

“MY DAUGHTER IS A WHITE GIRL IN A MIXED BODY THAT WISHES SHE WERE  
BLACK.” MONORACIAL PARENTS PERCEPTIONS OF MIXED-RACE CHILDREN AND  
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

YOLANDA T. MITCHELL

B.S., Kansas State University, 2005  
M.S. Kansas State University, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services  
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

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## **Abstract**

Racial identity of mixed race individuals is important to understand because of the growing proportion of the population with parents from different racial groups. Having more than one racial heritage has a direct impact on how these children are seen by others as well as how they understand and encounter the world around them. Parents socialize their children in matters of race and discrimination that can impact their racial identity development, which is a component of their overall identity development. The aim of this study was explore how multiracial children are socialized and the impact of that socialization on racial identity formation from a heuristic perspective. Heuristic inquiry is a facet of phenomenology that seeks to understand the researcher's experience of the phenomenon; therefore, I provided data on my experiences with raising a mixed-race child in a monoracial family. Two other families experiencing the same phenomenon were also interviewed. Themes related to racial profiling, parental perception of the mixed race child's personality, skin tone, level of respect, and parenting were identified through the five-step analysis process recommended by Moustakas for heuristic inquiry, including immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. This study highlights relevant aspects in the lives of mixed-race children, how that impacts the way society views mixed-race individuals, and how those individuals encounter the world around them.

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Approved by:

Co-Major Professor  
R. Roudi Nazarinia Roy

Approved by:

Co-Major Professor  
Karen S. Myers-Bowman

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Jr., Roudi, and Dee-Dee—you already know. Words cannot express.

## **Dedication**

For my P's.

## **Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION**

Race; from a social constructionist view, the idea of race stems from the historical need to create a hierarchy that would maintain privilege and supremacy among Whites (Gillem, Cohn, & Thorne, 2001). Race classifications are not grounded in biology but are socially and politically constructed and inclusion in a specific race is based upon “socially defined” criteria (Helms, 1995, p.181). From identifying race/ethnicity on a newborn’s birth certificate, to filling out college applications, to identifying the race of an armed robber on the 10 o’clock news— “race” is imbedded into our daily living and experiences, especially within the culture of the United States (U.S.).

Confusion often exists surrounding the definition and meanings of culture, ethnicity, and race, as aspects of the three often seem to overlap. The American Psychological Association (2003) provides definitions of each of the three terms. Culture is described as a person’s worldview that is informed by historical, economic, ecological, and political forces. It consists of belief systems and value orientations that can influence customs, norms, practices, social institutions, and organizations. Ethnicity refers to the acceptance of group traditions, customs, and practices of one’s culture. Multiple ethnic identities can be recognized and one can operate from different identities at different times. Because race as a biological basis is flawed, and that the definition of race operates from a social construction, race is defined as the method by which others assign individuals to a category based on physical characteristics such as skin color and hair type. It is the basis for the creation of many generalizations and stereotypes.

### **Racism in America**

With race comes racism. Racism is a “belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (Racism, n.d.) Many Americans believe racism was eradicated from public institutions and is only an issue in remote incidences of individual behavior (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Much of this belief stems from the changing racial demographics of the U.S. and an increase in civil rights. Over the last three decades major

changes to the racial make-up of the U.S. have occurred. Table 1.1 shows the progression of race distribution from 1980-2010 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Table 1.1 Hispanic Population and Race Distribution for Non-Hispanic Population**

|                                | 1980          |          | 1990          |          | 2000          |          | 2010          |          |
|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                | <i>Number</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Total Population               | 226,545,805   | 100%     | 248,709,873   | 100%     | 281,421,906   | 100%     | 308,745,538   | 100%     |
| Total Hispanics                | 14,608,673    | 6.4%     | 22,354,059    | 9.0%     | 35,305,818    | 12.5%    | 50,477,594    | 16.3%    |
| White*                         | 180,256,103   | 79.6%    | 188,128,296   | 75.6%    | 194,552,774   | 69.1%    | 196,817,552   | 63.7%    |
| Black*                         | 26,104,285    | 11.5%    | 29,216,293    | 11.7%    | 34,658,190    | 12.3%    | 38,929,19     | 12.6%    |
| American Indian/<br>Eskimo*    | 1,417,110     | 0.6%     | 1,793,773     | 0.7%     | 2,475,956     | 0.9%     | 2,932,248     | 0.9%     |
| Asian*                         | 3,489,835     | 1.5%     | 6,968,359     | 2.8%     | 10,242,998    | 3.6%     | 14,674,252    | 4.8%     |
| Hawaiian/<br>Pacific Islander* | -             | -        | -             | -        | 398,835       | 0.1%     | 540,013       | 0.2%     |
| Other*                         | 669,799       | 0.3%     | 249,093       | 0.1%     | 15,359,073    | 5.5%     | 19,107,368    | 6.2%     |
| Two or More Races*             | -             | -        | -             | -        | 6,826,228     | 2.4%     | 9,009,073     | 2.9%     |

\* Non-Hispanic only; in 1980 and 1990 "Asians" includes Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Note that race categories have changed over time; 2000 marked the first time the category of “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” was offered. The 2000 census also provided the option to select more than one racial category, whereas in previous years individuals were required to choose a single race or select the option “Some Other Race.”

Even though the demographics are changing, individually we often live residentially segregated lives, where members of two or more groups reside in different neighborhoods within a larger community (Lee, Iceland, & Sharp, 2012). This segregation emphasizes the differences in the ability of certain individuals to access opportunities and attain a high quality of life (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005) allowing for incidences of racism to continue to occur. Three types of racism exist in the U.S.: individual, ideological, and institutional.

### ***Individual Racism***

Individual racism can be intentional or unintentional. Intentional racism deals with “overt behaviors where the objective is clearly to deny someone access to an opportunity or resource, or to hurt and defile someone on the basis of race” (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 47).

Unintentional racism is what is most commonly experienced today; often the person committing the discriminatory act is unaware of how racist principles/beliefs influence his or her behavior (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). All people, no matter their defined race, can act in discriminatory ways. Examples of individual racism include:

- Using racially derogatory language
- Locking car doors when driving through predominantly Black neighborhoods
- Parents discouraging their children from forming friendships with children of particular racial groups
- Parents becoming concerned or angry when they learn that their son or daughter is dating someone of another race. (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 48-49)

### ***Ideological Racism***

Ideological racism refers to having a belief that there is a level of biological, intellectual, and/or cultural superiority/inferiority among different racial groups (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Ideological racism offers the principles on which the U.S. was founded and justification for social events such as slavery and segregation. Aspects of these events still have an impact on our lives today. The social world we now live in was built on the basis of difficult Black/White relations and White supremacy. The racist ideology of White supremacy upholds disparate social compositions and was once thought of as scientific theory that resulted in the development of racial typologies (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). However, from the Human Genome Project (U.S. Department of Energy Genome Programs, 2012) we know that humans cannot be simply divided into four biologically separate and mutually exclusive categories: White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian.

It is now recognized as a mistake to assume that all members of a particular socially defined race are alike, either in their cultural orientations or their physical structures. There are no biological criteria we can apply consistently that will yield the traditional racial groups that Americans have as a society established. It is the racist history of the United States and the continuing popular belief in biological race that allow people to accept uncritically the racial structures still operating in the country. (Spencer, 1999, p. 35)

Today, race as a social category provides the foundation for power relations and group position—the idea that races are distinct groups with specific behavioral characteristics continues to exist (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

### ***Institutional Racism***

Institutional racism is defined by the “practices, policies, procedures, and culture of social institutions that deprive racially identified groups from equal access, opportunities, and treatment” (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 44). Institutional racism, deliberate or not, can be just as damaging to human life and dignity as individual racism even though it is more subtle, less visible, and harder to identify (Knowles & Prewitt, 1967; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). An example of institutional racism lies within the public school system of the United States. Originally public schools in the U.S. were open only to White children. However, with the abolishment of slavery and the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, separate but equal schools were no longer deemed constitutionally just and the law mandated that schools must be open to all races and should be integrated. In spite of this, inequity exists between the education students receive at predominantly White schools and those with predominantly minority attendance. Many schools are racially segregated because neighborhoods are racially segregated—most people live in racially homogenous neighborhoods resulting in most children attending segregated schools (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). With public schools being mostly funded by property taxes, and many low-income families being people of color, minority children often live in poor neighborhoods where they attend inadequately funded and functionally inferior schools. This leads to a domino effect of undermining academic success, lower high school graduation rates, and a narrowing of the chances of pursuing higher education among minority students (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

It is evident that racism continues in U.S. society today. Traditionally, these three forms of racism were primarily focused on the “customary” racial categories (e.g. African Americans and Native Americans). However, as the racial characteristics of the U.S. change, so does the impact of racism on “new” racial categories (e.g., Multiracial Americans).

### **Multiracial Composition of America**

When discussing individuals who are comprised of two or more races, some researchers describe them as being biracial, while others use terms such as multiracial or multicultural. In



research, these terms are compounded by the understanding of Hispanic ethnicity. “Mixed” is a term often used in everyday conversation to identify individuals of two or more races/ethnicities. Throughout this paper terms such as bi and multiracial will be utilized when discussing what is present in the literature in the same manner as the author of the findings. In all other instances, the term *mixed-race* is used to define all individuals who may encompass multiple races and ethnicities.

Within the United States, the racial and ethnic diversity of the population is changing to include a growing body of mixed-race individuals. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 9 million people, or 3% of the population, identified as two or more races in 2010, a 32% increase from 2000 (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2012). When looking at ethnicity alone, approximately 50 million people (16.3% of the population) identify as Hispanic or Latino (Humes et al.). The U.S. Census classifies individuals by race as well as Hispanic origin (ethnicity) because they consider these concepts separate and distinct (Lofquist, Lugaila, O’Connell, & Feliz, 2012), meaning that people of Hispanic origin may be of any race. However, because this distinction is not clear in the minds of the entire U.S. public, many individuals of Hispanic origin self identified their race, accounting for another 6.2% of the population, or 19 million people—a 24% increase from 2000 (Humes et al.). Nearly half of all people who identify as American Indian and Alaska Native, as well as half of all people who identify as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, report multiple races. Therefore, when taken together multiracial individuals account for almost 25% of the U.S. population (Lofquist et al.).

## **Family Structure**

The persistent pervasiveness of racism, along with the changing racial demographics of our society, has several implications for children and families. The structure of the American family is always changing in an effort to keep up with the changing world (Coontz, 1999). The traditional nuclear family form of the White majority in the 1950s was a unique period in U.S. history and does not resemble the reality of families today, or even historically throughout the 1900s (Coontz).

Currently, approximately 39% of all births in the U.S. are to unmarried parents (Martin et al., 2010); although many unmarried parents are cohabitating when their child is born (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008), about half of those parents will be living apart by the child’s third

birthday (Osborne & McLanahan, 2007). This trend may occur more often among interracial couples because, although White men and women have overall positive attitudes towards interracial relationships, those attitudes do not often translate into actual cohabitation and marriage (Herman & Campbell, 2011). Additionally, interracial marriages do not last as long as monoracial marriages (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). As a result, in some instances, after a parent has a child, s/he goes on to form relationships with another partner and have additional children. This has led to the formation of a new family structure known as *joint biological-stepfamilies*—“that is at least one child is a *mutual* child, the biological child of both parents, and at least one other child is the biological child of one parent and the stepchild of the other parent” (Lamanna & Reidmann, 2010, p. 449). As of 2000, approximately 1.6 million, or 3.6% of U.S. households, were made up of joint biological-stepfamilies (Kreider, 2003).

The U.S. Census Bureau recognizes that marriage and cohabitation patterns have changed as evidenced by the number of joint biological-stepfamilies identified in the 2000 Census. It has been customary to use the term stepchild to recognize a child who is related to someone through marriage to the child’s parent (Kreider, 2003). However, as trends have changed, the terms stepchild and stepfamily now include families structured by cohabitation as well as marriage (Kreider). Unmarried individuals are identifying the children of their partners as their stepchildren. However, even these statistics do not reflect the true number of joint biological-stepfamilies, as only families where the head of household identified the spouse’s/partner’s children as a stepchild were counted in the census. These numbers do not reflect parents in the home not identified as head of household in the census count. Nor do they reflect the differences in race/ethnicity that may exist in joint biological-stepfamilies. This is important to consider because 23% of family households with children in the U.S. are made up of families who identify as including two or more races. An additional 31% of households with children identify as Hispanic or Latino of various races (Lofquist et al., 2012).

### ***Identity Development***

General identity development is a never-ending process (Erikson, 1965) and an essential aspect of healthy development. It includes meanings that individuals attach to various roles in modern society (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Aspects of identity theory consist of how social structure affects the structure of an individual and how structure of the self influences social

behaviors, as well as how the internal dynamics of self impact social behavior (Stryker & Burke).

The element of race, and also that of multiple races, increases the complexity of this development for multiracial individuals. When a person is a member of a minority group, maintaining an ethnic identity is very relevant in U.S. society (Morrison & Bordere, 2001). Biracial children often have trouble identifying with one particular racial/ethnic group due to racial polarization issues (Morrison & Bordere). While many multiracial children strive to merge their heritages without compromising one, they struggle because of society's attempt to ignore the blended heritages and keep races "pure" (Chiong, 1998). Multiracial children often are identified by society to be whatever race their physical features reflect, subjecting them to the same racisms and prejudices of unmixed minorities (Morrison & Bordere).

### **Statement of the Problem**

New family forms are consistently emerging that do not fit the traditional majority U.S. family structures and whereby their needs may not be met by traditional resources and services. Families with monoracial parents, a multiracial stepchild, and mutual monoracial children, all living in the same household represent one of those relatively new family structures that have not been examined in depth. Related to family dynamics and individual identity development, various topics and family concerns may emerge that are unique to this type of family composition. Along with these issues, the ability to survive in the race-conscious U.S. is arguably easier when one has a sense of belonging or understanding of where one fits in on the race continuum.

Non-traditional family compositions, by race, are not new. Interracial parenting has long existed in the U.S. As previously mentioned, 25% of the U.S. population identifies as being multiracial (Lofquist et al. 2012). Many of these individuals are the product of intermarriages (interracial and/or interethnic marriages) and were likely raised by parents of different races/ethnicities. In 2010, about 15% of all new marriages in the U.S. were intermarriages (Wang, 2012). Additionally, intercountry adoptions (ICA) and domestic transracial adoptions (TRA) are also prevalent in the U.S., with 17,000 ICAs occurring in 2008 (Zhang & Lee, 2011). Transracial adoptees often face unique developmental and racial issues. However, as TRA parents transition into parenthood, they are typically cognizant of the developmental challenges

and racism in America—due in part to support groups attended, a lack of biological children in the home, and traveling to the child’s country of origin (Vonk & Massatti, 2004). This cultural competence allows them to help their children navigate the challenges they may face by counteracting influences and how their children are racially classified. Does this level of cultural competence exist in joint biological-stepfamilies headed by monoracial parents?

### **Purpose of the Study**

Octavio Warnock-Graham is a mixed race, Black/White, cinematographer living in New York City—but this was not always his identity. Octavio’s White mother, Harriet Warnock, is from the small Midwestern town of Maumee, Ohio. Harriet left home in her late teens and moved to Washington D.C. A few years later she returned to Ohio—unmarried and pregnant with Octavio. Octavio was born with thick, brown, curly hair and a darker skin hue but the origins of his complexion were never discussed. Harriet soon met and married a White man who Octavio grew up knowing as his father. Harriet and her husband went on to have a son together as well.

Growing up in predominantly White Maumee, Octavio began to recognize physical differences not only between the people in his community and him, but between his family members and him as well. Octavio documented his life experiences in a film called *Silences* (Warnock-Graham, 2006). The title reflects the silence Octavio experienced from his mother and extended family whenever he would ask about his heritage; the silence of years of unanswered questions while living amongst a family that attempted to create a world where race did not matter. Extended family members told the adult Octavio that they “always had their suspicions,” but “it doesn’t really matter... you’re just one of us.” Although treated as “one of them” by his (step)father and extended family, Octavio’s social experiences were different. In the film, Octavio’s friends discuss how they recognized his “otherness,” but did not know what to do. Octavio also recalls in the film how an upperclassman in middle school physically tormented him into calling himself “a nigger” while at the same time his maternal Grandma Warnock stated adamantly to him that “Harriet never told me you were Black because you’re not Black!” Even years later in 2006 while filming his documentary in Maumee, a policeman pulled over Octavio because of reports of a “suspicious man driving around the neighborhood.”

At the end of the film, Octavio tracks down his Black biological father, who was unaware of Octavio's existence, in San Francisco, CA. Octavio now has a relationship with his birth father and his extended African American family and has begun to create a true identity for himself. The tagline for *Silences* states that the documentary is not about race and it is not about blame and it is not about shame. It is about the intricate and challenging problems that every parent faces in raising a child and every child faces in coming to terms with the choices, for better or for worse, that a parent makes.

Understanding the context and environment of a mixed-race child like Octavio is important because of the direct impact it has on how she or he is distinguished by others as well as how he or she understands and encounters the world around him or her (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005)—it is the emerging battle of identity versus identification. It also is important for young children to understand race in an effort to manage racialized interactions in response to acts of racism and questions regarding race/ethnicity (Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Lesane-Brown, 2007). Ideological racism impacts multiracial children because it can teach them to overvalue one of their races while devaluing the other (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). But what are the consequences when a situation like Octavio's occurs—when a parent is in a same-race relationship and, together with his or her partner, raises a multiracial child who is biologically related to one of the parents? Are parents conscious about being culturally competent when they are living in a household with a multiracial child and monoracial children? Is everyone in the household assumed to be, raised, to be, and socialized to be the same race? What messages does the multiracial child receive regarding race? Is there an emphasis placed on being the same and resistance to what is perceived as different?

It has been established that *racial ancestry* is the “geno-phenotypical racial group(s) which make up a person's biological family tree,” and *racial identification* refers to the “group or groups a person uses to identify him or herself racially” (Herman, 2008, p. 204). The purpose of this study is to identify the function of parents in the development of racial identity in multiracial children in joint biological-stepfamilies.

Specifically, this research is guided by the following questions: What aspects of family ethnic/racial socialization are present among monoracial parents raising mixed race children? What is the function of family ethnic/racial socialization in the formation of racial identity in mixed race children? A phenomenological heuristic inquiry approach will be used to develop

creative synthesis (Patton, 2002), or patterns and relationships relative to the total experience of monoracial parents raising mixed race children.

## Chapter 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

In a quest to understand racial identity development, many theories and models have been designed and measured. This chapter will explore the history, as well as the process, and the way scholars have thought about and chronicled racial identity development. Many theoretical approaches will be covered as we follow the progression of the way we have thought about this phenomenon.

### Identity Development

According to Erikson (1950), individuals progress through eight stages of social and emotional development over the life cycle (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Erikson’s Stages of Man**

|                                    |                                 |   |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Stage 1</i><br>Birth-1 year     | Trust vs. Mistrust              | Becoming trustful of others and developing a sense of one’s own trustworthiness |
| <i>Stage 2</i><br>1-3 years        | Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt    | Becoming creative vs. becoming inhibited  |
| <i>Stage 3</i><br>3-6 years        | Initiative vs. Guilt            | Activity, curiosity, and exploration or immobilization by fear                  |
| <i>Stage 4</i><br>6-11 years       | Industry vs. Inferiority        | Mastering basic skills needed in society  |
| <i>Stage 5</i><br>Adolescence      | Identity vs. Identity Confusion | Assessing strengths and weaknesses  |
| <i>Stage 6</i><br>Young Adulthood  | Intimacy vs. Isolation          | Establishing emotional closeness for enduring relationships                     |
| <i>Stage 7</i><br>Middle Adulthood | Generativity vs. Stagnation     | Productive vocational and professional contributions to society                 |
| <i>Stage 8</i><br>Old Age          | Integrity vs. Despair           | Appreciating vs. resenting life experiences                                     |

Erikson’s (1950) theory of human development is focused on the achievement of ego-identity or a conscious sense of self. Individuals begin at stage one and progress through development as they age and resolve the crisis experienced at each stage. Erikson’s fifth stage of development is identity versus identity confusion. At this stage adolescents must develop a

“sense of personal identity” in an effort to avoid “role diffusion and identity confusion” (Muuss, 1996, p. 51). This sense of achievement in identity implies that an adolescent has evaluated his/her individual assets and limitations in an effort to best determine how to respond to the questions of “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” and “What do I want to become?” (Muuss, p. 51).

The formation of a healthy identity leads to healthy intimate relationships in later life and is a core aspect of adolescence (Welch, 2010). Without the development of a healthy identity, negative qualities become part of the individual’s personality and can be evidenced through impaired self-concept, adjustment problems, psychopathology, and in its most brutal form, suicide/suicide attempts (Muuss, 1996). Erikson (1959) reported that some adolescents who are confused about their identities would rather be dead than face continued ambiguity in determining who they are.

As society changes, the manner in which individuals form their identity shifts as well. Historically individuals were narrowly socialized into their roles. Socialization is a means of fitting or training a person for society or a social environment (Socialize, n.d.). However, in the 1960s Keniston (1965) argued that the socialization process was being replaced by the exploration of identity, as the process of socialization implies a stable, uniform, socially defined role/value actually exists for adolescents. In other words, fitting into a prescribed role is no longer as important as understanding who a person is and who they want to be as an individual. Because identity is based on psychosocial reciprocity (e.g. interactions with others, social feedback), at times the process is met with struggles. Adolescents are concerned with how they are viewed by others; they often wrestle with making associations between their developed roles and the ideals provided by society (Muuss, 1996).

There are many factors that influence an adolescent’s identity formation. In middle and late adolescence peers emerge as a strong influence in the development of identity. Adolescents experience elevated levels of peer involvement and often conform to the expectations of peers in an effort to identify various potential roles (Muuss, 1996). This can cause problems in development because the adolescent does not often fully recognize how well the role actually fits him/her versus just following a peer clique (Muuss). In early adolescence parents are often a guiding force and serve as role models. Adolescents can reject their parent’s ideas for identity and rebel against values, intrusions, and control in an effort to develop autonomy and separate



their identity from that of their family. On the other hand, many adolescents follow their parent's guidance in order to fulfill their parent's aspirations for them. Unfortunately, the latter removes many opportunities for adolescents to appreciate the personal opportunities that accompany the quest for identity (Muuss).

In the pursuit of the ego-identity a particular strength of adolescence is fidelity. Erikson (1965) described fidelity as being essential to reaching autonomy. Fidelity is the ability to keep one's identity even when confronted with another person's value system. Fidelity is one's self-identity and how one is identified (Erikson, 1982). Adolescents use fidelity to form their personal ideology. This ideology, or philosophy, guides decision making, behavior, and value orientation (Muuss, 1996).

Scholars have continued to explore adolescent identity development based on Erikson's theory. Research on adolescent identity development has continued to evolve since the development of Erikson's (1950) Eight Stages of Man and has also examined the process of identity development.

### ***The Process of Identity Development***

Meeus (2011) reviewed longitudinal research on adolescent identity development throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century and found that identity develops steadily during adolescence; however, individuals do not typically change their identity once it has been accepted. Exploring identity development through a dimensional approach allows for the recognition of the process of development. In his research on the development of ego-identity, Marcia (1966) identified two processes of identity formation: *exploration* and *commitment*. Exploration includes the questioning and investigation of different identities before deciding which to pursue. Commitment is the extent to which adolescents make firm decisions in significant identity domains and engage in activities towards employing their choice.

Within each process of identity formation four identity statuses exist that detail the degree of commitment or exploration of the adolescent (Marcia, 1966). "Identity diffusion (D) indicates that the adolescent has not yet made a commitment regarding a specific developmental task and may or may not have explored different alternatives in that domain" (Meeus, 2011, p. 75). This status is characterized by "low emotional stability and conscientiousness, moderate levels of openness to experience and well-being, and poor parent-offspring relationships"

(Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008, p. 984). “Foreclosure (F) signifies that the adolescent has made a commitment without much prior exploration” (Meeus, p. 75). This status is characterized by increased intrapersonal adjustment but more rigid personality profiles (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, et al.). In Moratorium (M), “the adolescent is in a state of active exploration but has not made significant commitments” (Meeus, p. 75). These adolescents demonstrate a high level of openness to new experiences but low levels of adjustment and ambivalent family relationships (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, et al.). “Identity achievement (A) signifies that the adolescent has finished a period of active exploration and has subsequently made a commitment” (Meeus, p. 75). Characteristics of this category include “positive personality profiles and optimal interpersonal and social functioning” (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, et al., p. 984).

Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) further delineated the identity status of moratorium through the creation of a fifth status: searching moratorium. Whereby moratorium represents the negative aspects of the identity status including struggles to find self approved commitments, searching moratorium symbolizes the positive side of the identity status and includes opportunities to weigh new commitments “from the relatively secure basis of an articulated, existing commitment” (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, et al. 2008, p. 986). Adolescents in this status are aware of their lack of commitment to an identity but also recognize the need to choose one. Moratorium is an especially important status to understand because adolescents involved in this process exhibit the highest levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear of success, nervousness, self-destruction, and substance use (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, et al.).

Meeus (2011) also found that the majority of literature provides evidence that identity development incorporates less change than has been traditionally thought. While there are multiple methods to study the continuity of identity, there is no empirical evidence that finds that exploration must precede commitment, and that identity status actually follows the following linear continuum: diffusion (D) → moratorium (M) → foreclosure (F) → achievement (A). Additionally, two sets of identity transitions that adolescents can follow on the continuum were identified: D → F (or EC: early closure, an alternative label for foreclosure) → A or D → M → C (closure, a subtype of early closure) → A (Meeus). These processes help to identify where an adolescent lies in developing his or her personal identity. Although the majority of adolescents (63%) remain in the same accepted identity status over time (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010) adolescents can adjust and change their commitments. Even after the

primary exploration process that leads to a specific commitment ends, adolescents may keep reflecting on, and collecting information about, their choice in commitment (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006).

Identity formation and its process are key in an individual's understanding of him or herself. There are multiple dimensions of identity that inform one's core sense of self or personal identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Contextual influences such as family background and life experiences inform identity development along with core intersecting social identities including race, ethnicity, sexual and gender identities, social class, and religion (Jones & McEwen). In U.S. society there are implications for how an individual is defined and defines him or herself regarding the dimension of race. Developing a racial identity is a formative process with implications for how individuals exist in social, political, and economic contexts due to the emphasis in society on racial group inclusion.

### **Racial Identity Development**

While the search for identity, as defined by Erikson, can be applied to all youth, racial socialization is a phenomenon most commonly applied to youth of color (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007) and is related to the process of racial identity development. White racial identity is seen as an invisible and privileged opportunity (McDermott & Samson, 2005) while monoracial identity development among minorities is seen almost as a rite of passage. Children learn about race and ethnicity through modeling, discussion, observation, reinforcement, and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Helms (1990) defined racial identity as having a sense of a shared identity based on the perception that one shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group.

### ***White Racial Identity Development***

While other models of White racial identity exist (see Carney & Kahn, 1984; Hardiman, 1982) Helms's (1990) model is the most empirically investigated. Helms's (1990) theory of White racial identity development incorporates two phases of development: abandoning racism and defining a non-racist identity. This theory is a stage theory where individuals progress from one stage to the next as they have experiences in life. Helms's theory of White identity development is summarized by Sue et al. (1998) in the following six stages:

1. *Contact*: People in this status are oblivious to racism, lack an understanding of racism, have minimal experiences with people of color, and profess to be color-blind. Societal influence in perpetuating stereotypes and the superior/inferior dichotomy associated between Blacks and Whites are not noticed, but accepted unconsciously or consciously without critical thought or analysis. Racial and cultural differences are considered unimportant and these individuals seldom perceive themselves as “dominant” group members, or having biases and prejudices.
2. *Disintegration*: In this stage, the person becomes conflicted over unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that are frequently perceived as polar opposites: believing one is nonracist, yet not wanting one’s son or daughter to marry a minority group member; believing that “all men are created equal,” yet society treats Blacks as second class citizens; and not acknowledging that oppression exists while witnessing it. The person becomes increasingly conscious of his or her Whiteness and may experience dissonance and conflict when choosing between own-group loyalty and humanism.
3. *Reintegration*: Due to societal ideology, initial resolution of dissonance often moves in the direction of the dominant ideology associated with race and one’s own socioracial group identity. This stage may be characterized as a regression, for the tendency is to idealize one’s socioracial group and to be intolerant of other minority groups. There is a firmer and more conscious belief in White racial superiority and racial/ethnic minorities are blamed for their own problems.
4. *Pseudo-Independence*: A person is likely to move into this phase due to a painful or insightful encounter or event, which jars the person from reintegration status. The person begins to attempt an understanding of racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences and may reach out to interact with minority group members. The choice of minority individuals, however, is based on how “similar” they are to him or her, and the primary mechanism used to understand racial issues is intellectual and conceptual. An attempt to understand has not reached the experiential and affective domains.
5. *Immersion/Emersion*: If the person is reinforced to continue a personal exploration of himself or herself as a racial being, questions become focused on what it means to be White. There is an increasing willingness to truly confront one’s own biases, to redefine Whiteness, and to become more active in directly combating racism and oppression. This

stage is marked with increasing experiential and affective understanding that were lacking in the previous status.

6. *Autonomy*: Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist White identity becomes increasingly strong.

Models of White racial identity development, such as Helms's, have been deemed to be inadequate because they are based on oppression-adaptive models of minority identity development, they center heavily on attitudes towards racial minorities, not on White identity attitudes, and they portray the process as being developmental (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994)—in essence little attention is given to how White individuals feel about themselves (Leach, Behrens, & LeFleur, 2002).

Helms's (1990) White racial identity theory led to the development of the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRAIS) (Helms & Carter, 1990). Although the WRIAS is often utilized as a measure of White racial awareness that appears to support the model (see Block, Roberson, & Neuger, 1995; Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1992, 1994; Tokar & Sweanson, 1991;) it has been met with additional criticism beyond that of Rowe et al. (1994). Racial identity measures have been challenged on their ability to conform to measurement models intended to assess various constructs (Helms, 2007). The WRIAS is most harshly criticized by Behrens (1997; see Behrens & Rowe, 1997) who feels the scale is less complex than the White racial identity theory it is assumed to measure. Through factor analysis Behrens's research refutes the validity of the WRIAS; findings suggest that "scale structures found in the data are more parsimonious than those suggested by theory. Although it remains unclear which construct or constructs are actually measured by the instrument, interpretations of the WRIAS as composed of 5 meaningful dimensions are unsupported" (p. 3).

Conceptualizing White racial consciousness is an alternative method for identifying perceptions of being White. White racial consciousness is defined as an individual's awareness of being White and the implications of that awareness in relation to those who do not have White group membership (Rowe et al., 1994). White racial consciousness can be broken down into

unachieved White racial consciousness and achieved White racial consciousness as defined by Rowe et al.:

Unachieved White Racial Consciousness:

- Avoidant Type: The individual lacks consideration of their own White identity and avoids concern for minority issues. Problematic issues are ignored, minimized, or denied.
- Dependent Type: Individuals look to others to determine the significance of events and issues. The person has not internalized his or her own attitudes to create a level of meaningfulness.
- Dissonant Type: There is a level of uncertainty regarding being White and minority issues. The individual is open to new information that may reduce uncertainty, but lacks commitment to his or her own ideas.

Achieved White Racial Consciousness:

- Dominative Type: These individuals hold strong ethnocentric perspectives that justify the majority culture maintaining dominance over the minority. They hold views that Whites are superior, but often have limited knowledge outside of common negative stereotypes.
- Conflictive Type: Individuals are opposed to blatant discrimination however they are offended by and challenge programs or procedures enacted to reduce or eliminate discrimination.
- Reactive Type: Individuals hold more egalitarian perspectives as they are aware of racism and discrimination and recognize that White Americans are responsible for and benefit from its existence.
- Integrative Type: individuals have integrated their sense of Whiteness with a regard for minorities. Culturally pluralistic societies are valued and a deeper understanding of sociopolitical factors impacting race issues exists.

These aspects of consciousness are similar to the stages of White racial identity development; however, individuals can move between the statuses and types of White racial consciousness in a non-sequential, unpredictable manner based on their life experiences (Rowe et al.).

In response to the theory of White racial consciousness the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale (ORAS) was designed to measure the construct of White racial consciousness. Internal consistency estimates and principal component and common factor analyses were used to examine the scale. The result was the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form (ORAS-P) (Choney & Behrens, 1996). The ORAS-P has been shown to exhibit “adequate internal consistency and theoretically appropriate factor structure for the scales, representing both unachieved and achieved status types of racial attitudes” (Leach et al., 2002). These findings are supported by recent research on White racial consciousness including work on counselor competencies (see Cumming-McCann & Accordino, 2005) and White racial consciousness among student affairs practitioners (see Mueller & Pope, 2003).

White racial attitudes have been shown to be important when developing education curricula and to improve multicultural competence of counselors (Cumming-McCann & Accordino, 2005). These findings help us understand how Whites conceptualize working with diverse populations (Han, West-Olatunji & Thomas, 2010). Implicit in the findings is the importance of professional counselors having cross-cultural experiences in training programs, such as traveling and working in urban areas, which then contribute to their enhanced competence (Cumming-McCann & Accordino). Also evidenced is that as White individuals age, there is less confusion about and reliance on others regarding issues of race (Mueller & Pope, 2003). Whites who feel socially marginalized in other identity domains (e.g. gender, sexual orientation) were found to be in the Reactive Type of achieved White racial consciousness; they possess a greater understanding of racism’s impact on maintaining White privilege. As White counselors participate in multicultural education, implement multicultural programs, and discuss multicultural issues, they have a more positive attitude toward people of color, become less unsure about their own views on racial issues, and have an awareness and desire to combat racism (Mueller & Pope).

### ***Monoracial Identity Development in Minorities***

Racial identity theories evolved out of the need to explain the means by which minorities, often referred to as people/groups of color, adjust in environments where they are commonly denied privileges to societal resources and in which racial inferiority was used as justification for their maltreatment (Helms, 1995). People of color include individuals who do not identify their

race/ethnicity as non-Hispanic White (Humes et al., 20112) and whose purported ancestry is at least part African, Asian, or Indigenous (Helms, 1995). The development of a specific racial identity varies by race and culture because of power differences that exist in socioracial groups in the U.S. and the different reactions to that socialization. However, racial stereotypes have been, and continue to be, used to control visible socioracial and ethnic groups. For this reason relinquishment of internalized racism involves a similar process for each group of color regardless of the specific group to which they have been denoted (Helms, 1995).

Helms (1995) developed a theory on racial identity ego statuses among people of color; the theory includes different statuses that a minority may experience versus a progression through developmental stages because (a) individuals may exhibit attitudes, behaviors, and emotions indicative of more than one stage; (b) in research, ‘stage’ implies a static position that is achieved rather than a fluid cognitive and emotional process; and (c) theory and measurement do not support the belief of various stages being mutually exclusive constructs (Helms, 1995).

The statuses of Helms’s People of Color Racial Identity Theory include:

1. *Conformity (Pre-Encounter) Status*: External self-definition is experienced that implies devaluing one’s own group and allegiance to White standards of merit. An individual in this status probably is oblivious to socioracial groups’ sociopolitical histories.
2. *Dissonance (Encounter) Status*: Ambivalence and confusion concerning one’s own socioracial group commitment and ambivalent socioracial self-definition are experienced. One may be ambivalent about one’s life decisions.
3. *Immersion/Emersion Status*: A person in this status idealizes one’s own socioracial group and denigrates that which is perceived as White. One’s own-group external standards to are used to self-define, and own-group commitment and loyalty is valued. One may make life decisions for the benefit of the group.
4. *Internalization Status*: Positive commitment to one’s own socioracial group, internally defined racial attributes, and capacity to assess and respond objectively to members of the dominant group are evident. One can make life decisions by assessing and integrating socioracial group requirements and self-assessment.
5. *Integrative Awareness Status*: An individual in this status has the capacity to value one’s own collective identities as well as empathize and collaborate with members of



other oppressed groups. Life decisions may be motivated by globally humanistic self-expression.

Based this theory, Helms (1995) created the People of Color Racial Identity Attitude Scale (POCRIAS) to measure the five statuses of the theory and attitudes towards social and political race and ethnicity, which has been used amongst a variety of groups of color. In a sample of 150 Lumbee Native American college students, the POCRIAS was found to be a useful tool in constructing profiles of racial identity attitudes of Native Americans (Bryant & Baker, 2003). The implications of which may help practitioners understand the cultural context of Native Americans. The POCRIAS was also utilized as a tool to explore the relationship between racial identity development and college adjustment among students of color (African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latino/a) at predominantly White institutions. The results showed that students with internalization attitudes were more positively adjusted while dissonance and immersion attitudes were negatively associated with most aspects of college adjustment. Students with the latter attitudes were at greater risk for dropping out of college (Henry, 2000). Studies such as these support the use of the POCRIAS in racial identification among people of color.

On the other hand, in his examination of the construct validity of the POCRIAS, Lo (2004) identified mixed results. The POCRIAS was found to have good internal consistency as evidenced by internal reliability coefficients of the subscales that ranged from .86 to .71; however, statistically significant differences were reported among racial/ethnic groups on dissonance, immersion, and internalization (Lo). Interpretation on these findings was difficult related to factor structures; if the factor structures for the racial/ethnic groups are different then the POCRIAS may not be capturing the overall experiences of the various racial/ethnic groups. Whereas if the factor structures are similar, the mean differences may be manifested by the varying amount of universal experiences by the racial/ethnic groups (Lo). Essentially, Lo's findings tell us that while the POCRIAS may represent a good measure of the *general* developmental process of people of color, the scale does not encapsulate the *individual and unique* experiences that people of color may encounter that are specific to their racial/ethnic group.

Lo's (2004) results are evidenced further in studies on Asian Americans as well as samples comprised of multiple races. In a sample of minorities of various races, Vinson and

Neimeyer (2000) found that advanced levels of racial identity development were typically correlated with higher levels of multicultural competency, greater amounts of prior multicultural training, and higher self-reported ratings of overall competency and multicultural competency among counselors. However, high levels of interrelationships were found within the domains of the POCRIAS making it difficult to determine if racial identity development was exclusively related to higher levels of multicultural counseling competence or simply a higher level of overall counseling experience. Among a sample of 225 Asian American college students, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the POCRIAS (Perry, Vance, & Helms, 2009). The factorial structure again revealed mixed results in terms of consistency with the conformity, dissonance, emersion, and internalization statuses and suggestions were provided to aid in improving the measure through further scale development and revision related to Asian Americans. From these studies it is evidenced that while each of the five statuses of the Person of Color Theory may be pertinent to all minority races/ethnic groups, the specific social experiences of the group may limit the ability of the POCRIAS to measure racial identity development of all minority groups in the same way.

The various processes of racial identity development are important to examine because of the impact racial identity can have on multiracial children and their lives. In the case of multiracial children living in joint-biological stepfamilies, the process of racial identity development is not as clear-cut as in monoracial individuals.

### ***Multiracial Identity Development***

The process of identity development is different for an individual of mixed race than for monoracial individuals. With a greater amount of the U.S. population under the age of 18 identifying as multiracial (41% compared to 25% monoracial) (Herman, 2008), it is understandable that there are multiple theories regarding multiracial identity development. Most theories of multiracial identity development focus on psychological adjustment, racial identification categories, and political implications (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). How we as a society have traditionally categorized race does not match with the new ideals of multiracial identification—researchers and theorists are seemingly bound to the limits of perceived racial ideology. As the various approaches to multicultural identity formation have evolved over time, they have called specifically for the development of either an all-

encompassing multiracial identity or acquiescence of a single race category, typically according to hypodescent practices—assignment of the child’s race to the “subordinate” parent’s racial group (Rockquemore et al.).

The approaches to understanding multiracial identity development have evolved over time from a problem approach in the early 1900s to the currently used ecological framework. This evolution shows the growth in our understanding of multiracial identity development as well as the implications of the research on societal development.

### ***Problem Approach***

The problem approach to multicultural identity development emerged in the 1920s and was built on the assumption that being a multiracial person in a society divided by race is a problem (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Theories that work from a problem approach focus on the negative experiences of multiracial individuals in a segregated society (Rockquemore et al.).

Park’s (1928) theory of the marginal man—an unstable character striving to live in two diverse cultural groups—illustrated the problem approach and how the rigid color lines in the U.S. forced multiracial (Black/White) individuals to accept a Black status. He found that despite possessing Black and White ancestry, multiracial people were destined to a permanent state of crisis where their psychological state was plagued by chaos that reflected a racist and eugenic epistemology.

Stonequist (1937) expanded on the marginal man theory and found that multiracial individuals have an awareness of the conflict between the two races. This awareness generates a level of identification with both groups leading to an internalization of the conflict as a personal issue. Three stages of the life cycle for multiracial individuals were identified:

1. *Introduction Stage*: The marginal person is assimilated into the two cultures of his parents.
2. *Crisis Stage*: The multiracial individual has a defining experience where the incompatible nature of the cultural conflict is recognized. In the crisis stage, feelings of confusion, shock, disillusionment, and estrangement are felt.
3. *Adjustment Stage*: The marginal person adjusts to his/her status and develops an understanding of his/her social location. In most cases, the adjustment is toward the dominant group. In the instance of Black/White multiracial people in the United States, adjustment toward the dominant White group was impracticable because of White

supremacy and segregation. For this reason the marginal person was expected to become a leader among the subordinate Black group, or otherwise experience withdrawal or isolation.

Park's (1928) and Stonequist's (1937) original assumptions that being multiracial in the U.S. is a problem and that multiracial individuals are psychologically disadvantaged, continues to be seen in current literature that focuses on the negative experiences of multiracial individuals. Cheng and Livley (2009) investigated problem behaviors and psychological difficulties in multiracial (e.g. Black/White, American Indian/White, Asian/Black) and monoracial adolescents. A mixed methods approach was employed to sample over 90,000 adolescents; the quantitative findings of their study revealed that, on average, biracial youth display more depressive symptoms than their monoracial counterparts and biracial youth experience more self-depreciation and feelings of alienation than Black adolescents. Overall findings exhibited that multiracial youth have relatively lower psychological well being, beliefs about the quality of their social relations are not as positive as the real outcome, and they demonstrate negative behavior profiles (e.g. alcohol/tobacco use, skipping school).

### ***Equivalent Approach***

The equivalent approach was widely used from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s and is based on mixed race that includes Black racial heritage. It assumes that most Black people are of mixed race, as a result of slavery; therefore, there is no reason to differentiate between mixed individuals of immediate parentage (children of interracial parents) and individuals mixed over generations (most Black Americans). Thus, the healthiest outcome for mixed-race individuals results from the identification of a Black racial identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009). As racial identity theories developed that considered multiracial and Black people as analytically the same, researchers assumed that the multiracial experience was a linear progression toward a meaningful Black identity reflective of the culture and identity politics of its historical moment (Rockquemore et al). The equivalent approach echoes the idea of Erikson's (1959) ego identity formation, where the goal is to form a stable identity—one of sameness and historical continuity.

An example of the equivalent approach can be seen in William Cross's Nigrescence Model (1971), which represents a Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience. Cross's model consists of the following five stages:

1. *Pre-encounter*: This stage includes the individual's old frame of reference (which is dominated by White determinants) that needs to be changed. It is the time before an individual acknowledges race/racism and prefers dominant modes of being (Rockquemore et al.).
2. *Encounter*: This is a two-step process; first the individual "encounters" a shocking personal or social event that momentarily displaces their old worldview. At this point the individual is vulnerable to a new interpretation of self-identity. Second, the individual cautiously tries to validate his/her new perceptions.
3. *Immersion-Emersion*: "The vortex of psychological metamorphosis." The individual is totally immersed and withdrawn into their Blackness. Afterwards the individual emerges from the emotional aspects and is able to be cognitively open. The period of nigrescence comes to an end.
4. *Internalization*: At this point there is a resolution of conflict between the old and new worldviews. Flexibility and psychological openness replace emotion and defensiveness. The Black identity becomes a foundation for the self as the individual moves toward a nonracist perspective.
5. *Internalization-Commitment*: This includes an ongoing active expression of Black identity. Distinctions are made between individuals who internalize their new identity but are no longer part of the 'movement' and individuals who continue to be social activists. The divergence from stage four internalization is the "proposition that in order for the Black identity change to have lasting political significance, the "self" (me or "I") must become or continue to be involved in the resolution of problems shared by the "group" (we) (Cross, 1978, p. 18).

Although the nigrescence model originated in the early 1970s, the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) was not created as a tool to measure this concept of racial identity until 2001. Because research on racial identity development viewed multiracial individuals (with African ancestry) as being equivalent to Blacks, investigations on the development of multiracial identity during this time period are represented in studies on Black racial identity development.

Hall, Cross, and Freedle (1972) examined the validity of the Cross Model with 90 college students. Single sentence items representing the different beliefs and attitudes of the model

stages were written on index cards and sorted into clusters by the students. Results showed that no matter whether the participants were sorting cards marked with the categories or not, the cards were sorted in the same fashion and participants sorted the items in a sequence that replicated the stages of the Cross Model, validating the use of the stages.

Cross (1972 as cited in Cross, 1974) also conducted a retrospective interpretation of the experiences of acquiring a Black identity among Black college students who were ‘activists’ in the Black Student Movement. Findings indicated that the students used items from the pre-encounter stage to describe themselves before their involvement in the movement and attributes from the internalization stage were predominantly used to self-describe participants in the present. Patterns related to the immersion/emersion category indicated that the participants viewed themselves as having experienced a transition between old worldviews and the stabilization of a new identity, also supporting the validity of the Cross Models theoretical stages.

Krate, Leventhal, and Silverstein (1974) conducted a study similar to the Hall et al. (1972) study, however their study was conducted with low-income, urban, college students from a New Jersey state college, whom the researchers felt were more representative of the general Black population. Participants rated statements from the stages of the Cross Model, written on index cards, on a four-point scale on a ‘most like me’ continuum. The participants were to rate the items according to how they viewed themselves now, four years ago, two years ago, and how they saw themselves in the future. Findings from the study again validated the stages of the Cross Model by suggesting shifts in the participants away from the pre-encounter stage (a Negro identity) in the past to portraying themselves as being in the internalization stage (Black identity) now and in the future (Krate et al.).

While these studies show support for the progression of African Americans from a Negro identity to a Black identity, they fail to measure the process of racial identity development of all multiracial individuals. Especially multiracial people who do not have Black heritage and/or do not self-identify as Black. Unfortunately this approach in multiracial identity development is still evidenced in modern literature (see Collins, 2000; Thornton, 1996).

### ***Variant Approach***

The variant approach emerged in the mid 1980s and was widely recognized through the 1990s. It views mixed race as being distinct from other racial categories and attempts to explain

psychologically, clinically, and developmentally, how multiracial people actively and consciously construct a bi or multiracial identity, which is more healthy than identifying with one particular race (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Various models of biracial identity development have been proposed by Collins (2000), Jacobs (1992), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), Kich (1992), and Poston (1990). Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model (1990) exemplified biracial identity development through the following stages:

1. *Personal Identity*: Individuals at this stage are often very young, and membership in a particular ethnic group is just becoming salient. Sense of self is somewhat independent of his/her ethnic background.
2. *Choice of Group Categorization*: Individuals are pushed to choose an identity (by society), usually of one ethnic group—this is often a time of crisis or alienation. Factors that impact the decision include (a) status; status of the parents' ethnic backgrounds; demographics of the home neighborhood and ethnicity/influence of peer groups; (b) social support; parental style/influence, participation in cultures of various groups, parental and familial acceptance; (c) personal factors; physical appearance, knowledge of languages, cultural knowledge, age, political involvement and individual personality differences.
3. *Enmeshment/Denial*: Confusion and guilt at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one's background.
4. *Appreciation*: Appreciation of multiple identities; a broadening of reference group orientation occurs.
5. *Integration*: Wholeness and integration—recognition of values in all ethnic identities.

Through approaches such as Poston's, multiracial individuals are challenged to effectively integrate dual racial identifications and a positive self-concept while developing the ability to blend their earlier identifications into a stable sense of personal and positive racial identity (Gibbs 1989; Herring, 1992). This process is viewed to have negative implications on development; research in support of these approaches asserts that developmental problems may occur among biracial individuals including: (a) conflicts about their dual racial/ethnic identity, (b) conflicts about their social marginality, (c) conflicts about their sexuality and choice of sexual partners, (d) conflicts about separation from their parents, and (e) conflicts about their educational or career aspirations (Gibbs; Herring).

However, Shih and Sanchez (2005) refute these assertions. In their review of qualitative and quantitative literature that measures the variant approaches to multiracial identity development as well as, depression, problem behaviors, peer relationships, school performance, and self-esteem, Shih and Sanchez find that results are often mixed. Among qualitative studies (e.g. Hall, 1992; Kerwin et al., 1993; Korgen, 1998) there was evidence of both positive and negative psychological adjustment for multiracial individuals. These findings suggest that the processes for successful adjustment are more complex than suggested by traditional theories. There is evidence that being multiracial has challenges but also provides resources that contribute to resilience such as having access to and potentially gaining support from a larger number of cultural communities.

Quantitative studies (e.g., Grove, 1991, Herman, 2004) resulted in a lack of “clear and strong patterns” (Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 587). The direction of the outcome being considered as well as a lack of available studies for each area being assessed, contributed to the inability to measure the effects systemically. Overall the direction of results often depended on whether the sample was clinical or nonclinical; support for detrimental outcomes was found only in studies sampling clinical populations. Studies on nonclinical samples found that multiracial individuals tend to be just as well adjusted as their monoracial peers on most psychological outcomes (Shih & Sanchez).

Evidence from these findings suggests that researchers of the variant approaches to multicultural identity development sought to find a balanced middle ground. Instead of multiracial individuals having to choose a ‘pure’ socioracial identity they were provided models for identifying with their multiple heritages. However these processes often still include a problem perspective and do not fully capture the true process of development.

### ***Ecological Framework for Understanding Racial Identity***

The current approach to multiracial identity formation, the ecological approach (Root, 2002), applies Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological framework to the process of identity development.

The assumptions of the ecological framework for understanding racial identity include:

1. Mixed race people construct different racial identities based on various contextually specific logics.



2. There are no predictable stages of identity development because the process is not linear and there is no single optimal endpoint.
3. Privileging any one type of racial identity over another (i.e., multiracial over single-race identity) only replicates the essentialist flaws of previous models with a different outcome (Rockquemore et al., 2009).

The framework also provides multiracial individuals with the opportunity to not identify a racial category and, instead, to simply define themselves as human (Daniel, 2001).

Root (1990) provided an example of the ecological framework in her research on multiracial identity development. Root offered strategies multiracial individuals could utilize to resolve the dilemma of ethnic identity development to maintain a stable and positive self-image. A variety of options are presented in which multiracial individuals can function within the designated five-races through “border-crossing.” Root has continually expanded on her model (see Root see Root, 1996; 1997; 1998; 2003) to contextualize the border crossings with consideration given to the history of race relations, racial socialization, family functioning, and individual personality traits (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Efficient border crossing requires multiracial individuals to:

1. Have both feet in both groups so that one has the ability to hold, merge, and respect multiple perspectives simultaneously.
2. Shift the foreground and background as an individual crosses between and among social contexts defined by race.
3. Consciously choose to sit on the border and experience hybridity and a border identity as a central reference point.
4. Create a home in one “camp” while visiting other camps when necessary.

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) proposed four categories describing the ways in which biracial individuals understand their racial identities considering the ecological framework:

1. Singular Identity (e.g., “Black” or “White”): Traditional identity category.
2. Protean Identity: Flexible in terms of their racial identities; able to shift between identities based on the context or social interaction.

3. Transcendent Identity: Those who choose not to categorize themselves in terms of race. This option is only available to those individuals who have a high degree of ambiguity in their physical appearance.
4. Border Identity: Conceptualize racial identity as being on the “border” of their heritage races. Instead of categorizing oneself as “Black” or “White”, the individual chooses to understand him or herself as belonging to a third “biracial” category.

Examples of how the ecological framework of multiracial development influences racial identity are evidenced in the most recent literature. Rollins (2009) examined maternal socialization and its impact on biracial identity development. Her results demonstrated that mothers of biracial adolescents reported using a combination of messages reduced into three racial socialization strategies: proactive, protective, and no racial socialization strategies. Mothers’ socialization messages included cultural, minority, mainstream, egalitarian, and no racial socialization messages. The type of racial socialization varied by maternal race; Black mothers were most likely to use mainstream socialization messages while White and other minority mothers were more likely to provide no direct racial socialization. In general, Black mothers provided more socialization than their White and other minority counterparts. Proactive socialization was associated with racial identity salience—biracial adolescents who received proactive racial socialization reported less racial salience. Additionally, maternal race was associated with racial salience, private regard, and exploration—biracial adolescents with a White mother reported lower racial salience, private regard, and racial exploration.

Walker (2011) examined factors that influence biracial individuals’ level of racial identity development, and its impact on biracial identity and psychological adjustment, in biracial individuals of minority/minority racial group descent. Her findings established that (a) physical characteristics of two or more racial groups as well as exposure to multicultural experiences predicted biracial individuals’ identification with a border or protean identity; (b) high levels of subjection to multicultural experiences best predicted a high level of ethnic identity development and positive interactions with other racial groups; (c) the first two findings contributed to biracial individuals’ psychological adjustment (i.e., self-esteem and psychological well-being).

Han (2012) and Turner (2007) both utilized an ecological framework in their work on identity development in Korean/White biracial individuals. The results of their studies show multiple contextual factors that contribute to multiracial identity development. Parents are specifically identified as being influential to the developmental process. Han found that modified parenting styles better accommodate the needs of biracial children in interracial parenting, parents should be the primary facilitators in the racial socialization process of their biracial children to help them develop a healthy identity and effectively deal with race-related matters, and supportive peers and extended family are positively related to biracial individuals' psychological adjustment and identity development.

Similar to Marcia's (1966) work on the process of overall identity development, and as evidenced in the aforementioned studies, the ecological framework of multiracial identity development demonstrates that racial identity varies, racial identity often changes over the life course, racial identity development is not a predictable linear process with a single outcome, and social, cultural, and spatial context are critical (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Although it is evidenced that multiracial identity can change over time, research does not identify a single healthy, correct, and/or desirable end point (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Moreover, while these studies support the use of the ecological framework in understanding the racial identity process for multiracial individuals, they do so with multiracial people that have been raised by interracial parents and/or one monoracial parent. For this reason, specific contextual influences, such as the household construction of joint-biological stepfamilies and its influence on the process of multiracial identity development, requires an individual and exclusive theoretical approach.

Important to note is that a resounding amount of the literature that incorporates the ecological framework on multiracial identity development is found in academic dissertations. In some cases the data are so new that enough time has not yet lapsed to allow for publication in scholarly journals. However, I am left speculating as to why literature on advancements of our knowledge of this phenomenon is seemingly excluded from our data sources.

Our knowledge of multicultural competence among counselors and other professionals, as well as the advancements in theory and research of multicultural identity development, is very relevant to understanding racial identity development in multiracial children in monoracial families. Our understanding of this phenomenon has implications for the work professionals do

and how they potentially meet the needs of families. Through the progression of history a wealth of attention has been focused on identity scales and their ability to measure racial identity development as well as “problems” that occur in multiracial individuals (e.g. mental health issues, behavior problems, adjustment concerns). From this narrow focus we see a lack of literature—specifically literature in scholarly journals—and a gap in our knowledge base pertaining to the actual developmental process of multiracial identity.

### ***Family Ethnic/Race Socialization***

The establishment of a healthy identity is more difficult when there is little congruence among an individual's past, present, and future, especially in cases where family and community tradition has been lost or is unsure (Muuss, 1996). Familial ethnic/race socialization can be helpful in establishing identity as it emphasizes the function of family in creating congruence in racial/ethnic identity formation. It is the process by which family members and fictive kin communicate messages to children about the social meanings and consequences surrounding racial/ethnic identity (Brown, et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2004).

The microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory includes:

a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment. It is within the immediate environment of the microsystem that proximal processes operate to produce or sustain development...the power to do so depends on the content and structure of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39).

Elements of the microsystem include family, schools, peer groups, and the workplace.

From research on multiracial identity development we know that the parameters of racial identity are socially, culturally, and politically constructed; the context matters in the identity development process of multiracial people (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Racial identity in multiracial individuals is influenced by individual characteristics of the child and parents, the adaptive culture created by families, and the racial context within which families and individuals are positioned (including social location, racism and discrimination, segregation, and environment) (Rollins, 2009). Herman (2004) also found that the racial composition of

cohabitating family members has a significant impact on the racial identification of multiracial youth.

While other microsystem socialization agents such as school, peers, church, and communities are important in the racial and ethnic development of children, the current study was designed to investigate the role of monoracial parents. Through family ethnic/racial socialization children learn about phenotypic and cultural differences, history, heritage, identity politics, prejudice and discrimination (Brown et al., 2007). Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, and Shin (2006) found that families are an integral component of identity development in adolescents across all backgrounds. In their study of ethnic identity development in Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Salvadorian adolescents family context was found to be critical to identity formation in spite of differences in cultural beliefs, values, traditions, and history in the United States. Family ethnic/racial socialization serves as a significant component to understanding adolescent development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006) within the cultural context of the family. This study will seek to understand the level of cultural competence present, related to family ethnic/racial socialization, in monoracial families and its impact on the fidelity of multiracial children in racial identity development.

## **Chapter 3 - METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Approach**

Multiracial identity development has been studied in a variety of formats and settings. Before the emergence of large-scale data sets such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health,

scholars were forced to rely largely on qualitative interviews, ethnographies, and case studies. Data that emerge from narratives, interviews, life histories, and ethnographies reveal the complexity of the process of racial identity development among mixed race people and the creation of theoretical frameworks. (Rockquemore et al., 2009)

However, this study seeks to explore multiracial identity development among a specific population—joint biological stepfamilies with monoracial parents—in an effort to understand how it is experienced in this unique context. Qualitative research includes the collection and study of empirical materials in an effort to describe moments and meaning in individuals' lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative work emphasizes the qualities of process and meaning that are not measured by quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln). For these reasons a qualitative methodology will be utilized in this study.

### ***Heuristic Inquiry***

To gain an understanding of the experience of parents on during the process of racial identity development in multiracial children in monoracial families a heuristic method was employed. Heuristic inquiry is a facet of phenomenology that seeks to understand the researcher's experience of the phenomenon “and the essential experience of others who also experience the phenomenon intensely with the goal of bringing the personal experiences and insights of the researcher to the forefront” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

Heuristic inquiry challenges traditional scientific concerns of researcher bias and detachment because it personalizes the study so that the voice of the investigator is the focus throughout the process (Patton, 2002). Heuristics emphasizes connectedness and relationships, leads to representations of meanings and a picture of the personal significance that fuels the search to know, ends with a creative synthesis that includes the examiner's intuition and implicit understandings, and keeps the research participants (coresearchers) “visible in the examination of

the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). This is an important aspect in this study, because the needs of monoracial families raising multiracial children in relation to racial identity development have not been explored.

Heuristic inquiry is an appropriate avenue to take when investigating this phenomenon because of the lack of data that exists on the topic as a whole. This study serves as a means to further develop our knowledge and inform our understanding of the individual aspects within the phenomenon of multiracial identity development in monoracial families. The power of heuristic inquiry lies in its potential for disclosing truth. Through exhaustive self-search, dialogues with others, and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective and developing into a systematic and definitive exposition (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985, p. 40).

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research designs use a set of procedures that are open-ended while rigorous (Janesick, 2000). The research design of a study includes a flexible set of guidelines connecting theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and data collection methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Methods to consider include conceptualizing the problem, creating research questions, data collection, analysis, and writing the narrative.

### ***Research Questions***

My goal with this study was to explore how monoracial parents of multiracial children socialize their children regarding racial identity formation. The requirement for participation was that a multiracial child has been raised in a joint biological-stepfamily with monoracial parents. The study is not intended to be generalized to all multiracial children, but was designed to explore in depth the experience of the parents within my sample to identify any connections or distinctions within monoracial families. The research questions that directed my study were:

1. What aspects of family ethnic/ racial socialization are present among monoracial parents raising mixed race children?
2. What is the function of family ethnic/racial socialization in the formation of racial identity in mixed race children?

### ***Sampling and Sampling Strategy***

The sampling framework for this study was built using purposeful sampling to identify information rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002) of those who have experienced the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling was employed through criterion sampling, a method of sampling meant to examine cases that meet predetermined criteria in answer to questions such as “Who fits into this category?” and “What are the boundaries of the sampling criteria?” (Patton). Families were selected for inclusion in the study if they met the following requirements:

1. Each parent self-identifies as being the same mono-race.
2. The parents together are raising/did raise at least one mixed-race child.
3. The multiracial child must be the biological child of one of the parents.
4. The parents and mixed-race child must have resided in the home together.
5. The mixed-race child must have also resided in a home with a biological parent and stepparent (of the same mono-race) who have at least one child together.

Snowballing techniques (Patton, 2002) also were used to recruit participants. Particularly helpful were personal associates of mine who had friends or acquaintances that fit the criteria of the study sample. Participants were contacted by phone and were asked to participate in a research study focused on monoracial families with multiracial children.

### ***Research Tools***

Tools used in this study included a demographic information form, interview questionnaire, (both of which were self-administered) and Von Luschan’s chromatic scale (Robbins, 1991). The verbal answers to the interview questions were audio and video recorded and transcribed verbatim. The literature review and my personal experiences informed the specific content of the interview questionnaires.

#### ***Demographic Questions***

The demographic form (Appendix A) provided data and background information on the parents and monoracial child(ren).

#### ***Von Luschan’s Chromatic Scale***

Von Luschan’s Chromatic Scale (Robbins, 1991) was used as a visual representation of various human skin tones.



### ***Question Formation***

The use of qualitative interviews in this study allowed me to focus on the discovery of indigenous categories—those which the participants have created in order to describe and make sense of their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted with each parent individually. Research questions were designed based on areas of importance previously identified in the literature as well as those that developed during the course of the semi-structured interview. For my perspectives I journaled my responses to the questions as well as after participant interviews. At times my journaling raised additional questions; these questions were then discussed in subsequent participant interviews. Because the current study did not pose specific hypotheses regarding the relationship between monoracial families and racial identity development, but instead examined the process in an exploratory nature among this population, exploratory questions were utilized (see Appendix B).

### ***Interview Procedures***

The following procedures were followed in each interview:

1. Review and signature of approval of informed consent.
2. Completion of the demographic form.
3. Completion of the interview.
4. Offer the parent the opportunity to provide additional insight on their individual perspective and experience.

The demographic sheets took approximately 5 minutes to complete and the interviews lasted between 40-50 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview I thanked the parents for their participation, informed them that I may contact them in the future with follow-up questions, provided my contact information in case they had future questions or comments and finally thanked each person with \$30 for their participation.

After each interview I journaled my thoughts related to my own experiences of raising a mixed-race child and any thoughts I had relative to new topics raised by the participants. I also journaled my thoughts on the responses that each participant provided.

## **Data Analysis Method**

### **The Co-Researchers**

This investigation included the experiences of three families.

#### ***Family One***

##### ***Terrance and Tamika***

Terrance and Tamika both describe themselves as African American. At the time of this study, they had been married for 5½ years, living together for 6 years, and have 5 children. Terrance has two daughters from two previous relationships—Tasha, who is 18 years old, with a biological mother who is White, and Ariel, 10 years old, whose biological mother is African American. Together Tamika and Terrance have 3 children, 2 and 1-year-old girls and a 3-day-old son. Tasha has lived with Terrance her entire life. A few of these years were with her father and biological mother, a few years were with her father and the mother of his second oldest daughter, and six years were with her father and stepmother Tamika. Tasha has maintained contact with and visited her mother throughout her childhood. Now a senior in high school, Tasha chose to move out of state and live with her mother and her boyfriend (also White) to gain residency for a college she wants to attend.

#### ***Family Two***

##### ***DeShawn and Dawanna***

DeShawn and Dawanna both describe themselves as African American. At the time of the interview, they had been married for 10 years, living together for 11 years. DeShawn has two daughters, Shelia, 18 years old, and Stephanie, 16 years old, from a previous relationship with a White woman. DeShawn shares custody of his daughters with their mother. Their mother is remarried to a White man and they have one son together. The girls lived primarily with their mother when they were younger, but as teens decided to move in with their father.

#### ***Family Three***

##### ***Yolanda and Terry***

This is my family. My husband and I both identify as African American. We have been married for 5 years, living together for 9 years. Terry has a 10-year-old daughter from a previous relationship with a White/Mexican woman. Together we also have 2 boys, five and three, and a 3-month-old daughter. Our 10 year old lived with Terry and her mother until she was almost 1 year old. From age 1 to 5 they shared custody, with our daughter spending more and more time with us. For the last 5 years she has lived exclusively in our home.

In other words, I am a Black woman married to a Black man. We have three children mutually and a daughter from a previous relationship of my husband's; our daughter is Black—but she is also White and Mexican. We are a joint biological-stepfamily by definition, but in our home we are just a family—a Black family. As my daughter has grown through the years I have seen her interact with our extended family and friends and have noticed, for a lack of a better word, differences. Sometimes I have wondered about her experiences and what it must be like and questioned whether my husband and I are helping her develop the “right” way. She is not at a place in her identity formation where she can articulate or even wholly understand who she is, *racially*, but I know the life she is living will greatly impact that development. Even how we ‘define’ her race is a source of ambiguity. If you ask me, I say our daughter is Black, White and Mexican, which technically means she is biracial, Black and White, since Mexican is an ethnicity. If you asked my husband, he would tell you she is Black and Mexican, which technically makes her Black. And if you ask her—well she will tell you, “I’m just all mixed together.”

My own life and the work I have done with families led to my curiosity about racial identity development in mixed-race children. I also recognize the impact of my training as a marriage and family therapist. Jointly these experiences influenced how I presented the interview questions to the participants, responded to their responses, and interacted with them. As the researcher, I was part of the social construction of meaning as I created the interview questions.

### ***Heuristic Phenomenological Analysis***

Moustakas (1990) discussed a five-step process of analysis including immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. During this process, aspects of analysis, such as identifying themes and coding, are also completed.

#### ***Immersion***

In the immersion stage is when the researcher's total life and being are centered in the experience through questioning, meditating, dialoging, and daydreaming (Moustakas, 1990). This portion of the analysis often centered on my home life and everything I observed. I moved through this process by journaling my own, as well as my husband's, experiences keeping in mind rule 2 of qualitative heuristics by Kleining and Witt (2000): the topic is preliminary and may change during the research process. It is only fully known after being successfully explored. I also read over all of the transcripts of the participants being conscious of rule 1: the research person should be open to new concepts and change his or her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them.

Before I began this study I was acutely aware of this phenomenon in my life. After the study began I was almost obsessed to the point of looking at and analyzing every person and family I saw who appeared to be of mixed race. I thought more in-depth any time issues of race were discussed around my daughter and always wondered what she was thinking or how she was interpreting her life. Instead of merely making passing comments to my husband about my observations, I began having full-fledged conversations, almost drilling him, to gain his perspective about our family.

### ***Incubation***

The second stage, incubation, is a time for contemplation in which the researcher allows space for awareness, intuitive insights, and understanding; deliberately withdrawing, permitting awareness to awaken in its own time (Moustakas, 1990). After collecting the data and reading through the transcripts I attempted to create lists of themes, but the process was difficult for me. I experienced difficulty in gaining a complete understanding of my experience and the experiences of the participants. I feel this was due to my efforts at having a scientifically structured process inducing themes to make meaning of the data. I set the data aside for approximately two months. I continued to live with and examine my own experiences, but during this time I did not go to the interview data to seek out relationships.

### ***Illumination***

The illumination stage brings new clarity of knowing through expanded awareness and deepening meaning—the experience takes on vividness and the understanding grows (Moustakas, 1990). Stepping back from the data allowed me to see more clearly without forcing

the issues. After the two months away, I went back to the data and my new insight helped me to see recurring themes. I assigned each theme a code for identification. Identification included locating key phrases and statements; statements are then interpreted for meaning and what they show about the essential and recurring features of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I followed this step by writing descriptions of how each theme related to my original research questions supported by quotes from the data and began making new discoveries. This process was completed with rule 4 in mind: the analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities. It locates similarities, accordance, analogies or homologies within these most diverse and varied data. It tries to overcome differences (Kleining & Witt, 2000). After the identification of themes, I identified subthemes in the same manner as themes. Each subtheme was assigned a number for identification purposes. After the subthemes were identified, I re-read through the individual transcripts and my journal entries and coded them with identified subthemes.

### ***Explication and Creative Synthesis***

During explication, other dimensions of meaning are added through focus, self-dialogue and reflection (Moustakas, 1990). While coding I began to reflect on the literature and its relationship to the themes I was discovering. As previously noted, racial identity in multiracial individuals is influenced by individual characteristics of the child and parents, the adaptive culture created by families, and the racial context within which families and individuals are positioned (including social location, racism and discrimination, segregation, and environment) (Rollins, 2009). Herman (2004) also found that the racial composition of cohabitating family members has a significant impact on the racial identification of multiracial youth. In an effort to organize, illuminate, and facilitate understanding (Patton, 2002) of my experiences and those of my co-researchers, I decided that racial context and individual characteristics would be used as sensitizing concepts. Although these sensitizing concepts were used to organize the findings, the data (perspectives) uncovered in this inquiry were not obtained according to these concepts. However, the themes that emerged from the experiences presented were applicable and validated the concepts providing a depiction of our experiences.

The final stage of analysis in heuristic inquiry, creative synthesis, brings together the findings in a meaningful way. Pieces of our lives as monoracial parents have been compounded to offer a total experience of our daily living through rich patterns and relationships that provide

a new vision for the experiences of monoracial parents raising mixed race children and are presented in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to identify themes among monoracial parental dyads that potentially influence the racial identity development of their mixed-race children. Moustakas and Douglass (1985) asserted that experience and self-disclosure lie at the center of heuristic inquiry. For this reason I was vigorously involved in discussing my experiences, and the experiences of my husband, of raising a mixed race child. Semi-structured interviews served as the data collection instrument for this inquiry with the other participants. The data are offered first by presenting the experiences of my husband and me, and then are supplemented with the stories of the other participants. Themes related to racial profiling, perception of the mixed race child's personality, skin tone, level of respect, and parenting were identified.

As you read the results chapter you may note a shift in the tone (my voice) of my writing. This shift includes two of my selves/voices: 1) my voice as a parent of a mixed-race child (as it is expressed through my journaling), and 2) my voice as a researcher and scholar.

### **Racial Profiling**

Profiling is defined as “the use of personal characteristics or behavior patterns to make generalizations about a person” (Profiling, n.d.). Taken a step further, racial profiling constitutes using the particular characteristic of race to make those generalizations. The term racial profiling has typically been utilized to describe a method law enforcement agencies use to determine if a person (most often a person of color) is involved in illegal activity (e.g. driving while Black). Yet, history and tradition has shown us that racial profiling exists in many facets of our lives, not just illegal activity. And we, as people grounded in the tradition of segregation and discrimination, profile each other based on our skin color daily.

This concept was described by the participants in this study as an important component of raising a multiracial child. For example, a few years ago my husband and I went to purchase a new television. While waiting for one sales associate to bring up the television from the back, another associate began to ask me about my daughter. Part of the conversation included him asking me if she was “really” mine. I assume he was asking me if she was biologically my child, however, the fact that I have raised her since she was a baby makes her “mine” so I said yes. To this he replied, “Oh, cuz she looks mixed.” At this point I ask myself, does it matter if she is

“really” mine? Will it change the sales associate’s life in some drastic way if she is or isn’t? Will I receive a discount on my television if I answer the question the right way? But none of those questions matter. They do not matter because it is not about the question, but what the question will do for the person; it is about the one-drop rule used in racial profiling. By asking that question, the sales associate was trying to profile my daughter—to put her into a racial category whereby he could then correctly, and I use that term loosely, interact with and think about her. By telling him that, “Yes, she is mine,” I essentially said that no matter how her skin color appears she is a descendent of me, so she is Black.

Situations like these lead to the conversations my husband and I have with my daughter about race. While there have not been many, there have been enough for me to know that the words that come out of our mouths are molding her and potentially telling her who or what to be. In general, we have actual discussions about race when everyday experiences make race a central issue, such as the 2008 presidential race identifying Barack Obama as the first African American president or getting to a parking space first at Wal-Mart so the lady who missed the spot rolls down her window and calls me a “nigger.” Then other times we have more poignant conversations. For example, during Black History Month at my daughter’s predominantly White elementary school, her choir class was learning the Negro spiritual *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. One of her White classmates spoke up and said that they should not be singing the song because it could make someone feel bad, at which point everyone in the class turned and looked at my daughter. My daughter asked why they were all looking at her to which her teacher ever so intelligently asked, “Why do you think they are looking at you?” to which my daughter responded, “Because of my skin color.” This led to her teaching asking her if she would tell the class what she is mixed with (insert here the assumption that she is of mixed race because of her skin tone). The conversation my husband Terry and I had with her after this happened was a difficult one. Telling her, “When you don’t study your spelling words and do poorly on your test, your teacher doesn’t contact us because it could be that she expects the Black kid in school not to do as well as the rest. So you have to do well all the time and prove those stereotypes wrong.” It is difficult to explain to a child why race and racism exist, why people make judgments about (profile) others based on skin color and why, even though she knows she is mixed race, other people see her as Black. We try to explain to her what it is like to be seen as Black, and she tells us her skin is light brown. Then we have a really stumbled and frustrating conversation about



how yes, her skin is brown, but race is something different. Telling her, “You can call yourself what you want, but that is not what the people in this country are going to let you be.” The one-drop rule is not a concept a 10 year-old child can comprehend, nor should we, and society, have the expectation that they would be willing to accept what they cannot understand.

The four other parents interviewed echoed concepts and conversations like these related to how society views mixed race individuals. Dawanna said, *“I know it’s like one ounce of Black—you’re Black or something so. And, and that, you know, I think traditionally that is what people have thought, something, they believe.”* DeShawn recalled a conversation he had with his two mixed race daughters once.

*I don’t think we really talk about race a whole lot. But I remember a distinct time that I think the girls may have been like, nine and eleven. So they were kind of young and umm, they were telling me about something they were doing in school and they had to tell what race they were and they put White down. And ya know, they put White down, and I was like, “Well what were the other options?” And they were like well, they had Black and this and that. And I was like, “You didn’t think about putting any other?” I said, “Well are you only White?” And they said, “No we’re brown.” Then ya know, then they went through that whole stage where they were just brown. And then I said, “Well if you look at how society views it, that’s the way that you’re going to be treated—as if you’re African American. They’re not necessarily gonna see you as biracial or Black and White. And so you may wanna think about how you identify yourself.”*

Tamika stated,

*I mean obviously society might say you got drops, [so] you’re Black. Um, cause it seems like the racism is the same, you know? They discriminate against—from what I’ve seen—you know, most of the kids who are multi-racial the same way they would an African American. I think they just see them as African American. Some people say, ‘Oh, I’m ok with Black people, I just don’t want my kids dating any Black people’ or that type of—It just seems like they see you as different from them and that’s what they don’t like. They don’t care if both your parents are Black or one’s this or 1/4 or 1/8. You’re different from them—that’s what the issue is for them, so that’s what we try to kind of deal with.*

Terrance explained his perspective in more detail:

*[We talk about race] when news events happen, especially in [our city]. It was always, they always showed a 5’9, ya know, 160 pound Black man done robbed this, or is killing this, or shooting this, and I wanted—I think I kinda wanted her to understand that’s just not how it is everywhere. And, ya know, those few can actually make, uh, make it bad for everybody else. In a sense, because how they look at those few, now they look at those few as that’s just—they don’t individualize any of that. They, they--that’s the broad spectrum of who they are. So we, we talked about that. We talked about how we have to, we have to do 110% just to be 100% um, anytime because we are not expected to. And*

*when we, when we do have an opportunity to do something, a lot of people look at that as the affirmative action type stuff, where it's, 'We had to give them an opportunity and now that they have this opportunity, what are they going to do with it?' So, I kinda had to stress that, um, that they're going to look at you, your color, first, and then based off of what, ya know, your color is supposed to do, then they are gonna base that off of—because they're already gonna say, 'Oh this is' her moving to [another state], what are all the kids doing at school when they go home? 'Mom we got a new Black kid in school!' That's the first thing they're gonna say. And they are gonna say, 'Aw yea, what is this person like?' Not, 'We got this new kid in school.' And so now she's already the--the Black girl. Um, so I kind of wanted to—we just talked about things like, be you first. Be who you are, be of good character, and everything else will be, ya know, you will no longer be, 'Oh that Black girl.' You will be Tasha. I remember one point and time she had come home and was writing a paper and she said something in the paper like, 'Oh so and so got punked.' And I said 'Naw. You can't use those words as if you're talking to your friend around the corner or something. When you're writing it's totally different then what, ya know, you're speaking to [best friend] about or something. Um, because they're gonna look at that and say, 'This is who they are, this is how they speak, this is what they know,' and automatically say you are uneducated. And they're gonna target ya know—you're not going to have that fair shot.' For example, she might get in an altercation in the hallway. She may not even have done—but she's already considered the, that aggressive person because of the color of her skin. Um, and they're gonna look back at that paper, 'Oh she's talking about so and so getting punked.' And they're gonna use that, so. And I tried to kinda let her know about that type of stuff.*

## **Individual Characteristics**

Individual characteristics are the attributes applied to any one person. Those attributes include thoughts and perceptions on various topics. In the case of the participants in this study, perceptions of how society views race as well as how they as individuals view their family and its members in the context of race was investigated. Themes related to perception of the mixed race child's personality, skin tone, level of respect, and parenting were found and are further discussed.

### ***Parental Perception of Mixed Race Child and Family***

My daughter is a White girl in a mixed body that wishes she could be Black. That is how my husband and I perceive her. Does it make me feel good to say that? No. Is that the reality of my perception of her? Yes. Because our tradition in society has been to judge people based on the color of their skin, sometimes we then convert those skin color judgments into character judgments—a person's personality or even how she “acts.” We use those labels by saying or thinking stereotypes to describe people, such as the practice of saying that someone who speaks

with correct diction “talks White,” or that someone who sags his pants and eats chitlins’ (chitterlings) acts Black, or that Asians are over-achievers who only eat rice, or that all Mexicans have a house full of kids and park their cars in their yards.

Those perceptions do not cease simply because we are talking about our own children and families. We perceive ourselves based on how we “act” the same way we do others. I know my daughter wishes she were “all the way Black” because she has told me this on several occasions. She says it would just make things easier. In all honesty, I do not think she wishes to necessarily be “all Black,” I think she wishes she were simply only one race. Then there would not be so many questions or the level of confusion that exists in her world. Black is her choice of the moment because the family in her home, my husband, her three siblings, and myself, are “all Black.” This has led her to want to do things such as wear her hair in “Black hairstyles” (e.g. braids) like mine and I have to explain to her that her hair is “too different” (she has “White girl” hair).

When she was younger, before I had children of my “own,” I did not think about her being mixed, and I do not think she really did either. We just were. Now that I have other children, the reality of our situation and perceptions has become center stage. When I was pregnant with my youngest, my husband and I told our four-year-old son that he was going to have a little sister. He then wanted to know if he was going to have another “White sister.” My husband and I have never referred to our mixed race daughter as White, and if you ask us what race our family is we say Black. Why? My husband says that it is because of our traditions. Because we go to a “Black church.” We eat black-eyed peas on New Year’s Day. We eat chitlins, pig’s feet, gizzards, watermelon and greens with fat back. We love chicken. We were raised not to talk on the telephone during a thunderstorm. Sweeping someone’s feet is bad luck. Sometimes we wear our hair in an Afro or braids. And most obviously because our skin says we are Black.

Three of the other parent participants in the study had similar reasons for perceiving their family as Black. Terrance reported that his family is “*African American [because of] the color of our skin, our culture, some of the traditions we do—just regular African American traditions. We go to a Baptist church and follow Baptist tradition. That would be primarily it.*” His wife Tamika also felt her family was Black and said,

*I would label us as African American. I would. Um, even though we do have somebody that's mixed in our family, I would still label us as African American. Um, I would say multi-cultural or something like that to try and make it fancy but, I'd still say African American if someone asked. In all honesty, just because my husband and I are African American and the children that live with us right now are all African American and they have both parents that are African American. Um, and so—and I know like I said, the way society would label us is as African American. So if somebody asked that's what I would say.*

DeShawn described his family as

*African American. I think that's just the way that um...we've been taught, the way that we've been socialized. So when you think about, ya know, from a historical perspective, you have the one-drop rule. You know, you're one drop, you know, of the African American race, then that's what your gonna be considered. Even though, ya know, you may be able to pass for a different race, that's the race that you'll be primarily labeled. Um, I also think that the African American cultures are more accepting of other African American cultures or biracial or even just other cultures in general. So that's why I said African American.*

### ***Perceptions of Child's Skin Tone and Personality***

Each of the fathers in the study (all biological fathers) reported that they felt their daughters were the same race as them, Black, because the girls are “a part of them.” While each of the stepmothers (myself included) referred to their daughters as mixed race because that is how the girls identify themselves.

Using Von Luschan's Chromatic Scale (Robbins, 1991; see Figure 4.1) participants were asked to identify their daughters' physical skin tone and “personality” tone.

### **Figure 4.1 Von Luschan's Chromatic Scale**

|  |   |    |  |  |    |    |  |
|--|---|----|--|--|----|----|--|
|  | 1 | 10 |  |  | 19 | 28 |  |
|  | 2 | 11 |  |  | 20 | 29 |  |
|  | 3 | 12 |  |  | 21 | 30 |  |
|  | 4 | 13 |  |  | 22 | 31 |  |
|  | 5 | 14 |  |  | 23 | 32 |  |
|  | 6 | 15 |  |  | 24 | 33 |  |
|  | 7 | 16 |  |  | 25 | 34 |  |
|  | 8 | 17 |  |  | 26 | 35 |  |
|  | 9 | 18 |  |  | 27 | 36 |  |

I identified my daughter’s skin tone as an 18 and my husband labeled her a 26. DeShawn and Dawanna, labeled their daughters as 14, 20 and 20, 25 respectively. Terrance and Tamika labeled their daughter’s skin tone as 16 and 19 respectively. Society has told us these skin tones can be interpreted as anything from mixed race to “light-skinned” Black.

While we say our daughters are Black and mixed race according to their skin tone, we all perceived our daughters’ personalities, or the way they “act,” as White. In general my daughter “clicks,” or relates better with White people and I think she has a better understanding of “White things.” She listens to Beyoncé, Luther Vandross, and other R&B/Hip-Hop artists (what I think of as Black music) when she is riding in the car with our family, etc. But her iPod is full of Katy Perry, Justin Beiber, and other White artists. When getting ready for school and church, I constantly have to remind her to brush her hair into a neat style, make sure her clothes are neat and unwrinkled, etc. versus trying to leave the house with freshly washed hair and un-presentable dress. My rationale is that again, as African Americans we are judged by our looks first and must take pride in our appearance. Plus, we spend the majority of our social time with Black people and I know my people. It is hard enough for her to fit in when she appears ambiguous. So I would hate for the Black kids she is around to “go in” on her (make fun of) just because she’s okay with wearing “busted” tennis shoes. If she must comb her hair, her preference would be to

blow dry or flat iron it straight so she can walk down the hall swinging it like Marsha Brady instead of wearing her natural curls.

If we were to identify her “real” personality on the Chromatic Scale (Robbins, 1991), I would label it a 10, and my husband labels it a 9. We both feel her personality varies based on the race of people she is around. When she is with my family (or anyone African American), the tone of her voice, the language she uses, and her general personality becomes more “ethnic” and seems very awkward. She tries to play “the dozens” with her Black cousins just so she can prove she is the same as they are. When she is with her biological mother’s family and her friends (all of whom are White) she turns into a “valley girl,” but appears more natural and at ease than when she is with my family.

The majority of the other parents shared this sentiment as well. Dawanna reported that her daughter’s personalities changed depending

*on where they’re at; whether they’re with their, with their biological mom who is predominately White. I think they identify with them, but only because their mother, they would identify with, um, being White--being part White. And when they’re here, they identify with both Black and White. [There is a difference] because we (pause) because it’s, well they get exposure to African Americans in the church. They also get exposure to, umm, different types of people on the military post because Shelia goes to college out there, and Stephanie goes to school with, school in [city] which is umm a mix, um, mixed population. And where they come from, from what I understand, it’s predominately White and no, no Black people at all.*

DeShawn said that “because of their experiences” his daughters identify as “Caucasian.” The girls “act” like 15’s when they are “with their friends,” who are predominantly White, and “25’s when they are around African Americans.”

Tamika felt that Tasha’s personality is a 12. She said, “I think that’s how she—I wouldn’t necessarily say how she acts, but yeah, maybe how she acts here—just because she listens to country music and stuff like that. Which, there is Black people that listen to country music too, but...” Tamika then followed up by adding:

*I think she—yes, I do think she identifies a little more with the White side, because, like I said, she listens to country music. She likes some stuff that could be considered more, you know, more White. So, yeah, I can say that she would probably to be able to identify more with White kids and stuff like that. Sometimes I see Tasha trying to figure out where she fits in and I don’t know if that’s more age thing or if it’s a race thing or what. You know, it might be a combination of both. I see her, you know, she was in middle school trying to find her group or her clique, you know. That’s when we kind of dealt with the whole African American thing. She goes off on her own and hangs out and can’t be friends with*

*anybody else. You have to come to us first types of things. Um, and you know a lot of other issues that she's kind of dealing with and experimenting with and trying to figure out where exactly she fits in life and feels totally accepted. So I think there's more (pause) she deals with that a lot more with other kids that are more confident in who they are and, you know, what they feel comfortable doing. It's more just about I like this, this is who I am period. You know, there's no questions about, you know, about where other people would put me or I can kind of slide in or fit in things like that, so.*

Terrance reported Tasha's personality as a 10.

*I think with Tasha not totally understanding the Black race then there's not a 'Ok how do I act over here?' And 'I don't know how to.' But over here—because I say we're pretty cruel. You take high school, junior high school. If you're going to school and your shoes ain't right, your clothes aren't pressed, um your hair's not done right, we're going to say something or, you just can't hang out with us. With White people [it's like] 'I'll throw on these pair of jeans I had on Monday (laughing) rakin' leaves, and take this shirt and yeah throw that on. I don't have to match.' I don't have to do none of that stuff. (laughing) I mean, you know—that fits her. It's easy, it's so easy to fit in [with White people] and she was mad when I was like, 'Naw, you can't—that doesn't match. Fifteen, 16 years old and I'm telling you that don't match or you got to iron your clothes.' Yea, so I'm going to go with it was easy [for her to fit in with White people]. And with her being biracial, it kind of let her really go that way. That's not our [Black people's] personality, dark race I guess.*

### ***Perceptions of Parenting Mixed Race Children***

Being a parent is the hardest job I have ever had. Raising a mixed race child makes the job even harder. I do not know how to be anything other than a Black person. For my husband and me, our understanding of African American culture and our experiences of being Black come naturally. Conversations relating to race in our homes growing up were more or less one-liners such as, “You know that's how White people treat us” or “You are NOT goin' out the house lookin' like that”—no explanation needed. It is simply understood. This method holds true in many ways for our monoracial kids, but not so much for our mixed race daughter.

My perception of parenting a mixed race child is not the same as my perception of raising a monoracial child. Yes, my husband and I instill the same morals and values and use authoritative parenting styles with all of our children. But to have to try to explain to my child, only my biracial child, *why* I talk the way I do, *why* her hair is different, *why* people ask what she “is,” *why* it is expected that she work harder, why, why, why we are the same and yet we are different is extremely difficult. It is one thing to have to explain the complexities of race in the U.S. to a child who “looks like” you, but it is 10 times more difficult to explain to one who does

not. I cannot tell her what it feels like to be mixed or White. I cannot teach her what shampoo to use or how to style her hair.

Our situation is further complicated by the fact that her skin is so fair that she could actually pass—a term typically reserved for mixed race or light skinned African Americans who can appear to be/assimilate into the White culture. My daughter has said herself that she could just say she is Italian. In the winter when her skin is fairer, she could easily choose to identify herself as White, Hispanic, or Native American. Herein lies the difficulty I experience in even being proud of my own heritage. Because when I tell her “Black girls rock” she wants to know why I do not simply say “girls rock.” When she is learning about Black history in school, she does not want to even read the term Negro in the textbook, because “It is not okay to refer to *them* that way,” she says. How do I teach pride in a culture she does not even see herself as being a part of? I must be aware of everything I say and do around her, which I am not always proficient at doing.

Tamika expressed this concept well when she said,

*I didn't think [raising a mixed race child] would be a big deal or anything. But I do think she looks at me a lot, you know, as the 'African American' woman and it kind of makes me a little more conscious of some of the things, you know, I would say or do or things like that.*

Dawanna expressed,

*I have to be more (pause) sensitive to what I say. And although I'm not, I don't say, like the N-word or, anything like that. I know that I have to be more sensitive to what I say. Maybe if I see some—a Black person on the street verses a White person, I could, I could not look at their race and say something 'bout them. But I know if I, if I say something 'bout a White person [my daughters] might think that I'm being racist. So I just have to be umm, sensitive towards what I say. It's difficult to know what products to use in their hair; it's difficult to know like, is their skin more acne prone, or, do their hair get dry or is it more oily, and things like that.*

### ***Perceptions of Respect***

Tolerating the differences in our home can be difficult for me as well. Respect for one's elders is very important in the Black community and is how my husband and I were raised. I was taught, and I teach my children, that it is always, “Yes ma'am,” “No sir,” “Please and thank you.” Children leave the room when adults are talking. And often times, “Do as you are told, no questions asked.” My younger children have accepted this aspect of our lives so far with no problems. For my mixed race daughter it is a constant struggle, with daily reminders, to simply



be respectful. My husband is more understanding and says that he recognizes our daughter's "other side" saying,

*She doesn't have anybody teaching her respect when she's with [her White family]. She's kickin' her grandma in the butt on the swing and talkin' back and they're okay with that. They don't care if she has a smart mouth. When she get's home [to our house] we just have to re-teach her the correct way to act.*

DeShawn's perspective concurred with my husbands. He stated,

*I think that I am probably a little more tolerant, um, of certain things than my wife is. Um, just from a cultural prospective. African American cultures can be kinda rigid and some of their—I don't know what to call it. But um, it's just a lot of stuff you just don't do (laughing). You just, hmm I don't know how to really bring it out, but, um, just simple respect that would be the biggest thing. Um, African American cultures are big on respect, and Caucasians, European, White—I use those interchangeably—I think that, I don't think, they don't have the same levels of respect. Um, and I think that I'm a little bit more tolerant because growing up around White people I know that it's not anything that they're doing intentionally, they just haven't been taught that. Because um, you might get hit in the head with a shoe, walking into a room with [African American] adults and not speakin' to them (laughing). In another [White] home you know, that's just what it is. Adults go about their business. It's not that they're being disrespectful, they just weren't taught that. So, I would say, I am a lot more tolerant regarding stuff like that than my wife does.*

Terrance summed up his experiences of parenting a mixed race child, by saying,

*I think more personality wise it's difficult—because of her personality, not necessarily (pause) I would say her personality is the primary concern. Not because she's biracial. (pause) I guess the lack of, 'I'm going to stand up for myself and say who I am'. And listening, and understanding that when she gets up in the morning what people see. And understand how people are going to act towards her in some cases, not in all cases. But she has to be prepared for that and I don't think that—I don't feel that she's prepared for that. I want her to be more diverse, but she's not. That's probably it. I don't think that she can go to Atlanta (laughing). That's not her. She can go to Savannah and go to the country and live. But I would want any of my children to go anywhere and be able to fit in or not just fit in but be 'I'm cool with where I'm at. This is where I'm at. If I have to live here and it's a bunch of White people, fine. I got to live here and there's bunch of Black people, fine.' But I don't think that she has that ability to do that.*

The findings of the study identified racial profiling, parents' perception of their mixed race child's personality and skin tone, level of respect, and parenting mixed race versus monoracial children as common themes. These themes will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to identify aspects of family ethnic/racial socialization among monoracial parental dyads and their potential impact on the racial identity development of mixed-race children using heuristic inquiry. This study is important because it highlights relevant aspects in the lives of mixed-race children—especially identity versus identification. The changing racial demographics and racism that exist in U.S. culture impact the way society views mixed-race individuals and how those individuals encounter the world around them. My experience of conducting a heuristic inquiry was exactly as Moustakas (1990) described it when he called it

an extremely demanding process, not only in terms of continual questioning and checking to ensure full explication of one's own experience and that of others, but also in the challenges of thinking and creating, and in the requirements of authentic self-dialogue, self-honesty, and unwavering diligence to an understanding of both obvious and subtle elements of meaning and essence inherent in human issues, problems, questions and concerns (Closing Comments, para. 1).

### Summary of Findings

Through this investigation I discovered several significant aspects described by monoracial parents including racial profiling, perceptions of their families and children, perceptions of skin tone and personality, and perspectives on parenting, all relating to research question one: *What aspects of family ethnic socialization are present among monoracial parents raising biracial children?*

Racial context is one way of describing the aspects of racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, segregation, and social position variables that make up the racial ecology of people of color. This context is different from that of White individuals, so it is important to understand how racial context is perceived. In U.S. society “social position variables are used to hierarchically organize children of color” (Rollins, 2009). However, it is sometimes difficult to identify the race of a mixed race child simply by the color of his or her skin, which can be ambiguous. Yet, people of all races continue to categorize themselves and others based on their

skin tone and this often drives them to question what a mixed child “is” in order to place him or her into whatever racial category they plan to segregate and/or judge him/her by, hence the idea of racial profiling.

Racial profiling is a concept that I expressed and was echoed by the other parent participants as a method that individuals use to categorize our mixed-race children. As parents, we feel that society seeks to know the racial make-up of mixed-race children to place them into a category to make judgments about them. Our sentiments support the findings of Cross’s Nigrescence Model (1971) that used an equivalent approach (no differentiation between Black people and mixed children with Black racial heritage) to understanding multiracial identity development. Mixed-race children of African descent are victim to mechanisms of hypodescent (the one-drop rule). Similar to how Rockquemore, Brunson, and Delgado (2009) reported that many theories of multiracial identity development include a focus on racial identification categories, our children are not looked at as individuals, or even mixed race, but as Black kids. Because our children are looked at this way we socialize them, through conversations about race, to help them understand society’s perceptions of Black people so they will be prepared for the experiences they will have outside our homes.

Perceptions of our families and children, perceptions of skin tone and personality, and perspectives on parenting are all expressed through our individual characteristics, how we as individuals interpret and interact with our environment. Each parent conceptualized his or her family as a whole as being Black; fathers voiced that their daughters were also Black and mothers declared the girls as mixed race. While all parents stated their children were Black or mixed race based on physical skin tone and heritage, they identified their children’s personality as being akin to that of a White person. They expressed that their children at times voiced the assertion that they were ‘brown’ and as parents they encouraged their children to recognize their African American perspective. The variant approach to mixed-race identity development proposed by Collins (2000), Jacobs (1992), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), Kich (1992), and Poston (1990) allows for mixed-race individuals to consciously construct a biracial or multiracial identity, which is similar to the daughters’ brown identity declarations. The ‘choice of group categorization’ step of Poston’s Biracial Identity Development Model (1990) emphasizes that individuals are pushed to choose an identity (by society), usually of one ethnic group. Factors that impact this decision include status of the parents’ ethnic background, parental

style/influence, parental and familial acceptance, and individual personality differences. The testimonials of parents in this study support the ideals that their heritage, influence, and acceptance affect their child's identity development. For instance, in each case the daughters at some point in their young lives identified themselves as brown. However, as they grew older and experienced more socialization by their parents, they began to use the term Black or African American to identify themselves. Although the girls are mixed race, they never used the term 'White' as an identifier.

Related to parenting, although the fundamental elements of parenting were the same for all children, participants reported that raising a mixed-race child proved to be an unexpected challenge in terms of respect for elders, understanding the family's African American heritage, and managing culturally different personalities. These outcomes again reflect 'choice of group categorization' (Poston, 1990) as well as Root's Ecological Framework for Understanding Multicultural Identity (1990) that reflect on the many ecological factors influencing racial identity development, including family socialization and the individual characteristics of the child. These parenting concerns show that, while parents can socialize their mixed-race children to represent themselves to society as being part of the African American community, individual traits, aptitudes, and personality differences of mixed-race children are also influential in the racial identity process. These personal factors may be strongly tied to the mixed race child's 'true' view of themselves (their identity versus how they are identified), making parenting concerns such as understanding African American heritage more difficult.

Research question two asked, *What is the function of family ethnic/racial socialization in the formation of racial identity in multiracial children?* The elements of family ethnic/racial socialization identified in this study have several potential implications on racial identity development. Two key concerns include the development of a healthy ego identity and manifestation of polarization issues.

Part of having a healthy racial identity is having a healthy individual identity. Erikson's (1950) fifth stage of identity development focuses on identity versus role confusion. During this period of transition, adolescents are trying to determine who they are and may feel confused or insecure regarding who they are and how they fit into society. Development of a strong ego identity is further complicated in mixed-race children when they feel polarized, or forced to choose an association with one race versus another (Morrison & Bordere, 2001).

In the case of monoracial parents raising their biological mixed-race children, the very parenting practices that are employed to help their children function in a race conscious society could inhibit the child's ability to autonomously form a racial identity. In their work utilizing the ecological framework, Han (2012) and Turner (2007) reported that parents are specifically identified as being influential to the developmental process. Han found that parents who acknowledged the differences between biracial and monoracial individuals, and who modified their parenting styles from the way they were raised, were better able to suit the needs of their biracial children. However, monoracial parents have an individual understanding of what it means to be one race versus being mixed race. That knowledge is passed on to their children through familial ethnic/racial socialization. Through their own words it is evidenced that monoracial parents want their children to acknowledge, and be a part of, the dominant race in the home. When mixed-race children express the viewpoint that they are brown versus Black, the parents' response is almost flippant as they encourage the children to focus on the racial assessment that will most likely be met in society. This encouragement can reinforce polarization and make the children feel they should identify and associate with the race of the parents in their home while ignoring their other racial/ethnic heritage.

As monoracial parents we discussed racial profiling as a phenomenon used by others against our children; however, the same method was described as being used by us against our children at home. Because our children's personalities are different from what we are culturally used to, we often labeled them as being White. In essence, we are telling our children that, because their actions are not similar enough to our mono race, it is not okay to be who they are—they must conform and be more like us. While as parents we may be trying to encourage our children to recognize aspects of our identified culture and race, we are inhibiting the formation of individuality that makes a person distinct. Being of mixed race means exactly that, the individual is comprised of two or more racial backgrounds. But we say our families are Black, not multiracial or multicultural. And we tell our children to listen to our music, dress like us, and recognize our culture. We do not say, "Here is what we know about your African American heritage, here is what we know about your Caucasian heritage." We do not encourage our children to explore their multiple backgrounds—only ours. This may be due in part because these are our children and we live and breathe our "blackness" daily and that level of cultural competence may not be realized because these are not children from an adoption agency for

whom we made the conscious choice to parent knowing their heritage was different than ours as in TRA families. Even though all of the fathers consciously had a child with a woman of a different race/ethnicity, they are now in marriages with women of the same race. Our children do not live with both of their biological parents where they could have one parent from each racial background teaching them their perspectives on race and cultural heritage. When our children were born, a social worker did not visit our homes and offer advice on the racial aspects of parenting our children, like the services that are made available to transracial adoptive families. So we see ourselves and live our lives as monoracial families and do not consistently make a concerted effort to recognize the mixed anthology of our children.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

The results of this study have implications for a greater understanding of how monoracial parents socialize their mixed race children in relation to race. More importantly, there are implications for understanding the racial identity development of mixed-race children as they develop in monoracial families. This study offers the opportunity for family professionals, both Family Life Educators and Marriage and Family Therapists, to work with parents to recognize their role in creating an environment that supports healthy racial identity development of mixed race children and to answer a question that is raised by this research—when the world tells a mixed-race child she is Black, and her parents and home customs reinforce this assertion, is there really any other option for the child?

In an effort to limit the amount of racial polarization, practitioners can use this data to inform parents about how to not profile their children and become open to all types of identity formation so their children can form a sense of shared racial identity. Monoracial parents can benefit from education on how to teach their mixed-race children about their multiple heritages. The fact that stepmothers recognize their children as mixed race can be a tool to use in helping fathers broaden their perspectives.

Parents may also profit from learning more about Root's (2003) border crossing techniques and the child's racial identity no matter if its singular, protean, transcendent or on the border (see Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). This education not only teaches parents about the struggles mixed-race children experience in forming a racial identity, but the border crossing techniques also can apply to the family as a whole. For example, Root (2003) proposed several

ideas that parents could implement. 1) Mixed-race children have both feet in both racial heritage groups so that they have the ability to hold, merge, and respect multiple perspectives simultaneously. Parents who educate themselves on the multiple heritages of their children and recognize their *family* as being multiracial may be better able to manage the culturally different personalities that exist in the home. 2) Shift the foreground and background as an individual crosses between and among social contexts defined by race. Essentially this means that at times, mixed-race individuals highlight one racial heritage and de-emphasize another.. When mixed-race children are highlighting the part of their racial heritage that corresponds to their parents, parents can use this perspective and highlight their own individual and personal monoracial experiences to support their children. 3) Consciously choose to sit on the border and experience hybridity and a border identity as a central reference point. Here parents must recognize that “brown” may be how their children choose to identify themselves. In this case, parents can redefine the identity of the family to be one that is inclusive of all of its members. 4) Create a home in one “camp” while visiting other camps when necessary. Just as a monoracial person’s identity changes over a lifetime, so does that of a mixed-race person. Parents should recognize that, while mixed-race children may identify with a particular race at one point in time, their perspective will likely change as they grow. So there should not exist the need for parents to make their child conform to their mono-race.

### **Future Research**

Because of the qualitative and criterion based nature of this exploratory study, the sample size was small. While initially the study sought participants of all racial backgrounds, ultimately only African American parents volunteered to participate. Additionally, the mixed-race children of the parents were all girls, of various ages, and of Black and White heritage. This focused the study more narrowly than I originally intended. Again, parents of all racial backgrounds were invited to participate but declined. This lack of willingness to discuss issues of race may speak to the sensitivity of the issue as well as the fact that White parents do not always recognize issues of race. Had the study intentionally sought the perspectives of African American parents only, color complexities in Black communities would have been investigated as this would have expanded our knowledge on the relationship between perceptions of skin tone of mixed race children in

relationship to perceptions of skin tone in the Black community as a whole. That would be an interesting and appropriate next step in this line of inquiry.

These elements should be explored in future research through studies that investigate skin color perceptions in the African American community and how mixed-race individuals fit into the spectrum. Additionally, differences that may exist between African American parental dyads and other races of monoracial dyads raising multiracial children also should be explored through qualitative studies. This is imperative as previous research has identified differences that exist between the socialization practices of mothers of color, where non-Black mothers of color were shown to socialize less or not at all and had parenting practices aligned with White mothers (see Rollins, 2009). Moreover, inquiries into the perspectives of mixed-race children and how being raised in monoracial homes impacted their racial identity development is important to form a direct understanding of the mixed-race person's understanding of the influence of family ethnic/racial socialization and racial identity development.

This research opens the door to broadening our ability to look at mixed-race identity development among a unique family type. It has provided viewpoints of families that are not often investigated and demonstrated how their lives mirror many of the theoretical perspectives we follow in identifying race among mixed race individuals. Nevertheless, it also demonstrated the lack of knowledge related to healthy multiracial identity development that exists among monoracial parents. Many additional questions are left to be answered; in an effort to answer these questions I will continue to explore racial identity development in mixed-race individuals in an effort to develop parenting services for families.

## **Conclusion**

A heuristic method of inquiry is not an easy task to undertake. Add to the method the sensitive nature of the topic of race, and you have a very personal and challenging process. A process that is not for everyone; this research, in this manner, is not for everyone. The particular area of research addressed in this dissertation solicited a lot of difficult feelings. In many ways it was similar to the stages of grief. There was a denial that this was a phenomenon to investigate as I assumed it was only my 'issue.' Anger at myself for the way I perceive my own child. I bargained that if she just changed a little, or we as parents changed a little, it would make things better. Extreme sadness that in our society these topics are even a concern. The matter of



acceptance is two-fold. I am now more aware and accept my circumstance for what it is. What I do not accept is the lack of knowledge and ability to make improvements on this topic.

Octavio's story represents the development of racial identity for a mixed-race child raised in a monoracial family when race is ignored. My story and those of my participants represent racial identity development when race is at the forefront of consciousness. In both cases, a person of mixed racial heritage is trying to develop an individual identity when everyone around him or her looks different from how she or he looks. When society has prescribed rules for what a person is and is not allowed to be, when those prescribed rules continue to pave the way for individual, institutional, and ideological racism, there is struggle, uncertainty, pressure and no clear path to healthy racial identity development. White parents are afforded the opportunity to potentially ignore race, however, parents of color cannot. Even if we wanted to, we are faced with daily reminders of how our skin tone profiles us. As our society has a lengthy road ahead before race is no longer a factor, preparing multicultural individuals and families for life in U.S. society is a prevalent need; one we must face head on to eliminate the racial hierarchy that puts White privilege and supremacy at the top, people of color on the bottom, and classifies mixed race as 'other.'

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## Appendix A - Parent Demographic Form

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Family #: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Racial/Ethnic Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Current Marriage/Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time living together: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list your children (excluding biracial child) their age(s), gender, and race/ethnicity:

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Do/did these children reside in the home with you? \_\_\_\_\_

Is your current spouse the biological parent of these children?

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Race/Ethnicity of biracial child: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you the biological parent of your biracial child? \_\_\_\_\_

Was the other parent remarried/living with another partner while the child was growing up? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what is the race/ethnicity of that new partner? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Parent Interview Guide

### Introduction

- I am interested in your experiences and feelings about raising a multiracial child. Please feel free to speak openly as there are no right or wrong answers.
  - Please stop me at any time if you need a question clarified.
1. Please create a picture of your family while your mixed race child was growing up.
  2. Please create a picture of your family now.
  3. Tell me about your family.
  4. What types of activities did you like to do as a family as your child was growing up?
    - a. When you attended social events (e.g. church) were the majority of the people around you of a particular race?
      - i. Which race?
      - ii. Was this intentional?
    - b. How did you celebrate traditions (e.g. birthdays, holidays)?
      - i. Were there differences incorporated for different children?
  5. What types of people (friends, colleagues) did you socialize with?
    - a. Did your children see you interacting with these people?
  6. Tell me about the neighborhood/community your child grew up in.
    - a. Why did you choose to live there?
  7. Tell me about your child's friends growing up?
    - a. What races of people did your children socialize with?
    - b. How did you encourage your children to socialize with all races?
  8. How often did you and your family visit with extended family?
    - a. How do you think your child felt during those visits?
  9. Tell me about a time when you discussed race in your home?
    - a. What was different in the discussion based on the child you were talking to?
    - b. If you were to "label" your family by race, what would that label be?
    - c. Why?
  10. Tell me about a time where your child talked about being mixed?
    - a.
    - b. How do you describe your child's race?
    - c. Do you view your mixed child as being the same race as you?
      - i. Why or why not?
    - d. How did you encourage your child to "be" one race versus another?
    - e. Do you think your mixed child identifies with one particular race over another?
      - i. Why do you think that is?
  11. Tell me about a time when you had to talk to your child about experiencing/dealing with racism and discrimination?
    - a. Was this a conversation you felt prepared to have?
  12. Tell me about the first time your child brought home a date/discussed boy/girlfriends?
    - a. What is your preference for the race that you would like your mixed child to date?
    - b. What about your monoracial child?
    - c. Why?
  13. Tell me about a time when you encountered another family like yours?

- a. What differences exist between parenting monoracial and multiracial children?
  - b. What differences exist between people who are one race and those who are mixed?
14. Tell me about a time where you noticed differences between your children (based on race/ethnicity)?
15. What was it like for you parenting a mixed child?
16. What differences did you see in how your partner parented one child over the other?