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The doctoral project represents scholarly work that demonstrates a student's ability to assess, critically evaluate, and integrate knowledge gained from research, theoretical, and clinical sources regarding a topic in counseling psychology. Each student, under the direction of a faculty committee, investigates a problem of practical concern to practitioners in counseling psychology and presents the results of this investigation in the doctoral project. As "skeptical observers", this process requires students to immerse themselves in relevant literature, develop expertise in a give topic area, and approach the topic with a critical orientation.

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An Exploration of Factors Influencing Multiracial/Multiethnic Identity Development: A Qualitative Investigation

by

Anesh S. Patel, MA, Doctoral Candidate

A Doctoral Project Presented to the Graduate School of Professional Psychology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

University of St. Thomas

2012

University of St. Thomas

Psy.D. Program

Doctoral Project Approval Form

University of St. Thomas
Graduate School of Professional Psychology Psy.D. Program

This doctoral project was submitted by Anesh Patel, MA under the direction of the chair of the doctoral project committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Professional Psychology and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology at the University of St. Thomas.

Approved:

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Len Jennings, PhD, LP

5/12/12
Date of Final Approval

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Abstract

As of 2000, one in forty Americans identified themselves as multiracial/multiethnic (Lee & Bean, 2004), with 70% of the multiracial/multiethnic population younger than thirty-five years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Population trends predict that the multiracial population will continue to increase, possibly reaching 21% of the population by the year 2050 (Smith & Edmonston, 1997). With the burgeoning number of multiracial/multiethnic individuals in our society, it is important for counseling psychologists to understand the ways in which they identify with race/ethnicity, and how that identification is formed.

This qualitative study was designed to explore the lived experiences of a multiracial/multiethnic individual's life to in order to better understand their process of racial identification/ethnic identification and thus identity for the express purpose of enhancing therapeutic interventions with this population. The way in which experiences were explored was through addressing the following questions: What are the influencing factors on identity development in multiracial/multiethnic individuals? What, if any, implications do these factors have for the practice of psychology when working with mixed race/ethnicity individuals?

This study revealed three themes that most strongly influenced identity development in the eight participants. The first theme that arose was influential people as participants highlighted social and family groups that made an impact on participants overall sense of belonging. Secondly, the theme of influential moments arose, which joined together experiences in participant's lives that made them stop and think specifically about their different races/ethnicities. It could be defined for some as their

"eureka moment" in their identity selection process. The final theme that emerged from the eight interviews was influential cultural experiences. This theme ranged from specific college courses taken by individuals to pressure around learning cultural rituals, either way, it was experiences in their lives directly linked to increasing knowledge and understanding of one's specific culture/racial/ethnic group.

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First and foremost I would like to thank my family for their unconditional support, good meals and long walks as stress relievers during this project and throughout my doctorate degree. My father for leaving Uganda on a path inspired by education, and my mother who spent countless hours attending to my inattentive nature as a child to help me improve my writing. My parents instilled in me the desire to pursue the most education I could obtain and I thank them for believing in me and instilling this drive inside of me.

I would also like to thank my writing coach and friend Dr. Sheryl Grassie for her brilliance and positive attitude. She was critical in helping me break down this project into manageable pieces. I was inspired into the world of qualitative research by Dr. Len Jennings and greatly appreciate everything he has done to set a great example of how to balance being a good researcher, with so many other duties that he does so well. In addition, I would like to say thank you to my co-chair, Dr. Avdeyeva for her timely feedback and willingness to be flexible with my project through its numerous twists and turns.

I would like to give special appreciation to my wife Maytsua who had no idea of what she was getting herself into when she married someone who was in a doctoral program and was wedded to a project such as this. I look forward to giving my newfound free time to you and our son, Sachi. I must acknowledge my sister Anita Patel. She has always provided a sense of community and acceptance for me when at times I felt I had no “group” to belong. She inspires me on a path towards activism and social justice.

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Landing an internship at the University of Minnesota Counseling and Consulting Center on the day my son Sachi was born was a dream come true. I thank the UCCS staff for their dedication to training me and helping me grow professionally and personally this year, and supporting me as I finished this project. Again, I thank my wonderful UCCS intern cohort Becky, Stephanie and Seth, you three made internship a fantastic year. Now, on to the project!

Table of Contents

Title Page…….....…….....I

Approval Page…….II

Abstract……..III

Acknowledgements……V

Table of Contents…….VII

Section I: Introduction……....1

Section II: Literature Review……..9

Section III: Empirical Investigation……..33

Section IV: Results……...……46

Section V: Discussion……..…….70

Section VI: References.....87

Section VII: Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions……...102

Appendix B: Confidentiality Form……...……..103

Appendix C: Consent Form…….…….…….……..104

Table 1: Demographics……..……106

Table 2: Themes Grouped Into Categories……107

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

My Story

Exploring the topic of mixed race/ethnic identity has been a conscious choice for me in order to make sense of my day-to-day reality while growing up. Like an alien dropped from outer space, I landed in Clarkfield, MN, population 839. This quaint community easily became my home. I knew every sidewalk and every street, and nearly every face in town. Despite a sense of comfort with my surroundings, my intuition hinted at a deeper sense of belonging, which evaded me; a feeling I could not fully articulate until many years later.

Being one of two people of mixed race/ethnicity (Caucasian and Indian) in this small town (the other was my sister), I tried to make sense of this complex identity. It was not until graduate school in counseling psychology many years later that I explored my identity at a conscious level. It was in graduate school that I looked back and saw a boy trying his best to fit into a world that he did not really understand.

A pivotal moment in my experience happened when visiting Bangalore, India at the age of 22. I had taken a year off from my Master's program in psychology to move to India with the intent of exploring what life was like for a young Indian male. I assumed I would be accepted and appreciated just like in a Bollywood movie, with the warm and welcome embrace of a long lost son. This naïveté left me exposed and on my fourth day in Bangalore, I was robbed at knifepoint in a rickshaw just as the day faded to darkness. My need to be accepted left me vulnerable. Had I understood the local language, I would possibly have caught on to the thief's plan. Had I consciously known that acceptance

was what I was seeking all the way in Bangalore, India, maybe I would not have been in this foreign land in the first place.

I recovered from that incident and made the best out of my time in India and came back home to finish my Master's program in counseling psychology. This experience taught me how powerful the need is to be accepted and recognized as part of a group is; and likely fueled my passion for the study of psychology and working with marginalized populations. One of my personal goals for choosing this topic was to immerse myself in the identity literature in order to feel confident in my ability to counsel individuals who may be struggling with all variations of identity confusion.

In addition, I now have a one-year-old son, which has added an important dimension to my passion for this subject. He will be part of the new mixed race/ethnic community. He is ½ Hmong, ¼ Asian Indian, 1/8 Danish, 1/16th Scottish, 1/16th Irish, 1/16th French, and 1/16th German. I hope that through my increased understanding of this complex topic, I can offer him guidance and support if he ever has confusion about his ethnic/racial/cultural place in this world.

All of the individuals of mixed race/ethnicity that I interviewed questioned their identity in some way, at some point in time. The participants I interviewed in this study shared complex feelings as they opened up to me about their lives and their identity joys and struggles. I have greatly appreciated the trust that they have placed in me while sharing their stories of trying to navigate identity. Often as they were speaking about their experiences, I felt a sense of peace and warmth, unlike anything I have ever felt. Perhaps, this was the feeling I was chasing all of those years ago, some sense of belonging, an understanding that I was not alone in my experiences.

Multiracial/Multiethnic Individuals

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry acknowledges the fact that multiracial/multiethnic (multiracial/multiethnic) children are one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population (1999). According to the 2000 census, nearly seven million people checked more than one racial category, representing 2.4% of the total U.S. population (Jones & Smith, 2001). With the burgeoning number of multiracial/multiethnic individuals in our society, it is important to understand the ways in which they identify racially and ethnically and how that identification is formed.

A multiracial/multiethnic individual straddles the boundaries of several categories of identity and because of this they are often seen as outside the parameters of belonging to any particular group (Pauker et al., 2009). Identifying with a group is of primary importance to self-esteem development and healthy identity development (Erickson, 1950). Being questioned by those in the majority culture with questions such as "what are you?" the multiracial/multiethnic individuals may hope to find solace within their "other" group or side of their heritage, at times this is a group of minority status. However, due to physical appearance or self-identified mono-racial individuals of their "other" group, they may experience rejection from within this "other" group as well. So, a multiracial/multiethnic individual may choose to find refuge in the middle, under the label of "mixed race or multiracial, multiethnic".

A multiracial/multiethnic individual may have found renewed hope as the movement for the multiracial category reached the census. In 2000, for the first time in U.S. history, multiracial/multiethnic individuals were able to identify themselves as such in the national census (Jones & Smith, 2001). In 2011, the experience of a mixed

race/ethnic individual is as salient as ever in history, as having a president whose mixed race/ethnicity has created debate and criticism around the way that he classifies himself ethnically/racially. Those attached to the idea of a multiracial/multiethnic category have been initially excited by the attention his heritage brings to this issue.

However, the debates from the anti-classification movement led by scholars such as Ranier Spencer (2006, 2011), who I will be referring to throughout this paper, have outlined compelling arguments against the multiracial movement. In his opinion, "The multiracial/multiethnic movement is a self-indulgent social enterprise whose primary aim is to bend—but not break—the bars of race just enough to move its adherents upward from lesser-to more privileged positions within the structure of the US racial paradigm" (Spencer, 2011, p. 230). At the root of much concern have been arguments that, "multiracial identification and the advocacy of multiracial identity further perpetuate the false notion of race" (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008, p. 411). Despite the criticisms raised by Spencer (1999, 2006, 2011) against the multiracial movement, the fact is that the society at large still overtly and covertly discriminates based on race; and because of this, individuals need to understand the impact of their categorical race on their understanding of themselves, and counselors need tools to work with these individuals. I encourage interested readers to consult the texts of Spencer (1999, 2006, 2011) if they would like to know more about the controversy.

My purpose for researching this topic was ultimately to help my clients who may identify as a multiracial/multiethnic and to provide a developmental model or blueprint upon which to help them navigate what is sometimes a vague and complicated process. The question of how an individual chooses to identify with one group versus another

when coming from a mixed background is the focus of this study. In the field of psychology, as professionals treat more and more multiracial/multiethnic individuals, it becomes necessary to incorporate an understanding of identity to properly meet the needs of this unique population.

Currently, there is a lack of qualitative and quantitative research on the topic as a whole, especially related to current treatment recommendations for psychologists working with this population (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008). This qualitative study is designed to explore the lived experiences of multiracial/multiethnic people with the goal of better understanding their process of racial/ethnic identification. This knowledge will enhance therapeutic interventions with this population.

Statement of the Problem

Race is associated with significant economic, political, social, and psychological consequences. In our social world, race is used to divide people into groups, and these groups are associated with "differing levels of status, disparities in access to resources, and discrepancies in achievement, health, and well-being outcomes" (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007 p. 132). Very few people, besides multiracial/multiethnic individuals understand the complexities involved in their search for identity. Difficulty being classified into the monoracial majority or monoracial minority groups; multiracial/multiethnic people face rejection from both majority and minority groups in society (Root, 1992). As Taylor (2004) offers:

> The "middle margin" can be a lonely place. How do I as a multiracial individual construct this notion of "me" and in doing so reconcile seemingly contradictory aspects of myself that are communicated by the cultural nuances of the day? The

> imposed template does not fit with my reality. While society imposes Black or White, I look at my reality and feel both sides, yet strangely rejected too. At times I feel like a diplomat, brokering an uneasy truce between warring parties. However, at others, I get the impression that no one understands me and that I am destined to walk alone (p. 94).

In addition, because multiracial/multiethnic individuals do not easily fit into any preexisting racial/ethnic categories, a great deal of attention and controversy surrounds how they define themselves (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007, p. 125). To add to the struggles, minority leaders and prominent civil rights activists argue against the creation of a separate multiracial category to preserve minority numbers and maintain political influence (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Although the amount of research regarding this group continues to grow, qualitative lived experiences have not been adequately captured (Miville et al., 2005).

Society's rigid formulation of what defines a race, a lack of institutional acknowledgement of multiracial/multiethnic identity, and even social psychology's approach to studying race-related phenomena all reflect how multiracial/multiethnic people are often left out simply because they do not fit well into precise categories, check boxes, or models (Root & Kelley, 2003). Gaskin (1999) adds that some of these individuals may feel more connected to a single group and may resent and find it confusing to be placed in a multiracial/multiethnic category. Because society provides multiracial/multiethnic individuals with no easy answers about where they belong in terms of racial communities, they have been forced to come up with these answers on their own (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007, p. 125). Thus, they have to grapple

with questions surrounding race that many monoracial individuals, both from majority and minority groups, have answered for them by society (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007, p. 125).

There is an overall lack of research in the counseling literature relating to the process of multiracial/multiethnic identity development and specifically the factors influencing this development. As Wehrly (2003) stated, "Counseling literature has been slow to address the needs and strengths of the burgeoning mixed-race population" (p. 316). Edwards and Pedrotti (2005) and Steward et al., (1998) came to similar findings related to the lack of literature in the counseling field to address the topic of working with multiracial/multiethnic individuals in therapy.

Another important reason for this paucity of research on multiracial identity is that racial statistics, implemented by local governments and organizations and in national government samples, are typically gathered using a forced-choice questionnaires, where respondents are required to define themselves in one of the culturally dominant categories available (Herman, 2004, p. 732). Forced-choice questionnaires create a dilemma for many multiracial/multiethnic individuals. As Herman (2004) explains:

> The request please check the [one] box that best describes you is completed without a moment's hesitation by monoracial individuals…but, multiracial/multiethnic people wonder; should I report just one part of my heritage? Ignore the question? Give multiple answers? Report something that does not really describe me, like 'other'? (p. 730).

In addition to the overall lack of understanding by society, there is a lack of information for professionals in the mental health field as to how to help these individuals

appropriately navigate this process. Some professionals attempt to create healing for multiracial/multiethnic people by emphasizing a transcendent racial identity or trying to assert that race does not matter; it is "whom" one is in the world that matters. These attempts often fall short, as these concepts do not address the nuances of this complicated situation.

In addition, if this issue is ignored completely, the multiracial/multiethnic individual can be faced with having to explore these issues alone, resulting in potentially negative consequences. In psychodynamic models such as Erikson's (1950), personality develops through integrating conflicting identities into a coherent identity, and if a conflict goes unresolved, the individual may become less stable and inclined towards social deviance.

Significance of the Issue

By studying the factors that shape identity in multiracial/multiethnic people, this study will contribute to the understanding of how identity is formed in this population. Ultimately, endeavors such as this study aim to increase multicultural competency for counseling psychologists who work with this distinct group of individuals.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to use qualitative research methodologies to explore the lived experiences of multiracial individuals with a focus on identity development. The main research question is: "What factors influence multiracial/multiethnic individuals in their identity formation process?

Section II: Literature Review

Methods for the Literature Review

In order to have an in-depth understanding of this topic, Mixed Race/Ethnic Identity Formation, I reviewed literature and assessed information from multiple sources. Numerous bodies of literature, including an assortment of books and journal articles, contributed to an understanding of the identity formation of mixed race/ethnic individuals in contemporary society. The more pertinent information is included throughout the following review.

This literature search was accomplished by first conducting an exhaustive review of the current academic literature. Journals reviewed were sourced from: PsychInfo, PsycArticles, Academic Search Premier, and CLICnet Library Catalog. Keywords included but were not limited to: "identity development", "identity", "self-psychology", "racial identity", "racial identity theory", "ethnic identity", "identity theory", and "mixed race."

In general, this literature review was conducted using a search of the research pertaining to identity as a philosophical definition, its theoretical conceptualizations, and its implications on psychological development. In addition, I chose to focus on one aspect of identity, ethnic/racial identity, including current models of understanding ethnic/racial identity.

In order to provide a broad and comprehensive foundation upon which to make sense of the qualitative data collected, I will begin by exploring research directly related to factors that influence identity development. This specific literature on identity development is divided into the following subcategories: (a) the self and identity, (b)

developmental stages, (c) models of multiracial/multiethnic identity development, (d) related studies.

Definition of Key Terms

Within the literature covering this topic there are several terms with multiple meanings and ambiguities. To enable ease of reading, and to attempt to create consistency throughout, I have simplified the use of terms, but some further clarity is helpful regarding their exact meaning in this study. "Race" is a socially constructed term lacking clear definition (Crawford & Allagia, 2008, p. 82). The term "race" has been used as a "powerful tool, either for oppression or for group self-actualization" (Spickard, 1992, p. 19). "Ethnicity", as a related term, has a broader meaning and refers to connectedness based on common factors, such as religion and nationality (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Throughout the review of published research, the terms "biracial" and "multiracial" are used frequently to refer to a similar population. Biracial refers to a person whose parents are of two different socially designated racial groups, for example: African American mother, white father (Root & Kelley, 2003). Multiracial refers to people who are of two or more racial heritages, and it also includes biracial people (Root & Kelley, 2003). Due to the inclusive nature of the term "multiracial," I will be referring to the "biracial" population in the same group as "multiracial" and will not be using the term "biracial" again.

In addition, there is a movement within the current literature to eliminate the use of the term "race" and "multiracial" altogether, as the scientific basis for race does not exist. Rainier Spencer takes this argument further in his book *Challenging Multiracial*

Identity stating, "There are many faulty beliefs that produce the argument for multiracial identity. These beliefs revolve around acceptance of biological race, the need for external validation of personal identity, the quest for a federal multiracial category, and a concerted refusal to consider alternative identity options" (Spencer, 2006, p. 50).

With that being said, race continues to have historical and societal importance. Due to the uncertain nature of the multiracial literature at the time of this research study, I used multiracial/multiethnic labels interchangeably to identify the pool of participants that I interviewed. Regardless of where the future of racial identity research proceeds, the stories of these individuals and the factors influencing their identity choice are nonetheless relevant and important.

In addition, when writing this literature review, I operated from the viewpoint that "multicultural" is a distinct construct from "multiracial/multiethnic." Multiracial/multiethnic people belong to more than one racial/ethnic group. Racial groups have ethnicity-based cultural meanings and practices associated with them. Thus, multiracial people are always multicultural; however, multicultural people are not necessarily multiracial (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009, p. 244). For example, an Asian American person has one racial identity but multiple cultural identities (American and Asian). A Japanese/Chinese person has one racial identity but two ethnicities with multiple cultural identities associated with them. While cultural and racial identities are distinct constructs, levels of identification within such identities may be similarly malleable (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009, p. 244). Thus, some multiracial people may have context bound racial identification (Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009). Now that the terms "multicultural" and "multiracial/ multiethnic" have been distinguished and defined,

I will move into the literature's understanding of "self" and "identity."

Review of Relevant Literature

Self and identity. Clients in psychotherapy have come to therapy with questions pertaining to who they "truly are" for many years. This question has also driven philosophical debate in literature for centuries. The father of American psychology, William James, sees "identity" not as a quest, but rather as something that comes upon you. In a letter to his wife, William James wrote:

> A man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: "This is the real me." (James, 1890, p. 310)

James also aligns himself with the idea that people have multiple selves, as many different selves as there are different others that recognize individuals (James, 1890). The self may be an illusion, according to brain researchers, as researchers have not located a region in the brain that corresponds to the self (Baumeister & Bushman, 2011). "Much of the self is designed to enable you to relate to others; including claiming and sustaining a place in a cultural system that connects you to many other people" (Baumeister & Bush, 2011, p. 59).

Self. As the vessel to connect us to other people and to a system at large, a "self" helps us navigate the complex world of social acceptance. According to Cooley's ideas of the "looking glass self"… "We are what we think people see" (Korgen, 1999, p. 5). "Self-concepts" are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in the environment (Cooley, 1902). In the process of the "looking-glass self," individuals first

imagine how they appear to others. Secondly, individuals place a judgment on how they might imagine others perceive them. Finally, they develop some sort of self-feeling or self-concept from this process. In short, individuals come to see themselves as they perceive others see them. Their self and identity are formed, at least in part, by this reflective process (Cooley, 1902).

The idea of understanding the self in relation to the ways in which others see and accept or reject us is taken further as Felson (1981) suggests that reflected appraisals are likely to be important in instances when there are no clear criteria or objective feedback (such as grades or test scores) as a basis for self-evaluations. In the absence of clear-cut and objective criteria for judging who belongs where, "biracial and multiracial individuals may rely on reflected appraisals to decide where they belong racially" (Khanna, 2010, p. 101). This can become problematic if the society at large has no real idea of how to accept or reject this mixed group of individuals, thus they may be left at times in an ambiguous place, forced to come up with answers themselves. The dangers to the "self" of being ambiguous and unnoticed were recognized in 1890 by William James as he stated, "No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all members thereof" (James, 1890, p. 293).

Identity. Now that the term "self" has been introduced, I will move into how the literature defines "identity". Identity is "the set of meanings that define who one is when one is in an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of the particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). In order to fully understand identities, we need to understand both the

nature of the individuals who are creating society as well as the nature of society in which individuals are acting.

An important component of current identity theory is the idea of identity "standards." Standards are the comparators that an individual can judge himself/herself against. When left unquestioned, standards can develop into judgment of correct behavior for certain identities. Since the standard is ours, only we can tell when our perception matches the standard (Stets & Burke, 2009, p. 65). A key piece of the multiracial/multiethnic identity development experience is the individual's relationships with their own different racial/ethnic/cultural standards.

In general, "standards are ideas of how things might possibly be" (Baumeister & Bush, 2011, p. 64). When people are aware that they fall short of standards, the bad feelings lead to either of two reactions: "change or escape" (Baumeister & Bush, 2011, p. 65). If someone was trying to meet a "standard" in terms of a person's weight, they may work hard to lose weight. When it comes to changing to meet a standard of one's race or ethnicity, it becomes much more difficult. One cannot easily change their skin color or physical attributes. The closest compromise is to become more or less connected culturally to their target group through the clothes someone buys, the media someone chooses, and the social circles that one belongs to.

Each person has many identities (friend, coworker, church member, club member…etc.). There is a strong pull to manage these identities, and to keep them consistent with how one views himself/herself. There is a strong motive for people to control the perceptions of self-relevant meanings contained in the input to their identity processes and to keep them equal in value to the meanings in their identity standards

(Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, people who view themselves as "good" want to get feedback that they are "good."

There is evidence that people become upset and suffer symptoms of stress when they are not able to achieve this congruity. Problems arise when situationally-based self-perceptions do not concur with previously established identity standards (Zanna and Cooper, 1976). This may pertain to multiracial/multiethnic individuals, "who are arguably more likely to encounter more ambiguity about their race than individuals from monoracial backgrounds" (Khanna, 2010, p. 101). This idea is explained further in the next section on malleable racial identification.

Malleable racial identification. The idea of malleable racial identification was found to be a key variable in understanding multiracial/multiethnic identity development. According to Sanchez, Shih & Garcia (2009), the term "malleable racial identification" refers to the tendency to identify with different racial identities depending on the social context (p. 2). Multiracial/multiethnic adolescents examined over a period of five years were five times more likely to change their racial categorization than to keep it constant (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006). Malleable identity may be a more realistic view of understanding the complex world that multiracial/multiethnic people reside within. According to Sanchez, Shih & Garcia's (2009) study, "it is more common for someone of Black/White racial heritage to identify as Black at one point and White at another point, than it is for that person to maintain a constant label of one or the other, or a mixed race identification" (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009, p. 244). Moreover, it is also common for social contexts to influence the racial self-categorization of multiracial/multiethnic individuals. Harris and Sim (2002) found that multiracial/multiethnic adolescents who

were interviewed at home and school were more likely to change their racial categorization between contexts than to maintain constant racial categorization in both contexts.

If the nature of an identity is continuously malleable, what are the effects on psychological health? Instability and inconsistency are high indicators of poor self-concept and poor psychological health (Campbell et al., 2003). Inconsistency and instability of the self-concept have been found to predict lower self-esteem across cultures (Campbell et al., 1996). Consistent with this view, adolescents who changed their racial categorization in a five year period, either by adding or subtracting racial identities, reported lower self-esteem than multiracial/multiethnic adolescents who reported a more consistent racial categorization (Hitlin et al., 2006). Sanchez, Shih & Garcia's (2009) study uniquely shows that malleable racial identification among multiracial/multiethnic individuals is maladaptive for psychological health, "but this may depend on whether or not people have tolerance for ambiguity and inconsistency in the self" (p. 246). The primary aim of malleability is for group acceptance or group affiliation.

Group affiliation. A group may be defined as a collection of individuals whose interactions are structured by a set of roles and norms. According to this definition, the individuals are not a group unless their interactions are structured by a set of role definitions and norms (McDavid & Harari, 1968). Lewin (1951) stated that interdependence was a central concept of groups, and Tjosvold (1991) described a group as "two or more persons who interact and influence each other directly, who are mutually dependent and have interlocking roles and common norms; and who see themselves in

unity in pursuit of common goals that satisfy their individual aspirations and needs" (p. 22).

There is convincing data from the study of nonhuman primates, primitive human cultures, and contemporary society that human beings have always lived in groups that have been characterized by intense and persistent relationships among members. The need to belong "acts as a powerful, fundamental, and pervasive motivation for group affiliation" (Yalom, 2005, p. 19). On the topic of group affiliation, William James (1890) stated, "We are not only gregarious animals liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind" (p. 293).

The need to be closely related to others is a basic biological need and is, "in the light of the prolonged period of helpless infancy, equally necessary to survival" (Yalom, 2005, p. 21). The developing child, in the quest for security, tends to cultivate and to emphasize those traits and aspects of the self that meet with approval and to squelch or deny those that meet with disapproval. Eventually the individual "develops a concept of the self, based on perceived appraisals by significant others" (Yalom, 2005, p. 21).

A social group is a set of individuals who share the view that they are "members of the same social category" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118). Through a social comparison and categorization process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labeled the "in-group." Correspondingly, persons who differ from the self are categorized as the "out-group." Having a particular social identity means being like others in the group and seeing things from the group's perspective. All of the group memberships imply a sense of "us" versus "them" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118).

Someone is “prototypical” by the degree to which he/she exemplifies or is a representative of the stereotypical attributes of the group as a whole. By being most like “in-group” members and simultaneously most different from “out-group” members an individual reinforces the prototype (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118). “Prototypes” are used to maximize the similarities among members of groups as well as emphasize the differences between a given group’s members and members in “other” groups (Hogg, 2006, p. 118). For this reason, prototypes do not describe the typical or average “in-group” member; instead, “they are polarized away from out-group features and describe ideal, often hypothetical, in-group members” (Hogg, 2006, p. 118). When individuals view themselves as the embodiment of an “in-group” prototype, depersonalization has occurred. Rather than seeing themselves as unique individuals, they see themselves in terms of the prototypical attributes of “in-group” members (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 119).

By joining groups, prototypes help guide one's own behavior, as well as others behavior, and thus facilitate predictability over one's environment (Hogg, 2006). A sense of predictability and control over one’s environment is essential to self-concept and self-efficacy. Having one's social identity as a group member verified activates a sense of belongingness and raises one's self worth. With high levels of self-worth, “people have a degree of existential security that provides value and meaning to their lives” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 121). Not belonging to a group prototype is of primary importance in understanding the unique process of identity development of an multiracial/multiethnic individual, as many of these individuals fall into the land of ambiguity and rarely fit the “in-group prototype.” Now that we have explored the topics of self, identity, malleable identity, and group affiliation, it is important to see how all of these concepts converge

within identity development.

Developmental stages. The crucial period for identity development occurs between the ages of eighteen and thirty. These ages fall under the developmental stages of later adolescence and early adulthood, according to theory that has built upon Erik Erikson's (1950) original work. The key developmental task and central psychosocial crisis in later adolescence is individual identity versus role confusion. The main question during this stage is "who am I and where am I going?" (Erikson, 1950).

Differentiation and the understanding of one's own unique preferences, ideas, traits and personality is a key piece of developing autonomy from family and friend groups. This can also be considered the identity development period. Almost all of the participants in this study fell in the stage of early adulthood. In this stage, one may have come to a sense of peace or resolution of the psychosocial crisis of the previous stage, "identity versus role confusion." Erikson (1950) asserts that once a person's identity is solidified, he/she can develop deeper relationships and attachments to other people. If this stage develops unsuccessfully, the person will feel isolated. However, it can be argued that multiracial/multiethnic people may be behind in some of these developmental stages if they have no resources or people to help them navigate crucial stages of identity development. This has the potential to extend into the stage of early adulthood. With the idea of developmental psychology in mind, some researchers have developed specific multiracial/multiethnic identity development models.

Models of multiracial/multiethnic identity development. In 2000, for the first time in U.S. history, multiracial people were able to identify themselves as such in the national census (Jones & Smith, 2001). Root (1992) defines multiracial people as

"people who are of two or more racial heritages" (p. xi). A multiracial individual straddles the boundaries of several categories of racial identity and because of this; biracial and multiracial individuals are often not seen as outside the parameters of belonging to any particular group (Pauker et al., 2009). Identifying with a group is of primary importance to self-esteem development and healthy identity development (Erickson, 1950). In order to begin to understand the potential differences in multiracial/multiethnic identity development models, we need to contrast multiracial/multiethnic identity models with "normal" developmental models.

Identity development models for the multiracial/multiethnic population have been emerging in the research over the past two decades. Poston (1990) identified a five-stage model of biracial identity development. The first stage, *personal identity*, usually occurs in childhood, when biracial individuals are not aware of their mixed-race heritage. The second stage highlights numerous societal, communal and parental influences that compel individuals to choose one racial or ethnic group identity and this stage is labeled *choice of group categorization*. The third stage, *enmeshment/denial*, is characterized by individuals' feelings of guilt and disloyalty about choosing one racial/ethnic group over the other. The fourth stage is defined as *appreciation*, where an individual has a solid foundation in a racial/ethnic group, but may begin to explore the previously ignored racial/ethnic group. The final stage, *integration*, involves an individual likely identifying with one racial/ethnic group but valuing the integration of multiple racial/ethnic identities.

Another model of identity development is Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) model of biracial identity development. This model differs from others in the fact that it

acknowledges multiracial/multiethnic individuals might experience exclusion from groups of color as well as from whites. In Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) *preschool stage,* up to five years of age, biracial children start to become aware and possibly sensitive to differences in their physical appearance. In the following *entry to school stage*, biracial children may feel the pressure to classify themselves in a monoracial group as they begin to have more interactions with social groups. Next, they move into the *preadolescence stage*, where individuals become increasingly aware of such attributes as skin tone, physical appearance, ethnicity, religion, environmental factors, and direct or vicarious exposure to racism (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). As they enter *adolescence stage,* pressure to join the group of the parent of color begins to mount. In the *college/young adulthood stage*, continued immersion in a monoracial group is the pursued experience. Finally, the *adulthood stage* is characterized by continued exploration and interest in race and culture, and increased flexibility in adapting to various cultural settings (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Kich (1992) offers a slightly different model of multiracial/multiethnic identity development. Kich offers a three-stage model where one moves from incongruent feelings between self-perceptions and external perceptions (i.e., stage 1: 3-10 years of age) through working to gain acceptance socially (i.e., stage 2: 8 years of age through young adulthood) until they fully internalize a multicultural/multiracial identity (i.e., stage 3: late adolescence or young adulthood). Other similar stage models based on developmental perspectives include Rockquemore (2002) and Van Voorhis (1998).

In general, these models of multiracial/multiethnic identity development highlight potential stages that multiracial/multiethnic individuals pass through on their way

towards acceptance of their identity. Self-awareness is highlighted in these models as the impetus for exploration. One begins to notice his/her unique physical characteristics and becomes more curious about themselves and their history. This increased awareness may create questions about the referent groups one has chosen and at times may lead to a shift among peer groups. Feelings such as guilt and shame over how one chooses to identify emerge and demand one's attention in order to move beyond these uncomfortable feelings. Finally, a multiracial/multiethnic individual can move to a place of self-acceptance according to these developmental models if he/she manages the internal questions and emotions in an adaptive manner.

Popular identity developmental theories suggest similar stages to multiracial/multiethnic identity development models proposed above with certain crucial differences. The father of developmental identity theory, Erik Erikson (1966), asserts that the process of forming a stable identity is marked by establishing autonomy from parents, learning to relate to same- and opposite-sex peers, and developing a sense of uniqueness by comparing and differentiating oneself from others. The most apparent difference between "normal" identity development and multiracial/multiethnic identity development theory is in relation to the stage of developing uniqueness and differentiation of oneself from others in "normal" development. These differences are likely due to the fact that in "normal" development, aspects such as group affiliation and self-acceptance have likely already been obtained leaving differentiation as the obvious next stage. However, multiracial/multiethnic identity development seems to go in the opposite direction for period of time. Once self-awareness occurs, some multiracial/multiethnic individuals discover a sense of not "really" belonging and thus,

instead of going on a quest for differentiation, a multiracial/multiethnic individual may embark upon a quest for social acceptance. It is not until the multiracial/multiethnic individual feels accepted socially and goes through a process of self-acceptance that they can begin to think about developing their own "uniqueness."

Relevant Studies

Qualitative research studies addressing the factors that influence racial/ethnic identification in multiracial/multiethnic people are sparse. However, there are a few studies that addressed similar research questions to the one posed by this study regarding identification. Wardle (1987) suggests, "the interracial child must select the identity of one parent, usually the parent of color" (p. 53). Influencing factors on identity development include a bilateral acceptance, as a multiracial/multiethnic individual will seek acceptance from both communities, but ultimately acceptance is predicated on the individual's adoption of the mores of that community and the exhibition of specific cultural behaviors (Sebring, 1985). In terms of time periods that research studies have deemed critical in identity choice, "the transition period of adolescence has been described as a particularly difficult time for multiracial/multiethnic individuals, as this may be especially so if they are unable to discuss issues that arise with peers, parents, or both" (McRoy & Freeman, 1986).

Another qualitative study by Kerwin et al. (1993) provided a qualitative look into the lives of nine biracial Black/White children and their parents. This study highlighted individuals that grew to be appreciative and respectful of both cultural/ethnic/racial heritages while not perceiving themselves as "marginal" in two cultures. In addition, this study found that "a majority of respondents had an increased sensitivity to the views,

cultures, and values of the Black and the White communities and perceived more commonalities than differences between them" (Kerwin et al., 1993, p. 228). According to this study, "there was no apparent striving for children to identify more with one racial group or the other" (Kerwin et al., 1993, p. 228). However, physical appearance, religion and significant people were highlighted as factors that influenced identity development.

Although Kerwin et al.'s (1993) study was a beginning in trying to understand the little known phenomena of multiracial/multiethnic identity development; it was wrought with many of the errors that challenged similar studies such as focusing on the concept of "race." Kerwin et al.'s (1993) study is predicated on the fact that "race" exists and can be measured and understood. This dilemma at the core of the multiracial/multiethnic research, is identified most eloquently by Spencer (2006) as he states:

> We believe that everyone has—or must be made to have a racial identity, whether that identity is a biologically defined one or a socially defined one. In short, we are unwilling to conceive that life could exist other than as it does in our Raceland…a world whose inhabitants are perfectly race-able figures who cannot rise above or see above the surface plane of their racial existence…our whole social system is based on race; anything else would surely lead to psychological disorder and social chaos. (p. 36)

In addition, a limitation highlighted about this study was the parent's tendency towards social desirability when describing the experiences of their children and the factor of social desirability was not controlled as a variable in the interpretation of the results. "This tendency to present their children's experiences in an overly positive light may have resulted from a desire to counteract the negative stereotypes and expectations

that society puts forth regarding persons who have more than one racial heritage" (Kerwin et al., 1993, p. 229). Finally, a major flaw in the research design was the choice to interview children on a subject as abstract and deep as race, ethnicity, and identity. The participants ranged in age from five-years-old to sixteen-years-old. In this large spectrum of ages, participants were all treated equally, making it difficult to conclude that a five-year-old's views on racial/ethnic identity development would be equally as developed or aware as a sixteen-year-old's views. This age range would obviously have tremendous differences in life experiences and cognitive development.

The findings of Millville, Constantine, Baysden and So-Lloyd (2005) bear directly on the proposed questions of this research study. In their study, they explored essential themes of racial identity development among ten self-identified multiracial adults. After interviews were transcribed and coded, four themes emerged as essential factors to identity development including: (a) reference group orientation, (b) "chameleon" experience, (c) encounters with racism, (d) the importance of social context in identity development. The authors articulated that many of these themes overlap with contemporary mixed race identity theory. One of the unique findings of this study was the "simultaneous adoption of multiple labels or categories to describe one's racial identity. That is, many participants seemed to identify both as a monoracial person, generally the background of the parent of color, and as a multiracial person" (p. 514). These authors also found that:

> A multiracial label or identity was one that seemed to be more private, even unspoken, rather than an identity stemming from a clearly negotiated reference group orientation. The finding of a privately held multiracial identity label points

> to a unique identity development challenge that multiracial people face, the adoption of a racial label or reference group orientation that is different from that of one's own parents and most of one's peers. (p. 514)

This study by Millville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005) made extensive efforts to control for possible bias of the participants. Simultaneously, members of their research team were highly experienced with the subject resulting in a well-balanced study and significant contribution to the qualitative literature on multiracial/multiethnic identity. However, they were unable to defy the limitations that similar studies find themselves confronted with, including the limitations around qualitative research, snowball sampling, small sample size from a certain regional, rural area, and the limitations around studying "race" as a concept which have been outlined earlier.

Crawford and Allagia (2008) took a similar but slightly different approach to understanding identity development in the multiracial/multiethnic population. They explored the factors influencing identity development in those who identified themselves to be part of mixed African (Black) and European (White) origin. In Crawford and Allagia's (2008) study, they used the Long Interview Method (McCracken, 1998) to identify influences of racial identification with young adults aged 18-29. The role of the family emerged as a key influence on the formation of racial identity for each of the participants in very unique ways (Crawford & Allagia, 2008, p. 88). This overarching theme was broken down into subthemes including: Parental Awareness and Understanding of Race Issues; Impact of Family Structure and Lack of Role Models; and

Family Communication and Willingness to Talk about Race Issues (Crawford & Allagia, 2008, p. 88).

In general, the related studies on this topic demonstrate the importance of family, peer groups, and environmental messaging to one's sense of identity development. Again, the importance of the adolescent and emerging adulthood stages were highlighted as a crucial time period for identity to become solidified. Studies also found a tendency of individuals to look towards their physical appearance as a reference to identify initially with the parent most similar to one's physical appearance. However, data also emerged in regards to individuals beginning to navigate other possible identifications such as the label of multiracial/multiethnic, but this usually occurred after one had been firmly grounded in a primary sense of identity or affiliation with one of his/her parents.

Using a grounded theory approach interviewing 11 participants Calleroz (2003) found that parents influenced racial identity in multiracial/multiethnic individuals and this influence continued throughout college and affected the groups one chose to identify with in college. Another Calleroz (2003) finding was related to "the chameleon effect" or similar to "malleable racial identity" where multiracial/multiethnic individuals chose identity based on situations, surroundings and peers. Another of the major influencers on identity choice beyond parents was peers and the experience of peer acceptance in college further solidified racial/ethnic identity (Calleroz, 2003).

In a study of 194 ethnically or racially mixed high school students, Phinney and Alipuria (1996) reported that of the 14 students in the study that had one white parent and one African American parent, 8 used the African American label to identify themselves, 4 used identified themselves as "mixed". None of the mixed white/African American

students ever used the "white" label to define themselves. This was a study where 194 multiracial/multiethnic individuals were asked to fill out questionnaires asking them about information related to demographics, self labels of ethnic/racial identity, and measured ethnic identity (using Phinney's 1992 14-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure). This ethnic identity measure "assesses three aspects of ethnic identity: a sense of belonging to and attitudes towards one's ethnic group; ethnic behaviors and customs; and ethnic achievement, based on exploration and commitment" (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 147). These findings are similar to Brunsma's (2005) findings in virtually all white/non-white biological combinations, "the child is much more likely to be identified with the non-white facet of his parentage than the white aspect, with a few exceptions" (p. 1142). However, Herman's (2004) survey found that of 160 respondents who were African American and white biracial category, 107 indicated that they were African American and 32 indicated they were white.

Nishimura (1998) found one of the largest factors that influenced identity choice in multiracial/multiethnic individuals came from members in one's home. In this study, the primary concern of the participants was lack of empathy from loved ones reporting, "people, including parents, do not know what it is like to be multiracial" (p. 49). Another interesting finding of Nishimura (1998) was that participation in cultural/ethnic organizations on campus did not necessarily satisfy multiracial/multiethnic individual's sense of belonging as the pressure to "choose" a side was subtle and distracting.

Comparing 60 multiethnic college students to 60 monoethnic majority (white) students and 41 monoethnic minority students, Sparrold (2003) found the importance of ethnic identity to the emotional health of multiracial/multiethnic people. Participants in

this study completed questionnaires; a demographic questionnaire, a national background checklist, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983), and the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Multiple regression analyses showed that while self-esteem in multiracial/multiethnic subjects was not significantly predicted by demographic factors, psychopathology could be significantly predicted by ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, ethnic group affiliation, and parents' marital status (Sparrold, 2003). The unique finding in this study was that psychopathology was best predicted, however, by ethnic identity, acceptance of other groups, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem. Thus, according to this study one's ethnic/racial identity has ties to emotional health and well-being.

Terry and Winston (2010) used a Race Self Complexity (Winston et al., 2004) theoretical framework and open-ended questions with 66 adolescents. Race Self Complexity is a new narrative theory of personality that seeks to explain how the meaning of race in American culture can add complexity to an individual's identity construction and overall personality development (Winston, 2007; Winston & Kittles, 2005; Winston et al., 2004, 2007). Specifically, Race Self Complexity theory describes and Specifically, Race Self Complexity theory describes and explains the "nature, form, and function of the meaning of race within persons' internalized and evolving narrative of self as well as the motivational, affective, and cognitive processes and themes represented in narrative identity" (Terry & Winston, 2010, p. 435). The participants in this study identified their racial/ethnic identity as mixed African American/white (n=22), African American (n=22), and white (n=22). This study addressed the following

questions: (1) Across time, what racial categories do multiracial adolescents with one Black and one White biological parent select in their racial self-identification, and (2) is there a pattern of change across time in the racial categories used by these adolescents in their self-identification? (Terry & Winston, 2010, p. 434). Results suggested that the process of racial self-identification might be a personality characteristic adaptation to the meaning of race in American society that may change across time, place and role. This is consistent with existing theory and research on racial self-identification and racial identity (Brown, Hitlin, & Elder, 2006; Harris & Sim, 2002).

Using national survey data from Wave 1 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Harris and Sim (2002) looked 83,135 in-school interviews and specifically focused on 18,924 of those students who were also interviewed at their home. Those that were interviewed in their home, their primary caregivers were also interviewed. Add Health collects self-reported race data. Harris and Sim (2002) found that 12% of multiracial adolescents' racial self-identification differed in interviews conducted at home compared with those conducted in school within the same year. Specifically, these adolescents were more likely to not racially self-identify as ''multiracial'' if their parents were present during the interview. Harris and Sim (2002) explain that this finding is linked to parental socialization of parents whose own childhood and adolescence occurred during historical periods dominated by the one-drop rule.

Harris and Sim (2002) suspect that some children of monoracial parents classify themselves as multiracial because parents and children disagree about how recently mixed one must be to report being multiracial (p. 624). These researchers found that

patterns of racial/ethnic classification vary because multiracial/multiethnic groups comprise socially distinct monoracial groups.

Other unique findings and insights from Harris and Sim (2002) share that likely there is more stable identity in adults than adolescents due to the fact that their stage of development involves greater fluidity and experimentation with identity. In addition, Harris and Sim (2002) state that identities of older cohorts "were formed during a time of more restrictive racial regimes" (p. 625). The fact that the contextual environment of older cohorts was more restrictive, it would be easy to assume a greater necessity of strong racial/ethnic identity.

Edwards and Pedrotti (2008) conducted a comprehensive and methodological review regarding multiracial/multiethnic issues in six primary counseling journals from the years 1988-2006. The authors summarize findings about the 18 articles that emerged from this review of the Journal of Counseling Psychology, Journal of Counseling & Development, The Counseling Psychologist, Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, and Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development. Utilizing the key search words of biracial, multiracial, mixed heritage, interracial offspring, multiethnic, biethnic, mixed race, bi-racial, multiracial, bi-ethnic, and multi-ethnic they yielded 37 articles. Edwards and Pedrotti (2008) then followed an exclusion process yielding 18 final articles that had multiracial individuals as the primary focus of the article and the article addressed some aspect of psychological functioning.

Five of these 18 articles were quantitative, 2 were case studies, 5 were qualitative, 4 were theoretical/conceptual, and 2 were mixed method. The primary topic area was racial identity/racial identity development (11 articles), followed by psychiatric issues (3 articles), psychological adjustment (2 articles), and counseling techniques, models, and processes (2 articles) (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008). The only quantitative study that focused on racial identity development was Suzuki-Crumly and Hyers (2004) study investigating well-being and intergroup competence in 66 African American/white and asian/white adults.

Using a self-identification measure, the authors explored whether multiracial individuals would identify with one, both, or none of their ethnic heritages and the implications of these orientations on psychological well-being and intergroup competence. Sixty-six Black/White and Asian/White individuals were included. Results revealed that participants were most likely to be biculturally identified, followed by minority identified and then non-identified (Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004, p. 137). Furthermore, psychological well-being and intergroup anxiety varied as a function of identity. The five qualitative investigations that emerged from Edwards and Pedrotti's 2008 review of the literature highlighted the challenges and positive aspects of biracial identity, flexible and situational identities, and the influence of family and physical appearance on identity development.

SECTION III: Qualitative Investigation

Method

Overall approach and rationale. There is a limited amount of information in the scientific literature on the topic of influential factors of identity development among multiracial/multiethnic individuals. In addition, there is especially a lack of qualitative research on this subject; and due to this fact, the theoretical foundation of multiracial/multiethnic development is weak to nonexistent.

Studying factors influencing abstract concepts such as identity are difficult to measure through a traditional quantitative lens. For this reason, in order to help those who come into counseling with questions related to their racial/ethnic/cultural identity, the field of psychology needs to utilize research methods that are open enough to allow complex phenomenon to be studied in their entirety. In addition, the concept of "race" is socially constructed and thus the relationship between abstract concepts such as "race" and "identity" are complex and multifaceted. Due to the need to obtain an in-depth understanding of a complex and abstract process, the use of qualitative methods was utilized for this study.

In addition, qualitative research is better equipped than quantitative research to study lived experiences. "If you want to understand the way people think about their world and how those definitions are formed you need to get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them in their day to day lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 31). Qualitative approaches should be used when researchers are; (a) eliciting tacit knowledge and subjective understanding, (b) trying to understand little-known phenomena, (c) researching what cannot be done experimentally for practical or ethical reasons, (d)

trying to understand phenomena for which relevant variables have yet to be identified (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The factors influencing identity development for multiracial/multiethnic individuals is a little-known phenomena, thus further endorsing the appropriateness of using qualitative research for this study.

Participants. In this research study, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight individuals who self-identified as multiracial/multiethnic from a variety of mixed racial/ethnic backgrounds. In accordance with McCracken's recommended sampling procedures, eight participants were ultimately selected to participate in the study because "it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them" (1988, p. 17). Eight participants yielded 200 pages of data.

The primary researcher followed a similar research philosophy to Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia (2009) to focus on people who are first-generation multiracial/multiethnic individuals, as the child of an interracial marriage and thus, the participant's background is potentially more salient than it would be for 5th generation multiracial people. General demographic information is outlined in Table 1 (attached).

Participants were obtained through a snowball sample (i.e., asking a broad number of individuals, or informants, to identify information-rich contacts) (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling was chosen to "cast a wide net" in a similar manner presented by Jennings et al. (2008, p. 508). Initially, three key informants were identified and contacted to help locate individuals for potential inclusion in the study. These key informants were selected due to their long-standing work with professionals in multicultural settings and were contacted through electronic mail and telephone. These

key informants included one vice president of a local non-profit, a professor with over 10 years of experience in the field of teaching psychology and practicing psychotherapy, and a manager of a multicultural workforce at a for-profit organization. These key informants represented a broad range of professions, levels of education, and social networks thus potentially yielding a better diversity of participants from the snowball sample. Key informants provided the initial pool of participants. I followed the path of contacting participants and spending time building rapport with participants through casual conversation regarding their current life situation. Utilizing my counseling background I was able to intuitively know when sufficient trust and rapport was established in order to begin an interview. In addition, I would take steps throughout the interview to keep participants comfortable through the use of humor or casual conversation. Upon completion of the interview, I asked them to provide me with other potential participants for this study. It was through this snowball procedure that I ultimately obtained eight participants that fit the criteria of this research study.

Setting. The setting for this research was an urban, metropolitan area in the Midwest. All of the participants lived within one hour of a large metropolitan area. One of the participants was interviewed at the home of the author; all other participants were interviewed either in their homes or at their place of employment.

Data-Gathering Procedures. The data gathering methods used for this research study were in-depth interviewing and participant observation. The primary focus of capturing "lived experiences" through a qualitative approach relies on in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). Marshall and Rossman (2006) state the primary strategy of qualitative, in-depth interviewing is

to capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words.

To begin this research study, participants were prescreened for appropriateness via electronic mail or telephone. They were asked basic demographic questions to assure they fit the criteria for this study's sample, including age and racial/ethnic/cultural composition. For the purposes of this study, additional screening of participants included one of the parents being of ethnic or racial minority status. The inclusion criteria were narrowed to participants whose biological parents had differing racial/ethnic backgrounds to target those who are, in essence, first generation multiracial/multiethnic individuals, following a similar research philosophy to Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia (2009). If they met the criteria and were selected for the study, they were asked to sign a consent form.

In alignment with the idea that "interviews are conversations with a purpose" (Marshall & Rossman, 1996, p. 101), participants were interviewed in person using an interview-guide format (Patton, 2002). Interviews included 12 open-ended questions while allowing room for additional questions to emerge when appropriate (Appendix A). The questions served as the backbone for the interviews but the interviews were treated as a casual conversation to elicit the greatest amount of ease, trust, and openness from participants. The interviews were grounded in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. This approach to interviewing, "studies lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview, and rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated" (Marshall & Rossman, 1996, p. 104). A phenomenologist wants to understand the world as it appears to other people.

Upon arrival at the face-to-face interview, the informed consent was reviewed and

signed, and participants were allowed to ask questions that they had pertaining to the research study before the interview commenced. Interview duration ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length, and the interview setting (e.g., participant's home, interviewer's home, participant's place of employment, etc.) was established at the convenience of the participants.

Data Analysis. Audiotaped interviews were subsequently transcribed, producing over 200 pages of double spaced data. These transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory and open coding approach (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is a specific methodology developed as a way of building theory from qualitative data collected. Grounded theory was the approach that I felt would be the best fit for this research study as, similar to Jennings et al., (2008); I preferred to begin at the ground level, analyzing transcriptions one line at a time through open coding. A movement towards higher levels of theorizing and category development followed this and was done through the process of open coding.

In qualitative research, analytic procedures fall into seven phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) searching for alternative understandings; and (g) writing the report or other format for presenting the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Following this approach, I began my analysis by immersing myself into the interviews and organizing the data. I accomplished this primarily by repeatedly re-listening to the interviews on my audio recorder and pausing the recorder periodically for reflection. Simultaneously while I was re-listening to the interviews, I was waiting for my transcriptionist to return my transcripts to me in order to

complete my data analysis. This allowed me a sufficient amount of time to listen to the interviews multiple times. As I listened to the interviews, preliminary themes began to develop; one example is that while listening to the audiotapes I was already becoming aware of a common thread of "social acceptance" being alluded to in the interviews. However, being mindful that Patton (2002, p. 436) states, "rushing to premature conclusions should be avoided" I made a concerted effort to treat this emergent theme as an equal to other themes that were emerging from the data.

Once the transcripts arrived in the mail, I began reading the interviews and making broad intuitive comments in the margins of the transcripts as I read, which followed what Crabtree and Miller (1992) called an emergent/intuitive approach to data analysis. I would take several days off between reading each transcript to get a fresh look at the participant's statements. These breaks also served a critical role in ensuring I did not move too quickly while deducing the data into categories and themes. After multiple reads through each transcript, commenting intuitively in the margins, and taking days off to reflect, I had a tight and thorough understanding of the data and decided to proceed.

At this point, I met with a hired writing coach/auditor, Dr. Sheryl Spradley Grassie. Dr. Sheryl Grassie is currently the Executive Director of a Minnesota based non-profit call *The End of the Spectrum***,** which advocates for the needs of individuals with severe or "classic" autism, through legislation, research and housing development. She has a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Saint Thomas (UST). She previously worked at UST in the Graduate Writing and Research Center from 2006-2009 advising students on qualitative research and writing projects (master's theses and doctoral dissertations). Her

background in qualitative research began in childhood as an assistant to her father Dr. James P. Spradley, a cultural anthropologist and qualitative research pioneer in the 60's and 70's. She participated in numerous published ethnographic studies that resulted in books, including *Guests Never Leave Hungry*, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* and *The Cocktail Waitress* by James P. Spradley. Dr. Grassie has been involved in this research project since its conception. She worked with me to design the study and has been a consultant critiquing the research methods, the structure of the project and the writing throughout. Utilizing her expertise and writing savvy, she provided me with feedback on the words or phrases that were being developed as a reaction to the transcripts. In areas where we differed on our reactions to a quote, I would write all words that emerged in the margins to capture all reactions before further analysis

My next step was to eliminate "excess fat" from the transcripts including those comments that evoked little to no reaction through multiple readings. Usually this involved eliminating filler comments made by participants as a response to a rapport-building question from myself. Although these comments served a purpose in establishing trust between the participants and myself, they did not yield data that was meaningful or consistent. Trimming down these statements left me with quote-like paragraphs from each transcript.

I then cut the paragraphs/quotes into sections deciding on the spot where the best place to cut the quote off would be. I wrote one or two words on the back of the quote, which were triggered within me as I read the quote. My initial reactions were still in the margins of some of the quotes from my first readings of the transcripts, and therefore may have affected the overall one or two words that I chose to write on the back of the

cards. These words on the back of the quotes served a purpose of preliminary themes and the quotes were looked at as well by my auditor. If my auditor felt that there might be another, better word to summarize the quote, she would recommend that word and I would add it to the back of the quote for consideration. This stage of my analysis matched Marshall and Rossman's (2006) suggested stage of immersion in the data and generating categories and themes.

The next stage follows Marshall and Rossman's (2006) generating of categories and themes and coding the data. With the help of my auditor/coach, together we would look at each quote/paragraph and analyze the words that were on the back and decide together if these were the best summative word/phrases that could be assigned to that quote. Upon agreement of the final word/phrase to write on the back of the quote, we would record this on the "master list" of emerging themes. This process was repeated until all eight transcripts were analyzed for themes within each case. After four meetings lasting for one to two hours each, we felt that we had captured all of the emerging themes from the quotes. Following this process, we analyzed our "master list" for overarching themes. This was when the idea of "social acceptance" emerged from the data again, and was recognized by my auditor and myself. Realizing this was the overarching, emergent theme; we created an outline of other related sub themes that we identified from the data.

I then conducted a cross-case analysis (Patton, 2002), following a similar format to Jennings et al. (2008). This was done in an attempt to identify how much support each theme had due to the number of participants that endorsed that particular theme. Upon first attempt to identify themes, 17 themes were identified. After a preliminary review of these 17 themes, I eliminated 6 themes due to being associated with fewer than four

participants endorsing the theme. The remaining 11 themes were analyzed and merged when appropriate if there was not enough divergence between the themes, or if one theme seemed to fit better as a subtheme. After carefully reviewing the themes for overall support, I worked with my auditor on a final structure of an overarching theme social acceptance followed by three main themes (influential people, influential moments, cultural influences); and 7 of the preliminary themes turned into subthemes under the 3 main themes. In (Table 2) the three themes and eight subthemes are highlighted including the number of participants represented in each theme.

Trustworthiness. I followed a social constructivist perspective to ensure the quality of the qualitative data that I collected (Patton, 2002). I followed a systematic process and used authenticity in my interpretation of the data as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1986). As a constructivist in my approach to qualitative research, I view the world as socially, politically, and psychologically constructed and thus realize that there is great subjectivity impacting any attempt to understand reality. This directly impacts my research as I realize that each of my participants have constructed a reality based on their own experiences and biological makeup, thus making the inherent search for some sort of universal truth not reasonable. However, it is my hope that although the experiences of multiracial/multiethnic individuals are subjective, that there is some sort of commonality in participant experiences that can be uncovered in a study such as this.

Having the same researcher interview all participants ensured consistency across interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I identify as a multiracial/multiethnic individual studying to be a psychologist. This is very important as it affects all aspects of this research study. First of all, it impacts the study being explored in the first place. It

also impacts the questions that were asked of participants. It would be impossible in a study like this to eliminate all bias, but in an attempt to make the results as valid, meaningful and useful as possible, I utilized an external auditor, as opening up one's analysis to the scrutiny of others helps guard against bias (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Conceptual triangulation is needed to ensure reliability of the data, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Altrichter et al. (2008) asserts that triangulation, "gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation." Similarly, Cohen and Manion (1986) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (p. 254). The use of triangulation has various goals and benefits to the researcher, one being to increase the perceived validity of results. This strategy, "reduces the risks that conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows researchers to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues they are investigating" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93-94). I align with Marshall and Rossman (2006) as they state, "triangulation is not so much about getting 'truth' but rather about finding the multiple perspectives for knowing the social world" (p. 204). My approach to triangulation focused on using more than one source for gathering data (8 participants), and more than one observer of the data produced (auditor).

Researcher Background, Biases, and Expectations. An important influencing factor in this study is my multiracial/multiethnic background as the primary researcher. Marshall and Rossman (2006) assert, "closeness to the people and phenomenon [one is studying] through intense interactions provides subjective understandings that can greatly

increase the quality of qualitative data" (p. 62). I have outlined in the introduction my multiracial/multiethnic background including a father of Asian-Indian decent, and a mother of a Caucasian mix of Danish, Scottish, French and German, which is in alignment with Marshall and Rossman's (2006) assertion above related to closeness to the data. However, it is important to keep in mind Scheurich's (1994) remarks that one's historical position, class, race, gender, religion, etc., interact and influence, limit and constrain production of knowledge.

In addition, Mehra (2001) shares that who we are determines what we study especially related to social and historical positions, and my evolving self including my current educational and professional goals all impact this study. Qualitative researchers understand that bias is an inherent part of research. To help control for the bias in this study, an auditor was utilized who had knowledge regarding the qualitative research process, but minimal exposure to the literature regarding this population. In addition, the auditor identified as a monoracial/ethnic individual, and this provided a diverse perspective from me as the primary researcher.

When a study is completed that is "near and dear" to one's own experience it requires of the researcher that he/she we aware of his own perception of the research question, while also putting that completely aside and being open to what comes. It is human nature to want one's own perception validated, thus researcher bias. However, the professional guards against this by clearly seeing and stating his bias, in my case I talk explicitly earlier in this paper about my personal experiences being multiracial/ multiethnic and my data collection at times confirmed this and at times did not. The challenge in doing the research is to maintain objectivity, to let the data be different than

your experience and to try and solve the puzzle of your question with data that potentially contradicts your experience. Denzin (1989) comments that all research is really about the researcher but in order for the research to be of value it must move beyond the researcher and researcher's situation.

My bias and personal experience are explained here as Denzin (1989) states, "Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (p. 12). I identify as a multiracial/multiethnic male with seven years of experience in the mental health field and a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology from the University of Saint Thomas in Minnesota. I am currently enrolled in a doctorate program in counseling psychology (Psy.D) at the University of Saint Thomas. I was drawn to the idea of trying to understand the experiences of multiracial/multiethnic individuals as they attempt to comprehend and define themselves in a world eager to place them into defined categories, as I have witnessed from my own experience.

I grew up as one of the few children of color permanently located in Clarkfield, MN, population just under 900 people. The experience growing up in this town was overwhelmingly positive as I look back at fond memories of the people and experiences obtained. Yet, similar to being a visitor to a foreign country, I understood that there were invisible cultural walls that I was unable to penetrate due to external appearance and racial/ethnic heritage. This understanding fueled my fascination with identity and acceptance.

In college, I slowly began to meet other multiracial/multiethnic individuals who articulated a similar struggle of living in the alien, border-dwelling abyss defined by neither a sense of belonging nor necessarily rejection. This project has been deeply

satisfying for me, as it has provided a chance to gain a sense of community through learning about common experiences that multiracial/multiethnic people share.

Ethical considerations. Due to the highly personal nature of many of the questions asked of the participants, confidentiality of all data was of highest priority. I worked closely with Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Saint Thomas to make sure all of the necessary steps were completed and precautions were addressed. All research participants were given identification numbers that were used to label tapes and transcripts. The only identifying information was what was provided in the transcripts such as racial and ethnic background, but any distinguishing information that may identify the participant was changed for the sake of participant anonymity (e.g. place of employment, hometown). The list of corresponding names and addresses to identification numbers was kept behind two locked doors at all times, and all transcripts and audiotapes were only accessible by myself. I notified all participants of the ability to help them locate and access mental health resources as they left the interview, and encouraged them to reach out to a mental health professional if anything came up in the interview process that provoked disturbing emotions.

Section IV: Results

This study sought to investigate what kinds of factors affect how an individual identifies racially/ethnically when they are of mixed race/ethnic background. In general, the data yielded a pervasive overarching theme of *social acceptance*, which motivated the choice or identification with racial identity. For example, if a Hmong / American Indian individual feels pulled between two cultures, two races, two ethnicities, they are likely to identify themselves based on where they get the greatest social acceptance. This social acceptance comes through various ways based on one, or a combination, of the three main themes, (a) first wanting social acceptance and (b) looking to people through influential moments in their lives and / or an (c) experience of culture and media, to tell them how to identify to gain that acceptance. The three main themes under social acceptance more formally were: influential people, influential moments, and cultural influences. Each of these areas contained rich data that is detailed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Influential People

All of the participants in this study cited experiences with other people as factors that helped them choose how to identify ethnically. They understood the encounters with others as both good and bad, but either way they were catalytic. Sometimes these experiences challenged the individual participants, creating a kind of dissonance. Sometimes their experiences were supportive of a particular racial or ethnic identification, and could create a guidepost for identifying in general. All in all, people played an incredibly significant role in how these participants arrived at their ethnic/racial identification.

Dissonance. Having a mixed identity clearly created questions for all participants, and at times internal conflict or dissonance. How participants chose to navigate this dissonance varied widely. All of the participants articulated a struggle to define themselves in a world quick to place labels upon them. In addition, many articulated a difficulty in being accepted that furthered their own dissonance. Getting questions such as "what are you?" from the majority culture, at times motivated individuals to choose an answer in an effort to alleviate the dissonance.

Upon meeting another Venezuelan, one participant who is a mixture of Chinese, Trinidadian and Venezuelan was questioned, "But you're not really a Venezuelan? I got kind of offended and was like, "Yes I am!" The dissonance likely already existed, but questions from others can point it out and challenge the individual to choose identification, even if only in the moment. Blatant challenges to one's sense of self and identity are the norm for 5 of the 8 participants as is articulated here:

> So one of my host's cousins, he has a girlfriend from China. She is from Chen Zhen, China. So one day last summer they told her, "Oh, you're going to meet my cousin and she's Chinese too". So she was super excited to meet me…but then she met me and as soon as she saw me, she's like, "you are not really Chinese".

One participant shared the constant comparisons by her relatives to her monoracial/monoethnic cousins, "My grandmother would make blatant comments like… your cousins are doing this and this…"Always with the inference that these monoracial cousins were somehow superior.

Dissonance, on some occasions, followed participants into work, and at times painful and frustrating experiences resulted from the ignorance of coworkers. One participant who is half African American and half Caucasian commented:

> In fact, my last job I was working with a few people and one guy, we were talking about music that we liked and I had mentioned that I liked Damien Rice and he just said, "Oh, a Black guy likes Damien Rice." And I said, "I'm not even going to get started with you".

Not being accepted and having one's identity challenged created dissonance when abroad for one Chinese/Trinidadian/Venezuelan American citizen:

> I went to China …and that was kind of funny because the Chinese people were like, "Oh, well, you're not really Chinese." Because you know when you go to China everybody wants to take your picture…nobody really wanted to take my picture but they also did not identify me as being Chinese.

So this participant was stuck in a world where they did not accept her as American nor did they see her as one of their own in China, and even though the result was no photograph being taken of her, the unspoken ramifications of feeling ignored showed themselves subtly as she spoke in her interview.

Other questions or dissonance related to seeing how one's parents were treated in different social situations. Sometimes the pain of rejection was not felt directly, yet experienced vicariously by watching a parent go through social rejection. One participant, whose parent is Caucasian and was in a social situation with Asian Indians, described the following:

> When we would be at functions - my mom would be somewhat isolated; at least in so much as if everyone was having a conversation in Urdu and she did not really know what was going on.

This participant saw her Asian Indian father attempt to make the dissonance somehow "okay" and to take care of her Caucasian mother who was clearly an outcast in many situations:

> I think he also felt his own personal strain of trying to prove to everyone that even though he had married this white woman we were all very wholesome – like a good Muslim-Indian family.

Going back and forth, and never feeling fully accepted was a commonly expressed experience by most of the participants and generated dissonance. An example was articulated directly by this half Asian Indian, half Caucasian woman:

> It was kind of this game of trying to prove my Indian-ness and how good of a Muslim I was when I was among those people and then, you know, going from there and coming back to my white community and school where I spent a ton of time as well kind of trying to blend in there. So I never really fit in completely in either zone I would say and I developed a keen sense of what the social conventions were that I should be following and just kind of always kept track of that.

The back and forth of her identity roles and the resulting dissonance impacted her:

> It's definitely put a cramp in my self-esteem just because I feel like I always need to be working at being accepted and so that is translated into every area of my life. Maybe, I don't know if that came first or the questionable self-esteem came

> first … so that's kind of what made me question what is actually the root – is it me or is it this experience? But that definitely plays into it somehow.

Some participant's navigated dissonance by finding ways to remain resolute and confident in a judgmental world. One half Native American and half Caucasian individual commented:

> Yeah, I guess the challenges are people trying to force me to identify or force me to identify in a way that they can understand and a way that makes them feel comfortable. So for me, just kind of sticking to my guns and identifying the way that I feel comfortable is what I need to do.

One participant (mixed between Chinese, Venezuelan and Trinidadian) found her own way to rise above the questions and the dissonance through an inner sense of confidence:

> So I'm not really Chinese and I'm not really a Venezuelan and I'm not a Minnesotan, but I am who I am and I like who I am and my experience is going to be different than your experience.

Support/guideposts. In addition to occurrences that created dissonance for the participants, many cited supportive experiences, or even the lack of supportive experiences, that affected their identity development. These experiences often had just as profound of an effect on identity choice as did the more challenging experiences that resulted in dissonance. Support for one's racial/ethnic identity manifested for the participants in numerous examples throughout the interview process. A participant whose Native American father emphasized the benefits of seeing his mixed ethnic/racial

identity in a positive light highlighted the impact of strong, supportive parents as he told his Hmong / Native American son:

> You can either look at having all of these gifts given to you or you can look at them as burdens and if you carry them around as burdens each one is going to eat away at you, each different culture kind of make-up of who you are. But if you really look at them as strengths and together really look at that as a skill . . . when you get older you'll be able to navigate and this will help you . . . it will get you into doors that these other people the doors will be closed to. And not only that, you won't just have one door, you'll have several doors that you can go through and just to really look at that as a strength.

His father kept encouraging that he attends different Hmong and Native American cultural functions. So whether it was Hmong New Year, or whether it was Pow Wows, the result was increased understanding and pride in his heritage. Another key piece of support that participants identified was proximity and access to the different communities that their heritage represented. Some recognized how important this was for their sense of identity development:

> St. Paul has the largest number of Hmong people anywhere in the country. So I'm really fortunate in that sense where I have that back up, whereas if I grew up in Iowa maybe it wouldn't be in the same story. No matter how many times I was told that this is a strength or an asset after just kind of getting beat day after day after day of not being reassured that I'm worthy of being a strong person and that my strength comes from these different backgrounds. I don't think it would be the same if I didn't have those same opportunities.

In addition to proximity and access, a key piece was belonging to cultural/ethnic/racial groups that valued a strong sense of community. One half Hmong / half Native American male participant commented:

> I'm lucky in the fact that I'm from two communities who really value a sense of community and of family, and puts a strength and importance on the communal or the whole whereas people from other ethnic or racial backgrounds that don't have that same focus on that, I could easily get lost within the cracks.

For one half African American / half Caucasian participant, community and cultural support was not as easily accessible and because of this he had to create his own supportive group from the people that he met along his journey. He recognized that if a person could not find acceptance within his current community, "you need to leave where you are and get to one – or build one yourself…that is ultimately what I had to do, was just build the environment of the people I wanted to be around, the people I like being around and the people who like me for who I was". Another participant identified finding one's people and place of refuge as important, "It's a survival mechanism. I have to figure out who can I be myself around and who can I say things around".

One Japanese and Caucasian American participant shared his story of his heroic, iconic Japanese father who tragically died when he was a young teenager. He found that this death created a rift in his access to his Japanese heritage. He explained that his father's death brought an unpleasant split between his Caucasian mother and Japanese paternal grandparents, thus he was cut off from his Japanese heritage as he stated:

> So when it came time to me actually kind of questioning racial and ethnic identity and getting to that point, I didn't have my dad who I could talk to about it to get

> some info and really had a pretty deteriorated relationship for my grandparents to be able to answer some questions.

This story highlights the importance of supportive, influential people on one's choice of identity. Another theme that emerged very similar to support was those individuals who modeled strength in their identity or were seen as guideposts on how to navigate the complexities of racial and ethnic identity. For one participant (of Chinese, Venezuelan, Trinidadian heritage) having mixed race/ethnic parents who were well-traveled and were at peace within their marriage and in themselves served what seemed to be an unconscious signal that there was no real problem with being mixed:

> I really don't think I would be the same person if I was raised in like a home where my parents were foreigners and we lived in a very white environment, like our whole entire neighborhood was white, all our church was white, my entire school was white and I was the only non-white kid. I think my experience would be very different; I'd be giving a very different interview. But being that yes my parents were mixed but all their friends were mixed and I went to school and everybody was mixed, it was just not even something you questioned.

Theme 2: Influential Moments

In addition to the powerful impact that people have on an multiracial/multiethnic individual's process of identity development, participants also cited influential moments as crucial in their decision making process. These moments, when encountered, tended to affect the way that they understood themselves and their world. These experiences related to their physical appearance, their peer group, and their experiences in the world

of dating and having children. These experiences were deemed "influential" as they guided choice in a similar way as influential relationships.

Appearance. Many of the individuals in this study were pushed towards certain identification due to their physical appearance. The question brought to the attention of many multiracial/multiethnic individuals is "what are you?" This question has been cited in the multiracial/multiethnic literature as a key experience, having to justify identity in the categorical society in which we live. Similarly, it was up to one participant to negotiate other's expectations and feelings into her identity formation:

> If I say I'm bi-racial or I say my mom is Scotch-Irish, they're like, "Oh, but what are you?" I say, "Well, my dad's Dakota." "Ohhh." It's like a light bulb goes on in their head so they have to know – like what makes me a person of color so they can be more comfortable with me. So I think that kind of thing just kind of fueled my Dakota identity more I guess.

Middle school left little room for many participants to conceal difference in physical appearance that they shared, and their peers lacked any shame in pointing out the differences as one half Asian Indian / half Caucasian individual commented:

> Well one easy thing that I think of is being made fun of in middle school for the dark hair I have on my arms. Even though, in general, I never felt like I was the target of racism per se or anything like that, but . . . that was a single thing that made me feel like I stood out among my sort of white peers.

Hair and skin color were the traits that drew the most attention for this half African American / half Caucasian participant:

> So people would look at my hair and some people would make comments and I remember one time kids on the bus put gum in my hair – that was like worst case scenario and I felt that they had done that specifically because it was the way I looked and what not. Frankly, in 8th grade I went to the barber… and just shaved it all off. I just decided I didn't like my hair anymore so I was just going to get rid of it and then I just kind of kept it. People would always ask me why I had that hairstyle that way and it took me awhile before I realized that it was something that definitely identified me as being someone who wasn't the norm and from past experience kids had picked on me for it. Whether I did it deliberately or in the back of my mind just to try and remove myself from that group or make myself look . . . I don't know, I still looked different but I didn't have that one target…

This same participant realized that acceptance of his physical appearance was a turning point:

> When I was a little kid I noticed that my nose was bigger than every person you see on TV because they're all white people, for the most part. So I thought that if I just went like this and pushed on it, it would get smaller over time. And to be honest, I look back now; well my face would look ridiculous if that were the case. So that would have been 6-7 years old – really young. And then obviously at some point I as like, 'OK, well this is how I am, how I'm going to be.' I can cut my hair, I can do all sorts of things, but I'm me and I think the hardest thing for me to finally be comfortable with was how other people treat me based on what I look like and that was a thing that I just could not get over was that it varied so

> widely and then you start doing it by odds – because I don't really fit in with any particular group, people are unsure of what to do with me…

Finding acceptance despite obvious differences in physical appearance was a clear challenge for participants. However, one participant provided his own road map to acceptance through understanding and embracing of cultural norms and rituals. The understanding of important cultural rituals and norms provided access above any barriers created by physical appearance:

> Being multicultural, I identify more with the culture or traditions of my specific ethnic group than my color. Right? If somebody said, "Oh you're not dark enough, you're too dark, you're too light" – whatever. But if you are grounded in those cultures and traditions and ceremonies and people see that and see your understanding of that, that's been kind of my way in – at least in the initial sense for people that I'm not related to or don't know, then they say, "Oh, OK, you're one of us." So racially they might not accept me, ethnically they accept me because they know that I have similar beliefs or I know these traditions and so that has helped me, or that's been important for me when defining myself – I do it ethnically and through my ethnicity.

Peer group. Having peer acceptance is a key factor for all young adults according to the leading developmental psychology literature. This experience appears to be especially significant in individuals of mixed racial/ethnic/cultural background as they do not always blend externally or internally with the different peer groups they are trying to penetrate and gain acceptance by. As humans we are more likely to trust and accept

people who look and act just like us, but what do we do with those individuals who are only somewhat like us?

The experiences highlighted by the participants in this study are diverse. Adapting to fit in was a common experience, so common that at times it was part of a participant's identity in a social interaction; "I learned that I needed to make myself blend in all of these different zones. So I had to kind of learn to be adaptable". A few participants found peer acceptance at a young age, and others did not feel accepted by a peer group until much later. One participant of half Chinese, half Caucasian heritage recognized how she managed peer acceptance as a child in a way she now regrets:

> I must have been 4 or 5 and I would go around telling people, "You know, I'm half Chinese and I'm half regular" because that was my view of the world. They thought it was really funny at the time but now looking back well…that's really kind of sad.

Another participant of African American and Caucasian heritage highlighted the added weight that is put on an multiracial/multiethnic individual to understand the complexities of racial/ethnic acceptance, which are above and beyond the normal striving for acceptance that a teen endures:

> So you're too Hmong or you're not Hmong enough. Or you're too Black or you're not Black enough. And so it really is a weight that until you can become comfortable with yourself, I mean it's tough enough growing up, so you have what you perceive as a burden on you, hanging around you, being from all these different things and until you can really look at that as an asset and not as a deficit in going through life, just that for people to understand it is a difficult kind of path

> to walk in that no one should judge how much somebody . . . how worthy they are of a certain title – ethnic, racial, whatever you want to call it.

The costs of trying to blend in are high. Some participants shared that they needed to change or mute aspects of themselves, their values or ignore important family cultural rituals. In the same way this half Japanese and half Caucasian individual stated:

> The thing that holds me back from saying that I've arrived, is that I think that throughout all this there have been things that I've muted in order to fit in… maybe in my head if I were very strongly secured in my racial identity I would say something to people, or my friends that make racists and ignorant comments, but I guess I did not want to make a big deal about it, as I know these were my friends.

Being part Native American, part Caucasian, and understanding her cultural/ethnic history of what has been taken from her relatives, and peers makes her want to identify with her Native American group versus as an abstract multiracial/multiethnic category:

> Well, the Indian community, you don't really hear a lot about people identifying as bi-racial or multi-racial. I think people want to identify as Indian because it's kind of like uniting and solidarity and common. So like even people I know or work with or friends with, I know they're bi-racial and multi-racial and they still identify as Indian and they try to get me to identify as Indian or they put that label on me. I don't know . . . I think maybe part of it because we've had so much taken away that they just want to hang on to everything.

One participant, of Asian Indian and Caucasian heritage, confessed that peer acceptance became much easier when she dropped important cultural rituals, which were enforced by her Asian Indian father:

> Yeah, you know, those kinds of things didn't come up all the time unless I was at a friend's house and I needed to make sure they weren't . . . like serving me pork for dinner. So, yeah, it was a lot easier to make myself blend in as long as my dad wasn't around.

Some participants muted or subdued themselves to blend into the majority culture, while others took a different approach altogether. One multiracial/multiethnic (Trinidadian, Venezuelan, Chinese heritage) acknowledged halting her attempts to fit in with the majority group and found her place among other international students:

> My referent group, I would definitely coin the term international - for sure. And, you know, it's so funny because international people are so . . . their situations are changing all the time. But there are certain things that we can all identify with on some level…being an outcast.

In contrast, another participant (half African American, half Caucasian heritage) navigated peer acceptance by internally joining with the multiracial/multiethnic movement on a larger scale as she took refuge in the fact that the, "multiracial population was one of the fastest growing demographics in the country and I think we are kind of that new normal. So I think that's probably my peer group". However, when asked if this participant had any other multiracial/multiethnic friends, her reply was "no". So the alignment to the multiracial/multiethnic movement was entirely cognitive and not based on any multiracial/multiethnic relationships.

Another participant of Native American and Caucasian heritage noted that she found her people in college through the practice of cultural rituals. These cultural rituals were a key experience in uncovering shame and guilt, yet simultaneously fueled her identity development:

> I think it was just being around other Native college students and having that community there. And then our group was asked to do cultural presentations a lot – like come in to this freshman class and talk about cultural diversity, get credit for that. So we would go in there and give presentations, you know. I knew a lot about Pow Wows so I'd talk about Pow Wows and different dances and that kind of stuff. And then they'd ask us questions and they'd have . . . most people have like a box of what Native Americans are supposed to fit into. Like what you're supposed to look like, you grew up on the reservation, you grew up dancing at Pow Wows, you know the Indian language – they think there is just one Indian language…I started feeling like I didn't fit into that box and so I started feeling bad about myself, thinking I'm not a "good Indian" because I don't know the language, I didn't grow up dancing, I don't know a lot of cultural things, I didn't grow up with spiritual, traditional practices because my dad was brought up Christian…so then I was kind of just getting down on myself because I didn't fit into this box of how other people expected me to be. And then I don't know what the turning point was but I just decided, you know what? I'm bi-racial, I'm Dakota and I'm white and this is how I am and I shouldn't be ashamed that I don't fit into people's boxes and fit into people's judgments. So, yeah, in college I started . . . I just kind of changed my identity.

What seemed to be confusing for participants was the fact that they had to be always on guard, because they never really knew when some aspect of themselves might be called into question as one participant of Native American and Hmong descent shared:

> In a sense most people will not just sit down and say, "Are you gay or are you straight or are you bi or are you . . .?" It's not that same kind of . . . people don't feel that way about race. So you just hear, "Oh are you Asian or are you . . .?" But at the same time, some people might not be at a point in their life to be as comfortable as someone who, let's say, is out of the closet and can say, "Oh, yeah, I am gay." Well if somebody comes up and says, "Oh, are you African American or are you not African American?" You don't know that the path that this person has walked to get to that point and that could really be hurtful . . . they might not be comfortable at this point in time, just the same route as when it deals with sexuality. And so it should just really kind of be more just laid back and just wait for that person to open up to you about it instead of just kind of really confronting them.

Dating and children. The world of dating brought many feelings to the surface for participants. No longer would they be in the sometimes-grey areas of peer acceptance where one never knows if they are truly "in" the group. Being accepted by a romantic partner is a much deeper and more vulnerable form of acceptance, one that makes it difficult to mask underlying racism, ethnocentrism, or other feelings that often linger in the depths. Participants understood the impact of their identity on the dating world at a young age, especially this half African American and half Caucasian participant:

> I remember the first guy I dated, the only guy I dated at my undergraduate institution, within a couple months of dating he had to break up with me because his family found out I wasn't white. I remember just being mad at how he wasn't bold enough to stand up for what's right, but then what I really remember about that situation was being in the school cafeteria with one of his friends and his friend said to me, "I don't know what's the big deal, it's not like you're that Black." And I remember just being speechless and just hurt beyond words, and then just being ashamed later that I wasn't able to stand up and tell him how incredibly hurtful that was. And then I didn't date for a long time…

Being labeled as an "other" was disguised with words such as "exotic" for some participants:

> I would definitely get the comment that I looked exotic when I was in high school or when I was in college. I think my husband probably – I met him in college and I think he probably made some similar comments. So there's an extra step of, "What does that really mean?" And in some ways wanting to identify with that when I was younger and then when I was older getting kind of pissed off about that.

One multiracial/multiethnic participant was from Trinidad (mixed Venezuelan and Chinese heritage) and noticed that due to the fact that most Trinidadians are of mixed race and ethnic decent, issues such as dating were not a big deal; "We're all very strong identifying culturally as Trinidadians. And because Trinidad is so small and it is so diverse, everybody is mixed up so everybody is used to seeing mixed people and being around mixed people and not having any qualms about being in a mixed relationship".

Even if individuals developed tolerance for any dilemmas or pressures that they faced in the identity process, when thinking about having children, participants commented on the re-surfacing of old wounds. A participant of African American and Caucasian heritage highlighted this:

> I will say that one of the things that I always felt was I didn't want to have kids because that's going to be just the same scenario played out...now as an adult I realize that you know what? I don't really care what the rest of the world thinks; it's my life and my choice. Now granted, this is another life we're talking about but I know that this is probably one of them more prevalent things in a marriage, maybe setting up a family, adopting a kid, having a kid, whatever you're going to do, but for me as a child I was just like, "Well, I'm not going to have kids . . . I can take comfort in the knowledge that I'll never have to pass on this level of social conflict in the state that we live in and the country that we live in where it's such a big issue… now that I'm older it's not as big a deal to us anymore and whether we have the foresight to maybe identify issues where we can intervene and help with another person dealing with that, possibly.

For one participant of half Chinese and half Caucasian heritage, thinking about raising her own children brings back many emotions of her own identity quest:

> The stories I've told you are all stories I've told a lot of times in the past and I think I've done a lot of work around that. But there are . . . there's like that little twinge of that was hard, it was not an easy process. I'm fine with it now, but it continues to be a process too, especially through my son in terms of how people

> identify him and trying to figure out the best way to teach him about culture and how he's going to identify himself and all those ongoing questions.

The complexity of raising children who do not always resemble one of the parents or both, creates some interesting social experiences:

> I did have the first experience recently of somebody saying, "Are those your children?" And then at swimming lessons I went to talk to the swim teacher to see if they were passing or if I should sign them up for the same level and the blonde swim teacher said, "What? Oh, the twins – you're their mom? Cool – you don't look anything like them." I'm like, "Nope".

Theme 3: Cultural Influences

The final theme that helped participants navigate social acceptance was their understanding and experiences with the culture that surrounded them on a daily basis. Some participants recognized classes, theories, and academic resources that provided a way in which they could begin to understand themselves and their heritage. For one participant, his rich understanding of the history of one side of his heritage and the implications of his identifying with this group guided his racial/ethnic identity process:

Books/resources/classes. For one participant (of Native American / Caucasian heritage) the specific resource that helped her navigate her cultural/racial/ethnic identity was the Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage by Maria Root (1993):

> I just copied a couple of the statements from there – I saw this a few years ago and it really helped me. So I like the part of not having to justify my existence in this world, so not having to explain myself to people if I don't want to. I don't have to explain why I'm here – you don't have to explain why you're here, why

> do I have to...I never heard it like that and I'd never given myself permission to think of my identity in those ways... So that was really powerful to me and I still think back to that often – especially when I'm starting to feel put in a box.

Participants addressed the importance of academic information. Learning and knowledge about diversity/multicultural issues in general was a catalyst to begin to explore and accept themselves. This affected one Chinese / Caucasian participant in particular:

> To study the topic of multiculturalism and multicultural interactions brought me back to another place of thinking about my identity and how it's changed over time and, I think, prompted me to identify more strongly as bi-racial. . . I think taking that class helped open up different perspectives.

Through class assignments, one participant (of Japanese and Caucasian ancestry) was encouraged to get to know his history. This process ultimately influenced his understanding of his own identity, and he is very thankful for that opportunity:

> Yeah, you know, I think growing up I had a really good, close relationship with my grandpa and so I do feel like interviewing him and doing a project on him or about his Japanese heritage and internment was really powerful and getting me to feel more comfortable with, at least what he's gone through which helped me understand myself and my cultural identity.

Conversations in college and resources helped this half Chinese / half Caucasian participant think further about identity:

> When I got to college there was definitely a part of me that was intentionally seeking out a more diverse environment and social group and that kind of thing.

> There were a few conversations I had in college with multiracial individuals that definitely helped to open that up for me.

College was an important turning point for many participants. One participant of Native American / Caucasian heritage realized, "it wasn't until I got to college when I started identifying as bi-racial". Knowing how to begin to navigate questions around heritage and identity can be overwhelming for some. Classes on diversity and multiculturalism were cited frequently by participants as catalysts of the identity formation process. In addition, being a therapist and going through classes on diversity/multicultural issues helped this participant choose her identification:

> When I took my first multicultural counseling class . . . just to study the topic of multiculturalism and multicultural interactions brought me back to another place of thinking about my identity and how it's changed over time and, I think, prompted me to identify more strongly as bi-racial rather than . . . because I definitely think I did that sort of moving back and forth as identifying more strongly with one side than the other. I think taking that class helped open up different perspectives.

Repeatedly participants talked about the difference in their perceptions of being mixed race when introduced to academic literature on the subject. Classes helped them process their personal experiences, while theories of identity development and tools such as the "Bill of Rights for Multiracial People" by Maria Root, provided understanding and support.

Language. Another key piece of how one understands their culture and their world is language. Language provided a certain level of acceptance even to those who

did not "blend in" in terms of physical appearance. The barriers towards acceptance were found to be very high, if a participant did not speak the language, and they physically did not appear of this racial/cultural/ethnic group.

As a multiracial/multiethnic individual attempts to get to know himself or herself, a common barrier and/or catalyst is comfort with native languages of the specific group. One participant of Native American and Hmong heritage credits language as a crucial factor in how much he feels more closely identified with one side of his heritage versus another:

> In one sense the Native side was a little bit easier initially because so much of the language has been lost so the overwhelming majority, probably 90% of different relatives and Native friends, they don't speak the language and so there is a much . . . initially a much easier way yet to learning about that side. It was a little more difficult on the Hmong side, not through family but once you got to other functions or other ceremonies where people necessarily didn't know my story, but it was always important for me to balance both traditions and beliefs equally.

This phenomenon affected personal relationships as well:

> Yeah, because language wasn't a huge barrier and so I could talk to elders, Ojibwa elders, and learn different stories and teachings, whereas even, it would be difficult for me to really have a full conversation with my own grandpa, my Hmong grandpa, just because he doesn't speak at English at all. We could exchange words or different things but we didn't really have a constructive dialogue between each other.

Participants needed to learn languages in many situations in order to enter into one of the extended families:

> My mother…being she is Venezuelan and her family speaks Spanish. And so a lot of my family, one-half of my family is Chinese and I have to talk to them in English, but all my mom's siblings, my other set of grandparents, I could only speak to them in Spanish because they don't speak any English at all. So I had to learn how to speak to them. They all still live in Venezuela so when we were little my mom - we learned Spanish from her so we could talk to her parents.

Many of the caregivers of these multiracial/multiethnic individuals understood the importance of language acquisition, and thus provided a level of pressure:

> There were definitely lots of people who said you need to learn Urdu, you need to speak in Urdu - you need to learn more Urdu. From lots of relatives, family friends, it's a really common thing.

Another participant of Asian Indian / Caucasian heritage elaborated on the stress she feels in regards to language and acceptance:

> Well, I understood it and I felt like it was a pressure I put on myself too. I guess I felt like it was natural because it was an important part of culture that these people didn't want to see lost in the younger generation. I also felt sometimes, though, like it was . . . like they were directly speaking to the fact that my mom is white and so we're kind of . . . like if we do not hold on tight everything is just going to crumble or something.

This same participant commented that as language is no longer used, it lessened her ability to identify with a certain cultural/ethnic/racial group:

> I also have a fear . . . well not a fear because I know it's inevitable but kind of sadness about not necessarily being able to pass on the language and that kind of thing and maybe my kids being able to identify even less than me with relatives, our cousins and their kids and that kind of thing. There are not really any other relatives in our family who have strayed as much as I have or my sisters.

At the end of the day, participants had to come to a sense of peace with the limitations around language acquisition, as was articulated by this half Native American, half Caucasian participant:

> I guess, now, I would say that I do not feel bad that I do not know it just because there are so few speakers that it was not common to grow up learning it or knowing it. My dad was lucky though because his grandparents who raised him spoke Dakota in the house so he can understand it. He cannot speak it but he knows what they are talking about.

Section V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative research methodology to explore the factors that shaped identity formation of multiracial/multiethnic individuals. In order to make sense of the data gathered from these participants, I will now (a) review the three themes that emerged, (b) discuss strengths and limitations of the study and (c) discuss implications for professional practice in counseling psychology, including implications for literature and future research.

Social Acceptance

This study sought to investigate what kinds of factors affect how an individual identifies racially/ethnically when they are of mixed race/ethnic background. In general, the data yielded a pervasive overarching theme of *social acceptance*, which motivated the choice or identification with racial identity. For example, if a Asian / Caucasian individual feels pulled between two cultures, two races, two ethnicities, they are likely to identify themselves based on where they get the greatest social acceptance. This social acceptance comes through various ways based on one, or a combination, of the three main themes, (a) first wanting social acceptance and (b) looking to people through influential moments in their lives and / or an (c) experience of culture and media, to tell them how to identify to gain that acceptance. The three main themes under social acceptance more formally were: influential people, influential moments, and cultural influences. Each of these areas contained rich data that is detailed in the following sections.

Influential people emerged as a key factor in participants beginning to accept themselves and gain confidence in their identity. Influential moments included decisions

that were made as a direct response to one's peer group, physical appearance, dating relationship, and decisions about having children. These moments were important to participants as they highlighted the fact that being "different" was part of their current reality and were a strong motivator towards understanding identity.

The third theme, labeled cultural influences, reflects cultural and societal influences experienced by the participants. At times these experiences were described as passive, yet at other times, individuals shared how they participated actively in their identity formation process, such as reading certain books, or discussing the topic with friends and family. Influential people emerged as the first of these three themes under the larger umbrella of the desire for social acceptance.

Influential people. Research has revealed that affiliation with people who accept and support the multiracial identities of multiracial/multiethnic individuals is an essential component of positive identity development in this population (Gibbs, 1998; Root, 1992). Numerous participants identified significant family members or other individuals from their greater social circle that guided their identity development in both positive and negative ways.

Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly commented about their internal struggles to identify and how various individuals affected their thinking. What appeared to be essentially crucial was how these individuals helped participants answer questions related to who they were, and if they were "okay." These key influential people answered these questions at times verbally, but some of the strongest forms of acceptance came from how participants experienced nonverbal acceptance indicators from these people. Participants mentioned that these nonverbal acceptance indicators were difficult

to articulate, as feeling accepted is an intuitive feeling, thus it cannot be explained cognitively.

Quintana (1999) and Zwiebach-Sherman (1999) also found that the greatest influence on the participants' identity formation was the influence of family members. Family and peer support played a critical role in how the participants in my study choose to identify. Support could steer them in one direction or another, it could send them looking for groups outside their mixed races/ethnicities or it could endorse their mixed identity as the norm.

Negative experiences were common as well, like one participant who commented on how monoracial/ethnic individuals would say to her, "you are not really Chinese" which left her feeling challenged and rejected. Other participants experienced similar challenges, leaving them with choices to make and dissonance to be reckoned with. One participant recalled being constantly compared to her monoracial/monoethnic cousins by her grandmother. As she recalled this experience, she became aware of how she was always on guard for any slight insult that may come her way about not being "enough" of this certain racial/ethnic/cultural group.

A consequence of the experience of one's identity being challenged by the environment on an unpredictable basis created dissonance for many members of this study. This dissonance was navigated by every one of the multiracial/multiethnic individuals in situations from close to home to across the ocean. Many participants looked to significant people in their lives to help them navigate this dissonance.

In addition, the support provided by these Influential People served as a buffer against the inquisitive and at times invasive environment. For example, one participant

shared how when he was feeling down or ashamed about who he was, his father would step in and reframe the situation, reminding him of all the doors that will be opened to him in life due to his border-dwelling status/mixed heritage. This encouragement is one example of how influential people can aid these individuals on their journey of self-identification.

Influential moments. In addition to the powerful impact that people have on a participant's process of identity development, influential moments tended to affect the way that multiracial/multiethnic individuals understood themselves and their world. These experiences related to other's reactions to participant's physical appearance, their peer group, and their experiences in the world of dating and having children. The reason these experiences were deemed "influential" was due to the strong impact of the experience on identity choice and the participant's general feeling of acceptance by society.

Physical appearance. As Pellegrini (2005) shares, "In my lifetime, I have worn various masks of racial belonging, yet I never seem to be able to get my act just right, and rarely do I look the part in the eyes of others…as an actor in the ongoing story of race in America, I have been ambiguous, conflicted, uneasy and unsure" (p. 531).

A few participants acknowledged a feeling of immediate acceptance and connection to part of their heritage due to shared physical characteristics. These individuals also went through a time period where they began to wonder about other parts of their heritage but took comfort in having a "side" to belong to. The most racially/ethnically ambiguous participants, in regards to physical appearance, acknowledged the benefits of being able to be living on the border of many groups and

penetrate at least the first few layers of those groups. Rockquemore (1998) identified a border identity as one of the four distinct ways multiracial/multiethnic individuals understand and respond to mixed heritage. This experience of "border crossing" is also mentioned as a healthy resolution of mixed-race identity by Root (1996) and Wallace (2001). One participant navigated his ambiguous physical appearance through strongly grounding himself in the language and cultural traditions of both sides of his heritage, which he felt opened up access to deeper layers and levels of social acceptance.

All participants commented at one time or another about their physical appearance in relation to identity formation. The question brought to the attention of many multiracial/multiethnic individuals is, "what are you?" referring to how they look. This question has been cited in the multiracial/multiethnic literature as a key experience, and was integral for the participants in this study. Pellegrini (2005) discussed how he avoids the problem of having to explain his complex race/ethnicity stating, "I am who I am. I am usually quiet when I want to speak. I am hard to know. I am also athletic and good at sports, and that is what provides me with a stable sense of identity and belonging" (p. 540). He goes on to state, "When I am in doubt about how to react, how to respond to the racist comments tossed casually around me…I ride my bike… sometimes for many miles…I smother myself playing basketball until it becomes my identity" (p. 540).

Having to justify identity in the categorical society that we live in was a challenge for the participants in my study as well. Encounters where physical appearance was questioned often created moments where participants were initially caught off guard and forced to deal with this apparent challenge to their sense of self. As they developed

through life and clarified identity for themselves, answering this question became a source of pride rather than shame or confusion for participants.

Peer groups. Participants reinforced with multiple examples the pressure to fit into some norm as exhibited by their various peer groups. Adapting to fit in was a common experience among participants, so common that at times participants talked of needing to be chameleons as one participant stated, "I learned that I needed to make myself blend in all of these different groups…I had to learn to be adaptable." This idea of adaptability and malleability was also found in Renn (2000) demonstrating the extent to which multiracial/multiethnic identification is situational and optional.

This process occurred with most participants until they were able to find their "people" and thus be themselves. This is similar to Hogg and Abrams (1988) findings that when someone feels negative regarding their current social identity, they selectively increase membership in other identities that they can belong to in an attempt to increase their positive sense of self. Similarly this was illustrated by Pellegrini (2005) above when he alluded to playing more basketball as a way of boosting his positive sense of self and sense of identity. Participants in my study discussed needing to find their "people" in the face of feeling uneasy in the borderland of the mixed-race/ethnicity identity.

Dating and Children. The realm of romantic relationships, dating and having children appeared to be the ultimate test for a multiracial/multiethnic individual. Dating particularly highlighted ethnicity in a way that forced many to think more deeply about identity. Participants at times benefitted in the dating world, because of labels such as "exotic" which increased the amount of initial attention they received from potential romantic partners.

This was also found in Roberts-Clarke et al. (2004), as several participants in their study indicated that a positive consequence of being multiracial/multiethnic was potential partners' perceptions about their physical attractiveness, "where characteristics such as straighter hair, lighter skin tones, and distinct facial features were viewed as attractive and exotic" (p. 114). However, some participants realized the shallow nature of this form of attention and grew tired of being seen only for certain aspects of themselves. A romantic life commitment is a strong litmus test for anyone to judge if they are truly accepted, as someone is choosing to spend their life with them. However, some participants felt accepted up until the point of meeting a partner's parents or relatives, and then they were painfully reminded of their differences.

In addition, thinking about having children caused many of the participants to deal with some of the feelings that had been repressed from their own past. They realized they needed to understand themselves better in order to help their children navigate a mixed race/ethnic identity. For some, this served as a catalyst to no longer avoid this area of one's heritage in order to be able to help one's own children navigate the world of identity. In other participants, they went through stages where they clearly did not want to have children due to the pain and struggle they had faced on their quest for some sense of social acceptance. They did not want their children to face these same struggles. However, some participants mentioned that as they matured, they grew in confidence regarding their own identity and in their confidence to help their children navigate the world of identity development.

Cultural Influences. The final theme that helped participants navigate social acceptance was their understanding and experiences with the culture that surrounded

them on a daily basis. Some participants identified classes, theories, and academic resources that provided a way in which they could begin to understand themselves and their heritage. Overall, statements by the participants indicated that the role society played in the process of identity development made it easier for participants. Having classes geared towards multicultural understanding and introducing individuals to specific theories on identity development appeared to aid a multiethnic/multiracial individual as he/she made sense of his/her world. The society at large can make a positive impact on this process by allowing the space and tools for exploration of identity.

The backdrop of this entire study is the history of the way persons of mixed race/ethnicity have been treated over the centuries in the United States of America due to the rule of hypodescent or the "one drop" policy. The "one drop rule" is a term referred to throughout the literature on race, specifically to address people of mixed racial heritage. It means having even one drop of blood from a specific racial group qualifies an individual as a member of that group (Root, 1992; 1996).

This falls under the theme of cultural influences, as the history of the racial hierarchy in the United States of America appears to impact the choice of identity. Similar to Brunsma's (2005) findings in virtually all white/non-white biological combinations, "the child is much more likely to be identified with the non-white facet of his parentage than the white aspect, with a few exceptions" (p. 1142). The only exception in my study to this finding was one participant whose non-white parent had passed away and there had been a family split as a result of the death, thus he lost connection to his non-white side.

Some participants highlighted the dialogues, which followed Barack Obama's inauguration, as an impactful moment towards accepting themselves and the broader multiracial/multiethnic movement. Some highlighted the fact that he chose African American over the term multiracial, impacted how they viewed the idea of a multiracial/multiethnic category. The lack of clarity around this topic on a national level may contribute to some of the confusion faced by multiracial/multiethnic individuals.

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative research study, as with any study, had strengths and limitations. The nature of doctoral research being limited in time and scope necessitates a small sample and limited interviews. Some of the strengths of this study include: carefully chosen questions, clear informed consent, and community resources provided per request, confidentiality, and an auditor for the qualitative research that was conducted. In addition, some of the limitations included a self-selected group of participants, the bias of the primary researcher, small sample size and limited diversity in terms of geographical location of the participants.

Strengths. There were a number of aspects of this study that I believe were handled well, such as the following:

1. Ethical principles were continuously followed in conducting the research. Before beginning any interviews, I carefully reflected upon questions and obtained approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Saint Thomas.

2. Before each interview, I provided a comprehensive informed consent, with a section of the informed consent specifically addressing the potential of provocation of difficult memories by participants.
3. I made available resources in the community as the participants requested. Some participants reached out for additional material related to mixed race/ethnicity development and I provided these materials in a timely manner.
4. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all interviews anonymous and all transcripts behind two locked doors at all times.
5. All tape recordings of interviews and tapes were destroyed after sufficient time was allowed for the analysis of this material.
6. An auditor was utilized as a way to monitor the qualitative process to ensure the greatest possible validity in the results.
7. I utilized qualitative research for this study, which I considered the most important research method to obtain in-depth, personalized data for which this topic requires.

Limitations. In addition, all participants were self-selected which may have implied more or less of an effect than actually exists in the general population. Although an attempt was made to increase the diversity of the participant pool, I was limited by geographical area due to the resource limitations of the study. I made a choice to limit my focus on the cultural/racial/ethnic dimensions of diversity. With this decision, it was not my intent to imply in any way that other aspects of human diversity, such as sexual identity, gender identity, disability, religious affiliation, among others, are of less

importance and I encourage future research on understanding the experiences related to the intersections of identity.

In addition, the nature of how participant's interpreted concepts such as race and ethnicity for themselves seemed to vary and thus may have impacted how they responded to questions. Another limitation was the risk of potential bias from me as the primary researcher, as I identify as multiracial/multiethnic/multicultural. To help control for this bias, an auditor was utilized who had knowledge regarding the qualitative research process, but minimal exposure to the literature regarding this population. More information on how I dealt with bias is addressed above under the empirical investigation section.

Another key limitation was the development of the interview questions six months before beginning the research study. In the future if I repeat this study, I would utilize my increased knowledge on the topic to incorporate interview questions that would be more open-ended and thought provoking for the participants (which is easier said in hindsight after knowledge of the topic has increased). The interview questions also focused the topic and thus led to the exclusion of many other possible important themes and categories.

A possible area of concern in this research study involves my use of a transcriptionist. Due to the overall volume of work that is needed to complete a qualitative doctoral project, I decided to hire someone to do this. However, Patton (2002) states that, "doing all or some of your own interview transcriptions (instead of having them done by a transcriber), for example, provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights (p. 441).

Problems encountered. I had moments of frustration when the data was contra to my own experience, did not make sense or when it seemed to divergent, like everyone was saying something different and it did not appear easy to code things into groups. There is always, for every researcher, a time when the data looks like it is not going to produce anything, where it is all a big jumble. Then, little by little, one must code it out. The reason we do research is to get a bigger picture based on more input, the researcher must always keep that in mind. The picture the research creates is far different than the one generated only by my experience or preconceptions of a topic. How I "bracketed" and managed my subjective bias was by keeping this goal in mind. I wanted to contribute to the academic understanding of the multiracial/multiethnic person more than I want my personal experience validated. I expected the results to show evidence of the importance of language, physical appearance and talk about the "border identity" however; some of the factors regarding dissonance being positively associated with identity development were a surprise to me.

Implications for Professional Practice in Counseling Psychology

Psychologists and all helping professionals can benefit from understanding the journey that a multiracial/multiethnic individual takes on the road to defining identity. The most obvious lesson from this study is that helping professionals can provide more culturally sensitive care if they keep in mind how their clients choose to identify culturally/ethnically/racially. Jourdan (2006) and Williams and colleagues (2002, 2005) highlight relationships with family members as a beneficial intervention with multiracial/multiethnic clients as family has been a key variable in ethnic/racial identity development in the literature and in my study.

As Root (1999) notes, "multiracial identity development is conceptualized not as proceeding along a linear course, but as "a spiraling and circular process…by which one resolves tension and accomplishes identity" (p. 77). With this understanding in mind, this research study may provide a starting place for professionals to begin to understand some of the nuances of mixed race/ethnic identity, it is not a blueprint for understanding all of these individuals and thus it is very important to take time and consideration to hear each individual's identity story without preconceptions. Additionally, Suyemoto (2004) recommends that clinicians be aware regarding the characteristic experienced by many multiracial/ethnic clients of claiming multiple identities is not a sign of pathology or confusion.

In regards to theoretical orientation and therapy approaches and intervention, I have found some preliminary support for White and Epston's (1990) techniques in narrative therapy. This form of therapy has been suggested as "particularly applicable in multicultural counseling" (Semmler & Williams, 2000, p. 53). Narrative therapy utilizes a social constructivist perspective, encouraging individuals to tell the story of their individual realities which I believe would be very important given the wide array of differences in experiences of the participants in my study and throughout the related literature.

Jourdan (2006) utilizes direct interventions to aid an individual on a better understanding of his/her ethnic/racial identity through the use of genograms and encouraging the client to increase their involvement to their multiethnic/multiracial groups through organizations, clubs, and courses. Many other current techniques, orientations and approaches can likely be helpful to this population if time is taken to

explore their unique and personal history. Pedrotti et al. (2008) share the following recommendations:

> Therapists may want to be aware that "the search for validation may exist in multiracial/multiethnic individuals, and that comfort level may vary depending on the situation in which one is engaged, the environment or context in which the individual exists, and the type of identity being ascribed or used for self-definition…given the complexity of multiracial identity development, a dynamic, flexible, and fluid conceptualization of the degree to which people take on ascribed or self-defined cultural roles is necessary for the practitioner. (p. 197)

It is my hope that as a result of studies like this, a psychologist who may have previously neglected the potential psychological impact of living in an ambiguous, border-dwelling state, that many individuals of mixed heritage do, may develop greater attunement to the intricate identity development process that a multiracial/multiethnic individual may experience.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers will have the benefit of the topic of race and ethnicity being further defined and more solidified than they currently are. Also, participants will likely have a better understanding of how they identify themselves ethnically/racially/culturally given the zeitgeist of the time. Future researchers can explore and provide updated guidance to parents of multiracial/multiethnic children on how to best aid them on their journey, as the psychological literature is currently lacking in recommendations for parents/caregivers (Wehrly, 2003).

Likewise, researching microaggressions related specifically to this population of multiracial/multiethnic individuals may provide greater insight into the day-to-day realities of living between cultures, races and ethnicities. In addition, an important area to study is the aspects of the multiracial/multiethnic experience that are particular to specific states, countries and cultures given the differing histories around racial/ethnic mixing, marriage, racism and classification. For example, it may be important to explore the differences of the multiracial/multiethnic experience in the state of Hawaii, which has the highest population of multiracial/multiethnic people in the USA at 23% in contrast to Minnesota, which has 2% multiracial/multiethnic population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

One of the limitations of my study was how little attention was paid to the intersections of sexual identity and gender identity on the overall experience of being multiracial/multiethnic. Researchers in the future could place more emphasis on qualitative analyses that provide greater participant diversity in sexual identity and gender identity in their interviews.

Conclusion

The participants in this study offered valuable insights into the factors that influenced their identity choice; including the people in their lives that supported and challenged their sense of identity, the moments that either painted a clearer picture or created sufficient dissonance to begin the journey of self-discovery. The cultural influences on the participants showed the elements of identity that can be navigated with and through culture.

Reflecting back on the participants and their statements, I realize that there were participant glances, expressions and emotions that I saw as the primary researcher on this project that were difficult to articulate in this text. One example of this included one participant's relationship and anger to the microaggressions that she has faced. This participant shared that her Asian Indian relatives would ask her frequently if she spoke their local language. Although she understood that some of these comments were directed at genuine inquiry, she articulated an unspoken part of the multiracial/ multiethnic experience that I hope is explored in future research. This unspoken aspect is related to familial and cultural shaming of an individual that leaves a group. This Asian Indian participant said that even as a young girl, she knew there was more to the questioning of her language skills; it was code for saying that her mom was white, and to point out that she is an "other". I leave this study with a greater curiosity of these day-to-day experiences that seem so innocent on the surface but create an experience of "otherness" in the multiracial/multiethnic person.

This perspective is different than is shared by a Native American/Caucasian participant who does not feel confused as she states, "I know who I am and I know where I come from and I guess people assume that multi-racial people may be confused or they don't fit into their communities but I fit in just fine…my life isn't harder." This adds further evidence that although some participants have shared struggle and hardship, not all multiracial/multiethnic people feel the same regarding their experiences.

Overall, this study shared the voices and experiences of these eight participants, with the hope of increasing multicultural competence and awareness of the psychology community. This research is a call for understanding and support for the reality of the

multiracial/multiethnic experience. Participants requested of us, each in their own way, to slow down, to get to know their story personally and turn possible frustration over the difficulty on how to categorize them into educating oneself about that individual and his/her unique identity and journey.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is the ethnic background of your mother and your father?
2. How do you define yourself ethnically/culturally/racially?
3. What have other people around you and society at large categorized you as?
4. *Who represents your referent group?
5. *With what ethnic/racial/cultural group do you share attitudes and beliefs?
6. *When seeking answers related to your racial identity, where do you look---at self or external factors?
7. Have you experienced any critical incidents or experiences that have shaped your feelings and understandings of your racial identity? What is the first thing that comes to mind?
8. In what areas of your life has being multiracial had the greatest impact?
9. What skills and tools have been helpful in their process of seeking identity?
10. What are the best parts of being multiracial? Most challenging?
11. What would you want people to know about being ……
12. How do you feel about other's racial identity?
13. *How do you feel about my own referent group?

*(Questions #4, #5, #6 & #13 adopted from Frank, 2011)

Appendix B

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM
University of St. Thomas
Transcription of Dissertation Research Interviews

Project Title: Multiracial Identity Development: A Qualitative Look

IRB# B07-073-3

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. The transcriber agrees not to discuss or divulge any information from the tapes. After the tapes are transcribed, both tapes and transcripts will be returned to the researcher. During transcription the transcriber will be the only person with access to the tapes or transcripts.

Contact Info:

Researcher: Anesh Patel at 651-236-0887

Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Len Jennings at (651) 962-4652

Transcriber: Mary Dunn 651-962-6054; medunn@stthomas.edu

Other: University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____ _____
Signature of Transcriber **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher **Date**

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Multiracial Identity Development: A Qualitative Study

[Insert IRB log number when assigned]

I am conducting a study about identity formation in multiracial individuals. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you met the requirements of having one biological parent from a minority background, and the other from different cultural/racial/ethnic background. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Anesh Patel, MA, Dr. Len Jennings, Dr. Tatyana Avdeyeva, Graduate School of Professional Psychology, University of Saint Thomas, MN.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to use qualitative research methodology to explore the lived experiences of multiracial individuals with a focus on identity development. The main research question is, "How do multiracial individuals form their ethnic/cultural/racial identification?"

> **Research Questions:** What causes identity formation to happen? Are critical incidents important in identity development?
>
> **Hypothesis:** Multiracial individuals have a process of identity development, and this research seeks to unearth what it is.

Procedures:
Participants will be asked to participate in a semi-structured, formal interview in which they will be asked a series of questions. Interviews will be approximately 90 minutes in length and will be conducted in an informal setting to be determined by researcher and participant. Interviews will be recorded via video and audio devices.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

> **Risks:**
>
> 1. Possible invasion of privacy of subject or family
> 2. Probing information asked for in interviews of personal or sensitive information
>
> **Benefits:** Participants may experience personal benefits from the process of exploring their personal cultural/racial/ethnic identity journey.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include; written notes, audio recordings, and video recordings. Written notes, audio recordings in the form of tapes/transcriptions/video recordings will all be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. Access to all data will only be allowed to primary researcher and dissertation chair, along with transcriptionist through the University of Saint Thomas. Data will be kept throughout the year of research and will be destroyed upon completion of oral defense of the dissertation; on or before January 1, 2012.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until June, 2010. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will be used in the study, unless a written, signed request to withdraw the data is received. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Anesh Patel. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-236-0887, or my advisor Dr. Len Jennings at 651-962-4652. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age.

_____ _____
Signature of Study Participant **Date**

_____
Print Name of Study Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Parent or Guardian **Date**
(If applicable)

_____
Print Name of Parent or Guardian
(If Applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher **Date**

Table 1: Demographics

Sociodemographic Variables for Qualitative Sample

Demographics	Description
Gender of participants	Males (3) and Females (5)
Age of participants	20-25 yrs (1); 25-30 yrs (3); 30-35 yrs (4)
Race/Ethnicity of participants	Asian Indian and Caucasian (1); Native American and Caucasian (1); Hmong and Native American (1); Chinese and Caucasian (1); Trinidadian, Venezuelan and Chinese (1); Japanese and Caucasian (1); African American and Caucasian (2)
Education of participants	Bachelor's Degree (3); Master's Degree (4); Doctoral Degree (1)

Table 2: Themes Grouped Into Categories

Category and theme theme	No. of participants with
Overarching Theme of Social Acceptance	8
Theme #1 Influential People	
A. Dissonance	6
B. Support/Guideposts	5
Theme #2 Influential Moments	
A. Appearance	8
B. Peer Group	6
C. Dating and Children	5
Theme #3 Cultural Influences	
A. Books/resources/classes	4
B. Language	5