warranted the use of qualitative methodology for this particular study.

The literature review presented in chapter two provided a historical perspective of identity development and followed a progression which eventually led to some researchers purposely focusing on the exploration of multiracial identity development. Various models of multiracial identity development (Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1993; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990) depicted the interest in identifying the specific issues embodied in multiracial identity development, and proposed that the complexity of multiracial identity development requires a multidimensional approach which often includes the possibilities of multiple truths or "realties" regarding multiracial identity. Root's ecological model introduced the concept of Border Crossings which are strategies used in daily interactions with others and within the environment, that incorporate the possibility of multiple identities and multiple social realities for multiracial individuals. Border crossings demonstrate situations in which multiracial individuals have the ability to carry multiple racial and or ethnic perspectives simultaneously, and have the capacity to shift one's racial identity with regards to situational context and or social environment (Root, 1996). Reissmann (1993) suggests that, "individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (p.2). Border crossings are different for each multiracial individual, and the meaning that each multiracial person attaches to his or her identity is different than the

meaning that another multiracial person may attach to his or her individual racial identity (Root, 1996). Individuals and individuals' imagination determine what is included in personal accounts of situations. Individuals also determine how situations are described, how events are told, and what certain events are understood to mean. People make sense of and give meaning to their life experiences by organizing them in story format (Reissmann, 1993). By examining similarities between and among the interviews provided by research participants the researcher in this study attempted to garnish an understanding of the meaning associated with lived experiences in multiracial individuals' racial identity development.

Philosophical Foundation

A qualitative research design reflects a constructivist paradigm. According to Drisko (1997), it is imperative that the research paradigm and the research methodology be selected, so as to reveal as much information as possible for a "given purpose and a particular audience" (p.186). The ontology of the constructivist paradigm is that there are multiple realities, and that these realities are holistic and competing (Guba, 1990). The limited research which does exist on multiracial identity development rarely provides information from the perspective of multiracial individuals. Additionally, multiracial identity development is a fluid process and identity develop within this population is varied (Kerwin et al., 1993; Kich, 1992; Root, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004). Thus, it seems appropriate to explore the "meaning-making" process of multiracial identity development using a qualitative methodology.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that a fair amount of social experience consists of the meaning-making actions that different groups of people or communities participate in

regarding a social experience. Their position proposes that the basis for judging reality is derived from a collective consensus regarding what is real, what is useful, and what is meaning. They reason that meaning-making activities are important because it is "meaning-making" that shapes people's behavior. Additionally, "the meaning-making activities themselves can be changed when they are found to be incomplete, faulty (e.g., discriminatory, oppressive, or non-liberatory), or malformed created from data that can be shown to be false" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 264).

According to Guba (1990) "the subjectivist position provides insight to the constructions held by others. If only in respondents' minds, subjective interaction seems to be the only way to access them" (p. 26). Assuming the subjectivist position, the researcher allows the constructions of the participants to be revealed within the interaction between the two.

While a constructivist reality is subjective, a more social constructionist view posits that reality is socially constructed and interpreted by the respondent within the context it occurs. Additionally, information provided by the respondent is dependent on the interpretive situation, such as an interview, in which the information is revealed (Drisko, 1999). The possibility of multiple realties within the constructivist paradigm is being looked at in this study. Root's (1998) viewpoint regarding multiracial identity development in which she suggests that chosen multiracial identities may be situational, contextual, that they may change through one's life cycle, and that racial identities may be and probably are different for multiracial persons within this diverse and unique population is consistent with a social constructionist position.

Data Analysis

This research employed grounded theory methods, in particular constant comparative analysis, to explore whether similarities exist among the meanings associated with certain events and occurrences within multiracial individuals' racial identity development. Albeit this researcher's goal was not to develop theory she was extremely interested in identifying concepts which may contribute to the foundation of a future theory or theories regarding healthy multiracial identity development. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to grounded theory as the process of systematically gathering and analyzing data in a process in which theory is derived from the data. The information obtained by the data is "likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12). Additionally, data collection and analysis is a continuous process throughout the research study.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) consider comparative analysis a prominent feature of social science research and suggest that regardless of the researcher's intent comparative analysis is often incorporated into research designs "whether explicitly or implicitly" (p. 78). Subsequently, comparing incidents and occurrences stimulates the researcher's thinking about the characteristics and variations in the data. Constant comparative analysis is iterative, commencing as an inductive process, moving to deductive process, and then returning to an inductive process (Padgett, 1998). It involves a detailed dissection and close examination of data in order to find meaning provided in the detail of the data. It allows the researcher to discriminate and differentiate among various categories of meaning and also permits the researcher to make associations about the character of relationships among the various

categories and subcategories of meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The comparing of incident to incident between and among the data sources, the interviews, provided the researcher with a format to examine whether connections existed among the emerging categories based on the similarities in occurring incidents.

Constant comparative analysis in grounded theory follows three stages of coding open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is the initial stage of data analysis. In this stage, the researcher categorizes the data by reading through the data and assigning a name. If similar characteristics are present then categories or subcategories are created. During the axial coding, the second phase of constant comparative analysis, the researcher makes the connections between and among categories and subcategories, and the data is put together in a new way based on the connections. The connections between and among the data are achieved by the researcher's exploring each category with more focus in order to determine which factors give rise to a certain category, what is the context of a certain category, what are the strategies that people use to manage a category, and what might be the consequences of particular strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As additional data are collected the researcher constantly examines the data in a process that continually refines the subcategories and their interconnections. The final stage, selective coding, involves identifying the core, or main, category and then linking it to the other categories. It is the final phase of analysis in which the researcher integrates concepts around a core category and engages in "the filling in of categories in need of further development and refinement" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 236). During this phase it is important for the researcher to validate the connections between and among the categories. If one is building a theory, then the selective coding phase of

comparative analysis provides the researcher with a plot or "storyline" that describes what occurs in the phenomenon that is being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

With respect to healthy multiracial identity development the researcher in this study was interested in examining the similarities of behaviors, attitudes, and racial awareness of participants' racial identity development. Of particular interest was the examination of meaning associated with the question "what are you?", this question is often posed to many multiracial individuals usually during early stages of development, and a question which often triggers meaning associated with one's racial identity. This particular question appeared to elicit a lot of meaning-making associations among the participants of the study and enhanced the researcher's awareness and sensitivity to the meaning that was associated with the questioning of one's racial identity. One of the goals of comparative analysis is that the researcher becomes sensitive to the amount of and types of properties possibly pertaining to phenomena that otherwise in the broader text might go unnoticed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of the broader text is the "total personal narrative" provided in an interview. The prospect of gaining a better understanding of the intricacies of developing a healthy multiracial identity was extremely important to this study, and to future studies, because as mentioned previously, there is scarce research literature regarding healthy multiracial identity development. More importantly, information gathered in this study will contribute to the professional knowledge base regarding multiracial identity development.

Sampling Strategies

Participants consisted of multiracial young adults aged 18 to 30 who grew up in homes where both biological parents were present, and who have a strong multiracial

identity. In this study, multiracial identity is conceptualized as an individual's subjective incorporation of various aspects of his or her racial heritage, ethnic heritage, and social environment to establish a definition of self to include racial identity. The process of *racial identity development* is based on Phinney's ethnic identity development model as applied to racial groups. Because the study sought to determine how multiracial individuals construct their identities in a society that has strong opinions regarding race and specific ideas concerning racial categories, racial identity development of multiracial individuals was conceptualized by Phinney's ethnic identity model.

This study focused on participants of multiracial heritage. Multiracial was defined as those individuals who have biological parents who self-identify as members of different races. A strong multiracial identity was determined by a score of 2.0 or above on the commitment subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The MEIM measures and assesses ethnic identity within and among various ethnic groups (Phinney, 1992). The reliability of the MEIM is good to excellent with alphas of .81 and .90 respectively (Roberts, 1999). The score of 2.0 or above indicated "ethnic identity achieved" (see Methodology Addendum)

A two step process was used to identify a non-random purposive sample. In the first step potential participants were informed of the research study through flyers placed on university campuses, in public spaces, at community gathering places, and by word of mouth through professional references, peer references, and snowball sampling. Potential participants were asked to complete a consent form via the internet prior to completing the (MEIM). The time required to complete the MEIM was approximately five minutes.

Recruitment for participants for the interview portion of the study continued until a sample of 25 was obtained. The second step included participants who scored 2.0 or above on the MEIM and who consented to participate in an audio-taped interview.

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research is flexible and interpretive. It is flexible in that it may be fixed at the start of a study but open to changes throughout the course of the study, and data is interpretive in that the researcher "maintains a self-reflexive awareness that intersubjectivity and meaning is context and time specific" (Drisko, 1999, p. 19).

After potential participants completed the MEIM and achieved a score of 2.0 or above, they were contacted via email and offered an opportunity to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. When a participant agreed to partake in the interview portion of the study an agreement was made to meet in a public place to record the interview. Measures were taken to insure that the interview could be conducted in a manner that would maintain privacy. A public place was selected in order to neutralize the power dynamics of the researcher-respondent relationship (Padgett, 1988). Data were collected via semi-structured open-ended interviews with 15 participants. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

A semi-structured, open-ended interview guide based on racial identity theories and models included questions pertaining to family environment, social environment, and individual multiracial identity was used to initiate discussion about participants' racial identity development. The researcher directly followed the question format of the interview guide however, there were instances in which participants' responses required supplementary

questions by the researcher. Probe questions were developed for certain questions of the interview guide in order to provide opportunity for participants' narrate personal multiracial experiences.

The first two participants were reviewed as pilot interviews. Flexibility occurred as the information obtained from the pilot interviews assisted the researcher in modifying the interview guide for subsequent interviews. The pilot participants suggested that additional questions regarding sibling relationships and dating be added to the interview questions. Supplementary questions concerning dating were added to the interview guide. The researcher also decided to add the question "what are you?" to the interview guide. This question sometimes referred to as "the ubiquitous question" in the realm of multiracial research is well recognized throughout the multiracial population and all participants in the study recall several incidences in which the question was posed to them.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed in this study included transcribed interview and participants' demographics. The data consisted of 15 transcribed interviews and the MEIM survey. Data management and analysis was conducted using *Atlas.ti v6.2* a qualitative software program. Each participant was assigned a number from 1 to 25 and each transcribed participant interview was assigned an anonymous alphabetical name to match with the assigned number (i.e., 1-Ann, 2-Ben, 3-Cathy). Particular attention was made to insure that participants could not be identified by their pseudonyms.

The first step of the data management and analysis was to format the transcribed interview documents so they were compatible with the *Atlas.ti* format, and to then transfer

the documents into the *Atlas.ti* software. This allowed the researcher to maintain the goal of qualitative data management which, according to Padgett (1998), is having the ability to organize, store, and have easy access to raw data. After the transcribed interviews were transferred to *Atlas.ti* the researcher coded each interview using the three stages, open, axial, and selective, of constant comparative analysis.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Professional social work researchers are required integrate rigor and trustworthiness within the methodology of qualitative research inquiry (Padgett, 1998). Padgett refers to rigor as, "the degree to which a qualitative study's findings are authentic and its interpretations credible". She further suggests that, "rigor is essential to all forms of empirical research, whether quantitative or qualitative" (Padgett, 1998, p. 88). In this particular research the epistemology was constructivist. Within this framework the researcher acknowledged that there are multiple realities regarding multiracial identity. During this study it was imperative that the researcher present the reality of the respondent, and the respondent's perceptions about multiracial identity, and not the researcher's reality or what she "wished" the participants reality about their multiracial identity to be.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that there are many threats to rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research many of which fit into three major categories, reactivity, researcher biases, and respondent biases. Reactivity is the potential distortion effects presented by the researcher's presence in field, researcher biases occur when the researcher filters information from a prejudicial or preconceived opinion, and respondent biases occur when participants may withhold information and or provide false information to

protect their privacy or to avoid revealing unpleasant personal information. Padgett (1998) suggests six strategies for enhancing rigor in qualitative studies: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing/support, member checking, negative case analysis and audit trail.

In order to maintain rigor and trustworthiness in this study the researcher implemented several of Padgett's suggested strategies. The researcher maintained objectivity and coded the responses so that they were an authentic representation of what the participants stated. She conducted interviews in neutral settings and established trusting relationships with the respondents by revealing her identity as a member of an interracial couple, as the mother of multiracial children, and as a member of the social work profession who is dedicated to the study of multiracial identity development. A trusting relationship may allow for more open communication between researcher and participant, and can reduce the motivation as well as the opportunity for deception within qualitative research (Padgett, 1988).

The topic of multiracial identity development is of personal interest and great importance to the researcher and the interviews provided circumstances where there was a potential for "boundary crossing". Despite this circumstance the researcher was prudent in upholding an emotional middle distance in order to preserve the integrity and trustworthiness of the research (Weiss, 1994). Qualitative researchers should be self-reflexive throughout the study and remain cognizant of biases and how the biases might impact the study (Drisko, 1997; Padgett, 1998). To accomplish this, a peer debriefing group consisting of fellow graduate students was established to ensure against researcher bias. As peers, the groups'

responsibility included listening to one of the audio recorded interviews and providing the researcher with support, constructive feedback, and suggestions for the study. Of particular importance was the constructive feedback the peer debriefing group offered the researcher with an interview that elicited a significant amount of reaction from the researcher. As additional interviews were conducted, it was determined that an extra peer debriefing meeting would be beneficial to the researcher. This extra peer review meeting was added to provide the researcher with supplemental information regarding her interviewing skills, in addition to further constructive feedback and suggestions for the research.

During this process no identifying information about the participants was revealed. The members of the peer debriefing group were the same as the original group with the exception of one additional member. Additionally, members of the dissertation committee, all whom are licensed professional social workers, served as mentors throughout the study. As mentors the dissertation committee members provided guidance and support during each phase of the study. Their involvement included guarding against bias, examination of data, and providing invaluable professional insight to the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998, 2004).

Rigor and trustworthiness were also maintained in the study by the researcher's commitment to clarifying a specific framework in which to conduct the research and by incorporating research methodology consistent with the framework. Additionally, the researcher was certain to insure that sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis were all consistent with the research methodology and abided with professional social work ethics (Drisko, 1999). The researcher maintained an audit trail by using a personal journal, by

keeping field notes of the personal conversations which occurred following interviews after recording had ceased, and by saving all coded interviews. This information was saved so that the data collection process could be reviewed at a later date if necessary (Padgett, 1998).

Ethical considerations

In discussing ethical issues in qualitative research, Padgett (1998) suggests that the flexibility of qualitative research and the successful ability of the researcher to become involved in the world of the respondents can cause ethical dilemmas for both the researcher and the respondent. Ethical issues and dilemmas are often present throughout the duration of qualitative studies and researchers and may pose distress or discomfort for the researcher (Padgett, 2004). The ethical considerations for this particular study included, informed consent, confidentiality, emotional stress, and a vulnerable population.

In order to receive approval to conduct the research and because this study included human subjects it was necessary for the researcher to submit the required research proposal to the Institutional Review Board at The Catholic University of America. The research proposal outlined the study and provided information detailing the procedures that would be followed to protect the research participants. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement which included a statement that all tapes, files of tapes, and transcriptions would be returned to the researcher.

Participants agreed to be in the study based on a full understanding of the study based on the consent forms (SEE APPENDIX A). In-depth interviews may trigger unexpected emotional reactions (Padgett, 2004). Emotions are a natural part of the human experience and discussion of intense subject matter or a powerful experience sometimes

initiates a strong emotional response. Each participant was informed that a list of professional resources would be available upon request. Because this research dealt with the topic of multiracial identity development it was imperative that the researcher be concerned with emotional distress. Race is an emotionally charged and sometimes painful issue for many people (Pinderhughes, 1989; Root, 1992). This interview was designed to elicit discussions on the extremely sensitive issue of racial identity. It was essential that the researcher was mindful of research ethics which dictates that one, "not introduce topics gratuitously" and that topics should be information that is "volunteered by the respondents or inquired about when they are the focus of the study" (Padgett, 1998, p. 36). Prior to the recording of each interview the researcher informed participants that the subject matter can sometimes illicit powerful emotions and responses. Participants were informed that the questions being asked were to help the researcher understand the unique perspective of multiracial individuals' understanding of their racial identity development. Additionally, particular emphasis was placed on the fact that they, the participants, were educating the researcher. Throughout the study a personal journal was kept and the researcher met with a peer debriefing group in order to monitor her attitudes and biases on the topic.

Another important ethical consideration for this study, and perhaps many qualitative studies, was the researcher's ability to maintain a *critical distance.* The integrity and credibility of the study depends on the researcher's ability to maintain a professional demeanor and to exercise restraint (Padgett, 1998; Weiss, 1994). This is accomplished when the researcher is reflexive. Reflexivity is the researcher's ability to be self-aware and self-examining throughout the study. For example, it is extremely important for the researcher to

be aware of how he or she is using him or herself in an interview, particularly when interviewing someone who is different, such as in gender, race, ethnicity, or ability. According to Padgett, by continually examining one's biases "we do not seek to eliminate personal beliefs and biases, but to understand their impact on the study" (Padgett, 1998, p. 21). As mentioned previously, multiracial identity development is both a professional and personal interest of the researcher and so the researcher was vigilant about examining her biases and her self-awareness regarding multiracial individuals and multiracial identity development. The journal and peer debriefing group helped the researcher maintain critical distance (Weiss, 1994) during the research. By writing down thoughts and feelings about the interviews the researcher was able to stay abreast of her personal biases and kept them "in check", so as to maintain impartiality throughout the study. When the biases appeared to impair the objectivity of the researcher, the researcher met with the peer debriefing group so that the group could assist her to overcome some of the biases and discover additional means to preserve objectivity through the interviewing process.

Conclusion

This qualitative study utilized a grounded theory approach that reflects constructivist ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The research question explored the development of a healthy racial identity in multiracial young adults. This was accomplished by interviewing the participants who obtained "ethnic identity achieved" on the MEIM and by indentifying themes which emerged from the personal accounts used to describe the formation of a healthy multiracial identity. The researcher used several methods to ensure

rigor and trustworthiness to the study. Particular attention was paid to the reflexivity of the researcher. In chapter four the research findings are presented.

Chapter Four: The Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding of the unique process of establishing a healthy multiracial identity from a dual or multiple perspective through the examination of the personal accounts of multiracial young adults. It explored the question: What is the lived experience of multiracial young adults aged 18 to 30, which has contributed to a strong multiracial identity? The researcher chose a qualitative design and utilized grounded theory methods of analysis because there is limited information regarding the lived experiences of multiracial individuals, and because qualitative research studies offer rich and detailed information about the research subject that cannot be elaborated in quantitative studies. The fifteen young adults who participated in this study shared various aspects of their lives regarding being multiracial and described how family, psychosocial, and environmental factors contributed to their development of a strong multiracial identity.

Using the grounded theory technique of constant comparative analysis, the researcher explored whether similarities existed among the factors which contributed to the development of a healthy and strong racial identity in multiracial individuals. Additionally, the researcher was interested in whether the participants associated similar meaning to certain events and occurrences which they attributed to supporting their having developed a strong multiracial identity.

There are three stages of coding in grounded theory, open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is the initial stage of data analysis using grounded theory methods. In this stage,

the researcher categorizes the data by reading through the data and assigning a name. The categories were identified and established based on the answers provided by the participants. For example, participants were asked several questions regarding their family environment and their social environment. One question asked was, did your family have discussions regarding race? If the participant responded that they never discussed race, that response was assigned the code *family did not discuss race*. During the open coding stage of comparative analysis 119 categories were determined.

Following the open coding, axial coding was completed. During this stage of the analysis the researcher made connections between and among the categories; in a deductive process she collapsed the categories into eight subcategories. A description of this process is that after reviewing the fifteen transcripts the researcher noticed that several of the 119 categories within, among, and between the transcripts, all referred to discussions about race. For example some categories were: *family discussions about race, discussions with parents about race, initiated conversations about race*, and *openness to discuss race*. The researcher continued comparative analysis of the categories, and it was determined that various categories, such as those regarding discussions about race could be grouped together based on likeness or similarity, and eight subcategories were determined. The eight subcategories were *border crossing, dating, environment, family, language, multiracial identity, the ubiquitous question what are you?,* and *racial awareness*.

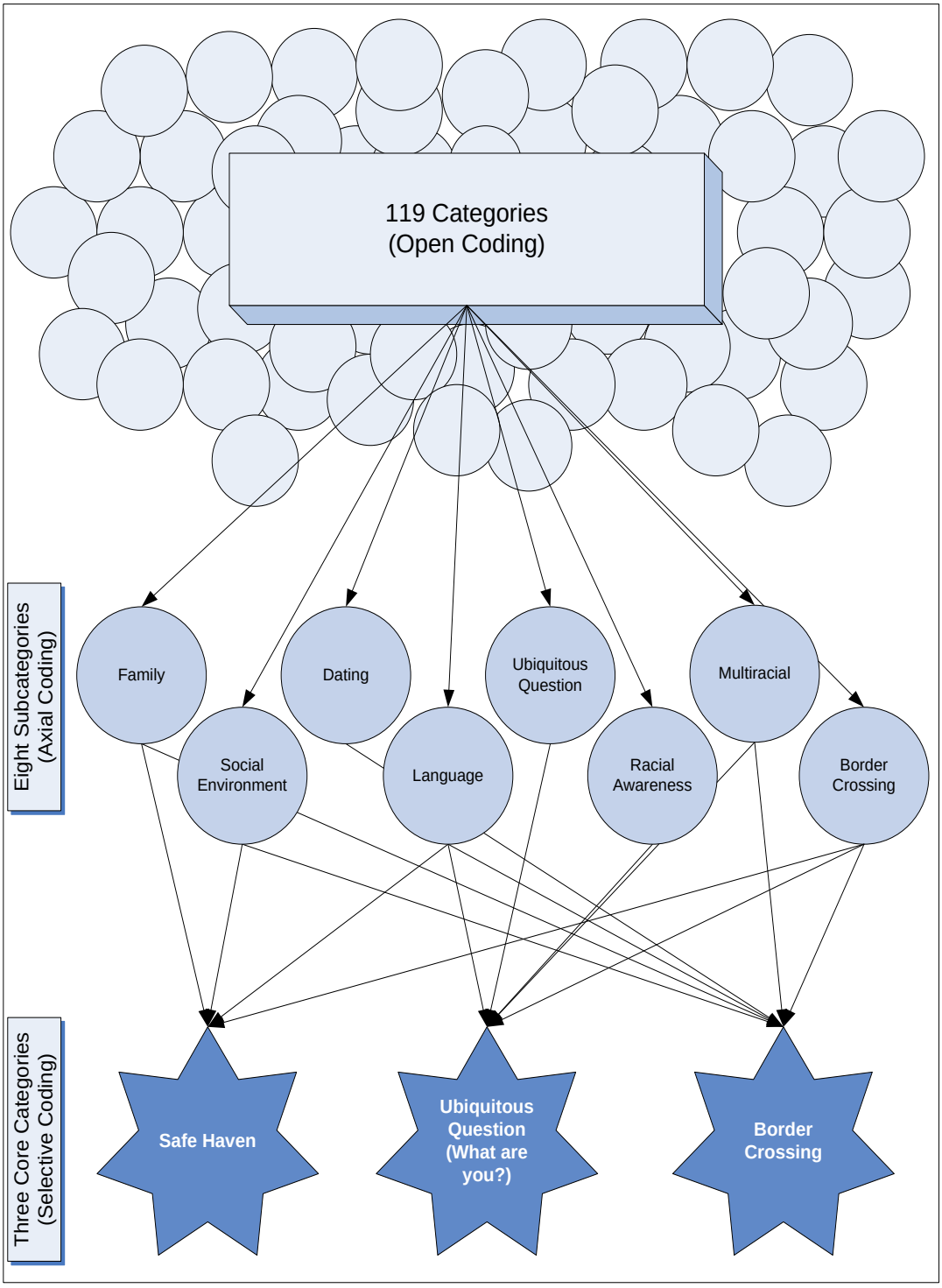
During the last stage of analysis, selective coding, three core categories were formulated. The first category *safe haven*, focuses on participants' perceptions that an early supportive environment provided a stable foundation that allowed them the opportunity to

figure out who they are. The second core category, *the ubiquitous question what are you?* focuses on participants' challenges to explore their racial identity development by being asked to define themselves. In particular this category articulates participants being challenged repeatedly to look deeply into their self-concept through frequently being asked the question "*what are you?* The third core category, *border crossings* focuses on participants' ability to socialize, interact, and connect with people from different racial groups because they are multiracial.

Upon further review and reflection, the researcher recognized three major themes which described each core category. They were (1) *A supportive family and social environment provides multiracial individuals with a stable foundation that is essential for their figuring out who they are; (*2) *A strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question, "What are you?"* and (3) *Those with healthy multiracial identities can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of people.* A description of these themes will be presented further in the chapter. Using the words of the participants, the focus of this chapter is to analyze and present the themes that provide an insight to the development of a strong multiracial identity. This chapter also includes a description of the participants and the reflections of the researcher.

Figure 1:

Constant Comparative Analysis Process



Description of participants

Among the sample of 15 young adults who participated in this study, there were four males and eleven females. The sample was well educated with all participants having had some college education. At the time of the interviews, each of the participants lived in the Washington, D.C metropolitan area; however it is important to note that some participants grew up in different areas of the United States and others had the experience of living in different parts of the world.

The sample was quite diverse among the multiracial population (See table 1). As presented in Table 1 and throughout the chapter, the participants were given fictional names to protect their anonymity. Attention was made to insure that there were no similarities between the participants' actual name and the fictional name. Race is noted as how participants said their parents' identified themselves. Two participants, Eve and Gail, are sisters and two participants, Dan and Iris, are married to each other.

Table 1:

Identifying Information of Participants

Name	Age	Education	Mother's Race	Father's Race
Ann	27	Advanced Degree	White	Hispanic/Native American
Betsy	26	Some college	White	Hispanic/Native American
Cara	23	College degree	African-American	African-American/White White
Dan	28	Advanced degree	White	African-American
Eve	27	Advanced degree	Asian (Korean)	White
Fran	20	Some college	White	Asian (Chinese)
Gail	26	College degree	Asian (Korean)	White
Hank	19	Some college	Asian (Pilipino)	White
Iris	28	Advanced degree	White	Hispanic(Puerto Rican)
John	21	Some college	White(Polish)	Middle Eastern (Iranian)
Karen	24	Advanced degree	White	African--American
Luke	18	College in Fall	White	African-American
Megan	21	Some college	White	Asian (Japanese)
Natalie	21	Some college	Hispanic	Asian (Japanese)
Olivia	21	Some college	White	African-American

Reflection of the Researcher

In conducting this research there were several issues about the researcher herself that are noteworthy of sharing. I informed participants that I am a partner in an interracial marriage. I am African-American and my spouse is White. We are the biological parents of

three multiracial children. This information was shared as a means of letting the participants know that I am sensitive to their situation. Some participants asked about my spouse and several wanted to know about my children, often inquiring about my children's experience being multiracial. Throughout my research on multiracial development and having the experience of raising multiracial children I am extremely familiar with the issues surrounding multiracial development. However, I did not expect the intensity of emotions I experienced as I conducted the various interviews.

I connected with participants as they discussed their family life, often they described how they believed their experiences were similar to that of their peers and how they did not think that their family was different from other families unless someone else made issue of the racial diversity of their family. As the participants shared what they described as painful or exasperating experiences, I discovered that I felt extremely protective towards them and had to stop myself from offering suggestions for dealing with certain circumstances. I found that I laughed with participants as they acknowledge and explained the absurdity of others' behaviors regarding the ubiquitous question "what are you"? This question, and others similar questions in which someone questioned the racial identity of a participant, often prompted the participants to respond in various ways; which in turn required the inquisitor to ponder his or her question, become educated about his or her lack of sensitivity, or involved a turn of events in which the questioner became the one being questioned. I experienced joy as several participants explained their gradual awareness and acceptance of their multiracial identity, and excitedly expressed how they felt good about being multiracial and how being multiracial helped them become great at *border crossing.*

I was encouraged by the passion that participants expressed both verbally and non-verbally as they discussed the importance of others needing to understand that multiracial people are not “exotic” nor “strange looking” because they do not fit neatly into one racially category. I also recognized that the participants appeared to be genuinely reassured and comforted that someone legitimately wanted to hear about, and understand, what it means to be multiracial. Additionally, I was saddened by the apparent exasperating toll having to explain frequently one’s self to others had on several of the participants. As one participant stated regarding the seemingly endless questions from others concerning her racial identity, “I’m exhausted”.

The participants were tremendously aware that by being multiracial, in a society that usually perceives race in monoracial terms, they often expressed that others perceived them as “different”. As a parent of multiracial children I felt an enormous amount of support for each participant as he or she explained the complex journey of developing a multiracial identity. Each participant appeared to be exceptionally determined to establish a strong multiracial identity for him or herself and though each was in a different phase of his or her racial identity development. It was truly an honor to hear about their lived experiences and to gather such rich and detailed information on a topic of which very little is known.

The Findings

Following the process of constant comparative analysis, three themes emerged in this study that described the three core categories. The first two themes inform understanding of the development of a healthy multiracial identity and the third theme represents an important advantage these participants feel as a result of their strong identity. The first theme which

emerged was that *a supportive family and social environment provides multiracial individuals with a stable foundation that is essential for their figuring out who they are*. Interactions and relationships with immediate and extended family members, as well as relationships with friends in the social environment which encompassed participants' neighborhoods, schools, and communities all contributed to the theme associated with core category *safe haven*.

Another central theme which emerged was that unlike for monoracial individuals, *a strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question, "What are you.* The question, *what are you?* is familiar to researchers in the field of multiracial identity, and is frequently referred to in research regarding multiracial individuals (Miller, 1992; Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1992; 1996; Williams, 1996). This same question is all too familiar to multiracial individuals. During the research interview participants were asked their thoughts and feelings regarding this frequently asked question. This particular question garnished so much verbal and nonverbal response from participants that it warranted a category to itself. Throughout each of the interviews, participants expressed that being asked to explain what one was occurred multiple times throughout their lives, and expressed that frequently being asked this question had significant and evolving impact on their multiracial identity. It has been suggested that the social environment, particularly the diversity of the social environment, can influence and impact the decision of how multiracial individuals choose to racially identify themselves (Lopez, in Wallace, 2004, Root, 1996). As symbolic interaction posits, the intersection between self and others can influence the perception that one has of him or herself (Blumer,

1969). In this study, participants' self-identifications were greatly influenced by social interactions in the social environment. Miville et al. (2005) suggest that multiracial individuals have, "ambiguous or unidentifiable physical characteristics related to racial group membership" (p. 510). They posit that multiracial individuals experience multi-racial racism when others ask them to identify or define themselves with what they call *the ubiquitous question*, "What are you?".

Unlike the first two themes that related to the development of a healthy multiracial identity, the third theme that emerged in the study reflected an important advantage of this strong identity; *those with healthy multiracial identities can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of people. Border crossings* is an expression created by Root (1996) to describe a multiracial person's ability of "experiencing, negotiating, and reconstructing" (p. xxi) the defined borders between races. Root posits that having parents who are from different races within a society that is organized by a hierarchical and mutually exclusive racial structure creates an environment which places multiracial individuals in the *borderlands* (Root, 1992, 1996). Borderlands are the areas between and among the racial borders that provide multiracial individuals access to all aspects of their racial heritage. Borderlands provide opportunities to challenge the way this country thinks about race and border crossing is a means of "connecting oneself to others, in a way perhaps both more apparent and more accessible to multiracial people than to their monoracial counterparts" (p. xxii).

Theme #1: The Supportive Family and Social Environment as a Stable Foundation

There was a great deal of variation among the participants' stories regarding social environment; however it was evident that a supportive family environment and a supportive social environment were critical in the development of a healthy multiracial identity. Thus, the first theme that emerged from the data was: *a supportive family and social environment provides multiracial individuals with a stable foundation that is essential for their figuring out who they are.*

Family Support. Most of the participants describe their home lives as being rather normal. As the interviews began, participants provided brief answers regarding the normalcy of their family describing the race of their parents, sometimes hinted about the relationships between and among siblings, and expressed how they believed their family to be similar to other families. Some family descriptions included Hanks,

> Well, my dad's White… my mom is Asian, Pilipino to be exact. I have two other siblings, I'm 20, my sister's 18, and my other sister turned 13 a few days ago.

Cara said,

> My mom raised me, she's African-American, and my dad is German-American. I have an older brother; we're very different. He's three years older than I am.

Betsy's description was,

> Growing up in my family, my mom is German, my dad is primarily African-American with a lot of, he's got a Native-American grandmother and a Jewish grandmother and some Spanish and not too far in his lineage, but he's primarily black.,

And regarding her sibling relationship,

> I think, like any sisters, we're just two siblings, four years apart. We hated each other until we grew up, because she was always four years ahead of me, where she was, and I was four years behind her, so I'm trying to catch-up to her, but still too immature to be friends.

Megan who is Japanese and White discussed how she learned to embrace both parts of her racial identity within her home by parents with very different but supportive and encouraging ways of teaching her about her heritage.

> Yeah, my mom's the American one, she always taught me to be very strong, I don't know if she did it herself, she is very outspoken, very a big personality sort of woman. So she, she's not like a meek and mild mannered sort of person and I guess because of that I always had to compete with my mom or something maybe that made me more like that. My dad is much more soft spoken, but he leads more by example versus than telling you what to do.

Megan's grandparents were also instrumental in her earlier upbringing and contributed to learning to embrace both parts of her racial heritage.

> they let me kind of be free and not always reprimand me when I was doing something non-Japanese, because they figured, oh, she's half American, she's half White, she's not… you can't contain this child to this box when she's not completely Japanese.

Megan expressed that she felt her family was very supportive and that in her home her "thoughts and ideas were valued".

As these participants indicated, being a multiracial family did not appear strange or unusual, and many felt their home and family provided a safe haven where they felt free to discuss everything including race and identity if and when the issue arose.

Luke really felt that his parents provided a lot of support and security and expressed that he felt comfort within his home,

> I think it was something that they realized needed to be said and pretending that it wasn't different (the family being multiracial) would be more hurtful and harmful. Like protective, so they, it was just introduced to us, we are a bit of a different family, that not everyone might except us and that people might be surprised by our family, but we're just the same as everyone else. Our family has always been like very open and connected, and we talk about everything. So of course, my sister and I would just go to my parents and go, 'Well I heard this today at school.' And they would, instead of blocking that out; they'd turn it into a discussion, that sort of system. As we came back saying, 'I heard this.' It really evolved into us having a full understanding of the racial dynamics of our area and just in general. I feel like we have a very tight connection.

Johnson (1992) stresses that there are several aspects of family environment with are critical in the development of multiracial children. One factor considered to be of critical value is the family dynamics and attitudes. Miller (1990) proposes that it is within the family that multiracial children first begin to learn about racial differences and about how others might respond to them. Additionally, the family environment is essential to multiracial children's understanding of their heritage, racial background, and identity. The examples

provided demonstrate how support from their parents was significant in the development their racial identity and in the formulation of what it means to be multiracial. Several of the factors associated with the core category Safe Haven related to family support included: ability to communicate openly with parents, discussing race with parents, family education about racial identity, and family support regarding racial difference. Many of these factors associated with a safe haven for participants support earlier research (Gibbs &Hines, Root, 1992) which suggested that positive psychosocial development in multiracial individuals included having supportive relationships with parents.

As participants interacted outside of their homes, they were eased into racial awareness about their multiracial heritage through social interactions with extended family members and later with others in the larger social environment. Through these social interactions participants began integrating some of the thoughts and actions of others with their personal perceptions of themselves. As noted, symbolic interaction theory posits all individuals experience an ever changing identity based on continual social interactions within society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). As we interact with others these encounters provide information that help us determine who we are, and consequently with each interaction we have the opportunity to change and develop our self identity.

Some participants expressed that interactions between their family and their extended family was not always positive. These participants said that they learned that their parents' early experiences with extended family members were sometimes unfavorable due to their parents' racial differences. These participants added that parents used these situations, racial tension between family and extended family, as teaching examples. It was within family

discussions about racial tensions that participants often received their first awareness that others may have a problem with the racial diversity of their family. Participants expressed that their parents' attitude and the manner in which their parents provided information about race, others' emotions regarding race, and racial difference, was essential to the foundation and formulation of a healthy multiracial identity. Parents' social skills such as temperament, coping, and interaction with the larger community contribute to multiracial identity development (Root, 1998). The education and refuge provided by parents of two different races mirror positive images which participants could blend and integrate into their multiracial identity. When participants were asked when they first recollected that their family might be somewhat different from other families due to the racial diversity in the home, and whether they noticed that their parents might be different from other parents due to the difference in their parents' race, it was evident that some did not recognize that their parents were "different" until someone outside of the family pointed it out to them. Karen,

> I guess, I mean I was just; I must have like a really fortunate upbringing just in that it wasn't something that I noticed. I guess you see your friends parents, they're both White or they're both Black. And I guess I recognized that difference, but it never, I don't think that affected me as a young child.

Luke,

> Well I guess I would say that it wasn't until I was older and knew what race was that I would even consider to use multiracial classifier to classify our household as a multiracial family. Like a way of life, I guess. It was just sort of the way our, we were. Our household was.

Ann's father is Native American and Hispanic and her mother is White and although her father expressed great pride in his Native American heritage and made a point that he was part Native American Ann never really thought that her family seemed that different from other families,

> Maybe because they both grew up in Virginia, despite my dad's race that they culturally they still had a lot in common with each other as well as everybody else. They didn't really seem that different.

Megan grew up all over the world and stated that "I had friends from Ethiopia, Denmark and we all just hung out together. It never occurred to me that not everyone was like me".

Natalie's family lived in Brazil, Japan and in the United States. Her experience with other people noticing that she and her family might be different varied depending on where she lived. She believes that when her family lived in Japan they were treated differently in part because she and her family were perceived as being different.

The participants all grew up in homes in which both parents were present. Participants reported that their family environment was positive and the support they received from family members was encouraging and helpful to the development of their healthy multiracial identity. This was particularly evident in family discussions that included race. Gail, whose father is white and whose mother is Korean, stated,

> We definitely discuss politics a lot and I think our family is very comfortable discussing race because we are a multi-mixed-racial background. It's an

> understanding that we're not afraid to talk about it, how does race affect these issues. It's never uncomfortable talking about race.

Dan, whose mother is white and whose father is African-American, describes supportive conversations about race occurring among family members but feels that his mother took the lead on educating him and his sibling about racial dynamics early;

> I had more conversations growing up with my mother. She actually sat me and my brother down one day and made us watch Roots. She was the one that really explained to us the legacy of slavery and the realities of being Black. I think my mother was probably more, just because she was more the one raising me, especially early on. So she was the one that really sat me down and told me about these things.

Natalie, whose mother is Hispanic and whose father is Japanese, believes that she has always been able to discuss racial issues with her mother. She describes that her mom is extremely supportive particularly with issues concerning Natalie's multiracial identity.

> With my mom I definitely have had it (racial discussions) before and I've told her briefly, I don't think she knows the extent of how much I struggled, although I've come to terms already, of course I still question every day. It would depend on the people I hang out with. But anyway, with my mom she recognizes that it was hard, it wasn't easy. Especially, because it's different there's such, they're truly different cultures.

Social Support. The social environment beyond the family was significant to the development of the participants' racial identity development. While all participants are currently living in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, an area which is very diverse, that

was not always the case when participants were growing up, and it is evident that the diversity of neighborhoods, schools and communities impacted the development of their racial identity. Symbolic Interaction theory suggests that the self and identity develop by using shared symbols that emerge through daily interaction. This appeared to be true in this study. Several participants described how interactions with peers groups and community groups were positive and were supportive to their racial identity development. Although most of the participants' peers were monoracial participants felt that friendships and social interactions in their communities were for the most part constructive.

Support from the neighborhood and school environment were essential to the participants' thoughts and feelings about being multiracial and contributed to the development of their multiracial identities. The diversity of Ann's school was supportive and allowed her the freedom to interact with many different people.

> It was very diverse. Kids of all different races and colors. Friends that I had, I kind of went back and forth, it was the 90s, so I went back and forth from hanging out with grunge kids, and the thug kids, and maybe some of the party kids. And I played soccer, so some times I hung out with the soccer people. I never moved. I stayed in the same house from kindergarten to my senior year. So I knew everybody. You know kids, your taste change; your interests change so I went with whatever I was feeling at the time. I hung out with all kinds of people.

The racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Ann's neighborhood provided a safe haven in which to interact with many different people without feeling out of place.

John started his education in a public elementary school that had a lot of diversity but then transferred to a parochial school that had little diversity and which subsequently limited his exposure to people of different races and ethnicities.

> Public school was, it was many different kids of many different ethnic backgrounds. And so I felt like just another one of the crowd. Not kind of isolated, "that kids weird" but that "kid is different than me", but it doesn't matter because we're all different things.

John's parents immigrated to the United States as young adults. They were very much involved in activities at the racially diverse school public school he attended. John felt that his school and family were connected and this reaffirmed that being multiracial was a good thing.

> Yes, definitely, there were international food fairs, there'd be, I feel like at least once a year one of my parents would come in and talk to the class about their respective culture. And once I moved to Catholic school it was very different.

The Korean church and school environments were instrumental in providing support and to Gail and her sister Eve, who is also a participant in this study. Gail and Eve spent time socializing with other children and families within the Korean church and community. In an effort to have them learn more about the Korean culture, Gail and Eve's parents attended a Korean Catholic church. In her interview Eve expressed that she liked interacting with other Korean children and felt that the community was supportive however, she also described how she felt somewhat left out at times because she was not fluent in the Korean language. Her

father taught Sunday school at the church and she and Gail were enrolled in bi-lingual classes and she describes that involvement as good for the family.

Both Gail and Eve expressed how school was a supportive environment and though their elementary school did not have many multiracial students, there was diversity among the student population and each was able to connect with other students within the school. By the time they entered middle school and high school Gail and Eve had several close friends, and each described having a close friend or friends who, like them, were multiracial. Gail said,

> My best friend, Rebecca, she's mixed Mexican-Korean. And when we met, I think, it was that we never talked about it. It was that understanding that we were both from mixed race families and we identified on a lot of stuff together and both our moms are Korean, and we really talked about that a lot and understood, so it's cool to meet somebody else who was also from a mixed race family".

Eve found similar circumstances in high school,

> I still did well in school. I mean did very well in school and I was still able to make friends through my classes and kind of be involved. So, I think comparatively, I made out pretty well….. One of my best friends is African-American and Caucasian. But I don't know if we ever talked about how that affected us, at all, which is interesting.

Iris lived in urban cities in New Jersey and New York. She expressed that her neighborhoods were ideal because there were lots of different people who lived and socialized together.

> I was born in Newark, New Jersey. Growing up originally, we started in New York City. Which was comfortable because around me there was so much diversity. Latinos, African-Americans, White Americans, there was such a mix.

Betsy attended a diverse middle school but choose to socialize with students that were similar to her racially and ethnically. "I actually would hang out with people of my complexion. Spanish kids, and there's one, she's still my friend today. She's from Paraguay. And I also hung out with a friend who was Iranian. More so, I would more so hang with people of my same complexion". Her social environment became more inclusive when she entered high school.

> But in high school I started hanging out with all races again. I had two best friends, who were White. And then I had, I still had my friend from Paraguay, who is White. I'm not really, oh, I even had a Black best friend in middle school that moved away before high school. So I definitely would hang out with people who were not white in middle school, but then in high school it just didn't matter anymore, we were all looking for ourselves. So I would hang out with any ethnicity and I would hang out White friends, Hispanic friends.

Dan's neighborhood and church were safe havens despite the fact that he grew up in a mid-west city which he describes as lacking diversity,

> My best friend on the street growing up was also mixed. ….but at the same time, we had a lot of kids on our street, a lot of boys. So growing up we would play all day, every day. It was all kind of boys. Most of them were Black, but me, my brother, and my friend JR, who I'm talking about, we were the only mixed ones in the crew. I

> think about playing outside, all day, and every day. With all these boys, playing hide-n-seek, kickball, whatever. And we just always thought of ourselves as Black. And then at my church that I grew up in it was a small multi-denominational church. It was multi-, somewhat multi-racial, especially for churches in [mid-west city], it was pretty multi-racial, but in terms of leadership, there were a lot of Black families and White families in my church that I hung out with. In church, my friends were pretty evenly spread out; they were White, Black, and mixed.

Symbolic Interaction theory posits that all individuals experience an ever changing identity based on continual social interactions within society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). These encounters provide information that help us determine who we are, and consequently with each interaction comes the opportunity to change and develop our self identity. These participants' examples illustrate how family, friends, neighborhood and community provided support for the participants in this study as they became more aware of their multiracial heritage. As each participant interacted within his or her family there was no indication that their family was "different" or "odd" or that they might be different from their peers. However, as a result of social interactions outside of their immediate families, most participants first became aware that they might be somewhat different from peers, and that this difference might have something to do with their racial make-up. Subsequently, such social interactions were often the impetus for the commencement of participants' racially identity development.

Theme #2: The Ubiquitous Question "What are you?"

Miville et al. (2005) characterized a common question, "What are you?" that is asked of multiracial individuals as "the ubiquitous question". Unlike monoracial individuals, the multiracial participants in this study have been challenged repeatedly by friends, acquaintances, and schoolmates about their racial identity. The second theme to emerge from the data was; *a strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question, "What are you?"*.

Multiracial children usually begin to recognize the racial difference between themselves and their parents between the ages of four and eight (Jacobs, 1977). With support from family and during the intimate interaction between parent and child multiracial individuals began the complex process of developing an identity from two or more racial groups. Root (1992, 1996) posits that multiracial identity development is a multidimensional process in which social interactions such as family dynamics, race and ethnicity of neighborhood, racial diversity of school and socio-economic status all contribute, and contribute differently, to identity development in multiracial individuals. Additionally, she suggests that a hallmark to achieving a **s**trong multiracial identity includes an individual's ability to identify as belonging to both groups. Multiracial individuals need to be able to differentiate between their perception of themselves and their personal interpretation of how others view them (Root, 1992, 1996).

For these participants, the safe haven of the school provided a vast environment in which participants could explore their racial identity through social interactions with others. At the same time, it provided a fertile venue in which their racial identity was questioned and

tested by others. Often the school environment is where participants first began to come across questions about their racial heritage and where multiracial individuals first encounter the question *what are you*? It is usually with this question that multiracial individuals first become aware that they might be different from their peers and that this difference might be connected to their racial heritage. Questions from peers and others regarding the participants' racial identity ranged from curiosity to confrontational. No question spurred more sentiment, intensity, and reaction, both verbal and non-verbal, than when the researcher asked participants about the "ubiquitous question", *what are you?* Each time this question was asked during an interview there was an immediate change in the participant's affect. Participants rolled eyes, sighed, laughed, nodded in agreement, became angered, offered strong opinions, and most notably changed body language. Each participant was more than familiar with this often "intrusive" and "in-your-face" question about what they were and to what group they belonged. Occasionally, participants were able to laugh about certain situations as they recalled being questioned about their identity nevertheless simultaneously; they expressed thoughts and feelings about how disconcerting and bewildering it was to be confronted with or challenged to identify *what are you?*.

The following examples demonstrate the impact that participants experienced after being questioned about their racial heritage. These accounts are significant, informative, and revealing, and they provide the reader with a brief indication of how our society may make a multiracial individual circumspect and guarded about his or her racial identity. What the researcher was able to experience, but what the reader may not be able to truly grasp, is the intensity, implication, and toll that constantly being questioned about one's racial identity has

on a person. The participants' nonverbal communication expressed during the interviews told so much about the personal struggles and emotions associated with being challenged to identify themselves. Each participant chose methods that aptly assisted them in coping. John used humor to confront the question *what are you?*, "I kind of remember growing up with people trying to figure out what my ancestry was. And I kind of joked, depending on like how my facial hair, whatever, I can almost pull off convincing someone that I belong to any nationality." Karen chuckled and said that she is questioned about her racial identity all the time. She had a neutral response to being questioned about her identity but explained how she frequently does a lot of clarification about her skin color to others when she is asked about her racial identity,

> Oh my God, all the time. I think a lot of people think I'm Hispanic. Because I'm really pale, I guess. I'm not pale; I'm really, really light-skinned. And I have curly hair and I think that it's easy for people to assume that I'm a lot of different things. Because traditionally or stereotypically you know Jewish people have curly hair. And I guess my complexion makes a lot of people think I'm Hispanic. I thought a lot of people know that I'm not just White, but they just can't put their finger on exactly what it is. I think I'm more commonly referred to as White than I am as just Black. But, like I'll tell people that I'm half Black and then it'll dawn on them 'oh, that makes sense.' That's why your hair's so curly and you're not completely pale.

Megan who did extensive exploration regarding her racial identity, and who really embraced her multiracial identity with enthusiasm, described her response to the ubiquitous

question as an evolving answer which truly expressed her thoughts and feelings as she became more astute and aware about what it means to be multiracial.

I never really had a problem with it because I could just easily answer Japanese and American. Because mine is obviously a very clear cut, I know exactly what I am sort of thing. Whereas a lot of mixed-race kids don't necessarily they have so much in them that it's, it's hard to answer that.

Megan continued by mentioning how she was inspired by multiracial artist/activist Kip Fulbright, who collected and disseminated responses to the *"what are you"* question from multiracial individuals.

I really loved the answers that he got. Because I always just gave, oh I'm half Japanese and half White.' But a lot of them were like I am human, or 'I am what everybody will be in the year 2050,' or … those little kids like, 'I'm a star!' they don't think about that and then, or one person said 'I'm 100% Japanese and 100% Black.' and that one was what really took to heart with me is that I am not more one than the other and in fact I'm competent in both cultures so I'm going to consider myself 100%. You can consider me whatever you want, but to me I'm 100% both". And so, now if I'm asked, 'what are you?' I still just to not make it awkward, I say I'm Japanese and American. If it comes up in further conversation, I definitely mention that I'm 10% both, but sometimes, you just want to answer 'I'm human.' Just like you"

Natalie, who in addition to being multiracial is also trilingual, stated that since she has become more racially aware, she has no problem being asked about her racial identity,

I love that question now; what are you? Because I am the epitome of globalization, the good part of globalization. And I like, like I said earlier about we are becoming the face of the world, I think Time Magazine did a, I forgot when it was, they put the face of what would, a person look like in 2050. I don't know what the year was, but its happening. There's no denying it. You can't stop it.

Eve's describes her experience with the ubiquitous question as being irritating. She often found comfort sharing with her sister and devising ways to combat others questions.

> I get frustrated that people are trying to put me in a box. And so, and I have talked to my sister about that. We'll stonewall them like "bear cubs from Virginia." 'Whatever,' and they'll be like 'really, what are you?' and then you can talk about it. It's just annoying.

Gail, Eve's sister, also uses humor to address others' curiosity about her racial heritage,

> I joke around a lot, because people are so hesitant to ask. What's your cultural background, what's your racial background, because some people look exotic that's what they always say. But they always say, where are you from? and I kind of joke around with them, 'I'm from (town where she lives). And they're like 'No. Where are you from?' I'm like, 'do you mean what race am I?' and they're like 'Yeah.' And they're just afraid to ask, I think it's just kind of an eggshell kind of area. I joke around at first and in a way it's to make people comfortable with I'm not offended by them asking me what my racial background is. I always ask them directly, 'do you mean where are my parents from? It's amusing to me.

Gail also expressed anger in other's insensitivity and rudeness regarding her being multiracial and what she describes as others' lack of awareness and uneasiness that someone could actually belong to two or more racial groups. "The most common thing I get is when I tell; somebody asks what's my ethnic background and I say ,oh my mom's Korean and my dad's Caucasian and the thing I get back the most is 'oh I went to China;' or 'oh my daughter went to Japan.' And I'm like 'whoa, I don't care. A lot of people travel to those countries."

Hank had mixed feelings about how he responded to questions about his multiracial heritage. He described that his responses to questions about his racial composition depended upon what people wanted to know. "It's the same kind of question that I get when people ask what my name means. So I get that with both questions. And people are also thrown off because I have a very White name and a very like culturally White name". As he recalled situations in which he was asked about his racial heritage he portrayed a tired and perplexed expression and responded, "I think that, my reaction is just, I just tell them what it is. I'm half Pilipino and half Irish". His words along with his nonverbal expression appeared to indicate that sometimes being asked *what are you* was exasperating.

Like Hank, Betsy had mixed feelings about being asked what she was. She usually responded by saying "I am American". However when she was more reflective about her feelings she stated,

> First it's annoyance. I'm a little annoyed. Like, what am I? I'm a human being. What do you think I am? And then I realize it doesn't necessarily come out of spite or any ill feeling at least from that person. It's kind of like a semi-ignorant, but interested

> question. So sometimes I'll just be playful back. But more time than not I'll start off a bit annoyed.

Ann's attitude about the ubiquitous question includes both humor and anger. When she was in school she was frequently mistaken as being Asian. Ann is Native American, Hispanic, and White. When Ann was asked how she felt when she was questioned about her identity she raised her voice and in a very assertive manner responded,

> Why? Why do you care? You don't know me. Like I said, it was funny for a while, but it definitely took some getting used to in order for it to be funny. And the other thing that annoyed me that people assumed that they know what you are. As opposed to saying "are you Asian" or saying "what are you", there's a certain amount of respect that comes with asking "what are you" as opposed to saying, "you must be this". We kind of laughed it off in high school, but the time I got to college and started studying race, class and gender then it really started to make me mad and I would find every way I could to not answer the question. What are you? I said to the person. Where are you from? Where are your parents from? You don't tell me the whole story. He got annoyed and I was like that's how it feels buddy. You don't know me. You don't go up to people you don't know on the street and go "what are you?" I felt like I never saw anybody else get that treatment.

Fran was the only participant who responded as if being questioned about her racial identity was not concerning. She thought because there are a lot of Asian-Americans, Asian/ White American multiracial, individuals in the United States that her mixed heritage was not a problem for others,

> Like, yeah. This happens with a lot of mixed race people where people are like, 'Oh, what are you?' And it's not really a big deal to me. I'm like, 'Oh, I'm half Chinese and half White.' I mean that happens to me fairly often. Not too much in college, there are a lot of mixed race people in this school.

It is important to note that although Fran did not think her racial heritage was a problem in any sense, she gave multiple examples throughout her interview that were to the contrary. Natalie was also not concerned about being asked about her racial identity, however she emphasized that not being bothered by the question was a process and that the more she embraced being multiracial the less being asked *what are you* bothered her, as was highlighted earlier,

> I love that question now, what are you, because I am the epitome of globalization, the good part of globalization.

Iris provided a great deal of information regarding her progression of reactions, feelings, and responses to the question *what are you?* When she was first asked if she ever recalled a time when someone questioned her identity she smiled and responded,

> Yes, always. It's in a ways it comes in the form of '… so, where are you from?' and you kind know they don't mean Jersey? So it's like, okay. Sometimes I deliberately, I'll be like 'I'm from New Jersey" and they'll be like, 'no,' because I want to make them ask what they really want to ask. And they'll be like, 'no like culturally where are you from?' I try to mess with them sometimes.

It appeared that she was quite familiar with the question and knew how to alter the situation in order to make the person who asked the question be specific about what it was he

or she wanted to know. She believed that when people used referring to culture or locality, such as neighborhood, they were being vague due to their personal uneasiness regarding race. She added,

> If a person said "culturally where are you from?" she would respond, the city of Elizabeth, and would deliberately not answer the question until the person would ask Why are you brown? Or What are you?

Frequently being asked about their racial identity, albeit sometimes frustrating and painful, activated participants' exploration of what it means to be multiracial. The method may not have always been a conscious process, particularly when one was younger, but nonetheless it appeared to generate the development of their perception of themselves. Subsequently, as their racial identity developed, helped participants challenge interpretations of how others view them. These personal accounts disclose the fluid process of developing a strong multiracial identity. With each personal challenge participants appeared to become more aware of their racial identity and commenced the process of establishing a strong multiracial identity. They rejected others' interpretations by definitely stating, "I'm not exotic", and "I am not odd" and claimed positive and celebratory responses to their multiracial identity, "I am human just like you", "I'm both", "all the above", and "You can consider me whatever you want, but to me I'm 100% both".

Participants emanated an unequivocal sense of racial awareness and appeared knowledgeable about some of this countries racial dynamics. Many expressed how they felt the country's attitudes and perceptions about race impacted everyone, and that these same attitudes and perceptions played in part in how others reacted to their being multiracial.

Participants' racial awareness was often nurtured in the home environment and that awareness and knowledge appeared to transfer to the larger social environments of school and community. There appeared to be a heightened sense of awareness that race in many ways influenced the social interaction in the school setting. When the researcher first posed questions regarding school experiences participants recalled that their experiences were pretty normal and talked about being involved in regular school activities such as gifted classes, band, sports teams, and theatre. However, when the researcher asked probing questions concerning their school experience, for example, were you ever treated unkind because of your race?, or did you feel pressured to socialize with a group?, participants recalled incidents where race undoubtedly impacted social interactions in school.

Each participant acknowledged that as he or she became more aware of the influenced of race in his or her life, he or she became better adept at recognizing the subtle nuances of how race also impacted social interactions with peers. As each navigated the school environment this awareness helped him or her contend with difficult or uncomfortable situations in which his or her racial identity was at issue. Participants relied on the positive information they received about themselves from family and the social environment in order to build a self-concept, and subsequently they relied on that same positive information to challenge any of the negative information they received about themselves from others. Rosenberg (1979) describes *self-concept* as an individual's thoughts and feelings about him or herself. Our self-concept is what we see when we look back at ourselves and may be described as a picture of how we view ourselves. With respects to the participants in this study racial identity, being multiracial, was and is part of their self concept. The development

of a strong and healthy multiracial identity which is part of the participants' self-concept developed overtime and appeared to become healthier as participants and participants encountered confrontations from others.

Symbolic Interaction theory posits that this picture or image of ourselves, self-concept, changes over time and can change with each interaction with another (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004). A person's self-concept is enduring and develops over time. "When others surprise us or act towards us in ways that are unusual to us, the self concept continues without a great deal of change because of the stability" (Charon, 2004, p. 81). Symbolic interaction theory also suggests that an individual's interactions are influenced by his or her thinking and additionally, that the internal process of thinking has significant impact on everything that people do. A person's actions are in accordance with how he or she is thinking in specific situations, and a person's thinking is often influenced to some extent by interactions with others. The positive and nurturing support received from family served as stability for the participants in this study. When they interacted with others their thoughts about whom they were, were firm and secure because of the support, encouragement, and positive information received from family, consequently assisting participants in confronting and rejecting negative thoughts and opinions from others.

Theme 3: The Ease of "Border Crossings"

The third and last theme revealed by the data reflects an important advantage the participants found as a result their healthy multiracial identity; *those with healthy multiracial identities can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of people.* This theme reflects *border crossings*, an expression created by Root (1996)

to describe a multiracial person's ability of "experiencing, negotiating, and reconstructing" (p. xxi) the defined borders between races. Root posits that having parents who are from different races within a society that is organized by a hierarchical and mutually exclusive racial structure creates a social environment which places multiracial individuals in the *borderlands* (Root, 1992, 1996). In a country which has a long history of racial discrimination, along with a history of defined boundaries between and among different racial groups (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003; Root, 1992, 1996) multiracial families, and in particular multiracial individuals, often challenge the status quo by freely moving among and between previously established racial borders, in a process known as *border crossing*. Root suggests that border crossings dispute the archaic fixed structure of racial boundaries and adds confusion to the racial structure of our country. Subsequently this confusion prevents the fixed racial boundaries from existing in their current manner; creating opportunities for change within the social racial structure (Root, 1996).

Border crossings are strategies used by multiracial individuals in daily interactions with others and within the environment. They include having the ability carry multiple racial and or ethnic perspectives simultaneously; being able to shift one's racial identity with regards to the situational context or the environment; known as situational identity; choosing to assert an independent multiracial identity that is separate from one's family and peers; and having the ability to maintain a monoracial identity when entering different cultural environments (Miville et al., 2005; Root, 1996). Multiracial individuals can border cross and bridge the racial borders in four ways; 1) having both feet in both groups, 2) shifting the

foreground and background as one crosses between and among social context defined by race, With this type of border crossing the multiracial individual pairs with the demands of whichever side of the border she is the social context brings into focus.. Root (1996) emphasizes that this type of border crossing should not be perceived as switching loyalties but rather "it is a neutral response to race as socially co-constructed by economics, by race, and by sexual orientation" (p.xxi). 3) Deciding to stand on the border, and 4) creating a place in one group for an extended period of time and venturing into other groups only infrequently (Root, 1996).

Participants in this study were unfamiliar with the term *border crossing,* however once the researcher provided them with a definition of the term participants exuberantly described themselves as having "great" border crossing skills. In their responses, participants expressed the third theme within the findings, that because they are multiracial, they can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of people. For example, Betsy, whose skin color is light brown like that of her native-American, African-American, and Latino father, described using border crossings to help her figure out into which group or groups she fit at school. She created a place in one group for an extended period of time and ventured into other groups depending on circumstances, crossing between borders contingent on which group made her feel comfortable at any given particular time.

> I more so gravitated to people of my same skin color. Because, right now that's something that I definitely see, people who look the same gravitate to each other. Like finding safety in similarities, so I think I definitely felt that from other people and other people of my complexion felt safer, so it's just where I looked for

> acceptance and warmth. ‘cause I can really claim myself to any group. So that is what I did in my schools days…sometimes I would tailor my actions to that group.

Fran describes border crossing on a regular bases and believes that her ease of adapting to different social and situational context has developed as she has matured. Her border crossings demonstrate shifting the foreground and the background of different racial groups as she crossed between and among the different social contexts in her multi racial extended family.

Fran said,

> Yeah, I mean totally I would say that I act a lot differently around my Chinese family than I do around my White family. I would say that I act differently around my grandfather and my aunt who is married to a Chinese man, with three kids. I act a little bit differently around them, a little more conservatively; I don’t necessarily voice my opinions much, if that makes sense. And then, and I would say that I act similarly around my cousins who are Guatemalan/Chinese/White and then around my mom’s family as well I act similarly around the two groups. More open and relaxed and how I would be acting around my White friends.

Fran went on to suggest that her border crossing skills were enhanced by her “vaguely ethnic” physical appearance and her excellent language skills allowing her to blend in with native populations of several countries and permitting her to freely move amongst the population in Jordan and Israel,

> I spent last semester in Jordan, I’ve been taking Arabic, and actually, I don’t know if this will count because I look kind of just like vaguely ethnic, is my general term for

> it. A lot of people, when I was I Jordan, a lot of people thought I was Arab, and they would just speak in Arabic to me and I would speak back to them in my horrible Arabic. They'd be 'Oh, where are you from?' and I'd be 'America,' and they'd be 'Are you an Arab?' and I'd be 'No.' and they'd say, 'Are you sure?' 'Yes, yes, I'm sure.' Then when we went to Israel, people thought I was Israeli, and when I went to Turkey people thought I was Turkish; it was kind of cool actually. It was really nice.

Fran's border crossings exhibit the advantage of standing on the border and not having to choose or being "forced to choose" (Herman, 2004) a defined group.

John's border crossing is similar to Fran's. John believes that his being multiracial helps him adapt to "any nationality". He describes how the color of his skin and the ability to speak several languages makes it easy to border cross into a "wide array of different cultures",

> In the summer my skin gets pretty tan. I can easily, because of my experiences with different languages; I am pretty adept at making accents, so I can easily pull off Latino or French. "I'm able to do it (border cross), I've been doing it for so long I feel like the borders have almost dissolved for me. And it's (the borders) just kind of become one.

Karen stated that since she went away to college her entire life 'has been border-crossing". She is African-American and White and attended a predominately white liberal arts college in the Midwest. She expressed that the social environment at the university lacked racial diversity and felt isolating, however Karen choose to place her feet in both the African-American and White groups and moved freely between the two groups;

> I knew all the Black people at the school because there were that few. My roommate was Black, but a lot of my peers were White so, when I'm with my roommate, I'm able to identify as a Black person, but then when I'm in class with my with all White students I can take that role and I can identify that. I was able to do [it] with some fluidity, just go back and forth.

Megan describes border crossing on a regular basis while currently attending college. At school she appears to have situated herself within a close group of Asian and multiracial friends, "establishing camp" within a certain group, however she interacts with several different groups of people from various racial backgrounds, Asian, White, African-American, and Multiracial at the university's multicultural center whenever opportunities arise. When asked if she border crossed, Megan replied,

> Yeah, a lot, especially here at school, fitting in with the Asian culture. I find myself saying more 'I'm Japanese' a lot of times versus just saying both.

Megan feels that being able to border cross is extremely helpful in different social contexts and believes that the way she border crosses changes depending on the circumstances in the environment. In the States she feels that she border crosses without effort among different racial groups, however when she travels abroad border crossing becomes a little more complicated. Within a foreign social context Megan's feet appear to straddle borders;

> When I'm in Japan I feel more both, I feel more 100% White, 100% Japanese, because I'm clearly not just Japanese. When you're surrounded by Japanese people you can't be just Japanese and then you take sort of pride in it too. But a lot of the

> times when I was in the Asian community itself, outside of Japan I've felt like I identify more as Japanese and then when I'm in the multicultural community there I identify myself as a minority; a multi-ethnic. That's when I really am like 'I'm multiracial, I don't necessarily say I'm both there either, I will state then that I'm half Japanese and half American.

Natalie totally embraced the term *border crossing.* She articulated that the term gave meaning and understanding to her ability to assimilate or "just blend in" to different racial and ethnic groups. Natalie is Japanese, Brazilian, and White and speaks three different languages fluently. Natalie decisively "sits on the border" excepting the true essence of human beings, while at the same time choosing the multiracial label, and refusing to be deconstructed by others (Root, 1996). She describes that the cultural mindsets of her multiracial heritage as being very different and describes that sometimes it when she was younger it was somewhat daunting to "switch" between the two races and cultures;

> The mindset of a Brazilian; make the most out of your life. Happy, happy, that carefree Brazilian culture. I really adopt that when I'm in Brazil. But when I'm in Asia, I feel like I'm more, not reserved, not that I become old, but less, less than I would be like in Brazil. And at first I was like, is that me having multiple personalities? Is that like, am like schizophrenic or whatever? But it's not that. It's you're in a different context, you just have to maybe talk a different way or behave differently because, and that's okay because that's part of my ability".

Natalie suggested that being multiracial affords her the opportunity to interact with many different people and, like her friend Megan, as she becomes more comfortable with her multiracial identity she border crosses with ease.

> Some of my friends are really astonished, like 'how do you get along with so many different groups?' I was at a party at a Korean friend's house and I was like, 'hey, it's kind of boring. Can I bring some of my friends?' and I called up my friends and I'm like 'they're all Black, but there's five of them' we just turned up the music, we starting talking it just became so lively and yet I can still talk to my Asian friends who I brought with me too. And at the end we're all talking with each other. I always like to see myself as the bridge that connects cultures, like… because I've had so much exposure and even in Brazil some of my cousins are Black, so it's not, I don't feel uncomfortable or anything. I know, I just know. I have experienced so many cultures Chinese, Japanese, Black, White, White in Brazil, White in America, I've been to France, so I know also of the culture there. I mean, I'm so thankful for all the exposure I've had. That's why I feel I can be a bridge and connect some people that wouldn't ever really talk to, engage in a conversation with.

Iris, who is Latina and White, described border crossing as a way of life for multiracial individuals and stated that "I feel like, depending on who I'm with I act differently". She discussed her socializing with groups of White people and lightheartedly joked about her critique of Whites punning about the way that "they talk and act", "they seem so different" and "all the jokes and stuff they don't make sense to me" and then within

the same breathe and with introspection asked herself "how do I fit in so well to that?" Iris described her border crossing in this manner;

I think it's just because of growing up and the different experiences I've had because who I'm with, I can get that (border crossing), I can, we watch The Princess Bride, we think this is, you know what I mean. I know all the jokes and all the lines and everything like that. We're comfortable there, but then also, among Latinos, I'm comfortable about the recipes and the best salsa artists in all these different things and I'd become much more vocal and animated. Latinos are more animated. Then I just become much more jokey, but chill among white people.

Perhaps Gail's statement regarding the ease of traversing across, between and among racial borders captures the true essence of living in the borderlands has contributed to the participants' healthy multiracial identity in which they feel good about being multiracial and have the unique benefit of being able to relate to everyone,

> I'm a border crosser! Yeah, on a daily basis. I have friends from every kind of background and it's just interesting, like one of my Asian friends we're able to enjoy our food together, Korean food and talk about Korean stuff and how our parents are and our relationships with our parents and things like that. We really identify more on an Asian level; we talk about what do White people do? It's really funny, I've never identified completely with one or the other, but I definitely I have enough of each race that I'm able to be really comfortable hanging out with Asian people, enjoying the food, enjoying the way we hang out and it's totally okay at the table to slurp your noodle soup, or whatever. And then it's easy for me to be a little bit more reserved

> when necessary if I'm with a very traditional White family with meat and potatoes and we all sit at the table with our backs straight and switch the fork and knife hand and all that stuff. It's just easy for me to relate to everything and the other thing is I really enjoy learning about other cultures and I think the border-crossing makes me able to learn more about other cultures and races. Because I can chameleon through a lot of things.

Dating was a subset of border crossing. Perhaps because all participants had parents who themselves are border crossers most believed border crossing with respects to dating as a natural occurrence. Nevertheless, each participant had strong opinions about who he or she chose to date and why or why not he or she chose to date a particular race. Several participants suggested that it did not really matter who they dated, and said that they "dated people who were most like them", or "who were interested in them". Fran said, "I would say without sounding creepy, that I probably tend to gravitate towards people whose personalities are like my parents and my family's., dating has never really been a big thing for me". Olivia's comment was, "I find that I like 'mixed' people who don't necessarily have a specific white or black group, and Asian, Middle Eastern, more 'brown'". John said, "I'm not partial to any one type. I have to click with a person on an intellectual level and if it's not there, then it's not going to happen". Others were open to dating everyone and appeared to travel freely across racial borders. Iris said,

> My dating patterns growing up were quite diverse, White, Latino, African-American, never Asian, just between those three. Because I couldn't get attractability wise I was more

attracted to people of color. So, that was just, so if I was ever dating a White person it was because they seriously pursued me. But if it was a person of color it was more mutual.

Betsy's response was, "Physical attraction, like, I'm a teeth person. It doesn't matter if your White, Black or Korean, if you have a nice smile I like you, and then personality".

Each of the participants having Asian heritage made reference to their preference to date other Asians or their inclination not to date other Asians or multiracial Asians. For example, Hank noted, "I love Asian women. Yeah, if there is a cool Asian woman, I'm pretty interested in them, but I'm definitely attracted to a wide range of people in the general population."

Gail said,

It's really funny; I'm totally not attracted to Asian men. And I'm even less attracted to mixed men. Asian mixed. I don't know why. I'm just; I would never date that person. It's easy to say, that's person attractive or good looking, but I would never date another Asian-White man. I don't know why. I've just always felt like that. It's very funny. I'm just totally not attracted. I would be, like every other, I've dated Arab men, Black men, White, like totally fine; but Asians and mixed Asian-White I'm like 'no thanks.'

Eve's view was, "There was never that expectation that I would marry, date or even be interested in Korean guys. I don't know, I feel like I had a pretty consistent preference for White guys the whole time." Gail also expressed that she was cautious about dating because people were sometimes intrigued by her being multiracial,

Gail also expressed that she was cautious about dating because people were sometimes intrigued by her being multiracial,

”I did feel interestingly, that a lot of times too people are like ‘Oh, being half-whatever is so attractive, those are like really good looking people.’ And I can see that sometimes, but I felt this weird like, ‘Oh, anyone half-Asian and half-White feels like my brother, almost.’ You know what I mean? They grew up in similar family dynamic; I feel sort of a kinship with them because of that. I perceive sort of sameness between us”.

She perceived multiracial males more like brothers than as potential dating partners,

“Like Chinese-American or Korean-American… Yeah. But they may be objectively good looking and a nice person, but I’d be like ‘Aww, I think of you as a brother.’ So, yeah, that was interesting”.

Dan, one of the African-American/White male participants, was the only participant adamant about only dating women of color. Dan describes crossing borders during his teen years and described having the freedom to cross borders in the dating arena at will. He dated white women for a brief time during high school and college and after a deeper racial awareness, which was closely connected to his political and spiritual views during college, Dan chose to exclusively date women of color. Dan appears to firmly situate himself in the African-American group and ventures into other groups on occasion. Root (1996) stresses that loyalty is not the issue in this case, rather it a person need to place himself or herself in an environment which supports one’s “psychological, emotional, social and political needs” (p. xxii). Dan said,

I started dating White girls. I was when I was 17 that I dated my first White girl and during that 2-1/2 year period I only dated White girls. I wasn’t consciously saying I’m only going to date White girls, but it just happened to be that way. It wasn’t an accident….Then I

was like, ‘I’m not going to only date Black girls, but I prefer at least to date a Black girl. That’s when I started dating my wife, who’s biracial too. She’s White and Puerto Rican. We dated through college, through most of college and got married right after.

These examples of border crossing demonstrate the various ways that these multiracial individuals negotiate and restructure the previously established intrapersonal racial borders of the United States. For them, having multiracial heritage afforded participants to use traditions, characteristics and languages shared by more than one racial group to traverse freely in, among, and between different racial groups. Symbolic Interaction theory posits that the self and identity develop by using shared symbols that emerge through daily interactions with others in a shared community or society and that all individuals experience an ever changing identity based on continual social interactions within society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The border crossings described by participants have assisted in the development of establishing a healthy multiracial identity. Although the thought process may not always be a conscious one each time that one of the multiracial participants in this study border crosses he or she strengthens the self-concept that he or she is in fact a member of both or multiple racial groups.

Symbolic Interaction theory stresses the importance of thinking and in particular the internal process of thinking about the self. The internal process of thinking has significant impact on everything that people do. A person’s actions are in accordance with how he or she is thinking in specific situations, and a person’s thinking is often influenced to some extent by interactions with others. Participants’ accounts of their border crossings suggest their ability to border cross effortlessly was due to the fact that they are members of multiple

racial groups. The internal thought process often determined how one behaved in certain situations. A good example is Gail's explanation of how she ate a meal with Korean friends versus how she ate a meal with White family members. The symbols and traditions between her Korean friend and her White family are different. Gail assessed each situation and adapted her behavior to fit the social environment. Symbolic Interaction theory would describe the Gail's behavior in that circumstance as defining the situation, giving meaning to the situation, and acting accordingly (Blumer, 1969). It is through this effortless border crossing that these participants developed a healthy multiracial identity.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study exploring the development of healthy multiracial identity among fifteen young adults. After analyzing the data, three core categories were formulated from the constant comparative analysis of the open and axial coding. Upon further review and reflection, the researcher recognized three major themes that emerged from the core categories. The first category *safe haven*, focused on participants' perceptions that an early supportive environment provided a stable foundation that allowed them the opportunity to figure out who they are. This core category was expressed as the theme; *a supportive family and social environment provides multiracial individuals with a stable foundation that is essential for their figuring out who they are; An early supportive environment provided a stable foundation that allowed participants the opportunity to figure out who they are.* The second core category, *the ubiquitous question,* focused on participants' challenges to explore their racial identity development by being asked to define themselves. In particular this category articulated participants being

challenged repeatedly to look deeply into their self-concept through frequently being asked the question "*what are you?*

From this core category came the theme; *a strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question, "What are you?"* These first two themes reflect contributions to the participants' healthy multiracial development. The third core category, border *crossings* focused on participants' ability to socialize, interact, and connect with people from different racial groups, because they are multiracial. The theme that emerged from this category was; *those with healthy multiracial identities can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of people.* This last theme reflected an important advantage the participants found as a result of their healthy multiracial identity. They felt good about being multiracial and in many situations, such as border crossings, these participants considered being multiracial an advantage.

Chapter five will present a discussion and analysis of these findings based on the theory presented in chapter two. The discussion will include advice that participants offered to parents of multiracial children and to younger multiracial individuals regarding what factors participants believed contributed to the development of a healthy multiracial identity. Limitations of the study, suggestions for social work practice, and recommendations for future research will be presented.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

What is not abundant in current literature regarding racial identity development is information regarding the process of developing a healthy racial identity in multiracial individuals. Therefore, this study used a qualitative research design and employed grounded theory methods to explore healthy racial identity development in multiracial young adults. The researcher explored the lived experiences of the participants in this study to understand their view of the process of the development of a healthy multiracial identity. Symbolic Interaction theory was used to ground the research question, "What is the lived experience of multiracial young adults, 18 to 30, which contributed to a healthy multiracial identity development?" Interview questions were developed based on concepts drawn from various identity theories (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) and racial identity theories (Cross 1971; Helms, 1995; Kich, 1992; Parham, 1989; Poston, 1990), all of which propose that identity formation occurs within social context.

In this chapter the researcher summarizes the findings of chapter four. Then, returning to the literature, she demonstrates how the findings support the overarching Symbolic Interaction theory and the various theories of identity and racial identities theories, and how they build upon those conceptual frameworks. The chapter concludes with the strengths and limitations of the study, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding the unique process of establishing a strong multiracial identity from a dual or multiple perspectives through the examination of the personal accounts of multiracial young adults. In the interviews, the researcher asked questions about family environment and social environment as they related to a healthy multiracial development. Using the grounded theory method of constant comparative analysis, three essential themes emerged. The first two spoke to the process of establishing a healthy multiracial identity: The Importance of Social Environment in Formation of a Strong Multiracial Identity and The Ubiquitous Question, "What Are You?" The last one describes the result of that strong identity: The Ease of "Border Crossings".

Theme #1: The Supportive Family and Social Environment as a Stable Foundation

Symbolic Interaction theory posits that the self and identity develop by using shared symbols that emerge through daily interactions with others in a shared community or society and that all individuals experience an ever changing identity based on continual social interactions within society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). A person becomes who he or she is by interacting, by thinking about the interacting, by defining the interacting, by applying past thoughts to current situations, and by making decisions in the present based on factors in the immediate situation (Charon, 2004). Consistent with this theory, the first theme reflected that an early supportive environment provided a stable foundation that allowed participants the opportunity to figure out who they are.

The participants in this study experienced diverse racial social interactions within their homes, within their extended families, and with friends, neighbors, and acquaintances in

their communities all which contributed to their racial identity development. Participants described family life as being supportive and comforting. They described having good relationships with their parents, and added that they were able to communicate openly with parents concerning most development issues. Parents provided emotional support regarding racial issues, offered different perspectives regarding their racial identity development, and helped them understand what it meant to be multiracial. Parents and grandparents also provided ethnic and cultural information about participants' heritage. This convincingly helped participants feel connected to both parts of their racial heritages. Home and family interactions were positive, encouraging, and assisted in participants in developing a good self-concept and provided a strong foundation for racial identity development. These findings support research (Gibbs, 1987; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) that suggests parental behavior and interaction with their multiracial children can help establish the foundation of a positive self-concept and self-esteem. Additionally, by providing an environment where there is open discussion about race, interracial labels, and "multiracial-ness" (Kich, 1992, p. 308) parents and families contribute to the development of a healthy self.

Participants lived and interacted in diverse neighborhoods and communities which were beneficial to the development of their racial identity. They participated in sports, participated in cultural activities, were able to form close and personal relationships, and generally felt that friendships and social interactions within their communities were positive and constructive. This finding supports research (Kich, 1992; Miville et al, 2005; Poston,

1977; Root, 1992, 1996) which proposes that an environment which is accepting of racial differences contributes to the development of a healthy racial identity.

Participants also attended diverse schools and describe that having a racially diverse school population made them feel integrated among other students, and also made them feel very much part of the total student body of their school. As one participant remarked, he felt like he was just one among "many different students". As these participants interacted with one another in social interactions, the shared symbols, in this case, school and activities associated with school, became part of a process in which they develop and evolve together (Blumer, 1937, 1969; Charron, 2004).

Theme #2: The Ubiquitous Question, "What Are You?

In contrast to the contribution of the supportive social environment to a strong multiracial identity that was captured in the first theme, the second theme which emerged from the data revealed that a strong multiracial identity was facilitated through the frequent challenge in growing up of the ubiquitous question of others in the social group, "What are you?" Symbolic Interaction theory posits that social interactions between and among people are dynamic, and that as individuals interact back and forth, a more dynamic and active individual emerges (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004). Each time a participant incurred an interaction where he or she was questioned about his or her racial identity and then acted upon that social interaction, he or she changed because of the interaction. The prominent detail of the social interaction is a change in one's self-concept and identity. Although it proved to be sometimes frustrating and painful, participants reflected that being asked *what are you?* activated their exploration of what it meant to be multiracial. The more participants

explored what it meant to be multiracial, the closer they moved toward establishing healthy multiracial identity Being asked about their racial identity activated participants' exploration of what it means to be multiracial, and because participants were asked frequently about their racial identity, they had abundant opportunities to test, deny, confirm, and claim all parts of their racial heritage.

Adolescence often is a time of crisis and alienation for multiracial adolescents (Gibbs, 1987; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990). Many of the study participants expressed feeling angry about having to "explain" their racial heritage to others. This occurred most frequently during middle school and high school years, in which participants described as periods having that produced the most challenges regarding their racial identity. Adolescence was time when these participants, like most adolescents, experienced a phase of trying to belong or fit in with a particular group, and simultaneously tried to establish an identity dependent on which group they belonged to. However these participants did not feel alienated by peers or the social environment. Participants credit this to the fact that they attended diverse schools where, they were accepted by peers, had an easy time making friends, and had little difficulty fitting in with other students. Despite being in a supportive school environment participants still had to contend with being asked *what are you?* Nevertheless, being asked about one's racial identity was not always an easy process, and in fact it proved exasperating for participants.

Furthermore, as participants became more comfortable with being multiracial they became more adept at coping with the multidimensional, multifaceted, emotional task of establishing their multiracial identity. They personalized confident responses to questions

about their racial identity and had an improved ability to deal with being asked *what are you?* Additionally, participants had an enhanced understanding that being asked *what are you?* more so represented a problem with the person asking the question and not a problem with them. Similar to Williams' (In Root1996) research, participants in this study articulated that encounters with the *what are you?* question provided them with a psychosocial moment to express and proclaim their racial identity, to renegotiate their racial identity, and empowered them to feel better about themselves. They were active participants in shaping and determining their racial identity, not just themselves but for others. Williams (In Root 1996), suggests that when confronted with questions about their racial identity, multiracial individuals "create new meanings of race during social interaction, sometimes forcing those with whom they interact to rethink their assumptions and shift their understanding" (p. 208).

Theme #3: The Ease of "Border Crossings"

A safe and secure environment and learning how to respond to the challenge of the ubiquitous question provided an anchor for the participants in this study, which subsequently, allowed them to solidify a healthy multiracial identity. These participants had a good self concept as a result of a caring and supportive family. The interplay between the *safe havens* of home and the diverse social environment permitted these participants to strengthen their racial identity, and as they matured, and to identity, confirm, and claim a multiracial identity. As they became more efficient in defining "*what they are*" each time they interacted with someone, particularly each time they were questioned about their racial identity.

As a result of this interactive process in which the meaning of their multiracial identity became a strength, these participants became expert border crossers. The third theme

that emerged was: *Those with healthy multiracial identities can travel with ease across the borders of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of people.* They expressed that because they were multiracial they had the ability to interact with people of all races, and in addition could easily adapt to racially diverse social environments. They were able to adjust or alter their identity dependent upon which environment they were in. For example, Fran, who said that she acted a lot differently around her Chinese family than she acted around her White family, Iris, who expressed that she "totally acts different" depending on who she is with, and Natalie, who said that she is comfortable with everyone and everywhere because she has Japanese, African-American, Latino, and White family members and she has lived in Chinese, Japanese, Brazilian, African-American and White communities. Participants did not feel hindered by their multiracial identity instead they felt empowered by it.

Current literature on racial identity formation (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2005; Collins, 2000; Hall, 1992; Herman, 2004; Miville et al., 2005; Phinney & Alpuria, 1996; Root, 1992, 1996; Suyemoto, 2004) suggests that often multiracial individuals possess multiple, and sometimes simultaneous, racial and or ethnic identities, and that the multiple identities may help multiracial individuals negotiate different psychological and environmental social interactions. Consistent with this research, participants who proudly embraced their multiracial identity felt they acquired a special status because they were multiracial. By claiming a multiracial identity these participants "got it". They could be who they wanted to be, when they wanted to be it, based on where they were and who they were with. The decision was theirs.

However, the views of these participants were not supportive of the research that found that a multiracial individual had to choose one particular group or another (Herman, 2004; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990). Rather, they felt that their personal experiences which were unique to multiracial identity development, contributed to the complexity of forming a multiracial identity (Poston, 1990). This allowed them to become accustomed to racially diverse environments, and to travel between and among racial borders with ease. This is something that monoracial individuals are not as capable of doing. Participants were proficient, as stage five of Poston's (1990) biracial identity models suggests, in appreciating and integrating all aspects of their racial heritage and valued the importance of a multiracial identity.

One of the hallmarks of this study, as with current biracial identity models research (Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990), is that by continuing to explore the uniqueness of their racial heritages participants developed a whole and integrated healthy multiracial identity. Furthermore, the process was situational, contextual, and fluid, and most prominently, participants' identities changed as they wanted them to change and was not dependant on how others perceived them. This supports Root's ecological model (1998), which emphasizes the identity that a multiracial individual may hold at any one time may not necessarily coincide with how others identify or label that particular multiracial.

Through border crossing experiences, participants interpreted and gave meaning to different social, political, and socio-economic class relations and changed their identity to match the context. Examples of this included, being politically involved in African-American awareness issues, being "very proper and reserved" with one side of the family and

"relaxed" with the other side of the family, and being involved in the Asian student group at the university. In each of these examples, participants border crossed and immersed themselves in one part of their racial identity, temporarily claiming a monoracial identity, while at the same time maintaining their multiracial identity. Participants described that being skillful at border crossing helped them to be more understanding of others and to better understand the racial dynamics of the United States. Their personal experience of being multiracial influenced their attitudes and awareness about race and race relations when they border crossed. Most noteworthy, participants felt that because they were multiracial and because they could border cross proficiently, they could better help others to see both, or multiple sides, of social interactions. Their multiracial identity made participants especially comfortable in racially diverse social interactions, to such a great extent that one participant, John, remarked for him "the borders do not exist".

Limitations of the Study

This studied utilized the grounded theory methodology of qualitative research to examine the lived experiences of multiracial young adults and determine which of these experiences contributed to the development of a healthy multiracial identity. Although qualitative methodology was appropriate to use for this particular research, there are several limitations of this study. The sample of 15 participants was drawn from a larger non-random purposive sample by scoring in the "ethnic identity achieved" range on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). Given the sampling techniques employed and the specific target group, multiracial young adults 18 to 30, the findings of this particular study cannot be generalized to a broader population. The participants is this study were well educated (see

Table 1), and lived in and attended school in a diverse metropolitan area, Washington, DC. Therefore, participants were not representative of the larger multiracial young adult population of the United States.

Although qualitative research tends not to be concerned with large sample sizes, a more robust population of multiracial individuals would have contributed to the depth and richness of the findings.

Another limitation of the findings was the study requirement that participants must have grown up in homes where both biological parents were present. This requirement excluded multiracial individuals who grew up in single parent homes, multiracial individuals who were adopted, and other multiracial individuals who otherwise might have been eligible to participate in the research, thus the findings in this study cannot be generalized to the larger multiracial population.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for improvement in social work practice with diverse populations. As the United States becomes more racially diverse the multiracial population of the United States is increasing. The most recent US Census reports that the multiracial population is the fastest growing population in the United States with an increase of 35% since the 2000 Census report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2008) requires that social workers be culturally competent in the areas of diverse populations. Nowhere is this more evident than with regards to the multiracial population. It is imperative that social workers have the knowledge base to serve this population.

Implications For Social Work Education and Practice

The findings of this study highlight the multidimensional process of racial identity for multiracial individuals. Because little is known regarding the process of establishing a healthy multiracial identity it is imperative that professionals who serve multiracial clients increase their knowledge regarding this population. Family support was critical to developing a healthy multiracial identity for the participants in this study and for that reason, clinical social workers need to understand multiracial families in order to better understand multiracial individuals and subsequently, multiracial identity development. Root (1992, 1996) suggests that the growing population of multiracial people in the United States changes the way that our country has traditionally viewed family. Keeping with that concept and the social work tradition of person-in-environment, social work practitioners will need to become knowledgeable in the areas of race, the dynamics of racism, and the significance of race in social interaction, to fully comprehend the complexity of multiracial identity development. In addition to having knowledge about families and family dynamics in general, social work practitioners will need to become familiar with multiracial families and the additional dynamics these families experience when two or more races are part of the family composition. Professional practitioners will need to explore their client's support systems and learn more about the different racial reference groups with which their multiracial clients identify.

Implications for Social Work Education and Continuing Education

The Counsel on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates policy regarding social work education for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW)

programs. This policy includes specific requirements for education regarding the issue of diversity (CSWE, Educational Policy 2.1.4-Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice), which emphasizes that social workers know and understand how diversity shapes the human experience and that it has a critical impact on identity formation. This means that social work students need to understand the multiple factors which influence multiracial identity development. Unfortunately, much of the information about multiracial identity development is unavailable in current academic settings and in continuing education for professional development. Because the multiracial population is growing significantly, it is necessary that schools of social work and continuing education for practicing social workers incorporate additional classes and training which provide more in depth and comprehensive information regarding multiracial identity development, diversity among the multiracial population, and particularly, issues regarding *border crossing*.

This would require that social work professionals and students have a strong foundation and understanding of Symbolic Interaction theory combined with education regarding multiracial identity and *border crossing*. To better serve the multiracial population social work professionals and students need to comprehend the relationship between the individual and the environment as it relates to multiracial identity development. Education should include specific and detailed content which highlights the multidimensional, complex relationship between the individual and the environment regarding racial identity development. Most significantly, social work professionals and students must be ready to position themselves in the role of novice instead of expert. Both must be prepared to learn

about healthy multiracial identity development from multiracial individuals, much like the participants represented in this study.

The findings of this research suggest that *border crossing* can best be understood when it is presented from the perspective of individuals who have experienced it. Root (1996) suggests that multiracial individuals often live their lives in the "borderlands" of this country. The healthy multiracial individuals in this study demonstrated their ability to border cross with ease. Many suggested that they understood the different perspectives presented in social interactions between and among people from different races because they were multiracial. Their perspective offers an alternative approach to understanding multiracial identity and border crossing, and perhaps can better assist professional social workers with comprehending multiple perspectives of the racial dynamics which occur in social interactions.

Implications for Future Research

After conducting this research, the researcher suggests that additional studies be conducted to obtain to add to the knowledge base regarding healthy multiracial identity development. The findings of this study support existing research that suggests multiracial identity development is multidimensional, complex, fluid throughout the life span, and varied among the multiracial population (Brunsma, 2005; Hall, 2002; Kich, 1992; Root, 1992, 1996; Williams, 1996). The findings also support research (Johnson, 1992; Kich, 1992; Miller, 1992; Root, 1992, 1996) that environment contributes to the development of racial identity in multiracial individuals. While some research focuses on problems associated with minority status and multiracial identity, this study was novel in its effort to understand what

contributes to healthy racial development in multiracial individuals. Further knowledge is needed regarding the fluid process between family and social environment which contributes to the development and establishment of a healthy multiracial identity, because it was the constant interaction between home and the larger society, in families and in diverse communities, which produced the foundation that permitted these participants to test, explore, and develop a healthy multiracial identity.

Using qualitative methodology, this study provided rich and deep data from which three significant themes emerged. However, additional research regarding healthy multiracial identity that is more representative of the multiracial population, for example, research that includes multiracial individuals from single parent homes and adopted multiracial individuals would add to the research knowledge base. Using a mixed methodology approach researchers could combine quantitative and qualitative information regarding healthy multiracial identity development to provide rich, deep data as well as data that could be generalized to the larger multiracial population. Additionally, it is suggested that future research be conducted using the MEIM, and that researchers accept all completed surveys. This would improve sample size and provide information on a more diverse population of multiracial individuals, including those who do not score in “ethnic identity achieved” category. Interviews with these individuals could provide significant information for social workers serving multiracial clients who have not yet established a healthy multiracial identity. Inferences from quantitative data obtained from MEIM surveys, as well as other racial identity surveys, could be generalized to others in the multiracial population.

Conclusion

Multiracial individuals have a significant role in the demographic shift of the United States (Root, 1996). Simply by being multiracial the participants in this study challenge the standard racial categories of the United States and consequently as researchers suggest and cause others to rethink their rigid ides regarding race and racial identity. The multiracial individuals in this study have lived most of their lives in what Root (1996) describes as the *borderlands.* Through the intricate process of developing their racial identity, these young adults have learned how to navigate the racial borders of their neighborhoods, schools, and communities. Additionally, having developed a healthy multiracial identity these participants demonstrated that racial borders were neither permanent nor rigid. Their lived experiences may serve as a guide for other multiracial individuals and for people in general who are in the process of developing a racial identity or for others who wish to strengthen their racial identity.

Through the use of qualitative research, this researcher identified three major themes. Two contributed to the understanding of the process of developing a healthy multiracial identity, and the third reflected how that healthy multiracial identity contributes to these individuals' capacity to move fluidly across the borders of racial difference. These themes suggest that the formation of a healthy multiracial identity begins in homes in which families provided a safe environment to discuss race and race related issues, is strengthened by a multiracial person's ability to confront questions regarding their racial identity, subsequently learning more about being multiracial, and is ultimately solidified when a multiracial individual has successfully integrated all parts of his or her racial heritages. The culmination

of this process is a multiracial individual's ability to traverse with ease across the racial borders of American society. Developing a healthy racial identity was not an easy process for these participants. However their personal accounts of the process revealed that the end result, a healthy multiracial identity, was worth the effort. These multiracial young adults were very proud to be multiracial and perceived their multiracial identity to be an asset not a hindrance.

Appendix A

CUA

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
National Catholic School of Social Service
Washington, DC 20064
202-319-5458
Fax 202-319-5093

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Name of the Study: Understanding the Racial Identity Development of Multiracial Young Adults through their Family, Social, and Environmental Experiences.
Investigator: Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt, MSW.
Research Supervisors: Barbara Early, Ph.D.; Karlynn BrintzenhofeSzoc, Ph.D.; Barbara Soniat, Ph.D. Phone number to call Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt if questions arise: (703) 639-8777.

Purpose: I understand that the purpose of this research is to learn about the process of establishing an identity from a dual or multiple perspectives. The research will explore the lived experiences of multiracial young adults who grew up in homes where both biological parents were present. This study is being carried out in partial fulfillment for the requirements of a PhD degree in social work at the Catholic University of America.

Procedure: I understand that this part of the research is attempting to gather more in-depth information regarding the development of a multiracial identity. I understand that I am 1 of 25 research participants who have been selected for the interview portion of this study based on the results of the MEIM I completed. I understand that the interview will last approximately 2 hours. I understand that the questions I will be asked focus on my family environment, my social environment and my experiences as a multiracial individual.

Risks, Inconveniences, and/or discomforts: I understand that there are no known risks for participating in this study. I understand that I may experience some discomfort in discussing my experiences. If I feel discomfort through the participation in the interview, and I would like to discuss this with a professional, the investigator, who is a professional social worker, will offer me a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of appropriate professionals. I understand that my involvement in this research is completely my choice. I do not have to answer any question that I do not want to answer. I understand that I am free to discuss any aspect of this research with the investigator. I also understand that I may choose not to participate, not to answer a specific question, or may end the interview at anytime. I further understand that the interview will be scheduled when it is convenient for me.

Benefits: I understand that this research may not benefit me directly but that the information obtained may be helpful in furthering knowledge regarding multiracial identity formation in multiracial young adults.

Incentives & Costs: I am aware that I will receive a $25 Visa gift certificate upon completing the interview in its entirety. I must be willing to provide a mailing address in order to receive the gift card. I have the right to refuse the gift card and if I do not provide a mailing address I will not receive the gift card.

Confidentiality: I understand that the information collected for this study will be kept confidential. I understand that my name and any identify information will be erased from the audio-tapes and my name will be replaced with a unique id number. I understand that the findings of the study will be published in the dissertation and professional literature and that my identity will not be revealed. I have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions I may have about this research. If I have questions, or concerns, I can contact Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt at: (703) 639-8777.

Any complaints or comments about your participation in this research project should be directed to the secretary, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064; Telephone (202) 319-5128

I have read the above and am satisfied with my understanding of this study and its possible risks and benefits. My questions about this study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the research study as described. I have been given a copy of this consent form. I am a legal adult.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Investigator's Name Date

CUA

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
National Catholic School of Social Service
Washington, DC 20064
202-319-5458
Fax 202-319-5093

ONLINE
MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE CONSENT FORM

Name of the Study: Understanding the Racial Identity Development of Multiracial Young Adults through their Family, Social, and Environmental Experiences.
Investigator: Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt, MSW.
Research Supervisors: Barbara Early, Ph. D.; Karlynn BrintzenhofeSzoc, Ph. D.; Barbara Soniat, Ph.D. Phone number to call Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt if questions arise: (703) 639-8777.

Purpose: I understand that the purpose of this research is to learn about the process of establishing an identity from a dual or multiple perspectives. The research will explore the lived experiences of multiracial young adults who grew up in homes where both biological parents were present. This study is being carried out in partial fulfillment for the requirements of a PhD degree in social work at the Catholic University of America.

Procedure: I understand that:

- I will be asked to complete the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The MEIM was developed to assess ethnic identity within and among various ethnic groups.
- The MEIM will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- Based on my MEIM results, I may be selected at random to participate in an audio-taped interview.
- If I am not asked to participate in an audio-taped interview my participation in the study is complete.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: I am aware that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at anytime. I am aware that I am being asked to participate in this study because I am a multiracial young adult. A multiracial person is defined as having biological parents who define themselves as members of different races.

Risks, inconveniences, and/or discomforts: I understand that there are no known risks for participating in this study. I understand that my involvement in this research is completely my choice. I understand that I am free to discuss any aspect of this research with the investigator.

Benefits and Incentives: I understand that this research may not benefit me directly but that the information obtained may be helpful in furthering knowledge regarding identity development in multiracial individuals. Additionally, information obtained from the study may help social workers and other health care professionals to better serve multiracial individuals. I understand that I will receive a $10 gift certificate upon completion of the MEIM. I must be willing to provide a mailing address in order to receive the gift card. I have the right to refuse the gift card and if I do not provide a mailing address I will not receive the gift card.

Confidentiality: I understand that the information collected for this study will be kept confidential. I understand that I will be given a unique identification number. I understand that my name and any contact information will be separate from the actual data and only my unique number will be associated with the data. Only the researcher will have access to both my name and my results. This information will be kept on a secure computer that is password protected. The only reason the researcher needs my name and contact information is if I am selected for the second stage of the study and to mail my $10 gift certificate. If I am not selected my name and identifying information will be destroyed. I understand that the findings of the study will be published in the dissertation and professional literature and that my identity will not be revealed.

Any complaints or comments about your participation in this research project should be directed to the secretary, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064; Telephone (202) 319-5128

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and am satisfied with my understanding of this study and its possible risks and benefits. My questions about this study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the research study as described. I am a legal adult. Please print a copy of this form for your records.

Signatures: Please click below to show that you have read and understood what the study is and why the study is being conducted. By clicking the *"Begin survey"* button you are telling the researcher that you agree to take part in this study. If you do not agree to take part in this study simply close the window or click Decline.

Appendix B

Are you Multiracial &

18-30 years Old?

A study is being conducted exploring the positive racial identity development of multiracial young adults.

You are eligible to participate in this study

If you are:

- Multiracial – defined as having biological parents who self-identify as belonging to two different races. (examples, One Asian parent one African-American parent, one Caucasian parent one Latino parent)
- 18-30 years old.
- Grew up in a home in which both biological parents were present.
- Live within a 50 mile radius of the Washington Monument.

And you are interested in volunteering:

- Complete the online survey that will take about 5 minutes at http://vovici.com/wsb.dll/s/15326g448b6

Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt, the researcher, will contact you to discuss your interest in participating in a face-to-face interview.

If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact Lisa Sechrest-Ehrhardt at (703) 639-8777 or 79sechresteh@cardinalmail.cua.edu.

This study is partial fulfillment for the requirement of a PhD degree in social work at The Catholic University of America.

Appendix C

Identity Development in Multiracial Young Adults

Name_____ Age_____ Sex_____

Occupation _____
Education Level _____
High School years completed_____
College years completed _____
Advanced Degree MA, MS, MBA, etc._____

MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13- My ethnicity is

(1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
(2) Black or African American
(3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
(4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
(5) American Indian/Native American
(6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
(7) Other (write in): _____

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above) _____
15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above) _____

Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview #_____

You were selected to participate in the interview portion of this research due to your score on the MEIM. Researchers who study racial and ethnic identity formation believe that life experiences, such as family dynamics, social environment, and peer interactions contribute to identity development in multiracial individuals. I believe that you can teach me and other social science professionals a lot about the events in your life which have contributed to your having a multiracial identity. You have a copy of the consent form agreeing to participate in this interview. If you have any questions about the consent form I can answer them at this time. If you would like to go forward with the interview we can sign the form and begin.

Family Environment

Tell me a little bit about growing up in your family. Mom? Dad Siblings.

Probe: Do you remember a time or an event when you first recognized that your family might be different from other families?

Do you remember noticing that your parents might be different from other parents due to their difference in race? How does your extended family treat you differently from cousins who are monoracial? In what way?

Tell me about discussions about race you had with your parents.

How many siblings do you have? How is your relationship with sibling 1, sibling 2, etc.?

Social Environment

Can you tell me about what it was like growing up? Did you live in a place where there were other families like yours?

Probe: How would you describe your school experience? What was middle school like? Can you recall any incidents where you were treated unkind because of your race?

Can you recall a time when someone questioned your racial identity? What ways did your parents help you understand such incidences?

Tell me about your best friend? or close group of friends?.

Was there ever pressure to socialize with certain groups of people?

Tell me about your dating? What were some issues you considered when deciding whether or not to date someone? Was race ever considered?

Multiracial Identity

How do you identify yourself?

Researcher Maria Root talks about border crossings, multiracial individuals are able to own several racial identities at the same time and are capable of adapting their racial identity to fit the social environment. Can you recall any of these situations?

Can you provide any experiences where being multiracial is an advantage? B) What are the negatives?

In what ways do you feel you have a better understanding of certain situations that a mono-racial individual may not have?

The ubiquitous question, what are you? When someone asks you this what are your thoughts and feelings?

Given your thoughts about your multiracial identity, what advice would you give to parents of multiracial children? What advice would you give to younger multiracial children and adults?

Closing

Is there anything regarding multiracial identity that you would like to share with me that we did not discuss? Are there any questions that you would have liked to have been asked?

Appendix E

List of Categories

Ability to communicate openly with parents
Acknowledge being racially different from peers
Advantage of being multiracial
Advantage of diverse environment
Advice to parents of multiracial children
Advice to younger multiracial children
Anger related to race
Attempting to establish self among peers
Attitude about dating
Attitude about establishing racial identity
Attitude about interracial dating
Awareness of being racially different from family members
Awareness that family racially different
Better understanding due to being multiracial
Better understanding than monoracial
Border crossing
Change behavior to fit in
Choosing race as a factor in selecting peer group
Close connection due to multiracial identity
Close/closest friends
Comfortable being only multiracial in group
Connection with extended family
Dating
Disadvantage of being multiracial
Discussing race with others
Discussions with parents about race
Diversity of Church, synagogue, etc
Diversity of family friends
Diversity of friends
Diversity of neighborhood
Diversity of school
Educating others about your racial identity
Education assisted in racial awareness
Environment
Ethnic or cultural traditions
Extended family attitudes about your parents
Extended family attitudes towards you and siblings
Family education about racial identity
Family’s feelings and attitudes regarding race
Family's racial awareness
Family does not discuss race
Family environment within the home
Family ethnicity
Family social environment
Family social behavior regarding race
Family support regarding racial difference

Feelings about being multiracial
Feelings about the ubiquitous question
Feelings about being racially different from other family members
Feelings about border crossings
Feelings about discussing race with parents
Helping others understand their multiracial identity
Identifying more with one race
Identifying with others in racial group
Importance of educating children
Lack of connection due to social environment
Language
Language as a barrier among family members
Language as an advantage
Major change in racial identity
Multiracial identity
Noticing racial difference from extended family members
Others' attitudes towards you
Others' perception of your beauty
Others behavior because family was different
Others confusion about your race
Others questioning your racial identity
Others view multiracial as an advantage
Parent concern regarding dating
Parental socialization based on race/ethnicity
Parents' ethnicity
Parents' race
Parents' racial prejudice regarding dating
Parents educate multiracial children about their racial identity
Parent’s openness to discuss race
Perception about the difference between races
Personal understanding of what race meant in the family
Personal struggle with defining racial identity
Physical description of self
Political view regarding race
Powerful racial awareness
Prejudicial treatment towards family
Pressure from parents to be a certain way
Pressure to socialize with certain racial groups
Protective parent behavior
Racial diversity acceptance
Racial diversity of friends
Racial incident in school
Race based on looks
Racial awareness
Racial slant aimed at another
Racial/ethnic connection
Rejection by racial group
Relationship with parent
Sarcasm at others ignorance/insensitivity
Self-Identification

Sibling's racial identity
Sibling relationship
Significant incident
Significant racial incident
Social interaction
Social interaction in school
Social interaction of neighborhood
Social interaction racial similarity
Stereotype/slang about a racial group
Strong emphasis on education
Strong emphasis on racial identity
Strong opinion or statement about race
Thoughts about parent's racial identity
Thoughts about being multiracial
Thoughts about neighborhood
Thoughts about others questioning racial identity
Thoughts about parents' racial identity
Thoughts about parents being racially different
Thoughts regarding border crossing
Thoughts/feelings about others' racial insensitivity
Treated differently because of race
Trust because of similarities
Ubiquitous question

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