

**Black, White, or Mixed: Identity Formation and Choice Among Black-White Biracial
Individuals**

by

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Abstract

Identity is a term that is difficult to define, yet every human being has one. It is a strong indicator of how people will act and defines them in an important way and is a reflection of one's self and self-understanding. Identity is an important aspect for all humans, but it is an especially interesting trait when describing biracial individuals due to their multiracial background. The biracial demographic is growing quickly from that of the past, so it is important that their unique situation be researched. This study explores the family influence on biracial identity choice by gathering data using both a questionnaire and a focus group. The findings concluded family does have a significant, yet indirect, impact on the racial identity choice of their biracial children by encouraging individuality and allowing the person to choose their racial category themselves.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Identity is a term that is difficult to define, yet every human being has one. It is a strong indicator of how people will act and defines them in an important way. Identity is how one sees one's self as derived from self-understanding. Hewitt explains that personal identity is "a sense of self built up over time as the person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are not thought of as those of a community, but as the property of the person. Personal identity thus emphasizes a sense of individual autonomy rather than of communal involvement" (Hewitt 1997:93). Identity consists of many different aspects, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, ethnicity, and race. Race is a prominent feature and an impermeable part of identity (Omi & Winant, 2005: 5). Omi and Winant stated that the United States is completely racialized, and when individuals do not have a racial identity they are at risk of having no identity at all (2005: 5). Therefore, for individuals with two or more races, identity formation and choice can be a lengthy and thoughtful process.

1.1 *Exploring Identity*

Theorist Borch-Jacobson claims identity formation is a shift of enthusiasm for different identifications that transform into assertions of identity, in that identification must come before identity is established (Seltzer, 1998: 38). In addition to personal preferences, sociologists also believe identity is linked to society.

Identity arises from social interactions and inside the framework of a multifaceted, structured, discerned social system, and there have been debates that the identity is also

multifaceted, structured, and differentiated, replicating the motto that the “self reflects society” (Stets & Burke, 2003: 132). Mead explains, "It is by means of reflexiveness -the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself- that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it" (Mead, 1934: 134). Stets and Burke further claim that there are multiple selves and all consist of multiple roles that an individual possesses in the social world, therefore there are different groups that respond to each role. In this position identity arrives at the “overall self”, which is where the various identities are linked to the multiple parts of social structure (2003: 132).

Sociologists Stets and Burke discuss the reciprocal nature of the identity. They state that the self has an influence on society from the activities of individuals, who create groups, organizations, and institutions. Furthermore, society influences the identity of individuals through the collective understanding of meaning and language. These devices allow individuals to act as the other and join in social interaction, as well as view themselves as an object (2003: 128). Callero claims the self is defined by many different aspects, including the method of being able to reflect on oneself as an object. He claims that one must know one’s self in terms of concept, meanings, and image, as well as be able to connect those to historical, cultural, and political aspects of identity (Callero, 2003: 128).

Society is also important to identity formation because people get an idea of who they are from what they believe other’s perceptions of them are. This concept is known as the “Looking Glass Self” and was developed by Charles Cooley. He claimed that the self cannot be separated from social influences (Cooley, 1998:164). While the self is ultimately determined by an individual, society influences this choice by the messages given to the individual. An example of society’s influence on the self is the case of Gregory Howard Williams, who was raised as white

during his younger years in 1950's Virginia. While his mother was white, he also had a dark-skinned father who claimed he was Italian-American. However, when Williams' parents divorced, he learned his father was actually black, and in turn, Williams learned he was half black. He stayed with his father during the divorce, and in society's view he became black overnight. During the move, Williams' father explained to Williams and his younger brother that people would view them both differently, because their father would be living as a black man in a black neighborhood. Their father stated, "Life is going to be different from now on. In Virginia you were white boys. In Indiana you're going to be colored boys. I want you to remember that you're the same today that you were yesterday. But people in Indiana will treat you differently" (Williams, 1995:40). Williams' father realized that although his sons would still look the same as before, because in Indiana he was seen as black, his boys would also be treated as such. When people saw them as white, Williams and his brother saw themselves as white and never questioned their race. Once they were redefined by their community as black, their identity changed and people viewed them differently despite the fact that they looked the same as they did in Virginia. Although Williams understood that his personality was no different, he still had a change of identity since others saw him otherwise and he learned aspects of his race were different than he originally thought.

Multiracial individuals have to make decisions about their identity. A recent study discovered that multiracials identify themselves differently in public versus in private (Brunsma, 2006). Therefore, the number of multiracials in the U.S. Census could only be a fraction of the actual population of those with two or more racial backgrounds. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States has over seventy-four million children in the country (2012). In the year 2000, over six million of those children were classified as more than one race, up from five

hundred thousand in 1970 (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001). The U.S. Census may have cases of some multiracial people labeling themselves as something separate than what they actually think of themselves personally. Brunnsma attributed this phenomenon of a different public and private classification of race to whether the person's personal identity was confirmed by those around him or her. He found that of those whose personal identity was not confirmed, 75% chose black on the Census, while only one-third of the validated individuals chose black (Brunnsma, 2006: 571). Recently, there has been a renewed interest in biracial and multiracial people, especially black-white biracial individuals. Most likely this newfound awareness has stemmed from the multi-racial background of the current U.S. president.

1.2 Multiracial Individuals

Historically, race was decided by the "one drop rule". The "one-drop rule" meant that just one drop of "black blood" made a person black (Davis, 1991: 4). According to F. James Davis, the rule is also known as the "one black ancestor rule" and the "traceable amount rule" (Davis, 1991: 4). He also says that anthropologists call it the "hypo-descent rule", which means that in the case of multiracial people, they are given the status of the subordinate group (1991: 4-5). The "one drop rule", particularly pernicious in the southern United States, became more entrenched into the law after the Civil War. During the post-Civil War era, the white people of the south were focused on keeping the white race "pure" and did not want it sullied with the blood of the people they thought were inferior. A clear, legal line of black and white was needed in order to segregate the races. Many states created laws prohibiting cross-racial marriage for the purpose of preventing miscegenation. However, racial mixing still occurred, as it did during slavery, and many American blacks have multiracial ancestry. Therefore, the history of American blacks is the history of multiracial people as well (McNamara, Temenis, & Walton,

1999: 21). Gullickson and Morning state, “Although it is not clear how widespread the one-drop principle remains, it certainly survives to some extent in the contemporary United States: the fact that a man whose mother was white is routinely considered our first black president testifies to its enduring power” (2011: 499). Although the president is biracial, until 2000 he would not have had the choice to indicate that category on the United States Census.

Until 2000, the multiple race category was not an option on the census survey, so people of multiple races were forced to choose a different classification. As a result, many estimates of multiracial populations were just guesses. Now, multiracial identity is progressing to a more acceptable categorization, and the acknowledgement by the Census Bureau is just a single example of evidence that supports this trend. Many groups, including Project RACE and the Association of MultiEthnic Americans fought to have the right to choose a classification other than one race; however, there was also opposition to the movement (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002: 2). Some, including activist Jesse Jackson, Congressional Black Caucus representative, Kweisi Mfume, and the organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), felt that dividing the race category would not be as effective in monitoring discrimination or tracking inequalities (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002: 2). Furthermore, Civil Rights activists argued that the new category would undermine monitoring and compliance since it is determined by how others categorize and respond to individuals’ racial group membership (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002: 2). They debated that the importance of identification purposes overshadowed the need for individuals to proclaim their self-identity (Rockquemore, Brunisma, & Delgado, 2009: 14). The new census data helped to show a new perspective of mixed race individuals and give clues to how they identify themselves. In previous censuses they could only identify themselves as one of the races they encompassed.

This could be a challenging decision. How could an individual choose a single classification if he felt as if there were multiple races that described himself?

One reason for choice of one race over another could be the social factors that go along with that race (Cornell & Hartmann, 2006). For example, throughout history, black has been equated with bad and white with good. An article by French et al, mentions Tajfel and Turner's theory (1986) that suggests in order for a group to combat these negative associations there are one of three choices for the group. They state that members themselves can choose not to identify with the group, the group as a whole can redefine the negative associations in order to enhance their positive traits, or the group can fight society in order to modify the hierarchy of the group in it (French et al., 2006: 2).

Negative racial associations have been documented recently among both adults and children (Neto & Paiva, 1998: 233). In 1973, Adams and Osgood discovered that young adults rated the color name white more positively than the color name black in twenty-three language-culture groups studied in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. A study three years later by a different pair of researchers found the same results (Neto & Paiva, 1998: 234).

Furthermore, studies performed in the United States among black and white preschoolers have found the identical associations (Neto & Paiva, 1998: 234). A well-known study of children's attitudes towards dark and light skin color was conducted in the 1940's by sociologists Clark and Clark through the use of dolls (1939a; 1939b; 1940). The experiment asked black children about their thoughts on two dolls, one white and one black. Sixty-three percent of the children said that they would rather play with the white doll. The majority also said the white doll was nicer than the black doll and forty-four percent of the black children said the white doll looked most like them, therefore equating themselves with the "nice" doll (Ahuja, 2009).

The Clark doll study was recently repeated by the ABC News show, *Good Morning America*. Their article states, "Some of our results differed vastly from those of the original experiment. For example, 88 percent of our children happily identified with the dark-skinned doll" (Ahuja, 2009: 1). The majority of the children in their study said that the black doll or both dolls were nice. However, the news source did note a few derogatory statements about the black doll's characteristics, such as this one by a seven year old girl, "'It talks back and don't follow directions.'" When asked about their perceived prettiness of the dolls, most of the boys chose the black doll, while the little girls (47 percent) had an affinity to the white doll (Ahuja, 2009). Dark skinned biases are thought to be a reflection of children's learning experiences in multiracial societies, since these biases are not present from birth. These might give a hint as to why some biracial people would classify themselves as part of the white population in societies where light-skinned individuals experience more privilege and less prejudice.

A significant point of identity choice for some multiracial individuals is their outward appearance. People who look more white than black may choose to be categorized as white and vice versa. Also, some who have ambiguous appearances choose to self-identify as biracial or multiracial. Since black-white biracial people have dual racial backgrounds, theoretically they can choose to belong to either group. However, it seems that the decision may not be simple or even a choice. For some people, despite how they classify themselves, others group them into another classification entirely, a phenomenon addressed by Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism was originally proposed by George Herbert Mead, but was termed by Herbert Blumer who further elaborated on it. The concept revolves around three main themes: a) People act towards others and objects based on the understanding they have for those things, b) these meanings come from social interaction between individuals, and c) the meanings can change

from person to person as they are based on one's own experiences. Blumer assumed that society was constructed by people through their interactions with each other. These interactions center on meanings that attributed to symbols and objects. These symbols then go on to determine the actions that an individual takes towards those symbols by their interpretation. Blumer states, "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (1986: 4).

Symbolic Interactionism contends that meanings are products of social action, that is, they are created and shaped by people as they interact. These symbols are language and gestures, which have meanings attached that change throughout time, depending on where one is located. Meaning is both derived and acted upon because of social interaction. This causes a cyclical effect, as not only are symbols derived from social action, but the actions taken towards those symbols are also derivative of the meaning given by interaction. Blumer says that human beings must constantly view and interpret their world. He says that they are not just actors, but are interpreters who decide their actions based on social cues attributed to gestures and symbols.

Khanna completed research delving into how mixed-race individuals were influenced by reflected appraisals, how people assume they appear to others, which is a concept within Symbolic Interactionism. Khanna found many of her subjects did react to how they thought others viewed their appearance (2010: 114). She discovered that the majority of her respondents reacted to the race they were around. Subjects responded that when whites were around they assumed that whites saw them as black, but when the subjects were around blacks they assumed their multiracial background was recognized. However, Khanna also mentions that although other blacks did notice the background of the mixed-race individuals, they also referred to the one drop rule to label multiracials as black (2010: 114).

A recent short documentary entitled, “Other”, shows how these reflected appraisals can influence multiracial individuals. The video reveals interviews of eight college-age multiracial young adults. All of them report being sometimes categorized as a race other than their own, including black or white. This is a common dilemma for many biracial and multiracial people. Some of the adults interviewed even admitted to answering the question before it was asked, because they assumed the topic would arise. One of the males clearly did not like the questioning of his ethnicity and stated, “You don’t ask someone who’s a hundred percent white, or like who’s perceived as one hundred percent white: what type of whiteness are you?” (Gagen, 2012: 3:46-3:54). One of the females of the video voiced that she found the questioning irritating when people asked her about her ethnicity, “They want to define me, which, they don’t really understand how annoying that is cuz they *never* have to do that cuz they’re white [laugh] like, period. They’re white, they don’t have to do that and they don’t get defined in the same way and it’s not as offensive to their sense of self or something when other people are doing that. It’s just so annoying and these are like my best friends, too” (Gagen, 2012: 5:00-5:21). At the beginning it seems as if she is talking about complete strangers, but during the end the viewer realizes that she’s speaking of close relationships. Perhaps her statement is referring to friends witnessing these questions and not understanding her annoyance. Another multiracial male says that he does not find the questioning invasive, as long as it is for curiosity’s sake, stating, “Questioning in an inquisitive way, I—I don’t find um, offensive.” (Gagen, 2012: 4:14-3:54).

According to Shih and Sanchez, when asked “What are you?” multiracial individuals feel the need to define themselves somehow, whether it is as a biracial individual or monoracial category (2005: 572). They often feel that they must identify with one racial category instead of realizing that it is possible to identify with a mixture of them and this dilemma can cause the

person emotional pain since they are forced to choose one characteristic over another. Standen (1996) called this the forced choice dilemma, because the action of choosing one race over another can cause biracial children to feel guilty about selecting one parent over the other (Shih & Sanchez, 2005: 572). Furthermore, this can cause a problem for the multiracial person because they are also denying a part of themselves by claiming only a single ethnicity. Self-identification is further complicated because racial limits for deciding a person's race do not exist. One person's definition of a race may be completely different than another's, making race a fluid concept. Korgen (1998: 92) claims that changes in the United States' laws and culture have made racial identity increasingly fluid and black-white biracial people are no longer forced to be identified as black due to the rule of the hypodescent. She states, "Race, like gender, is a product of our culture" meaning it is socially defined (Korgen, 1998:93). For example, race concepts are based off one's appearance, which is why multiracial people often get the "What are you?" question. Many people of a mixed black-white heritage have physical appearances similar to blacks, while some have white appearances, and some have ambiguous characteristics, making it challenging for others to racially define them. This can be an advantage to some, however, especially with regards to "passing." "Passing" is when a multiracial person attempts to live and portray themselves as the race they appear or prefer.

Khanna and Johnson researched the phenomenon of multiracials "passing" in the United States. They noted that historically, people of mixed races would try to pass themselves as white if they had more European features. Most times, these people would completely turn away from their families in order to keep the illusion of whiteness alive. Sometimes the deception would go on so long that children from later generations would not even know. This phenomenon was so well-known that it is even noted in fiction written in the past, such as the 1892 short story,

“*Désirée’s Baby*” by Kate Chopin, which follows the birth of a dark baby to a white, New Orleans couple. The husband accuses his wife of “not being white”; however, by the end of the tale and after his wife leaves with the infant, the husband discovers documentation revealing he is biracial (Chopin, 2006). While the goal in the past was more towards passing for white, the inclination has now mostly reversed.

The previously mentioned study by Khanna and Johnson points out that the recent trend in “passing” is to pass as black. There are several ways that subjects did this, including changing their way of speech, wearing specific hairstyles or clothes, tanning, and withholding information from their peer groups (Khanna & Johnson, 2010: 387; Khanna, 2011). Subjects responded that they wanted to pass as black for multiple reasons, such as to “fit in” and to avoid stigmas associated with whiteness. Another reason was to “pass as black in other contexts for perceived advantage—in particular, on college, scholarship, financial aid, and job applications” (Khanna, 2011: 143). Khanna and Johnson also note that the subjects were “frequently unaware that being biracial is often sufficient for affirmative action purposes, they presented themselves exclusively as black” (Khanna & Johnson, 2010: 390-393). Their study also found that at times the subjects used the above strategies to conceal their identity, so when passing was not possible they could still cover particular aspects of their racial heritage while emphasizing a desired trait. In contrast, Rockquemore and Arend (2002) found that there are also some multiracials who choose to identify with whites, either because they were comfortable “being white”, or others classified them as white.

While some multiracial individuals identify as biracial or monoracial, others feel their identity is fluid, Funderburg (1994) cites the case of Brad, a black-white biracial adult from California, who sees himself as “straddling the bridges” (97). Brad continues the conversation by

recalling how his identity as a teenager was confusing and that he had difficulty telling others about his multiracial family. “Now,” he says, “it’s just like, it just comes out and it’s very natural. It’s very flowing. I’m a mixture of both. I like to have the ability to go into either side of the two extremes, the white side or the black side...” (Funderburg, 1996: 97). He also describes that when he fills out paperwork he checks the “black” box, since he feels he is grouped into that racial type anyway, “On paperwork, I say I’m black, because they only give you ‘white’ or ‘black’ or they give you ‘other.’ If you put ‘white’ then you’re in there with everyone else and their [expletive] granny, and I know when I walk through that door, I know they’re not *thinking* that. So I put ‘black’ on everything” (1996: 97). Brad mentions that he feels he “straddles the bridge between black and white” and checks ‘black’ on paperwork because of his assumptions of others’ thoughts, which is conducive to the theory that race is very much a socially constructed category.

According to Jacobs (1992), multiracial individuals go through three stages during childhood in order to determine their racial identity. The first is experimenting with color, since they do not yet understand racial categorizations. During the second stage, biracial children understand and internalize their label as biracial. The third stage is determined by children fully understanding that their heritage is not decided by their color, but by parentage.

Interestingly, Doyle and Kao completed a study of multiracial individuals and found that the identity chosen during adolescence and young adulthood is not concrete. As with many other aspects of self-discovery during these years, the researchers discovered that mixed-race individuals tended to change their racial self-identification during this period. The category of multiracial chosen during this time did not translate to the same label later on in life (2013: 419-20). Shih and Sanchez claim that multiracial people have a more fluid definition of race because

of their mixed background. The researchers conclude that multiracials are more apt to interpret race as a social construction, which is beneficial to them as it causes racial stereotypes to become invalid and not influence behavior (Shih & Sanchez, 2009: 7).

1.3 Multiracial Identity and Gender

Gender is another aspect that factors into identity decisions for mixed-race individuals. Rockquemore discusses the problems some biracial black-white women had with monoracial black women and how it contributed to their identity choice. While many women in the research reported negative encounters with black women, a much smaller percentage of biracial men recounted maltreatment with monoracial peers. Many biracial women felt they were unfairly targeted by black women, especially regarding their appearance. Rockquemore notes that many multiracial women reported “strong anti-black sentiments” because of this negative treatment (2002: 495) and were also more likely to identify as multiracial or completely shun their black heritage by identifying as white as a direct result of the maltreatment. Storrs (1999) found that mixed women tended to stigmatize their white background and choose to identify with their non-European ancestry. However, another more recent research endeavor by Rockquemore and Arend, studies mixed-race individuals who have chosen to identify as white.

Rockquemore and Arend found that physical appearance had much to do with the identification choice. For example, one multiracial respondent, who identified and appeared white, mentioned that after telling people of her heritage she was generally met with disbelief. The woman attributed her identity of whiteness to her looks, as well as being raised in a mostly white culture. A second woman interviewed appeared black, but was labeled as white because of an “honorary status.” This woman described how others she met saw her as white because of her actions, likes, dislikes, and close friendship networks. Although her appearance conflicts with the

classification of white, she was still able to be accepted as white in an “honorary status” from her likes, dislikes, and actions (Rockquemore & Arend, 2002: 58-9).

1.4 Past Studies on Multiracial Identity and Their Theories

Studies of multiracial people have been conducted since the early 1900’s and theories have ranged from earlier, more negative views of identity to more modern, positive outlooks on mixed-race identity. The past studies of mixed-race people are few and fragmented.

Rockquemore et al suggest that the reason for this is that theory construction contains restrictions from the predominant ideology of race, which inherently prevents theory and empirical studies from linking together (2009: 15).

Moreover, the research through history has focused on the popular beliefs at the time. For example, researchers in the 1930’s concentrated on what is known as the “problem approach”, which took the stance that mixed-race people had a problematic position in society that resulted in tragedy for them. The “Marginal Man” concept from Robert Parks was also applied to multiracial people by stating that the “one drop rule” required them to be a part of the black race. The concept claimed that multiracial people were condemned to a life of emotional pain.

As time progressed, the 1960s took on an altered view, because of the Black Power and Civil Rights movements. During this era, mixed-race individuals were regarded as black, and it was thought that they must develop a positive black identity. This ideology comes mostly from Erik Erikson’s framework for ego-identity formation. Erikson proposed that during adolescence, the individual was tasked with forming a stable identity. This model was applied to race by assuming that racial identity was also a part of adolescence, since this was the time that identity developed.

The 1980s and 1990s brought about even more evolution in theories of identity for biracial people and researchers began to look at mixed-race people as completely separate from the other racial categories. For example, Gibbs and Moskowitz-Sweet claim that some studies determined that the racial attitudes and self-concepts of biracial children might develop differently than black or white children (1991: 580). However, separate studies have been performed that found biracial children have a more positive self-concept than their monoracial peers (Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991: 580). Studies centered on focusing their research completely on multiracial individuals, instead of the multiracial population as a group, which added a new dimension to the information collected. One of the reasons for this change in research focus is that many of the researchers who were interested in the topic were of mixed-races themselves.

Two researchers, Gibbs (1989) and Herring (1992) came up with three challenges that the biracial population face. They said that first, multiracial people need to successfully integrate their dual racial and cultural labels. Second, they must also learn how to develop a positive concept of themselves and sense of competence (Rockquemore et al., 2009: 18). The third challenge the researchers claimed mixed-race people face is that it is imperative for them to blend their earlier identifications into a clear, steady sense of personal identity and a positive racial identity. They suggested that when this did not happen there could be detrimental effects, including developmental problems. Development issues could arrive when a person had conflicts about: their multiple racial identity; social nonconformity; sexuality or partners; separation from parents; and about their career or education ambitions (Rockquemore et al., 2009: 18).

While in the past it was automatically assumed that members of the multiracial population were going to have problems integrating into society, now the outlook is much more

positive. In fact, a study completed in 2009 found that multiracials had the same amount of friendship networks as their monoracial peers, but had more racially diverse groups of friends (Quillian & Redd, 2009: 292). More recently, the objective is for multiracial individuals to become integrated into society with an identity that reflects their multiple ethnicities. Waters (1990) states that identity for multiracials is a personal choice and she acknowledges that throughout the lives of the multiracial individual the racial identity may change. In fact, identification with only one of the several racial categories is thought to be unhealthy and an over-identification to one of the parents (Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2013).

Rockquemore has determined four types of categories for racial identification; border, protean, transcendent, and traditional (1998: 200). The first category describes people who define themselves as between racial categories and is known as a “border personality”. These people generally stress their biracial heritage and think of it as a unique part of themselves. They do not choose black or white separately, but prefer to look at themselves as a blend of the two ethnicities. An example of a border identity formation would be Maureen Reddy’s son, the main subject of her book, *Crossing the Color Line*. Her son wanted to be identified as biracial, no matter that she and her husband tried to teach him he was black. He wanted to be known and classified himself as biracial because he was proud of his duality.

The second identity formation mentioned by Rockquemore is the “protean identity.” The person with the protean identity feels that they have the ability to be white, black, or biracial depending on what they want at the moment. Brad displayed this type of self-identification when he mentioned that he thinks of himself as “straddling the bridge” between black and white. (Funderburg, 1994: 97). He identified as a mixture of both races and felt comfortable in both. He also mentions that depending on the audience around him, he can shift to appease whatever

group he is with. Rockquemore also mentions a mixed-race man that describes stereotypical views of black and white worlds, while revealing that he knows how to act in both because of his biculturalism. (1998: 201). This can be an advantage to biracial individuals who feel their identity is fluid, as they can assess a situation and adapt (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013).

The third type of identity is known as the “transcendent personality” and is equated with Parks’ concept of the “Marginal Man.” Parks described the qualities of a person who was bicultural and whose “marginal status enabled an objective view of social reality” (Rockquemore, 1998: 201). Although Parks was referring to multiculturalism, his concept can also be applied to the multiracial population. For these people race is not a master status. The self-understanding is uniquely and exclusively available to individuals whose physical characteristics are highly ambiguous. The people who are grouped into this category do not see race as a defining part of themselves. They may avoid questions about racial groups and base their identity on personality or other characteristics instead. They will choose a label for identification purposes, whether white, black, or biracial, but only when pressured into making a decision.

The fourth and last type of identity formation that Rockquemore labeled is known as a “traditional identity.” It is when people of the biracial population choose to identify with their black or white heritage exclusively. However, they do not completely deny the dual ethnicity of themselves and consider their biracialism to simply be a description of their birth parents, not themselves. During the documentary, “Other”, most interviewees considered themselves biracial, but a few identified as black exclusively. This group preferred not to be publicly associated with the label of biracial or white, because they felt they did not fit-in to that classification.

1.5 Multiracial Individuals and Family

Families and close friendship networks also provide information about race to their children. Brunnsma and Rockquemore claim that one's social networks from adolescence through adulthood consist of many important influences to identity, such as friends, family and acquaintances. Through interaction these people assist in modeling and distinguishing an individual's identity (2002: 339). Roth claims nuclear family is one of the most significant, if not the most imperative network for people. Parents and family members assist in socializing children about race, which determines how those children construe future social interactions with others. (Roth, 2005: 40). To the multiracial child, family may be even more important than the monoracial child, because of issues about identity. While monoracial adolescents generally do not question their racial identification, biracial classification is not so clear. Parental communication is important in fostering a healthy sense of self for the biracial child (Bratter & Heard, 2009: 661). Bratter and Heard discovered that adolescents rarely have a tendency to match either parent's race, although preceding research found that multiracial children are more likely to choose their father's race (2009: 679). However, Bratter and Heard did discover closeness between parents and children and parental involvement in educational activities made children more apt to identify as the same race of their father if the closeness and involvement was from him and more toward a multiracial label if the attention came from their mother (Bratter & Heard, 2009: 680). In contrast, Brunnsma determined that with black-white mixed children, the father's race has more of an impact on a child's racial identification, especially if the father is black. He explains that if the father is black then the child is more likely to be identified as black and not white or multiracial (Brunnsma, 2005: 1148). However, he mentions

that father's race has more influence on the child's classification in the South than in other parts of the United States.

Cheng and Lively reinforce this theory, as well as the fact that the one drop rule still has an effect on today's mixed-race youth. They agree that biracial individuals are more likely to be raised and "socialized as black" (Davis 1991; Doyle & Kao 2007; Williamson 1980), which means they are also more likely to be accepted into black communities (2009: 68). Furthermore, Schlabach (2013) found that in regards to gender and race, multiracials fared socially and emotionally better when they had a white mother versus a minority mother (169). Moreover, family social capital is important for the multiracial adolescents' well-being.

As related to families, Soliz et al, found when parents had supportive communication and discussed identity, the children noticed fewer group differences in the family (2009: 829). However, they also discovered that in order to lessen group differences, open communication in families needed to clearly address concerns of racial or ethnic identity (Soliz et al., 2009: 829). Furthermore, possessing high self-esteem and feeling comfortable in one's ethnicity are highly correlated, particularly for adolescents (Kroger, 2003). Communication with parents has been shown important to foster self-esteem in children, and it is also important to black children in terms of their identity (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987; Demo & Hughes, 1990). When black families had open communication, discussed race with their child, and raised them in an assertive manner, the children felt closer to blacks (Demo & Hughes, 1990). The same study also found that living in a black community and having black friends were also reinforcing of a black identity (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

Kilson and Ladd interviewed the mothers of biracial children of black and white descent and collected the conversations in a book entitled, *Is That Your Child?* Many black mothers

encouraged their children to identify with their black ethnicity rather than their white. The reasoning behind this was simple. About her decision to raise her son to identify with his black heritage, one mother stated, “Because the world would see him that way and he needed to be able to face the world as black” (Kilson & Ladd, 2009: 27-28). Black mothers also discussed trying to keep their children aware of their multiracial heritage while promoting blackness. One of the mothers made scrapbooks for her children with pictures of both her and her husband’s families. White mothers interviewed by the researchers had much of the same reaction about race and indicated that they assumed their children would self-identify as biracial or black. In addition, white mothers admitted to trying to surround their biracial children with positive messages about their race and exposing them to a multicultural environment. Despite some dissimilarities in their opinions, all of the mothers interviewed described their desires for their children to become self-assured and self-confident adults. Most parents teach their children about race, so as these interviews show, at least some aspect of racial identity is taught at home.

In *Crossing the Color Line*, Maureen Reddy describes raising her black-white multiracial son. She writes that she and her husband educated their son that he is racially black and ethnically African-American from his father, as well as Irish-American from his mother. However, by the age of six he insisted that he was not black, but biracial (Reddy, 1994: 68). Although others may have a different idea about a person’s race, that individual must choose on his or her own which category they most identify with. Kerwin and Ponterotto write that interracial couples tend to encourage their multiracial children to identify with both racial groups, so many children have the task of establishing a dual identity from a young age (1995).

Funderburg notes, “It takes two people to create a biracial child: a mother and a father. Like all parents, they may be largely responsible for shaping how their children see themselves

and the world. What parents teach about race comes, in part, from their own experience of race” (1994: 25).

If what Funderburg says is true, then race must be assessed differently in homes where a child does not have the same racial background as the parents, such as in transracial adoptions. In fact, there is an entire debate about this issue. Many people argue that a child should be adopted by parents who share the same racial background (Butler-Sweet, 2011a: 195). The proponents of this topic argue, especially in the case of black or biracial children placed in white homes, that parents are not capable of fully preparing their child for the struggles of living as a minority (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Alstein, 2002). Butler-Sweet found that black individuals adopted by white couples were less likely to describe themselves using race than blacks adopted by black couples (2011b: 766). She states the adoptees felt less pressured to identify using their race and generally only mentioned it among the last few characteristics when describing themselves (Butler-Sweet, 2011b: 766). Wood argues that ethnic identity is important for multiracial children and placing a child in a home with parents of a similar background is preferable. However, she also acknowledges that the option is not always feasible and children should be placed in families with other similar characteristics (2009: 438). When transracial adoptions do occur, it is better for the mixed or minority child to be raised in an environment better suited to familiarizing the child with their racial or ethnic identity (Hollingsworth, 1997; Shireman & Johnson, 1986). For instance, the child should attend an integrated school or live in a neighborhood with a variety of racial backgrounds.

Despite this information and the recent attention given to transnational adoptions, race is not concrete. Race is a way to categorize people, but as discussed, there are not concrete rules regarding how to classify people using it. In fact, “ethnic identities are not given, fixed, or

unchanging, but are continually evolving products of material and social circumstances and of the actions of the groups themselves, wrestling with, interpreting, and responding to those circumstances, building or transforming identities in the process” (Cornell, 2000: 42). Since race is not concrete, it is very much fluid and based on the personal views of the individual. In the cases above of multiracial people being mistaken for other ethnicities, it is obvious that there is no rule for how to define race. Those examples also make it clear that although a person might appear to have characteristics from a specific category they may fit in a completely different one and race is a social concept that is continually changing. Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado ask, “Is the color line disappearing, slightly fading, or reconfiguring itself in new ways?” (2009: 15). The color line is not waning, although it may be faintly fading, as well as reconfiguring itself. For example, race is still an important concept today as in the past, which is why it is necessary for biracial individuals to develop a positive racial identity. An equally essential component is to research how biracial and multiracial people cultivate those positive identities and study more about this group.

1.6 The Present Study on Biracial Identity and Family Influence

The following research focuses on determining the identity choice of black-white biracial individuals, as well as exploring further aspects of their choice, such as family. Black-white biracials were chosen as the research sample because of the location of the study. According to the United States Census, Alabama’s population consists of over 4 million people. The majority of the inhabitants are whites (77%) and blacks (26%) (2014). Alabama has a history of racial aggression between blacks and whites and black-white interracial relationships are still a taboo in much of the Deep South. However, despite this, anecdotal evidence suggests black-white

couplings still occur regularly. Moreover, the biracial children produced from these relationships must often contend with the conflict from both sides of their families and from external sources.

Previous studies on biracial individuals have failed to examine family intimacy and proximity as possible influences to racial identity choice. Therefore, this study involves researching racial identity formation and the influence of family on identity choice among biracial individuals. This study could benefit the current research by revealing the multifaceted identity choices of multiracial people and what influences their choices.

Chapter 2

Methods

2.1 Research Strategy

The proposed study's purpose is to answer questions about biracial identity to be used in order to foster healthy growth for biracial individuals by determining why they chose their identity and what influences, focusing specifically on the impact of family, assisted in that choice.

The eligibility requirements included: current Auburn University, and Auburn University-Montgomery students, age 19 or older, and having both a black and white biological parent. Clark-Atlanta University was included in the original target demographic, as well, but was ultimately excluded due to lack of participation. In order to gather participants, ads were placed in the Auburn Plainsman (both online and on Twitter), as well as on AUM social media (Facebook). Flyers were posted on both Auburn and AUM campuses, and sent electronically via email to department heads (only per department head's request) when flyers were forbidden from hanging in the buildings, specifically the School of Veterinary Medicine and the Athletic Department.

Since the proposed study used human subjects, an IRB form was completed and approved. Prior to data collection, an informed consent document was distributed and a signed one was obtained. I have completed CITI certification and the completion certificate was turned in with the proposal and the IRB form in order to follow all protocols involved with human research subjects. Furthermore, all identifying information was be kept private and was destroyed upon completion of the research.

The research included two phases. The first phase included quantitative and qualitative information, as it included a questionnaire to measure the relationship between biracial individuals, family, and identity. The second phase was a focus groups designed to foster open communication and allow opinions to be expressed by all members of the group.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do families of biracial individuals have an influence on their choice of identity?
2. Does the identity choice of biracial individuals tie into their closeness to their families?

2.2 Data

The questionnaire asked participants about self-classification (biracial identity), age (measured by the year of birth), sex (nominal choice of male or female), father's race (nominal scale where respondent chooses answer), mother's race (nominal scale where respondent chooses answer), perceived views from others match own ("yes" or "no" choice), closeness to blacks (measured from Not Close to Very Close), closeness to whites (measured from Not Close to Very Close), perceived integration (open-ended) , parents' influence on choice (open-ended), parents' previous racial discussions (four choices: from No to Yes; Extensively), neighborhood type (suburban, urban, rural), and predominant race of neighborhood (black, white, other).

Once all data were gathered, the researcher analyzed them by hand, as it was a small sample size.

2.3 Expected Findings

The information discovered through the research mentioned was expected to examine the identity choice of black-white biracial individuals and explore how families contribute. The influence of family was expected to be a large part of identity choice and closeness to family a deciding factor in the final decision of multiracial individuals.

Chapter 3

Findings

The research consisted of one focus group comprised of seven volunteers and was conducted April 4, 2014 at 4:00pm. It took place in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work's conference room, as it was a private location fitted with a table and chairs. The questionnaires and consent forms were completed prior to the study and then gathered from participants upon their entrance into the meeting room. Refreshments were provided, and the participants were encouraged to partake of the snacks. Once all participants were seated, I introduced myself and reminded everyone of consent and the confidentiality of the study. After the introduction, the focus group began. The tone was relaxed and congenial. Many of the volunteers had arrived early and conversed before the actual research discussions were initiated. The pre-study conversation relaxed the participants, helping them to speak more comfortably about topics that otherwise may have been awkward for them. Conversation flowed smoothly, although there were a few moments where I had to encourage people to speak. Furthermore, there were volunteers who were more comfortable speaking than others. This required me to act as a facilitator, to gently remind some participants that others needed to speak, as well as in some

instances, to encourage the conversation to those who were quieter. The participants seemed at ease discussing most of the topics that emerged.

In order to analyze the questionnaire data, I began by recording each participant's answers to each question and listed the questions 1 to 24. I then grouped those who had the same answers, followed by the people who did not. The data from the questionnaire revealed interesting demographic information, as well as opinions from volunteers.

3.1 *Questionnaire*

The actual names of participants in this study have been changed for confidentiality purposes, and the names listed are pseudonyms. The sample included a total of seven participants, including five women: Krystal, 20 years; Emily, 22 years; Cadence, 24 years; Arielle, 26 years, and Tamara, 45 years. There were also two men, Jonathan, 20 years and Daniel, 33 years. Table 1 shows that regarding parents' race, six participants reported having a black father and white mother, while one person, Jonathan, reported having a white father and black mother. Daniel had a black father and white mother, but was adopted by monoracial black parents. Regarding racial classification, five people recorded identifying themselves as "biracial", while the remaining two, Arielle and Daniel, recorded themselves as "black". There were no participants who identified as white, although one participant, Cadence, who currently identifies as biracial acknowledged that as an adolescent she identified herself as "white". Four participants who identified as biracial reported that they did not think others saw them as biracial. Emily, who identifies as biracial, was the only one who reported feeling that others did see her as biracial. In contrast, both Arielle and Daniel, who identified as black, reported that they felt others did see them as black.

When participants were asked to rate their closeness to blacks and whites, Daniel and Jonathan reported feeling very close to blacks, but only somewhat close to whites. The women's results varied. Two women, Arielle and Krystal, reported that they felt close to both blacks and whites, while the last three women reported they felt: close to blacks and somewhat close to whites (Tamara), somewhat close to blacks and very close to whites (Emily), and not close to blacks, but very close to whites (Cadence). When participants were asked if they felt they could integrate into one race better than another, three women, Tamara, Emily, and Cadence, felt they could integrate easier with whites. Both men, Daniel and Jonathan, as well as Krystal, felt they could integrate better with blacks. Arielle felt she could integrate with blacks easier, but noted that culture, background, and common interests were more significant to integrating than race alone.

Participants were also asked about family influence on their racial identity. When asked if their parents influenced their racial identity, four people: Arielle, Daniel, Krystal, and Cadence, answered yes. The remaining three: Tamara, Jonathan, and Emily, reported their parents did not influence their racial identity. Participants were also asked if their parents discussed race with them. In response to this question, Daniel, Krystal, and Jonathan said their parents had discussed race extensively; Tamara answered her parents had discussed it adequately; and Cadence, Emily, and Arielle reported their parents discussed race with them, but very little.

The respondents answered questions about their neighborhoods. Five people were raised in suburban neighborhoods. Of those five, Arielle, Emily, and Cadence reported the neighborhood consisted of a mixture of races; Tamara and Jonathan reported their suburban neighborhoods were mainly white. Krystal reported being raised in a rural, black neighborhood and Daniel reported he was raised in an urban, black neighborhood. It should also be noted that

Arielle was raised outside of the continental United States, in a majority black country, before moving to Alabama for college.

When asked about income, five people self-reported their families to be middle class: Tamara, Arielle, Emily, Jonathan, and Cadence. While Daniel reported his family was blue collar and Krystal indicated her family was poor. Tamara, Arielle, Emily, Jonathan, and Cadence reported they were raised by both parents. Daniel was adopted and raised by a monoracial black couple. Krystal was the only participant raised by a single parent, which was her mother.

When asked about contact with extended family, three participants said they had contact with both sides (Tamara, Arielle, and Emily), two had contact with mostly white relatives (Cadence and Krystal), one only had contact with mostly non-white relatives (Jonathan). Daniel only had contact with his adoptive family. He only had contact once with his biological mother by phone in 2004 and had no contact with his biological father.

When asked about parents' education, three people reported their mothers had some college and fathers had a high school education (Tamara, Emily, and Cadence); Krystal's mom had some college and her father's education was unknown, Arielle's mother had some college and her father had finished college, Jonathan's mother had completed her Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine and his father had some college, lastly, Daniel's adoptive parents both had a high school education. The parents' occupations ranged from retail positions to highly paid state employees.

When asked which parent the participant would discuss a negative racial experience with, three people responded they would speak with either or both parents (Jonathan, Arielle, and Emily); two people responded they would speak with their mother (Cadence and Krystal); One

person responded that she would speak with her father (Tamara); and Daniel responded that he would not speak to either parent. He explained,

My parents reflect their experience of being black very heavily. So, sometimes I need to hear a more rounded perspective on what might have happened, versus my parents' opinion, which is always biased towards racial discrimination...

Respondents were asked how important race is to them, and four responded that it was somewhat important (Tamara, Arielle, Cadence, and Daniel); two chose not important (Emily and Krystal); and Jonathan said it was very important. However, Jonathan also acknowledged that while race was an important issue to discuss it was not significant overall. Respondents were also asked if they could recall a time when race was important. Four answered they could not think of a time (Tamara, Emily, Krystal, and Cadence); Arielle and Daniel answered that it is important for scholarship opportunities. Jonathan answered that it was important for college and scholarship opportunities. He explained that he previously attended a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and was welcomed instantly. He did not feel immediately welcomed once he began attending Auburn University, although with time people eventually began to accept him.

Lastly on the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they felt they could identify as black, white, or biracial because of their black-white background. Four answered affirmatively, (Tamara, Krystal, Jonathan, and Cadence). Daniel answered that he felt other biracials could and that he could due to his background, but that he felt more black personally because of his experiences being raised in a black family. Emily responded no to this question and answered that she felt she could only identify as biracial. Arielle responded that she felt she could identify as biracial or black, but not white.

The information gathered from the questionnaire offered information from the participants about their identity, parents' influence, and other important factors. It revealed that in terms of racial identity, two of the participants identified as black and five identified as biracial. While there were no participants that identified as white, one of the biracial participants discussed how she identified as white at a younger age. Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed their parents had an influence on identity, while three said their parents did not. This information assists in adding more depth to the respondents' discussions during the focus group and gives data as to each person's upbringing.

3.2 Focus Group

During the focus group, participants were asked a list of questions. The discussion deviated from those queries occasionally as the participants brought in issues that were important to them. Four themes emerged showing how family influenced identity, including: approval from parents' families on the interracial relationship, family closeness, closeness to parents, and messages from parents on identity. Furthermore, a recurring theme of messages from external sources on identity was also mentioned by the group.

Family Approval of Parents' Relationship

When participants were asked if there were any negative issues with family, five out of seven admitted that when their parents began the relationship, there was some disapproval from the white parent's family (Jonathan, Emily, Krystal, Cadence, and Tamara). Jonathan revealed that this disapproval did not have much change with time, but there had been some contact:

So, my dad's white and my mom's black. Um, when they first started dating, my dad's family didn't take it too kindly. Um, they ended-up getting married and none of the people from my dad's side of the family came to the wedding except

one of his aunts. And ever since then it was kinda like us working to like get to know them better.

Emily's parents had a similar experience, but unlike Jonathan, her family's approval drastically changed with her birth,

My family, I mean, it's kinda the same, almost a little different, but kinda the same. My mom's white, my dad's black. My mom and dad, whenever they first got together, my mom's parents, like family, did not really care that my mom was with my dad. They kind of got over it. They had a small wedding, it wasn't anything big. So, nobody really came, ya know. But like, whenever they had me, my family has always been, ya know, both sides of my family have always been really welcoming.

Krystal's experiences with negativity from family expanded from the alienation that Jonathan and Emily had experienced, as she revealed her mother's family was so harsh they were forced to move. Speaking about her mother, she stated,

And she's from... rural Alabama, and it's really backwards back there. And when she had my brother first, her family—the white side—completely cut her off. They were like, 'Your kids are abominations and you're going to hell.' So, she just packed us up and we moved...

Cadence's mother was from Europe and her mother's family was worried about their daughter's suitor being both American, as well as black:

...Her family was more skeptical because he was American. There were stories about European women that would marry black men and then come to the states and they were abused. So, they were a little apprehensive about that.

Tamara's mother's family was from a different country in Europe and the family also had doubts about her parent's union,

My mother's family –who are all [from European country]—um, I *never* saw this, but my mother said that they had –umm, you know, it was a little touch-and go— but, they were open enough to get to know my dad and once they got to know him everything was just hunky dory.

While five participants mentioned conflict with the white sides of their families, two people, Arielle and Tamara, mentioned conflict with the black sides of their families. Tamara's family conflict resides mostly with a paternal aunt and the aunt's family, who treat her mother badly. Arielle's paternal grandmother disliked Arielle's white mother. Arielle explained, "...She would have rather my dad had married a black, Bohemian woman and she kind of always, made that known. Like, in her own little subtle ways, I guess."

Daniel was the only participant who did not have to deal with this issue, as he was adopted at an early age by a monoracial black couple and was embraced by his adopted parents' families.

In terms of familial conflict, all of the participants mentioned some disapproval because of their parents' coupling, except Daniel. However, during the discussion, Daniel had mentioned that his biological mother gave him up for adoption because of her age (17 at the time) and racial tension. Furthermore, while most of the participants discussed strain with the white side of their family, a few mentioned disapproval was from the black side of their family.

Family Closeness

When the issue of closeness to family was discussed, four people mentioned they were closer to the white sides of their families (Krystal, Tamara, Arielle, and Cadence), and three were

closer to their black family members (Jonathan, Emily, and Daniel). Krystal stated that she only felt close to her mother and brother, while Tamara felt close to her European family, despite the distance separating them. Arielle and Cadence stated that they felt closer to their mothers' families.

The participants who felt closer to their black family had differing reasons as to why. Daniel, who was adopted, had never met either of his biological parents. However, he discussed his closeness to both adoptive parents' families.

When explaining why he felt closer to the black side of his family, Jonathan said proximity was a large issue. He stated that he saw his white family very little, but would love to be close to them if it were possible:

And the only other time I do get to see my white family is when—I hate to say it—when a tragedy happens in the family... And, um, yeah. I would love to be closer to my white side family, like all my cousins and stuff, but it just never happened that kinda way.

Emily felt closer to her black family because it was large and more family oriented. In addition, she was incredibly close to her paternal grandmother, who was very accepting of Emily's mother. Emily stated,

She always babysat me, like I was, like her favorite grandchild ever. Like, she adored me, she loved my mom. Like, definitely, my mom says she loved my grandmother so much and she always felt like my grandmother cared about her a lot more. She felt like she was even more of a mother figure than *her* mom was.

Closeness to Parents

When participants were asked if they felt closer to their mother or father, four people mentioned they felt equally close to both parents (Jonathan, Emily, Arielle, and Daniel), Krystal and Cadence said they were close to their mother, and Tamara said she was closer to her father. Krystal had never met her father, but had been raised by her mother. Cadence mentioned that she felt closer to her mother because she was Cadence's primary caregiver. Cadence's father was in the military and often on trips away. Cadence also expressed that if she were not disabled maybe she would be closer to her father.

Jonathan, Emily, Arielle, and Daniel all mentioned that their feelings of closeness were associated with talking to their parents openly. Jonathan specifically states, "We all talk about race and what goes on in the world. We don't have any discrepancies with anything." Emily stated something similar, saying: "I don't feel like I ever have to, you know, hide anything from them or not tell them about something. Whether it's racial, not, whatever. Anything going on." Arielle and Daniel both described being able to talk to their parents about anything, but did acknowledge they call each parent for different things. Arielle explained, "... I talk to my mom on a more regular basis about things and she kinda relays it over to my dad. He comes in for like the big stuff, and then I'll call my mom about all the little stuff in between." Daniel explained a similar situation:

I don't really think I'm that much closer to either one of my parents. I have Arielle's thing that like I use them—not like *use* them, but where I use them for different things. I look to them for different things. Like, my dad gives me more calm advice, and my mom...I just have to, like get her off my back at certain points.

Messages from Parents

All of the participants mentioned receiving positive messages from their family. The positive messages ranged from acceptance to preparation for future coping strategies of unacceptance from others. The positive messages came from parents, sibling, and even grandparents. Some messages mentioned appearance specifically, such as with Emily and Arielle. According to Emily,

I've always been told—my parents have always told me, 'You're just so pretty. Everyone wants your skin tone.' Like, I don't ever see why you could complain about anything.

Arielle also mentioned compliments from her mother about appearance, "My mom would always say that I can't complain [about my hair], because women pay hundreds of dollars to get hair that looks like mine."

In comparison, Tamara received affirming messages about herself as a person, but not necessarily about appearance,

The biggest thing I remember as a child, um, is that they always made me feel—again, that I was *me*, and I was special, and that there was nothing wrong with me. You know, we never sat down and said, "You know, Tamara, you're mixed and you have this history and that history.

Messages from family also discussed race, as mentioned by Arielle and Krystal. Arielle recalls a story her mother told about her grandmother,

So, I guess when we were really little, she [my grandmother] didn't understand why people kept calling us black, because she was like, 'They're also half white. I don't understand why they automatically get put in this category.' Not 'cause she—she didn't have an issue with black people, I guess—but for her, she didn't

really see *color* she just saw *us*. But she noticed when we were born and as we were growing up that a lot of other people saw us as a color. And the color was black.

Krystal told how she received positive messages from both her mother and her only brother, who is also biracial. Her mother was adamant to tell Krystal that race was not a ruling characteristic of her as a person, saying:

Okay, so you're black and I'm obviously white, so you're white, too. But, it doesn't define you. It's not who you are. You can be whoever you wanna be, so go ahead and be president. I love you, baby girl.

In addition, her brother offered her the following advice and compares their racial mixture to ice cream flavors, "Not everybody likes vanilla, and not everybody likes chocolate ice cream, but everybody loves the chocolate-vanilla swirl." He is ultimately hinting at the self-affirming message that they are a 'perfect combination' of both black and white, just as chocolate and vanilla are a perfect combination of ice cream.

Other messages that participants mentioned were messages about coping with racial discrimination. Jonathan, Daniel, Emily, and Arielle all revealed that they had received this type of message. Jonathan recollected, "We would talk about it [race] in a sense, like, how it affects me when I'm at school or when I'm out and they're not around me, and how I should possibly respond to it or not respond to it."

Emily also said her father warned her of problems she may face as a biracial woman,

And talking about race, the only time I can even specifically remember my mom or my dad telling me anything about it, I was very little, my dad had told me,

“Emily, it might be a little harder because you are black and you are female. Most people are going to see that and you might have—people might not like you because of who you are.” He was like, “You don’t need to let them—those people aren’t gonna matter in your life. You just need to—you know, focus on you.”

Arielle’s father was particularly worried when he learned she was moving from her home country to the American South. She recalls him warning her of problems she may face in Alabama,

...Before I moved to Alabama my dad was really nervous about me coming here. I remember that. And that’s I think the only time that he brought up that race might be an issue. Because in [her home country] it just wasn’t an issue for me or, anybody else. Because everybody was black. Yeah, more, just more, racial comments and things like that. And just—to just be aware of it...and I don’t know. Just not, like, fight back about it. Just understand that *that’s* the environment that you’re going into and it might be a lot different than what you’re used to. He didn’t tell me—really tell me *what* to do. He was just making me aware *of* it.

Daniel mentions advice his adoptive parents gave him about encountering whites and admitted to feeling like they may be blinded by their focus on race as a root problem of many issues:

It was always weird, because I understood that I was biracial and they come from a hardcore black experience of, you know, like, ‘Don’t trust white people, don’t do this, don’t do that. They’re always out—anytime anything happens, that there’s a black and a white person, like this white person is out to get whatever black

person there is.’ Like, sometimes I feel like they’re maybe blinded with that, from seeing ‘Well, what is the root cause of whatever’, because they’re stuck on that.

That it’s—that it’s because of white and black.

The guidance from Daniel’s parents could be construed as both positive and negative.

While it does undeniably prepare him for discrimination, it also seems to encourage him to expect discernment from the whites he encounters. He also discussed how it made him feel since he has a biracial background,

And um, it was just—I don’t know. It was really weird when they would say things like that and I was like, ‘So, how then...So, do y’all distrust me? Is there this underlying distrust that you guys have of me?’ Or, what is that really saying towards our relationship to a degree?

Unfortunately, Daniel’s parents’ mistrust of whites made him question their trust of him, and gave him doubts about their relationship. Although his parents were trying to protect Daniel and warn him of problems that could arise, their message also had unintentional negative consequences.

In terms of closeness to family, four participants mentioned they were close to their white family, while three were close to their black family. Those close to the black side of their kin mentioned proximity, adoption into the family, and black relatives being more family oriented as reasons for their stronger bond. Furthermore, when asked about parental closeness, four participants stated they were close to both parents and discussed open communication with both was why. Two people said they were close to their mothers, and in both cases the mother was the primary caregiver. Lastly, one respondent discussed feeling close to her father and mentioned repeatedly that she was a “daddy’s girl.” When asked about messages from their parents, all

participants revealed they had received positive messages, ranging from acceptance of them as a person or of physical characteristics, to preparation for racial prejudice.

External Messages

In addition to messages from family, the participants also discussed messages they had received from external agents, such as peers and even strangers. The only positive messages that any of the participants received from non-family were compliments on their hair. Five out of the seven respondents received this type of praise (Jonathan, Krystal, Emily, Arielle, and Tamara). Praise about their hair came from friends, family, and complete strangers.

Unfortunately, negative social messages were more prevalent and included: derogatory names, claims that the biracial individual was “too white”, statements the biracial individual “only counts as half”, questions asking “what are you”, isolation because of their race, and judgmental statements about the race of dating partners.

Four out of the seven participants reported being called derogatory names, Tamara, Krystal, Jonathan, and Emily. The insults were generally given from strangers, however some comments were reportedly from friends, as well. Tamara mentions her experience and also how she coped with it:

I was called the n-word in Germany once or twice, but I had no idea what it was, so I was not offended. I went home and I said ‘They called me this and they looked like they were trying to be mean, but I don’t know what this means.’ And so, my parents said—my parents talked about—They said ‘That means—It’s a bad word and people shouldn’t call you that. But, it really just means they’re an ignorant person. And somebody else called me a ‘bastard’ and I knew what that meant and I said, ‘Okay.’ Cuz, I was. It was a child, so I was not offended.

So, a lot of these things that have been thrown at me in my life, I just don't take offense to them. Either it's true, and whatever. Or I don't care that they're saying that.

Krystal discussed the taunts she and her brother received because they were biracial and how their mother was targeted as a mother of biracial children:

We've been called every derogatory name that you can get. She's gotten, like, vicious comments. Like, 'Omigosh. You're an awful person.' But, you can't let it affect you. It is what it is.

Jonathan was called a traitor from a complete stranger for attending Auburn University instead of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU):

There was an event that was going on [at the university]...And a lady came up to me and she was on this tour with black kids. And I was like, I was telling her about how I got to Auburn and how I transferred from [an HBCU]. And she was like, 'Oh! You traitor!' I was just like, I was just taken back for a moment. I was like, "Well, [HBCU] didn't really offer me money and I had a full ride and full books at Auburn." And she was like, "Ooh, okay."

While the woman was a stranger, she felt comfortable enough to call him a traitor for transferring from an HBCU. However, her attitude completely changed once she discovered Jonathan got funding from Auburn and not the other university. He continues by explaining his feelings on the encounter,

But before, you didn't know that and you called me a traitor. I guess because I'm like, obligated to go to a historical Black college. I don't know. Just, the whole entire dynamic of that conversation just...flabbergasted me.

While Tamara, Krystal, and Jonathan got comments from strangers, Emily received derogatory names from friends. She explains her experience and her coping strategy,

Like, as I got older and stuff people would be like, ‘Emily, you act like an Oreo.’

Like, because I’m black, but I act white.

But, like, I don’t feel like I act anyway. I feel like I act like *ME*. Because, I might talk this way, or, like, just because of the color I look. It doesn’t mean I’m supposed to act like, you know, a certain way. So, I was like, ‘I don’t know what you mean by that, but if you wanna say that, that’s fine.’ But I was like, ‘I’m me. I grew up the way I wanted to grow up. I’m not trying to like, fit in to any stereotypical category.’

Arielle and Jonathan also received similar messages about “acting white” from peers. They both reported hearing comments such as, “you’re not black enough.” or “you’re too white.” Furthermore, Krystal and Emily reported hearing other belittling comments related to their mixed heritage:

“I have a lot of black friends here and they’ll be like, ‘Oh yeah, guys!—Oh, Krystal, you don’t count. You’re mixed.’” -Krystal

“Oh yeah! I get that SO much! I either get: ‘you don’t count’ or ‘you count as half’. Or, like, with certain subjects, they’re like, ‘Emily, you can’t even get mad about that!’ And I’m like, ‘What!? Why?’” -Emily

Emily continues by explaining her feelings on this occurrence and how others do not seem to think their comments are condescending:

Like, I mean, just because I’m half a race doesn’t mean that I, like, have to feel a certain way about something. Like, I’m a person, too. I just feel like a lot of

people, like, they think it's okay, though. Like, I don't think some people understand that it can kinda come off rude.

While Emily mentions rude comments, all participants in the study reported being asked a question they also consider demeaning: "What are you?" Emily discusses her reactions to this question:

I feel like there's a bunch of people that like—like I said earlier [before actual taping]—they ask, like "What am I?" I'm like, "What? Like, I'm a person!" [Arielle interjects and simultaneously says "I'm a person" with Emily. Head nods from around table] [laughter] And I'm like, "What are you?" I just kinda give, smart kinda comments. And then whenever they look at me, they're like, "Well, I didn't mean it in a bad way!" and I'm like, "I know you didn't, but just the fact that you just asked *what am I*. I'm like, "maybe you should have reworded it a little differently.

When asked this question, Emily, Jonathan, and Krystal all state they answer with "I'm mixed". Daniel and Arielle reply to the question with "I'm black." In comparison, Tamara changes her answer depending on the context of the question and the situation. She explains one instance of reporting race,

When I was in high school and we had to fill out the ACT/SAT, all those bubble in—back in the day. And, uh, they wanted us to bubble in [our race] I just bubbled in everything, which just, of course, made it spit out the computer and, ya know. Then the teacher would come and be like, 'You need to choose.' And I'd say, 'Okay, can I be white today?' And then they'd look at me with this look on their face, like 'What!?' I'm like, 'Well, you're asking me to choose one side over

another! Top part or bottom part? Left or right, which one do you want today?’

You can’t do that.

Many of the respondents also discussed discrimination because of their mixed background. Emily, Arielle, and Jonathan discussed this phenomenon. Furthermore, Emily, Krystal, Tamara, and Arielle reported isolation from groups because of discrimination. These four women out of the five total reported experiencing negative looks or comments from black women and being isolated from groups of black women because of this negativity. Emily commented on this issue and the women continued in a discussion:

I feel like, um, sometimes I feel like I get really mean, nasty looks from really dark, African American girls. Because I feel like there’s a lot of girls right now that are, like, trying to get their skin a little lighter or whatever, and I don’t know if it’s because they think that I’m—attract more—they think that I’m maybe better than them or whatever, I feel like that sometimes I get nasty looks. From, black girls that just stare at me, like if I’m walking into a party or something, they’re not the ones who come and talk to me. And, even if I go and try to talk to them, I’m like, they’re the more, like... they don’t wanna interact. –Emily

Krystal also agreed with Emily and in a mimicking, high-pitched voice stated, “Who is this light-skinned girl? Uuugh.” Emily continued by describing how she will speak to whomever speaks to her and Arielle agreed, saying she will speak to “Whoever seems most open.” Tamara described discrimination in sororities and how when she decided to join a sorority she originally went to join a black sorority. However, she felt they discriminated against her and joined a white sorority.

The respondents also mentioned negative comments from others about their dating choices. Emily brought up the topic and stated:

I've had some of my black friends be like, 'You're not ever with a black guy!' And I'm like, I don't really like, look. Like, I'm like I'm with whoever I *choose* to be. It's not because: this person's Asian, this person's white, you're black, whatever...I date people for their personalities.

Jonathan also seemed to have these types of negative comments and discussed a recent encounter his mother had with a girl from his previous school:

...My mom was in the nail salon one day and one of her friends was there. And the friend's daughter came—she's black—and she mentioned that she went to Washington—and I went to Washington, also. She said, 'You must know my son, Jonathan Hill?' And she said, 'Yeah, he goes with a lot of white girls. I don't think he likes black girls a lot.' I'm just like, it's not that! It's just that I hang out with who I like. And if I like a white girl, I like a white girl. If I like a black girl, I like a black girl. It just depends on the connection I have. Not really the outer skin color.

Another issue all participants discussed was their public versus private identity.

Jonathan, Krystal, and Emily all agreed that they choose both black and white on paperwork that specified that they could choose one or more and identify as biracial publicly. However, they also stated if the instructions on paperwork asked them to choose one they would choose black, especially if there were scholarship opportunities involved. Arielle and Daniel choose black no matter the instruction or scholarship opportunities, as well as privately. Cadence mentioned she chose "white" when she was younger, but now

identifies as “biracial” on any paperwork. Tamara stated she always identifies as both black and white.

Many of the participants’ parents had received negative messages regarding the interracial relationship. Some of the participants had witnessed the dissatisfaction firsthand, while others had only heard of it through relatives. This seemed to affect family closeness at times, such as Jonathan having little contact with his father’s side of the family. Krystal also had an interesting family situation, as she had no contact with her father or his family, but also very limited contact with her mother’s family. While her father’s family had never been involved in her life, her mother’s family had been unsupportive and had even demeaned Krystal’s mother for the interracial relationship, as well as Krystal and her brother for their biracial background. Emily discussed how the closeness she felt for her father’s side of the family was derived from their family-oriented attitude and the immense love her paternal grandmother had for her.

Most of the participants felt close to both parents, while two felt closer to their mother, and one person had a closer relationship with her father. Those who were close to both parents mentioned equally open-communication with each parent as a large factor, while those closest to their mother mentioned open-communication as well, the mother was also the primary caregiver. Tamara was the only participant who discussed feeling closest to her father and explained that she had always been a “daddy’s girl.”

The participants had all received positive messages from their parents, whether those messages were affirming about race or not. The main theme was an overall message of explanation of the person’s racial background, while also confirming acceptance and love of the participant as a unique individual. Some people were also

given warnings of how they may be perceived by others because of their racial background, as well as suggestions on how to cope or counteract negative attention.

In addition to messages from parents, all of the participants discussed various reactions from external sources, including strangers. Most of the individuals had received compliments on their hair, but also reported negative reactions to their presence. Many of the women had dealt with dirty looks and comments from black women; however the men did not reveal any negativity from other men. Participants also recalled name-calling and statements insinuating they did not count as a whole person, such as comments of “you don’t count” or “you’re only half.”

The information from the questionnaire and focus group reveal the many messages multiracial individuals receive from their families and external agents. It also explores the different racial identity choices of the participants involved and why they feel those identities are the right decision. Tamara is an example of the duality of biracials. While Jonathan, Krystal, and Emily identify as biracial in private or to others, they will also identify as black should the situation present better opportunities. Arielle and Daniel identify more closely with black and so always identify both publicly and privately as black. Tamara states here that she always identifies as black and white, but also discussed changing her identity choice in different situations, as in the ACT prep scenario. Cadence’s identity has changed throughout her life, as she identified more closely with white as an adolescent. However, she now identifies as biracial both publicly and privately.

3.3 Rockquemore's Four Identity Types

In addition to answering the research questions, this study also revealed the identity types of the participants, according to Rockquemore's four identity types (1998). According to her typology, there are four possible categories for biracial identification; border, protean, transcendent, and traditional (1998: 200). Border Identity describes people who stress their biracial heritage and consider it unique. Protean Identity are those who identify as either black or white depending on the situation, but do not choose one definitive category. Transcendent Identity describes people who reject race as a master status and instead prefer to identify themselves as simply "human". They will choose a race if forced to for identification purposes. The last category that Rockquemore noted is known as the Traditional Identity. It includes people who choose to identify as black or white exclusively.

Out of the seven participants of this study, five people classified themselves as biracial, while two people classified themselves as black. However, according to the discussions in the focus group and in consideration of the open-ended answers to the questionnaires, four people seemed to fit into the Border Identity classification (Jonathan, Emily, Cadence, and Krystal), two people categorized as the Traditional Identity (Arielle and Daniel), and one person categorized into the Transcendent Identity (Tamara). There were no results for the Protean Identity type.

Jonathan, Emily, Cadence, and Krystal were adamant about their biracial backgrounds during the discussion and in the questionnaires. While some were clearly more comfortable around blacks or whites, they still identified themselves as biracial. They all acknowledged their duality and each had discussions with their parents about

race. Jonathan and Emily's families had discussions revolving around problems that may arise because of their background. In contrast, Cadence and Krystal had discussions with their families that focused on informing them of their racial background.

Daniel and Arielle were aware of their biracial backgrounds, but felt more comfortable identifying as black. Both were raised in a majority black setting, Daniel by monoracial parents and Arielle by interracial parents. Tamara racially identified as biracial on the questionnaire, but during discussions it was clear she preferred to think of herself as raceless. While she acknowledged both parents and her duality, she also disliked having to identify herself as a single race. During the focus group, Tamara admits her family never discussed her race with her and instead emphasized that she was an individual and special. This could be one of the reasons why she is so adamant that she is a person. She seems to dislike being identified as a race and instead prefers to be identified as human.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The population of multiracial Americans is growing larger every day. It has increased twelve times what it was in 1970, from five hundred thousand then to over six million multiracials today (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001). Biracial and multiracial individuals face different challenges than monoracials, particularly in terms of racial identity choice. It is important to research and determine the challenges unique to multiracials, in order to better assist in the outcome of a positive racial identity. The purpose of this study was to determine how families have an influence on biracials identity choice and to discover if that identity choice ties into the closeness of families.

4.1 Research Question 1

The first research question asks how the families of biracial individuals have an influence on the person's choice of identity. Family intimacy seems to be connected to racial identity, according to responses by participants, reinforcing the findings of Brunnsma and Rockquemore (2002). Participants who confirmed their parents had influenced their racial identity were Arielle, Cadence, Daniel, and Krystal. All of those whose parents influenced them described their parents explaining to them that they were mixed black and white, but decisions of racial identity were left to the participant.

However, Arielle clearly feels she had no choice in her identity, as in the discussion when the respondents were asked about identity choice she questioned, "Our

choice?” In contrast, Cadence clearly believes her racial identity is fluid and she has a choice in the matter. She explained that as a teenager she identified herself as white because that is how she felt. However, as she got older she now identifies herself as “biracial”. This reinforces Doyle and Kao (2007) that states multiple race individual’s identity can change over time.

Krystal’s mother discussed her race in an affirming manner. Her mother described her as both black and white, but also maintained that Krystal’s race was not the only component of her identity and encouraged her daughter to, “be whoever you wanna be”, as well as letting Krystal know she loved her.

Emily, Jonathan, and Tamara explained on the questionnaire that they did not feel their parents influenced their racial identity. However, during the discussion, participants were asked about the source of the main influence of their identity and Emily answered “my mom.” Emily then explained her parents reinforced that she was a “perfect combination of both [black and white]”, so in giving her affirming messages they helped her to be comfortable enough to decide. During the focus group, Jonathan also discussed messages he received from his parents. While Emily’s provided affirming messages, Jonathan was given advice on how his biracial ancestry might affect him at school or in public. He admits that his parents did not sway him either way in terms of choosing a racial classification, but they did discuss how he should deal with different situations that may occur due to his mixed background. Tamara does not remember her parents ever having a discussion of race, however they did make her feel special just because she was herself. She also mentioned that they, “they always made me feel—again, that I was me, and I was special, and that there was nothing wrong with me.”

In addition to parental and familial messages, the participants also discussed external influences in their lives. While messages from family were positive, many messages from other sources were not. Most of the participants mentioned positive messages, such as compliments on their hair or appearance. However, they also received negative attention due to these same attributes. The women, in particular, mention nasty looks, as well as isolation from groups, and derogatory comments, all from other women. Other negative social messages mentioned by both men and women were derogatory names and judgment from others about dating partners. Furthermore, claims that the biracial individual was not a whole person were also mentioned, such as individuals claiming the biracial participant was “too white”, or “only counts as half.” Lastly, participants discussed people asking questions about their race, such as “what are you”.

4.2 Research Question 2

The second research question asks if identity choice ties into the biracial person’s closeness to their families. All of the participants in the study revealed they received both positive and negative messages throughout their lives from family or external sources. While some of the participants said their family did have an influence on their race, it does not seem that closeness plays a part in identity choice. While parents and family do have an impact on the individual, the most helpful thing that the families did, according to the participants was to discuss race with the individual and explain their racial background, then give the participant the freedom to make the choice for themselves. Participants also mention that other helpful messages from parents included support, encouragement, and affirming statements.

The majority of the participants racially identified as biracial and all had an understanding of their biracial background. The two who identified as black, Arielle and Daniel, were raised in majority black settings. Arielle was from a country that has a majority black citizenship, while Daniel mentions he spent the majority of his life among black friends and family members. This closeness ties into Demo and Hughes (1990) findings that living in a black community is highly influential to black identity.

Interestingly, the information from the questionnaire given pre-focus group revealed that when asked if they could integrate with whites or blacks better, Daniel and Arielle felt they could integrate with blacks easier, as did Krystal and Jonathan. When asked about closeness to blacks in the questionnaire, Arielle and Krystal had the same answers, as did Daniel and Jonathan. Both women felt close to both blacks and whites, while the men felt closer to blacks, but still somewhat close to whites. Furthermore, while Jonathan was raised in a suburban neighborhood consisting of a mixture of races, he had more contact with his black family members. Krystal, in contrast, was raised in a rural, black neighborhood, but only had contact with her white family members.

Participants who felt they could integrate with whites were Cadence, Emily, and Tamara. Cadence and Emily were raised in suburban neighborhoods with a mixture of races, while Tamara was raised in a suburban, white neighborhood. Tamara and Emily had contact with both sides of their families, while Cadence had contact with mostly her white side.

The study concludes that families of biracial individuals appear to have an influence on the identity choice of biracial individuals. Parental communication is also important, reinforcing Bratter and Heard (2009). Kilson and Ladd (2009) revealed that

some parents opted to discuss negative issues with their biracial children that may occur due to their racial background, which was also confirmed with these findings.

4.3 Limitations

The main limitation to this study is that it focuses mainly on black-white biracial individuals. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other biracial populations. Furthermore, the sample size is small and there was only one focus group.

4.4 Future Implications

This study could benefit the current research by revealing the multifaceted identity choices of multiracial people and what influences the choices in identity. This information could be used to educate the parents of biracial children and assist them in raising an individual with a healthy racial identity. Furthermore, the research could assist the community in the way it handles those of multiracial backgrounds.

4.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could focus on larger samples from more locations. Furthermore, there could be additional focus groups from a more diverse group of biracial individuals in order to broaden the study.

4.6 Conclusion

These data reveal that in response to the first question, families do influence racial identity indirectly. The participants' families often avoided directly steering their children into one particular identity. Instead, they gave guidance, explained race, and prepared their children for problems that may arise because of the child's biracial background. The families also encouraged individuality, which may or may not have included race, leaving the racial identity to the child's own choice.

In regards to the second research question, family closeness allowed the children to discuss racial issues and have the freedom to express their feelings. This ultimately led to the children to comfortably exploring racial meanings for themselves and deciding upon their own racial classification.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Data Table

Racial ID	Closeness to: Blacks	Whites	Race Feel You Could Integrate into	Parental Influence	Type of Neighborhood	Income	Raised by	Contact with Extended Family
Arielle	Close	Close	Black	Yes	Sub: mixed	Middle Class	Both Parents	Both Sides
Cadence	Not Close	Very Close	White	Yes	Sub: mixed	Middle Class	Both Parents	Mostly White
Daniel	Very Close	Somewhat Close	Black	Yes	Urban: Black	Blue Collar	Both Parents (Adopted)	Adoptive, non-White
Emily	Somewhat Close	Very Close	White	No	Sub: mixed	Middle Class	Both Parents	Both Sides
Jonathan	Very Close	Somewhat Close	Black	No	Sub: White	Middle Class	Both Parents	Mostly non-White
Krystal	Close	Close	Black	Yes	Rural: Black	Poor	Single Parent (Mother)	Mostly White
Tamara	Close	Somewhat Close	White	No	Sub: White	Middle Class	Both Parents	Both Sides

Parents' Education: Mother	Father	Which parent would you discuss a negative racial experience	Recall a Time When Race Was Important	Do you feel you could identify as Black, White, or Biracial because of your racial background?
Some College	College	Both/Either	Scholarships	Yes: Black or Biracial, not White
Some College	HS	Mother	No	Yes
HS	HS	Neither: Need different perspective	Scholarships	Others: Yes, But not him personally
Some College	HS	Both/Either	No	No: Only Biracial
DVM	Some College	Both/Either	College/Scholarships	Yes
Some College	N/A	Mother	No	Yes
Some College	HS	Father	No	Yes

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT for a Research Study entitled “Identity Formation and Choice among Black-White Biracial Individuals”

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the racial identity of biracial individuals. The study is being conducted by Madison Hinton, graduate student, under the direction of Dr. Allen Furr in the Auburn University Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a biracial college student and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill-out a short questionnaire and participate in a focus-discussion group. Your total time commitment will be approximately 2 hours.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal, but involve possible emotional discomfort from the answers of other participants. To minimize these risks, we will require every participant to sign a part of this form committing them to respect the opinions and thoughts of others.

By signing this form, you agree to respect the opinions and thoughts of others. Any matters that are disagreed upon will be discussed in a calm and civil manner in order to resolve the conflict.

Participant’s initials_____

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to receive information pertaining to your group from other biracial individuals. We/I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? No compensation will be given.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, you will not have any costs associated with the study.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with your college, Auburn University, the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, or the researchers. **Page 1 of 2**

Participant's Initials _____

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a peer-reviewed journal, or presented at a professional conference.

During your participation in this research study, "Identity Formation and Choice among Black-White Biracial Individuals", you will be audio and video recorded. Your signature on the Informed Consent gives us permission to do so. The recordings will be destroyed after transcription into text. The following persons or groups will have access to the tapes: Madison Hinton and Dr. Allen Furr.

If you have questions about this study, *please ask them now* or contact Madison Hinton at 334-233-8624 or email at mah0059@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature

Date

Investigator obtaining consent

Date

Printed Name

Printed Name

Appendix C

Newspaper Ad:

PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
If you are a biracial individual with one black and one white parent, age 19 or over, as well as a student, you are invited to participate in a research study to explore issues you might be interested in. If you are interested, please contact Madison Hinton at 334-233-8624 or mah0059@auburn.edu.

Email Invitation:

I am Madison Hinton, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to explore biracial individuals. You may participate if you are age 19 or older, a college student, and have one black and one white parent.

As a participant, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey and participate in a focus group discussion lasting no more than 2 hours.

As a participant, you will be contributing voluntarily and allowed to quit the study at any time with no repercussions. All information gathered from the study will be collected anonymously and no identifying information will be recorded.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please email me at **mah0059@auburn.edu**. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact me at **mah0059@auburn.edu** or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Allen Furr at **laf0014@auburn.edu**.

Thank you for your consideration,
Madison A. Hinton

Flyer:



Biracial Adults Research Study

Be part of an important research study exploring race!

Are you the child of two parents of different races?

Are you age 19 years or older?

Are you a college student?

If you answered **YES** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a study exploring biracial individuals.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the racial identity choices of black-white biracial individuals and determine the influences of those choices.

Adults 19 or older with one black and one white parent are eligible.

This study is being conducted by Sociology graduate student Madison Hinton as a requirement for her Masters thesis.

Please contact Madison Hinton at mah0059@auburn.edu for more information.

Appendix D

Questionnaire

1) In what year were you born?

2) What is your sex?

Male Female

3) What is the race of your father?

Black White Biracial/Explain _____

4) What is the race of your mother?

Black White Biracial/Explain _____

5) How do you classify yourself in terms of a racial category?

Black White Biracial Other _____ I don't classify myself

6) Do you feel others see you this way?

Yes No

7) How close do you feel to blacks?

Not Close Somewhat Close Close Very Close

8) How close do you feel to whites?

Not Close Somewhat Close Close Very Close

9) Do you feel you can integrate into one race better than another? If yes, which one and why?

10) Did your parents influence how you feel about your racial categorization?

Yes No

11) If yes, how did they influence you?

12) Did your parents ever discuss race with you?

No Yes: Very little Yes: Adequately Yes: Extensively

13) In what type of neighborhood were you raised?

Suburban Urban Rural

14) What was the predominant racial category of neighborhood?

Black White Other (Explain)_____

15) Do you consider your family

Poor Blue Collar Middle Class Upper Middle Class

16) Were you raised by both biological parents? [If yes: Are they still married?]

- _____ Yes, I was raised by both parents
- _____ No, I was raised by my mother
- _____ No, I was raised by my father
- _____ No, I was raised by another family member (specify_____)
- _____ No, I was adopted

17) Have you had contact with both sides of your extended family? [Explain].

- _____ Yes
- _____ Mostly with my white relatives
- _____ Mostly with my non-white relatives
- _____ Other (specify _____)

18) What is/was your mother's educational background?

- _____ Less than high school
- _____ High school
- _____ Some college
- _____ College
- _____ Some professional/graduate school (specify _____)
- _____ Professional/graduate school (specify _____)

19) What is/was your father's educational background?

Less than high school

High school

Some college

College

Some professional/graduate school (specify _____)

Professional/graduate school (specify _____)

20) What is/was your mother's occupation?

21) What is/was your father's occupation?

22) If you needed to discuss a negative racial experience, which one of your parents would you most likely talk to?

Mother

Father

Other(explain:)

23) In general, how important is race to you?

Would you say it has been pretty important, somewhat important, or not important at all?
[Explain.]

Are there any experiences that you could describe, in which race seemed to be pretty important?

24) Your racial background is white and black, so do you feel that you can identify however you choose? (eg, black, white, biracial...)

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

1. Have you ever had people ask you about your racial background (e.g., “What are you?”)?
When this happens, how do you present yourself to give them clues as to how you understand yourself?
How do you identify yourself to others?
2. Do you feel that others (other blacks & other whites) have been supportive of this identity (black/white/biracial)?
3. Can you think of a situation in which that identity was not supported?
4. Questions about your parents:
Did you talk openly to your family about being biracial?
What messages, if any, have you received from your parents about your race?
How was race addressed in your household growing up (if at all)? [Explain.]
Have your parents influenced how you identify yourself racially?
How so? Mom? Dad?
Have they ever directly told you how you should identify yourself? [Explain.]
What about other family members? (Grandparents, siblings, aunts/ uncles, etc.)
5. What messages, if any, have you received from ____ about how you should or should not identify?
From other blacks in general?
From other whites in general?
How do you think this has impacted your identity?
6. How would you describe your social networks growing up? Today?
Were you primarily surrounded by other blacks, whites, another group altogether, or by diverse racial groups?
What about in your neighborhood? Church? At school? College?
How do you think growing up in this environment has impacted you? Your identity?
7. Do you feel as if you made a conscious choice to surround yourself by a specific racial group or groups? (Or has this been by chance?)
Have you ever made a conscious choice to surround yourself by a specific group? [If yes, why?]

8. Have you ever experienced hostility or negative treatment by other blacks because of your multiracial background (DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY)?
Because of your looks?
What about because of your white background?
9. Have you ever experienced hostility or negative treatment by other whites because of your multiracial background?
Because of your looks?
What about because of your black background?
10. Have you ever tried to hide (or at least downplay) your multiracial background, or highlight one racial background over another? Why?
At any point in your life? When you were younger?
11. Do you ever or have you ever presented yourself differently when you were with whites versus when you've been with other blacks?
How so?
Why?
12. Are you currently married or in a long-term relationship?
What is the race/ethnic background of your partner?
If not, what are the race/ethnic backgrounds of previous dating partners?
Has race ever played a role in who you selected to date/marry?
13. In terms of your friends today, would you describe them as belonging primarily to one race or another, or are they varied in terms of racial background?
Has race ever played a role in who you choose/chose to become friends with? Why or why not? [Please explain.]
14. Since you are a person of mixed-race ancestry, how would you describe your racial identity?
How do you understand yourself racially?
15. What factors do you think have influenced your racial identity?
16. Did your parents ever discuss personal experiences of discrimination based upon their race/ethnicity?
17. Has the way you understand your racial identity changed over time?
18. At what age did you become conscious of race? (differences between people that were racially based.)
19. How did you in the past as well as in the present racially identify yourself on forms (admissions, jobs, government, ect)
20. Can you tell me a time when you specifically identified yourself as black? White? Biracial?
21. Do you feel closer to one of your parents? Which one? Why?

22. Do you feel closer to your father's or mother's side of the family? Why?
23. Did your father's family or mother's family treat you different than the rest of the relatives? How?
24. Did this treatment have an influence on how you identify yourself? Why?
25. How often were you around your father's side of the family? Mother's?
26. What advice, if any, would you give to biracial individuals who are struggling with their racial identity?
27. What advice would you give parents raising biracial children?
28. Is there anything we haven't covered that you want to talk about or add before we finish?