

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF  
BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY  
CHERLY GARY-FURDGE, B.S., M.S.

DENTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER 2013

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my son, Marvin Maurice Furdge, II. Pooh Bear, mommy loves you. Seeing your smile made writing so much easier.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would never have been able to finish this dissertation without the grace of God, guidance from my committee, support from the staff at North Central Texas College, help from friends, the love and support from my family, and those who participated in this study.

I thank God for giving me the grace to get through this journey. Without Him leading me, guiding me, and giving me strength, I never would have made it. I really appreciate God providing me with the support I needed to complete this process. As I acknowledge God, I am reminded of Philippians 1:6, "*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Chair, Dr. Phillip Yang. Thank you for being willing to serve as my chair. Thank you for your excellent guidance, care, and patience. You helped to set and keep timelines which made it easier to stay on track. To Dr. Kizuwanda Grant, thank you for planting the seed in my mind to apply for graduate school. You not only planted the seed but also gave me unlimited support throughout this process. Dr. Grant, you made things that appeared difficult, very easy. Thank you for everything. Dr. Katie Rose, thank you for helping me set the foundation for this study. Words cannot express how grateful I am to you for your wisdom, guidance, and understanding.

You make research fun! Dr. Linda Marshall, thank you for the words of encouragement, suggestions, and guidance. You have a way of making things that appear bad, look good. Thank you for being calming and encouraging. I thank all of you for serving on my committee and seeing me through this process.

Special thanks to Dr. Larry LeFlore, who saw something that I did not see. Without your insight and wisdom, this study would not have existed. I have always been told, "Words spoken at the right time could change a person's life." Thank you for planting the seed that made this study possible. To President Dr. Eddie Hadlock, Vice President Dr. G. Brent Wallace, and Dean Marjorie Archer, thank you for being so supportive and understanding. Without your support and understanding, this process would have been very difficult. Dr. Wallace, thank you for providing guidance whenever I needed it. You were always available and willing to answer any questions I had. To the faculty and staff at North Central Texas College, thank you. I am really grateful to work with people who are not just my colleagues, but my family. Patsy Wilson, thank you. Words cannot express how much I appreciate your support. From the first day you found out I was in graduate school, you made me aware that you were there for me. Even though you retired from NCTC, you did not retire from the process of helping me get through this. I am forever grateful.

It is hard to mention everyone who showed me love and support during this time. Thank you to friends and family who were there when I needed them.

Whether it was through words of encouragement, prayer, or suggestions, I really appreciate it. Special thanks to Mrs. Lillian Hollins, my high school English teacher, who encouraged me to go to college. Thank you for looking at a little girl who was trying to find her way and guiding her in the right direction. You and Mr. Hollins always treated me like I was your child and encouraged me to be all I can be. Thank you! Giovanni Dortch, for the countless times you met with me to study or to just talk. Thank you for being a great study partner.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my loving husband, Marvin Maurice Furdge. Words are not enough to express my appreciation to you. Without your love, support, understanding and sacrifice there is no way I would have made it. Your presence, in not only this process, but also in my life, is invaluable. I thank God for you and all that you are to me and our family. I love you more than words can express. To my parents, Robert and Doris Gary, I love you and appreciate all the support you have given and continue to give me. You are great parents and without you, none of this would have been possible. To my siblings, (Laverne, Randy and the late Robert Gary), thank you for taking care of me throughout my education career. I love you guys.

To all of the participants, thank you for sacrificing your time to participate in this study. Without you this study would not be complete.

**This process has made this scripture alive to me:**

*Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me".*

## ABSTRACT

### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

CHERLY GARY-FURDGE

DECEMBER 2013

This study examines how black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity and how black-white parents of mixed-race children help their children with developing their racial identity. For this study, racial identity development is the process by which one selects or identifies his/her racial category. Three research questions are explored: (1) How do black-white interracial couples assist their children with developing their racial identities? (2) How do children born to black-white parents develop their racial identities? (3) What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children?

This study included 36 participants: 12 biracial children who were raised by their biological parents and 12 black-white interracial couples who conceived a child together. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect data about how the parents assisted the children with developing their racial identity, how the children developed their racial identity, and what challenges are encountered by these children.

The data collected for this study provide answers to all of the three research questions. The parent participants used four strategies to assist their children with their racial identity development: educating them about their culture, the “one drop rule”, using their race to benefit them, and “see no race and hear no race.” The adult children in this study chose either black or biracial as their racial identities because of their experiences, but none of them chose white as their racial identity. The adult children participants also reported challenges they experienced, including being rejected by family members, the object of prejudiced in school, and being made to feel invisible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vii
 Chapters	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Research Problem .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	6
Researcher's Position in Research .....	7
Structure of the Dissertation .....	8
Delimitations .....	9
Limitations .....	9
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	11
Paradigm and Methodological Framework .....	11
Phenomenology .....	12
Historical Context .....	13
Roles of Black-White Couples in Their Mixed Race Children	
Racial Identity Development .....	17
The Racial Identity Development of Black-White Mixed-Race	
Children .....	20
Challenges Faced by Mixed-Race Children .....	26
Conclusion .....	29
III. DATA AND METHODS .....	31
Data and Data Collection Procedures .....	31
Participants .....	35
Participants Protection .....	36



Demographic Information for Couples .....	37
Demographic Information for Mixed-Race Children.....	38
Methods of Data Analysis.....	39
 IV. PARENTAL STRATEGIES: LET’S SEE WHAT WORKS BEST .....	 41
Mommy and Daddy, What Color Am I? .....	43
How Do We Help Them? .....	49
Education Is Important.....	50
Don’t Forget the “One Drop Rule”.....	53
God Is Your Foundation but Do What Benefits You.....	56
See No Race, and Hear No Race.....	61
What Did the Children Say? .....	62
Summary .....	65
 V. RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN.....	  68
I Am Biracial .....	69
I Am Black .....	73
Summary .....	79
 VI. CHALLENGES FACED BY BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN .....	  82
Rejected by the Family .....	82
Prejudice in School.....	86
I Am Invisible.....	88
Summary.....	89
 VII. CONCLUSION .....	 92
Summary of the Findings.....	92
Strategies Used By Parents.....	92
Racial Identity Development for Children.....	95
Challenges Facing Black-White Mixed-Race Children.....	96
Implications of the Findings for Research.....	98
Implications for Social Practice and Policy .....	103
Directions for Future Research.....	106
Conclusion.....	108
 REFERENCES.....	 109

## APPENDICES

A. Interview Guide for Couples.....	114
B. Interview Guide for Adult Children.....	120
C. Demographics of Couples.....	126
D. Demographics of Adult Children .....	130
E. IRB Approval .....	124

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to Cameron and Wycoff (1998), race is a socially constructed classification system that has historically served as a tool to explain three things: human diversity, justify exploitation, and advance privileged groups. Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha (2011) define identity as a phenomenological experience of coming to understand oneself. The contemporary process of racial identity development for children born to black-white parents appears to be different from the process in the past. In the United States, the “one drop rule” that designated persons with a traceable amount of black or other minority blood as black or other minority had played a major role in determining the racial identity of mixed-race children (Sherman 1988). Mixed-race children and their parents had little room to choose their racial identities.

The Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 annulled the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924 and made the one-drop rule unconstitutional (Emens 2010). Since then, the impact of the one-drop rule has declined, but lingered on in American society. Nevertheless, today mixed-race individuals have more freedom to choose their racial identities, and parents have more freedom to help their children choose their racial identity. Strict policies that

force parents to assume a racial identity for their children no longer exist.

Although “other,” “other race,” or “some other race” has been included in the United States Census since 1970 for mixed race-people, this category has not had much impact on the process of racial identity development for mixed-race children. Even though the law has stepped away from interfering with the process of racial identification, how black-white mixed-race children choose their racial identity and how their parents help their mixed-race children develop their racial identities have remained significant challenges for them.

The racial identification of black-white mixed-race children is an important issue to study because of the many challenges children in this population and their parents face. The challenges faced by mixed-race children may often go unnoticed. As people observe mixed-race children, the focus may be solely on their looks rather than possible challenges associated with their race. Wright (1998) found that mixed-race children began to experience racial challenges as early as pre-school. The author found that pre-school children’s attitudes towards other races begin as their relatives, friends and others who are close to them show negative or positive attitudes or behaviors toward people of other races. Comments such as, “Beware of black people” and “Beware of white people” instill fear in children about the black and white races at an early age (Wright 1998: 37). From comments that seem so simple, children began to treat other races in a negative manner. Wright found that as children of mixed race begin to hear the

comments, they began to see their race as a bad thing. Young children, because of their cognitive and emotional immaturity, are predisposed to pick up negative values and internalize them. Banks and Rompf (1973) found that black-white mixed-race children face challenges based on how they have been taught to interpret the black race and the white race. Because of the assumption of a generalized negative self-concept of the black race, they found that children will show preferences for the white identity and for white playmates over black playmates. Banks and Rompf (1973, 777) also explained this process caused some mixed-race children to feel depressed, to have a general syndrome of passivity, and to feel fearful about their self-concept. Without proper development of their identity, black-white mixed-race children could develop emotional problems that affect them throughout adulthood. In brief, the identity of mixed-race children affects them socially and mentally.

According to Wilson (1987), children who have one white parent and one black parent are bound to suffer from divided loyalty. Because of the fact the children in this category belong to both races, there may be a conflict in developing their identity. The author found that to avoid this conflict, children must choose to be black or white or they will forever be racked between the two (p. 1). But how do they decide which race to identify themselves with? Is this something their parents assist them with or do they come to the conclusion on their own?

Race has always played a major role in social interaction in the United States. Consequently, it is sometimes vital that an individual has a racial identity. Before 2000, a black-white mixed-race couple had no alternative but to choose either black or white as their child's race. Similarly, children born to parents of the black and white race had to choose either black or white. Currently, individuals who fit those categories can identify themselves as either black or white on paperwork. Because of this change, the United States 2000 Census reported that one in forty Americans were registered as belonging to two or more racial groups (Gallagher 2009: 94). The author further stated that many sociologists think this ratio could soar by 2050 (p. 94).

Ironically, there is a level of discomfort associated with black-white mixed-race parents and their children's racial identities. According to Korgen (1998), children who are viewed as biracial may be frustrated in their efforts to fit into a recognized category in the United States. Cooley's (1902) "looking glass self" reflected Cooley's idea that a person achieves a sense of self by how others see him/her (Cooley and Schubert 1998: 22). Many mixed-race people may see themselves as all white or all black. Because race is enmeshed in people's impression of others, this perception could prove disconcerting to both mixed-race individuals and the general public. As reviewed below, there are some studies of how black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity (e.g., Conkin 2004; Harris and Sims 2002; Michaels 1994; Rockquemore and Brunsma

2002; Rosato 1998; Roth 2005), but the research on this subject may not provide the whole picture. In particular, there is a lack of theorization and a lack of integration of the different perspectives on the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children. Furthermore, there is little research on how black-white parents assist their mixed-race children in developing their racial identity. Because of the importance of this topic and the insufficiency or lack of research on it, this dissertation seeks to fill these gaps in the literature.

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to examine how black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identities and how black-white parents of mixed-race children help their children with developing their racial identities. For this research, racial *Identity* refers to identification with a particular racial category. The *racial identity development process* is the process in which one selects or identifies his/her racial category. *Black-white parents* are parents of one black and one white, either male or female, who are married and raise their biological child(ren) together. *Interracial couple* refers to a couple with two or more racial backgrounds. In this study, an interracial couple is a couple with black and white backgrounds. *Black-white mixed-race child* is a child whose birth parents are one white and one black.

The racial categories currently recognized by the United States government include White, Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian,

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or some other race. The “some other race” category is for those who do not fit in the previous categories or are mixed with more than one race.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do black-white mixed-race couples assist their children with developing their racial identity? (2) How do children born to black-white parents develop their racial identity? (3) What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children?

The population of interest for this study is black-white married couples who have biological child(ren) together. Choosing married couples provides an opportunity to gather information from both parents and to see how or if they work together to assist their child(ren) with their racial identity development. Restricting the race to black and white allows the researcher to focus on this particular population of interest and makes the project more manageable.

Adult children with one black and one white parent are also the population of interest for this study. Studying this group affords an opportunity to gather rich data of their experiences from childhood to adulthood.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This proposed study is significant because the findings can increase understanding of the dynamic process of racial identification among black-white mixed-race children and the role of their black-white parents in this process. It



may also assist in the articulation of new theories of racial identity development among mixed-race children.

The results of this study may allow for the development of programs that will assist parents with helping their children develop their identity so they will have an understanding of the social significance attached to their race. The findings may also help parents understand the many challenges they may experience because of their decision to marry outside of their race. Interracial couples need to become more aware that struggles in racial identity development still exist, and they should also be aware of the discrimination their children may face in society.

The results of this study may provide information that will allow professionals working with children and families to assist the children of mixed-race parents in gaining knowledge on how some people in society view them. With this knowledge, mixed-race children may function better in schools and can make better emotional decisions. This information combined may be very important with helping the couples and their children develop their racial identity to deal with societal racial pressures. These results may also assist schools and other social organizations that interact with mixed-race children. Perhaps, this study may present helpful information not only to black-white couples, but also to all interracial couples.

## RESEARCHER'S POSITION IN RESEARCH

It is important for me to identify my position in this research study. I am a black woman who grew up in Mississippi. Historically, Mississippi was known for a lot of racial tension. The idea of marriage between a black and a white person was at worst illegal but also socially unacceptable. While I am not in a mixed-race marriage myself, I find this topic intriguing due to being aware of challenges faced by mixed-race people. Observing the issues that have come up with mixed-race friends and family has always provoked my interest in understanding their life experiences. Most people examine this issue from a layman's perspective but the opportunity to research this topic will afford me a more informed perspective and perhaps the ability to assist those living this experience.

## STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature that addresses the roles of black-white interracial couples in the racial identity development of their children, the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children, and challenges facing these mixed-race children. Chapter 3 describes the data and methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 presents findings to answer the first research question, "How do black-white parents assist their children with developing their racial identity?" Chapter 5 presents findings to answer the

second research question, “How do children born to black-white parents develop their racial identities?” Chapter 6 presents the findings to answer the third research question, “What are some of the challenges experienced by children born to black-white parents?” Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the key findings, discusses implications of the findings, and points to the directions for future research.

## DELIMITATIONS

The population of interest for this study were black-white married couples who had given birth and are parenting a child(ren) together. Choosing married couples provided an opportunity to gather information from both parents and to see how or if they were working together to assist their child(ren) with their racial identity development. Restricting the race to black and white allowed the researcher to focus on a particular sample of the population. It may be implied that people of the same race have similar values and share similar experiences. Not including other races increases the chance of finding a consensus among the participants.

Adult children with one white and one black parent were also the population sample of interest for this study. Participants must have been between the ages of 18 and 35 to avoid barriers in obtaining consent.

## LIMITATIONS

Basic research seeks knowledge as an end in itself and to discover the truth (Patton 224). Some limitations of the data should be acknowledged. One limitation has to do with geographic location. The sample reflects the experiences of people in southern states, which may be different from the experiences of those who live in other regions.

Age is another limitation. Participants in this study were ages 18-35. Thus, the data in this study does not represent the experiences of those younger than 18 or older than 35. A further study will be needed to examine those age groups.

Finally, although this study is about racial identity development, it does not reflect identity development for all mixed-race people, only those mixed with black-white. Because of these limitations, readers should be mindful that the findings of this study do not reflect the entire United States population and cannot be generalized to the experiences of all interracial couples and all mixed-race children, but they reflect the experiences of the participants in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How the racial identification process takes place is the question of this current research study. The issue of identity development for children born to black-white parents must be examined to understand their lived experiences and how they fit into the culture of the United States. The racial identification process of children born to black-white parents has changed in contemporary society compared to the historical record.

#### PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the researcher's first priorities is to position oneself in the context of the research and provide a paradigm with which to frame the study. This is done by explaining the methodological framework guiding this research study. The methodological framework focuses the researcher's philosophy about how knowledge and reality forms (Bogden and Biklen 2003). The reality of race is socially constructed. For example, this could mean that the race of a biracial person is preconceived by society as black. It does not matter if the person is mixed with another race. By the mere fact that he or she has some black blood, society may assume the person is black. Harris (2013) used the word "Pigmentocracy" to describe this process. He found that "the mighty drop" of black blood was powerful enough to control generations of persons legally

classified as black who might otherwise have been classified as white or who might have passed for white.

The current research study focuses on how black-white mixed-raced couples help their children develop a racial identity. It also examines how black-white mixed race children developed their racial identity on their own. To understand the identity decisions of the participants, the researcher examined constructed realities of mixed-race couples and biracial children to determine how they made decisions about racial identity. The researcher could not ignore nor separate the social factors that contribute to the construction of the participants' reality regarding their racial identity. The qualitative methodology that fits this perspective is phenomenology.

### *Phenomenology*

Patton (2002) found phenomenology is an empirical research tradition designed to answer questions about thinking and learning. The author stated in phenomenographic research, the researcher chooses to study how people experience a given phenomenon but not to study a given phenomenon. This current research study is not focused solely on racial identity but on the lived experiences of black-white couples and how their children developed their racial identity.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated that the various phenomena of everyday life fall under a limited number of shared constructs. In other words, in qualitative

research the meaning of participants' lived experiences can be revealed or defined by a limited number of constructs. In this current study, the phenomenon examined is racial identity development, which can be categorized as a particular construct. The participants are twelve black-white mixed race couples who are married and gave birth to children, and twelve black-white mixed race children who were raised by their birth parents.

The work of Patton, and Denzin and Lincoln support the researcher's choice of methods and procedures for this study, which align with phenomenology. The selection of participants, creation of the interview guide, all data collection procedures, and data analysis fit the phenomenological approach.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Slavery in the United States was limited primarily to people of African descent. According to Yang (2000) in the colony of Virginia, in 1662, the race of a child whose father was white and whose mother was black was designated black. Although cohabitation between blacks and whites was illegal, it still occurred. In 1862 the Emancipation Proclamation legally freed slaves, however, it did nothing to address issues related race, or to the social standing of freed slaves. The civil war was fought between 1861 and 1865, is incorrectly thought to have been about racial issues or improving the lives of slaves. In reality, it was about states' rights and the rights of the south to continue to own slaves as property.

Historically, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 required that a racial description of every person be recorded at birth. This law divided society into only two classifications: white and colored. It defined race by the “one drop rule”, defining as colored, persons with any African blood (Sherman, 1988). The one drop rule states a person with as little as one drop of black blood was to be considered black. The purpose of this rule was to discourage integration of black and white races and stigmatize children mixed with black and white blood. “This stigmatization continued throughout the South during the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s with Jim Crow laws and other written and unwritten rules that required separate educational institutions, water fountains, seating on public transportation, and bathroom facilities for black and white citizens, to name a few. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s desegregated these institutions and practices, but racial tensions and discrimination continued to exist.”

In contemporary society, public policy seeks to address race in an inclusive way by having more racial categories on government documents. However, historical policies continue to have an influence on the interpretation of race and treatment of black-white individuals. As stated by Thernstrom (2000), “The United States is the only country in the world in which a white mother can have a black child but a black mother cannot have a white child” (pg. 3). Hollinger (2005) further explains, though Jim Crow is dead, its legacy lives on in current racial classification practices. Due to the impact of society’s perception of



who is white or black, the racial identity development of black- white mixed-race continues to be affected.

Historically, it was illegal for whites and blacks to marry each other. Therefore, if the couple produced a child, the racial identity of the child was an issue. During this time, black women were forced to have sex with white men. If a child was conceived, the woman was forbidden to tell who the father was. In most cases, the child would remain with the mother who afforded them the opportunity to develop the identity associated with their environment. There was no social pressure associated with the child's identity. Due to the "one drop rule" it was automatically assumed he or she was black. Although the rule is no longer legally enforced, it still has an impact on society's perception of who should be black or white. As society changed, interracial marriages between blacks and whites have become more acceptable but challenges for the children still exist, even before their birth.

The platform for these challenges is set by those who do not wish to see people marry outside of their race. In 1958, Mildred and Richard Loving did not believe they broke the law when they decided to get married (Weir 2012).

Richard (white) and Mildred (black) did not know it was illegal for them to marry. During this time, Washington D.C. and 15 other states had laws on the book that made it illegal for black-white couples to get married. The couple was arrested and sentenced to a year in prison that would be suspended if they left

Washington, D.C. and moved to Virginia. Their case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court. In 1967, the court struck down laws against interracial marriages (Weir 2012).

Although the law was changed, people's perception of interracial marriages and their children did not. For example, in October 2009, a Louisiana judge refused to marry a black-white couple because of his concerns for the children the couple might have. Judge Bardwell concluded that most of black society does not readily accept offspring of such relationships, and neither does white society. "There is a problem with both groups accepting a child from such a marriage," Bardwell said. "I think those children suffer and I won't help put them through it" (Huffington Post 2009). Judge Bardwell's reaction assumed that children of black-white couples face difficulties that could affect their identity development. The judge was asked to change his practice or step down from his position. He chose to step down, a decision that may have appeared to express a bias to the black community. His opinion presupposed difficulties with societal acceptance of their mixed-race heritage.

Recently, Joe Rickey Hundley of Idaho was charged with assaulting a 19-month-old black-white mixed-race child on a Delta flight. Because the little boy was crying, Hundley slapped the child in the face with an open hand. After slapping the child, he told the mother to, "Shut that Nigger baby up." Though the victim is a young child, this situation is an example of how the issues of race still

exist in contemporary society. Mr. Hundley's actions can be viewed as hatred toward black-white mixed-race children. This case exhibits that even in 2013 there are individuals who have a negative perception of black-white mixed-race children. In a situation clearly unrelated to racial issues, Mr. Hundley's reaction to the child was purely based on his perception of the race of the child.

As evidence by the history of the United States, the idea that race is socially constructed may have the strongest impact on identity development of mixed-race children. Parents may raise their child to take on the behavior and mannerisms of a particular race but due to societal influences those behaviors may disappear. Due to the possibility of this impact, a review of current research is needed. This literature review is organized in terms of the three research questions of this study pertinent to the roles of black-white couples in helping their mixed-race children through the process of racial identity development, the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children, and the challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children.

#### ROLES OF BLACK-WHITE COUPLES IN THEIR MIXED-RACE CHILDREN'S RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

If research on how black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity is inadequate, then research on how black-white parents help their mixed-race children develop their racial identity is even thinner. Hill and Thomas (2000) probably provide the most comprehensive information on this issue. Hill

and Thomas (2000) identified three types of strategies used by white-black couples to help their children develop their racial identity: blocking strategy, transforming strategy, and generating strategy. The blocking strategy is used to block or deflect constraining narratives others try to impose on them. Those using this strategy remain free or block themselves from narratives that are oppressive or inconsistent with one's self-identification. The transforming strategy is used to take a constraining narrative and convert it into an empowering identity. Those using this strategy mask their relationship when interacting with others but watch their reactions when their spouse is introduced. The generating strategy is not a direct reaction or response to any specific encounter with constraining narratives, but would develop independently as a mean of constructing empowering identities.

Of the three strategies, the blocking strategy is most helpful for black-white mixed-race couples to help their children develop their racial identity. Hill and Thomas (2000) found that as couples worked to suppress their feelings and experiences, present and past, of racial discrimination, it was easier to work towards their own identity. Their research also concluded that, within biracial marriages, identity development was harder for women than for men because women tended to care more about the feelings of their families and friends.

Hill and Thomas (2000) provide great insight into the strategies used by interracial couples. However, the strategies still do not fully address how the

couples develop their identity, which could affect how their mixed-race children develop their identity. Suppressing experiences of the past and present (the blocking strategy) is a step towards developing their identity, but it does not address how suppressed feelings are replaced. The author did address that the process of suppressing feelings was harder for men than for women but did not address additional steps the women might have taken to succeed with this process. As for the transforming and generating strategies, the authors seemed to focus more on how the couples attempted to avoid the issue of their race, such as masking their relationship when interacting with others and only surrounding themselves with certain types of people.

Leslie and Letiecq (2004: 564) found that most married black-white couples tended to have their children identify themselves with the race of the husband. Several factors may have contributed to this finding including: first, if the husband resolved any issues related to race while showing racial tolerance; second, if he developed a strong black identity (570); finally, if the husband was the breadwinner of the family.

A limitation with these findings is that the strategies used by the couples eliminate any interaction with the wife. It appears that the development of identity for those families solely depended on the husband. Second, the authors' assumption that if the man had a strong black identity the family will take on his identity does not account for how development occurs if the husband is white.

The authors did not explain what happened if the women were the breadwinners of the family.

Hughes and Johnson (2001) found that parents' racial socialization, parents' experiences of discrimination, parents' reports of their children being treated unfairly, and socio-demographics all played a role in how parents communicated race with their children. The authors uncovered that if the black-white mixed-race couples socialized more with whites, then they would communicate more with their children about the white culture. However, if the parents experienced discrimination from blacks, the parents would socialize with whites. Hughes and Johnson also found that when parents received reports that their children were being mistreated by either blacks or whites, they were more likely to communicate with their children about race. Finally, they concluded that where the parents lived affected their communication about race to the children.

Overall, not much has been written about how black-white mixed-race couples assist their mixed-race children in racial identity development. The few strategies mentioned in the literature such as the blocking, transforming, and generating strategies are still limited. Moreover, these strategies rely on an implicit assumption of choosing between black or white identity. Nothing has been mentioned about the multiple or border, changeable or protean, and transcendent racial identities suggested by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002). Other strategies and new ways of thinking ought to be researched and identified.

## RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN

Systematic research on the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children is insufficient, but a few studies provide some useful insight into this issue. A review of the literature uncovers several approaches in determining the racial identity of black-white mixed-race children: the environmental model, the societal model, the demographic model, and the social network model. The environmental model highlights the role of environment in shaping the racial identity of black-white mixed-race children. For example, Rosato (1998) found that adopted children who were placed in a healthy and happy home environment with parents of the black and white race developed positive racial identities. She stated, "In reality, a biracial child may identify as white or multiracial" (Rosato 1998: 44). To Rosato, a healthy home environment will not presume that any biracial child is black because it reinforces the "one drop rule" used previously to ensure a slave population. Parents are permitted to make decisions for their children because they are responsible for the children's needs and experiences. She stated that training children about their racial identity at an early age will assist them with developing and preserving their identity. Rosato stated, "When a child is already integrated into a white, black, or

multiracial family and is thriving, their racial identity development is neither disturbed nor confusing” (Rosato 1998: 49).

According to Conkin (2004), other practitioners such as John B. Watson, B.F. Skinner, and Albert Bundura support some aspects of Rosato’s philosophy. Environmentalists believe that a child's environment shapes learning and behavior; in fact, human behavior, development, and learning are thought of as reactions to the environment (Conkin 2004). This environment includes home, school and other public venues. Environmental theory leads many families, schools, and educators to assume that young children develop and acquire new knowledge by reacting to their surroundings. However, a limitation of Rosato’s theory is the assumption that a healthy home environment will have the strongest impact on identity development for biracial children, and other factors will not have much impact on their identity development. Corkin (2004) reported studies by Skinner, Bundura, and Watson found there were many other facets of environmental learning and all must be considered.

The societal model stresses the importance of social rules in shaping the racial identification of black-white mixed-race children. For instance, Michaels (1994) emphasized the role that society plays in the identity development of children born to black-white parents. The author contended that although the “one drop rule” attempted a biological meaning for racial identity, racial designation relied purely on social and cultural perceptions. He stated that racial



identity was no more than a question of social perception. This finding was a clear example of race being socially constructed. Racial assigning rules are socially constructed or determined on the basis of physical appearance or ancestry, and the rules may be informal or unwritten, not in the form of a law, but are widely acknowledged and practiced by society (Yang 2000). Social rules largely determine how mixed-race children perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Michaels' study of Adrian Piper, a biracial female, found that passing for white or passing for black had little to do with physical characteristics. Regardless of Adrian's physical characteristics, those who knew the race of her parents identified her based on her minority parent. The point of the definition of being black meant being identified by the white racist society as black (Michaels 1994).

The demographic model uses demographic factors such as age, gender, family structure, and geographic location to explain the racial identification of black-white mixed-race children. For example, Harris and Sims (2002) found that age plays a crucial role in racial identity development for children born to black-white parents. Their finding show that youth sixteen years of age or older were about one-third as likely as younger adolescents to select white as their sole racial identity. The group younger than 16 was more likely to conform to the one-drop rule, claiming that they were more black than white despite their mixed black and white backgrounds. The authors concluded that children aged 16 or

older were affected by what others thought of them, and therefore, may adjust their identity to fit others' perceptions. Harris and Sims identify 16 as an important age for the development of racial identity for mixed-race children.

Roth (2005) found that more than one demographic factor influences the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children. She concurred with Harris and Sims that children do develop their racial identity based on their age and that teenage years are more crucial than young adolescent years in the development of their racial identity for black-white mixed race children. However, Roth found that physical characteristics and the family structure also play certain roles in racial identity development for children born to black-white parents. If the child's physical characteristics are visibly darker, the parents are more likely to raise the child as black; conversely, if the child is lighter in complexion, he or she is more likely to be raised as white. Roth (2005) also found that racial identification was influenced by the head of household whether it was a male or female. When the father is the head of the household, the transmission of the child's racial identity is developed based on his racial identity. However, the head of household considers not only their own identity but also the physical characteristics of the child. Physical characteristics and the head of household interact to influence racial identification. Combining the three variables--age, family structure, and characteristics--adds an interesting argument to the racial identity development for children born to black-white parents.

In a study of identity development for children born to Hispanic-white parents and Asian-white parents, Brunisma (2005) identified other demographic determinants of racial/ethnic identification such as gender and geographic location in addition to the father's race/ethnicity and family socioeconomic status. Brunisma (2005) found that if the father was Hispanic, the children were more likely to be identified as Hispanic. Girls born to Hispanic-white parents were more likely to be identified as Hispanic than their male counterparts. Hispanic-white children living in the South were more likely to develop a Hispanic identity rather than a white identity. Children whose parents were of a high socioeconomic status were more likely to develop a white identity. Similar results were found for children of white-Asian parents with one exception. In the western part of the United States, the children were more likely to identify as Asian.

The underlying assumption of the environmental, societal, and demographic models is that black-white mixed-race children choose their racial identity to be either black or white with no other options. A more recent study by Rockquemore and Brunisma (2002) challenges that assumption and broadens our vision. Rockquemore and Brunisma (2002) found that children with one white parent and one black parent chose among four racial identity options: *singular identity*, *border identity*, *protean identity*, and *transcendent identity*. Singular identity is when the child exclusively chooses black or white. Border identity is when the child chooses to be exclusively biracial. Protean identity occurs when

the child chooses to be white sometimes, black sometimes, and biracial sometimes. Transcendent identity is when the child chooses no racial category.

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) proposed a social network theory to explain why children of mixed black-white backgrounds choose a particular option of the four types of identity. They argue that social network composition influences racial construction among biracial individuals. Social network composition includes family members, neighbors, and peers who influence the daily interaction of shaping and defining one's identity (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002: 339). Rockquemore and Brunsma also found that as children aged, negative or positive experiences related to their race may play a role in how they develop their identity. For example, being mistreated by members of the black race may cause mixed-race black-white children to lean more towards developing a white identity. While Rockquemore and Brunsma offer a unique categorization of the four types of racial identification and a social network perspective, their social network theory overlaps with the environmental, societal, and demographic models. The overlapping suggested by other researchers, to some extent, point to the important roles of social environment or network, social institutions, and demographic factors in how mixed-race black-white children develop their racial identity.

Although all of the four approaches reviewed above offer useful insights, none of them alone is adequate for understanding the racial identity development

of black-white mixed-race children. Efforts must be made at integrating these approaches to develop a more comprehensive approach that can incorporate the useful elements of these approaches and provide a fuller understanding of the racial identity development for black-white mixed-race children.

#### CHALLENGES FACED BY MIXED-RACE CHILDREN

The challenges faced by mixed-race children may oftentimes go unnoticed. Examining these challenges may provide rich information about the process of identity development for black-white mixed-race children. As people may observe mixed-race children, the focus may be solely on their looks rather than on possible challenges associated with their race.

Wilson (1987) examined arguments that were centered on mixed-race children not being born because they would be victims of racial prejudice. Wilson found whites were more likely to disapprove of and mistreat mixed-race children than blacks. She explained that the source of white disapproval of mixed children can be found in the powerful eroticism with which the black race is invested (p. 8). The author further explained that although mixed-race children experience challenges with society, they also face the challenge of trying to understand who they are and how they fit into society (p.64).

In a study conducted by Tizzard and Phoenix (2002), it was found that many mixed-race children stated they have experienced racist name calling. The participants in the study shared that name calling did not bother them as they

aged; however, when they were younger, it did. The authors also interviewed several mixed-race adults and found the majority experienced being called racist names when they were younger but not since becoming an adult. The data from their study revealed that boys were more likely to be called racist names than girls.

Wright (1998) found that mixed-race children began to experience racial challenges as early as preschool. The author found that a preschool child's attitude towards children who were not the same race as them begins as their relatives, friends and others who are close to them, show negative or positive attitudes or behaviors toward people of other races. Comments such as, "beware of black people", and "beware of white people" instill fear in children about the black-white race at an early age (Wright 1998: 37). From comments that seem so simple, the children began to treat other race in a negative manner. Wright found that as the children of the black and white race begin to hear racial comments, they began to see their race as a bad thing. Young children, because of their cognitive and emotional immaturity, are predisposed to pick up on negative values and internalize them.

McClurg (2004) found that biracial adolescents may experience social marginality in their search for social acceptance. Because of being mixed with more than one race, the adolescents may experience a conflict trying to decide which social group to interact with. The author stated adolescents find

themselves confronted with many choices related to peer group interactions, including structured environments such as cliques and sports teams. One issue they may face while interacting with the group is being accepted or rejected because of their race. McClurg explains that biracial youth at times find it difficult to conform fully to any group, thus making it very challenging to socialize.

McClurg (2004) also stated that adolescents whose parents are of different races face conflicts when choosing a sexual partner. The author stated the complexity may occur because of the adolescent's perceptions of their own race. Gibbs (1998) explains the sexual activity patterns among mixed-race adolescents are found to be similar. She explained the pattern is usually on one side or the other. In other words, biracial youth have a tendency to be promiscuous in an attempt to identify with a component of their heritage. Those found not to be promiscuous decided not to engage in any sexual activity to avoid choosing an identity (335). Gibbs further explained biracial females often perceive that their dating options are limited to black males, a group from which they frequently feel alienated (335).

## CONCLUSION

While the existing research offers insight into how parents may assist their children with identity development, how the child may develop his/her identity, and challenges faced by the children, there are still gaps in the literature. Rich information on the process of racial identity development for mixed-race children

is lacking. Providing information to show that children choose their racial identity based on circumstances may not be sufficient.

I contend it is more vital to know the nature of the circumstance which may provoke the decision. For example, what is the make-up of the family? Is the mother white and the father black? Does it matter which parent is white or black? Another gap in the literature is location. Could it be that black-white mixed-race children in southern states develop their racial identity differently from those in other regions? The literature also fails to present in-depth personal information about the families which may influence how they assist their children and how their children develop their racial identity (*i.e.* religion). Since the contemporary process of identity development is historically different, many concepts must be examined.

These are the gaps in the research that I will attempt to close. Overall, the gap in the literature lies in the fact that the authors do not provide information on the underlying influence of the parents' decision to choose or not to choose to assist their children with their racial identity development. Past studies also fail to uncover detailed strategies on how black-white parents help their children with developing their racial identity. Other articles explain that identity development is not only an issue for black-white couples and their children, but also for parents and children mixed with other races.



## CHAPTER III

### DATA AND METHODS

This chapter discusses data, sample selection and data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis.

#### DATA AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

A pilot study was conducted in 2010 to gain preliminary data on racial identity development for black-white mixed raced children. Ten couples were interviewed, including six black-wife and white-husband couples and four white-wife and black-husband couples. The pilot study asked several questions on strategies used to assist their children with racial identity development, but it did not include adult children. The results of this study helped to inform the current study especially the need to include the black-white mixed-race children lived experiences as well as altering interview guide.

The current study seeks to answer three questions: (1) How do black-white mixed-race couples assist their children with developing their racial identities? (2) How do children born to black-white parents develop their racial identities? (3) What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed race children?

The sampling technique used to gather data for this study was snowball sampling since it is extremely difficult to identify the population of black-white

mixed race couples with children and black-white mixed-race children. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method, often employed in field research, whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people (Patton 2002:243). In snowball sampling, the researcher collects data on a few members of the target population he or she can locate and then asks those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members of that population whom they happen to know (Healey 2009).

The key informants for study were close friends, colleagues, and classmates. An email was sent with a flyer attached stating the following:

“Greetings: My name is Cherly Gary and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Woman’s University. I am conducting a study for my dissertation entitled “Racial Identity Development for Mixed-Race Children: Parents’ and Children’s Perspective”, and am in need of volunteers. If you are interested in assisting me with this study, please see the attached flyer for details. If you know of anyone who may be willing to participate in this study, I greatly appreciate your forwarding this e-mail and flyer to them. Please note that you are not obligated either to participate in this study or to forward this flyer. I am seeking willing volunteer participants only. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.”

In response to the flyer and email, those who were willing to participate responded by email or a telephone call. Some participants were recommended

by others who participated. At the completion of the interview, the researcher asked, “Do you know of anyone else who may be willing to participate in this study?” If the answer was yes, that participant connected the researcher and the potential participants.

Data collection did not begin until each potential informant read and signed the consent form and completed the demographic information sheet. Interviews occurred in places that were convenient for the participants, for example, participants’ home or over the phone. Participants were able to provide rich details of their experiences. Follow-up questions were asked as needed.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher also took notes while conducting the interviews. The notes were analyzed to collect data for emerging themes. Transcription did not take place until all interviews were completed.

The research literature in Chapter 2 and the pilot study guided the creation of the interview guide. The interview guide for the couples was divided into four categories: family and dating, the marriage, the children, and closing questions. Each section included questions that designed to yield rich data to answer the research question “How do black-white parents assist their children with racial identity development” (See Appendix A for details). The interview guide for the adult children also consisted of four categories: childhood ages 7-12, high school and college experience, socialization process (high school through adulthood),

and closing questions. Each section in the adult children's interview guide included questions that provided rich data to answer the research question "How do mixed-race children (black-white) develop their racial identity?" (See Appendix B for details).

Participants were encouraged to provide their reaction to the questions or to ask additional questions at the end. Participants were also informed that if they did not feel comfortable answering a question, they did not have to answer and that the interview could end at any time.

Some of the participants asked me if I were in a mixed-race marriage and at the time I was eight months pregnant. The participants may have been curious of me because I was asking them about their relationship and their children. I answered the participants the best I could; however, I do not know if their questions to me impacted their responses to the interview questions. Also, the fact that I am a black female may have also impacted the participants in some way.

Data collection began once the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix E for details) and ended once the researcher had reached saturation. Saturation means the research is at the point when no new data is collected (Patton 2002). Unlike quantitative research, in which data is analyzed at the end, qualitative research data is analyzed throughout the study.

Data collection resulted in 652 minutes of audio recording which produced 108 pages of transcript data.

## PARTICIPANTS

The population of interest for this study is mixed-race couples (black-white) who are parenting a birth child or children together and mixed-race children (black-white) raised by their biological parents who are also black-white. Six couples from the pilot study also participated in the current study. One couple from the pilot study divorced, while the other three were not easily located. Twelve black-white couples and twelve adult children born to black-white parents were interviewed. The reason for choosing to interview twelve couples and twelve adult children was to balance the adequacy of information for the study and for the manageability of the project within a reasonable timeframe.

According to Yancey and Lewis (2009), individuals with some black heritage may face a greater degree of racism than individuals with other types of multiracial mixes. The authors found this makes it harder for those with some black heritage to identify with non-black aspects with their racial identity and to obtain a multiracial identity (p. 88). To limit the number of possible confounding factors, the researcher excluded other races from the study. There was no age requirement for the couples; however, the age requirement of 18-35 was placed on the adult children to capture their experiences from childhood to adulthood. The required minimum age of 18 or over was to eliminate any minors, and the

age was capped at 35 so the participants were able to recall childhood memories.

### *Participant's Protection*

Due to the sensitivity of qualitative research, it is important that all ethical guidelines are followed. The researcher ensured the participants that the information would be confidential. Each participant was given a consent form explaining the nature of the study and information about confidentiality. Prior to conducting the research explained the details of the consent to all participants prior to signing. After the consent form was explained and reviewed, the researcher participants signed the form and gave to the researcher. Each participant including the wife, the husband, and the adult child will signed a separate consent form. The consent form did include a section on how to obtain a copy of this study.

The interviews took place at a neutral location that was comfortable for the participants. The participants were assigned numbers therefore no names are mentioned in this study. Participants were also given a list of available services outside of TWU in case a problem occurred. This was important incase participants were affected emotionally by the interview and needed professional assistance.

Participants were made aware that all information was being recorded, would be downloaded to a cd and transcribed into a word document. No one but the researcher knew the real names of the participants.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR COUPLES

The twelve couples were interviewed separately. This project included residents of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. The racial representation of the couples included four white-husband and black-wife couples and eight black-husband and white-wife couples. The ages of the husbands range from 27 to 62. The minimum number of children a couple has is one and the maximum is ten. The minimum years of marriage for the couples are five. The maximum years of marriage are 31. The educational levels for the wives were as follows: one has a high school diploma, four have an Associate's degree, three have a Bachelor's degree, and four have a Master's degree. The educational levels for the husbands are as follows: five have a high school diploma, three have an Associate degree, one has a Bachelor's degree and three have a Master's degree. All participants' religious affiliation is Christian, except for two husbands, who claim no religious affiliation. A brief description of three of the couples is provided as an example to the reader of the demographic make-up of the couples. Couples are anonymous and identified by numbers.

Demographic information about the participants can be seen in Appendix C. For instance, for couple # 1, the husband is white, 36 years old, has an

Associate degree, and is a Christian; the wife is black, 30 years old, has an Associate degree, and is a Christian. This couple resides in Texas and has four children, but only one is biracial. To identify the participant better, each couple was assigned an alias to assist the reader in reading the data (See Appendix C for details).

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR MIXED-RACE CHILDREN

The ages of the adult children range from 18-35 years old. Between the ages of 18-35, most participants have completed at least high school and are either in college or the workforce. Because of the transitions they may have gone through within this age range, I believe I obtained some diverse and in-depth information about their experiences as a black-white mixed-race child.

One participant was still in high school but had reached the age of 18. Seven participants had completed their high school education and were either attending college or completing a GED. One had completed a Bachelor's degree and the remaining two completed a Master's degree. The locations of the twelve adult children were Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Florida, Arkansas and Missouri. Eleven of the adult children had black fathers and white mothers. Only one child had a black mother and a white father. The religious affiliation of all of the adult children is Christian. Of the twelve children interviewed, three of the children's parents participated in the study as well. Data from the connected children and parents will be analyzed to examine strategies.



A brief description of an adult child is provided to offer the reader an example of their demographic make-up. Like the couples, the adult children are anonymous and are identified by numbers. For example, adult child # 1 is female, 27 years of age, with a GED education, a black father and a white mother, resides in Oklahoma, and is a Christian. Each participant was assigned an alias in order allow the reader to easily read the data (See Appendix D for details).

## METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

During the interview process the researcher engaged in ongoing, active analysis (Depoy and Gitlin 2011). Data analysis began with the first interview and was an ongoing process throughout the study. After each interview, the notes were reflected upon. Once saturation was achieved, the interview process was completed and data transcription began. The researcher assumed the responsibility of transcribing data to determine if there was a need to seek additional participants for the interview process.

After all interviews were transcribed, the coding process began. The coding process involved recognizing an important moment and encoding it before a process of interpretation. It was used to capture qualitative richness of the phenomenon. By encoding the information, the researcher was able to capture themes. The researcher coded the interviews by using NVIVO and the Track Change feature in Microsoft Word.

A coding log was created to categorize the many themes that may have been seen throughout the coding process. To accommodate the many events and conditions that were collected from the data, the coding log continuously expanded. Once all data was coded and the coding log was completed, the researcher began to examine the data for consistent themes among the participants' responses. The researcher tried to generate new concepts and theories that would address how racial identity is developed among black-white mixed-race children and how black-white couples help shape the racial identity of their mixed-race children.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARENTAL STRATEGIES: LET'S SEE WHAT WORKS BEST

Parents have an opportunity to teach and train their children in many ways. The methods used may vary from parent to parent and from situation to situation. Each life lesson may require parents to help their children learn by bringing in information from others. Attempting to assist a child in the development of a racial identity may not cross the minds of many mixed-race couples, while others may struggle to find ways to help their children. A central purpose of this study is to identify strategies used by black-white parents when assisting their children in developing their racial identity.

This study's transcripts reflect responses from parents who did not deem it vital to have a racial identity development process in place for their children. There were couples who participated in this study and answered the research question, but they felt it was not important to focus on a racial identity. Even though the couples deemed it not important to have a set strategy in place, their responses rendered information to show they assisted their children with developing their racial identity. This chapter provides evidence to answer

research question #1, “How do black-white mixed-race parents assist their children with developing their racial identity?”

An analysis of the interview transcripts relevant to this research question indicates the presence of common themes identified among the participants. Although some of the parents did not have a specific answer about how they helped their child(ren) to develop a racial identity, after a series of questions (e.g., “How important do you think it is for interracial couples who have mixed-race or biracial children to discuss race or identity with them?” “How important do you think it is to help him/her with constantly developing his/her racial identity?”), the parents showed that they had some form of strategy in place to help their child(ren) develop their racial identity. Many questions were asked during the process of the interview. However, the two key specific questions examined that were relevant to this research question were:

1. How do (did) you answer your child when he/she asked you about his/her color?
2. What strategies do you have in place to assist your child(ren) with developing his/her racial identity?

An analysis of the data pertinent to the two interview questions listed above, which were asked to the black-white couples, provides rich information to answer research question # 1. The data below also reflect responses to prior questions asked during the interviews. The researcher felt it was vital to include additional data to allow the reader to view the participants’ responses before answering the key questions.

## MOMMY AND DADDY, WHAT COLOR AM I?

One significant question that provided great insight into racial identity strategies was “How did you answer your child(ren) when they asked ‘Mommy and Daddy, what color am I?’” Examining this question is important because it provides a specific answer related to race given to the children by their parents. We will begin with examples of how couples would deal with or dealt with questions from their child(ren) associated their racial identification.

Participants were given an opportunity to share how they would respond to their child(ren)’s questions about their race. The response to this question did provide strategies used by parents although the participants did not view them as such. Parents reported that their children started noticing they were different at an early age. This observation presented a complicated situation for most couples about their child’s racial identity development. The ages of the participants’ child(ren) in this study ranged from 6 six months to 31 years old. The couples with children aged two and under had not been asked the “What color am I?” question. Evidence suggests that as the children began to reach age three, the question of race began to arise. However, couples with children under the age of three presented the researcher with an idea of how they may respond if and when they are asked by their child.

The data in this study display evidence that children by at least age three are telling their parents what color they are. This verbalization could be the beginning stage of the children developing their racial identity. Roth (2005) suggests that children develop their racial identity based on their age. However, she found that adolescent and teenage years were more crucial. Roth also suggests that teenage years were more crucial because of socializing with others. However, it appears that, in contemporary society, crucial years are even younger. This difference could be based on location and the fact that more parents are utilizing day care services thus causing the socialization process to begin earlier. Another possibility could be that society is so diverse that people are more comfortable discussing race, which may enlighten children about race sooner.

Jason and Francis, couple #10, were the only couple that had not been asked “Mommy and Daddy, What color am I?” Other couples who had children under the age of three had already been presented with the question. When asked how they would respond when their child asked “What color am I?” Jason and Francis, the parents of a two-year-old daughter, stated the following:

**Jason:** I guess it’s going to depend on how old she is or how much understanding she has of what she is asking. I will probably turn around and ask her the same question and let her tell me what color she is. Then I will let her know that she is biracial but more of my side. Then I will ask her, does she look like she’s black or white? Finally, I will ask her why she feels that way.

**Francis:** I will probably say she is mixed. That’s how I normally refer to my children, biracial or mixed.

There is a clear indication in this response that Jason and Francis are willing to leave the decision of racial identity up to the child even at this young age. Asking the child what color she is could be their way of trying to see how the child sees herself. Jason, who is black, then indicated that he would tell the child she was biracial but more of his side, which could be an underlying way of telling the child she is black. His response exhibits two strategies: letting the child choose and his choosing for her.

However, Francis's response did not indicate choosing a race but rather her attempt to help the child understand that she is both black and white. Even though the parents had not discussed this matter, they were consistent on letting their child know she is mixed with black and white. On the other hand, not receiving consistent information from both parents may cause confusion for the child. The father's response that she is biracial, but more black, could render the child still to wonder "What color am I?" Although Jason and Francis's child is not old enough to ask questions about race, what they presented can be viewed as a possible strategy used to help their child establish her racial identity. However, the parents did not agree on whether she was black or biracial.

David and Helen, couple # 4, provided a similar response to Jason and Francis's, which was connected to appearance. David and Helen's children were older and had already passed the stage of asking about color. The difference between David and Helen and Jason and Francis is that choice of response lies

in the fact that David and Helen did deem it necessary to ask their children how they see themselves. David and Helen shared that their children have strong white features. When asked how they responded when their daughter, who is the oldest child, asked them, "What color am I?," the wife recalled:

**Helen:** I told her she's actually white. Her skin tone is white. She has curly red hair. It's kind of different from other black-white couple's children. She doesn't have any kind of tan. Black people always said when she was an infant and we walked around that they could tell she was mixed.

In this case, Helen chose to answer the racial identity question according to features. Since the child looked white, the mother explained that the child was "actually white," which could mean she had strong white features. Here the wife also commented that black people "always know" she is mixed. These statements seem contradictory, as she states the child looks white, but black people make comments and know that she's mixed. Apparently, the child has some features that clearly indicate that she is a mixed-race child. If the child were "100 percent white, it is very likely that no one, regardless of race, would assume she is mixed."

Apparently, Helen feels it is important for her children to develop their racial identity based on appearance. In other words, if the child has darker skin, he/she should take on the identity of a black person. The wife's preference could also be because of social preference.



Couple # 1, Mark and Brenda, dealt with a situation a little different from those of Jason and Francis and David and Helen, but it was also connected to appearance. Their child's question of color was not sparked by his appearance but by the color of mommy and daddy. Noticing the parents were different colors provoked the child to ask them if they were two different colors, what color that would make him? The parents also noticed that their child was also getting this question from other children. The parents found that children who were one race questioned their biracial child about it because the child looked different and their parents looked different. Even though the child had a question because of Mark and Brenda's difference in appearance and questions by peers, they provided the following:

**Interviewer:** So you're saying that you don't plan to, even though I think you mentioned on the birth certificate it says that your son is white. You do not plan to raise him as what society would call a white child. You're raising him as a mixed-race or a biracial child?

**Brenda:** I don't know how to raise a white child. I would set him up for failure. Our understanding of white people is they're spoiled; they are rotten, they are rude, and they look down on people. Being that I've been with one for so long, I don't see that so I can't take that and have him being brought up like that.

The wife makes a general statement about the perception that blacks have about whites. This perception seems to indicate that she does not want to raise her son to be white because they are spoiled, rotten, rude, and look down on people. She clearly states at the end that she can't take that and have her son

brought up like that. While the wife indicated that she did not know how to raise a "white" child, the child has been allowed to choose which race he identifies with as illustrated in the paragraph below:

**Interviewer:** What race have you chosen for your child?

**Brenda:** He's already done that. He'll tell you, he'll say I'm white. And you're brown and daddy is white. Then I'll tell him, no you're not white baby, you're both. You're mixed. Because daddy is white and you came from daddy, and mommy is brown, and you came from mommy...so you're both. Then he'll say no, look at me. I'm white. So with him being as young as he is now, I have to allow him to shape his own judgment. But then I also have to insert my own judgment as well.

**Mark:** I think it's very important that he understands both sides of his ethnicity.

The wife stated she did not know how to raise a white child, which may cause some hesitation in her helping the child develop a racial identity. Clearly, she is raising her son to be both black and white. Even though the son is young in age, it appears that his racial choice is white. His self-identification to be white could be because he identifies with the race of his father. This choice is supported in the research by Leslie and Letiecq (2004: 564). The authors found that most married black- white couples tended to have their children identify themselves with the race of the husband. The research stated that one factor that contributes to this process is if the father is the breadwinner of the family. For couple # 1, the wife is a student and stay-at-home mom, and the father is the breadwinner. Though the parents are not training the child to be black or white, it

could be that the family dynamics, in a subtle way, are contributing to the racial identity development of the child.

Couples # 1, # 4 and # 10 shed great light on the question, "Mommy and daddy, what color am I?" The idea that the couples at some point were telling their children they were black, white or mixed opens the door for more in-depth dialogue about strategies in place to assist the racial identity development of their children. After much communication with all the couples, more strategies were identified. All couples shared strategies in assisting their children to develop their racial identities, whether concrete or in an underlying way. For the most part, all couples interviewed had a strategy in place and answered research question # 1.

#### HOW DO WE HELP THEM?

Before participating in this study, some couples had not discussed strategies to help their child(ren) develop their racial identity. The data in this research show that to help their children to establish a racial identity, some parents spent time talking to each other, talking to the children, and involving the children in cultural events. There were many responses where the mother and father were not in agreement on how the process would be done; therefore, they both had their own strategy in place.

When the parents were asked, "What strategies do you have in place to assist your children with developing their racial identities?" the couples' responses included four themes: *1. Education is important. 2. Don't forget the*

*one drop rule, 3. God is your foundation, but do what's beneficial, and 4. See no race and hear no race.* As mentioned previously, the participants' responses to questions related to the importance of racial identity for biracial children provide similar insight. The next subsection discusses strategies used by parents in this study to assist their children with their racial identity development.

### *Education is Important*

Several couples in this study felt that the way to minimize their children's struggles with developing their racial identity was by educating them on both of their races. When asked "What strategies do you have in place to assist your children with their racial identity?" couples # 1, # 6, and # 7 agreed that educating the child about both races is the best way to help them develop their racial identity.

Couple # 6, Charles and Angie, felt even though they were told by the hospital to check black for their children, they believe their children are neither black nor white. When asked how they felt about paperwork not having a category for black-white mixed-race people, the couple stated the following:

**Angie:** That bothers me. My children are neither all black nor are they all white. So they need to recognize that this is a growing population. Even if it's Asian and white or Asian and black. They just need to have options for a lot of the mixed-race children growing up or who have already grown up in the UNITED STATES I just feel like it's another way to be blended, to have mixed. We as a nation and a community are not going to acknowledge that? How can you not when it's a growing population?

**Charles:** I would say the same thing. Not sure how that plays out or what, whether it's student loans or whatever. How do you play against your advantage?

Since completing the paperwork at the hospital, the wife explained that if the paperwork does not have a box for both races, she creates her own box. The couple was very clear on the fact that their children were both races, which is in alignment with the strategy used to assist them with their racial identity development. When asked to explain how they would help their children, the wife noted:

**Angie:** I'm still going to instill within them that they are interracial and the black side of their genetic makeup. This is the history you may or may not face. This is mommy's phase, etc...And just educate them. What they do with that is their business. They're certainly going to be educated from my part about where they come from. I think for us its being around different kinds of people. Like being around black and white people. Being around my family.

The husband agreed. They both felt that having honest conversations with the children about both of their races will also help. Both parents agreed to be extremely honest with their children about the challenges they may face because of being bi-racial. In essence, this couple is not choosing a race for their children but is helping them cultivate both being black and white.

Couple # 7, Paul and Vanessa, concurred with Charles and Angie. The children for couple Paul and Vanessa were much older than those of Charles and Angie and had already begun the identity development process.

The couple shared their conversation with their children.

**Paul:** It's something that we spoke to them about when they were old enough to understand that you're not black, you're not white. You're both. We made them aware that there was going to be some prejudice out there towards that. We told them if they ever had any problems to come speak with us about it. I told them it's very important for you to understand who you are and where they came from.

**Vanessa:** The same thing he said. Just as long as they know who they are and not to be ashamed of who they are and where they came from.

Unlike Charles and Angie, Paul and Vanessa did not choose to educate their children on both sides of their race by exposing them to different people but by teaching them about only the challenges associated with being biracial. Paul and Vanessa were not concerned about the children understanding the cultural differences but the challenges associated with being identified as black or white. Both couples shared the same experiences with filling out paperwork and being told they had to choose black for their children's race. However, neither couple felt it was important to choose one race on documents.

Although the couples did not assist the children with developing a racial identity choice--black or white--they had an underlying strategy in place. Educating and exposing the children to both sides may be the parents' way of allowing the children to choose their own racial identity. Paul and Vanessa stated when their daughter went to get her driver's license, she was forced to put black down. This experience validated the parents' teaching about challenges

associated with her race and may have an impact on the daughter's racial identity development process. In this case, educating the children about both of their racial backgrounds appears to be important. However, similar to exposing them to both sides of their culture, this approach could place the identity development process in the hands of the children.

*Don't Forget the "One Drop Rule"*

The "one drop rule" is a historical rule that designated persons with a traceable amount of black or other minority blood as black or other minority. It played a major role in determining the racial identity of mixed-race children (Sherman 1988). Couples # 5 and # 9 agreed with Couples # 6, # 7, # 10, and # 12 that education is important, but they also believed that it was best to pick an identity for their children. The couples explained when their children asked. When they fill out paperwork, they always mark black for their children. They revealed that their children understood they were mixed; however, because of what they might experience in society, the couples believed it was best to let them know they were mixed but to tell them they were black. Couple # 5, Michael and Linda, explained:

**Linda:** When she was born, I just told him I was going to put down that she was black. He didn't care. I put down she was black because her mommy is black. I was always told that that if one of the parents is black then the child is black.

**Michael:** I didn't care; I just wanted a healthy baby.

The wife further explained that she has no problems with paperwork or what others say because even though her child has a black and white parent, she is black.

The couple's decision to tell their daughter that she is black coincides with their response to the question, "What strategy do you have in place to assist your daughter with her racial identity development?"

**Linda:** Well, she is really up on black history. She can tell you about Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks. She can tell you about all of those people. She can tell you about the President, I mean just everybody. She loves both sides of the family, his family, our family. She loves both her grandmas, but she'll even tell you, of course I spend more time with my mommy's side of the family. So of course, I like being with them more, because she sees them more. But if she saw his side of the family more, she'd probably say the same thing. When she's interacting with them, it's the same. She loves her cousins. She hangs out with them and plays with them. The same thing on both sides.

Linda makes sure the child has knowledge about black history but did say she knows all the Presidents, not just President Obama. Also, the child spends more time with her family, which could further increase her knowledge of the black culture. Signing all paperwork as black, telling the child she's black, educating the child about black history, and socializing with the wife's family (who is black) are clear examples that this child is being raised as a black child. The wife has a strong belief in the "one drop rule" and is preparing her child as such. The husband did not think choosing a race was important at all.



Couple # 9, Kevin and Kimberly, shared similar views as couple #5, Michael and Linda. This couple tells their children they are black. When asked what race did you choose for your children, the couple stated the following:

**Kevin:** Black.

**Kimberly:** African American.

**Interviewer:** How did you decide to select that race?

**Kevin:** Because they're black.

**Interviewer:** So you went with the race of the father?

**Kevin:** Yes.

Unlike Kevin and Kimberly, Michael and Linda did not see educating their children on both sides of the family as important. The couple did mention that they would tell their children they are both black and white, but at the end of the day, they were black because daddy is black. This couple shared that, until a year ago, their daughter actually thought she was white because of her features. They explained to her that she was neither fully black nor fully white, but because daddy was black, she had to say she was black.

Both couples have taken on the historical "one drop rule" to develop their children's racial identity. Couple # 12, Carl and Kathy, clearly stated they choose black for their children because of their knowledge of the "one drop rule." The father stated:

**Carl:** Because I heard this story called the "one drop rule." And it's true though. You get checked even if you are... My youngest son is very light, but he's got black features. In most cases, he can get picked as, if someone is checking the census off, he's going to pick, if they find out he has a little bit of black, they'll check African American. It happens to me all the time and it just the one drop. If you have little bit of black in you, then you are as black as someone

that's so dark you can't smile in order to see them. Among most white people or people that are black. It's kind of where I go with that.

The father's response about the census taker shows that some people still see biracial children as black. Even though the "one drop rule" is not enforced, the couple may assume that society's perception of their children will still be in alignment with the rule's concept. Apparently, couples # 5's and # 9's strategy of choosing a race for their children may also be to prevent the children from having divided loyalty with race. Wilson (1987) found that children who have one white parent and one black parent are bound to suffer from divided loyalty.

The strategy used by couples # 6, # 7, # 10, and # 12 extends the societal model discussed in the literature review. The societal model emphasizes the role society plays in the identity development of black-white mixed-race children. However, the data in this study reveals the role parents play in developing their children's racial identity. The parents felt that society would always see their children as black; therefore, they will raise them to be black children. This idea of the parents concurs with Yang's (2000) findings that racial assigning rules are socially constructed or determined on the basis of physical appearance or ancestry.

### *God Is Your Foundation but Do What Benefits You*

On the contrary, couples # 2, # 3, and # 8, use a different, unique strategy to assist their children with developing their racial identity. These couples talked to their children about being both black and white but did not feel a strong need to focus on this issue. Interestingly, the data from these couples revealed two strategies. The strategies may be viewed as being contradictory; however, a close examination of the two concepts reveals a combination strategy. For example, couple # 2, Cliff and Sharon, strongly believed their children should not really focus on race. They felt it was very important for their children to have a strong foundation in God and not focus on being a particular color. When asked what strategies they had in place to assist their children with their racial identity the husband stated:

**Cliff:** We didn't really sit down and discuss this. We knew who we were. Having that solid foundation, we thought we would be able to give them the values that we have and try to teach them to the same. It was more important to give them a solid foundation **in** Christ, rather than a racial identity.

Furthermore, the couple stated:

**Cliff:** I think if you help your children to develop as individuals, and not what society dictates, you get to set norms, morals and teach them to respect people if they want to be respected. I don't think that will be a problem.

**Sharon:** I can say that we always focused on the behavior not race or the modification of the behavior based on an ethical standpoint. We don't really associate them with a race. We had a very unusual incident when our youngest daughter-I want to say maybe she was 8 or 9 in school-and she came home crying. My husband asked,

what's wrong. She said, "I want to know what I am." I said, "What do you mean?" Am I black? Am I white? What am I? He looked at her and he looked at me and looked back at her and said you are who you are.

Although the couple felt strongly that their children should have a solid foundation in God and know who they are as individuals, when it came to filling out important documents such as applications for jobs or scholarships, they told their children to do what benefits them:

**Sharon:** I tell them, this may be bad, but I've always told them to do whatever benefits them the most. If you're trying to get a grant or a program or something, and you know if you put white they're not going to give it to you because they think your income is so high, don't put white. If you think they will give it to you if you put black, put black. Don't be stupid. It does bother me that they do not have the option for biracial, whether it's black and white, Hispanic and black. White and Hispanic or a syllable one where you can put your own, and maybe check the boxes. They just don't make it available. And I know that in conversation with, especially my daughter, she told me frequently she'll always check other and leave it blank and tell them they can do the guessing. I mean it's crazy because there are some things you can get based on low income and there's some things they can get just by being black or white. I just feel that sometimes being both races has its advantages. So I tell them, use it at your advantage.

Similarly, couple # 8, Brian and Tracie, shared the exact same views as couple # 2, Cliff and Sharon. Interestingly, the two couples are from different states but have similar perspectives on how to help their children develop their racial identity. While explaining the strategies used to assist their children develop their racial identity, the couple expounded:

**Brian:** I tell you what, it, and I keep referencing God because he has done it all for us. If you just teach them who they are in Christ, their racial identity is so embedded in them. They embrace the African American. They embrace the Caucasian American. They embrace it more than most of those that I know who are one of the other. They participate and they learn all they can. They write stories and do things on African American culture and then they do the same for the white culture. They absolutely embrace and love who they are. They've done that without us really intervening and try to make a big deal out of it. I think just teaching them who they are in Christ has done it all.

**Tracie:** He's right. It's what you teach them. I teach my children they are important. That they are perfect. They're made in the image of God so they have a perfect image. I would teach my children the same thing if they weren't biracial. They would be taught that they are perfect. They are fearfully and wonderfully made. They are the head and not the tail. That's what I tell my kids all the time. I tell them be encouraged. Walk in faith. When I say color, I reference their spirit and their spirit doesn't have a color. That's what I need them to walk in.

Equally, Brian and Tracie believe a strong foundation in God is all their children need; however, they also tell their children to use their race to their advantage. The couple share that unless their children are seeking a scholarship, they should mark African American or use whatever race is advantageous for them. With the exception of applications, the couple revealed they would tell their children they are black and white, but they should not focus on race only who they are in Christ.

Conversely, couple # 3, Maurice and Gabbie, spoke briefly about teaching their children about who they were in Christ. The couple did state they talk to their children about being complete in who they are and not focus too much on a

race. This couple shared they were advised by a school principal to use the fact that their children were black and white to their advantage.

**Gabbie:** It was actually my principal, a white lady that told me that I needed, for school purposes, to put them down black for my children and that would help them when it came time for scholarships and stuff. Also if they needed to be identified as African American in the school system, which I found interesting. I think it has its purposes, which in a way can be. The way she kind of explained it can be confusing. The more people you can get in that sub box, the higher percentage your chances are. That's kind of what we were told to do. We really thought about it more once they got older and began to do that.

The couple did not feel they had a strategy in place. They further explained they wanted their child not to be ashamed that she was biracial.

The strategy used by these couples appears to be confusing. Helping their children establish a strong foundation in God could be viewed as a protective strategy to avoid looking at race. Obviously, the parents know that even if they do not train their children about their race, it is important for them to identify with either black or white in heritage. Surely, the couples may mean well in giving their children a good moral foundation, but in a subtle way, they are also giving them a foundation as black or white. This approach also shows the parents are aware of society's perception of their children. As stated by couple # 2, Cliff and Sharon, there are some things you cannot get because of income. This statement appears to mean that there is a perception in society that black people are poor, which means the couple is training their children to take on their poor

identity when needed. The data shows that parents are aware of racial inequalities and the benefits associated with them. Therefore, it can be seen that being biracial is a benefit and should be used accordingly.

*See No Race, and Hear No Race*

Some parents not only believed assisting their children to develop a racial identity unnecessary but they also felt having a discussion about race, black, white or any color was useless. Couple # 11, Frank and Sarah, shared similar views as couples # 2, # 3 and # 8 that teaching children who they are in God is important; however, they stated they do not see color. In their household, the couple shared that conversations about race do not occur. Since the couple never discusses race, the researcher avoided asking the couple about strategies. However, to gain insight into the subject, the couple was asked if they think it is important to develop their racial identity for their biracial child? The couple replied:

**Sarah:** I don't think it's so much about racial identity because it's more of who you want to be. I don't think that really color has a big part in it honestly because everyone is something. It doesn't even matter. That's what I would like our kids to know that it doesn't matter that your dad is black and your mom is white because it's not a big deal at all.

**Frank:** Yeah I would say. At the end of the day, I don't think it matters what color you are. Just really matters what you do and who you are. More so your character and what's inside of that person to help people and all that good stuff character wise.

They further explained they were raised not to put a whole lot of emphasis on the race card issue and that is how they plan to raise their children. They felt identity comes more from working hard and making an honest living. They both came from strong Christian backgrounds that did not see color. Frank and Sarah could not think of any issues that are concerns related to their children's race and hope not to encounter any. They felt that biracial children would not have any problems if their parents would just teach them to love. It appears the couple's purpose is to protect their children from focus on their race. The data shows they feel that identity is not assigned; it is achieved, and what color you are does not matter.

#### WHAT DID THE CHILDREN SAY?

The adult children of couple # 2, Cliff and Sharon, and couple # 3, Maurice and Gabbie, participated in this study. Couple # 2 has two children, a son and a daughter and both participated in the study. Couple # 4, David and Helen, had four children; however, only one son was old enough to be interviewed. The adult children were asked a series of questions about their experiences from elementary school through adulthood. The questions asked sought to learn if the parents had any influence on the children's racial identity development.

Adult child # 3, Davis, the child of couple # 3, Maurice and Gabbie, confirmed the strategy used by his parents to assist with his racial identity development. The participant felt his parents did a great job explaining that he



was both black and white. Davis felt his parents' emphasized his understanding that he was both black and white because he was attending an all-white school.

When asked how his parents helped develop his racial identity, he stated:

They explained it well toward the early part of my high school days because I was going to a predominately white high school. They wanted to make sure that I knew that wasn't all of who I was; I am both black and white.

Couple # 2, Cliff and Sharon, the parents of adult children # 4, Jackson, and # 5, Nicole, stated they helped their children to develop as individuals and not to focus on race. The couple gave their children a strong foundation in God and felt that was more important than their conforming to society's social construction of race. However, the couple did encourage their children to use their race to their benefit. That is, if they needed to choose black, choose black, or if they needed to be white, be white.

The children of Cliff and Sharon confirmed their parents' strategy; however, they also felt their parents could have done more. Both children stated when they discussed their racial identity with their parents, they were told to be comfortable with both of their races: black and white.

When asked "Did you ever talk to your parents about your racial identity?", the adult children stated:

**Jackson:** Well first their explanation absolutely helped me, but the discussion itself wasn't biased by any means. It didn't in one way or the other. The discussion simply was you describe yourself as you see yourself. So it wasn't important to either one of my parents for

me to identify myself with a particular race, or creed or whatever. Whereas, it was more important that I felt comfortable with the person that I am and for me to identify myself as such.

**Nicole:** I honestly don't recall having any detailed discussion with my parents about my race. But I feel they helped me by showing me I am who I am. I am not who one side say I am or that the other side say I am. They also help me understand that I needed to do what I feel is right and I needed to check what I feel I am.

Both participants explained that their parents did not choose a race for them but wanted them to understand themselves as being biracial. It is also clear the parents wanted the children to develop a level of comfort with them, which could mean I am not going to choose a race for you, but it is ok if you want to. The son stated he was asked "How do you see yourself?" This could mean, even though the parents were teaching the children to be comfortable being biracial, the children were at liberty to choose a racial identity for themselves. Also, the daughter stated her parents told her to do what she felt. This was a reference to the parents' strategy of giving the children a strong foundation in God.

Jackson stated there were times he chose black, and there were times he chose white. His decision of what race he was going to be depended on the situation. Although the parents told the children to do what benefited them, Nicole stated she never did. The participant explained when filling out papers in high school and for college, she never chose a race; she checked both. After entering high school, the participant stated she was clear and confident that she was

biracial. Because of her decision, she decided to always check black and white on paperwork.

## SUMMARY

The data collected provides evidence to answer research question #1, “How do black-white mixed-race couples assist their children to develop their racial identity?” The couples in this study provided information on their experiences related to the phenomenon of helping mixed-race children develop their racial identity.

Each couple shared specific strategies used to assist their children with developing their racial identity. For example, some participants used the strategy of exposing their children to both sides of their culture. The couples believed that educating their child on the black and white races would assist them with understanding that they were a black and white person. To expose them to both sides of their culture, the parents often spent time with both their black and white families. Those who were experiencing any form of rejection from family members used museums, books, and other forms of literature to educate their children about both sides of their culture. Other couples felt it was important to assist their children with their racial identity based on their knowledge of the “*one drop rule*.” According to Sherman (1988) the “one drop rule” designated persons with a traceable amount of black or other minority blood as black or other minority. The author further stated this rule played a major role in determining the

racial identity of mixed-race children. The parents who used this strategy believed that even though their children had mixed blood of black and white, society would always see them as being black. Therefore, these participants trained their children to be black.

Not all of the parents who participated in this study felt having a racial identity was important. There were couples who concluded that if their children understood who they were in God, and then having a racial identity was not important. Interestingly, some couples who shared this idea also taught their children to use mixed heritage of black and white to their benefit. The couples shared, “We tell our children that God is your foundation but *do* what’s beneficial.” The participants taught their children that if they needed to choose black to get a scholarship, then choose black. However, if they needed to be white to get a job, then be white. Other parents who advocated the idea that a racial identity was not important trained their children to see no race and hear no race. These couples spent time training their children to be moral and productive citizens in society and not to focus on color.

In the instances where the parents, as well as their children, participated in the study, very similar responses related to the need to understand race were collected. In other words, parents and children tended to agree that it was important for black-white mixed-race children to develop a racial identity. The adult children confirmed that their parents did discuss their race with them. For

example, Davis shared that Maurice and Gabbie made sure he understood and was not confused about being black and white because he attended an all-white school. Hughes and Johnson (2001) found that parents who socialized more with whites communicated more with their children about whites. The experience of Davis could be used to extend Hughes and Johnson's findings in that Maurice and Gabbie communicated with Davis based on his attending an all-white school.

Jackson and Nicole confirmed that their parents not only gave them a strong foundation in God, but also encouraged them to use their race to benefit them. Nicole shared that even though her parents trained her to do what benefited her, she never did. It will be seen later in the data that as the participant aged; she concluded that she is neither black nor white; she is biracial. Jackson, on the other hand, chose at times to be black or biracial. The participant shared that his choice of race depended on his need at the time.

Overall, the data collected in this study challenges existing research in that it offers specific strategies used by black-white mixed-race couples in assisting their children to develop their racial identity. Parent participants in this study provided the following four specific strategies they use to assist their children with developing their racial identity: 1. Expose them to both sides of their culture. 2. Don't forget the one drop rule. 3. God is your foundation but do what's beneficial. and 4. See no race and hear no race. These strategies answer

research question number 1: How do black-white mixed-race parents assist their children with developing their racial identity?

## CHAPTER V

### RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN

Developing a racial identity can be very challenging for some children. All participants were asked to share their feelings about how their parents helped them with developing their racial identity. The participants provided insight into how, as they aged, they began to develop their racial identity. A study conducted by Wright (1998) revealed that challenges for mixed-race children began as early as pre-school. The data from participants in the current study suggest challenges continue throughout adulthood. The author explained that pre-school children's attitudes about race came from those close to them, for example, family. Wright also found that as the mixed-race child began to hear negative racial comments, he/she would view the race being discussed as bad. McClurg (2004) found that adolescents of more than one race, who are trying to fit in, experience a conflict. An overwhelming number of the participants in this study, upon entering high school, made a decision to be black.

The participants confirmed research by Harris and Sims (2002), which found that age plays a crucial role in racial identity development for children born to black-white parents. Harris and Sims also found that youth 16 years of age or

older were about one-third as likely as younger adolescents to select white as their sole racial identity. However, data in this study show that none of the participants ever chose white as a race. Moreover, for the participants racial identity was either biracial or black, thus limiting the possible variety of identities that could be expressed to two categories.

Although the adult children, at a younger age, may have chosen a race for themselves, an analysis of the data shows, as they aged, their decision about their race changed. After entering high school, the participants felt their racial identity was established. There were no commonalities among the participants in the process of establishing their racial identity; however, commonalities did exist among the racial identity chosen. The two commonly chosen racial identity themes found among the participants are: (1) I am biracial, and (2) I am black.

#### I AM BIRACIAL

Adult children--# 2 Allison, # 3 Jason, # 4 Jackson, # 5 Nicole, # 6 Tammie, # 7 Marilyn, and # 11 Samson--decided they were not going to be forced to choose a race. The participants expressed choosing one race was not a true representation of who they were. Participants # 4 and # 5, Jackson and Nicole, as stated in the previous chapter, explained that their parents did not choose a race for them but told them to be who they wanted to be. As they aged, both participants decided their racial identity was biracial. Adult children--# 3 Jason, # 6 Tammie, and # 7 Marilyn--also decided they were going to be biracial.



The participants in this category all shared similar feelings about why they chose to be biracial. Adult child # 3, Jason, stated his parents assisted him with understanding his race once he was older. He stated in his younger years he had no questions nor were there any discussions about race. Jason felt his parents did a great job with exposing him to both sides of his heritage, which made him comfortable being biracial. However, once he entered high school, he went through a phase where he just wanted to be one race. He stated:

I guess part of me just wanted to be one race instead of two different ones. There was a time when I did refer to myself as African American in high school just because I was sick of hearing being called mixed.

The participant shared that later, he decided his racial identity was biracial. Choosing to be black happened when he was in school, but he always saw himself as biracial. He further stated:

In the past that wasn't so. I saw myself as black. I guess I was because I went to a predominately white school and that's how I was seen by them.

Regardless of his experience in a predominately white school, the participant was very comfortable identifying himself as biracial. This attitude could be attributed to the fact that his parents exposed him to both sides of his heritage.

Adult child # 7, Marilyn, also felt her parents did a great job explaining that she was both black and white. She shared that her parents did a great job of

explaining cultural differences between the two races. The participant recalled times when she was forced to choose a race on an exam. She stated:

I asked my parents why I am considered African American on the TAKS test. They said it had something to do with test results. I don't know, I think they're like scholarships included if you're African American and stuff like that. So, that's the only thing I've ever asked them was about the TAKS test. Regardless to what I was told to mark, I always saw myself as biracial.

When asked, "What race do you see yourself as and how did you come to that conclusion?" the participant shared:

I see myself as mixed. I mean that's what I call myself. I feel like that should be a category in life on all documents because it's more common. My parents may have chosen one for me on my birth certificate, but I see myself as biracial.

The participants who chose to be biracial shared similar feelings about why they did not choose to be one race. They all explained how they were forced to be either black or white at some time. It was either social pressure or a benefit to them or the school. However, deep down inside of them, they never were black or white; they were biracial.

Adult children # 2 and #11, Allison and Samson, had a different perspective on being biracial. Both participants identified with being biracial, but also as being black and white. Unlike the participants above, Allison and Samson felt being black and white was a benefit that should be enjoyed by all biracial children.

When asked, “What race do you see yourself as and how did you come to this conclusion?” Allison stated:

Biracial. I will put this out. Like, this will be funny. But, when it comes to scholarships, well applying for them I, would put Black because that's the race. Just to get me some money. That would be the way to do it because I'm half black, I just put that down, because you really couldn't put white on there because most of the jobs were for minorities and I am a minority since I'm mixed. If I wanted just for the views. Yeah.

She further explained:

I didn't do it to offend my race. You know, but I did it you know, because it's not wrong. It's just. You have to do what you have to do to get some money, but I know who I am and I know it was doing it just to get some scholarship money. I do ponder about my race sometimes. Do I say I'm both? And it's like I just say I'm both because my mom is white, my dad is black and God said it's going to be like that. So, you know I'm blessed. I think God put them in my life for a reason, regardless of color. So I accept my black and whiteness.

Samson concurred with Allison. He stated that when filling out documents, he marked African American for the opportunity to receive race-based scholarships. This strategy suggests that benefit is an important reason behind racial identification. Overall, the reasons for choosing a biracial identity were based on either a conclusion reached after being given the liberty to decide race independently or after some experiences identifying as one race only, which proved inefficient.

## I AM BLACK

Adult children--# 1 Ariel, # 8 Erin, # 9 Sylvia, # 10 Melvin, and # 12, Angela--shared that as they were growing up they were told many things about their race. The information received from their parents was that you are black and white or you are your dad's color. Adult children # 10 and # 12, Melvin and Angela, stated there were vague conversations about their race; however, they were still confused. The participants expressed that they dealt with their racial issues on their own and decided not to ask any more questions. The data reveals, as each of the participants reached high school, they felt their racial identity was established and thoughts about their race were diminished. Each of the participants stated they chose black to be their racial identity; however, their reasons for choosing black were different.

Adult child # 1 Ariel shared that her whole family was biracial; therefore, biracial was normal to her. The participant said race was never a conversation in their home except when it was time to fill out papers. Her parents always explained to her that God made her the way she was, and she never questioned it. Since she looked darker, Ariel shared that she would always check black on documents. She stated that although she knew she was black and white, she chose black as her racial identity because of her appearance. When asked how she came to that decision, she shared:

When I was in high school, I decided I was going to be black.  
Choosing to be black had nothing to [do with] preferring one race

over the other; it was off my Christian beliefs. I believe God made me black.

The participant's appearance influenced her racial identity decision. It can be concluded that she feels that since God made her dark, he wanted her to be black. Also, she stated that her parents told her God made her that way therefore, she never questioned it. Her appearance and her Christian beliefs influenced how she developed her racial identity.

Adult child # 8, Erin, shared that her parents told her she was black. However, Erin stated she received many questions from people because she was light with green eyes. Because of her features, she was called Albino by many of her friends. The participant shared that after entering high school she no longer had questions about her identity and decided that she was going to be black. When asked what race do you see yourself as and how you came to this conclusion, Erin explained:

I see myself more on the black side. I don't have a lot of white extended family members. We were on the black side a lot. So that's just, I just fit in more on that side. So that's what I chose to be.

Erin was questioned about her race by her peers. She expressed that there were times when she experienced some prejudice from people of the white race. The prejudice and being called Albino may have influenced her decision to identify herself as black. She also stated that she was associated more with the black side of her family and that she just fit more with them. This suggests the

participant was more comfortable around blacks than whites. The data did not reveal information about her parents' explanation for telling her to say she was black. However, she did share that while learning about history in school she questioned where she fit as a biracial child, in the history books. Overall, her decision to be black lay in the fact that she was more comfortable with blacks than whites.

Adult child # 9, Sylvia, shared that she was always confused about her race but never discussed it with her parents. She shared that her parents always told her she was both races and that is how she should fill out paperwork. Sylvia felt the message that she was both races confused her more. Upon entering high school, to her, the confusion was even more intense. Taking an African American history class gave her more insight into her race. When asked what race you saw yourself and how you came to that conclusion, she stated:

Black. Because it's all really bad but, no matter what I did, I was never good enough for the white kids. Because I was raised in an inner city I wasn't as calm as the white kids would like me to be. Even though the black kids hated me because my hair was curly, it was nice and it was long. They still knew that we went through the same struggles growing up in the inner city.

The participant's decision to be black seemed to be influenced by her knowledge of struggles experienced by blacks and the fact that even though she is mixed with white, she was never good enough to associate with the white kids. Although it appears being rejected by whites influenced her decision to be black, there is also the perception she was more comfortable with blacks. Her

statement, “We went through the same struggles” is an underlying revelation that she was treated like a black person even when she would say she was white.

Adult child # 10, Melvin, stated that he began to identify with his race at a very early age. He explained when he was younger he identified more with blacks because his parents told him he was. The participant shared instances of sitting on the porch with his parents and people driving by calling his mom a “nigger” lover. He shared many negative experiences related to race. Melvin did not have race conversations with his parents but did hear little comments, here and there, from his parents.

When asked what race you saw yourself as and how you did come to the conclusion, Melvin shared:

I want to say it wasn't an overnight decision. It was more just a gradual thing. In that time, I don't know if I could really explain it. Again, I think a lot of it had to do with the treatment I received. The way I was interacted with. Today, the way I explain it is that I can have my own personal racial identity all I want to, but that doesn't necessarily dictate ways others interact with me. I don't want to dominate this, but as a sociologist it interests me. The notion of biracial and things of that nature really raised questions about the importance of a personal identity. Because the thing that I tell my students sometimes is you know, you don't exist on an island by yourself. I can tell people that I'm polka dot if I want to. That can be my racial identity. But they don't see it that way and they don't act with you that way. Are you really that way? It's kind of an idea of what people have self taught thing. I think that is the thing that helped shape my racial identity now. It's more so based on the way in which others interact with me.

The participant described his decision as a gradual result of how he was treated by people of the “white” race. He was clear on the fact that the white race

interacted with him differently from the black race. His statement, "You can call yourself polka dot if you want to, but they don't see you that way," also explains his knowledge of the social construction of race. Melvin, a doctoral level sociology student studying race, shared that the negative experiences associated with his race intensified within the last four to five years. He stated that his quest concerning learning about race and identity has not stopped. He explained that his continuous education has no influence on his racial identity. His identity is shaped more by how people treated him.

Adult child # 12, Angela, described her childhood experience as very confusing. There were moments when she did not know what color to be. The participant shared a similar experience as Sylvia. Angela stated:

There were times I felt too black to have white friends. I felt black enough with my black friends, primarily because of my skin tone, light skin and because of the type of hair that I had. I was teased a lot by people. So that brought about a little bit of confusion and I really just pushed that to the side and just accepted myself as a light skinned black person. My parents really didn't help me. It was not an issue that they talked with me about. They may have talked about it privately but looking back through the eyes of an adult now, for example the elementary school I was supposed to go to was black. My parents got me re-zoned to go to a mostly white school. That is when I began to wonder if white was better than black. They never addressed that with me. This was when I was in elementary school.

At an early age, Angela saw things that made her want to discuss race with her parents, but she chose to deal with the issue on her own. There is an indication that she was rejected by those of the white race because she felt she



was too black to have white friends. However, she also stated that she felt just black enough for her black friends because of her appearance. Because of the feelings she had when associating with both races, she chose to be a light skinned black person. The reason for her choice could have been because of the harshness of the treatment received by the white race.

Angela felt her parents always avoided talking with her about race although she noticed little things they did to her related to race such as sending her to an all-white school. After entering high school, she attempted to talk to her parents about race; however, they told her learning about her race was her responsibility. When asked, "Upon entering high school what race did you identify yourself as and how you came to that conclusion," she stated:

I only identified as a black person. This was during the time the movie Malcolm X came out. It was lot of tension in our school between white and black. There was no in-between.

It appeared that the tension associated with the movie "Malcolm X" forced the participant to solidify her racial identity as black. It could be assumed that during this time, black students took information from the movie and formed a negative opinion about White Americans. Malcolm X was a human rights activist who received frequent harassment from white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and one of its splinter factions, the Black Legion. Angela's statement "there was no in between" could mean during the time, she could not say she was biracial, but either black or white.

## SUMMARY

The data in this study extends Rockquemore and Brunnsma's (2002) social network theory. The social network theory includes family members, neighbor, and peers who influence the daily interaction of shaping and defining racial identity. The authors found four racial identity options used by black-white mixed-race children: *singular identity*, *border identity*, *protean identity*, and *transcendent identity*. Singular identity is when the child exclusively chooses black or white. As revealed in the data, Ariel, Erin, Sylvia, Melvin and Angela all chose to be exclusively black but all for different reasons. Border identity is when the child chooses to be exclusively biracial. Jason, Jackson, Nicole, Tammie and Marilyn chose to be exclusively biracial for similar reasons. Protean identity occurs when the child chooses to be white sometimes, black sometimes and biracial sometimes. Participants Allison and Samson fit more in this category; however, no information was shared about whether the participants ever chose to be white. Allison and Samson established their racial identity as biracial but chose to be black when it was beneficial. The data collected in this study dispels Rockquemore and Brunnsma's transcendent identity type which states that the child chooses no racial category. All of the participants in this study chose their race to be either black or biracial.

Rocquemore and Brunnsma (2002) found experiences played a major role in why black-white mixed-race children developed their racial identity. Their study

identified the important experiences from interactions with family members, neighbors, and friends. The data in this study reveals these types of experiences are similar to those of the participants who chose to be black. However, these types of experiences had no effect on those who chose to be biracial.

The participants who chose to be biracial concluded within themselves that they were biracial and felt there was no need to choose black or white. They felt they should not have to choose a color but identify themselves as both black and white. The social network theory fails to address biracial children's decision to be black when it benefits them. For example, Allison and Samson chose to be black when applying for scholarships. Neither of the participants revealed a time when they chose to be white. This could be because they both were still in college and attended schools where being a minority was beneficial.

On the other hand, experiences did play a role in those who chose black as their racial identity. The total of what the participants experienced is dark skin tone, socializing with others, racial prejudice, and racial tension. Ariel shared that she was dark, and since God made her that way, she was meant to be black. Erin and Sylvia did not fit in with the white race. Melvin experienced racial prejudice personally and along with his family. Hearing his mom being called a "Nigger Lover" from those of the white race had an impact on his decision also. Angela was in school during the time of racial tension; therefore, felt there was no other race she could choose but black. Although these experiences can be

viewed as challenges, the next chapter gives specific challenges that black-white adult children experienced even after their racial identity was established.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHALLENGES FACED BY BLACK-WHITE MIXED-RACE CHILDREN

Interestingly, all of the participants faced some forms of challenge. However, the challenges they faced did not cease after they had decided their racial identity. There were three common themes found among the challenges faced by mixed-race children: (1) rejection by family, (2) facing prejudice in school, and (3) feeling invisible. The literature review reveals several challenges experienced by black-white mixed-race children. Wilson (1987) examined arguments centered on the fact that biracial children experience prejudice. The author found that whites were more likely to mistreat black/biracial children. As seen in the data, the participants in this study did experience racial prejudice; however, it was not only from whites but also from blacks, mainly family members.

#### REJECTED BY THE FAMILY

The participants who decided their racial identity to be black explained how issues associated with socializing, prejudice, and racial tension influenced their racial identity development. However, each participant was asked to share specific challenges experienced with family, in school, and in society that occurred even after they had established their racial identity. Adult children-- # 1, Ariel, # 2, Allison, # 5, Nicole, # 6, Tammie, and # 9 Sylvia- shared that they were

not accepted by members of at least one side of their family. Neither participant experienced being rejected by both sides. Each participant discussed an encounter with family members to explain how they were rejected. Ariel shared that while growing up she was never picked on by friends because of her race, however, when it came to family, she was rejected by her mom's side of the family, who is white. As she aged, she was around her dad's side of the family a lot more, and the contact with her mother's side of the family diminished. She shared:

Growing up as a teenager, I was around my Dad's side of the family a lot more. I never went around my mom's side of the family after I got older. I was always told that they treated us different. I think in a lot of ways I was just naïve, and I didn't know. Now looking back I can kind of see the differences. But since I never really grew up around them and everything, it was kind of hard.

Ariel did not express this as a challenge, however, because of her race; she was not able to spend time with a portion of her family. Apparently, her parents recognized that her mother's immediate family was treating her differently; therefore, they isolated her from that family.

Allison shared a similar experience as Ariel. She stated she was not treated differently by her friends but was also rejected by family members. Allison shared that most people never questioned her race but assumed she was black because she is so dark. When dating, there were times she would have to share a picture of her family to prove to the guys that she was biracial. Her friends were shocked by her family dynamics but accepted her. On the other

hand, when it came to her mom's side of the family, who is white, the experience she shared was:

When I was younger, one family member really didn't accept me. From what I was told it was because I was black. So every time we would go to his house we would stay in the car and my mom would just go to talk to that family member for a couple of minutes to see how they were doing, then we would just leave.

Both Ariel and Allison desired to have a relationship with all of their family, but because of being biracial, the family made it impossible. It appears that the white side of the family was not accepting of the black race. Both participants appeared to have been shielded from having contact with the family members who treated them differently. They both shared an encounter that occurred when they were younger. Their parents would not allow them to be around the person or persons.

Wilson (1987) found that whites were more likely to disapprove black-white mixed- race children. The data from Ariel and Allison concurs with that theory. However, the data from Tammie and Sylvia extends the likelihood of disapproval of black-white mixed-race children to blacks. Tammie and Sylvia were accepted by their white side of the family but experienced rejection from the black side. Tammie, whose father is black, stated the following:

My dad's side of the family treated me different. My cousins picked on me. They were always making remarks about my features. They felt I thought I was too good. My dad's side of the family has always thought that I always thought I was too good for them. My dad said it was because I have lighter skin and pretty curly hair and that's what my dad would tell me.

She appeared to have been bullied by her cousins because of her biracial features. The assumptions her cousins made about her based on her skin color and hair caused them to treat her differently. This was the understanding she received from her family. The “jealousy” of the participant’s cousins placed a barrier between them having a relationship and caused them to reject her.

Sylvia, whose father is black, didn’t go into a lot of details but shared:

I feel really bad, but my dad’s side of the family treated me and my sister basically like trash. That made me angry. I used to be so upset. We just had to go over. We would go with my dad to see them and as soon as we entered the house, I was so angry. I completely shut down. Like, I don’t want to be here. I hate these people and I don’t want to look at them. But I couldn’t say anything because it was being disrespectful and I wasn’t brought up that way. It used to make me mad.

The participant expressed the rage she felt. It appears her father was adamant about her and her sister having a relationship with his family even though they treated them badly. As shared in Chapter 5, this participant also experienced mistreatment by friends.

Nicole was treated differently by both sides of her family. This participant was unable to have a good relationship with most of her family. The participant experienced the same form of jealousy that Sylvia experienced. Even though she is older, she indicated:

I feel still to this day I get treatment more differently from my cousins than members outside of my family. There are no other biracial people in my family. At times I was not sure if the family



was treating me differently because they didn't like my dad or if it's because of me being mixed.

Samson was not treated differently by family members but was emotionally affected by how they treated his mom. Samson, whose mother is black shared that his dad's family accepted him but mistreated his mom. He stated:

My family did not mistreat me but they did mistreat my mom. It really upset me. My dad's family, I guess didn't agree with them getting married. Therefore, they mistreated my mom. I didn't really like the way they treated her when I was younger.

Although the treatment was not directed towards Samson, he was indirectly affected. The mere fact that he knew they did not approve of his mom, who is black, provided him with an explanation of why they treated her that way. However, the impact of how his family treated his mom made him feel as if they were mistreating him.

#### PREJUDICE IN SCHOOL

Jason and Jackson experienced challenges at school. Both participants shared they were loved by both sides of their family. Jason shared that once he started high school, he realized that race really matters. There were times when he was picked on by other students. The participant did not perceive the fact that others were picking on him as mean but said it did affect him emotionally. He shared:

I don't think people were picking on me to be mean. I felt it was more just kind of joking around. Some kids would ask about my parents being different colors also. They questioned me about my race and my parents' race in school. I was a little upset. This is

when I first realized that race was important. Before, I felt like it matters what people look like, even if they were different, you could still be friends with them. I just felt race shouldn't matter when it comes to friends, but I found out not everyone felt that way.

The participants' experiences validate McClurg's (2004) finding that adolescents may experience problems socializing. The author explained that black-white mixed-race children may have problems trying to decide which group to socialize with. However, all of the participants, except Sylvia, only experienced socialization problems with family members.

Jackson shared that he got along great with his friends and family members but had a very hard time with teachers. Jackson felt that he socialized easily with both white and black friends. He also shared that he had an equal number of black and white friends. He did say he was constantly told that he was acting white or acting black but it never affected how he socialized with his friends. The participant felt teachers treated him differently. He shared:

Yes. I had a very, very, very bad experience at that high school I attended. In one of my favorite classes, which was band, I had four or five teachers that were actually in that program. Of those five teachers that came in, one of the instructors was the hardest on me. At first I figured it was he liked me. But then I realized differently. I was very accomplished at that point. I had reached some very high levels of achievement in my high school class. One of the teachers was holding me back. He made it a point to let me know that there wouldn't be a black leader in the band class. It weighed a little bit on me and on my family, which is one of the biggest reasons I didn't pursue a career in music.

Jackson's experience with his teacher reveals prejudice. The teacher, who was white, pointed out to the participant, who desired to be a leader, that there

would be no black leaders in his class. It is interesting that at first, the participant viewed the mistreatment from the teacher as the teacher favoring him. The unfortunate thing is the mistreatment damaged the participant emotionally and caused him to never pursue his music career.

### I AM INVISIBLE

Marilyn, Erin and Angela shared great experiences with families, friends and school. However, each one felt mentally as if she were invisible in society. They felt people really fail to understand that biracial children have experiences different from children who are one race.

Marilyn stated it annoyed her when the family received stares. There were times when they were in the mall walking or out to dinner that people would not stop looking at them. The participant said the stares made her feel very uncomfortable. She never understood why people stared at them when all they wanted to do was go out and have dinner together. She felt the stares were because they were biracial. The participant further explained:

I just want people that aren't biracial to have a better understanding of the problems we have. The things that we go through just because I guess, a lot of people don't really think we're different. We do have a lot of different experiences just being biracial. So I guess I would want people to have a better understand of that. We don't want to be stared at as if we are zoo people or something. We are normal just like everyone else.

It appears that participant feels that being biracial is an invisible normal race in society and that people view them almost like aliens. It can be assumed

that she felt people were viewing them as if something was wrong with them because they were two races. Her desire is that people would grasp and understand what biracial children experience. Angela extended the perspective of Adult child # 7 by saying:

I think people should spend more time talking about biracial. At one point, I was on a path to self-discovery which happened later in life and I felt invisible within society. I do feel if my parents had helped me more, this could have been prevented. But now, even at 35, I feel invisible. There's no biracial mark for anything. I have to choose other on documents. Why am I considered other rather than biracial? There is this cliché that all biracial black and white children are beautiful. I have heard that about myself, my face, my skin, my hair, my complexion. But my body shape takes after my mother. So in trying to fit in with black people, I am not shaped like a black girl. That is significant but when you are an adolescent and you want most of your friends to be accepting [of you], I think you cares about that. That ventures over into adulthood, [where I ask am beautiful or not.]

## SUMMARY

Extending findings in the literature, the adult children in this study shared detailed encounters of their racial experience. None of the participants shared experiences of being attacked physically because of their race, but all felt emotionally affected by the experiences. Tizzard and Phoenix (2002) found that mixed-race children experienced name calling, but as they aged, it did not bother them. However, the author stated that being called names did not bother them as they aged. The participants in this study did not report being called racist names.

Interestingly, all the participants in this study experienced some type of challenge. They included being rejected by family members, treated differently in

school, and feeling invisible in society. Some participants were not accepted by at least one side of their family. Although Wilson (1987) found that this type of rejection was common among the white race, data in this current study show that this behavior also exists among black family members. Even though participants in this study were not called names, they did, however experience the challenge of being rejected.

Other participants were loved by family members but rejected by teachers and friends at school. This challenge is consistent with McCurg's (2004) finding that black-white mixed-race children may experience problems in socializing. The author addressed the concern about being able to fit in certain social groups; however, she failed to address the treatment from teachers. The data in the current study shows that black-white mixed-race children did experience mistreatment by the teachers in school.

There was no existing research on the finding that black-white mixed-race children feel invisible. As stated by participant #12, who was 35 at the time of the interview, because people do not accept her as biracial, it makes her feel invisible. There were other participants who shared similar feelings. This challenge adds to existing data. Historically, black-white mixed-race children probably didn't feel this way because of a greater need to just be accepted. In the past, racism experienced by black-white mixed-race children was more prevalent than in contemporary society.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings of this research investigating identity development for black-white mixed-race children. It discusses the implications of the findings for research and for social practice and policy. It makes recommendations for future research.

#### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Using a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to address three research questions: (1) How do parents assist their children with developing their racial identity? (2) How do black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity? (3) What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children? The findings do yield answers to these research questions. The participants in this study provided insightful information about identity development and challenges associated with being mixed-race.

#### *Strategies Used by Parents*

Overall, the parents in this study had strategies in place to assist their children with developing their identity. The data show that some parents understood there was a need for their child to understand they were black and white even though society may see them as one race. There was not a

consensus among the parent participants in this study that choosing one race was a bad thing. The data reveals that some parents expressed that their child was black regardless of being mixed with both races. Other participants revealed that they would teach their children they were both races but encourage them to always do what benefits them.

The data revealed that black-white mixed-race children do at some point want to know what color they are. As stated in the literature review, Roth (2005) explained that the developing of racial identity is based on age. Even though Roth suggests this process does not occur until teenage years, the data in this study revealed that it occurs earlier. Children of participants in this study were curious about their race as early as age five. At such young ages, the participants felt it was best to teach the children they were both black and white. Even though the parents explained to the children they were both black and white, there were children who, as early as age five, decided they would be black or white. The most common thing that sparked the young children to ask questions about their race was noticing that their mom and dad were different colors. According to the data, the child's decision to be black was based on which parent they wanted to be like.

As the children aged, the parents had specific strategies in place to assist them with developing their racial identity. The four strategies used by participants in this study are: *educating the children about both sides of their culture,*

*remembering the one drop rule, giving them a spiritual foundation but also teaching them to use their race to benefit them, and being color blind.*

The participants in this study felt it was vital to expose their children to both sides of their family. They felt this was a way to help the children learn more about who they are and the background of their race. Those who did not take their children around family members took their children to museums and encouraged them to read books. Interestingly, the findings did not show that any of the parents encouraged their children to read books about the white race, only the black. Either way the participants felt it was their job to educate their children and allow them to decide later what race they wanted to be.

Another strategy used by the participants in this study was the “one drop rule.” Those who believed in the “one drop rule” told their children they were black. The parents felt it was not important to help children understand they were black and white, but it was more important for them to understand how society was going to see them. The participants in this study expressed that regardless of the many changes that have occurred, the “one drop rule” is still alive and well. Therefore, when assisting their children with developing their racial identity, they explained to them that because they have one drop of black blood, people would always see them as being black. The parents felt that helping the child understand this concept justified their decision to tell them they are black.



Four couples provided their children with a spiritual foundation which encouraged them not to focus on color, but to understand who they are in God. This strategy suggested that if the children were secure in their faith, a racial identity is not needed. On the other hand, the parents encouraged their children to use their race to benefit them. This means the children were trained be black when they needed to and be white when they needed to. The participants mainly used the benefit strategy when it came to scholarships and jobs.

Although there were participants who trained their children not to focus on race but used their race to benefit them, there were parent participants who trained their children not to see race/color at all. These parents did not discuss race in their house, nor did they allow their children to discuss race. The participants felt it was more important to train their children about good morals and work ethics. They felt that if their children had a good understanding of morals and work ethics, race would not be important.

#### *Racial Identity Development of Children*

The adult children participants in this study presented data on how they developed their racial identity. Interestingly, none of the participants chose to identify themselves as white; they only chose to be black or black and white. The reasons the participants chose to be black or black and white varied.

Overall, the participants who chose to be black did so because of how they were treated by family members or members of society. Some of the

participants shared that their parents attempted to teach them to accept being black and white; however, because of experiences they chose to be black. The participants shared how at least one member of their family disowned one of their parents or mistreated them. Others shared they were treated differently or called names. Only one participant stated she did not experience any bad treatment. She decided she was black because she was dark.

Those who chose to be both black and white did so because they felt their parents trained them well, being black and white was beneficial, or they felt comfortable with who they were. Some of the participants expressed that their parents did a good job of teaching them about who they were as a black-white child. Because their parents did such a good job at explaining and educating them about being black and white, as they aged they decided not to be black or white, but biracial. Other participants felt it was a benefit to be black and white, and therefore, they used it to their advantage. This confirms the parents' ideas about how race operates in the larger world, as well as, supports parental strategies for using race as a benefit in the lives of their children. Overall, all of the adult children, by the time they reached 18, had developed their racial identity.

### *Challenges Facing Black-White Mixed-race Children*

All of the adult children in this study faced challenges as a black-white mixed-race child. For some, those challenges did not stop as they aged but

proceeded into adulthood. The three common challenges the participants in this study faced were being rejected by family, treated with prejudice in school, and feeling invisible.

Some of the participants not only saw their parents being rejected by family members, but they were also. They shared that there were uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins who they do not have a relationship with. This was not their fault but that of their family members who were not happy about their parents marrying outside of their race. This study shows that not only do white families reject mixed-race marriages but also black families. Because the families rejected the couple the children were rejected also.

The participants in this study also shared how they were treated differently by educators. There was a time when they were forbidden from excelling because of their race. Because of the mistreatment, one participant's career goal changed. The others were emotionally affected. This shows that there were concrete consequences for their racial identity. Being mistreated by teachers in school seemed to have placed fear in the participant about seeking a career in music. It is possible that the participant felt if he was held back in school because of his race, he could expect to be held back by society as he aged. The experiences relayed by the participants in this study echo the experiences of African Americans historically.

One of the other challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children is feeling invisible. The participants felt that people in society overlook the fact that they are black and white and want to force them to choose one race. They felt it was not fair that when they filled out documents, there was not a box for biracial. The participants expressed that there are so many biracial children in society today that documents need to be updated. This suggests there may be a need to update documents to reflect the biracial population.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH

Findings of this study confirm some of the results in the literature but challenge others. Some of the data in this study was consistent with existing research. For example, Hills and Thomas (2000) presented three strategies used by black-white mixed-race couples to assist their children with developing their identity: the blocking strategy, transforming strategy, and generating strategy. The strategy Hills and Thomas felt was the most effective was the blocking strategy. The blocking strategy suggested that parents should block or restrain their children from oppressive narratives that others may attempt to impose on them. This strategy is consistent with parents who decided to “see no race and hear no race.” The parent participants who trained their children to see no race extend Hill and Thomas’s “blocking strategy.” It was important for these couples to give their children a strong foundation in God, which could be viewed as a

form of “blocking.” The couples placed more emphasis on teaching their children to be moral citizens rather than to focus on color.

Some data in this study challenges Hills and Thomas’s blocking strategy. For example, more parents in this study did not suppress what others may impose on their children but educated them on what they would face because of their race. Rather than suggesting their race was not an issue in society, they felt it was important for their children to know how others were going to see them because one of their biological parents was black and the other was white. It appeared that most of the parent participants in this study made sure that their children understood society would view them as black even though they are mixed with black and white ancestries. This was especially true for the parents who were mindful of the “one drop rule.”

However, existing studies suggest that parents who do not train their children about their race are “setting them up for failure.” According to Hughes and Chen (1997), parents’ silence about race leaves children ill-prepared for social injustices and stereotypes they will inevitably encounter. The data presented by adult children provides evidence that it is important for black-white mixed-race couples to discuss the topic of race with their children. Many of the adult children participants expressed that they felt their parents should have talked to them more about their racial identity. Some felt they were blind-sided by people not accepting them as black and white but only saw them as one color.

This also left participants feeling that they were invisible as a biracial person and only seen as black.

Hughes and Johnson (2001) found that when black-white mixed couples received reports that their children were being mistreated, this was when they would communicate with their children about their race. The authors suggested that geographical location affected parents' communication about race with their children. The data in this study did not suggest geographical location had an influence on racial discussion for the families. Current data presents evidence that the race of the parent had a direct impact on race discussions. Among the participants in this study, there was a consistent pattern of concern, among the black parents, about how their children would be treated.

Findings in other existing research conducted by Elliott and Asletine (2012) showed that black parents closely monitor their children because of concerns about racism. The authors further stated that parents of color strive to teach their children how to flourish in discriminatory/hostile environments. Overall, most of the black parents in this study assumed their children would face some sort of racism because of their race regardless of where they lived and therefore sought to prepare them. Interestingly, some parents had concerns about their children experiencing racism, while others felt that in contemporary society, race is not an issue.

Data present by the adult children also challenge the previous literature. Rosato (1998) found that children who grew up in healthy and happy home environments developed positive identities. The participants in this study reported facing many emotional challenges because of the lack of understanding of who they were. The participants stated their parents were very loving and supportive, but that alone did not help assist them with developing a healthy racial identity. They explained how they felt things would have been a lot easier if their parents had talked to them.

Roth (2005) reported that family structure (father being the head of the house) and physical characteristics affect how black-white mixed-race children develop racial identity. Roth's finding on physical characteristics is consistent with the current study with a slight challenge. Most of the participants who were darker automatically assumed the identity of a black person. On the other hand, those who were lighter did not assume the white identity. The data in this study shows that participants either identified themselves as black or black and white (biracial).

This study found that family structure had no influence on black-white children's racial identity process. None of the participants used the role of their parents to determine if they were going to identify as black or white. Most of the participants reported that the race of their parent was never questioned as a deciding factor for which race they were going to be. However, they did want to

understand, at a young age, if mom is white and dad is black, then what color am I? Their understanding was “I know I’m not all black, and I know I am not all white, so what color am I?”

Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) typology of identities for black-white mixed-race children was also challenged by the data in this study. The authors identified four racial identities for black-white mixed-race children: singular identity, border identity, protean identity, and transcendent identity. That is, black-white mixed-race children chose to be exclusively black or white (singular), biracial, sometimes black and sometimes white (protean), or no race at all (transcendent). However, the participants in this study only chose to be either black or biracial. None of the participants ever chose white as their racial identity; however, they chose a unique singular identity. Also none of the participants reported there was a time when they did not choose a racial category.

All of the participants in this study experienced some form of challenge. The data in this study expands existing findings related to challenges faced by black-white mixed-race children. The current literature does not show how these challenges influence how mixed-race children develop their racial identity. For example, Tizzard and Phoenix (2002) found that name calling, at a young age, bothered mixed-race children, but as they aged, it did not. The authors also found that the majority of the participants in their study experienced being called racist names, but racist name calling stopped when they became an adult. The



participants in this study reported that they still have racist experiences. The experiences still continue whether it's through stares from others, being rejected by family members and treated differently in school.

Overall, the data in this study presents new information on identity development for black-white mixed-race children and provide answers to all three research questions of this study. The themes developed in this research show that there are environmental and social factors that influence how mixed-race children develop their racial identity. But this study goes a little further and brings out personal experiences that influence identity development for black-white mixed-race children, such as seeing their parents being called racist names, being rejected by family members, and being mistreated in school. In this study, participants' experiences caused them to decide if they were going to be black or biracial.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL PRACTICE AND POLICY

The findings of this study also have implications for social practice and policy. Based on the data in this study, age five is when children really begin to question parents about their color. Most adult children participants reported at that age, their parents told them they were who God made them, a human being, or black and white. The truth of the matter is most adult children felt these responses did not assist them with developing their racial identity but caused them to ask more questions. Overall, it appears that the conversation of

developing a racial identity is an ongoing process. Based on the data, this study suggests that parents must be more comfortable with painting a realistic portrait of race in the United States.

The biracial and multiracial population is growing in America. Identity development for black-white mixed-race children is a very complex issue. Even though there is an assumption that society is more accepting of mixed-race couples in America, there is still strong resistance for accepting black-white mixed-race children. While the “one drop rule” was supposed to be nullified, there is still evidence that it is used in contemporary society. This study provides practical information to parents of black-white mixed-race children that it is vitally important to educate their children on who they are and to help them develop a racial identity. The reasons why a racial identity is important are evident in the data collected in this study.

The participants in this study reported being rejected by the family, being treated differently in school, and feeling invisible. Most of the adult children participants in this study did not share their negative experiences with their parents. This could have occurred for various reasons. The common response from the participants about their experiences was: “I never understood why they didn’t like me or treated me differently.” They knew the treatment was associated with race but still lacked an understanding of why people, including the family, treated them differently because of their color.

There is concrete evidence in contemporary society that black-white mixed-race children have challenges. On November 13, 2008, the first black president was elected in the United States, President Barack Obama. There was much controversy about President Obama's color. His mother was white and his father was black. Piston (2010) reported during his presidential campaign that Obama seldom referred to himself as black and rarely mentioned race at all. However, much discussion about his race took place among the American population. The author found that prejudice led to a significant loss of white voters. Even though the current president had a white mother, the overall perception of him is that he is black. The fact that he lost voters because of his race indicates that challenges remain for black mixed-race children, and it is important for parents to work with their children.

It is evident that race is socially constructed. Race has been constructed in different ways at different times and places for many reasons. Spickard and Root (1992) stated in 1950, the Census categories reflected a different social understanding: Black, White, and Other. The authors found in 1870 the UNITED STATES Bureau of the Census divided the American population into races: White, Colored (Blacks), Colored (Mulattoes), Chinese, and Indian. Racial categories are established by policy makers for various reasons. Current racial categories do not include biracial. Based on this study, there is a need to revisit the current categories to include a biracial or multiracial/mixed-race category.

Adult children in this study reported that not seeing a biracial category on documents caused them to feel invisible. None of the participants mentioned multi-racial as a category. Because of the growing population of black-white mixed-race children, there is now a need to include a biracial or mixed-race category.

The mere fact that we have a biracial president should make the American public more accepting of biracial people and provoke policy makers to include biracial or multiracial as a category on documents. Many may argue against this addition, but their position does not minimize the need to address the issue. Saulny (2011) reported among American children the multiracial population has increased almost 50 percent to 4.2 million since 2000, which makes them the fastest growing youth group in this country. The author stated since 2000, the number of people of all ages who identified themselves as both white and black increased 134 percent according to U. S. Census data. This data alone supports the need to add the biracial category to documents so that biracial people do not have to check black, white, or other.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For future research on identity development among black-white mixed-race children, I suggest the following recommendations:

The first recommendation is to narrow the age group of mixed-race children. The age group for the adult children in this study was 18-35. An

analysis of the data revealed that those who were 18-25 had more consistent responses than those who were 25-35. This result could be because those 25 and older were born in the 1970s and 1980s when the perception of race was somewhat different. Also, those 25-35 finished college and were in the workforce. Therefore, their perception of their race and society was different. Those who were 18-25 were either in high school or just finishing college. Although they shared some of the same feelings as those who were 25-35, their experiences were very limited.

Also, future research should interview mixed-race children and their parents. Interviewing both children and their parents would assist with gathering more consistent data about the assistance received from the parents. Many of the couples in this study had children under 18; therefore, the age restriction made interviewing their children more difficult.

My final suggestion is that future research should collect quantitative data. At times it was complicated to pinpoint clear data because the parents and children shared multiple responses to a question. Using quantitative data would ask participants to choose one answer and thus provide consistent information. Although it may be challenging to collect quantitative data on identity development, the result may be worth the effort. Future research will no doubt increase knowledge of the ongoing challenges and experiences of black-white mixed-race children.

## CONCLUSION

The overwhelming response by the participants in this study attests to the ongoing issue of identity development among black-white mixed-race children. Identity development is challenging for this population because race is socially constructed. Since society continues subtly to assign a race to mixed-race children, this population still experiences rejection, name calling, and discrimination. This research finds no evidence that the participants in this study ever accepted white as their identity. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), whiteness is constructed in this society as the absence of the “contaminating” influence of blackness. The authors, who are proponents of critical race theory, believe that the “one drop rule” still prevails in society and affects the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children, regardless of the phenotypic makers. Unless this issue is addressed at the macro level, the biracial population will continue to experience challenges related to their race.

## REFERENCES

- Banks, Curtis W. and William Rompf . 1973. "Evaluative Bias and Preference Behavior in Black and White Children." *Child Development* 44: 776-783.
- Bogan, Robert and Sari Knopp Biken. 2003. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: Pearson Education.
- Brunsma, David. 2005. "Interracial Families and the Racial Identification of Mixed-Race Children: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. *Social Forces* 84(2): 1131-1156.
- Cameron, Susan, and Susan Macias Wycoff. 1998. "The Destructive Nature of the Term Race: Growing Beyond a False Paradigm." *Journal Of Counseling and Development* 76: 227-285.
- Conkin, John. 2004. *Criminology*. Boston, Da.: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cooley, Charles Horton and Hans Joachim Schubert. 1998. *On Self and Social Organization*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2003. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DePoy, Elizabeth and Laura N. Gitlin. 2011. *Introduction to Research: Understanding and Applying Multiple Strategies*. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier

- Gallagher, Charles. 2009. *Rethinking the Color Line: Readings in Race and Ethnicity*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Gibbs, Jewelle Taylor. 1998. *Biracial Adolescents*. Jossey-Bass. Pp. 302-332.
- Elliott, Sinikka and Elyshia Asetine. 2012. "Raising Teenagers in Hostile Environments: How Race, Class, and Gender Matter for Mothers' Protective Carework." *Journal of Family Issues*. 34: 719-744.
- Emens, Elizabeth. 2010. "Intimate Discrimination: The State's Role in Accidents of Sex. Sex and Love." *Harvard Law Review* 122: 2009-1402.
- Harris, David and Joseph Sims. 2002. "Who is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race." *American Sociological Review* 67 (4): 614-627.
- Harris, Trudier and J. Carlyle Sitterson. 2013. *Pigmentocracy: Freedom Story Essays* TeacherServe®. National Humanities Center.  
<<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/pigmentocracy.htm>>
- Healy, Joseph. 2009. *Statistics: A Tool for Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Thompson Learning.
- Hill, Miriam and Volker Thomas. 2000. "Strategies for Racial Identity Development: Narratives of Black and White Women in Interracial Partner Relationships." *Family Relations* 49(2): 193-200.



- Hollinger, David. 2005. "The One Drop Rule and the One Hate Rule." *Daedalus* 134 (1) 18-28.
- Hughes, Dianne and Lisa Chen. 1997. "When and What Parents Tell Children about Race: An Examination of Race Related Socialization among African American Families." *Applied Developmental Science* 4: 200-214.
- Hughes, Diane and Deborah Johnson. 2001. "Correlates in Children's Experiences of Parents' Racial Socialization Behaviors." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63: 981-995.
- Huffington Post. 2009. "Interracial Couple Denied Marriage License by Louisiana Justice Of The Peace." Retrieved October 5, 2011. ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/15/interracial-couple-denied\\_n\\_322784.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/15/interracial-couple-denied_n_322784.html)).
- Korgen, Kathleen Odell. 1998. *From Biracial to Black: Transforming Racial Identity Among Americans*. Westport CT: Praeger Publisher.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria and William F. Tate IV. 1995. "Toward a Critical Race Theory Of Education." *Teachers College Record*. 97: 47-68.
- Leslie, Leslie and Bethany Letiecq. 2004. "Marital Quality of African American and White Partners in Interracial Couples." *Person Relationship* 11(2004): 559-574.

- Michaels, Walter. 1994. "The No-Drop Rule." *Critical Inquiry* 20 (4): 758-769.
- McClurg, Laurie. 2004. "Biracial Youth and Their Parents: Counseling Considerations For Family Therapists." *Sage Publication* 12 (2): 170-173.
- Patton, Michael. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publication.
- Piston, Spencer. 2010. "How Explicit Racial Prejudice Hurt Obama in the 2008 Election." *Political Behavior*. 32: 431-451.
- Rockquemore, Kerry A. and David L. Brunsma. 2002. "Socially Embedded Identities: Theories, Typologies, and Process of Racial Identity among Black/White Biracials." *The Sociological Quarterly* 43 (3): 335-356.
- Rosato, Jennifer. 1998. "A Color of Their Own: Multiracial Children and the Family." *Brandeis Journal of Family Law* 34 (41): 41-51.
- Roth, Wendy. 2005. "The End of the One-Drop Rule? Labeling of Multiracial Children in Black Intermarriages." *Sociological Review* 20 (1): 35-67.
- Sherman, Richard. 1988. "The Last Stand: The Fight against Racial Integrity in Virginia in the 1920s." *The Journal of Southern History* 54 (1): 69-92.
- Spickard, Paul R. and Mary Root. 1992. *Racially Mixed People*. Sage Publication: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Saulny, Susan. 2011. Census Data Presents Rise in Multiracial Population of Youth. New York Times. March 24, 2011. Retrieved from database <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/us/25race.html? r=0>.

Thernstrom, Stephen. 2000. New life for the "One Drop Rule" National Review.

Retrieved from Database June 8, 2010

[http://www.tysknews.com/Depts/Constitution\\_Issues/one\\_drop\\_rule.htm](http://www.tysknews.com/Depts/Constitution_Issues/one_drop_rule.htm).

Thomas, Anita Jones, Jason Daniel Hacker, and Denada Hoxha. 2011.

"Gendered Racial Identity of Black Young Women." *Loyal University Chicago, School of Education* 64:530-542.

Tizard, Barbara and Ann Phoenix. 2002. Black, White, or Mixed Race?. New

York, NY: Routledge Publication.

Weir, Sarah. 2012. "Tender Photos Unearthed from a Turbulent Time."

Retrieved database January 21, 2012.

(<http://shine.yahoo.com/love-sex/tender-photos-unearthed-turbulent-time-235100316.html>).

Wilson, Anne. 1987. *Mixed Raced Children: A Study of Identity*. Allyn & Unwin:

Winchester, Mass.

Wright, Marguerite. 1998. *I'm Chocolate-You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black*

*and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World*. Jossey-Bass: Danvers, MA.

Yancey, George and Richard Lewis, Jr. 2009. *"Interracial Families: Current*

*concepts." and Controversies.*" New York: Routledge.

Yang, Philip. 2000. *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*. Albany, NY. State:

University of New York Press.

Appendix A  
Interview Guide for Couples

## Interview Guide for Couples

### Overview of the Study

This research is about the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children.

*The goals of this research are 1) identify challenges for black-white interracial couples, 2) examine how they develop their identity as a couple, 3) how their children develop their racial identity, 4) how the couples assist their children with developing their racial identity, and 5) identify some of the challenges their children face.*

#### **Central Questions:**

*How do black-white mixed-race couples assist their children in developing their racial identity?*

*How do black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity?*

*What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed raced children?*

The following is a detailed line of questions that flows from the interview protocol I will use with my respondents. The interview questions and the probes will center on marital issues and will explore the core categories that emerged from the interviews. While this level of detail is likely to flow from the interview questions, the respondent will also play an important role in determining what is most relevant, and the order of the questions.

## Introduction

Twelve black-white, mixed-race couples will be interviewed on the strategies they use with assisting their children in developing their racial identity along with some of the issues and challenges they and their children face. All couples or participants are 18 years or old.

This study will explore the social aspects of interracial marriages: the feelings of the couple, their view of their children's feelings, the couples' relationship with others, and their decision to marry.

## STARTING THE INTERVIEW

Now I'd like to talk with you in depth about a number of issues or concerns that may be related to your experience as a mixed-race couple: family concerns, interaction with your children, decision to marry, experience with friends, your view of your relationship: your life and your perspective.

## BACKGROUND

**Interviewer's Note:** This section will be used to collect demographic information from the respondents. Since this is a very sensitive issue, these questions will be used as an icebreaker to get the interviewer and the respondents comfortable with each other.

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. Where did you go to school?
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
6. How did you meet?
7. How long have you been married?
8. How many children do you have? What are the sexes of your children?  
How old are they?
9. What is your religious affiliation?
10. What is your current employment?
11. Do you enjoy your job?
12. Are you involved in any social organizations?
13. How many friends do you have?
14. What are some of your goals as a couple?
15. Do you have any hobbies?
16. What is your favorite place to take a vacation?

## Family and Dating Process

**The following questions deal with opinions, values and feelings.**

1. Did you grow up in a home that was against interracial dating?
2. How did you feel about it?
3. Had you ever dated outside of your race before meeting your spouse?

4. Are there any other interracial couples in your family?
5. How did you respond when you first met them?
6. Were you nervous about taking your mate home to meet your family?
7. While dating your spouse did you see color or did you see “this is someone I love”?
8. Were there any of your family members against your relationship?
9. Which side of the family had the hardest time with your relationship and how did that make you feel?
10. What were some of the things that drew you close to the idea of marriage? In other words, how did you come to the conclusion that you wanted to be together for the rest of your life?

<b>The marriage</b>
---------------------

**So now you are married**

1. What were your thoughts after the “I Do’s” were said?
2. At any point did you find yourself changing to act more like each other?
3. Do you find it easy to be you as a black-white person in your marriage?
4. Being that you came from not just two different families but also two different cultures as well, were there any challenges with blending behaviors?
5. Did you all ever discuss the culture background and how you were going to handle your differences?
6. Did you ever hear, “You are acting white?” Or “You are acting black?”
7. If so, how did that make you feel?
8. How did you handle the stares/comments when you introduced your wife/husband to people?
9. How do you identify yourself as a couple?
10. Were you taking on each other’s identity?
11. Were you concerned about having children?
12. If so, what were they?

### **The children**

**The following questions deal with how the parents assist the children with developing their racial identity.**

1. How do you feel about racial groups in America? Do they serve a purpose?
2. How do (did) you answer your child when he/she ask(ed) you about his/her color?
3. After your child(ren) were born, did you have any fears related to them being mixed?
4. How did you think your child was going to be affected by being born mixed race?
5. How important do you think it is to help your child(ren) develop their racial identity as a biracial child?
6. What race do you identify your child as? Do you tell them that?
7. How did you decide his/her race? Is this something you all discussed as a couple or did it just happen?
8. Who is the head of your household? Does that influence your decision about racial identity for you and your child(ren)?
9. What strategies do you have in place to assist your child(ren) with developing his/her racial identity?
10. Does who you associated with influence how you communicate with your child(ren) about their race?
11. How do you handle situations when your child is being picked on about his/her race?

### **CLOSING QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think that other couples who have experienced problems as an interracial couple would share similar feelings as you?
2. How important do you think it is that interracial couples assist their children with developing their racial identity? Why?



3. Recently in the state of Louisiana, a judge would not marry a black-white couple because he stated he was concerned about the children? How do you feel about that?
4. Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to share?
5. What would you like to see come out of this study?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Adult Children

## Interview Guide for Adult Children

### Overview of Study

This research is about the racial identity development of black-white mixed-race children.

*The goals of this research are 1) how black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity, 2) how their black-white parents assist their mixed-race children with developing their racial identity, and 3) identify some of the challenges the black-white mixed-race children face.*

#### **Central Questions:**

*How do black-white mixed-race couples assist their children in developing their racial identity?*

*How do black-white mixed-race children develop their racial identity?*

*What are some of the challenges faced by black-white mixed race children?*

The following is a detailed line of questions that flows from the interview protocol I will use with my respondents. The interview questions and the probes will center on marital issues and will explore the core categories that emerged from the interviews. While this level of detail is likely to flow from the interview questions, the respondent will also play an important role in determining what is most relevant, and the order of the questions.

### Introduction

Twelve black-white, mixed-race children will be interviewed on how they develop their racial identity along with some of the issues and challenge they face. All participants are 18 years or old.

### STARTING THE INTERVIEW

Now I'd like to talk with you in depth about a number of issues or concerns that may be related to your experience as a mixed-race person.

### BACKGROUND

**Interviewer's Note:** This section will be used to collect demographic information from the respondents. Since this is a very sensitive issue, these questions will be

used as an icebreaker to get the interviewer and the respondents comfortable with each other.

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. Are your siblings biracial?
5. Where did you go to school?
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
7. Are you married?
8. How long have you been married?
9. How many children do you have? What are the sexes of your children?  
How old are they?
10. What is your religious affiliation?
11. What is your current employment?
12. Do you enjoy your job?
13. Are you involved in any social organizations?
14. How many friends do you have?
15. What are some of your goals?
16. Do you have any hobbies?
17. What is your favorite place to take a vacation?

<b>CHILDHOOD</b> <b>Ages 7-12</b>
--------------------------------------

1. When you were a child (between the ages of 7-12) were you curious about your race?

2. What were your thoughts about having one white parent and one black parent? Did you ever question your parents about this after seeing some of your friends had parents of the same race?
3. After it was clear to you that your parents were two different races, were you confused about what race you were? How did this affect you in school and when it came to choosing friends?
4. Between the ages of 7-12, did you ever talk to your mom and dad about what color you were? Can you share what you were told?
5. Were you ever picked on because of your race or because of your parents' race?
6. How did this make you feel? Did it affect emotionally, socially or educationally?
7. Did you ever talk to your parents?

<b>HIGH SCHOOL and COLLEGE EXPERIENCE</b>
---

1. So now you are in high school, as you aged, did you have a better understanding about your race?
2. Did you develop more questions as you aged or did you feel it was just time to decide who you were going to be?
3. What race do you see yourself as and how did you come to that conclusion?
4. Did you and your parents ever talk about your cultural background both black and white?
5. Did you and your parents ever talk about your racial identity? Do you feel how they explained it to you helped you? Why? Why not?

6. Did you have this conversation with your friends in school?
7. Did your teachers treat you differently?
8. Did race influence your decision to go to college (if the child went)?
9. How do you feel your parents helped you prepare for your experience as a biracial child?

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SOCIALIZATION PROCESS</b> <b>HIGH SCHOOL THOROUGH ADULTHOOD</b></p>
---

1. Rockquemore and Brusma wrote an article entitled Socially Embedded Identities: Theories, Typologies, and Process of Racial Identity among Black/White Biracials. In this article, the authors found children with one white and one black parent chose between four racial identity options: *singular identity*, *border identity*, *protean identity*, and *transcendent identity*. Singular identity is when the child exclusively chooses black or white. Border identity is when the child chooses to be exclusively biracial. Protean identity occurs when the child chooses to be white sometimes, black sometimes and biracial sometimes. Transcendent identity is when the child chooses no racial category. Can you identify with this process?
2. How did you come to the decision to choose one of the specific identities?
3. Could you see where you chose all of them at a given time? Explain.
4. Did your parents play a role in your decision to socialize with specific individuals? Was race a factor?

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLOSING QUESTIONS</b></p>
---

1. Do you think that other biracial children shared the same experience as you?
2. Recently in the state of Louisiana, a judge would not marry a black-white couple because he stated he was concerned about the children? Based on your experience as a biracial child, do you think that's a valid concern?

3. Do you think parents who are one black and one white should spend more time assisting their children with their identity development as a biracial child? If so, why do you think this is important?
4. Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to share?
5. What would you like to see come out of this study?

Appendix C  
Demographics of Couples



Couples Demographic Information/ Alias	Race of Husband	Race of Wife	Age of Husband	Age of Wife	Number of Children	Years of Marriage	Education of Husband	Education of Wife	Location	Religious Affiliation of Husband	Religious Affiliation of Wife
Couple #1											
Mark/Brenda	White	Black	36	30	4	7	Associates	Associates	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #2											
Cliff/Sharon	Black	White	62	58	2	31	Military	Master's	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #3											
Maurice/Gabby	Black	White	37	38	3	11	Bachelor's	Bachelor's	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #4											
David/Helen	Black	White	40	43	1	12	Master's	Master's	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #5											
Michael/Linda	White	Black	45	39	1	14	Associate's	Bachelor's	Texas	None	Christian
Couple #6											
Charles/Angie	White	Black	45	39	2	8.5	Master's	Master's	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #7											
Paul/Vanessa	White	Black	41	39	2	17	High School Diploma	Bachelor's	Texas	None	Christian
Couple #8											
Brian/Tracie	Black	White	38	35	10	18	Associates	Associates	Oklahoma	Christian	Christian
Couple #9											
Kevin/Kimberly	Black	White	30	33	2	4	High School Diploma	Associates Degree	Texas	Christian	Christian
Couple #10											
Jason/Francis	Black	White	29	28	1	5	High School Diploma	Associates Degree	Arkansas	Christian	Christian
Couple #11											
Frank/Sarah	Black	White	27	27	3	6 years 11 months	High School Diploma	High School Diploma	Arkansas	Christian	Christian
Couple #12											
Carl/Kathy	Black	White	36	34	2	8	Master's D	Master's	Texas	Christian	Christian

Appendix D

Demographics of Adult Children

Demographics Participant/Alias	Age	Education	Race of Father	Race of Mother	Location	Religious Affiliation
Child #1						
Ariel	27	GED	Black	White	Oklahoma	Christian
Child #2		High School				
Allison	19	Diploma	Black	White	Mississippi	Christian
Child #3		High School				
Jason	19	Diploma	Black	White	Arkansas	Christian
Child #4		High School				
Jackson	25	Diploma	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #5		High School				
Nicole	29	Diploma	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #6		High School				
Tammie	19	Diploma	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #7		High School				
Marilyn	20	Diploma	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #8		High School				
Erin	18	Diploma	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #9		Bachelor's				
Sylvia	24	Degree	Black	White	Missouri	Christian
Child #10		Master's				
Melvin	26	Degree	Black	White	Texas	Christian
Child #11		High School				
Samson	20	Diploma	White	Black	Texas	Christian
Child #12		Master's				
Angela	35	Degree	Black	White	Florida	Christian

Appendix E  
IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416  
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

September 12, 2012

Ms. Cherly Dianne Gary  
2608 Misty Harbor Dr.  
Little Elm, TX 75068

Dear Ms. Gary:

Re: *The Racial Identity Development of Black-White Mixed Race Children (Protocol #: 17102)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from September 12, 2012. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair  
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. James Williams, Department of Sociology & Social Work  
Dr. Philip Yang, Department of Sociology & Social Work  
Graduate School