BIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:

A STUDY OF COLORISM AND RACIAL INVALIDATION

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BY

RACHELLE L. GANDY, A.S., B.A.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the little '*brown*' girls of the world, this is just the beggings.

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I would first like to acknowledge my mother, Dawn Gandy, without her there wouldn't be me. She has been my greatest cheerleader and advocate throughout my education and personal life. I can't imagine where I would be without her never wavering faith in my ability to succeed in one way or another.

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ABSTRACT

RACHELLE L. GANDY

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I examine the impact familial and social dynamics play in bi/multiracial (my term for non-monoracial people) women's sense of their own racial identity. I argue for the need to reevaluate our understanding of colorism when applied to bi/multiracial individuals who are the amalgamation of their parent's interracial relationship. Their lived experiences show that lighter skin and other bodily features that signify "whiteness" are not necessarily or always more desirable. As the bi/multiracial women I spoke with demonstrate, claims to nonwhite identity categories or to multiple racial and ethnic identities may reflect attempts to externalize one's own sense of self and/or desires to belong with one's kin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A Memory

I was two-years-old when I received my first dog. Since my parents took me on annual visits to Disney World, it was no surprise that I chose to name him Pongo after the male protagonist in Disney's animated film *101 Dalmatians*. At the time, my mother was a head teller at a local bank in a small town in Upstate New York where I grew up. As the story goes, one of her coworkers owned a farm with a dog who had recently had puppies. These puppies were not "purebred" by any means; their mother was a beagle who had gotten loose while she was in heat. Lo and behold, she found herself a handsome German shepherd that lived two farms over. This led to a litter of six puppies of varying colors; gold, black, brown, and a mixture of all three.

I can still remember the night my mother took me out to the farm to pick a puppy. It was cold and wet, and the puppies were under a heat lamp, cuddled up, trying to stay warm. My mother initially tried to convince me to choose a golden-colored puppy, but I was drawn to the one that sat off to the side, in a corner of the small wooden box, away from his littermates. His coat was black, brown, and white, with a melding of the individual colors creating distinct facial markings.

My mother was perplexed by my decision, and looking back now I understand her confusion. Pongo was not the cuddly type, he did not play with toys, and his favorite things in life were naps and food: not exactly the ideal puppy for an active two-year-old. But I held a deep affection for Pongo despite his less than stellar personality. I bet you are wondering why, and you are not alone. A year later, my next-door neighbor asked me why I had chosen Pongo. My response was simple in my three-year-old mind: Pongo looked like us. He was black like my dad, white like my mother, and brown like me. I saw my unique biracial existence represented in my dog's fur.

Rachelle and Pongo Gandy (Personal photo)

Rachelle and Pongo Gandy (Personal Photo)

Background

According to Kerry Ann Rockquemore, activists and researchers have suggested that multiracialism is one of the most salient racial issues of the twenty-first century (485). Census data reveals that the US multiracial population exceeds nine million, with a vast majority of these individuals being of black/African American and white descent (Parker et al. 6). Moreover, the immigration and colonization history of the United States means that many different racial and ethnic groups reside here, whether they or their ancestors were forced to migrate or chose to do so. As a result, mixed-race identity includes people with more than two racial lineages, and to accommodate this complexity, I use the term "bi/multiracial" to describe individuals who do not identify with a single racial category.

While there is a growing body of social and psychological research on biracial individuals, there remains a need for further exploration of both racial self-identification and the role of family and childhood in the development of racial identity among this population. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of familial and social racial dynamics on bi/multiracial women's self-image and racial self-identification. Throughout this project, I applied an intersectional analytical framework in order to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with six black/white and Hispanic bi/multiracial women between the ages of 18-25. By investing time and resources into the study of bi/multiracial women, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which colorism, racial environment, and interracial families' discussions of race influence biracial women's racial identity.

The existence of bi/multiracial people is nothing new, and biracialism specifically has been a significant feature of race relations throughout American history, so a dichotomy of whiteness and blackness prevails, leaving a stark impact on the perspective of bi/multiracial individuals. Historically, offspring of an interracial union may have self-identified as biracial or even passed as white, but they were often—if not always—viewed as black in the eyes of society. The "one-drop rule," which has had a variety of names, from "black blood rule" to "traceable amount rule," defines an individual as black if they have any black ancestry in their family lineage (David). According to Rockquemore, the one-drop rule is slowly losing its power over the construction of racial identity, as we are now beginning to see new hybrid categories that reflect changes in race relations in post-civil rights America (485).

Children of interracial unions are faced with a complex racial identification process. Social assumptions about racial categories have historically excluded those who consider themselves multiracial. Founded on the premise that race is a biological reality, rather than a combination of biology, cultural context, and personal identity, a monoracial system views racial groups as homogenous and separate. In fact, the US Census only began to permit individuals to identify with more than one race in 2000 (Franco and O'Brien 113). Systems and policies like these have made it more difficult for bi/multiracialism to be visible, legible, and recognized at both macro and micro scales. According to Marisa G. Franco and Karen M. O'Brien, social forces like racial invalidation (the denial or misperception of a multiracial individual's identity) play a significant role in identity development (112). They argue that racial identity invalidation

constitutes a type of minority stress, rooted in a discrepancy between self and societal understandings. This is particularly detrimental for biracial individuals, since within this system, multiracial identities are perceived as illegitimate (Franco and O'Brien 113).

Even though acceptance of racial hybridity is on the rise, discrimination remains an issue. Unsurprisingly, biracial individuals of African descent experience racism on both individual and institutional levels, which, as with other people of color, has the potential to impact their psychological development and life opportunities (Snyder 266). In addition to experiencing forms of racism that automatically devalue people of color, biracial individuals may experience racism differently than those who identify as monoracial (Snyder 265). For example, it is common for interracial couples' extended families to reject their union from the onset, or relate ambivalently to biracial children (Crawford and Alaggia 85). Some studies, such as Franco and O'Brien's, suggest that biracial people are more at risk than their monoracial peers of experiencing discrimination, acts of violence, and behavioral health problems, including substance abuse (112-14).

Another ongoing tension for biracial individuals is that they may feel simultaneously included in and excluded from their parents' racial groups. Black/white biracial individuals often note feeling like they are "not black enough" in predominantly black settings, while at the same time feeling that they are "too black" to be accepted in white settings (Snyder 266). According to Snyder, biracial individuals' unique experiences of racism push them to identify with one racial or ethnic background over the other (266). If a biracial individual with an "ambiguous" appearance chooses to identify

as black or white, they may find their racial authenticity challenged with invasive questions such as, "What are you?" (Franco et al. 97). Such queries often leave biracial individuals with the impression that they have to choose between parts of their racial identity (Gaither 114; Snyder 266). Moreover, due to this sort of racial invalidation, biracial individuals often self-identify differently than the way others perceive them, depending on the social context (Wilton et al. 41). Thus, since biracial individuals experience alienation and rejection from multiple racial communities, they may face distinct forms of racism from people who identify as monoracial.

Recognizing the complexity of racial identification, I take an intersectional approach to this topic, situating the potential ambiguity of biraciality in relation to gender identity, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and family dynamics. All of these interrelated factors have the potential to play a significant role in identity formation. Thus, this study contributes to the relatively small body of research on the expanding bi/multiracial population, while also addressing the significance of gender and race in the lives of bi/multiracial women in the United States. It also expands epistemological understandings of the role of skin tone and colorism, positionality,[1] and interracial families' discussions of race in the lived experiences of biracial women who racially identify as part, black, white and Hispanic.

Significantly, this study also constitutes a step in the right direction regarding bi/multiracial underrepresentation in women and gender studies (WGS) research. This is

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[1] Positionality is the social and political context that creates your identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status. Positionality also describes how one's identity influences an individual's biases, understanding of and outlook on the world.

not to say that I did not find any articles within my research parameters in WGS journals. *Frontiers* and *Women's Studies Quarterly*, for example, have published articles pertaining to biraciality. However, I found that the search terms "biracial," "multiracial," and "mulatto" did not yield articles with a significant focus on biraciality in journals such as *Genders*, *Feminist Formations*, and *Signs*. Therefore, my thesis also adds to the growing field of biraciality research within WGS.

In addition to contributing to the literature about bi/multiraciality, this thesis contributes to woman's and gender studies epistemologically regarding intersectionality. Law professor and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw popularized this term in her 1991 article "Mapping the Margins," where she explained how people of color—specifically black women—are both women and people of color. Thus, black women were often marginalized by discourses that were shaped to respond to only one part of their identity, rather than the entirety of their intersectional identity. Though Crenshaw's article is noteworthy, many changes have been made within the field of women's and gender studies regarding intersectionality as a theoretical tool. In fact, intersectionality is often associated with third wave feminism due to the theories focus on creating greater awareness of privileges and power (Chazan and Baldwin 73).

Yet, a major critique of modern intersectionality as an analytic tool is its inability to emphasize beyond the multiple burdens of black women's experiences of subjectivity and oppression. According to both Jennifer C. Nash and Sirma Bilge intersectional theory has obscured questions about whether all individuals can be viewed as intersectional, or whether only those who are multiply marginalized possess an intersectional identity

(Nash 9). Thus, the call to broaden the applicability of intersectionality, along with the need for expanding intersectional analyses beyond those specially focused individuals and communities that identify monoracially (Bilge 416). My thesis expands our current understanding of intersectionality to include bi/multiracial women's nonsingular racial identity, along with their gender, class, and sexuality in order to ensure greater inclusivity and complexity within our field of study.

My conversations with six bi/multiracial women between the ages of 18 and 25 have allowed me to examine the impact of varying family, peer-group, and other cultural dynamics on the development of their biracial identities. Each of these women came from different parts of the United States, but due to my location and recruitment method, the majority of participants lived in Texas for at least one year.

Literature Review

This literature review first engages critical race theory to consider racial perceptions of African Americans and the subsequent privileges associated with whiteness. Second, I discuss the pivotal role of slavery on lasting generations of both African Americans and bi/multiracial Americans. Third, I reflect on how familial, community, and social dynamics impact bi/multiracial women's racial identity development. Finally, this section explores the unique discrimination that biracial people face, including an analysis of gender's influence on biracial experiences.

Historically, the exploitation of black women in the US can be traced back to Southern white men's sexual behavior during slavery and beyond. Southern white men were concerned not only with constructing and maintaining a caste system defined by

race but also wanted to preserve the oppressive traditions of racial patriarchy that allowed

them complete control over both black and white women (Feimster 52). As Deborah

Gray White explains, one consequence of this system was that black women did not

historically experience sexism in the same way as white women. According to White,

white men saw black women differently and therefore exploited them differently (4).

Because violations of black women's lives and personhood have plagued their existence

since the era of slavery (Haley 7), one cannot examine the lives of biracial women

without being conscious of the fact that race and sexuality remain bound together for

black women in America (White 5).

　　　　African Americans' social status has shared an intimate relationship with

perceptions of race and privileges of whiteness. According to critical race theorists

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, races are products of social thought and relations;

they are thus neither inherent nor objective (Delgado and Stefancic 7). They argue that

racism is a means by which society allocates privileges and social status, which has led to

the formation of racial hierarchies that determine who receives tangible benefits (Delgado

and Stefancic 17). Within the context of this ever-present racial caste system, black

individuals' ability to pass as white is a byproduct of social and legal

privileges. According to Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson, racial passing has generally

been understood as a phenomenon in which a person of one race identifies and presents

him/herself as another (usually white race; 380-381). Cheryl I. Harris also points out that

"passing" has historically meant gaining access to a set of public and private privileges

that help guarantee basic subsistence needs, often increasing one's chance of survival

(277). Interestingly, research conducted by Ramona Douglass a multiracial activist, also

indicates that the concept of passing (not the act itself) is racist in origin because it is

entwined with the racist one-drop rule (381).

Thus, bi/multiracial individual's lives are often complicated if they have a

perceived connection to blackness. According to black studies scholar Tru Leverette, the

one-drop rule and conceptions of whiteness are rooted in the notion of white purity and

black impurity (435). The one-drop rule has encouraged the African American

community to accept those of mixed-race ancestry, which would often give them access

to a "common fold."[2] Yet due to biracial individuals' perceived connection to whiteness,

acceptance may be begrudging and thus both problematic and a source of possibilities.

Likewise, whites often regard biracial individuals as closely embodying the benefits

associated with whiteness, while at other times denouncing the presence of blackness

within them (Leverette 435). In the antebellum era in areas such as New Orleans and

Charleston, biracial individuals held a middle social tier, acting as a "buffer" between

whites and blacks. In this context, white society often viewed them as benign, and thus

treated them paternalistically to ensure their continued cooperation. This favored and

inherently problematic status historically led to animosity from blacks (Leverette 436;

Curington 31).

In addition to the legacy of the one-drop rule, bi/multiracial people's identities are

shaped by parental racial identity claims. According to Maria P.P. Root the methods by

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[2] A common fold refers to "bringing someone into the fold," is to welcome them into a group of friendly
insiders.

which parents of black/white biracial children choose to racially identify their children

(parental racial claims) are influenced by the geographic, economic, and racial dynamics

of their household (Root 239). Parental racial claims are multifaceted in nature because

they are a direct reflection of the relationship among the child's racial formation,

social/psychological identity development, and racial socialization (Holloway et al. 523).

Research shows that individuals associated with higher-status groups are more likely to

claim a biracial identity than those associated with lower-status groups (Townsend et al.

522). According to Robert L. Reece, multiracial black Southerners are more likely to

identify as black only, as opposed to multiracial individuals raised in Northern states

(141). Racial identification, therefore, starts with sociocultural forces—geography,

culture, family dynamics, politics, and economics—which then shape our understanding

of biology, not the other way around (Townsend et al. 523).

Adding to this research considering the social context of biracial identity

development, Susan E. Crawford and Ramona Alaggia explore how mixed-race youths'

racial identities are influenced by their peers, society, and family. Three major themes

emerged from their eight in-depth interviews: participants' parental awareness and

understanding of race issues, the impact of family structure, and a lack of role models and

communication about race within families (81). Crawford and Alaggia's research falls in

line with that of David L. Brunsma and Kerry Ann Rockquemore, who found that a

biracial child's immediate community is crucial to their identity development. I,

therefore, made it a point to incorporate questions that asked interview participants to reflect on how and when their parents discussed race with them.[3]

Biracial individuals must contend with their own feelings of invalidation, as well as the feelings and perceptions of those in their environment, when constructing their racial identities (Wilton et al. 43). Brunsma and Rockquemore found that biracial individuals who have darker skin and grew up interacting with black communities have an increased likelihood of choosing a singular black identity or of being categorized by their black or brown minority heritage (Franco et al. 97). Conversely, biracial individuals whose skin tone ranges from light to medium, and those socialized in predominantly white communities are more likely to report their race as biracial, even if they experience the world as a black person (Brunsma and Rockquemore 240). Categorization research indicates that part-black biracial individuals are highly vulnerable to invalidation of the part of their racial identity deemed illegible. Such feelings of invalidation are often compounded by the fact that it is common for biracial individuals to adopt "chameleon" or malleable racial identities, or to identify with different racial identities depending on social context (Brunsma and Rockquemore 243). If this research is accurate, then further investigation into the impact of bi/multiracial individuals' social habits and adoption of a malleable racial identity is necessary to best understand how colorism impacts their ability to adopt a specific racial identity.

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[3] The author used the Multiracial Challenges and Resilience Scale, by Nazish M. Salahuddin and Karen M. O'Brien (2011) located in Appendix B.

Gender also plays a significant role in the lived experiences of being a biracial individual. On the one hand, biracial women experience a level of exotification, objectification, and hypersexualization not reported by men (Root 242). Yet biraciality may also have material benefits for women of color. For example, according to Reece, black women who worked as strippers found themselves marginalized by patrons who sought to only interact with white dancers, yet these same patrons were willing to receive services from multiracial "exotic-looking" women with racially ambiguous features. Such multiracial strippers were found to earn more income than women who were perceived as "only" black (142). Dedicated to the lived experiences of biracial women from varied walks of life, this study begins to theorize the role that colorism, environment/location, racial (in)validation, and familial and social dynamics all play in the development of biracial racial identity.

Methodology

Many of the studies conducted on biraciality are quantitative in nature (i.e., Crawford and Alaggia; Franco et al; Kerwin et al.). For this study, I have engaged in qualitative research from a feminist theoretical perspective. The use of this specific perspective allows the researcher the ability to explore and/or understand the underlying reasons associated with their given topic at the lived experiences level of one's participants. According to William Neuman, qualitative researchers have also been known to become "immersed" or deeply involved often at a personal level with their data collection process (270-75). Moreover, feminist perspectives emphasize the need to challenge sexism, racism, colonialism, class, and other forms of inequality within the

research process (Naples 13). Thus, the use of a feminist theoretical perspective has allowed me the ability to challenge our current understanding of racial identity development and the role colorism plays in the development of bi/multiracial woman's identity development.

The Multiracial Challenges and Resilience Scale (MCRS) was developed by Naxish M. Salahuddin and Karen M. O'Brien in 2011 to analyze identity development, specifically in relation to social connectedness, self-esteem, and ethnic identity of biracial individuals. Although their work is quantitative, I have used the MCRS as a guide to help me formulate interview questions that facilitated detailed conversations regarding participants' lived experiences as biracial women in America. Questions pertaining to the emotional impact of family dynamics and geographic location on biracial racial identity, along with feelings of isolation and/or having to choose between parents' ethnic background, have enriched my understanding of the ways in which black/white bi/multiracial identity develops in cisgender women.

For this study, I interviewed six black/white biracial women between the ages of 18 and 25 from a variety of demographics. The study was advertised through the Texas Woman's University campus-wide email server and consisted of an initial 90-minute interview session conducted either face-to-face (at a location of the participant's choosing) or through Skype and additional information gathered through email correspondence. During these interviews, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym to use throughout the study to protect their anonymity.

Judith Butler argues that the personal is inherently political (522)—an analysis that has influenced my decision to address a topic that is personal and political, as well as academically significant, in my life. My choice to conduct qualitative interviews has allowed me a glimpse into the private lives of black/white biracial women. Many of the stories they shared with me are similar to my own deeply personal experiences. I found that during these interviews, participants helped me gain new insights into the interconnectedness of skin color/outward appearance, family dynamics, and environment. However, I am aware of the drawbacks and complications associated with working on research that is closely tied to one's personal experiences and identity. For example, throughout this research process, I did find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance among appreciation for my thesis, dealing with my own biraciality within the academy, and my responsibility to ethically explore and discuss my participants' lived experiences. Ultimately, though, I would like to use my positionality as a black/white biracial woman to significantly contribute to scholarship on identity politics and biraciality. After all, the Combahee River Collective said it best: "we believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics comes directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression" (Weiss 272). I agree. I have only ever known the world as a black/white biracial cisgender woman, and the site of my research, activism and politics is all heavily influenced by my identity.

These interviews were intended to address my primary research question: What is the impact of geographic location and family dynamics on biracial women's self-image and racial self-identification? I analyzed each interview transcript to identify themes and

patterns in participants' responses. The results indicate that skin tone, isolation/cultural

homelessness, feelings of invisibility/visibility, hyperawareness of race, family dynamics,

location/space, discrimination, chameleon behavior, and self-identification were all

significant in shaping how my participants understood their racial identity. In the next

chapter, I examine the role colorism has played in my participants' biracial experience,

specifically via their skin tone and hair texture. I then conclude the thesis with the

discussion of the nuanced relationship shared between racial validity and outward

appearance, ultimately complicating our current understanding of the relationship shared

between colorism and racial authenticity.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS THE WEIGHT OF ONE'S SKIN?

Introduction

Following the legalization of interracial marriage in 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*), the

United States has seen a "biracial baby boom"—the exponential growth of numbers of

biracial children. In 2000, the US census reported that approximately 6.8 million

Americans, or 2.4% of the total population, identified as more than one race ("Multiracial

Population"). By the 2010 census, that population had increased to 9 million ("Multiracial

Population"). At the time of this writing, the Census Bureau is in the process of gathering

data for the 2020 census, which will allow future researchers a more accurate sense of

how the bi/multiracial population has expanded over the last 10 years. The biracial baby

boom led to an increase in social science studies theorizing its potential influence on the

racial identification processes and options available to this new generation of Americans

in the late 1980s and 1990s (Jackson 43-44). With the visibility of biracial/multiracial

mainstream public figures, such as actress Jennifer Beals, singer Alicia Keys, and actress,

philanthropist, and Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle, there has been a more recent

increase in social science research attempting to understand the impact of social

structures such as colorism and racial validation on biracial individuals' racial

identification processes.

This chapter explores colorism in relation to my participants' feelings of

invisibility and visibility, cultural homelessness, objectification, and discrimination based

on their skin tone. I argue that traditional understandings of colorism, which assert that

light skin or whiteness is always desired and/or valued over darker skin or blackness, are not adequate for an analysis of the experiences of bi/multiracial individuals. Colorism is defined as prejudice and discrimination from both within and outside of an individual's minority group that primarily reflects a preference for lighter skin tones and more European-looking features in people of color (DaCosta 28-29). According to Margaret Hunter, the maintenance of white supremacy via aesthetic, ideological, and material signifiers is predicted on interpretations of dark skin as the physical representation of savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority (238-39). White skin, and thus whiteness, has been defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and overall superiority (White 238). However, since my participants straddle the metaphorical fence of their parents' interracial coupling and are thus not entirely black, Hispanic, or white, their racial identity is an amalgamation of at least two racial/ethnic backgrounds. While there are monetary and social benefits associated with the ability to be perceived as white or light-skinned, my participants' feelings of invisibility and visibility, cultural homelessness, objectification, and experiences of discrimination are not sufficiently accounted for by colorism as a frame for understanding race and racism in the United States.

Geography, Family, and Racial Identity

For this project, I interviewed a total of six bi/multiracial women ranging in age from 18 to 25, all of whom were raised within a variety of geographic locations and family dynamics. As a biracial woman, I also bring my own experience into this thesis. As stated in the introduction, I have been conscious of my biracial status and the

importance of skin color since the age of three. Both of my parents racially identifies differently: my father identifies as black, while my mother identifies as Puerto Rican and Polish (white). I was born in 1994 in a small town in the Hudson Valley in Upstate New York. There, I was raised with a clear idea that my being biracial was "normal" and understood by those in my environment. Even so, my childhood left me with a variety of scars concerning what it means to be biracial in America.

Racial identity is rooted in transactional processes that define the elements that determine social stratification. Thus, bi/multiracial people's environment significantly influences their racial identity (Root 238). I asked each participant to identify a specific location that they consider to be their hometown in order to help situate their racial environment and its potential impact on their bi/multiraciality. Racial environment can be defined as the surroundings or conditions in which a biracial individual experiences and develops social norms. In addition, social perceptions of and/or assumptions about a biracial individual's race often depend upon location. For example, historically in many cities such as Chicago, many believed that intermarriage constituted social suicide, and whites and blacks who intermarried were consequently confined to the black social sphere along with their offspring. This racial environment of this city would thus ultimately impact bi/multiracial children's racial identity development (DaCosta 28-29).

Family environment is also significant for identity development. The physical and racial geography of one's household and family impact the process by which parents label their bi/multiracial children. Parents' racial claims are multifaceted in nature, as they are a direct reflection of the relationship between processes of racial

formation/socialization and social/psychological identity development, all of which are powerfully situated within the individual family and household (Holloway 523). Moreover, family life is important because bi/multiracial children traditionally live in a community, or "bubble," of their parents' making. But when a bi/multiracial child leaves their familial "bubble," they are then required to negotiate their racial identity in a new space with potentially different racial relations and histories (Root 239).

My first participant, Naomi (age 21), identifies as biracial. Her mother identifies as white/Hispanic, while her father is Trigeño/black-Hispanic. Despite moving many times, Naomi has always considered Arlington, Texas to be her hometown. During her interview, Naomi discussed how and when she became aware of her biraciality:

> If I'm honest, I didn't really consider myself to be biracial growing up. It wasn't until I got to college that my racial heritage became a topic of focus for me. Because growing up in my family, the topic of race was somewhat simple—we were Hispanic and that was it. And so, on the rare occasions when I would ask questions about my race, my parents would say they really didn't know for sure because we were a mixture of different races. So, for me, I never really thought about it until a group of my new friends here on campus who happen to be black as well asked me if I was black or biracial, I guess because I don't "look" like a typical Hispanic woman. So that's when I started to question my racial identity and my family's mixed heritage.

It is of particular interest to me that Naomi did not begin to question her racial identity until she was college-age, which is not uncommon (Root 239). She explained that her

racial environment varied greatly throughout her childhood due to her father's military career. For example, she was originally born in Fort Riley, Kansas, but her family relocated to Germany when Naomi was six-years-old, and then to Puerto Rico after her father was medically discharged. Throughout these moves, Naomi said that her parents maintained a racially diverse environment due to the diversity often found in and around military bases.

Like Naomi, my second participant, Purple (age 18), grew up in a variety of places because of her father's military career and also described her racial environment as highly diverse. When prompted to pick a specific location as her hometown, Purple indicated spending a lot of her childhood at Fort Hood in Texas. Her mother is an immigrant from Germany who identifies as white, her father identifies as a black American, and Purple herself identifies as biracial. When discussing her feelings regarding her biraciality Purple described a common sentiment—that her multiracial heritage prevents her from feeling that she truly fits in anywhere. She explained:

> As I've gotten older, I have definitely come to embrace my blackness more than I did as a youth. I can remember being a kid and always feeling like I was in this weird "in-between" space, like I was too white for the black girls, and I was too black for the white girls. So, I always felt out of place and strange growing up and throughout my adolescence. But now I think I've come to embrace the entirety of my racial identity, if that makes sense.

What Purple described did indeed make sense to me. As a black/white biracial woman, I mostly grew up with my mother's side of the family, which is predominantly

white. I can recall noticing throughout my childhood that I didn't look like my cousins with blonde hair and blue eyes. I also remember the looks we would get when I accompanied my white aunt and uncle to stores. Strangers always looked at me as if I did not belong, and when I think back, most of the negative looks came from white people. For most of my life, I felt as if I did not fit in with white or black people. So, to put it simply, I knew exactly what Purple was talking about.

Kendra (age 21) is one of the few participants who spent part of her childhood in both the US Northeast and Southeast. She considers the state of Rhode Island to be her hometown, and describes the racial environment throughout her childhood as predominantly white. Kendra's father identifies as African American, her mother as Caucasian, and Kendra as biracial. When asked to describe her feelings about that identity, she responded, "Fine. I mean. I don't know any other way. And I know this isn't the case for everyone but I haven't had any issues regarding friends or family and my being biracial. So, I guess I have a pretty positive outlook on being biracial." Kendra's ability to effortlessly discuss her feelings regarding her biraciality (or lack thereof) was surprising to me. But as Maria P. P. Root points out, biracial children's physical environment significantly impacts their racial identity development (238). Thus, it is possible that the social acceptance that Kendra experienced in Rhode Island, coupled with her parents' willingness to embrace her ambiguity as a biracial individual, played a role in her attitude towards her biraciality. Likewise, my biraciality often went unchecked in suburban Update New York, where most people seemed to understand and accept my racial ambiguity, automatically classifying me as biracial or "mixed." In fact, I was not

questioned about my racial identity until I moved to South Carolina for college. It was then that my darker skin tone and African American-leaning facial features led those within my social environment to code my race as black—not biracial.

Julie (age 18), my fourth participant, primarily grew up in Houston, Texas—an environment made up predominantly of Hispanics and African Americans. Julie's mother identifies as white and Mexican, as she immigrated to the United States as a young child; her father identifies as African American. According to Julie's demographic paperwork, she labeled her race as biracial, but throughout her interview she also indicated the desire to be viewed as Mexican. When asked to describe her feelings about her identity, Julie said:

> I kind of like being mixed sometimes, and other times I don't like it at all. I've always felt like I couldn't really fit in with any crowd. I've struggled with feeling like people were always trying to put me in a specific box according to my parents' race and how they looked. Because for me, I grew up mostly with my mom, so I tend to classify myself as Mexican over black. But I remember going to school and people would say to me. "Oh, you're not Mexican, you don't even speak Spanish." And yeah, I couldn't speak Spanish but something they didn't know was that I could understand it pretty well.

The complexity Julie describes is in part related to both her physical and racial environment and her family dynamics. Because she was raised primarily by her mother, and because she witnessed the domestic abuse her mother suffered with her father, Julie

would prefer to *only* identify as white and Mexican. Unfortunately, she has experienced conflict over this choice due to her darker complexion and inability to speak Spanish.

My fifth participant, Nera (age 22), is from Long Island, New York. Like Kendra, Nera spent part of her childhood in the Northeast, but she also lived in California and Texas. She describes her racial environment as diverse. Nera's mother identifies as white, while her father identifies as black, and she identifies as biracial. Nera and Kendra also have similar outlooks on being biracial, as both recognize that their race is an immutable fact of their existence. Nera said:

> I don't know. I mean there's no negative or positive to being biracial, it's all kind
> of neutral to me. I mean, I enjoy both parts of myself and learning about them, so
> in a way I think being biracial is very interesting. And it's obviously shaped me in
> both positive and negative ways, so I wouldn't necessarily say, "Yeah, there
> should be less multiracial people in the world," because I definitely don't think
> that.

As with Kendra, Nera's ability to spend significant portions of her childhood in environments that were more accepting of her biracial identity likely played a large role in her overall acceptance of her biraciality. According to both Kendra and Nera, their families were supportive of their biraciality and open to interracial relationships, which contributed to their generally positive feelings regarding adopting a biracial identity. Moreover, their experiences support research that has shown that parents of biracial children often take extra precautions to ensure that their families reside in racially diverse

environments with the hope that such diversity will subsequently provide accepting environments for their multiracial children (Tindale and Klocker 196).

Unlike my other participants, Lotus (age 21) identifies as multiracial. Lotus is also unique in that she is the only participant with a mother who identifies as African American; her father is Puerto Rican, Italian, and Spanish. Throughout her interview, she made it clear that she wanted to equally represent and discuss her multiple racial identities. Lotus grew up in Irving, Texas, where she described her surroundings as racially diverse. When asked how she feels about being biracial, she said:

> My biracial identity has changed as I've gotten older. At first, I didn't like being biracial because I felt like I was always seen as not being fully a part of any of the racial identity groups that make up my mixed heritage. But now that I'm older, I view being multiracial as something that is great, and I'm able to understand the multitude of races and cultures.

Lotus's description of her attitude towards being multiracial is similar in nature to that of Purple, Kendra, and Nera. Each demonstrated a neutral, if not positive, outlook on their racial status.

Skin Tone and Colorism

Skin color played a significant role in the racial identity development of my six participants, which is not surprising given the history of race and racism in the United States. Racial discrimination is a pervasive problem for African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other individuals of color who are denied fair competition for jobs and educational opportunities (Hunter 237). A significant factor within these structures of

racial discrimination is colorism. I use colorism as an analytical framework to demonstrate the lasting effects of both internalized racism and interracial prejudice on the lives of black/white and Hispanic bi/multiracial women. I argue that my participants' lived experiences complicate current understandings of colorism as the intuitive preference for whiteness. For example, my light-skinned participants—Purple, Nera, Lotus, and Kendra—have all struggled to defend their claims of racial authenticity within the black community. It is here that these biracial women call into question strict binary ideas of colorism that automatically signify a preference for the embodiment of whiteness.

Colorism is a term thought to be coined in 1982 by Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker. Walker defines it as prejudice or preferential treatment found within a racial community based solely on skin color (Norwood 586). The term has evolved over time, and according to Michal Jones, a writer and editor for *Everyday Feminism*, colorism is the internalized racism and white supremacy within the black community and other communities of color, that has leads to individuals feeling confusion, shame and pain around the topic of skin color (1). For the purpose of this study, I define colorism as the prejudice and discrimination individuals of color face based on their skin tone from both within and outside of their minority group. According to Kimberly Jade Norwood, a clear example of racism would be refusing to hire a black applicant because of their race, whereas colorism looks more like an employer having a preference for a black applicant who is light-skinned over one who is dark-skinned (586). Therefore, colorism is a useful framework for my analysis because it allows one to analyze skin tone along a continuum

of "lighter" and "darker" instead of just a black/white or person of color/white binary. These binaries are still important, but they do not capture the complexity of identification processes in bi/multiracial women's racial identity development. Unfortunately, colorism not only occurs within a specific race, such as the black community, but can also work across races; race and discrimination are not clear-cut issues, and colorism can thrive in the gray nuances of any given society.

Margret Hunter's research on colorism and European colonization of Mexico and the US Southwest helps contextualize the pervasive role that colorism continues to play in specific regions. According to Hunter, colorism within Latino and African American communities has roots in European colonialism and slavery in the Americas. Both systems operated as forms of white domination that privileged those who were able to culturally, ideologically, economically, and aesthetically emulate whiteness. Thus, light-skinned people received rewards and resources that were otherwise unattainable to their darker-skinned counterparts (Hunter 238-39). Ruling whites maintained dominance via white supremacy in part by enlisting the assistance of the "colonial elite"—a small class of light-skinned colonized people. In addition, despite a high rate of interracial relationships among Europeans, indigenous people, and blacks in Mexico, a caste system based on skin color was established and maintained throughout the region (Anzaldúa 3). Light-skinned Spaniards held the most power and resources, while darker-skinned indigenous communities were routinely oppressed and displaced from their own land, rendering them completely powerless in the early colonies (Hunter 239). The scars of colonial colorism have left a distinct mark on this particular region, and citizens of

Mexico remain divided by a color-based system (Hunter 239). This is particularly

relevant for my participants, as five out of six identified Hispanic and/or Native

American components of their multiracial heritage. I also acknowledge my Hispanic

heritage from my maternal family line.

The question of racial authenticity and its relationship to colorism has affected me

and my participants. Racial authenticity refers to the ability to claim a particular racial

identity without it being called into question by those within and/or outside of that

specific racial identity group (Franco et al. 96-97). I use it as a theoretical framework to

discuss the unique forms of identity invalidation that biracial women face via colorism.

Biracial individuals who identify as black may find their racial authenticity and identity

challenged due to their appearance (Franco et al. 97). Julie and I have both experienced

this kind of discrimination. For example, we have each been asked if we were adopted on

multiple occasions due to our darker complexions in comparison to our mothers, who

appear white. This does not mean that lighter-skinned individuals such as Lotus, Naomi,

Kendra, and Nera have not experienced racial discrimination. If anything, light-skinned

individuals can be at a disadvantage with respect to claims of ethnic legitimacy or to be

seen as an "authentic" person of color, as many view darker skin tones as more

"ethnically authentic."

Racial authenticity is further connected to biracial individuals' ability to establish

a lasting "cultural home." According to Hunter, light-skinned and biracial people often

report feeling left out or pushed out of co-ethnic groups, defined as groups comprised of

28

individuals who are considered to be the same race (244). For example, when I asked Purple if she had ever struggled with being recognized as a woman of color, she said:

> Yes, definitely. I would say more so years ago when I was in middle school. I remember people saying things like, "You're not really black," or "You're not black enough." I don't think at the time that the kids in my school were able to understand the fact that just because I had fair skin and looked white didn't mean that I wasn't also black.

The quickness with which Purple firmly responded "yes" struck me. It was as if she had come to accept that as a light-skinned, black/white biracial woman she would always have to defend her claim to racial authenticity as part of the black community. Without Purple's constant vigilance in asserting her status as a black biracial woman, she would likely have been rejected or overlooked by black people within her community because of her physical appearance.

> Similarly, Lotus struggled to be seen as a member of a minority group:
> I think at times I did during certain points were like with kids who always seemed to question me about my race. I think I did then, because I felt at the time that my life would be simpler, I didn't always have to feel like I had to prove that I am this race. Because at the time, it always seemed easier for people who were one race, like Mexican, they wouldn't have to prove their membership to this group, the world would just accept that they looked Mexican and therefore were indeed Mexican. But for me I've always had to prove that I belonged in a specific racial

group. And I remember being about eleven and the constant questioning really got

to me.

Questioning or negating a bi/multiracial individual's identity because their appearance or

behavior does not align with racial stereotypes, which both Purple and Lotus have

experienced, is a particular form of racial invalidation. According to research conducted

by Maria G. Franco et. al., multiracial individuals experienced racial invalidation due to

stereotypes 31% of the time. In addition, 87% of multiracial participants described having

their black identity negated in a similar fashion to Purple (101). Therefore, the task of

proving oneself as a legitimate or authentic member of a nonwhite ethnic community is a

significant burden for those with lighter skin tones (244).

Purple and Lotus's experiences get to the core of the issue of light-skinned

bi/multiracial individuals' experiences with racial invalidation. Their responses reveal an

ongoing need to prove either their "blackness" or "Hispanic-ness" to co-ethnic group

members in order to gain racial authenticity. Interestingly, comments that a biracial

individual is not black or Hispanic "enough"—i.e., understood as authentically ethnic in

any given community—is a serious insult, as they imply that those with lighter skin do

not identify with their fellow minority group members (Hunter 244). This accusation can

put biracial individuals in a difficult position. On the one hand, having lighter skin

enables the ability to experience the world similarly to that of a white person, which

provides certain privileges; as a result, there are ways in which their experiences of race

and racism would differ from other people of color in their co-ethnic group. And, on the

other hand, due to monoracial groups' internalization of a colorist form of racism, light-

skinned bi/multiracial individuals often feel a need to prove or perform part of their non-white racial identity to gain full membership into minority groups. This is accomplished by either actively renouncing their white heritage, or conforming to preconceived ideas and stereotypes regarding how that specific minority group is thought to speak or dress.

Remarks that a biracial individual is not an authentic member of an ethnic group can create feelings of isolation and cultural homelessness. Navarrete and Jenkins define cultural home as a space that provides a cognitive frame of reference for social interactions within a specific community that shares common history, activities, and traditions. Cultural homes offer collective support that acts as a protective shield against racial stress and oppression (792). Franco et al. found that, due to racial invalidation, 20% of multiracial participants felt isolated and that they did not belong to a racial community. Interestingly, 80% of these participants mentioned feeling specifically excluded after being rejected by members of the black community (Franco et al. 792). These feelings of rejections may in part be related to light-skinned bi/multiracial individuals' ability to pass for white and thus, retain access to monetary and social privileges excluded from that of those within the black community (Khanna and Jonson 382-383).

Isolation from a cultural home and tension between biracial individuals and those in their co-ethnic group can unfortunately lead some biracial individuals to wish they were only one specific race, completely excommunicating themselves from half of their racial identity and community. This was the case for Julie who, unlike Purple, has a darker complexion and was raised primarily by her mother and older sister in a predominantly Hispanic and black community in Houston, Texas. She prefers to racially

identify as Mexican out of respect for her mother and reported having verbal disagreements with many of the black girls in her high school because she had indifferent feelings towards her black heritage. During our interview, Julie recalled this argument:

> I remember there was this black girl who came up to me and said something to me and I can't really remember what I said to her in response, but I remember it came out wrong and I ended up offending her. So, the girl got mad at me and said something else rude to me, and I just laughed and then she was like, "Don't count yourself out, you're one of us, you're black too." And I remember getting annoyed at this point and I said, "Don't compare me to them." My last comment really aggravated the girl and the fact that I referred to black people as "them." But to me, I was trying to distinguish myself from the negative stereotypical black people, and not her and her friends specifically. But as you can imagine, in the middle of a confrontation this girl wasn't willing to see where I was coming from. So, we ended up getting into a fight. All because she saw me as black but I didn't, and I was going to defend myself.

It is significant that Julie felt the need to physically protect her right to racially identify as Hispanic instead of black. It should go without saying that racial identification is complex and goes beyond skin color. However, current understandings of colorism have yet to account for the idea that even if someone's skin color grants them automatic admission into a specific racial community, that community might not match how that biracial individual identifies. In this case, Julie's darker complexion allows her easier access to

her black co-ethnic group, while simultaneously excluding her from her chosen racial identity as both Mexican and biracial.

Lotus, Purple, Kendra, and Nera's transcripts reveal a distinct parallel regarding their outlook on their bi/multiraciality and its connection to colorism. These women have similar physical appearances—light to medium complexions with Caucasian features and soft, curly, non-kinky hair. They might pass as white in some situations. When asked about the need to prove their blackness or having it negated, they all reported similar experiences. Purple indicated that she could not recall a time when her whiteness was ever called into question, but she did cite multiple examples of others negating her blackness. When asked if people often identified their race as any one in particular, Purple and Kendra reported that they were often misidentified as Puerto Rican or white due to their light complexions, European facial features, and curly hair. Similarly, Nera and Lotus both received negative comments from black family members and friends regarding their inability to relate to black music and culture, and accusing them of lacking blackness because of their light skin and biraciality.

Julie and I both have darker complexions and hair texture that can be described as thick and kinky-curly. Therefore, we are most often assumed to be black, which, as with the other participants, strips us of our ability to choose a bi/multiracial identity. Yet unlike the other participants, due to a combination of colorism and racism, Julie and I are not granted access to the privileges and resources reserved for light-skinned biracial individuals. During her interview, Julie shared that she went through a phase in her life in which she hated her skin tone:

I personally feel like I'm so ugly because when I get a mosquito bite or a cut it doesn't just scab over and go away. No, it leaves a dark mark that stands out on my already dark skin. And I remember thinking, "Why do I have to have these marks and dark skin?" Plus I've had a tan since the age of nine, and I truly feel that because of my tan skin people have tended to look at me and classify me as black only, which isn't necessarily a bad thing but I've also always felt like it's unfair to classify my race solely by the fact that my skin "looks" black.

To summarize, each of my participants have described a time in which they experienced colorism, which I have defined as the prejudice and discrimination toward individuals of color based on their skin tone from both within and outside of monoracial communities. Yet this discrimination differs according to whether or not the bi/multiracial individual possesses a lighter or darker skin tone and can be perpetuated by a person of color within the bi/multiracial person's co-ethnic group, which is a contributing factor to one's overall attitude regarding being bi/multiracial. For example, Julie and I both hold ambivalent attitudes towards our biraciality due to our having darker skin tones, while my lighter participants outlooks are more optimistic if not positive.

Colorism and Beauty

Eurocentric beauty standards are defined and reinforced by dominant culture, marking white women as the epitome of beauty. Constantly compared to white women, there are incredible amounts of pressure for black women to conform to dominant Eurocentric "white" beauty standards (Gilchrist and Thompson 5). Within this context, colorism is a tool that not only helps maintain white supremacy but also influences

34

understandings of beauty within the black community. As a result, the black community has historically considered light skin, non-kinky hair, thin lips, and light eyes to be "good" features, and darker skin, kinky-curly hair, and fuller lips to be "bad" features (Leverette 436-37).

According to Vanessa King and Dieynaba Niabaly, media portrayals overwhelmingly reinforce conventional colorist hierarchies, depicting white women with long straight hair and the few black women on screen also with straight hair and other Caucasian traits, such as light skin (3-5). The media thus contributes to social definitions of whom and what are deemed beautiful and show the ways that colorism is quite gendered, ultimately affecting women more than men (Norwood 586). Despite women's attempts to distance themselves from beauty as the primary indicator of overall success, it remains a means by which women can advance their status, for better or worse.

It has become common within the African American community to embrace hair care that is heavily influenced by white standards of beauty because characteristics such as light skin, straight and/or long hair, a small nose, thin lips, and light eyes can operate as a form of social capital for women of color (Hunter 246-47; Neal and Wilson 326). Conversely, this white supremacist beauty system categorizes short and/or kinky hair, full lips, and a wide nose as undesirable, putting black and bi/multiracial women who cannot emulate whiteness at a clear disadvantage (Neal and Wilson 326). Therefore, chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers, are common treatments that permanently alter hair texture to produce straight hair (Gilchrist and Thompson 10-11). Bi/multiracial women can have a variety of hair textures, skin tones, and facial features that combine

European and African American characteristics, as well as physical characteristics associated with other racial and ethnic categories, and are thus often subject to competing messages. As a result, my participants' experiences offer an interesting glimpse into the effects of colorism and dominant beauty standards on identity development.

Interestingly, though, light-skinned black/white biracial women often experience colorism that happens in reverse. And by reverse, I am referring to the fact that light-skinned bi/multiracial women often have access to the ability to the monetary and social benefits that come with being able to potentially pass as white. But for light skinned bi/multiracial women, this ability comes the inability to be readily accepted and seen as a valid member of the minority group that makes up part of their racial heritage. Lotus, for example, has received competing messages that demonstrate the complex role that beauty, and specifically hair, play in her life. Lotus has thick, curly, brown-black hair that garners a significant amount of male attention, which, whether she wants it or not, constitutes either a European/exotic affirmation of beauty. When I asked her about comments she has received about her hair, she responded:

> I remember there was this one time when I first got my hair braided. But for the longest time prior to this, I always felt like I couldn't wear this particular hairstyle because I didn't look fully African American. But I finally made the decision to have the braids put in, and I went to school the next day and I noticed that all the black girls gave me dirty looks. I remember feeling like I was being judged even harder than usual.

The looks Lotus received from her peers regarding her hairstyle can be interpreted as a challenge to her blackness and thus to her authenticity as a black bi/multiracial woman. This response to her decision to embody her black heritage by wearing braids is an example of the complex discrimination that light-skinned multiracial individuals face and relates to the question of racial authenticity. As Keshia Harris explains, many believe that light-skinned biracial individuals have the ability to "cross the color line"—that is, to access the privileges associated with whiteness and simultaneously hide their minority status due to a racially ambiguous physical appearance (2073). Crossing the color line is significant when one considers the fact that within the United States racial categorization is focused upon the segmentation of group membership into white/nonwhite binary (Harris "Biracial America" 2073-2074). Ultimately, this segmentation has led to the creation of an 'us' versus 'them' mentality between the dominant racial group and minority racial groups.

Lotus's experience reveals a gap in current understandings of colorism and beauty standards. Conventional systems of racism and colorism in the United States privilege physical features that are associated with whiteness, yet Lotus was not trying to emulate whiteness by having straight, long hair. Instead, she made a conscious choice to style her hair in a fashion that is popular within the black community. This decision to embody blackness via her choice of hairstyle despite having light skin and the ability to pass for white demonstrates forms of colorism that center a preference for whiteness are not always true when discussing bi/multiracial individuals' experiences.

Contemporary writers such as Abi Ishola, Haaniyah Angus, and Tiffany Onyejiaka discuss the "biracial aesthetic," a colloquialism used to describe the ways in which Hollywood casting agents, producers, and directors tend to gravitate towards a distinct type of black woman. According to Onyejiaka, this type embodies the "Halle Berry look": slim, light-skinned, and classically attractive according to European beauty standards (3). Ishola and Angus also point out that the young faces celebrated in advertisements and modern films such as *The Hunger Games* and *X-Men* are most often light-skinned black or bi/multiracial individuals (Ishola 2; Angus 1). However, these discussions of the biracial aesthetic are exclusionary by suggesting that all bi/multiracial women have light skin or "European" facial features, but this is not accurate. Those with darker skin and other variations from this standard can get the sense that their experiences are less important and/or abnormal, leaving under- or unrepresented bi/multiracial individuals feeling excluded.

In the following examples, I demonstrate the fact that the biracial aesthetic has impacted Naomi's understandings of their bi/multiraciality, making my participants feel that they need to alter their physical appearance in order to be perceived as not only beautiful but also as bi/multiracial in America. Naomi asserted that she did not recall seeing women that looked like her on television or in magazines:

> Growing up I started to realize that there weren't a lot of women who looked like
> me on the screen. But it was when I was in college that I seriously began looking
> into understanding the underrepresentation of minorities in the media. And since
> I'm mixed with Puerto Rican, I specifically wanted to look into the fact that, yes,

there are Puerto Rican women on the screen but they don't look like me. The

women you tend to see on TV are usually significantly lighter than me. But they

also always seem to have long luscious deep brown hair that's naturally pin-

straight, and their skin is always a honey gold tan, so you know they're tan

enough to know that they're Hispanic, but not too tan.

When asked how this observation made her feel, Naomi responded that she got the sense

that it was not normal for Hispanic people to have curly hair like hers. She is aware that

the very select aesthetic of women of color depicted on TV shows, movies, and

advertisements is not indicative of the wide range of blackness and biraciality that exist in

our society. Even so, this media representation, although inaccurate, ultimately led

Naomi to feel that her hair excluded her from claiming racial authenticity. Moreover, her

experience clearly demonstrates the ill effects of the biracial aesthetic and its intersection

with colorism. Naomi's observation that Puerto Rican women are always portrayed with

unnaturally straight hair is in line with Onyejiaka, who argues that the biracial aesthetic

functions as means by which the film and television industries avoid true inclusivity and

maintain the power of the "white aesthetic" via colorism (5).

As my participants show, hair acts as a medium through which people can make

significant statements about their identity, code of values, and society (Mercer 34; Versey

811). Yet, biracial and multiracial individuals sit at the intersection of two (or more)

societies, and, interestingly, each participant reported going through a phase of coming to

terms with their natural hair; that is, hair that has been unaltered by chemical

straighteners. For instance, Naomi explained that she and her sister have been on an ongoing journey in terms of their hair:

> I can remember growing up, everyone would straighten their hair. . . But my older sister has beautiful kinky hair, like the texture of it was so thick I remember her having braids put in. But I swear as soon as a flat iron was introduced to her [she] no longer kept it curly. She straightened it to the point that her curl pattern and hair texture changed. And I remember growing up with this idea that curly hair not being considered "pretty." I hated my hair because it was always just a big "poof." It wasn't until I got into high school and I actually went to a salon and not a Great Clips that I began to learn what kind of products I could use to embrace my naturally curly hair. It was after these experiences that I cut out using the flat iron and started actively learning about my natural hair.

Kendra's hair journey parallels Naomi's in many ways:

> I remember being in middle school and wanting to have thinner hair, but I didn't want my hair to be straight, though. I just wanted my hair to be less frizzy and poofy. And I will say that I wasn't always comfortable with my hair, but I kind of just got over it with the help of my other friend who also had curly, frizzy hair. When I told her how I felt about my hair, she explained that she felt the same way, and so we made the decision to just go to school every day with our hair down. We decided to embrace it and just not worry about what others might think or say, which really helped my confidence regarding my hair.

As Kendra and Naomi indicated, they both struggled with accepting their natural hair, and both used "poof" as a way to describe its unruliness. It is likely that Kendra and Naomi are aware of the fact that bi/multiracial hair tends to require more time and effort to maintain over that of white hair.[4] According to Tywana Smith, the desire to have perfectly straight shinny hair for those who are either African American or Bi/multiracial is born out of the unrealistic societal standards taught to each generation to attributed health and beauty to that of a specific white European standard (Smith). Thus, it is not surprising that Kendra and Naomi both seemed to harbor feelings of confusion, if not shame, regarding the maintenance and styling of their own bi/multiracial hair. Ultimately, they would come to terms with their natural hair. For Kendra, it took the support of a friend going through a similar struggle, while for Naomi, it was gaining the knowledge and skills to effectively work with her natural curls. Each woman's hair journey supports Versey's argument that many women are reluctant to alter their hair if they feel that it aesthetically represents their value, self-worth, or central identity (811). At the time of our interview, each woman wore her hair in its natural state.

According to Neal and Wilson, due to dominant European beauty standards, hair has long been a point of contention for black and biracial women, who have been attempting methods of altering their natural hair texture since the nineteenth century

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[4] It is unclear as to whether or not they are aware of the fact that the time and effort required to maintain their bi/multiracial hair is in part due to the fact that our hair tends to have a difficult time allowing the natural sebum (oil that is produced by the scalp) to travel from the scalp along the length of the hair shaft which aids detangling (Smith). This process is less difficult in white hair, which has tended to allow for easy detangling and styling. According to African American and biracial hair care specialist Tywana Smith, the biggest complaint she receives regarding the maintenance of black or bi/multiracial hair is its tendency to appear to be dry or lack shine (Smith). The second biggest complaint according to Smith is dealing with "fizziness."

(328-30). King and Niabaly further argue that these beauty ideals produce constant comparisons to white women, subjecting black and biracial women to immense pressure to aesthetically conform to white norms. They point out that Eurocentric beauty standards are so ingrained in Western societies that black and biracial women's hair and hairstyles can gravely impact the kinds of jobs they have access to and whether they can keep them. Indeed, most workplaces in the Western world view straight hair as more professional and presentable, and consider natural hair to be "unkempt" (King and Niabaly 5). Interestingly, in Gilchrist and Thompson's research assessing how black magazine advertisements impact black women's idea of beautiful hair, participants reported that they found straight hair to be the most beautiful, while curly hair came in seventh (11). These findings could connect to Kendra and Naomi's negative feelings towards their natural curly hair, and demonstrates the relationship between hair politics, racism, and colorism.

No matter their background or geographic location, each of my participants has experienced both highs and lows on their racial identification journey, with skin tone as a defining factor. Colorism has significantly impacted Lotus, Purple, Nera, Julie, Naomi, and Kendra's personal development as biracial women, as well as my own, in ways that deviate from traditional understandings. Our experiences reveal that colorism is far more complicated than a simple preference for light skin or whiteness over dark skin or blackness. This binary understanding must be reinterpreted to incorporate those who identify as more than one race and their racial identification processes.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

My overarching goal for this research project was to understand the role of

familial and social dynamics in bi- or multiracial women's racial identity development. I

argue that traditional understandings of colorism—which assert that light skin or

"whiteness" is always desired and/or valued over that of dark skin or "blackness"—are

complicated within the context of bi/multiracial experiences. This is especially pertinent

when discussing racial authenticity, defined as bi/multiracial individuals' ability to claim

a particular racial identity without having it questioned by those within and/or outside of

that specific racial identity group (Franco et al. 96-97). Thus, bi/multiracial individuals

may struggle to have their chosen racial identity recognized by those within and outside

said specific racial group due impart to their "incongruent" outward appearances and

colorism.

As I have discussed in this thesis, bi- and multiracial individuals who choose to

identify with a race that may be read as incongruent with their physical appearance have

an increased likelihood of having the authenticity of that identification challenged. These

findings resonate with examples from my own life. When I turned 22, I lived in South

Carolina and needed to renew my driver's license. The Department of Motor Vehicles

paperwork included a request to identify my race. My choices were: African American,

Caucasian, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or "other," with a blank to fill in a

chosen identity. I was not comfortable picking the "white" box because I do not look

white—a significant factor if I ever needed my license to act as a true source of

identificatory proof—but I also felt that it would be a disservice to my white mother if I did not indicate that her blood runs through my veins. At the same time, I did not feel comfortable solely identifying as black (this is usually the part of my story that makes non-biracial or multiracial people uncomfortable). I decided to go with the box marked "other," and indicated that I was biracial. I submitted my paperwork and when my number was eventually called by a sweet, dark-skinned black woman, I noticed that she had changed my race from "biracial" to "African American." When I pointed out this error, she said, "Well, you look black, dear." Due to my physical appearance (i.e., skin tone, hair color/texture, and facial features), she had denied my chosen racial identity. My physical appearance was given more weight than my chosen identity, leaving me feeling invalidated and frustrated.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the inability to have one's racial identity recognized and validated can lead to feelings of isolation, invalidation, invisibility, and cultural homelessness. Yet, I feel that my participants' willingness to share their unique bi- and multiracial experiences allowed me to foster a space within each interview in which we were no longer outsiders or culturally homeless. I have never felt comfortable discussing the incident at the DMV with colleagues or classmates, but it was something that I shared freely within the safe space of my interviews. And by doing so, I was rewarded with my participants' own humorous and painful memories of times in which their racial identity was called into question by strangers as well as family and friends.

Each of my participant's experiences demonstrated the nuanced relationship between racial validity and outward appearance, ultimately complicating understandings

of the relationship between colorism and racial authenticity. During my interview with Kendra, I asked if she had ever experienced any negative or odd comments when making a claim to her whiteness. She said:

> I don't think so. But I remember one of my friends at my previous college who was black, she was closer to one of my best friends, but still I remember she really had an issue with white people. And I'm not sure if she forgot that I was part white, so I just never mentioned it, because I felt uncomfortable with some of the comments she would make about white people. And I didn't want to add to the tension around her and I also didn't think she would have been willing to accept my mixed heritage.

I found it interesting that Kendra was willing to sacrifice her own comfort and ability to identify as a bi/multiracial woman in order to maintain the peace within her friend group. What Kendra experienced—being denied claims to a biracial identity that included her white heritage because of her friend's prejudice towards white people—is a prime example of racial invalidation.[5]

Kendra was not alone. Lotus also described a time in which her mother's family's prejudice impeded her ability to claim a racial identity. When I asked Lotus if she had ever felt that her family treated her differently because she was bi/multiracial, she said that while some of her cousins were okay with her being biracial, others on her mother's

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[5] Kendra's example could also have a more nuanced connection to racial microaggressions, which falls outside the scope of this project. Racial microaggressions are defined as brief, commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color (Nadal et al. 'Microaggressions and the Multiracial Experience' 37).

side of the family, who were black and older, did not approve of her mom dating outside of her race and having biracial children:

> They didn't like the fact that I claimed to be African American as well as biracial. So that was where the negative comments would come from. They would say things about my mom trying to act white and her not accepting her blackness, but that wasn't the truth. But they continued to make comments, and those were predominantly from my African American side of the family and continued throughout my childhood.

I wanted to understand how these negative comments impacted Lotus, particularly since she described predominately growing up with the black side of her family. Though she identifies as multiracial, Lotus is also very proud of her African American heritage and was offended by her cousin's comments. She said, "I feel like I am African American. I have a right to claim that part of my identity. And I feel like they were trying to take that part of my racial identity away from me. I felt excluded and it hurt me."

Racial authenticity is often challenged with the question: "What are you?" During my interview with Naomi, I asked if she ever wished she was not biracial. Like many other participants, she was proud of her mixed heritage and even joked about the idea that Puerto Ricans are very proud in general. I laughed in agreement, but then she went on to say:

> I remember when we moved to Texas specifically people would ask me, "What are you? Are you white or are you black?" Or they would just make assumptions and say, "You're black," "You're white," "You're Hispanic." And it was after

being asked these questions that I would say, "No," because I didn't identify

myself that way. I noticed that people in Texas more often than not would ask.

Naomi also used the "What are you?" question as an opportunity to educate others about

the complexity of mixed-race and Hispanic ethnicities, explaining, "Just because

someone looks Hispanic that doesn't make them automatically Mexican. There are so

many different countries."[6]

A person's racial identity is overwhelmingly determined by their appearance,

which affects biracial individuals' ability to adopt an identity that feels true to them.

Normative images of what black and white individuals are *supposed* to look like, coupled

with assumptions about racial authenticity, heavily impact who is able to make a

believable identity claim. Anecdotally, I can remember my mother saying to me, "You're

technically white, Rachelle. If you want to claim that you're white, say it." But I also

knew that when the world looked at me, they did not see my white mother; they saw my

black father and I was thus categorized as black instead of my chosen biracial identity.

This phenomenon was also apparent when Julie questioned why she could not claim a

white or Hispanic racial identity over that of a black identity, due to the assumptions

often made regarding her race and subsequent darker complexion.

My participants' experiences demonstrate that biracial individuals in America are

at a higher risk of experiencing racial invalidation because of their mixed heritage and

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[6] Naomi's experiences illuminate the significance of physical location for racial identity and the role that questions of racial validity play in biracial individuals' lives. Though a deeper analysis of physical location falls out the scope of this thesis, it is worth mentioning as a potential factor in Naomi's biracial identity development.

often ambiguous physical appearance. Their racial identity claims are seen as *in*authentic. Though I was unable to complete a thorough analysis of the significance of racial authenticity claims in bi- and multiracial individuals' lives, this thesis establishes a link between the role of outward appearance and colorism, and how they influence biracial/multiracial individuals' ability to make and maintain their chosen racial identity.

This thesis has allowed me to examine a small sample of the ever-growing bi- and multiracial population within the United States. Specifically, I analyzed the impact of familial and social dynamics on biracial/multiracial women's racial identity development. I have argued for the need to reevaluate understandings of colorism when applied to bi- and multiracial individuals. As an amalgamation of their parents' interracial relationships, their lived experiences show that lighter skin and other physical features signifying whiteness are not necessarily always more desirable. As the multiracial women I spoke with demonstrate, claims to non-white identity categories or to multiple racial and ethnic identities may reflect attempts to externalize one's sense of self and/or a desire to belong with one's kin.

Thus, this thesis offers a deeper understanding of the ways in which race, specifically bi- and multiraciality, acts as both interpersonal and structural interactions. And while there is a growing body of social and psychological research on biracial individuals, there remains room within women's and gender studies for further scholarship on bi/multiracial individuals' lived experiences through the use of feminist analysis. Therefore, I suggest that future researchers explore the impact age/generational differences plays in bi/multiracial women's racial identity development. This study can

also be seen as the bases for the need to explore the role gender plays in bi/multiracial individuals racial identity development. And finally, I encourage further exploration into the role physical/geographic location and racial environment contribute to bi/multiracial individuals' racial identity. But above all else, I hope that this thesis acts as a step in the right direction for future research in the field of biraciality/multiraciality.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Statement

Recruitment Statement:
Hello, my name is Rachelle Gandy and I am a master's student in the Department of Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies at Texas Woman's University. I am conducting a study for my thesis entitled **"Biracial Identity Development: Family Dynamics and Geographic Location."** The purpose of this research is to determine how geographic location and family dynamics impact black/white biracial women's perceptions of their racial identity, and I am seeking participants. If you are interested in this study please contact me.

Participants must:
- Identify currently or historically as a black-white biracial woman, multiracial or mixed.
- Have two parents, one of whom is Black and the other is White.
- Be 18 years or older
- Identify as female

- If you meet the criteria listed please email Rachelle Gandy at rgandy@twu.edu. If you do not meet the criteria listed above but know someone who does and may be willing to participate in this study, I would greatly appreciate you forwarding this information to them.

Participation includes:
- Completing a demographics form and participating in either a face-to-face interview or a Skype interview with an estimated time of 90 minutes, plus a possible 35-minute follow-up interview. Therefore participants will be making a maximum time commitment of 125 minutes when participating in this study.

Benefits of Participation:
- The ability to help further research on biracial individuals, specifically women
- Participation in this study will also further the fields of biracial studies and multicultural women's and gender studies.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
If you have any further questions, please contact Rachelle Gandy at rgandy@twu.edu (Principal Investigator) or Agatha Beins, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor), abeins@twu.edu,
(940) 898-2117.

** *Please note that you are not obligated to either participate in this study or forward this email. I am seeking willing to volunteer participants only. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all emails, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. Thank you very much for your time and help.*

Sincerely,

Rachelle L. Gandy
Master of Arts in Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies

APPENDIX B

Multiracial Challenges and Resilience Scale

Nazish M. Salahuddin and Karen M. O'Brien

Part 1
The term "Multiracial" refers to an individual whose biological parents represent two or more different racial groups (e.g., your mother is Black, White, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Latino, or biracial and your father is a different race than your mother).

For the following 15 items, please indicate how often each event has happened to you (FREQUENCY) and how distressed you felt as a result of the event (DISTRESS). Please use the following 6 point scales:

FREQUENCY   **RESS**
  0-Never happened to me   0-Not at all distressed
  1-Happened to me once   1-Slightly distressed
  2-Happened to me 2-4 times   2-Somewhat distressed
  3-Happened to me 5-7 times   3-Moderately distressed
  4-Happened to me 8-10 times   4-Very distressed
5-Happened to me more than 10 times   5-Extremely distressed

1. Someone chose NOT to date me because I am Multiracial.

2. An individual acted surprised when they saw me with a family member because we look like we belong to different racial group(s).

3. A family member said something negative about Multiracial/Biracial people.

4. Someone outside my family said something derogatory about Multiracial/Biracial people.

5. I was discriminated against because of one or more of my racial backgrounds.

6. Someone in my family made a hurtful statement about one of the racial group(s) with whom I identify.

7. When I disclosed my racial background, someone acted surprised.

8. A family member said that I am NOT a "real" member of a racial group(s) with whom I identify.

9. I told someone about my racial background(s), but they did NOT believe

me.

10. A member of my family expected me to "choose" one racial group with whom to identify.

11. Someone placed me in a racial category based on their assumptions about my race.

12. A member of my family treated me like an "outsider" because I am Multiracial.

13. I was the victim of discrimination because I am Multiracial.

14. A person outside of my family made a hurtful statement about one of the racial groups with whom I identify.

15. Someone did NOT believe I was related to a family member because we look like we belong to different racial groups.

Part 2
Based on your experiences as a Multiracial person, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Please respond to items 26-35 use the following 6 point scale, indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

0= Strongly disagree
1= Disagree
2= Slightly disagree
3= Slightly agree
4= Agree
5= Strongly
Agree

16. I love being Multiracial.

17. I hide parts of myself when interacting with some friends.

18. Being Multiracial makes me feel MORE attractive to romantic partners.

19. As a Multiracial person, I have developed an appreciation of different

cultures.

20. I feel the need to prove my racial identity to
others.

21. Because of my experiences as a Multiracial person, I value human
differences.

22. I am proud that I am
Multiracial.

23. Being Multiracial has taught me to understand multiple
perspectives.

24. I feel as if I do NOT belong to any racial
group.

25. Because of my experiences as a Multiracial person, I have compassion for people
who are different than myself.

26. I wish I was NOT
Multiracial.

27. Being Multiracial has taught me to adapt to a variety of cultural
situations.

28. Being Multiracial makes me feel
special.

29.   I feel pressure to distance myself from a racial group to which I feel
connected.

30. Because I am Multiracial, I do NOT have a strong sense of who I
am.

*Item 26 should be reverse scored. Scores are obtained by computing the mean for each
subscale separately.

SUBSCALES:
Others' Surprise/Disbelief Regarding Racial Heritage 2, 7, 9, 11, 15
Lack of Family Acceptance: 3, 6, 8, 10, 12
Multiracial Discrimination: 1, 4, 5, 13, 14
Challenges with Racial Identity: 17, 20, 24, 29, 30
Appreciation of Human Differences: 19, 21, 23, 25, 27

Multiracial Pride: 16, 18, 22, 26, 28

**Individuals may use this scale without permission from the researchers for research or counseling purposes.

Salahuddin, N.M., & O'Brien, K.M. (2011). Challenges and resilience in the lives of urban, multiracial adults: An instrument development study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58(4), 494-507.*

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule

1. Each interview will open with "lighter" general questions. Such as asking participants to tell me about their family and where they grew up, specifically the community they were raised in. My reason for this I want to get a sense of the environment each participant was raised in all while easing participants into the interview process.
2. Talk about how you feel about being biracial?
   a.   Can you say more as to why you feel this way?
3. About how old were you when you became aware that you were racially different from one of your parents?

.   What happened after you became aware of this? What kind of conversations did you have with your parents about race? How did this revelation make you feel then and now?

4. How did your parents talk to you about race as a child? How old were you when these conversations began?

.   What circumstances/contexts would lead to discussions about race?

5. Have you ever wished you were not biracial?

.   If yes what race did or would you identify with?

6. Do you identify as predominantly biracial or monoracial (ie. one specific race) or do you use another term?

.   Please talk about why you have chosen this identity?

7. How have you found your racial identification to change according to your surroundings (ie. neighborhood, career path, specific geographic locations within the United States?) How has your racial identity evolved or changed significantly throughout your life? Could you please describe a specific example that sticks out in your mind?

8. How have your peers acted when they have seen you with a member of your family who looks different from you?

.   If so tell me about a specific experience that sticks out in your mind. How did you handle the situation? (How did you feel throughout the encounter and after?)

a.   How did this event impact your racial identity?

9. To the best of your recollection has a family member ever made a derogatory comment about black or white individuals?

.   If yes, can you think of a specific example that you feel had a significant impact on you? How old were you when this event occurred? What was the race and sex of the individual/s who said these derogatory comments? How did this experience affect your sense of self and/or racial identity? [suggested revision]

10. At any point have you felt that you were eroticized and or objectified in a romantic/sexual relationship due to your outward racial appearance?

.   Tell me about this event: how old were you when this event occurred? What was the race and sex of the individual who you felt objectified and or eroticized you?

a.   How did this experience make you feel? What judgments did you make about yourself from this interaction (do you feel as if this event left a mark on your racial identity)?

11. How have cultural beauty standards affected your understanding of beauty and your sense of self-worth?
12. Describe your experience dating people? Have you ever felt that your racial identity or appearance has affected these experiences?
13. How do family members perceive your racial identity? or What messages about your racial identity have family members conveyed to you?
.   How did these messages make you feel about yourself?
14. Has a family member or friend who is monoracial (one race) treated or made you feel as if you were an "outsider" due to your choice to identify as biracial?
.   If so can you tell me about at what age did this event occur? What was the race and sex of the individual/s who made you feel as if you were an outsider? How did you handle this encounter? Do you feel as if this encounter left a lasting mark on your racial identity?
a.   Do you feel isolated due to these kinds of encounters? Or as if you are hiding a part of your identity?

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY (TWU)
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Biracial Identity development: Family Dynamics and Geographic Location

Principal Investigator: Rachelle L. Gandy   rgandy@twu.edu   845/866-5728
Faculty Advisor: Agatha Beins, Ph.D.   abeins@twu.edu   940/898-2117

Summary and Key Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Rachelle L. Gandy, a graduate student at Texas Woman's University, as a part of her thesis. The purpose of this research is to determine how geographic location and family dynamics impact black/white biracial women's perceptions of their racial identity. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are female and identify as a black-white biracial woman, multiracial, mixed currently or at some point in your life. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview regarding your family dynamics and life experiences. This interview will be audio-recorded, and we will use a code name to protect your confidentiality. The total time commitment for this study will be about 125 minutes. The greatest risks of this study include the potential loss of confidentiality, time loss to the participant, and emotional discomfort. We will discuss these risks and the rest of the study procedures in greater detail below.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you have about the study at any time.

Description of Procedures

In order to be a participant in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age or older and identify currently or in the past racially as a biracial women. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to spend about 90 minutes of your time in either a face-to-face interview or an interview via Skype depending on your comfort level with the researcher. You and the researcher will decide together on the location of a face-to-face meeting site and when the interview will happen. Participants who chose a Skype interview will also have the ability to choose the date and time of their interview. You and the researcher will choose a code name for you to use during the interview. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions about your family dynamics and the communal environment you were raised in for specific time periods. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed so that the researcher can have an accurate record of what you have said. Additional time of approximately 35 minutes may be needed to verify information after the interview.

Potential Risks

Emotional Distress: The researcher will ask you questions about how your family dynamics and geography have impacted your racial identity as a black/white biracial woman. A possible risk in

70

this study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you feel you need to talk to a professional about your discomfort, please refer to the list of resources the researcher has provided.

Fatigue and Time Loss: Interviews are scheduled to last approximately 90 minutes with a possible additional interview of 35 minutes bringing the total time commitment to 125 minutes. Therefore, if you become tired or upset throughout this process you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview.

Loss of confidentiality: Another risk in this study is the loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held at a private location that you and the researcher have agreed upon. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. However, there is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings and internet transactions.

Initials _____

Resources:
- **Mental Health America Hotline:** Text MHA to 741741
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** (1-800-273-8255)
- **SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline:** (1-877-726-4727)
- **Up2SD.org:** (888-724-7240)

The audio recording and the transcribed interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher, her advisor, two thesis committee members, will have access to the recordings. The audio recording and interview notes will be destroyed within three years after the study is finished. The signed consent form will be stored separately from all collected information and will be destroyed three years after the study is finished. The results of the study may be reported in scholarly magazines or journals, but your name and any other identifying information will not be included.
The researchers will remove all of your personal or identifiable information (e.g., your name, date of birth, contact information) from study information. After all identifiable information is removed, your audio recordings and/or any personal information collected for this study may be used for future research or be given to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent.
        If you would like to participate in the current study but **not** allow your de-identified data to be used for future research, please initial here _____.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study we will email or mail them to you.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their contact information is at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the TWU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

TWU Disclaimer Statement:

The researcher will try to prevent any problems that could happen because of this research. As a participant you should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and they will try to help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services of financial assistance for injuries that might happen because of you taking part in this research.

_____

                                                                          _____
Signature of Participant   Date

*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: _____ or
Address: _____