

Constructing Racial Identity as a Biracial Individual in the United States

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Introduction

In 2010, for the second time in decennial history, the United States allowed multiracial citizens to formally acknowledge all races that apply to their identity in order to provide statistical data exemplifying the group's exponential increase over a 10-year period. As read in the brief published by United States Census Bureau written by Jones & Bullock (2012), "One of the most effective ways to compare the 2000 and 2010 data is to examine changes in specific race combination groups, such as people who reported White as well as Black or African American—a population that grew by over one million people, increasing by 134 percent..." (p. 1). In evaluation of the numbers collected on the 2010 census, it was published that an entire group of people with the same racial makeup seemed to have exponentially increased in a mere decade. With such an increase in a previously almost undetected populous, there will be changes in the pattern of identity construction within the group.

The embracing of multiracial identities in all people, especially Black-White biracial people seems to be more accepted than ever before seen in the history of this country. Over 10 years, there was a surge in the number of multiracial babies being born; however, we also observed individuals who chose to mark only one box in 2000 decide in 2010 to identify as multiracial instead (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Most Black and White people at age 50 will have marked their race on at least 3 different censuses, but there is no way of truly knowing how each individual decided to identify; fifty-year-old biracial people have filled out 3 censuses that did not even offer their most accurate racial make-up. From the statistics, it can be predicted that some of these 50-year-old biracial people also identified differently ten years ago than they do now.

With a flourishing biracial population, our nation must continue to evaluate the construct of race, its importance in modern-day society, its historic validity, and its use for generalizing and observing individual people. Some people habitually use the words Black and White as descriptive terms to affirm, reject, or justify stereotypes and generalizations merely based upon people's phenotypes and dialect; in many ways, this practice can be destructive to an individual's identity construction. In turn, by further researching this topic, people of any color living in the United States can grasp the concepts of race and racial identity to be more educated about the benefits of diversity in the community, the importance of race in modern day society and the fluidity of identity.

When discussing the idea of race in *Intercultural Communications in Context*, Martin and Nikayama recognize, "In general, distinctions between White and Black are fairly rigid in the United States, and many people become uneasy when they are unable to categorize individuals" (2010, p. 185). This idea of a malleable and all-encompassing racial identity remains a novelty in the United States, compared to a country like Brazil, where racial ambiguities are a normality bred through centuries' old practices. With this emerging fluidity in the idea of race and racial identity, new questions must be posed about the construction of racial identity especially within this unique, ever-increasing group of people. Since race is socially constructed, there is a lack of biology to support any true variance in the anatomical make up of one race compared to another, but that argument has been used as an agent for social hierarchy, institutionalism, racism, and separation. Adversely, ethnicity describes a person's culture, which can denote native language, geography, tradition, heritage, and ancestry.

Martin and Nikayama go on to explain identity as "a core issue for most people. It is about who we are and who others think we are" (2010, p. 162). Identity is of certain complexity;

it is compiled with aspects of personality, race, social class, talent, ability, disadvantages, privileges, family dynamics, peers, religion, and life experiences. While the basis of building identity is similar for every person, the formulation of identity can look vastly different depending on race, geography, family, education, and circumstance. Also, age continues changing identity, so a person at 25 will not be exactly the same at 40; identity is flexible and forever changing because every facet of identity is not only dependent upon the formulating person, but also upon what others' perceptions are of the formulating individual (Martin & Nikayama, p. 162). With identity being partly dependent upon outsiders' views, along with the knowledge that many people still perpetuate racial stereotypes that separate Blacks and Whites, it can be inferred that biracial people are constantly balancing on a racial line when constructing racial identity. It may also be argued that a biracial identity experiences more transmutation than does a monoracial identity.

With the population's numbers continuing to climb, there is progression to move from a dying practice of defining and identifying a biracial person as either Black or White; the past 15 years have brought many changes to the way Black-White biracial individuals have been encouraged to identify on a national stage, therefore we must allow for further study of this particular group's formation of racial identity as it seems to be taking a shift. Biracial people are most commonly known for being affected by the social phenomenon of "passing" as described by James Davis as "rest(ing) on the one-drop rule and on folk beliefs about race and miscegenation, not on biological or historical fact" (1991, p. 1-6). While these Jim Crow birthed practices are still talked about in present day, it is likely we would see different patterns in a current study of Black-White biracial individuals. The idea of passing was one entangled with

and contracted from the idea of race, especially considering the historical rigidity of the terms Black and White.

Spanning from slavery through the Jim Crow era, the practice of “passing” was shown through the falsified narrative of *The Tragic Mulatto*. This character, first created by Lydia Maria Child, depicted a Black-White biracial person who experienced psychological trauma and strife, wandering aimlessly and ignorantly through life constantly confused about her racial identity. This idea was first introduced in Child’s book entitled *The Quadroons* (1842) and through the 1900s in films like *The Birth of a Nation* (1900), *Lost Boundaries* (1949), and *Showboat* (1951) (Pilgram, 2012). Many times the stories consisted of a biracial person, usually a woman, desiring to be entirely White and self-loathing when she finds that she has “negro blood”; the woman was usually passing and living life as a White person when she is found to be Black. At that time, this fictional character was born from white people’s hypersensitive fear of any interracial mixing. By placing the *Tragic Mulatto* in film and literature, she could be used as a precaution to any individuals who thought about stepping outside of cultural norms.

Although the narrative was not particularly true then and is even further from true now, *The Tragic Mulatto* as seen in literature and film was indeed the first visual depiction of a biracial person in the United States; obviously, directors and writers publicized this as an undesirable, lonely, deceitful life to have to live. It is without coincidence that the character was constantly shown struggling to form racial identity. It is doubtful that modern-day biracial people hold any similar feelings of self-hatred or illegitimacy based solely upon race, but all the same, they could experience this increased complexity when constructing a biracial identity. *The Tragic Mulatto* so openly exploited during the Jim Crow Era is no longer existent in the 21st

century; but in politics and entertainment, we can observe the modern construction of biracial identity.

After his election in 2008, President Obama was referred to as the 'First Black President'. In fact, many believe this sentiment was a mere attempt to personify the United States as a post-racial society (Nasser, 2010), although that is neither more or less desirable than a race-filled country, but is imagined to be far more maneuverable for the majority. In many ways, this title of the 'First Black President' could in fact be a direct symptom of his own racial identity; nonetheless, it raises questions about the formulation and inclusivity of his identity. As mentioned, many biracial people are constantly balancing Black and White identities between themselves and their observers. If the American people looked at President Obama and the majority thought him to be Black, then in this certain scenario, almost surely other people's identification of the President is just as or more important than the President's own identification of self. A biracial identity is more dependent upon phenotype than is a monoracial identity; one biracial individual could be classified into three different categories depending upon the observer's perception and experience.

Indeed, our own President must understand an aspect of society most others do not, or maybe our nation is not exactly post-racial at all; on the contrary, as a nation, perhaps we were built upon racial consciousness, therefore forever will be conscious of race, denying all along that we are, while still boxing people into categories. It seems counterprogressive. President Obama's racial identification is both intriguing and mystifying to some in the sense that if we are supposed moving past race, then why does he still identify as Black? And if he identifies as Black in the 21st century, other biracial people must identify as monoracial in certain situations

as well. Furthermore, studying the construction of biracial identity may provide information about the feelings on race and race relations in the United States.

Musician Aubrey Drake Graham's song "You & the 6" featured on his newest album *If You're Reading this, it's Too Late* (2015) states, "I used to get teased for being Black, and now I'm here and I'm not Black enough. Cause I'm not acting tough or making stories up bout where I'm actually from." Through the lyrics, Drake is discussing the contrast of his childhood growing up around mostly White and Jewish people, to his adulthood, living almost entirely in the predominantly Black community of hip-hop and rap. Most monoracial people will never have the opportunity to cross cohabitate as a member of two racial groups in this way, therefore they are neither able to understand the struggles, nor reap the benefits that might be presented to a biracial individual based upon their dual admittance into either group. To evaluate general identity construction in a Black-White biracial individual is similar to doing that of Black-monoracial or White-monoracial people; but Black and White people born in the United States are subject to a slightly different reality because of a varying appearance and perceptions of their unique existence during this impactful time in the present day. Inevitably, biracial people's identity then becomes intermingled with race as the two are almost inseparable for monoracial people alike because race does play a role in opportunity and situation. Although seminal writers have recognized these differences, there are increasingly important questions in modern day that have been left unanswered: what variables affect Black-White biracial identity construction and why is it more abstract?

Literature Review

Black, White, Other

Lise Funderburg is a pioneer in the discussion of racial identity specifically as it pertains to biracial individuals. Funderburg authored seminal works discussing biracial identity formulation; most recognizable is her book Black, White, Other in which she interviews 65 Black-White biracial people between January 1992 and January 1993 (Funderburg, 1994). Their interviews were conducted and the book was authored long before the 2000 census; and it seems that a gaping hole still exists in literature on the topic because of this rapid change in the United State's population in the past 15 years. As this work provides interesting antidotes and stories of biracial people from various backgrounds, born to an array of different hometowns, Funderburg focuses on only qualitative answers. The interviews spanned for hours, as she uses her questions to highlight factors in identity formation, such as family, education, religion, love and romance, neighborhood, and friends. With such a vast amount of biracial stories tailored into 300 pages, this book truly exemplifies the unique upbringings experienced by most biracial individuals.

Funderburg (1994) stated, "For the purposes of this book, racial identity is defined not by pseudoscientific measurements or by appearance, but how people choose to define themselves" (1994, p. 15). Her knowledge of racial identity construction and its many different components to receive an abundance of in depth, insightful answers. In this way, Funderburg absolutely succeeds in her purpose for writing the book, as she wanted biracial voices to seep through each page, soaking them with racial perplexities to provoke thoughtfulness in the reader. Black, White, Other is undoubtedly created to help the reader understand biracial identity, but Funderburg also wants the audience to grasp the concept of race and its interdependence with institutionalism in the United States. With a deeper understanding of racial formation, and an

increased Black-White biracial population, Funderburg's seminal research and writings can be modified to guide a more advanced investigation of certain variables in the formulation of racial identity.

Biracial identity development stages

When discussing biracial identities, it is difficult to determine how much information we actually know. It seems in the research, biracial identity development has been oversimplified and in many ways sensationalized. While many people could describe the phenotype of a 'mixed' person, it might still be difficult to speak to complexities of the racial development that goes beyond the physical attributes. Although identity is made up of many components, Intercultural Communication in Contexts (2010) understands the difference in majority, minority, and biracial identity as they all follow different stages, with majority and minority racial identity development looking far more similar than that of biracial individuals. While minority in the United States defines all races outside of White, for this study, minority's operational definition will be considered Black. (See Appendix A)

While a biracial individual's struggle for acceptance might manifest during adolescence years as this behavior is seen in most teens, there is no guarantee that her struggle will in fact subside thereafter. "Identity development is a complex process; not everyone experiences these phases in exactly the same way. Some people spend more time in one phase than do others; individuals may experience the phases in different ways, and not everyone reaches the final phase" (Martin, 2010, p. 173). With fewer and different stages to move through as a biracial individual, there is viability to the idea that these individuals might be more fluid when describing identity and possibly at risk of never truly reaching the last stage.

Education and racial identity

One of the most important institutions in the United States society is education. Charter and magnet schools aside, the largest population of children and adolescents (50.1 million) are being taught within the public school system funded by and evaluated by the United States government, zoned by the neighborhood or municipality in which a person resides (United States Department of Education, 2015). Socioeconomic status does affect where a family lives, therefore an argument can be made that ultimately a family's class and choices can affect the education its children receive.

With the existent school system, education can be somewhat subjective depending upon teachers' openness and expectations. For example, if there is a white female teacher in a predominantly 'Black' neighborhood teaching mostly Black children, she must have knowledge of the culture and be able to identify with them in order to cultivate relationships and be productive in the classroom. If she does not, she is not able to help them flourish within their identity, which causes confusion, rejection, and anger. Life in Duality: Biracial identity development (2014). Perkins talks to this issue of perception, misconception, projection, and construction of racial identity in the classroom setting. This study uses a historical perspective to lay the groundwork. Perkins (2014) discusses the misconception amongst educators about the racial identity of biracial individuals. Biracial children and adolescents may experience frustration when being identified in a way contrasting to their own belief of themselves (p. 213); teachers at racially-homogenous schools are more likely to group biracial children in with the majority in said school, therefore the need for duality in self can dilute a biracial person's desirable identity.

Hyman (2010) about biracial college students in her explanation as she stated, “Many biracial college students live their life in duality, understanding both their Black identity coupled with their White identity. This may present a challenge for some biracial students in higher education, given that the collegiate years are a primetime for self-discovery and identity development” (2014, p. 1). With this knowledge, it could be hypothesized teachers who mentor a biracial student through his or her education could ultimately have an effect on his or her racial identity; these effects are more impactful on a biracial person than a monoracial person constructing racial identity because many times, the school setting very well might be the first place in which a child cognitively discovers differences in identity compared to classmates. From this study, I can further study and assert the need for more education about the construction of racial identity and the presence of varied histories encompassing all heritages.

Family, ethnic-racial socialization, and racial identity

First-generation biracial individuals have a contrasting racial family structure than that of a monoracial person; upon birth, their existence is the very essence of integration. Annamaria Csizmadia, Rollins, and Kaneakua (2014) articulate the fragmented line walked by many biracial people in Ethnic Racial Socialization and Its Correlates in Families of Black-White Biracial Children. Using literature from Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, the studiers stated, “First generation Black-White biracial children are of particular interest given that they occupy a unique position in the U.S. racial hierarchy. They belong to two racial groups that have historically been at a great social distance and that view them very differently” (2014, p. 259). With a long-standing gap in the history of two races, there are questions concerning how an interracial family might operate on this social-constructed racial line drawn so deeply in the

sands of the past. Just as family is exponentially important in all other aspects of identity formulation, it is inevitable that this is inclusive of race.

Research from Racial Socialization of Biracial Youth: Maternal Messages and Approaches to Address Discrimination (2013) is used to explain ethnic-racial socialization as a way to “protect from and prepare Black-White biracial children for racism and discrimination and influence racial identity and identification” (p. 268). Through their research and findings, there was a correlation found between ethnic-racial socialization and healthy ethnic-racial identity formation. It can be said that if parents talk with their biracial children more about race, then the children will construct healthier biracial identities than if parents do not. In this particular sample, 80% of the 269 mothers of Black-White biracial children said they discussed race at least several times a year, while one third of these families actually discussed the subject of race several times a week (Rollins & Hunter, 2014, p. 266). With such a statistic, evidently most parents of biracial children inherently discuss the topic because of race’s relevancy within an interracial family unit. While it is encouraging to observe best practices being used by parents for healthier racial identity construction in their children, there is a lack of specification in topics and levels of effectiveness.

While there are more parents that help in the ethnic-racial socialization of their biracial child, one-fifth of the sample reported that they never have conversations about race with their children. Furthermore, it was also found that if parents identified children within the majority within just over a year of the mean age in the study, ethnic-racial socialization decreased to almost nonexistence in the household (Rollins & Hunter, p. 265). It has been observed that biracial children who discuss race are better socially adjusted and more confident in their identity, so by withholding these conversations, parents may be neglecting their child’s needs.

Age also seemed to be a variable; the older a parent was when the child was born, the less likely he or she will discuss race; a proposal can be made that older parents have experienced more racial tension, therefore they think it best to avoid the topic, and may not be educated on the benefits of discussion about race. Family is one of the closest, most preliminary relationships in this world, so undoubtedly family members play a huge role in a biracial individual's identity formation.

Religion and identity

Just as many other institutions within the United States, religion did not remain untainted through the history of racism. In Richard and Mildred Loving's first judgment against Virginia (1959) to gain the freedom of interracial marriage, Justice Leon M. Bazile ruled:

Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix" (American Civil Liberties Union, 1962).

As with many historical events, the wounds left by haunting words from figures like Justice Bazile have diminished in importance and have been left entirely forgotten by most. On the evening of June 17, 2015, it seemed these ignorant words bounding race, spirituality, and religion echoed in the mind of one tormented soul. Dylann Roof quietly integrated himself into a Wednesday night bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. Walking out, he coolly left nine brown bodies, dead on the church's floor, including a state senator Clementa Pinckney. Before Roof fired shots, he declared that it was his obligatory duty to kill these innocent churchgoers—he chillingly said, "I have to" before firing off the first round.

As much angst as the story of Charleston brings, reading about one of the three survivors Polly Sheppard might talk to the common belief held throughout most religions, be it a

predominantly Black, White, or Biracial congregation: “I believe he should have to think about this the rest of his life. He's got a long time, if he's healthy. I believe in repentance” (Chuck, 2015). Even after she saw Roof murder her 26-year old son, Sheppard still believes in the salvation of his killer. In most religions, the common denominator is salvation, forgiveness, and a life of eternity; religion has become more diverse and dynamic in the types of worship, the beliefs within a congregation, and openness to various cultures and races. Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is a historically predominantly Black church, but that did not stop the bible study group from including Roof upon his arrival. With an increase in diversity across the United States, many churches show progression in their views on interracial families and biracial people.

Samuel L. Perry extended his analysis stating, “Other studies report that interracial couple and families hoping to find religious communities that value ethno-cultural diversity often intentionally search out racially diverse congregation” (2013, p. 357). Interracial families might try to find the most diverse place for ethnic-socialization of their children in their spiritual upbringing. With more variation in race and culture within a congregation, the more likely it is that the populous is more accepting as a whole. Many of the interviewees in *Black, White, Other* did not feel comfortable within their congregation growing up; some said their feelings as a youth caused them to refrain from proclamation of any religious affiliation whatsoever (1994, p. 239-270). During the time of Funderburg’s interviews, there were less multiracial congregations, which meant less accepting church homes for biracial individuals. This information might lend itself to a hypothesis stating that since there is more variation in religions and congregations, biracial individuals might have a better time discovering their racial identity within a religious setting without outlying forces.

Research tells us that education, family, and religion can all be identified as correlates to the construction of racial identity. Each variable has been proven to have an affect on how an individual might racially identify. Without concrete causational research, there seems to be an uncertain amount of correlates that affect the construction of racial identity; education, family, and religion are the most prominent institutions in an individual's identity construction. Furthermore, other research tells us that biracial individuals do construct racial identity quite different than does their monoracial counterparts. The literature shows that minority and majority populations actually draw more similarity in construction of racial identity than do the biracial population. In literature some of the models and critical analysis merely evaluated monoracial identity construction. It can be said that the results of some research does not remain applicable when evaluating biracial identity construction, but can be used to decipher the variables proven as significant in the general process of racial identity construction. Thus I posit that education, family, and religion will have an affect on biracial individuals' racial identity construction. Thus, I posit below:

RQ: How does a biracial individual's education affect his or her racial identity?

RQ: How does a biracial individual's family affect his or her racial identity?

RQ: How does a biracial individual's religion affect his or her racial identity?

Methods/Results

Participants

The ten participants in my study are between the ages of 18 and 32; there were three male subjects and seven females. My sample was one of convenience as I used my contacts with Black-White biracial teammates, classmates, and peers to create a potential list of subjects for the study. I contacted those on the list to ask for their involvement in the actual study or to pass along the names of other people who might be interested. I was also able to secure some recruits and in the process, I gained more participants as well. I recognize being biracial also aided in the process of finding participants for such a study, as I am part of the demographic sample. I also thought that the study should be conducted and carried out by a Black-White Biracial individual, as it would skew responses if anyone of the minority or majority race was present during the time of the interviews.

With a wide variety of different people, I was able to gain insight upon a wide variety of different realities. Each participant seemed to have a unique story; all of them did in some way incorporate their racial identity at some point in time. While many participants recognized their religion as *Christian*, there were four who denoted no religious affiliation at all, and one in particular was *Muslim*, providing diversity in religion too. There were a variety of different responses when asked about annual household income. With such variety, it will be nearing impossible to extract any significant evidence about the demographic bivariates, making this feel much more like individual case studies. While this study might not provide overwhelming data in number form representing correlations between demographics and biracial identity construction, patterns amongst participants are still recognizable.

By conducting the study on campus at a small Midwest university, the majority of the sample size shares similar formal educational aspirations, as most are going to school to graduate with their undergraduate degree. A couple participants have higher levels of education, while most are still students completing their studies. I also interviewed one subject who was still in high school, which provided a different perspective as high school to college can cause quite the shift in idea, knowledge and mentality.

The strengths of my sample size include the variety in age, which gives a look into generational gaps and the change in ideas involving race. Although the interviews were done on a college campus in the Midwest, it provided the study with participants from different regions of the country, as they have traveled to come to college. There were subjects who have moved about the United States; one participant who grew up in California, and one person spent half of his life in the far North and the other half in the Deep South. With varied regions also came varied hometowns; some people grew up in large cities while other Black-White biracial participants grew up in rural towns.

Although it was not asked of the subjects, most divulged information about their family's racial make-up. Through the questionnaire and the interview, it seemed most people referred to their mother as being White-identified and their father as being Black-identified. Each subject either brought it up in stories or seemed to feel the need to inform; this could be true because of the pure nature of the study, but all the same, I found it interesting.

Procedure

To begin building my questionnaire to find how education, family, and religion affect biracial identity construction, I piloted my interview to me in tailoring the questions to better evaluate biracial identity construction. I conducted a taped interview with my brother, as I

would not be able to use him in my actual study because of obvious conflicts of interests. The entire interview took two hours and consisted of forty-four questions. With that being said, my brother wanted to be a part of the study; in conducting my pilot interview with him, he was able to discuss the topic of race with me, his sister, which he ensured was equally as rewarding for him. Additionally, we are comfortable enough with each other to go through a thorough debriefing process in which he was able to give me feedback and thoughts about the questions.

By taking part in the debriefing process, I was able to eliminate and add questions that were less or more important to the study. Our conversation was beneficial in my creation of the final questionnaire, because I evaluated the length and decreased it by more than half. In taking this necessary step, I made my survey much more user friendly. This interview proved most advantageous in the construction of my probing interview questions; as I was able to couple necessary quantitative questions with equally as important, more informative qualitative questions based upon my brother's interview.

Before passing IRB approval, I had to make more modifications to the initial study than first intended. During the earliest stages of my study, I planned to ask each subject over 40 questions. In decreasing the questions and revamping the procedure, my correlates became clearer. By adding further research at latter stages, I found family, education, and religion to be three of the most testable correlates to identity construction. In the United States, each of these institutions is heavily intertwined with race, therefore ultimately having an affect on racial identity construction. I also planned to videotape the subjects as they responded to the interview questions, as I wanted to show the vast physical variations of biracial identity, even within a small sample size. Some of my research actually found correlation between appearance and racial identity. While this seemed to be a good idea, I found it rather difficult to pass it by the

Institutional Review Board, as it would breach the subjects' confidentiality. Although I was disappointed by the final decision, it gave the subjects' a more open environment to discuss their experiences without feeling as vulnerable.

Timeframe

I scheduled an hour of time with each subject individually to start the interviewing process. I conducted the interviews during the months of October and November in the year of 2015. Nine out of the eleven subjects were interviewed in a study room at the library; this environment was pretty well secluded to ensure the subject's confidentiality and to create a more comfortable space. During each interview, I first talked briefly about my study; I introduced the release form, went over it, had them read it, and sign it (Appendix B). After this, I gave them a survey (Appendix C); the first page consisted of basic demographic questions, and the next couple of pages consisted of likert scale questions about education, family, and religion. Each of the three subjects was clearly and boldly labeled above each section of scale questions corresponding with said topic. After each participant answered all questions, I graded the survey with its corresponding instrument. During this time, I marked the necessary qualitative, interview-style questions (Appendix D) that followed up on each person's individual answers on each likert scale question.

Most subjects completed the questionnaire within five or ten minutes, and it only took 5 minutes for me to grade each. In grading the questionnaires, I saw patterns in the responses of certain questions, which caused me to probe almost every subject. For example, all but one subject answered that they strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, "In school, I was given adequate education on biracial*** identity and information/history about the minority group." Because many subjects' responses fell on one side of the scale, this data could be

considered significant. During the interview, I audio recorded the answers to the subjects' qualitative questions on *Audacity* to ensure quality and accuracy in the quotes. Along with recording the answers on an audio recording device, taking notes on each individual survey was also beneficial during the analysis. After each interview, I took an hour on average to transcribe the most important, intriguing quotes.

Racial identity, along with general identity formation consists of many different correlates; so I chose to study what literature says along with what I believed to be three of the most influential aspects in identity construction: education, family and religion. During the demographic section of the survey, subjects were asked to denote the three most influential aspects of identity construction. Listed below were nine different subtopics, including a category *other* where there was a space provided for varied responses. Upon evaluating questionnaires, all but one subject expressed that *parents* were influential in their identity construction. My study found that *siblings* to be the second most frequent response amongst subjects. Six subjects recognized that their education or schooling has been influential in their constructing of identity. Neither of the two results surprised me at all, as I was expecting the three most frequent answers would have to do with family, education or religion. *Religion*, as one of the categories listed, was only recognized by two subjects as having been pivotal in their identity construction; a more frequent response was *appearance*, as four subjects in the study documented that it was one of the three most influential aspects in their identity construction.

Limitation

The very nature of my study with the time allotted unfortunately only allowed me a small sample size, but with a small sample size, I was able to focus time and attention on each participant individually during their interviews. I would allow for more time to interview a

greater amount of subjects and to give more time for evaluation of each question. In the future, I can create a key for all qualitative answers in order to derive statistics from patterns seen within the group of biracial subjects' answers.

To continue a more productive study next time, I will need to survey more people around the country. Since the study was centered at a university in the Midwest, it would be great to talk with people from different regions of the country. It would also be good to evaluate the variable of subject's town size, which I do believe has an effect on biracial identity construction. In many ways, the survey tool is already established and merely needs refinement to be applied in the next study. I look forward to continuing this study as time will allow for more measurement and comparison in the fluidity of biracial individual's racial identity construction.

Results

In using the software SPSS, I was able to evaluate the correlations between variables.

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the subjects experiencing confusion about racial make up and feeling isolated in high school was $r=.809$, S.S., $P < .01$ level.

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the subjects having discussed racial make-up with their parents and feeling different than friends was $r=.581$, close to S.S., $P < .05$ level.

The ANOVA by the subjects' racial identity (either self-identified as Biracial or Black) and their confusion about racial make-up in the past was $F=8.710$, S.S, $P < .05$.

Analysis

I found significant patterns within the subjects' responses to support the assertion that family, education, and religion affect biracial identity; just how much each variable affects biracial identity and how interdependent each variable is to a certain racial identification is numerically unknown. One pattern throughout the subject's questionnaire was quite interesting

though; in interviewing ten biracial individuals, more than half racially identified as Black or African American. Even after explaining the study to each subject and emphasizing that all subjects were biracial or multicultural, still more than half of the participants identified as Black when asked to write their racial identity on the first page.

Although some Americans were confused by Obama's identifying as Black, it seems many other biracial people, even of the younger generation, still proclaim a Black racial identity. Although more than half of the subjects claimed a Black identity, none of the subjects identified as Caucasian or White. Upon first thought, the results seem concurrent with the ideology that fueled Jim Crow, which was the 'one-drop' rule. The regulations that were in place during Jim Crow are nonexistent though, so it can be inferred that the subjects' Black identification could be for different reason than lack of free expression.

In many places in the United States, Black-White Biracial people are usually still the minorities no matter where they go. Even in their family settings, Biracial individuals may still be a minority, especially if they are the first-generation. Subject 1 who identified as Black discussed her experience, "The majority of the church was Black, so they looked at me, as a mixed child, as White...Black people look at me as I am White and White people look at me as I am Black." Subject 1's feelings are not uncommon amongst Biracial individuals as they often feel like the *minority* no matter which group they are around. With that being said, Biracial individuals could perceive themselves a part of the *minority* as they never fit into the *majority*, even when they are amongst a group of Black people who are considered a *minority* within the United States. It seems that Biracial people do have a lens unattained by most in the United States of either the *majority* or *minority*; but when striving to compare self, it would make sense that Black-White Biracial people might identify with whom they see as the *minority* on a larger,

national scale; most likely, they believe their experiences to be more similar to that of the *minority* than that of the *majority*.

I did predict that some of the subjects would monoracially identify, but finding that seven out of ten subjects did indeed racially identify as Black was unexpected. Furthermore, I was surprised to find that how a subject identified self by denoting either a Black or Black-White Biracial identity (i.e. Biracial, mixed, Black and White) was significantly correlated to whether or not the said subject experienced confusion about their racial make-up. In the study, it was found that the only five subjects who agreed with the statement *In the past, I have experienced confusion about my racial make-up** indeed did identify as Black. More interesting is that all three subjects who did identify themselves as biracial, multiracial, or mixed also strongly disagreed with the previously stated phrase. With such significance in the data, especially correlated directly to the idea of racial identity, I compared my findings to the previously introduced model of biracial identity construction (Appendix A).

In the biracial identification model, there are certain phases that recognize confusion to be a primary, necessary aspect of healthy identity construction in multiracial people. While this model does not necessarily apply to every person within the biracial population, it is said that most individuals cycle through a stage of *sensing that they don't fit in anywhere*. The table also recognizes that biracial individuals usually travel through a phase in which they *may feel that they need to choose one race or another*. During this point, it could be imagined that confusion might arise within a biracial individual, but to my surprise, every subject that claimed a biracial identity also claimed they strongly disagreed with having felt confused about racial identity. In turn, subjects who agreed they did feel confusion about racial identity always identified as Black. This finding might uncover a reality about biracial people; in fact, it is possible that people who

have journeyed through more of the stages in claiming a Biracial identity might in fact identify as Black or something other than Biracial through the latter stages of identity construction. It seems counterintuitive but in fact, it is possible that the subjects who proclaimed a Black identity, as President Obama has, actually have a more healthy racial identity, giving them a more knowledge perception of race, which causes them to identify as Black.

The last stage for biracial individuals being self-acceptance and self-assertion—this table finely depicts the core difference in racial identity between that of a monoracial person and that of a biracial person. While one group is striving for integration, the other is vying for acceptance of others, while trying to find acceptance in self. It is necessary to apply this stage-specific biracial identity formation diagram when evaluating biracial individuals as opposed to applying a diagram depicting a more general explanation of racial identity. It can be inferred that biracial individuals journey through a more fluid formation of racial identity than do their monoracial counterparts. From my study in particular, it seemed that at least 60% of the subjects were certain and content within their racial identity. One subject stated, “My mom’s white and my dad’s black, but at some point, you learn how to balance and how to be both at some different times, so when I’m with my black friends, I can relate to that culture and when I’m with my white friends, I can relate to their culture.” Most other subjects echoed that their racial identity had been segregated in some senses, but that it had been equally as fulfilling and beneficial to have the unique perspective and experiences.

Interview Analysis

After transcribing key quotes from the interviews I had with ten subjects (Appendix E), I found patterns within their responses when asked what they would change about their biracial upbringing. Subject 5 explains, “I wouldn’t change anything. I think it’s almost the best of both

worlds. I kind of embrace that. I am not necessarily special, but I am different and I think that is kind of cool... I don't even think about it as race. I think about it as its own little thing." Subject 5 was not alone in this assertion as exactly half of the sample echoed that they would not change anything in their biracial upbringing. Most believed every aspect of their biracial experience has made them who they are. Even through the race-fueled bullying she endured in school, Subject 8 said, "It's made me the person I am today. It's made me strong mentally and emotionally...I honestly wouldn't change it for the world. I love being biracial, just having different heritage and ancestry to learn about. That makes me who I am." Even those who listed something they desired to change went onto explain the joy they have derived from so many facets of their Biracial upbringing.

Most subjects who desired a change in their upbringing spoke of craving more knowledge and education. Through my study, it was painfully obvious that the Biracial subjects felt that their education on Biracial identity and minority history was lacking in the school setting. While 80% of subjects denoted that they disagreed or strongly disagreed when evaluating the statement *In school, I was given adequate education on biracial*** identity and information/history about the minority group*, there were a couple of reasons as to why they felt this way. In some instances, subjects felt that Black history was either inaccurate or anecdotal in nature, while others believed that their educators discussed African American history and slavery at great length without mentioning anything about Biracial people.

Among the subjects who believed they were not exposed to enough Black history was a female who grew up in a school where she was the only Biracial or Black child. In her fifth grade class, she learned a very small amount about slavery and the Civil War; after completing the chapter and taking the test, her and her friends were comparing scores. After cross-

examining the tests, she sees the questions concerning slavery and Black history were omitted from her particular test. Subject 2 discusses this issue saying, “They were afraid it would offend me,” while recognizing, “...I think if I would have had more of an understanding of it, then I would have had better biracial identity.” In hindsight, this particular subject acknowledges how her lack of Black history could have affected her in creating a more healthy Biracial identity. With more education about her African American heritage, she might have felt become more equated with the idea of racial identity and what it means to be Biracial.

From these eight subjects, even those who felt they were given adequate education about Black history did not believe they were given adequate education about Biracial identity history. Most subjects alluded to the idea of “grand narrative” as talked about in *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*. “The grand narrative refers to the overarching, all-encompassing story of a nation or humankind in general. Because of the way it is built, this grand narrative organizes history into an understandable story that leads to some “truths” over other possible conclusions” (p. 130). It seemed most subjects in the study were discussing their discontentment with the grand narrative so eloquently and neatly told around the United States, as a nation with years of rigid, impermeable color lines.

During at least two interviews, subjects suggested implementing lessons and discussions about the reality of Biracial existence in the United States. *Intercultural Communication in Contexts* (2012) explains, “In place of the grand narrative are revised and restored histories that previously were suppressed, hidden, or erased. The cultural movements making this shift possible are empowering to the cultural identities involved. Recovering various histories is necessary to rethinking what some cultural identities mean” (p. 132). By bringing more attention to the true narrative of Biracial history, people from monoracial groups might be more

understanding as racial mixing has existed in this country as long as the country has existed itself. For example, many children and adolescents are taught about Thomas Jefferson; most classes will surely discuss his presidency, and many classes will sift through and analyze his writings. All the same, he is an important man in the history of the United States, but some of the most important aspects of his life go unwritten in history books. By implementing lessons about his decades-old relationship with Sally Hemmings, his slave, Biracial students will obtain a better grasp on the ambiguity of race; as race is understood as nothing more than a constantly failing social construct to separate two groups of people, individuals might see its virtual irrelevance in modern-day society.

Since biracial people construct racial identity differently than others and it is proven that biracial people do not feel they have been given adequate education about their identity, we can further study if and how their specific education is interdependent to their acceptance and assertion of a biracial identity. Curriculum taught from school to school can differ quite drastically, meaning one's education might have additional, more deeply seeded effects on his or her biracial identity formation. As a country, the United States continues to accept the grand narrative of the majority as the undeniable truth of historical events, but of course, there are always two sides to every story. Martin and Nikayama explain, "Nonmainstream histories sometimes stand alongside the grand narrative, but sometimes they challenge the grand narrative...as they offer different views on the grand narrative and, therefore, have been suppressed or marginalized in our understanding of the past" (2010, p. 135).

Rape against Black women sparked the procreation of biracial babies during slave times; although it is a dark truth, it helps to explain the existence of the one-drop rule, Jim Crow laws, and other institutionalizations of racism. In many ways, the roots of and history behind racial

mixing has long been denied, simplified, and untaught. During the interview, one subject explained her discontentment with her education:

In the school systems I feel like there is a perceived notion, even with historical figures, that they were of one race or ethnicity and that is it. Like there was no intermarrying or any kind of experience like that. Because I feel like even when I was older, you are not really clear about the Sally Hemmings of the world. You assume that all slaves were African. None of them were the product of the masters procreating with slaves or any of these kinds of things, so everybody is like everything is white or black. All of the presidents are white, all of the historical figures are white...all of these people of color anecdotally die and then the white people, you spend a whole bunch of time, even if they are corrupt people like Nixon. You don't find your place in that. There is just not enough education in relation to minority figures.

Through my study, I found that overall, education in history needs to better encompass Biracial identities in order to create more healthy Biracial identities.

Although many subjects value education (most being in college or college graduates), most did discuss how what they learned from their family was far more important to their identity construction than was what they learned in a school setting. Subject 3 discusses his unique experience, "I was raised by my grandparents and they are both Black, and I came from a really proud household and they always taught me to be proud of your skin color and not let anybody else deter you and let you think a different way, because you know your history. Educate yourself about it." Although Subject 3 lived with his grandparents, 6 other subjects expressed that they discussed their racial identity with their parents as well. This evidence seems to coincide with other findings within the literature that assert many Biracial families discuss racial identity quite frequently.

Ethnic and Racial Socialization is said to be of importance in a Biracial child's racial identity construction, so in many ways, it seems like the better part of the study's sample showed a strong agreement toward the statement *My parents talked to me about racial make-up* as I*

was growing up. However, the amount of disagreement I found on this answer does concur with the findings in “Racial Socialization of Biracial Youth: Maternal Messages and Approaches to Address Discrimination” (2013) as one-fifth of the subjects did not talk with parents about racial make-up. Although this only discusses 20% of the Biracial population, it does still affect individuals within these circumstances, as it has been shown that discussing race gives more confidence to Biracial individuals. Most subjects did echo the sentiments of Subject 3 discussing that a certain pride about their racial identity has been taught and handed down by their family, in particular.

Many times, our family helps in develop our religious identity as well, and with a lack of multicultural congregations, especially in certain areas of the United States, it can be difficult to find a comfortable place for Biracial children to worship. Through my study, I saw a pattern of the terms *Black church* and *White church*. Obviously, in their very essence, they echo a time of segregation; a time well before people had the ability and right to cohabitate and worship together. Subject 3 articulates his frustration with this reality in religious settings, “I feel like today we have black churches, white churches...I feel like we are not doing a good job of bringing everybody together in God’s name.” Only one subject, who grew up in Chicago, attested to having been a part of a multicultural congregation while growing up, and voiced her difficulty with finding an equally as diverse congregation in her current location of Southwest Missouri.

A couple of subjects discussed the differences they personally experienced in these deemed *Black churches* and *White churches*. While these subjects spoke of the differences within churches of varying races, there was something magical about these experiences: **THEY HAD THEM**. In most monoracial people’s religious identity, they are never given the freedom

or opportunity to have these experiences, and through this study, it is evident that religious freedom is independent of racial identity. As a whole, Biracial individuals who worship in multiracial settings usually feel more comfortable than they would otherwise when attending a monoracial church, but with these experiences have come pretty thoughts and feelings that the subjects felt were both enriching and necessary based upon their specific locations.

Race as a historic institution created to separate and divide cannot be discounted or removed from the face of the United States' society; as a nation, we cannot simply "remove labels" or live in a "raceless" society, because it seems the very essence of and existence of this country has been built on its unstable ideology. In many ways, it seems the way society thinks about and treats race is a direct reflection of how Biracial people are creating their racial identity. History has created race, but it seems that multicultural families on their own accord are redefining race and its powerful, falsified constraints on people's individual minds. In many ways Biracial people are powerful in their voice because they have mutual inclusivity to the two most dominant populations in the United States; they are both *minority* and *majority*.

Since most families with Biracial children are in fact racially and ethnically socializing them, the educational system must continue. There must be a focus on the idea of race and how it was constructed; through these lessons about the ambiguities of race on a historic scale, we can hold conversations about the mutual inclusivity of race when applied to Biracial identity, since race in its very nature is but mere colors to denote one's phenotype. Education can use Biracial identities and narratives within history to not only help Biracial children enjoy their fluidity in race, but to reject the concreteness of race in monoracial people's minds as well. Through these integration-specific lessons and conversations using history, there may be a

change in ideology enough so that we see shift in the existing segregation pledging other institutions, like religion.

In 2013, National Geographic unveiled their version of what an American is going to appear like in 2050. The generated image is of a beautiful, green-eyed, curly, blond-haired, olive-skinned female, who would appear to be the description associated with a Black-White biracial individual. Along with her image, there were more than 25 different images of other mixed race people from White and Latino to Black and Asian, but I see the gallery image of this stunning young woman as no coincidence; just as it is no coincidence that Funderburg (2013) wrote an additive for National Geographic entitled *The Changing Face of America: We've become a country where race is no longer black and white*. Funderburg (2013) so eloquently describes the nuances of race and the ideology that grows such confusion:

It's a step toward fixing a categorization system that, paradoxically, is both erroneous (since geneticists have demonstrated that race is biologically not a reality) and essential (since living with race and racism is). The tracking of race is used both to enforce antidiscrimination laws and to identify health issues specific to certain populations.

Although it can be more comfortable to tiptoe around the topic of race, it is essential to acknowledge its force in individual identity, especially as we move from an era of Black or White to Black and White. As we progress into this new age, more and more individuals will be building biracial identities, so it is essentially to continue studying this topic in relation to the institution of race in the United States.

Funderburg concludes *The Changing Face of America: We've become a country where race is no longer black and white* with this thought:

It's also, for the rest of us, an opportunity. If we can't slot people into familiar categories, perhaps we'll be forced to reconsider existing definitions of race and identity, presumptions about who is us and who is them. Perhaps we'll all end up less parsimonious about who we feel connected to as we increasingly come across people whose faces seem to speak that resounding line from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself":

I am large, I contain multitudes.”

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Key Quotes

Subject 1: This subject grew up in a large city on the west coast. She was involved in athletics and thinks herself having experienced many cultures.

- Education 3: *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree when asked if you were given adequate education about biracial identity and minority history. Why did you feel this way? In hindsight, do you believe the quality of education you received about biracial identity affected your own identity in any way?)*

“Well, in school we never really learned about anything biracial. We just learned obviously about the slaves and African Americans.”

“Pretty much all I have learned about being biracial was from my family and not from my schooling.”

- Family 1: *You answered that you disagree or strong disagree that you never felt like you were different from your friends growing up, so why did you feel like you were different than your friends growing up?*
- “Growing up in the different neighborhoods and playing sports. I played on a majority white soccer team; their families were rich, and my family is middle class so it was really different. Obviously, I stood out a lot, so it was a little uncomfortable.”

- Family 2: *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that both of your parents identified you as biracial to others. Can you explain how your parents did identify you? Did you feel comfortable with this identification?*

“Well it is kind of confusing because my dad is a black African American, and he identified me as black. My mom took it as an issue that I was not only black and she was Italian. She wanted to make it clear that I wasn’t only one race.”

- Religious 2: *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that you worshipped in a diverse congregation while growing up. During this time, what was the majority race in your congregation? In turn do you believe your religion or the members of that congregation helped in forming your racial identity?*

“Well, my family is not really religious or anything like that. I do go to church with my grandma and she is African American, so I ended up going to a black church...so I was around a lot of black people, but I went when I was younger maybe until the age of seven and after I got older, I stopped going”

“It affected me a little bit. I was confused when I was younger, but obviously now, I know and I identify myself as biracial.”

“It might have hurt it (racial identity construction) a little bit because the majority of the church was black so they looked at me, as a mixed child, as white...black people look at me as I am white and white people look at me as I am black”

- Conclusion: *If there was anything you could change in your (bi)racial*** upbringing, what would it be and why? Also, what have you found advantageous about being biracial, if anything?*

“I would have changed schooling wise...learning more about biracial and not just strictly one race, so I could have kind of got a feel, and not just from obviously listening to my family, because you know kids tend to drift from their family, and want to know from other people, so some schooling would have helped a lot.”

“Growing up, you just learn... I hung out with a lot of white kids, I hung out with a lot of black kids. Played sports with different races, so that was a big part of it”

“You have to learn to identify yourself as you. You should not change for anybody, but you do stand out when you are one of the only biracial kids (on the team).”

“I do love being biracial because it is a whole other world I think. You just have two different families...my black side, my Italian side—I do so many different things with each of them.”

“Then the people who are really fascinated with it like ‘what race are you’ and I do love answering that; it is really cool. It could be negative the way people look at it, but the way I was brought up, it is definitely positive.”

Subject 2: Grew up in a small town in Missouri and has received a biracial scholarship. Does identify as biracial, but notices that her freckles and features are unique to the expected biracial phenotype.

- Education 1: *How were your interactions with the teacher different from others? Do you have an inference as to why you were treated differently? Did anyone else in your life at this point in time treat you differently for the same reasons as did your teachers?*

“Whenever we would discuss things like slavery, my teachers were conflicted about talking to me and asking me questions about it and having me answer things about it.

“There was one time in fifth grade when I actually got a different test than everybody else because they were afraid it would offend me.

“I am the only biracial/black anything in my school.”

- Education 3:

“I did not receive correct information about what had happened and just as far as black history. We never studied anything about black history or anything like that in my school. It was very strict, to the book, never veered from it and I was never given an opportunity to discover things like that.”

“I don’t think it affected my identity, but I think if I would have had more of an understanding of it, then I would have had better biracial identity”

“My parents did a good job of making me understand that I am biracial and that’s okay.”

- Family 2:

“My parents really never had to explain to others that I was biracial. Everyone knows. I live in a very small town and everyone knows you know my mom married my dad and we are all biracial. It is just everyone knows that we are a mixed family, so my parents never had to explain that to anyone. “
- Religious 2:

“When I was younger, we used to go to church with my ant. We went to a church in a bigger town, where it was more diverse and there more people around. Whenever I was home, I go to church with my family like my mom and dad—we were the only type of any other color in the congregation, other than white. It’s just different. I think I have grown to accept that I am going to be different than most people most of the time, which does not bother me or anything like that. It’s just odd to think about, but it is just how it is.
- Conclusion:

“(I would change) the education—more education about the black side of me. I understand I am black and I know I am black. I don’t think I actually know things about what I am, other than what I was taught in school, which was the bare minimum. I would change that”

“Honestly, I just really like it because I am different. There are a lot of opportunities I have been able to have. There are more scholarships and more opportunities for me... and I just really like that I am given those opportunities.

Subject 3: This subject grew up in one of the larger towns in Arkansas; spending a lot of time with his dad’s parents (African American family), although upon recent discovery, found his real father was actually Black and Puerto Rican.

- Education 1:

“I am from Arkansas...I felt like teachers would usually pick on (to answer questions) the white kids pretty much, instead of the minorities in the class”

“They did not care as much for the minority as much as they did the majority of the class.”

“I think because they didn’t think the minorities would really do much after high school, because we had such a high drop out rates and it was usually the minorities that was dropping out, so they really focused more on the kids who they thought would progress to go onto college.”

“I just always felt like I was a minority when I was in the class”
- Education 3:

“Every time I am learning about a piece of history, I am learning about white history.”

“I am half white, but I would love to learn about black history and always felt like I was learning about white history.

“I know we live in America, but my people descended here too just like white people did, so I feel like instead of learning more about white history, maybe half of the book should be about slavery and what happened to the black people instead of just about white people.”

“No, because I was raised by my grandparents and they are both black, and I came from a really proud household and they always taught me to be proud of your skin color and not let anybody else deter you and let you think a different way, because you know your history. Educate yourself about it.

- Education 4: *You answered that you agree or strongly agree that a previous or current boss did or does in fact treat you differently than others within your workplace. How does he or she show this? Why do you infer that you are treated differently?*

“If you are at a place with less minority, you are definitely more of the minority and it is going to show.”

- Family 1:

“I hung out a lot of mixed people like me and black people and...I felt like I was different because I was only hanging out with black people. I wish I could have hung out with more white people but I felt like they didn't want to hang out with me because maybe they were not used to it.”

“I always felt like there was just some separation there. And me being half white, growing up, that was kind of weird. I'm like ‘Well, I'm half white and if they're white, how come they can't just see me as a white person?’”

“As I got older, I started to realize, it's not about our ethnicity; it's really just about this color of our skin.”

- Family 3: *You answered that you agree or strongly agree that you have experienced confusion about your racial make-up in the past. What caused this confusion about racial make-up?*

“I would say about three years ago, I found out that my father was not my biological father, so me and my mom got together and she told me about. I went and found my biological father and asked him about my ethnicity and that is where the confusion was at, really.”

“Another reason why I would be confused about that is just because I always thought since I was black and white growing up, I was both of those things together, but really I believe that mixed people are unique just like any other race, where we have our own race.”

- Religion 1:

“I do feel like in God’s eyes everybody is equal and I feel like everybody tried to bring everybody up equal and not talk about race...but it is still there in a way too. “

“I feel like today we have black churches, white churches...I feel like we are not doing a good job of bringing everybody together in God’s name.”

- Religion 2:

“When I was little, I went to church with my mom. We went to a white church and when I got older, I stayed with my grandparents. We went to a black church.”

- Conclusion:

“I wish that people could see skin as just color and realize that we’re all people at the end of the day and we all come from different circumstances and backgrounds.”

“I would say understanding both sides of my race.”

“I feel like I had to understand myself...no one else could have brought me up but me.”

Subject 4: This subject grew up right in southwest Missouri. Even living in a medium sized town, he and his parents experienced immense racism that affected his overall perception of people in his environment.

- Education 1: *How were your interactions with the teacher different from others? Do you have an inference as to why you were treated differently? Did anyone else in your life at this point in time treat you differently for the same reasons as did your teachers?*

“Coming from a small town, most classes, I was the only other race in there. They didn’t really bother with helping me.

“I was kind of left in the dark.”

“The subjects were garbage, really and based more upon the European theory.”

“Because of my looks or race, I was automatically the token black kid. That was cool to everybody. Kinda like an extraterrestrial, almost.”

- Education 3:

“There was zero biracial history or anything geared towards that and to me, to keep it all the way one hundred, the black history, well world history really is garbage in school books. It’s inaccurate. To pick one thing out, the slaves were called workers in half of the history books.”

- Family 2:

“It really was not even talked about really until some problems arose.”

“Me and my mom’s views never really matched up at all. She was too busy trying to tell me what she thought I was. I just found myself. I chose my own path, but there really was no talk of that.”

“My mom would make things uncomfortable when she tried to tell me what I was.”

- Mom and Dad probe:

“They met at work, and out the gate, my mom’s dad wasn’t with it...on my dad’s side, his mom wasn’t really with it either.”

“I’m the youngest of five...when she got pregnant with my brother, when they decided to purchase a house, my dad couldn’t go look at it with her. She had to go view it, because that neighborhood in general that they bought in and it is not a rich neighborhood by far...it was a worse deal than just having black folks in the neighborhood. It was a black man who was going to move in with a white woman...my dad didn’t get to go. He bought the house without looking at it.

“When they got married, it took them a long while to find a preacher to do the ceremony and it was a small wedding. The guy that finally did it he told them he didn’t agree with it but it was kind of part of his job.”

“Further on down, there was always a problem with neighbors. If me and my brother’s ball went over in the yard, the cops were called...just little silly stuff like that.”

- Religious 2:

“Well, my family is not really religious or anything like that. I do go to church with my grandma and she is African American, so I ended up going to a black church...so I was around a lot of black people, but I went when I was younger maybe until the age of seven and after I got older, I stopped going”

- Conclusion:

“I would hit the books. The real history books you don’t find in schools. I would not worry about what any race thought about me.”

“With the white folks, I was too black. With some of the black folks, I was too white. And when I was younger, that made me search for respect.”

“When people ask me, I say I’m yellow.”

Subject 5: This subject discusses her upbringing in a medium sized town in Oklahoma.

- Education 3:

“We have this topic in our history classes, and I even thought about learning about Native American history, which it is totally ignored.”

“Recognizing in college compared to high school, I feel it is totally ignored in lower level education when its clearly important and it affects everybody and everyone’s social class. I don’t know why its ignored, but I feel it is. Being in an upper level history class in college, we have lately examined the constitution. We are literally thinking about what these words mean...”

“I am more confused as to why people shy away from it and why it is left ignored.”

- Religion 2:

“When I was younger, it would be a small church where everybody knows everybody and my mom literally would be one out of two white people in the whole church.”

“No one has made me feel like ‘oh you don’t belong here’...”

- Conclusion:

“I wouldn’t change anything. I think its almost the best of both worlds...I kind of embrace that. I am not necessarily special, but I am different and I think that is kind of cool.”

“I don’t even think about it as race; I think about it as its own little thing.”

“Get in the mix of people’s conversation...it kind of confuses people, so I think that is kind of interesting their take on it and their views on it...I just think it is funny what people come up with, like what they say.”

Subject 6: Having had no contact with her black father for nearly twenty years, this subject discusses growing up in a very small town in Oklahoma with her mother.

- Family 1:

“I grew up in the small town because I stuck out like a sore thumb because I was the black girl, or the “mixed girl’.”

“When we would go out, we would always get looks.”

- Family 2:

“I was obviously raised by white people...she (my mom) would make it clear that she is black and white, but she knows her white side better.”

“I was raised by white people, so that’s what I knew best.”

- Conclusion:

“I think one thing that bothers most mixed people is being asked what are you mixed people. We are not an animal...I think that is the most ridiculous question.”

“I think it is rude. I don’t think that should be the first question someone asks you. Instead of hi how are you, it is oh ‘are you mixed’ and ‘what are you mixed with’?”

Subject 7: A male who lived in the north, then moved to the Deep South with his white mother after having experienced shifts in the family dynamic.

- Education 3:

“We learned about everything in other cultures, but they never simply talked about being biracial.”

“I am already living as a biracial, so I know everything about myself and my family.”

- Family 1:

“My mom’s white and my dad’s black, but at some point, you learn how to balance and how to be both at some different times, so when I’m with my black friends, I can relate to that culture and when I’m with my white friends, I can relate to their culture.”

- Religion 2:

“I went to some white churches...but as long as I can remember, the church I used to always go to when I was little was mostly a black church. Even my mom, she’s white but she been in three marriages, and all three marriages were with black guys.”

- Conclusion:

“My parents made me, god made me, so there is nothing I can change or will change. It’s just me. Everyone has their specific place in the world, so I am not gonna question anything. I am going to go with the flow. I like being me.”

“I guess girls. It gives good social life.”

Subject 8: Having experienced Chicago and New Orleans, this subject discusses her experiences growing up in a predominantly black neighborhood

- Education 3:

“Because they don’t really talk about anything like that; they just talk about strictly Caucasian, or strictly African American. They don’t talk about just being biracial.”

“Not really because I had a strong support system...my parents would educated me on where they came from and where my families come from., so growing up with them, I didn’t need education from the school setting.”

“One thing I guess I would suggest is going back to slavery where you would have a Caucasian master having interaction with an African female slave. They don’t really talk about that and where basically our biracial heritage and identity started from, so just going back to that time and

seeing how it has progressed up until now. We need to start it from the beginning.”

- Family 3:

“Being confused came from friends and from school, and when I was younger, I would always get bullied like are you white, are you black? I was like No I am just a mixture of both...like this is just me, this is just who I am and some people just couldn’t accept it.”

“Where I am from, the neighborhood that I grew up in is predominantly African American, so because I was pretty much the lightest in the class or around the neighborhood, people would just always ask.”

- Religion 2:

“When I was younger, I would always go to church with my grandparents...we went to a church where it was complete diverse...you have blacks, whites, Asian, Hispanics, so I was around people who were all different shades of colors or different ethnic backgrounds...now I am not in the congregation as much as I should be, so that is why I put neutral for that.”

- Conclusion:

“I would say nothing just because through the good and the bad, you know being bullied when I was younger...it’s made me the person I am today. It’s made me strong mentally and emotionally.”

“Being both Polish and African American, I fit in with both segregated groups, so I have a lot of white friends and I can hang out with them and relate to them in certain aspects...and I also have black friends where I can hang out with them on a different day or even together. We can all hang out and relate to each other...to help them understand more.”

“I honestly wouldn’t change it for the world. I love being biracial, just having different heritage and ancestry to learn about. That makes me who I am.”

Subject 9: A female subject, who has moved around the country and the world growing up. The subject’s grandfather at one point held membership in the Ku Klux Klan in Kentucky.

- Education 1: *How were your interactions with the teacher different from others? Do you have an inference as to why you were treated differently? Did anyone else in your life at this point in time treat you differently for the same reasons as did your teachers?*

“When I was older, I do remember when I first started preparing for standardized tests, there were like ‘oh make sure you check the African American box because then you will get scholarship.’ I always used to be like how do you know I am African American? I mean why do you think I should? You are not telling other people what they should mark on their test.”

“My brother is a lot darker complected than I, so he experienced things a little more different than I... when we lived in California, I think he spent two whole months in ELS, before they sent a notice home to my mom and she was like he is not Hispanic... why is he taking all of his classes in Spanish?”

“My mom tried to be proactive about what was going on in school with us and how our teachers were interacting with us.”

“Especially when I was in high school, in Lexington, there was a teacher who was not fond of me at all... She accused me of cheating on a day I was absent... these other students don't seem to be picked on at all and I don't have a bad attitude... My sister once told me (my half sister) you just don't know that they are treating you that way because of the way you look.”

- Education 2: *You answered that you agree or strongly agree when asked if you felt isolated during high school. How did you feel isolated?*

“Because when I moved to Kentucky, a lot of the people--they had been cliqued up... The African American community didn't really welcome me in. Then because of the racial differences in Lexington, the Caucasian community didn't really welcome me, so I felt extremely isolated—part of it was because I didn't have those connections but then there was the additional factor that there weren't too many African Americans and Caucasians that had their own multicultural groups either, so I had to try to fit in where I could fit.

“When I was in Memphis, I didn't really have much of a choice, because they had had a race riot at that high school years before I moved there, so you associated with white people, but you didn't hang out with them if you had a *drop*. People had their guns in the back of their pickup trucks on the school property.”

- Education 3:

“In the school systems I feel like there is a perceived notion, even with historical figures, that they were of one race or ethnicity and that is it. Like there was no intermarrying or any kind of experience like that. Because I feel like even when I was older, you are not really clear about the Sally Hemmings of the world. You assume that all slaves were African. None of them were the product of the masters procreating with slaves or any of these kinds of things, so everybody is like everything is white or black. All of the presidents are white, all of the historical figures are white... all of these people of color anecdotally die and then the white people, you spend a whole bunch of time, even if they are corrupt people like Nixon. You don't find your place in that. There is just not enough education in relation to minority figures.”

- Education 4:

“Then there are people who perceived I was a foreigner because I am wearing hijab. They say, ‘Well you know you probably realized this too when you moved to this country’ and I was like ‘No, that didn’t really happen to me because I was born in this country.’” You know or asking things in an interview process like you know, ‘Do you have United States citizenship,’ these kinds of things, which I feel are not standard in a job interview.

- Family 2:

“But I do know every time my dad has changed a job, he would only put pictures of me and my brother, and not my mom until after he worked there for a full year, because he was afraid of what the precautions of being aware that his wife was white. Part of the reason he left the military is because he couldn’t get promoted. People found out that he was married to my mom and that is how he got stationed in Alaska. They stationed my mom and dad as far apart as they possibly could.”

- Family 3:

“I think that’s sort of the nature of being biracial...I started to show signs of a skin disorder...When you take on the dynamic that affects your appearance...Right when I turned about ten, I stopped retaining pigment, so my skin wasn’t darker. I just stayed a vanilla-y type color and my brother is much darker complected than I. Then it was like I’m not my mother’s color and I am not dark like my dad or my brother. Before we looked like twins at some point...it was just a weird thing to me in middle school.”

- Religion 1:

“For so much of my life, it was very manila. The population is primarily white because my mom raised us protestant. It wasn’t until I was in middle school, transitioning into high school when I was like I’m more inclined to African Americans because that’s who was accepting me at that point. I want to join a black church and get baptized even though being protestant, I already did that, but I wanted to do it again so that I could feel more connected to my church...and then my mom started attending the church I got baptized in. She also said she felt connected to it...my mom was the only white person there.”

“When I became Muslim, one of the hardest things for me to digest was this feeling of being rejected solely based upon my race. Like surely ‘as a convert, you don’t know anything. Not only that--like ‘you are American. Not even White, Black, but you are America’...then ‘you’re African American, like who is going to marry you? We all know how African American people are.’”

- Religion 2:

“I’d have to say white, because on the military instillations, I was going to the protestant service, which was primarily white. It wasn’t until I was in middle school that a friend invited me to come to one of the Baptist services on base...I was like ‘Woah, this is where all the Black people

are!’ ...Even the songs were different, and like this was my first real experience with that... That was part of that push towards me joining a Black church because I was like the religious experience could be more engaging physically and emotionally, so that is ultimately what shifted me in that direction.”

“Although, before when I was the minority but I wasn’t really paying attention to being the minority in the protestant church, I didn’t think too much about it, but definitely being that fish out of water, being in a church where everyone is African American, then it was like a part of me felt neglected.”

“This is when I started realizing that I hadn’t been around black people that much... because the church I went to was white and the only black person who was in my life on a regular basis was my dad, so it was like I don’t even know what it means to be African American in this context, because people might say I’m African American, but when I meet other African Americans and they go to a different type of church than me, they wear different types of clothes than me, their hair’s different from me, sometimes they even talk differently than me, like listen to different music than I listen to, then I am like...*pause*... THERE IS SOMETHING MORE HAPPENING HERE... then that started that first real self-evaluation of ‘Who am I?’ you know? Like what does this mean to be Biracial or African American.”

- Conclusion:

“It would be spending more time with both sides of my family, because ultimately defining who I am in relationship with who I am related to. My grandmother lived in a trailer park and everybody was White there. I saw those people, and my dad’s side of the family and all my cousin on that side... whom I don’t really have a connection with now to this day...”

“My sister who didn’t live with us growing up, who’s fully African American, has like four kids, and three baby daddies... that are just so far removed from my frame of reference... These really limited interactions and observations made these people so ‘other’ to me.”

“Because I think if I had a better perspective or more exposure, they wouldn’t have seemed so stranger to me.”

“Honestly, I really thank my mom for this, but striving hard to make us the best human beings possible, but also making us self aware. I know she probably has her own baggage dealing with race based upon her own personal upbringing, but knowing that she wanted us to treat people equally and fairly whatever their skin complexion might be or background was so important, rich, poor, whatever... it wasn’t like superiority was ever acceptable in our home.”

“I feel like that has given me and my brother the ability to maneuver in different situations and environments a little bit more comfortably...and not trying to put ourselves in that box either, because my brother is very eclectic in his music choices and clothing choices, and I would say the same for me on a certain level because even comparing myself to other Muslims, right, I’m not wearing a Jilbab which is traditional worn by Arab women, I’m not wearing a _____ Indo Pakistan women wear and some people who convert to Islam have that identity crisis where whatever population is predominant there like if it is Pakistanis then they start dressing like the Pakistanis...they sort of lose the essence of representation of their own cultural upbringing which has nothing to do with Islam.”

Subject 10: This high school subject was adopted into a white family, but seems very aware of her biracial identity.

- Education 1:

“I feel like I guess they give me a little bit more attention than the other ones because maybe they see me as not as smart as the other kids, because the stereotypes that Blacks or African Americans are not as smart as whites .”

“All the students in my school see the color of my skin and just kind of treat me differently...like the teachers basically they think that maybe I am not as smart as all the other kids.”

- Education 3:

“I haven’t had a lot but I have had enough to continue on through education. I would like to know a little bit more about my race, but it might not actually happen, so I guess I am fine with the knowledge that I have.”

- Family 1

“I never really had a lot of friends while I was growing up...I was basically the loner in my school because all the kids kind of ignored me...I believe that was mostly because of racial identity.”

- Family 2:

“Because they didn’t really know exactly who my father was. We still don’t know who he is and my mom, my sister, and I always joke around saying that maybe we had different dads because we don’t look alike and we don’t act the same. Unlike my brother and I...who have the same type of problems...we have similar looks too.”

- Family 3:

“Well mostly because I have never known who my father was, so I don’t know what race he was, so I was confused about exactly what race I was.”

“I knew that my birth mother was part African American and that is what I went on and I said basically, well that must mean I am part African American.”

“I am still a little bit confused, but I don’t know. I guess I am just okay with not knowing, fully.”

- Conclusion:

“I wouldn’t really change anything. If I would change something about me, I would probably change my skin color, just a little darker, or my hair...my hair isn’t really like normal Whites and my hair is not like normal African American. Mine is just kind of wavy and poofy.”

“My mom always tells me I am beautiful as I am and I don’t need to change anything about myself.”

“I feel unique. And I feel like when I do something great (like giving my senior speech earlier this month), I have the ability to comprehend things a little more than most of the kids in the class do.

The Construction of Racial Identity

My name is Kristen Hanna and I am conducting a study about the formation of biracial identities. To participate in the study, you must be a Black-White Biracial individual over 18 years of age.

As a participant, you will take a survey in which all information will be kept confidential. After taking the survey, you will be asked qualitative, interview questions. Your individual interview will be recorded on a voice recorder device. The entire process should take no more than an hour.

Subjects' quotes might be extracted and used during my final presentation as anecdotal evidence. While presenting, I will follow every step possible in order to keep the subjects' identity confidential. The voice records will be kept in a locked folder on my personal laptop. When the surveys and voice records are no longer needed for this study in the future, I will destroy the files.

Since this study discusses the topic of race, I recognize that there might be moments of acute discomfort. As the interviewer, I will also give subjects time for inquiries concluding the interviews. During the debriefing process, you can convey any discomfort during the study. By giving your consent, you are acknowledging that your participation in this study is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time, for any reason.

Interviewee's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer's Signature: _____

Date: _____

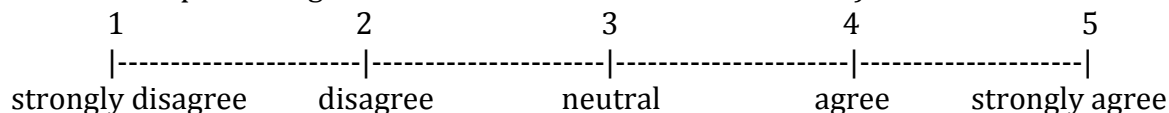
My senior thesis advisor is Ree Wells-Lewis. She can be contacted at Wells-R@mssu.edu for more information. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any answers given during your interview, please contact me at 314.494.5240 or email hannak001@mymail.mssu.edu.

If you experienced any unresolved discomfort, please contact Missouri Southern's on campus Advising, Counseling and Testing Services (ACTS) at [417-625-9324](tel:417-625-9324).

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

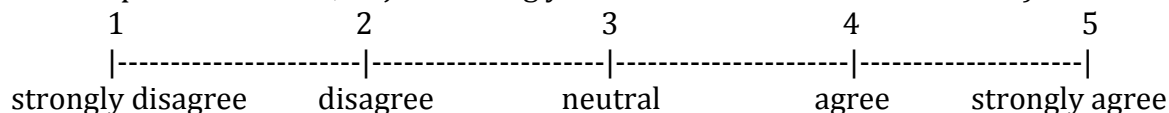
Education and occupation

My teachers interacted with me differently than others** in the class setting. (For example I was given more or less attention than others)



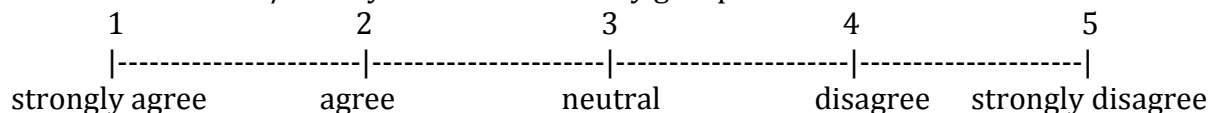
(If you answered with agree or strongly agree, refer to Education 1)

I felt isolated in my high school setting because of my race/ethnicity. (For example spent time alone, or just finding yourself to be different than others)



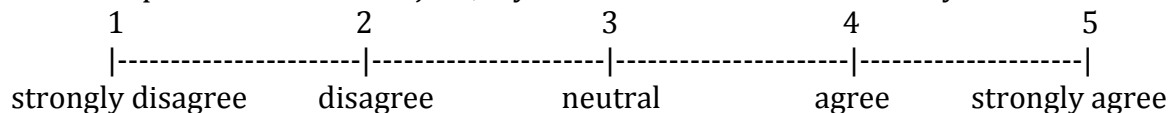
(If you answered with agree or strongly agree, refer to Education 2)

In school, I was given adequate education on biracial*** identity and information/history about the minority group?



(If answered with disagree or strongly disagree, refer to Education 3).

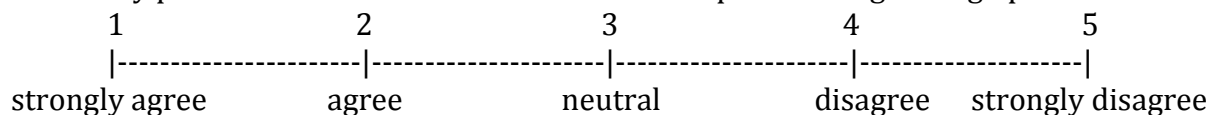
In previous or current jobs, my boss has treated me differently than others**.



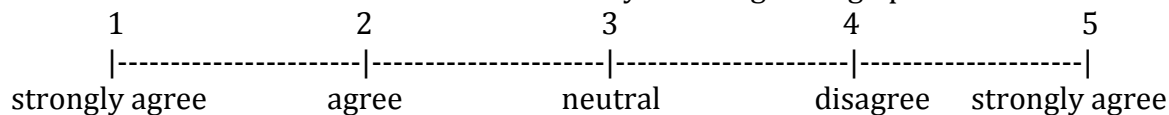
(If answered with agree or strongly agree, refer to Education 4)

Family/friends

My parents talked to me about racial make-up* as I was growing up.



I never felt like I was different from my friends growing up.



Racial identity*: A socially constructed system of classifying individuals according to phenotypic characteristics that are genetically determined but not always consistent

Others** : Those who do not appear like you.

Biracial***: Person with one Black/African American identified parent and one White/Caucasian identified parent.

Diverse****: Showing a great deal of variety

(If answered with disagree or strongly disagree, refer to Family 1)

My mother and father identified me as biracial*** to others**.

1	2	3	4	5
----- ----- ----- -----				
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly agree

(If answered with disagree or strongly disagree, refer to Family 2)

In the past, I have experienced confusion about my racial make-up*.

1	2	3	4	5
----- ----- ----- -----				
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

(If answered with agree or strongly agree, refer to Family 3)

Religion:

In my spiritual upbringing, everybody was equal.

1	2	3	4	5
----- ----- ----- -----				
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

(If answered with disagree or strongly disagree, refer to Religion 1)

I worshipped in a diverse**** congregation while growing up.

1	2	3	4	5
----- ----- ----- -----				
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

(If answered with disagree or strongly disagree, refer to Religion 2)

In the congregation I worship in now, the members are more diverse**** than when I was younger.

1	2	3	4	5
----- ----- ----- -----				
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Racial identity*: A socially constructed system of classifying individuals according to phenotypic characteristics that are genetically determined but not always consistent

Others** : Those who do not appear like you.

Biracial***: Person with one Black/African American identified parent and one White/Caucasian identified parent.

Diverse****: Showing a great deal of variety

Education/Occupation Probes:

1. *You answered that you agree or strongly agree when asked if teachers interacted with you differently than others in the class setting. How were your interactions with the teacher different from others? Do you have an inference as to why you were treated differently? Did anyone else in your life at this point in time treat you differently for the same reasons as did your teachers?*
2. *You answered that you agree or strongly agree when asked if you felt isolated during high school. How did you feel isolated?*
3. *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree when asked if you were given adequate education about biracial identity and minority history. Why did you feel this way? In hindsight, do you believe the quality of education you received about biracial identity affected your own identity in any way? (might ask to give examples of what could have been changed in curriculum to encompass more biracial and minority identities)*
4. *You answered that you agree or strongly agree that a previous or current boss did or does in fact treat you differently than others within your workplace. How does he or she show this? Why do you infer that you are treated differently?*

Family Probes:

1. *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that you never felt like you were different from your friends growing up, so why did you feel like you were different than your friends growing up?*
2. *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that both of your parents identified you as biracial to others. Can you explain how your parents did identify you? Did you feel comfortable with this identification?*
3. *You answered that you agree or strongly agree that you have experienced confusion about your racial make-up in the past. What caused this confusion about racial make-up?*

Religious Probes:

1. *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that everybody in your spiritual upbringing was equal. What groups did you find that were not considered equal? Why were they not considered equal?*
2. *You answered that you disagree or strongly disagree that you worshipped in a diverse congregation while growing up. During this time, what was the majority race in your congregation? In turn do you believe your religion or the members of that congregation helped in forming your racial identity?*

In conclusion:

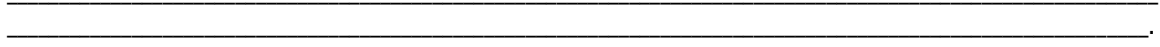
If there was anything I could change in my (bi)racial*** upbringing, it would be _____

Racial identity*: A socially constructed system of classifying individuals according to phenotypic characteristics that are genetically determined but not always consistent

Others** : Those who do not appear like you.

Biracial***: Person with one Black/African American identified parent and one White/Caucasian identified parent.

Diverse****: Showing a great deal of variety



Racial identity*: A socially constructed system of classifying individuals according to phenotypic characteristics that are genetically determined but not always consistent

Others** : Those who do not appear like you.

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Diverse****: Showing a great deal of variety

TABLE 5-2 MAJORITY, MINORITY, AND BIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT STAGES

Minority	Majority	★ Biracial
<p>1. Unexamined Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of exploration of ethnicity • Acceptance of majority group values • Positive attitudes toward the majority group • Lack of interest in issues of ethnicity 	<p>1. Unexamined Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of exploration of ethnicity • Acceptance of majority group values • Positive attitudes toward the majority group • Lack of interest in issues of ethnicity 	<p>1. May cycle through 3 stages of identity development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of differences and resulting dissonance • Awareness that they are different from other children • Sense that they don't fit in anywhere
<p>2. Conformity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalization of dominant group norms; desire for assimilation into this group • Negative attitudes toward themselves and their groups until an experience causes them to question the dominant culture attitudes 	<p>2. Acceptance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalization of a racist ideology (passive or active acceptance) • The key point is that individuals are not aware that they have been programmed to accept this worldview. 	<p>2. Struggle for acceptance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May feel that they need to choose one race or another
<p>3. Resistance and Separatism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing awareness that not all dominant values are beneficial to minorities • Often triggered by negative events • Blanket endorsement of one's group's values and attitudes • Rejection of dominant group values and norms 	<p>3. Resistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving from blaming minority members for their situations and beginning to blame their own dominant group 	<p>3. Self-acceptance and self-assertion</p>
<p>4. Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal outcome of identity development—achieved identity • Strong sense of their own group identity and an appreciation for other cultural groups 	<p>4. Redefinition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonacceptance of society's definition of white • Able to see positive aspects of being white • Becoming comfortable with being in dominant group 	
	<p>5. Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal outcome of identity development—achieved identity • Strong sense of their own group identity and an appreciation for other cultural groups 	