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AUTHENTIC, TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK/WHITE BIRACIAL LEADERS

By

Carmen R. Zafft

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Human Sciences
(Leadership Studies)

Under the Supervision of Professor Gina S. Matkin

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2013

AUTHENTIC, TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
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University of Nebraska, 2013

Adviser: Gina S. Matkin

This phenomenological study described the racial identity and leadership experiences of eight community, education, and business Black/White biracial leaders. Four central themes emerged relating to the participants' racial identity choices: (a) family discourse, (b) social networks, (c) appearance, and (d) identity work. Three central themes emerged relating to the participants' leadership experiences: (a) cultural agility: "Blessed to be flexible", (b) perceived representation: "I look like them", and (c) transformational leadership: "I lead so others can grow." Because the participants were conscious of their identity development experience, all demonstrated a strong sense of self which influenced how they experienced leadership. As a result, the essence of experiencing leadership as a biracial leader was to be authentic and transformational.

Acknowledgements

Accomplishing this dissertation was a personal ambition. However, without the support, guidance, wisdom, and encouragement of others its completion would have been impossible. Because of this I would like to recognize and thank the people, both personally and professionally, who were influential in the development and completion of my academic journey.

I am grateful to my adviser and committee chair Dr. Gina Matkin, who without her compassion, patience, wisdom, and expertise this study would not have been completed. I would like to thank the members of my committee Dr. Jim King, Dr. Colleen Jones, and Dr. Karen Cannon for their time, attention, and feedback. I am also appreciative of the support of Dr. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner for generously offering her expertise in strengthening this dissertation. Additionally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. David Jones for his mentorship and spiritual guidance.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues Kevin, Heather, Colette, Helen, and Marianne for their honest discussions and encouragement.

Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the participants in this study. I am overwhelmed by the trust they placed in me and their willingness to share their stories.

Lastly, I am blessed with a husband who though this journey was my friend, mentor, and protector. Without complaining he gave up his time and many of his personal ambitions to support me through this journey. I am grateful for his love and sacrifice.

Dedication

To Kaysaya Luna Zafft,

You were with me spiritually and physically from the beginning to the end.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In an interview for CBS news in 2007, Presidential candidate Barack Obama was asked, “How important is race in defining yourself?” to which he responded, “I am rooted in the African-American community, but I'm not defined by it. I am comfortable in my racial identity, but that's not all I am” (Kroft, 2007). Historically, a presidential candidate’s racial identity has not to this degree been questioned. This question was due, in part, to his identification as a Black American yet his racial lineage consists of a White, Midwest-American mother and a Black, Kenyan father. Walters (2007) brought attention to the conflict surrounding President Obama’s racial and cultural heritage:

He appeared to be of African descent, but the cultural markers to which traditional American Blacks were exposed presented him as someone born of a White American mother and a Kenyan father and raised in Hawaii. Also, the fact that he had lived for a while in Indonesia complicated the matter further. In short, his identity omitted many of the cultural markers with which Blacks are more familiar to the extent that it has promoted a curiosity of ‘cultural fit’ that in turn has become an issue of political trust. (p. 13)

These “cultural markers” influence how Black Americans make sense of and fit in the world around them. Essentially, these markers have traditionally defined Blackness in America. Though Obama identified as a Black American, his racial heritage and social influences did not fit the cultural markers typical of a Black American male leader. This caused voters, Black and White, to question whose interests Barack Obama was committed to and if they could follow him. For these reasons, Obama’s racial lineage, his cultural influences, his racial identification, and his post-racial rhetoric communicated a welcomed, albeit “mixed message” to the American public.

Despite this mixed message, President Obama's election signified substantial racial gains for African Americans. Of equal significance is the special attention his biracial parentage brings to this growing population. His election led me to consider how a biracial leaders' racial identity influences their leadership experiences.

The *purpose* of this phenomenological study is to describe how biracial leaders identify racially and how they experience leadership. Biracial leaders are defined as an individual with a Black biological parent and a White biological parent who exercises leadership in an organization or group.

Identifying as multi- or biracial is not a new phenomenon. Since the institution of slavery, mixed-race persons have been legally, socially, and culturally defined by American society. Political systems, mass media, and entertainment have owned the discourse on racial identification (Nakashima, 1992). Their definitions of who is Black, White, or "other" have pervaded the consciousness of America. Consequently, mixed-race persons have historically been marginalized in the political and social debate regarding race. However, at present, mixed-race people are experiencing the freedom to self-define and to publically declare all parts of their racial and ethnic heritages.

The liberty to self-define is due in large part to two historical events. It was not until the year 1967 that interracial marriages and unions were made legal. *Loving vs. Virginia* was a landmark Civil Rights case declaring Virginia's anti- miscegenation law unconstitutional, which led to the overturning of race-based legal restrictions on marriage and unions across the United States (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008). Furthermore, mixed-race people could not legally identify as multiple races on the U.S. Census until the year 2000 (Brunnsma, 2006). Since these significant events, the body of academic

research and theory pertaining to multiracial people has increased, but empirical research about the experiences of multiracial people is still lacking (Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2008). This research is needed to challenge current thinking about race and its intersection with social phenomena such as leadership.

Traditional approaches to the study of leadership have largely minimized the experiences of racial minorities (Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Cox, 2004; Nkomo, 1992; Northouse, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). As reported by Nkomo (1992), when racial minorities are included they are “relegated to subcategories; their experiences are seen as outside of the mainstream of developing knowledge of organizations” (p. 489). Additionally, when race is a factor, it is not perceived as a source of theory development (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996); population samples are small making generalizations difficult (Bell, 1990; Cox & Nkomo, 1990); and scholars tend to focus on uncovering acts of discrimination rather than considering race as a complex and innate variable (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Much of the literature agrees that these deficiencies reduce one’s capacity to understand the full complexity of leadership (Bell, 1990; Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Cox, 2004; Nkomo, 1992; Northouse, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Rusch, 2004; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Despite the previous arguments, the dominant view in the study of leadership and race has excluded the experiences of biracial and multiracial leaders focusing disproportionately on the leadership experiences of African Americans or other monoracial groups. Nkomo (1992) argued:

We have amassed a great deal of knowledge about the experience of only one group, yet we generalize our theories and concepts to all groups. We do not acknowledge that these universal theories emanate from an inadequate sample and, therefore, there is the possibility that the range of a theory or construct is limited. (p. 489)

Although Nkomo's statement was in response to the traditional bent towards the experiences of White male leaders, the same criticisms should be applied to leadership research that has focused predominately on the experiences of African American leaders.

Leadership and organizational scholars have persisted in polarizing leadership research into a Black and White dichotomy (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Cox, 2004). With this approach, only two paths are considered suggesting that the leadership experiences of Blacks or Whites is the norm. However, for biracial people, clear Black and White distinctions cannot always be made. Often the most salient feature and source of difference for biracial people is their skin color. Racial ambiguity is the object of confusion and curiosity for biracial people because their physical features do not fit conventional racial characteristics. Furthermore, structural and contextual factors that contribute to the formation of a biracial person's racial identity are often distinct from what monoracial minorities experience. To further illustrate, Omi and Winant (1994) clearly articulate the problem that biracial people encounter:

One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize – someone who is, for example, racially 'mixed' or of an ethnic/racial group we are not familiar with. Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning. (p. 59)

Omi and Winant (1994) point out that our behaviors are based on prejudicial perceptions that are the result of a "racialized social structure" (p. 59). Therefore, when a person of

color behaves in ways that are not congruent with society's preconceived notions of race, confusion sets in (Omi & Winant, 1994; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2008). For these reasons, fitting the experiences of biracial people into the Black and White research paradigm is inappropriate.

Leadership is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship, fitted within a social setting (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). It induces “followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 19). Central to this relationship is influence (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2010) which drives the leader and followers to achieve a common purpose. Some scholars argue that influence is granted to those who fit a leadership prototype (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Martin, 2003; Slay, 2003). According to Northouse (2010), “Being similar to the prototype makes leaders attractive to the group and gives them influence with the group” (p. 6). The process of prototypicality occurs when group members cognitively determine the traits, competencies, and behaviors they believe to be typical of an effective leader (Hogg, 2001). This process is used as a means to exert control or to regulate identity so that leaders and emerging leaders conform to a cultural standard. This approach presupposes homogenous leadership. Consequently, racial minorities who do not fit prototypical norms are not seen as prospective leaders especially in White, homogenous, ethnocentric environments (Slay, 2003).

Elliott and Smith (2004) investigate homosocial reproduction, a process similar to prototypicality. Homosocial reproduction is a mechanism often used in hiring and promotion practices to maintain social homogeneity among leaders in an organization. It is assumed that social similarity reduces uncertainty and produces effectiveness and trust.

However, the consequences are that those in power, typically White men, benefit from “in-group” favoritism, therefore maintaining inequality in organizations (Elliott & Smith, 2004). The authors found that compared to White men, women and racial minorities are adversely affected by homosocial reproduction. However, regardless of race or gender, those in positions of power exercise “self-similar” preferences.

This issue might be further exacerbated for biracial leaders. For instance, the need for biracial or multiracial leaders to appear prototypical (of the group) could create an on-going struggle between their chosen racial identity and the allure of what the group deems typical. This process has consequences on the leadership enactments and experiences of mixed-race leaders. McRae and Short (2010) elaborate:

Racial-cultural identity attitudes and cultural values influence how leaders take up their authority. These attitudes and values also affect their authorization in role and the power and influence they hold in providing leadership. The leader and members’ racial-cultural identity attitudes and cultural values help shape experiences of leadership, authority, and power in the group and in organizational life. (p. 93)

In addition to influence, the role of power is pivotal in the leadership relationship. According to Burns (1978), because influence is exerted within the leader and follower relationship power is central. In American culture, power in relationships is meaningful since one’s social position is often granted based on a racial hierarchy. Because of this hierarchy, race within the leadership relationship is perceived as a constraint, rather than an asset due to the burden of systemic marginalization and powerlessness (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix, 2003; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). Examining race within the context of leadership therefore calls attention to the inequities that extend privilege to some and disadvantages to others.

While it is imperative that research be inclusive of the experiences of all racial minorities, scholars should include a unique perspective, one that is unavailable in the current literature and goes beyond the Black and White paradigm. In light of the changing demographics of the United States, and the historic election of President Barack Obama, the time has come for leadership scholars to examine the unique perspectives and experiences of biracial leaders.

Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) wrote that there are two primary questions intrinsic to phenomenological research: (a) What are the experiences of the participants? and (b) What is the context of those experiences? With Moustakas (1994) in mind, the *central research question* for the present study is: What are the leadership experiences of biracial leaders? The sub questions are: (a) How do the participants racially identify? and (b) How does their racial identification influence their leadership experiences?

Definition of Terms

The terms multiracial, mixed-race, interracial, and biracial are often used interchangeably to characterize individuals of more than one race (Root, 1992). For the purpose of this research study, the terms biracial, multiracial, and mixed race were used interchangeably; as were the terms Black and African American.

Biracial. An individual whose biological parents are members of two social and phenotypically distinct groups (Root, 1992). The term biracial, as it pertained to the present study, used the definition employed by Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008):

Any individual with one black and one white (biological) parent, irrespective of that person's racial self-identification. We use the term to denote parentage, as opposed to self-understanding, to allow for the possibility that people who have one black and one white parent may racially identify themselves in a variety of different ways. (p. ix)

Monoracial. An individual who claims a single-racial identity (Daniel, 2002).

Leadership. A dynamic, reciprocal, and influential relationship; positioned within a social setting with the intent of accomplishing goals and producing change. The most basic components are that it is a process, it is influential, it occurs in groups, and it involves common goals held by both the leader and followers (Northouse, 2010).

Leaders. For the purpose of the present study, individuals were designated as leaders if he/she had attained a positional or recognized leadership position. I define a *positional* leader was someone who occupied a supervisor, manager, executive officer, or administrator position within a non-profit or religious organization, corporation, small business, or academic institution. I define a *recognized* leader was someone who had been designated a leader, by reputation, in their community.

Significance of the Study

The examination of the experiences of biracial leaders is a step on the path of addressing the research deficiencies in the areas of multiracial research and leadership studies. The 2010 Census estimated that 3% of the population identified as two or more races – a relatively small population (“2010 Census Briefs”, 2011). However, of those who identified as two or more races in the 2000 census, 42% were under the age of 18 (Brunsma, 2006). This expanding population is indicative of the United States' changing

racial landscape, and thus significantly impacts how scholars view race and leadership issues.

Current models of leadership do not allow for disparate views – views specific to biracial people. The increase in number and in influence of biracial people offers opportunities and challenges for organizations. As more develop into organizational leaders their experiences will contest traditional organizational structures and cultures. This view is supported by Odell Korgen (1998) who stated, “The numbers make it clear that interracial couples and the children they produce must be given some serious attention by those who wish to understand our present and future society” (p. 1).

The treatment of race within the field of leadership and organizations is of concern considering that today’s changing political, economic, and cultural landscape will mean traditional theories of leadership might have less applicability to America’s organizations. If scholars and practitioners expect organizations to move beyond a diversity paradigm defined by equal opportunity, compliance, and regulation, to one that views diversity as a moral necessity, then it is critical that scholars include race as an essential variable to the study of leadership.

Furthermore, investigating the experiences of biracial leaders will enhance existing leadership research by creating a more complete understanding of leadership theory and practice. With this understanding, researchers can re-conceptualize current racial meanings by further codifying what insights might be gained about race and leadership. The findings will impact the development of biracial leaders by broadening our understanding of biracial identity and its influence on leadership experiences. It will

also add to the field of multiracial research by answering significant and prevailing questions concerning biracial identity.

Delimitations

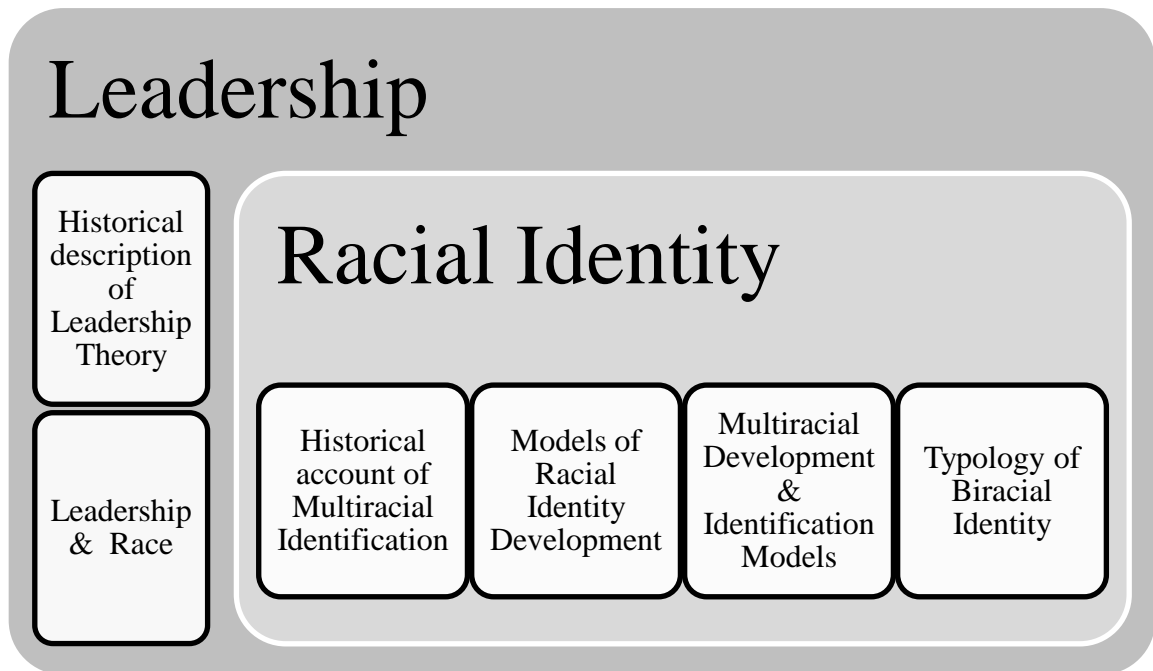
Several delimitations were incorporated into the present study. First, no biracial persons outside of Black and White racial combinations were considered as participants. Second, newly “minted” leaders with less than two years of leadership experience were excluded. Third, participation was limited to those who live in the Midwest. Lastly, using qualitative methods limits the number of participants. However, using in-depth interviews and multiple data sources provided an opportunity to gather an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Phenomenological studies are designed with the intent to understand a common human experience through perspectives of the participants (Patton, 1990). A phenomenologist refrains from classifying or theorizing the descriptions. Instead, he or she sets aside preconceived biases, knowledge, and experiences so that partiality is reduced and openness is enhanced (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Staying true to the concept of phenomenological design, the intent of this literature review was not to inform the results of this study with previous theoretical knowledge or empirical findings; but to present a framework that provided insight into the context of the study.

The focus of the present study is the leadership experiences of biracial leaders. Therefore, the literature review was constructed to provide a synopsis of leadership theory throughout history, and the use of race as a variable in the study of leadership. This literature was reviewed to serve as a foundation to illustrate the contexts biracial leaders navigate. The second part of this chapter provides a summary of the history of multiracial identification in the United States. This is followed by a discussion on models of racial identity development. Studies that examine the factors that influence racial identity development and identification of biracial people are then addressed. The review concludes with a summary of K.A. Rockquemore's typology of biracial identity. This typology was used to help better understand the various ways participants racially identify. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the literature review topics presented in this chapter.

Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Literature Review Topics



Leadership throughout History

Leadership research dates back to the first half of the 19th century; the term *leader* appeared in text as early as 1300 (Bass, 1990). Historically, leaders were analyzed for what they did and how they did it. The why of leadership was not largely explored until the 20th century. At that point, fundamental principles of leadership emerged. Since that time, leadership theories have been constructed, tested, and evaluated with the intent of determining the characteristics and environments that develop effective and sustainable leaders.

Leadership varies depending on the historical context, situation, culture, institution, and social identity. Consequently, leadership has different meanings. Despite the diverse and contrasting definitions of leadership, B. M. Bass, a noted leadership

scholar concluded that a number of fundamental principles have persisted throughout time. Bass (1990) defined these as:

...a process that has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions. (p. 11)

Despite the longevity of these leadership principles, scholars have not abandoned their examination of the *what*, *how*, and *why* of leadership. The definition and enactment of leadership continues to differ amongst scholars and across disciplines. However, these differences demonstrate the complexity inherent in leadership that inspires leadership research (Huges, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993). The following section highlights leadership views and theories that have influenced leadership scholars throughout the years. The literature is divided into four subsections that focus on leadership from various perspectives: leader perspective, relationship perspective, follower perspective, and leader identity.

Leadership from the leader's perspective. History's greatest philosophical writers pondered what distinguished great leaders. Plato's "philosopher king" and Carlyle's "ablest man" (Wren, 1995), are examples of theoretical musings that underlie modern-day trait theories of leadership. *Trait theory* claims that effective leadership is not dependent on the situation, followers, social context, or other sociological variables. Instead, the inherent characteristics possessed by the leader enables effective leadership. Trait theory reinforces the adage, "leaders are born and not made."

The *skills approach* to leadership claims that effective leadership occurs through technical, human, and conceptual skills (Katz, 1955). Each competency is equally significant, but utilization varies depending on the organizational level of the leader. For instance, upper level managers will use human and conceptual skills more than technical skills.

The *styles approach* separates leader behaviors into two categories: task behaviors and relationship behaviors. This approach emerged out of the Ohio State and University of Michigan studies of the 1950s and 1960s (Northouse, 2010). These studies identified a combination of leadership behaviors to be executed across various situations. Although the results of the studies were inconclusive, Blake and Mouton (1964) extended the research and developed the *Managerial Grid*. Grid theory describes how leaders reach goals through either concern for people or concern for production. Concern for production involves behaviors that contribute to achieving organizational tasks. Conversely, concern for people reflects behaviors of trust, commitment, and personal growth.

Unlike the trait, skills, and styles approach, *situational leadership* claims that since situations differ, leadership behaviors differ as well. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) observed that leadership effectiveness is dependent on the leader, follower, job demands, and other situational elements. The leader's objective is to accurately identify the readiness and development level of the follower and the context of the situation. With this information, leaders can apply task or relationship behaviors accordingly.

Leadership from the relational perspective. During the 1970s and 1980s leadership research transitioned from focusing solely on the leader, to examining the

leader and follower relationship. *Leader member exchange theory* (LMX) and transformational leadership examine the interaction of the leaders and followers throughout the leadership process. The foundation of LMX theory is the leader/follower dyad and its development (Anand, Hu, Liden, & Vidyardhi, 2011). These relationships are categorized into two groups: the in-group and the out-group. Members of the in-group are a part of a leadership relationship that allows for open communication and coaching which creates trust and high job satisfaction. Members of the out-group experience the opposite. Open communication is at a minimum and the feelings and needs of the follower are diminished. Consequently, members experience lower job satisfaction, less influence, and lack of trust.

Burns (1978) was the first to introduce *transformational leadership*. This form of leadership goes beyond the transactional model of leadership. Transactional leadership is a concrete exchange between the leader and follower where both focus on day-to-day tasks. According to Burns, the goal of the leader is to gain compliance through the giving or withholding of rewards. Conversely, transformational leaders understand and adapt to the needs and motives of the followers with the intention of accomplishing goals through follower empowerment.

Leadership from the follower's perspective. In the essay "*The Servant as Leader*", Greenleaf (1977) claimed that great leaders are servants first. Greenleaf's assertion was similar to Aristotle who argued that one must follow before leading and Lao Tzu, a 6th century Chinese philosopher, who advocated for selflessness and non-directive leadership (Wren, 1995). Greenleaf proposed applying this form of leadership to the modern day organization. He argued that the needs of followers are central to

effective leadership, and that results emerge through collaboration, trust, empathy, and ethics. In an attempt to make the theory operational, Spears (1995) identified ten characteristics of a servant leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community. Attempts to define the constructs for measurement have been recently developed. For instance, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) developed a questionnaire focusing on five factors of servant leadership: altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organizational stewardship. Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008) extended existing models of servant leadership by developing a multidimensional measure of servant leadership behavior. The authors developed a more holistic model of servant leadership which accounts for service orientation, holistic outlook, and moral-spiritual emphasis.

Leadership identity. Across the literature, a consistent definition of leadership identity was absent. More recently, there is a growing body of research on leadership identity theory. The purpose is to understand how a leader's self-concept contributes to their leadership behaviors. Gardner and Avolio (1998) examined the utilization of impression management in the creation of a charismatic leadership identity. DeRue and Ashford (2010) and Lührmann and Eberl (2007) conceptualized models of leadership identity construction as a social process and as a function of the leader-follower relationship, and Ford (2010) analyzed the concept through a psychosocial lens. The existing research depicts an evolving and jointly created relationship between the leader and follower that is largely influenced by the leader's identity.

However, much of the research did discuss leadership identity within the context of social identity theory (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Martin, 2003; Slay, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; 2005). This theory of leadership holds two principles of leadership: (a) leadership is relational and bounded by common group membership, and (b) leadership is influential (Hogg & Martin, 2003). According to this theory leaders negotiate their leadership identity through social processes; particularly through group membership. Lührmann and Eberl (2007) found that individuals “who are perceived to match their group’s social identity are more likely to be endorsed as leaders” (p. 115). Hogg (2001) identified this process as *prototypicality*. Through prototypicality, members of a group cognitively determine the traits that they believe to be typical of an effective leader. This process grants influence to the most prototypical member of the group. As a result, influence is not necessarily about one’s behavior. Instead, influence is granted because the individual fits the group’s prototype. Essentially, the most prototypical member of the group has the most influence and is endowed as the leader.

There is a great degree of leadership research beyond what was provided in this literature review. Yet, insights into the leadership experiences of racial minorities are absent. The research provided in the following section brings attention to the professional and leadership experiences of (primarily) African Americans. In the present study, the decision was made to concentrate on the experience of African Americans for the following reasons: (a) studies addressing the leadership and professional experiences of biracial or multiracial leaders were not available, and (b) because Black and White biracial people are the target population of the present study, examining the experiences

of Black leaders and professionals seemed reasonable. Although the research in the following section is useful, it fails to incorporate many of the seminal theories of leadership into the research designs. The intent of this section is to reveal the challenges that racial minority leaders and professionals encounter and to demonstrate the deficiency of published research that uses race as a variable in the study of leadership.

Leadership & Race

Cox and Nkomo (1990) conducted an extensive literature review investigating the use of race as a variable in organizational research. The researchers discovered that research focusing on race in organizations was widely unavailable. In a follow-up study, Cox (2004) conducted an in-depth literature review and case study addressing many of the questions from the previous study. Cox sought to determine (a) why little research and theory on race and ethnicity have been addressed in management journals, (b) what hinders the development of high-quality research in this area, (c) and actions scholars should take to improve the probability that their work is published. Key findings included a dearth of researchers and methodological obstacles. Factors affecting minimal publications included low submission rates, reviewers' unfamiliarity with the relevant literature, insistence on comparative research designs, and high levels of bias and subjectivity in the review process.

The literature also suggests that race is not used as a source of theory development. In their literature review of race-ethnicity and leadership, Ospina and Foldy (2009) examined how race has been treated in the leadership literature. The researchers specifically addressed how race-ethnicity affects perceptions of leadership,

leadership enactments, and how leaders struggle with the “social reality of race-ethnicity” (p. 878). They found a discontinuity in theory building as it relates to race-ethnicity. The researchers suggested moving towards an integrated framework of knowledge about race and leadership; requiring complex considerations of context, acknowledging power, holistic explorations, and understanding the collective dimension of leadership and social identity.

Previous research has supported the notion that racial minorities experience leadership and professional development differently than their White counterparts (Bass, 1990; Daley, 1996; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Igbaria & Wormley, 1992; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Knight et al., 2003; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Rosette, Leonardelli & Phillips, 2008; Thomas, 1990; Ugorji, 1997). First, Whites and racial minorities experience professional development differently. These differences are evident through performance evaluations, job satisfaction, and career advancement. Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) found that when matching Black managers and White managers demographically (e.g., age, length of employment, job function, and organizational level), Blacks experience less job discretion, lower feelings of acceptance, lower performance evaluation ratings, and lower career satisfaction than their White counterparts. The researchers concluded that Blacks are largely excluded from positions of power and from full integration into organizations. Igbaria and Wormley (1992) conducted a follow-up of Greenhaus et al.’s study and supported previous findings that race did have a negative effect on job discretion, job performance evaluations, and career satisfaction. Likewise, Ugorji (1997) found that Blacks reported significantly more incidents of career-impeding supervisory behaviors

than Whites. Consequently, Blacks were significantly less satisfied with their careers than Whites.

Daley (1996) examined the influence of the glass ceiling phenomenon on female and racial minority federal employees and found that differences based on one's race are real and significant. It was discovered that unlike their White, male counterparts, racial minorities and women lacked access to social networks that are necessary in receiving career advice and mentoring from decision-making gatekeepers. Dreher and Cox (1996) also examined access to gatekeepers. They found that Black and Hispanic MBAs were less likely to develop mentoring relationships with White males, who are considered gatekeepers to career advancement. They concluded that White males have access to social networks and career advice that is often not available to racial minorities and female professionals. Therefore, career advancement and compensation are negatively impacted. For instance, the results revealed that Blacks with MBAs earned lower compensation than Whites with MBAs. Additionally, MBA graduates who did have mentoring relationships with White men received on average, \$16,000 more in compensation than those who did not.

In addition to differences in career experiences, the literature suggests that racial minorities experience leadership differently than Whites. Bass (1990) concluded that leadership styles are influenced by the race of the leader and follower and discrimination hinders Black leaders and emerging Black leaders. Parker and Ogilvie's (1996) study of African American female executive leaders argued that a culturally distinct model of leadership should be developed for racial minorities. They suggested that the participants' leadership practices were unique because of systemic discrimination and

prejudice. Similar to Parker and Ogilvie (1996), Parker (2001) concluded that leadership models should be re-conceptualized to address the practices and experiences of Black females in leadership roles. The findings were the result of a qualitative case study on the communication practices of African American female leaders in White dominant organizations. Five communication themes were found representing how Black women lead in these environments. These findings are echoed by Slay and Smith (2011).

Although their study did not isolate leadership experiences, it did examine professional identity construction for African Americans. Like Parker (2001) and Parker and Ogilvie (1996) they proposed a distinct model of professional identity construction specifically for members of stigmatized cultures. Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherma's (2009) narrative study on 12 Black women leaders in higher education found that their leadership enactments were influenced by their experience during the Civil Rights Movement. Through this, they developed resiliency and a deep cultural understanding and commitment to their communities. Fundamental to their leadership practices were consensus building and collaboration with the intent of building support, creating opportunities, and eliminating marginalization.

Across the literature there was agreement that African American leaders, particularly women, feel the pressure to live out a bicultural experience (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990; Edmondson-Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Hooijberg & DiTomaso, 1996; Nkomo, 1992; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Bell (1990) sought to explain the ways Black professional women interpret, organize, and manage the Black world they live in and the White world they work. The study found that Black professional women view themselves as living in two cultural worlds that must be continually managed.

Surprisingly, the participants benefited from this experience; reporting high levels of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Overall, they were found to have a high degree of complexity in a variety of environmental, social, and cultural experiences. This complexity enhanced their self-development. However, managing a bicultural identity produced a high level of compartmentalization – a boundary between personal and professional life, a token status, role overload, and role ambiguity. According to Bell (1990):

A recurring theme is the constant competition for attention among their many life contexts. For example, while a woman is constantly trying to prove her competence in the dominant white community, she must also exert an equal, if not greater, amount of energy in maintaining ties to the black community. (p. 475)

Lastly, the literature supports Hogg (2001) who addressed the impact that identity concepts, like prototypicality, can have on racial minorities. Prototypical leader behavior can be detrimental to potential racial minority leaders in homogenous and ethnocentric environments. According to Hogg (2001), “social minorities may find it difficult to assume leadership roles in some contexts” (p. 195). This is due in part to followers granting authority to the person who best fits the group prototype. Northouse (2010) states, “Being similar to the prototype makes leaders attractive to the group and gives them influence with the group” (p. 6). Much of the literature maintains that perception and prototypicality influences the leadership experiences of racial minorities and their ability to be selected as leaders (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Hooijberg & DiTomaso, 1996; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Jones, 2002; Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips, 2008; Wade, Romano, & Blue, 2004).

Using the theory of image management, Jones (2002) found that Black and White teachers perceived African American principals differently. Elliott and Smith (2004) determined that compared to White males, men and women of diverse races and ethnicities experience inequality in workplace power. The results demonstrated that those in positions of power, regardless of race or gender, promoted others who were similar to them. In an experimental study, Chung-Herrera and Lankau (2005) examined the perceptions White managers have of the successful-manager prototype. White managers identified White and Asian American managers as the prototypical successful manager, whereas African American and Hispanic managers were not viewed as favorable for management. Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips (2008) discovered that Whites were viewed as the prototypical leader significantly more than racial minorities and were perceived to be more effective as leaders. In a unique finding, Pitts (2005) examined ethnicity as an individual determinant of empowerment. Although prior studies suggested that racial minorities enact a collectivist approach to management through building relationships; this study revealed that racial minority managers were less likely than White managers to empower subordinates. This finding contradicts previous studies and raises more questions than answers. However, Pitt argued that the finding revealed that racial minorities are consciously or subconsciously conforming to the White prototype.

Multiracial Identity: A brief historical overview

The United States is not a color-blind or post-racial society. Color consciousness is deeply embedded in American cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Race does not define one's biological function or intellectual ability, yet it persists in defining our society's social, economic, and political structures. Racial differences make our society unique. However, society should strive towards racial equality, not towards one that is inattentive of racial differences. To move to a place of valuing and understanding racial differences, consideration of our nation's past and how it has permeated all aspects of our society is essential. Therefore, this section will provide a discussion on the history of multiracial racial identification in the United States.

The United States' *one-drop rule* left little disagreement, amongst Blacks and Whites, on how biracial people should racially identify (Odell Korgen, 1992; Rockquemore, Brunisma & Delgado, 2009; Roth, 2005). This rule, also known as hypodescent, is an automatic racial assignment of mixed-race children. It mandated that mixed-race children be racially assigned to the subordinate ethnic or racial group (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008). Consequently, mixed-race children with one-drop of Black blood were to be legally, socially, and culturally classified as Black (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002). The rule was applied informally throughout the United States during the antebellum years. During this time, the intent was to not only hinder interactions between the races but to preserve racial boundaries for economic purposes. The rule was made legal and enforced through anti-miscegenation marriage laws throughout the 20th century (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008; Roth, 2005). The intent was to maintain racial purity and power inequities between Black and White relationships.

Throughout history, the United States census has served as a catalyst for keeping racial categories well-defined. In Nobles' (2000) comparative analysis of the histories of racial categorizations in American and Brazilian censuses, the author chronicles the use of race as a fundamental variable in the American census. From 1790 to 1840 racial categories appeared on the census for apportionment purposes. On the 1850 census a "mulatto" category was added to advance race science. According to Nobles (2000) the inclusion of the category signified the "ascendance of scientific authority within racial discourse" (p. 1739). Race science, which argued that the races were unequal and distinct, permeated the census categories through the early 1900s. The mulatto category was used on the census until it was replaced with non-White categories in 1930 (Nobles, 2000). The removal was due partially to the concern that the Census Bureau did not have the ability to accurately measure who was "mulatto" (Nobles, 2000).

During the Civil Rights Era, the census gathered racial data with the goal of developing and monitoring anti-discriminatory legislation, to account for population inequalities, and to form congressional voting districts (Nobles, 2000; Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). Post-Civil Rights Era, mixed-race persons defended their rights to identify with more than one racial group (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Roth, 2005; Spickard, 1992). This push was due largely to Civil Rights legislation and the breakdown of anti-miscegenation marriage laws which resulted in a "biracial baby boom" (Rockquemore, Brunnsma, & Delgado, 2009). In fact, from 1960 to 1990 marriages between Blacks and Whites grew by 414%, and between 1970 and 1992 mixed-race births increased from 1.0 to 3.4% (Roth, 2005). The increase in interracial marriages and mixed-race children challenged predominate views on race and racial

identification. Therefore, the need for census categories to reflect the changing racial landscape was needed (Brunisma, 2006; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008; Roth, 2005).

In the 1990s efforts were made by multiracial organizations to seek greater freedom in racial identification; advocating that mixed-race persons should have the choice to identify as multiracial. Because of these efforts, the decision was made by the Office of Management and Budget to allow individuals to “check” as many races that apply on the 2000 census (Roth, 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). As a result, 6 million people, about 2.4% of the population, identified as more than one race on the census, with estimates that the actual size of the multiracial population was larger (Brunisma, 2006; Shih & Sanchez, 2009).

The ability to be recognized on the census did not alter the views of many African American Civil Rights activists who argued against multiple racial categories (Rockquemore, Brunisma, & Delgado, 2009). This stance had deep historical roots. To illustrate, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ushered in a new level of Black pride and unity. Because of the one-drop rule, mixed-race persons (with a biological Black parent) largely identified as Black, but were seen as a liability to the movement (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008). According to Daniel (2002), the one-drop rule no longer signified the legal implications of the Jim Crow system and instead began to solidify “Blackness”. Therefore, the African American community largely upheld the notion that to have one biological Black parent meant that one was indeed Black. Yet, many African Americans are cautious towards biracial people who did identify exclusively as Black (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008). To some extent this is

due to the historical treatment of Black and White biracial people and light-skinned African Americans. Because of their level of access to the White dominant culture, the aforementioned groups have experienced more social and economic mobility compared to dark-skinned African Americans. Furthermore, these advantages have been carried over into the post-Civil Rights era (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002).

The Black community's response to multiracial people has been complicated. However, Civil Rights activists were consistent in their argument against multiple race categories on the census. According to Rockquemore, Burnsma, and Delgado (2009), Civil Rights activists argued that "existing racial categories should remain unchanged because the data is used to monitor discrimination and track population inequalities, and the categories themselves are reflective of historically rooted racial groupings" (p. 14). Their response sends the message to multiracial people that they must live by the definition and expectations of others. This restriction is somewhat reminiscent of what many African American Civil Rights activists fought against. Root (1992) articulates the contradiction by stating that "multiracial people experience a 'squeeze' of oppression as people of color and by people of color. People of color who have internalized the vehicle of oppression in turn apply rigid rules of belonging or establishing 'legitimate' membership" (p. 5).

Because the "spirit" of the one-drop rule is still upheld by a number of African Americans, the multiracial movement has been opposed by the Black community (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008; Roth, 2005), resulting in tension between the two groups. For example, the multiracial movement views identity as an experience unique to the Black experience, therefore instilling the need for mixed-race people to have pride

for all of their racial heritages. In contrast, the Black community is generally of the belief that identifying as multiracial significantly diminishes one's Black heritage (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008).

It is understandable that multiracial people present a unique problem to the African American community. First, mixed-race people represent a level of disorder in a supposedly ordered society (Nakashima, 1992). As previously discussed, American culture has its own socially constructed definition of race, and mixed-race people call into question commonly held definitions. Second, a change in the system of racial meanings influences all groups and identities (Omi & Winant, 1994). It is not isolated to the experiences of those who identify as multiracial. Multiracial people may confront others to re-conceptualize their own racial identity. Lastly, determining who belongs to which racial group has significant political, social, and economic implications (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008).

Although the one-drop rule is not mandated today, its ramifications have permeated and reinforced cultural norms about the exclusivity of race in the United States. Its influence further demonstrates that race is a "profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location within the labor market, and indeed one's sense of identity" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 1).

Racial Identity Development

Considering that a portion of the present study discovered how the participants racially identified and how their racial identification influenced their leadership experiences, it was essential to discuss the theory of racial identity development; beginning with the more established monoracial identity models. The following sections will serve as a foundation for understanding how models of racial identity development have been created to better understand the ways racial minorities resolve their minority status. Monoracial identity development models are first described to demonstrate the progression of how monoracial individuals reach healthy identities, which illustrates that these models can not accurately portray the identity development process of biracial people. Although a great deal of research exists about racial identity development models, this section is confined to two major theorists to illustrate two fundamental models.

Cross' model of Black identity development. In 1971 William E. Cross, Jr. introduced a model of Black racial identity development that has served as the foundation for theories of racial identity development within counseling psychology and across other academic disciplines (Cokley, 2002; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Vandiver, 2001). Conceptualized during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Cross (1971) called for Black Americans to become conscious of and to claim their racial identity. Nigrescence, as it is called, describes the cognitive process one experiences as he/she accepts and affirms a Black racial identity. Unlike traditional identity models, nigrescence considers the "conditions of oppression" (Cross, 1971, p.13) African Americans were accustomed to therefore allowing practitioners to become more racially

sensitive to the needs of African Americans and to better understand cross-cultural interactions (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Cross developed five stages of Black racial identity development. Through these stages, one moves from an unconsciousness awareness of race towards a conscious awareness, resulting in a confident and healthy Black racial identity (Burrow, Tubman, & Montgomery, 2006; Cross, 1971; Vandiver, 2001).

Limitations to Cross' model have been identified. First, the model is firmly grounded in the psychological tradition of identity development. This implies a stage-based theory of development where identity is constructed as a linear progression through multiple stages. According to Winkle-Wagner (2009) this perspective is limited because it assumes that there is an end to racial identity development and that "one can have a more achieved identity if one can accomplish more tasks" (p. 14). Once one's racial identity is achieved it remains constant and resolved. This perspective reinforces stereotyping, conforming to a singular identity, and reduces the influence of social structures in identity development (Parham, 1989; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Cross' model is further limited in that it implies that racial identity development begins during late adolescence (Parham, 1989), suggesting that prior to this stage Blacks are indifferent about issues of race (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). The model does not acknowledge that social and environmental circumstances change over time thus impacting the development of the individual. Lastly, it does not recognize within-group differences among African Americans.

These limitations ultimately led to a reexamination of nigrescence (Cokley, 2002; Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver, 2001). Cross' thinking about

nigrescence evolved allowing for broader discourse and understanding of what it means to be Black in America (Burrow et al., 2006; Cokley, 2002; Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Helms & Parham, 1996; Vandiver et al., 2002) by asserting that “great variability exists in the way Black people make meaning of and interpret their social sense of self” (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 381).

Cross’ (1971, 1991) model has remained the basis from which other researchers have theorized, in order to develop more inclusive theories of racial identity development. One such theory is Helms’ (1984, 1990) theory of White identity development.

Helms’ model of White identity development. Using Cross’ model of nigrescence as groundwork, Helms’ (1984) examination of race in counseling psychology resulted in one of the leading White racial identity development models for cross-race counseling dyads. This model not only sought to better understand the evolution of White racial consciousness, it also brought awareness to White counselors of the influence that their own attitudes about race has on cross-race counseling situations.

According to Helms, previous models defined White racial identity development in terms of one’s prejudicial attitudes and behaviors towards Blacks; an understanding of how White individuals felt about their own racial identity was disregarded. Furthermore, models were minority-centric, suggesting that the “problem is the minority clients’ cultural adaptations” (Helms, 1984, p. 153). Additionally, previous theories supported the assumption that racism was only detrimental to the victims and not to the “beneficiaries or perpetrators of racism” (Helms, 1990, p. 50).

The goal of Helms' model was to conceptualize how White individuals develop a healthy racial identity. According to Helms (1990) "the evolution of a positive White racial identity consists of two processes, the abandonment of racism and the development of a non-racist White identity" (p. 50). The author argued that a White individual does not have a healthy racial identity until he or she accepts their Whiteness and the influence it has had on political, economic, and social structures. Helms' model is useful because it created conditions (i.e., counseling situations) where racial identity development could occur in a healthy manner (Helms, 1984). Second, it further supported the belief that racial identity models in counseling psychology failed to account for differences amongst racial groups. Third, the model revealed to Whites a better understanding of their own racial attitudes and beliefs. Lastly, similar to Cross' model, it has served as a foundation for subsequent models of development (Lee, Puig, Pasquarella-Daley, Denny, Rai, Dallape, & Parker, 2007).

Although useful, the model contains a few conceptual problems (Lee et al., 2007; Rowe, et al., 1994). Similar to Cross (1971), Helms' theory is a stage-based theory of racial identity development. As previously discussed, this suggests a simplistic and fixed method of racial identity development. Additionally, the model assumes that the racial development of Whites is limited solely to one's relationship to Blacks (White-Black terms). Also of importance is the model's reliance on the role of racist behaviors, attitudes, and social structures in defining a White's person's identity (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Rowe et al., 1994).

In Helms' reassessment of the model, it was determined that racial identity is too complex to think of the stages as clearly defined and hierarchical constructs (Pope-Davis,

Vandiver & Stone, 1999). The previous model did not account for the cognitive and emotional interplay that occurs between the stages. To conceptualize a permeable model, Helms replaced the restrictive term *stages* with the more pliable term *statuses*. However, the model continued to reinforce the notion that one progresses in stages from racist attitudes and behaviors to a non-racist White identity.

Although Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) amended their thoughts on racial identity development, their models still ran short of fully embracing a sociological perspective of racial identity development; a more holistic view where development does not occur apart from social structures. Moreover, the models are an incomplete framework from which to understand biracial people (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Miller, 1992; Renn, 2000; Root, 1990).

Biracial and Multiracial Identity Development

In response to the aforementioned concerns, scholars developed theories of racial identity development that considered the unique experiences of biracial people. However, early theories and models contain limitations. These models embraced a *deficit* approach, assuming that biracial people reached a final stage of identity development which, without exception, resulted in an inferior and marginal identity. Scholars of the *equivalent* approach assumed that multiracial people experienced identity development patterns akin to their monoracial counterparts. For healthy identity development to occur, biracial people must assimilate into minority monoracial culture and deny the racial heritage of one parent.

It was in the 1990s that student development scholars, in an effort to understand how identity influenced college student development, sought to provide alternative models that promoted the development of positive multiracial identities that allowed for identity choice and adaptability. Known as *variant* approaches, these models allowed for biracial people to accept all parts of their racial heritages and to identify as they choose.

The following section provides a more detailed description of *integrated* and *ecological* models of biracial and multiracial identity development. These models were chosen for the present study because they are represented across the continuum of the deficit, equivalent, and variant approaches of multiracial identity development.

Providing a description of these models demonstrates the progression of racial identity development.

Integrated theories. Poston (1990) argued that traditional stage models of identity development for monoracials were not reflective of the experiences of biracial people, yet were commonly applied to their experiences. In response, Poston proposed a five-stage progressive model of biracial identity development. The model was positive in that it countered commonly held myths about biracial people and suggested that they can and do develop a “secure, integrated, and multicultural identity” (Renn, 2004, p. 15).

Poston’s (1990) model:

emphasizes the individual’s need to value and integrate multiple cultures and it specifies the social, personal, and status factors important in this process; delineates difficulties in identity development that are unique to the multiethnic individual; it emphasizes that the development process in biracial individual’s progresses, for most persons, in a healthy fashion. (p. 154)

The first stage, *personal identity*, is characterized by individuals who do not yet identify with a racial group. The second stage, *choice of group categorization*, is

exemplified by individuals who choose an identity based on status, social, and personal factors such as physical appearance and environment. During the third stage, *enmeshment/denial*, one experiences guilt and the consequences of his or her choice of one ethnic/racial group over the other. The fourth stage, *appreciation*, is when an individual begins to resolve the conflict he or she experienced during the enmeshment/denial stage by beginning to identify with all parts of their racial identity. Finally, *integration*, is defined as an individual who recognizes and values all of his or her ethnic and racial identities, thus experiencing a healthy and integrated biracial identity.

Similar to Poston (1990), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) developed a model representing the progression towards an integrated, healthy biracial identity. This model is a stage model that begins in preschool and ends in adulthood. According to the model, biracial people move from a new awareness of racial differences towards a period of integration, during adulthood, when the various idiosyncrasies of their identity create a strong sense of self. At this stage, one “is able to function effectively in varying situations and understand different communities” (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995, p. 214).

A number of common themes emerged from these models. Both have stages where a multiracial person experiences a significant level of challenge as he or she progress developmentally. This often occurs during adolescence and is characterized by guilt due to feeling the pressure to choose one part of their identity over the other. Similar between both theories is the notion that the integration of multiple identities implies identity completion; an end result to identity development. Although useful in setting the groundwork for future studies on biracial identity, these models were

insufficient in addressing the role of racism and the prospect of developing *multiple* healthy identities (Renn, 2008). The following section will discuss an alternative to the integrated theories of biracial and multiracial identity development.

Ecological theories. Ecological theories of biracial identity development assert that the environment influences human development. For instance, in Root's (1990) exploration of "otherness" she examined the socio-cultural, political, and familial influences that shape the identity development of biracial people. Contrary to integrative theories, Root concluded that multiple racial identities were possible. To resolve the tension of a biracial person's dual existence, Root (1990) identified four positive resolutions of identity that are "driven by the assumption that an individual recognizes both sides of their heritage" (p. 199). The resolutions are: (a) acceptance of the identity society assigns, (b) identification with both racial groups, (c) identification with a single racial group, and (d) identification as a new racial group. Root diverged from the integrated models by asserting that one resolution does not hold a more achieved status than the other. Therefore, the concept of stages did not apply to this model. Additionally, Root took into account the formation of new identity groups. For instance, the resolutions do not operate in a linear manner. Instead, individuals with a positive sense of self may move among the resolutions or hold multiple resolutions concurrently, allowing for fluidity.

Renn (2000, 2003, 2004), a scholar of college student development, explored how one's post-secondary environment promotes or hinders the development of mixed-race students and affects their racial identity choices. By utilizing Bronfenbrenner's ecology model, Renn (2004) accounted for the "ever-changing world of the developing person as

he or she moves from home to school, then school to work or college, and so on, seeking and shaping environments just as he or she is attracted to and shaped them” (p. 29).

Renn’s ecological theory of mixed-race identity development considers the various social processes like, appearance, socio-cultural influences, peer culture, familial relationships, and academic experiences that shape the racial identity of biracial people. For an illustration of these social processes refer to Figure 2. Renn’s model is comprised of five patterns of biracial identity choices that are influenced by the previously mentioned social processes. For an illustration of the identity patterns refer to Figure 3. The underlying principles of this theory are that multiple racial identities are plausible, they have the right to self-identify, and their identification is fluid.

According to Renn’s model, biracial people hold either a (a) *monoracial identity*, where one identifies with one of their racial heritages, (b) *multiple monoracial identities*, where one identifies with both racial heritages equally (e.g., I am both Black and White), (c) a *multiracial identity*, where one identifies as having a new racial identity (e.g., I am mixed-race), (d) an *extra-racial identity*, where one deconstructs race by opting out of identifying with U.S. racial categories, or (e) *situational identity*, where one identifies differently in different contexts. In contrast to the integrative models, Renn (2004) argued that the flexibility found in these identity patterns strengthen one’s identity because one has the ability to ‘shift’ among different social environments, yet feel equally comfortable among those environments.

Figure 2. Renn's Influences of Biracial Identity

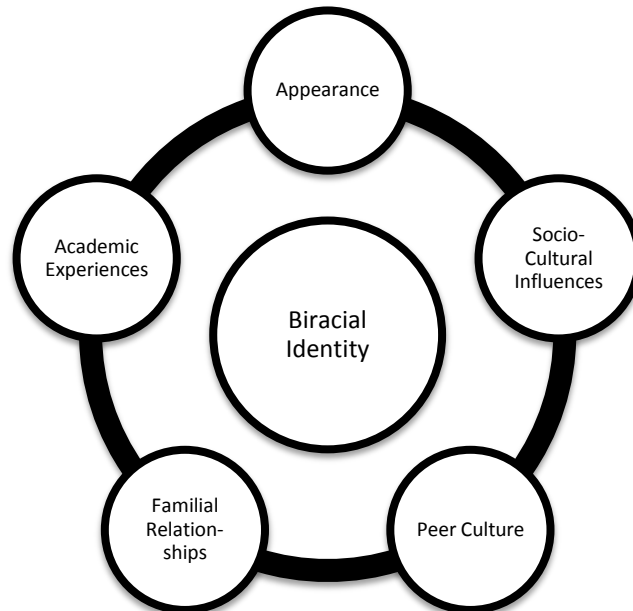
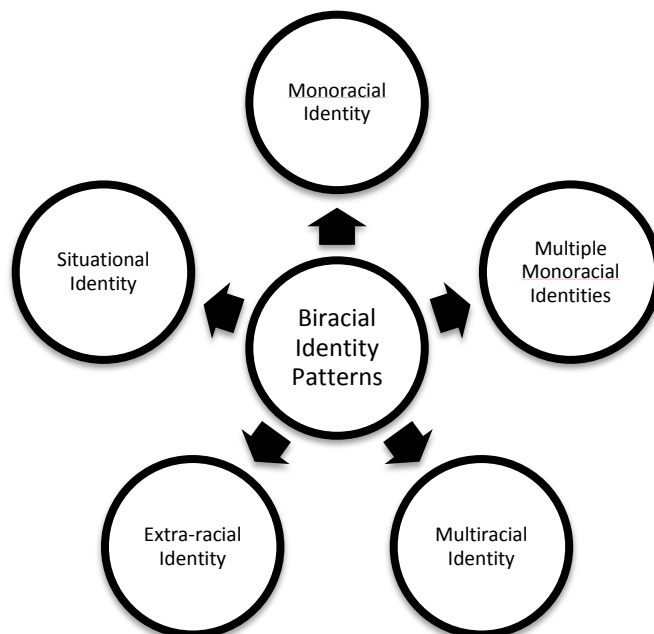


Figure 3. Renn's Identity Patterns of Biracial People



Renn's theory challenges previously held assumptions about racial identity by advocating that there is not a singular path to healthy racial identity and that racial identity cannot be developed or examined in a cognitive silo. In agreement with Evans et al. (2010), "ecological theories of multiracial identity development seem to provide a closer representation of reality than other theories found in the literature" (p. 302 – 304). However, Renn's identity influences and patterns were based on results that were inclusive of diverse biracial individuals (e.g., Black and Latino, Asian and Black, etc.). For the purpose of understanding how the participants of the present study racially identify, this study will reference K.A. Rockquemore's (2008) typology of biracial identity. This typology was developed using elements of the ecological approach of racial identity development. Furthermore, its findings were based exclusively on the identification patterns of Black and White biracial people.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) concluded that biracial people differ significantly in how they racially identify. Four (4) variations in biracial identity classification were identified

- *singular identity*, individual chooses to identify as exclusively Black or White;
- *border identity*, individual chooses to identify as biracial;
- *protean identity*, individual shifts between Black, White, or biracial; and
- *transcendent identity*, individual claims no racial identity (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008).

The development of a singular identity is the result of experiencing the world as a Black or White person. This choice is the cultural norm and serves as a way to resolve "other" status. Furthermore, the one-drop rule underlies the choice to identify as Black.

Individuals who identify as White often do so because of their physical appearance and socioeconomic status. According to Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) individuals who identify as a singular identity “do not deny the existence of their opposite race parent but it is not salient in their racial self-understanding and may not be offered as identifying information unless specifically requested” (p. 42).

The border identity is the most common racial classification (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008). This preference lies between two socially constructed categories of race: Black and White. It is conceptualized as a blending of the individual’s essential racial heritages. The authors categorize this identity into two categories: validated and unvalidated. A border identity is validated through social interactions with those who approve of their racial identification. Those with unvalidated identities self-identify as biracial but publically identify as Black because others do not approve of their biracial identity. The protean identity changes and shifts depending on the social and environmental context. These individuals are simultaneously comfortable in both Black and White worlds. Lastly, to identify as transcendent is to have a nonracial self-understanding. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) state that these individuals “opt out of the categorization game” (p. 50). They feel comfortable in opting out because they accept and embrace that they are viewed as strangers in a racially stratified society. They commonly identify as belonging to the “human race”. These four identification choices develop as a result of one’s interaction with various dynamics of appearance, social networks, socialization during adult and childhood, and familial context (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008).

Summary

The most significant observation of much of the foundational literature on leadership theory is that it is void of the experiences of racial minorities. Additionally, the literature on leadership and race is centered on the experiences of monoracial leaders, therefore highlighting the need for research on multiracial leaders and their experiences in monoracial environments.

The research on biracial identity development and identification demonstrates that one's identity develops as a result of various social influences. This notion parallels how leaders develop and experience leadership. To be effective, leaders must come to understand self, others, the relationship between self and others, and the environment where leadership occurs. Sonnenschein (1999) suggests that if leaders expect to capitalize on their strengths they must be self-aware, which means becoming conscious of how they were socialized and aware of their values and perceptions. For that reason, one's identity and leadership enactments and experiences are inseparable.

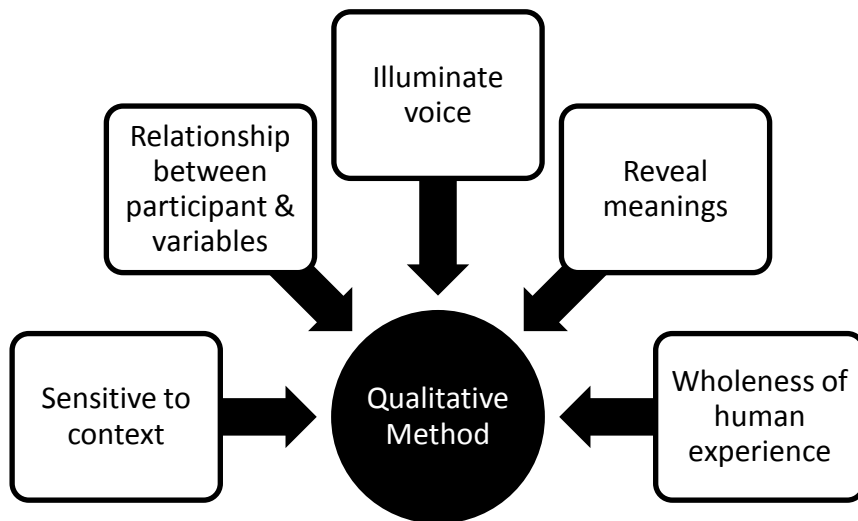
The process of racial identity development and identification are central to the experience of biracial people. Therefore, if biracial leaders are not given the opportunity to understand who they are in the context of leadership it becomes difficult to understand others (e.g., followers), their relationship with others, and the environment in which they are operating. It seems reasonable then, to suggest that a biracial leader's racial identification should in some way influence their leadership experiences. This unique interplay between racial identity and leadership is the impetus for the proposed study. Consequently, the purpose of the present study is to describe how biracial leaders racially identify and how those identities influence their leadership experiences.

Chapter Three: Methodology

“Phenomenology asks, ‘What is this or that kind of experience like....it does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that brings us in more direct contact with the world.’ – Max van Manen

Quantitative research methods have been a long-established approach to the study of leadership (Bryman, Stephens, à Campo, 1996; Conger, 1998; Ospina, 2004). Although critical to the examination of leadership, these methods often do not provide insight into the “multiple levels of phenomena” inherent in leadership (Conger, 1998). For instance, leadership is dynamic and symbolic (Conger, 1998). It is contextual; dependent upon time, skills, behaviors, personalities, characteristics, and relationships (Bryman et al., 1996; Ospina, 2004). Albeit quantitative methods consider contextual variables, “by themselves, [they] are insufficient to investigate thoroughly phenomena with such characteristics” (Conger, 1998, para. 9), and apply a more universal approach to the study of leadership (Bryman et al. 1996). In contrast, qualitative methods are sensitive to contextual variables (Bryman et al. 1996; Conger, 1998; Ospina, 2004); regard the participant’s relationship to these variables as integrated and inseparable (Moustakas, 1994); illuminate the voice of participants (Bryman et al., 1996); reveal meanings of experience rather than measurements (Moustakas, 1994); and value the “wholeness” of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, qualitative methods allow for longitudinal perspectives and are responsible for “paradigm shifts” in understanding leadership (Conger, 1998). For an illustration of the critical components of qualitative research refer to Figure 4.

Figure 4. Critical Components of Qualitative Research



Creswell (2007) found that few foundational texts on qualitative research provided an established definition of qualitative research. This was due, in part, to the evolving nature of qualitative methods and differences in philosophical assumptions. Nonetheless, some core characteristics have been identified that can be applied across the various qualitative approaches and philosophical worldviews. The characteristics include (a) naturalistic setting, (b) participant perspectives, (c) researcher as data gathering instrument, (d) extended firsthand engagement, (e) centrality of meaning, (f) wholeness and complexity, (g) emergent design, (h) inductive data analysis, and (i) reflexivity.

There are five common traditions of qualitative research. Table 1 provides a description of these traditional approaches. When deciding which qualitative method to use, Richards and Morse (2007) advised researchers to consider three questions: (a) is little known about the topic or are previous understandings inadequate; (b) is your aim to

learn from the participants in a setting or process the way they experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience; and (c) is the purpose to understand the phenomena deeply and in detail (p. 29 – 30)?

The decision to use qualitative methods, for the purpose of the present study was made because few empirical studies of the phenomena exist. Because qualitative methods play a significant role in the exploratory stages of researching a topic (Conger, 1998), this study fits well within a qualitative design. Furthermore, in an effort to understand the experiences of biracial leaders, it is imperative to understand this phenomenon from their perspective rather than explaining it from an “outside” perspective (Ospina, 2004). Lastly, it is difficult to capture the complexity of this phenomenon, therefore reinforcing the need to utilize qualitative methods.

Table 1

Traditional approaches to qualitative research

Method	Research Question	Data Sources	Type of Results
<i>Case Study</i>	Case specific questions	Interviews, observations, documents	Detailed case analysis
<i>Ethnography</i>	Observational questions	Participant observation, field notes, interviews	Descriptions of patterns
<i>Grounded theory</i>	Process questions	Interviews, observations, field notes	Theory generation
<i>Narrative</i>	Individual experiences	Interviews, documents	Life story
<i>Phenomenology</i>	Questions about meaning / essence of experience	In-depth conversations, artifacts, journals	In-depth reflective descriptions / essence of the experience

Note. Adapted from Richards, L. & Morse, J.M. (2007). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Qualitative Research Method: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a form of research that seeks to understand how individuals perceive and understand the world they live in without the researcher applying preconceived judgments and biases (Moustakas, 1994). The central purpose is to acquire a “universal essence” based upon the shared experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Essence is defined as a real and significant feature of a phenomenon.

According to Hatch (2002) phenomenology is at the core of all qualitative work. Moustakas (1994) agrees stating that, “Phenomenology is the first method of knowledge because it begins with ‘things themselves’” (p. 41). According to Moustakas (1994) it requires:

disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

The phenomenological tradition that best fits the purpose of the present study is the *hermeneutical* method. This method is the act of description and interpretation (van Manen, 1990). The researcher provides a description of the lived experience and then extends a description of the *meaning* of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen (1990) it is a descriptive, reflective, interpretative, and engaging method of research. In an effort to put a structure around this method, Creswell (2007) provided a summation of van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research framework: (a) give attention to a phenomenon of “serious” interest, (b) reflect on essential themes of the phenomenon, (c) write a description of the phenomenon while maintaining a relationship to the topic and balancing the parts to the whole, and (d) make an interpretation of the lived experience. Some researchers find interpretation to be outside the scope of phenomenological research and others argue that all description is essentially interpretation (van Manen, 1990). van Manen suggests that the latter is true if the description is an accurate representation of one’s lived experience.

There is an inherent contradiction within phenomenological research methods. For instance, the aim of this methodology is to “ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts” (van Manen, 1990, p. 29) that would control the study. However, van Manen (1990) points out that there is a systematic approach to conducting this form of research. He attempts to reconcile this contradiction by concluding that phenomenological research is a framework and set of recommendations for inquiry that neither “rejects or ignores tradition, nor slavishly follows or kneels in front of it” (p. 30).

Research Paradigm

The present study assumes a constructivist research paradigm. Researchers using this paradigm seek to understand the world of the participants and develop subjective meanings of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). Creswell further states that constructivists understand that multiple views and meanings exist. Furthermore, these views and meanings are shaped by the participants’ social interactions and historical and cultural norms.

One’s philosophical assumptions define the nature of reality (*ontology*), the way we know what we know (*epistemology*), the role of values (*axiology*), the methodology, and the results (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Each philosophical assumption is reviewed along with implications for practice within a constructivist research paradigm.

Ontology. According to Hatch (2002), hermeneutic phenomenology is a constructivist approach to research. This approach implies that multiple, socially-constructed realities exist (Hatch, 2002). The phenomenon, experiences of biracial

leaders, fits within the constructivist paradigm. Although the participants' experience of being biracial leaders might be expressed differently due to different contexts, they still share the common phenomenon of being biracial leaders. Therefore, the nature of how they experience the phenomenon will differ.

Epistemology. In its simplest form, epistemology is the study of that way we know what we know, or a "way of knowing." The relationship between the researcher and participant is influenced by this philosophical assumption. The researcher and participants are co-constructors of the descriptions and interpretations. Therefore, the researcher becomes a participating member of the research process. In practice, the researcher conducts the research in a natural setting that is comfortable to the participants and allows distance to be minimized between the participants and researcher (Creswell, 2007). From this perspective, researchers are not distant and objective.

Axiology. In regards to values, the researcher acknowledges that values will inform the results of the study. In practice, the researcher's values and biases are *bracketed* throughout data collection and then reintroduced during the researcher's and participants' interpretations (Creswell, 2007). The process of bracketing is addressed in the section, "Role of the Researcher."

Methodology. The process of research is inductive and emergent (Creswell, 2007). To make sense of the participants' worlds, multiple sources of data collection, including multiple interviews, are used to uncover rich meanings (Hatch, 2002).

Results. Using rich narratives, the results characterize the final interpretations. In practice, the results include contextual detail and ample illustrations of the

participants' voices (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch (2002) the intent is to provide results where the readers become empathetic to the participants' experience.

Together, these philosophical assumptions inform the purpose and structure of the study. Furthermore, they guide the interpretations that are co-created by the researcher and the participants.

Role of the researcher

Conducting a phenomenological study requires the researcher to examine his or her assumptions and biases about the topic of study. According to Creswell (2007) this examination should include a discussion about past experiences, biases, prejudices and orientations that might shape the approach to the study. This process is referred to as *bracketing* (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) cautions that this method might be difficult to implement if adopting an interpretive approach. To ease this difficulty, Creswell (2007) suggests that instead of using the traditional definition of bracketing, researchers suspend their understandings "in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity" (p. 62). However, the researcher must decide when and how he or she will disclose their understandings into the study.

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief description about the process of bracketing, provide a deeper understanding of my suppositions about biracial identity and leadership, and to explain how my personal understandings of these issues will be introduced into the study.

In an effort to demystify the process of bracketing, Gearing (2004) identified the essential features of the method. The author identified six bracketing compositions: (1)

ideal, (2) descriptive, (3) existential, (4) analytic, (5) reflexive, and (6) pragmatic.

Because this study assumes a constructivist research paradigm and an ontological view that is characterized by relativism, the *reflexive/cultural bracketing process* was applied.

Table 2 outlines the four phases that comprise the reflexive/cultural bracketing process.

Table 2

Reflexive /Cultural Bracketing Process

Phases	Components
Abstract formulation	Constructivism
<i>Orientation standpoint</i>	Relativism
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	Hermeneutics
Research praxis	
<i>Foundational focus</i>	Set aside some suppositions
<i>Internal supposition</i>	Values, culture, judgments of researcher identified & made transparent
<i>External supposition</i>	Impossible to set aside
<i>Temporal structure</i>	Begins and ends during preparation; might return during analysis
<i>Parenthesis composition</i>	Designed, yet fluid
Reintegration	After identification of suppositions & attempt to minimize impact; suppositions might loosely remain

Note. Adapted from Gearing, R.E. (2004). Bracketing in Research: A Typology. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14, 1429 – 1452.

Once abstract formulation was determined, four research praxes were identified. Foundational focus is the attempt to make clear the personal suppositions held prior to the investigation and to set those aside throughout the data collection process. Internal suppositions comprise the researcher's personal knowledge, history, culture, experiences, and values, in addition to academic theories. Bracketing these suppositions allows the researcher to approach the interviews in a discernible manner. Gearing (2004) argues that bracketing external suppositions is impracticable as it is "impossible to remove the context, culture, and environment from the phenomenon" (p. 1445). Temporal structure is the determination of when bracketing begins and ends. Within the cultural bracketing process, bracketing is applied during preparation and can be reintroduced during the analysis. Parentheses, or boundaries, are fluid. Lastly, reintegration is the process of reintroducing one's suppositions and lessons learned during the interpretation stage.

As a biracial woman who has held various leadership roles, I knew at the onset that bracketing my experiences and biases would be vital to this research study. My own racial identity adventure is ripe with stories of perception, prejudice, revelation, rejection, and acceptance. While preparing the research proposal, I held few assumptions as to how the participants would reveal their own racial identity and describe their leadership journey. I was cognizant that each participant could have experiences and views that differed from my own. However, it was not until the research process unfolded that I realized the extent to which my suppositions, although minimal, influenced my perceptions.

As each story was told, I became aware that the participants' experiences were also my experiences. What I felt during these interviews was greater than sympathy or

empathy. It was as if my identity was in accord with their identity. Their trials were my trials. The questions I struggled with were their questions. I also arrived at the notion that it is not uncommon for all of us, regardless of racial heritage, to encounter awkward stages of identity. But unlike having to wear awkward glasses, coping with acne, or bad hair; we shared the awkwardness of growing up with skin color, hair texture, and a family that did not reflect societal norms. And unlike the aforementioned awkward experiences, we could not grow out of how we looked or how our family looked. We could not grow out of our skin color, our hair texture, or that fact that one parent was Black and one was White.

As a result of these reflections, I made a concerted effort after each interview to process, examine, and reflect upon my own experience. I was not always successful in my efforts to stay impartial throughout the interview process. Instead of fearing the inclinations I had, I chose to embrace the fact that I had a shared experience with the participants, while still being open to the notion that differences exist.

The following section provides a list of the internal and external suppositions I held prior to conducting this study. My own beliefs about racial identity and leadership were reflected upon and processed at the outset, and throughout the course of the study. I wrote a reflective journal during the research process. Through this journal I noted the personal philosophies I held prior to collecting data. As the research process progressed, I contributed to this journal offering new insights and reflections that confirmed or challenged my views. Furthermore, I documented how my personal journey, as a biracial woman in a leadership role, evolved throughout the research process. From this process

three personal assumptions emerged: (1) identity confusion, (2) racial choice, (3) and maneuvering between two worlds.

Identity Confusion. The first assumption was that each participant, at some point in his or her life, had to defy the notion that they were racially confused. Historically, racial confusion was depicted in film, media, and print as the *tragic mulatto*. The tragic mulatto is the archetype of a depressed individual with a lost identity. This person suffers because he or she does not fit neatly into the *black world* or *white world* and are a causality of a racially divided society (Baltran, 2005).

Racial Choice. Another assumption was the matter of racial choice. I had to restrain the belief that the manner in which each participant racially identified would be different than my own identification. Prior to the study, I believed that most Black/White biracial persons identified exclusively as Black and that my identification as a Black/White biracial was unique. My decision to identify as such was brought about by the messages communicated to me by my parents; particularly my Black father. My identification also reflected the predominately White neighborhoods and schools I was reared and educated in. In these environments, I could not ignore that my father was Black that my hair was not straight, fine, and blonde and that my skin tone was not milky White like my mother's. Additionally, I could not deny that the environment I was situated in for the majority of my adolescence was primarily a White, working class neighborhood. Consequently, identifying (exclusively) as Black made me feel as though I was not telling the whole story. After all, having to continually answer the question, "What are you?" made it clear to me at an early age that others saw my race as something other than Black. Throughout my life I met few biracial persons who identified in the

same way. Therefore, I had the assumption that most of the participants would identify solely as Black because of their skin color, hair texture, facial features, and/or social environment.

Maneuvering Between Two Worlds. In addition to identity confusion and racial choice, another expectation was that the participants would feel equally comfortable and uncomfortable within monoracial environments. I had to bracket the notion that regardless of how the participants racially identified, they would experience a constant, awkward tension of being between two worlds. My assumptions went further in presuming that this feeling could have several advantages and disadvantages for biracial leaders. Advantages might include feeling flexible and adaptable within diverse racial and ethnic environments. Being identified as racially ambiguous is another advantage. In some contexts an ambiguous racial identity might be viewed as safe; meaning the individual might not be confined to restrictive and stereotypical labels. Disadvantages might include others applying insensitive, confusing and/or irrelevant labels on the individual. For instance, the leader might be viewed as not “Black enough” or “White enough.” Or, in my case, being labeled as a “White mixed-girl.” Regarding leadership, these labels relate to issues of cultural and professional fit or prototypicality addressed in Chapter 2.

Sample

The decision to focus on participants with Black and White parentage was intentional. First, the racial history between Black and White Americans is deep, tragic, complicated, and emotional. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) argued that these two groups have the “greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage” (p. ix). This separation was reinforced nationally by anti-miscegenation laws that targeted interracial unions and marriages until these laws were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967. Second, it should not be assumed that Black and White biracial people experience the same degree of racial discrimination and racial identity development as other biracial groups. According to Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), biracial people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds experience a range of discrimination from society depending on their racial composition. Therefore, narrowing the population to persons of Black and White parentage seemed reasonable. Finally, in agreement again with Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008)

No other racial group has the question of racial group membership been so rigidly defined, legally codified, and historically long-standing as it has been for African Americans. Nor has any other racial group been as vocal and adamant in its opposition to the potential addition of a multiracial category. (p. ix)

For those reasons, concentrating on individuals whose racial identity is inclusive of the two most divisive racial populations in the United States warranted attention.

The target population in the present study is biracial leaders who have a biological White and biological Black parent and who exercise leadership in an organization or group. Leaders are defined as those who have attained a *positional* or *recognized* leadership position for at least two years. A positional leader occupies a supervisor,

manager, executive officer, or administrator position within a non-profit or religious organization, corporation, small business, or academic institution. A recognized leader has been designated a leader, by reputation, in their community. Furthermore, participants are located in the Midwest. According to Creswell (2007) population sizes for phenomenological studies can range from 1 to 10 participants. Therefore, the goal was to collect data with at least ten participants or until saturation was reached.

Sampling Technique. Two forms of sampling were used to select the participants. Through *purposeful sampling*, participants are intentionally chosen who would provide information rich data about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). It was anticipated that I would have a small pool of participants to choose from, so it was also necessary to use *snowball sampling*, or chain sampling, as an additional technique to recruit the participants. This form of sampling proceeds after the study begins, and the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals who might offer rich information about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2008).

I used my personal networks to identify participants who met the established criteria. I also made contact with various multiracial organizations to recruit participants. However, many of these organizations are located outside of the Midwest and were unable to refer participants who fit the physical geographic parameters of the study.

Once the participants were identified, I contacted each potential participant by email requesting permission to call them via phone to explain the research study. Upon contact, three questions were asked of the participants to determine if they met inclusion criteria:

1. Does your racial parentage consist of a biological Black parent and a biological White parent?
2. Have you served in a leadership role at your place of work, an organization, or your community for at least two years?
3. Are you interested in participating in at least two, one-hour long interviews about your experiences as a biracial leader?

If the individual responded “yes” to all three questions, I proceeded by scheduling interview times to conduct the study.

Data Collection

Interviews. Two audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. This form of data collection is used when the researcher asks one individual at a time open-ended questions while recording their responses (Creswell, 2008). Both interviews took place in a naturalistic setting of the participant’s choice so he or she felt comfortable. Of the eight participants, only three chose their place of employment as an interview location.

My role as the researcher was to ignite a conversation between myself and the participants (Creswell, 2007). The interview was a space for the participants to share their story as it pertained to the phenomena of study. While an interview protocol was used, a conversational partnership developed, leading the participants to feel comfortable while they shared their journey without judgment and with respect.

First interview. The first interview focused on participants’ racial identification. To accurately describe how participants racially identify, questions were adapted from Rockquemore and Brunzma’s (2008) study of biracial identity development. The interview was guided by a standard set of open and close-ended questions, along with a

number of probes. A copy of the interview protocol is located in Appendix A. The following are sample questions that were part of the interview protocol:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about a time when your family openly talked about you being biracial.
3. Tell me about a time when someone asked you what race you are, or “what” you are.
4. What does it mean to you to be biracial?

Second interview. A phenomenological approach characterized the second interview. In phenomenological research the intent is to (a) explore and gather experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (b) serve as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner about the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Using a conversational approach requires staying true to the fundamental research question while “guarding against the temptation to let method rule the question” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66).

The second interview explored the participants’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences about their leadership experiences and how their racial identity might or might not have influenced these experiences. The interview was guided by an interview protocol containing a number of broad, open-ended questions so that meanings were formed throughout the discussions (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The interview protocol is located in Appendix B. The following are sample questions that were part of the interview protocol:

1. Tell me about your current leadership roles.
2. Describe your leadership style.
3. Tell me about a time when your leadership role and your racial identity interacted.

Artifacts. Other forms of data collection included personal journals, reflections or other personal artifacts. The purpose of collecting these pieces was to provide objects that represented the participants' racial identity development and/or their experiences as leaders. Incorporating reflective accounts of human experiences is a valuable tool in phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). At the close of each interview, I invited each participant to provide me examples of these personal artifacts or documents. To maintain confidentiality, the documents were used only to analyze the results and to assist in describing the data. The documents provided are not published in this research, nor will they be shown to others.

Reflective Journal. I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process to control for bias. Another purpose of maintaining this journal was to keep a record of insights gained, discerning patterns, and reflections (van Manen, 1990).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the collected data. As a constructivist, the intent was to uncover the reality of the phenomena as expressed by the participants (Hatch, 2002). To uncover this reality, Hatch (2002) suggests "asking questions of the data," tracking reflections, impressions, reactions, and initial interpretations. A more structured analysis process is then encouraged. Creswell (2007)

outlines a general format phenomenological researchers use to analyze data and it was adapted for this study. Table 3 provides this format.

Table 3

Procedures for Conducting and Analyzing Phenomenological Research

Method	Purpose
<i>Bracketing</i> Describe own experience with the phenomenon.	Set aside personal experience, biases, etc.
<i>Horizontalization</i> List of significant statements.	Develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements of the participants' experience.
<i>Clusters of meaning</i> Group significant statements.	Develop themes.
<i>Textual Description</i> Describe what participants experienced with the phenomenon.	Develop textual description with specific examples.
<i>Structural Description</i> Describe how the experiences happened.	Develop structural descriptions which reflect on the setting and context of the phenomenon.
<i>Essence</i> Describe the phenomenon with textual and structural descriptions.	Develop the "essence" of the experience – <i>what</i> the participants experienced and <i>how</i> they experienced the phenomenon.
<i>Reflexivity</i> Researcher's reflections of the research process	Develop personal reflections based on themes and participant experiences.

Note. Adapted from Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

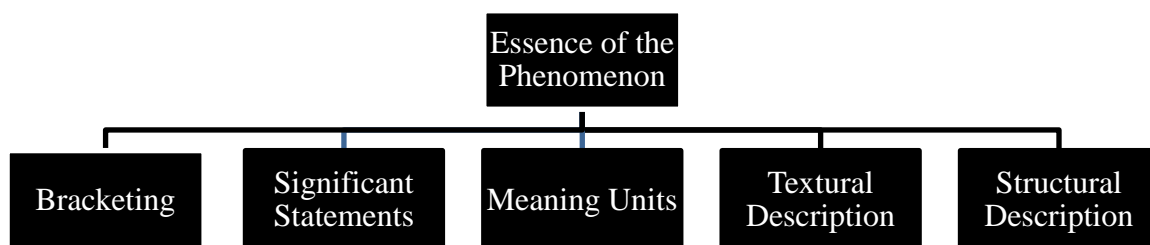
Prior to engaging in the following procedures, I organized the data to prepare for transcription. I contracted a transcriber who is an expert in transcribing interview data. To protect the data, the transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement in addition to transmitting the data through a secure website. The data are stored on my personal laptop that is password protected.

First, I bracketed my preconceived judgments and experiences about biracial identity and leadership prior to conducting the study and throughout. Following transcription, I made sense of the data by reading through the text several times and created memos with reflective comments. To assist with the horizontalization process I used MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. This software allowed me to import data from the interviews and sort the data into groups. I was then able to create my own code system by categorizing the data. A list of significant statements were identified which uncovered the themes of the text. The themes were then coded. The labels of the codes emerged from significant statements and words provided by the participants. Creswell (2007) refers to this as *in vivo codes*. The *in vivo codes* were used to develop and describe themes from the data. Creswell (2007) states these codes specifically represent themes researchers expect to discover, surprising information, and information that is attention-grabbing to the researcher and participants.

Once themes were developed a textural summary was created to describe *what* the biracial leader experienced along with specific examples to add richness to the descriptions. A structural summary was then developed to describe *how* he or she experienced the phenomenon of being a biracial leader. Out of these descriptions, the essence of the experience was then described. Figure 5 is a visual representation of the

procedures used to come to the essence of the phenomenon experienced by the participants.

Figure 5. Process of Analyzing Phenomenological Data



Note. Adapted from Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Validation. Several validation techniques were applied to ensure that data were well grounded and supported. Distinct validation strategies are not available across the five approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Nonetheless, Creswell proposed eight strategies he found to be frequently used by qualitative researchers. Of the eight strategies, Creswell suggests using at least two in a study. To ensure the validity of the findings, *member checking*, *peer review*, *rich description*, and *triangulation* were implemented.

Member checking. This strategy involves asking the participants to review and judge the accuracy and credibility of the researcher's findings and interpretations. Once the interview was transcribed, a copy of their responses was provided to the participants along with themes. A follow-up discussion was scheduled with each participant to solicit

their feedback. Each participant was asked to review a preliminary analysis of the findings and interpretations and provide alternative language and provide clarity.

Peer review. A peer review involves seeking external advice from fellow colleagues or subject experts who are familiar with the phenomenon and research methods (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007) a peer reviewer asks hard questions and allows the researcher to freely share their thoughts, feelings, challenges, and successes concerning the study. For this study, two peer review processes were implemented. For the first peer review a colleague from the Department of Agricultural Leadership Education and Communication who is familiar with qualitative methods, leadership, and racial issues, reviewed four interview transcripts and identified significant statements and themes. The colleague and I then compared our significant statements from the transcripts and discussed differences and commonalities. The intent of this process was to consider alternative perspectives and to ensure the validity of the findings. About 80 percent of the time we came to an agreement in our coding.

The second review was conducted with a panel of three peer reviewers from the Department of Agricultural Leadership Education and Communication and the Department of Educational Administration. I presented the findings to the panel and asked for feedback. Using Creswell's and Moustaka's (1994) guidelines, the panel was asked to consider if I (a) conveyed an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology, (b) had a clear phenomenon to study that is articulated in a concise way, (c) used procedures of data analysis in phenomenology, (d) conveyed the overall essence of the experience of the participant and if the essence includes a description of the

experience and the context in which it occurred, and (e) if I was reflexive throughout the study. Using these standards, the panel judged the findings well grounded and supported.

Rich Description. Providing thick and rich description is the process of applying detailed examples to themes. This involves more than describing the data or explaining facts. Instead, it allows for the reader to put themselves in the shoes of the participants. Creswell (2007) calls this transferability, which allows the reader to transfer the findings to their own experience. This is accomplished by using the participants' own words and including details about the participants.

Triangulation. This validation strategy corroborates multiple data sources (Creswell, 2007). Comparing various data sources provides verification of the information provided. For the purpose of the present study, triangulation was used to verify the racial identity of the participants. Their responses to the first interview were verified with previous theoretical knowledge provided by K.A. Rockquemore's typology of biracial identity. Doing so improved confidence in reporting findings on the participants' biracial identification.

Ethical Considerations

Permissions. Permission to conduct the study was obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation in the research was voluntary. Participants had the right to refuse to answer questions and to end the interview at any time throughout the process. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. A consent form was made available to each participant along with a description of the

study. Questions about the study were permitted. The consent forms were signed prior to participation in the study and were collected by the lead researcher.

Confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned or chose a pseudonym of his or her choice. Participants were interviewed at various locations agreed upon by both the participant and the researcher. The sites were chosen based on convenience and confidentiality of participants' identity.

Chapter Four: Findings

“One key to successful leadership is continuous personal change. Personal change is a reflection of our inner growth and empowerment.” – Robert E. Quinn

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how biracial leaders racially identified and how those identities influenced their leadership experiences. The central research question was: What are the leadership experiences of biracial leaders? The sub questions were: (a) How do the participants racially identify? and (b) How does their racial identification influence their leadership experiences?

The participants were eager to share their experiences. I was surprised and grateful that they were willing to express themselves. It felt as if many of the participants had been waiting for someone to ask about their unique and often misunderstood circumstances. Because of this, each participant was open to divulging parts of himself/herself that were both public and private. The reason for this openness might have been due, in part, to our “shared experience.” Because I identify as a Black/White biracial, a level of trust and rapport was established. In Cox’s (2004) literature review on the challenges researching issues of race and ethnicity within the field of organizational behavior, he found that the race and/or ethnicity of the researcher influenced how the participants responded to questions about race. While some scholars consider this a limitation to collecting data, I hold the opposite view. Our shared experience resulted in the participants feeling comfortable recounting the misconceptions of being linked to two racial worlds, while also sharing how the paradox of being biracial serves an inherent purpose in a diverse and complicated society.

Participants

The study included eight participants. I explained the research presentation to each potential participant via phone. Participants were included in the study if they met the following criteria: (a) racial parentage consists of a biological Black parent and biological White parent, (b) served in a leadership role for at least two years, and (c) willing to participate in at least two, one-hour long interviews. All participants lived and worked in a state located within the Midwest. Because this study focuses on race, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the state and the cities the participants reside in. As of the 2010 Census, 86% of the state's population were White, 4.5% were Black and only 2.2% identified as more than two races ("2010 State Census Profile," 2013). All lived and worked in one of the state's two largest metropolitan cities. Both cities have a combined population of approximately 650,000 people.

Table 4 provides a summary of participant demographics. The table includes each participant's pseudonym, racial identification, parental racial identification, and gender, and the communities where participants live and work have few persons of color who hold leadership roles. Therefore, to protect their identities, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Furthermore, only information specific to the participant's racial identification and leadership role is reported. To maintain confidentiality, the remaining demographic information such as age, level of education, and organization type are summarized.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Assigned Pseudonym	Racial Identification	Mother's Race	Father's Race	Gender
Dell	Black	White	Black	Male
Brian	Black	White	Black	Male
Lisa	Black	White	Black	Female
Andrea	Black Biracial	White	Black	Female
Austin	Multiracial	White	Black	Male
Derek	Biracial	White	Black	Male
Ethel	Biracial	Black	White	Female
Devin	Biracial	White	Black	Male

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 49 with an average age of 38 years. Five participants held master's degrees, with one having completed some Ph.D. coursework. Two participants received bachelor's degrees. One participant completed some college coursework, but had not yet earned a degree. Participants held leadership positions in areas of education, government, religious, and community non-profit organizations. The average tenure held in current, ¹*positional* leadership role was 1.5 years. This average does not include the number of years that each leader spent in positional leadership roles prior to participation in this study, nor does it include the number of years served as ²*recognized* leaders in their communities through volunteer service and/or governing board service. Universally, participants began their leadership journeys as young people and continue to serve in various leadership capacities in their communities.

¹ A positional leader occupies a supervisor, manager, executive officer, or administrator position within a non-profit or religious organization, corporation, small business, or academic institution.

² A recognized leader has been designated a leader, by reputation, in their community.

The findings are divided into two categories: *racial identity* and *transforming leadership*. The racial identity findings inform the first sub research question, “How do the participants racially identify?” It is important to mention that these findings are significant to the study because one can not address the experiences of a biracial leader without first laying the foundation for how a biracial leader racially identifies. The transforming leadership findings inform the second sub research question, “How does their racial identification influence their leadership experiences?”

Racial Identity: Factors influencing identity choices

Renn (2004) cautions researchers when reporting and interpreting racial demographic trends among biracial people. Similar to Rockquemore and Brunson (2008) several differences in how biracial people identify and the processes they use in coming to their identification emerged in the present study. To harmonize discussion, the decision was made to focus on factors that were salient across interviews. But even among those salient factors, differences emerged.

Of the 16 interview transcripts, 144 significant statements in relation to the sub research question, “How do the participants racially identify?” were identified. In addition to the transcripts, participants were asked at the end of the interviews to provide personal artifacts that represent their racial identity. Of the eight participants, three provided personal photos of their families and two provided reflection papers they had written about their racial identity. To maintain confidentiality, the personal photos were used only to assist in describing the data and are not published in this report.

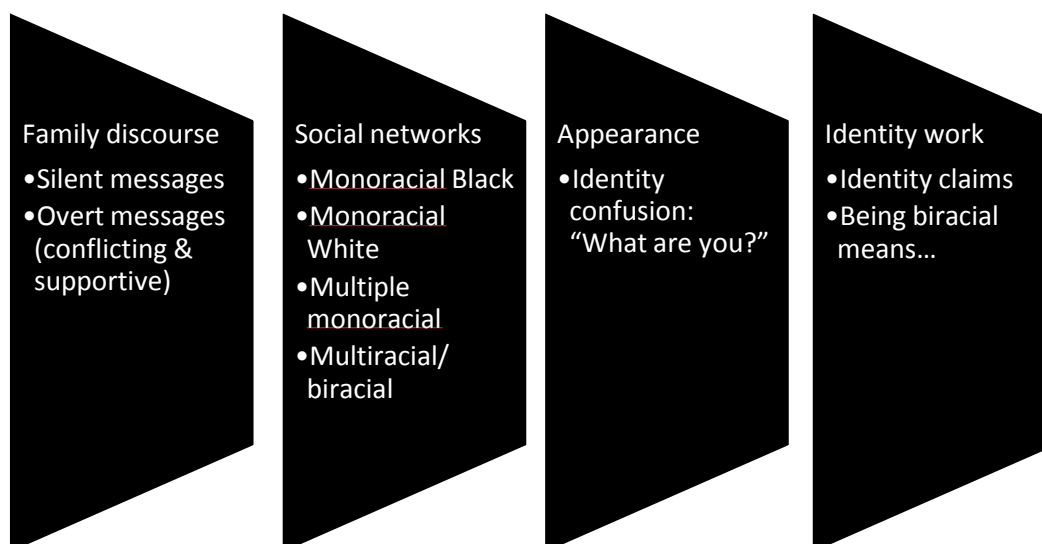
Four central themes emerged from the data related to factors that influence their racial identity choices: (a) *family discourse*, (b) *social networks*, (c) *appearance*, and (d) *identity work*. Table 5 contains the four themes and subthemes. Figure 6 displays the themes related to factors influencing racial identity.

Table 5

Factors influencing racial identity

Theme	Subtheme
Family Discourse	<i>Silent Messages</i> <i>Overt Messages</i>
Social Networks	<i>Monoracial Black</i> <i>Monoracial White</i> <i>Multiple monoracial</i> <i>Multiracial/biracial</i>
Appearance	<i>Identity confusion: “What are you?”</i>
Identity Work	<i>Identity claims</i> <i>Being biracial means...</i>

Figure 6. Factors Influencing Racial Identity Choices



Family Discourse. The messages communicated to the participants were influential in how they made sense of his or her racial identity. A person's identity is largely shaped by the socialization process of their environment. Included in the environment are the experiences and messages communicated by their families. Parents are particularly influential in a child's identity development at an early age. It is within this relationship that a child's self-concept and self-esteem are nurtured; leading to acceptance of their identity. Verbal and non-verbal messages between parents and their biracial children serve as the foundation for his or her identity work. What is essential is that the environment this foundation is laid on is open to racial discussions and/or positive modeling behaviors. An environment like this encourages a healthy sense of self. Experiencing the opposite can create a sense of rejection and a negative view of one's identity (Kich, 1992).

The messages shared by participants were largely communicated during pre-adolescence and adolescence years. Moreover, these messages came in various forms. Some messages were overt while others were silent. An interesting observation was made regarding the overt messages. These messages were either supportive and/or conflicting, but rarely were they unsupportive.

What the participants shared could not be directly correlated with how they racially identified as adults. However, sharing messages they received provides useful insight into how they experienced racial identity formation. Table 6 provides examples of the significant statements related to the theme, *family discourse*.

Table 6

Theme: Family Discourse

Theme	Subtheme	Example of significant statements
Family Discourse	<i>Silent messages</i>	<p>“I don’t think we ever had that discussion...just ‘cause it was the norm.”</p> <p>“...we never talked about the implications of race in our family”</p>
	<i>Overt (conflicting) messages</i>	<p>“[My mother] and brother felt I was acting too Black...”</p> <p>“...when I defined myself as Black she’d seen that as excluding her or denying her...”</p>
	<i>Overt (supportive) messages</i>	<p>“My mom really tried to impress upon both my brother and I that we really need to tell our story in a way that was going to be really rewarding.”</p> <p>“My mom did a good job of saying, ‘You’re Black. Be proud of that.’”</p>

Silent messages. When I asked participants about a time when their family openly talked about being biracial, the majority expressed that this topic was not central to their family experience. Austin shared that his family never addressed how being biracial might impact him. After pondering the question he responded, “...it never seemed to really be a topic of discussion amongst ourselves or anyone else.” Dell agreed, “...[we] never really talked about race when I came up and [my mother] said it was never really that important an issue for us to talk about.” Dell went on to describe why his family may have viewed the issue as irrelevant:

When you’re comin’ up maybe you recognize that your mom’s White, but that’s not material. That’s your mom. I just don’t think they considered it material. It

wasn't like, "Hey, you know, you're biracial." ...there's no emphasis. And part of that was my dad. There was no emphasis on Black history, none of that stuff. That was never something that they said, "Well, you're Black and being Black means this or being mixed means this." That was *never* part of the conversation.

Initially, Austin did not feel the significance of its absence. But, after some reflection he said "...for the sake of just discussing it and being aware of it...it would have been nice to just discuss it. For the sake of knowing, I think it would've been helpful."

When I met Dell for our second interview he expressed that he was curious why this topic was not discussed and consequently reached out to his mom to ask why:

[I] really started reflecting a little bit more about just the topic in general, about being biracial. I talked to my mom about it and I said, "You know, one of the things that came up is we never really talked about race when I came up." And she said it was never really that important an issue for us to talk about, you know, from that standpoint so I thought that was interesting.

Like Dell and Austin, Derek could not recall a time when the topic was addressed. But he attributed its absence to the environment where he grew up. Derek grew up in a military family, in San Diego, California during the early 1990s. He was consistently exposed to different cultures from all around the world. He shared that being biracial was the norm. "When you're out in California and you have such diversity, it's not an issue there." He went on to explain that had he been raised in Nebraska, he is certain his family would have had the conversation.

Both Brian and Andrea shared that their parents did not openly discuss race. However, as the interviews progressed, both recalled key moments when their parents did communicate overt, yet conflicting messages.

Overt (conflicting) messages. Brian, who grew up in a predominately White neighborhood with a Black father and White mother, expressed that his parents were to some extent silent on racial issues. “I think my dad had seen so much ugly about race, we never talked about the racial identity of our family...we never talked about the implications of race.” Although his father rarely addressed racial issues, Brian did recall a time when his father did discuss race:

I had one teacher saying, “You should maybe think about going to Morehouse or Howard.” And so I talked about it with my dad, and my dad said, "... you don't wanna go to a Black college 'cause they treat light-skinned Blacks differently and bad." And he was meaning Black people treat light-skinned Blacks bad in the South. And so that was the only time we ever talked about race.

While his parents may have been mostly silent about the topic, Brian did receive an interesting response from his White mother when he began exploring his identity choices:

When I got into late high school and college, I wasn't a radical...Black Nationalist, but I certainly was really interested in it. And so, I remember havin' to have some conversations with my mom about when I defined myself as Black. She had seen that as excluding her or denying.

Andrea shared a similar experience with her mother. While attending college at a predominately white institution, Andrea quickly realized that she identified with and found more acceptance and similarities amongst her Black peers compared to her White peers. She explained that her father “let me be who I am.” But her mother and brother were not as accepting of her choices:

I think [my mother] and my brother both felt that I was acting too Black when I was in college and I think they've come to now accept that's who I am but, [they felt I had] way to many Black friends. But in high school when I had mostly White friends there didn't seem to be a problem.

This was an interesting response from her mother considering her background and life's work. Andrea shared that her mother understood the political and economic implications of race and made sure to communicate these issues to her children. In Andrea's artifact, a reflection paper on her racial identity, she shared "My mother told my brother and me that, though unfortunate and unfair, we would always have to be twice as good as our White counterparts..." and "...that people would dislike us because of 'who we are.'" Furthermore, her mother understood the benefits of being a person of color.

When applying for college and completing admissions forms Andrea shared:

My mom really tried to impress upon both my brother and I that we really need to tell our story in a way that was going to be really rewarding as far as scholarships. Even though she didn't really want me to probably identify with as many Black folks as I did in college, when working on those scholarship forms she made sure that the people knew we were people of color.

When reflecting on the influence of her mother, Andrea described her as a woman ahead of her time. First, her mother married a Black man only a few years removed from its legalization in 1967. Second, as an ardent educator her mother worked tirelessly to provide educational opportunities to minority and underrepresented students. "She was very conscious of race, but in a way that I think benefits a community as opposed as tears it apart." For example, when she was the director of a federal program that provided education support and opportunities to low-income and underrepresented students,

Andrea observed:

...she was more committed to some other African American males more so than anyone else. I'm not going to say that she didn't treat everybody with just as much respect and love and care...but, [they] were like brother and sisters and siblings to all of us...

When asked why her mother paid particular attention to these students, Andrea shared, “I think subconsciously she really wanted to see them all successful. And there were some that she really took under her wing and really tried to mentor.” Although Andrea’s mother understood her children’s position in society and worked incessantly to provide opportunities to African American students, when her daughter began the process of exploring the meaning of race and her racial identity options, her mother was not as understanding of Andrea’s choice of peer group and racial identification. Her mother seemed to disassociate with how the world viewed her daughter, how her daughter experienced the world, and how she wanted her daughter to racially identify.

The tension Andrea and Brian experienced is not uncommon to biracial individuals. According to Kich (1992), one’s desire to stay true to self and what he/she experiences as a biracial person is often in conflict with how their families view him/her. Both saw themselves as different from their White parent and their intent was to form an identity that paralleled their personal experience. Although these messages were conflicting, what they demonstrate is that both participants felt safe addressing these sensitive topics with their mothers despite the consequence of being misunderstood or creating an atmosphere of rejection. Therefore, despite Andrea’s and Brian’s mothers not agreeing with and/or understanding their child’s identity choices, both developed a positive sense of self and secure racial identities due to the supportive environment.

Overt (supportive) messages. Derek and Lisa received overt and supportive messages from their family about their race. Both were born and raised in diverse communities in California. Lisa grew up in Hollywood and Fresno. Derek grew up in San Diego, but also spent a significant amount of time during his teenage years in

Philadelphia. Both admitted to being raised in homes that were fractured, but eagerly shared instances when their parents communicated messages of support and acceptance. Both families were open to cultural differences and exposing their children to the positive and negative realities of race in America.

Despite being married to an abusive and mostly absent husband, Lisa shared that her mother consistently emphasized Black pride and encouraged her to have a healthy Black identity. “My mom did a good job of saying, ‘You’re Black. Be proud of that.’” Lisa expressed that she was grateful that her mother did not blame her father’s behavior on his race. Lisa shared a powerful memory of her mother modeling the messages she communicated about Black pride:

This would've been when we were little because Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated April of...sixty...eight? But I just remember her wakin' us up, or lettin' us *stay* up late at night to watch the television coverage of the King funeral procession. And I remember her sayin', “I know you don't understand all this, but you'll be glad. This is a very important event that has taken place in our history.” And I just remember that.

Devin’s mother would tell her children stories about the discrimination and racism she experienced at the hands of her family because of her decision to marry a Black man. He shared one experience when his mother, who lived in the Midwest at the time, was preparing to bring him home after giving birth:

...people had lined up, literally lined up outside the door of our apartment to see me when I came home from the hospital because they were curious about what I looked like. And so, some thought I was gonna have spots or stripes, you know. It was kinda funny. So she'd tell me stories like that. She tells me stories about her dad chasin' her out the house with me in her arms...you know, callin' and sayin' “Get that nigger baby outta here” type of thing.

He went on to express how his mother had given up part of her own identity to “try to be Black” for her children:

My mom used to tell us stories all the time because it was part of her whole thing. I mean as a White woman... I always felt like she gave up her identity in order to be a parent to us. *I* felt like *she* felt she had to be Black for us, it sounds kinda weird. I remember I seen pictures of her with [an] Afro, you know, um...which was a perm. She used to listen to R&B. She took African studies courses in college. I remember her sayin' she would never be able to go out with a White guy again because she has Black kids. At the time, she felt like they would never accept her. I would get comments from my friends all the time that, you know, that she talks, you know, funny.

Devin questioned if the stories were a way for his mother to vent or if she was in fact attempting to teach him about race. Although he seemed uncomfortable addressing the complexity of his mother's behavior, one could interpret her behavior as an attempt to develop a cultural connection with her children. Disowned by her own family, she did not have a culture to instill in her own children. Her stories also demonstrated that she understood how her children would be viewed by society. Therefore, it might have been important to her to connect with a culture that would be deemed beneficial to her children. Through these stories, Devin's mother might not have directly implied how her children should interpret their racial identity, but they did give meaning to their interracial family experience. Her stories were affecting and had a profound influence on how he processes the meaning of race and discrimination.

Social networks. In this theme, social networks influenced how the participants constructed their racial identity. Social networks include family members, friends, peers, and neighbors. Just as direct correlations cannot be made between family messages and one's racial identity, the same principal is true when considering the weight of social

networks. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) assert that because these networks are often extensive and fluid, they can only provide some insight into understanding racial identity choices.

Similar to Renn's (2004) work on the identity choices of mixed race students, what emerged from the present study was the influence of peers as an active agent in the participants' racial identity formation. What resulted were the types of social environments the participants immersed themselves in voluntarily or involuntarily. Table 7 contains examples of significant statements for the theme, social networks and its related subthemes: *monoracial Black*, *monoracial White*, *multiple monoracial*, and *multiracial/biracial*. Monoracial Black implies that the participants preferred social networks that were predominately Black, or most of their peers were Black because of where they lived, worked, or played. The same description applies to participants who experienced monoracial White environments. Multiple monoracial suggests that these participants engaged with individuals across Black and White racial boundaries, but that these boundaries rarely intermix. Multiracial/biracial are environments where the participants preferred diverse social networks or were exposed to environments comprised of both Blacks and Whites, or individuals from other racial and ethnic heritages.

Table 7

Theme: Social Networks

Theme	Subtheme	Example of significant statements
Social Networks	<i>Monoracial Black</i>	<p>“I would show up as the new girl at the school and inevitably it was the Black girls that would see me and call me out and take me under...”</p> <p>“I went through this period of time where I had hardly <i>any</i> White friends...”</p> <p>“I become very active in a number of Black and/or racially-affiliated organizations on campus...”</p>
	<i>Monoracial White</i>	<p>“For us, we adapt really easy to our situations. Um, it helps when you have my mom's side who is completely White...”</p> <p>“...they saw me sticking with just the White kids in school 'cause I didn't know them. So I was (laugh) one of <i>those</i> ones.”</p> <p>“Most of my friends were White ‘cause most of the people in my neighborhood that I grew up with were White.”</p>
	<i>Multiple monoracial</i>	<p>“I had two distinct sets of peer groups [in high school].”</p> <p>“My father and most of his friends were African American men from the South. And my mom’s friends were all White ladies. And so, I’m very comfortable with Black men and White women.”</p>
	<i>Multiracial / Biracial</i>	<p>“... a lot of my friends were biracial, 'cause you know how it is. We kinda graft to each other. We find each other!”</p> <p>“I wanted to just kind of broaden my community. I didn't want it just to be, just this learning community of all these students of color...”</p>

Each participant expressed the type of social networks he/she preferred to engage in. However, when describing these networks, few participants followed the same trajectory from adolescence through adulthood. Consequently, reporting the results into neatly fitted subthemes eliminated the substance of each participant's journey. Therefore, the decision was made to report the results in a way that allows for a description of the evolution of each participant's social network across time.

Dell. Dell, who has a White mother and a Black father, was born and raised in the same community he lives in today. A predominately Black community, it is the community that he loves and it is the community where he has chosen to raise his family. Most importantly, it is the community that he carries an inherent connection to and responsibility for. "I grew up in [this community]. That's where my friends' sphere was and my circle of friends was in [this community]." He shared that where he grew up was a significant piece of how his identity developed. Unlike the other participants, Dell was the only respondent who grew up in a predominately Black monoracial environment. This distinction explains his strong racial and cultural background and the assurance of his place within the Black community.

Andrea. Andrea was raised in the same city as Dell but in a neighborhood that was racially diverse. "We had Blacks, Whites, Native Hawaiians, Native Americans, and so you really didn't call anybody out of their name (laugh). I think that's unique to [my city] cause [it is] fairly segregated." Growing up Andrea had a diverse array of friends and school environments. She maintained friendships with both Black and White peers. However, it was in high school when she started to think differently about race and began immersing herself with her Black peers. When asked why she started to explore this part

of herself she responded, “I had some Black male friends that [said], ‘You always hang out with too many White people. Why don’t you hang out with more brothers and sisters?’ So I started exploring that.” Andrea’s exploration continued into college where she attended a predominately White university only an hour from her home. Andrea did not view the campus as a gateway to a new world of diversity. Instead, she saw herself as one of the few. “By the time I reached college, I truly understood where I *fit* as a racial minority on a campus of 25,000 students.” A member of the marching band, she was one of six racial minorities among a 250 piece band. After experiencing *rush*—the process predominately White sororities on campus use to recruit new members—she realized how she fit in this college environment. Andrea was forthright and concise in how she felt about the rush process. “I called my mom and I’m like ‘I know you paid [but], I can’t do this anymore they’re freaking me out.’” Because of her experience she understood that she could not connect culturally with many of her White peers. As a result she did not waste any time finding the connections she needed to navigate this new landscape. In her paper on racial identity, Andrea shared:

I became very active in a number of Black and/or racially-affiliated organizations on campus including the Black student government, gospel choir, Racial Pluralism Action Team and University Programs Council. Membership in these organizations afforded me the opportunity to associate my identity as Black. I felt “accepted” and was viewed as being “part of the struggle” as I grew into my persona as an out-spoken, quasi-militant on campus.

In proclaiming the confidence she gained in her identity, she went on to state that “I felt completely at home in my ‘high-yella’ Black skin.”

Lisa. Lisa reflected on growing up as a young girl in California. Used to moving frequently, it became all too normal for her to become the “new girl” in school. What she found was that she received immediate acceptance by the Black girls:

I would show up as the new girl at the school and inevitably it was the Black girls that would see me and call me out and take me under... not that White girls would never reach out. I had little White friends too, but I just remember that bein' pretty obvious... And you know it's such a stereotypical phrase: We know our own.

For Lisa, being identified as, and accepted as, a viable member of this peer group contributed to her racial identification. What is not clear from her example is if her acceptance by the Black girls was due to her physical appearance. Although she did not express this directly, it could be assumed that when she pointed out that “we know our own,” that this was due in part to her physical appearance. One often enters into their ethnicity through their hair, facial features and/or skin tone. What her peers were communicating was that based on her appearance she looked like one of them and therefore would be accepted by them. Yet she also felt accepted by her biracial peers. Living in California, even in the 1960s and 1970s, was diverse and it was not uncommon for her to be surrounded by other biracial peers. She felt immediately connected to them. “A lot of my friends were biracial 'cause you know how it is. We kinda graft to each other. (laugh) We find each other!” Lisa’s experience across racial boundaries speaks to the dynamic racial intersections that biracial individuals experience. While she expressed that she did have “little White friends” she felt most comfortable and most accepted by those who looked like her and shared a similar cultural and racial experience. Furthermore, this acceptance was a message that she was socialized with growing up.

She explained that she was always told that “Black folks would far more accept a biracial person than White folks.” She admits that she does not know if that theory holds true today, but it certainly supported itself throughout her childhood and early adult experiences.

Today, Lisa prefers social networks that are multiracial. Her preferences might have changed because of her life experiences. For instance, immediately after her high school graduation, Lisa enlisted in the Air Force. It was through her experience in the Air Force that her social networks expanded by serving with men and women of different races, and being stationed overseas. Additionally, when she married her husband, a White pastor, she found herself planted in various communities across the Midwest that were either predominately White or multiracial. She expressed that some of her strongest relationships and best experiences were experienced in multiracial environments.

Derek. The son of a White mother and Black father, Derek spent most of his youth in San Diego. A self-proclaimed “military brat” he grew accustomed to different cultures. He was a part of a diverse circle of peers both in his neighborhood and school. “I had friends that were from all over. Teachers from the Philippines. I just was exposed to a lotta different cultures.” However, after his father retired from the Navy it was decided that the family would move back to their home state in the Midwest. Derek lamented having to leave not only a diverse community, but a community that provided ample opportunities to “get lost” in an environment that was full of nature, canyons, and the like. Upon moving to this new state he quickly recognized the lack of racial diversity. After initially struggling to adjust to being the “only one” in a small, rural, predominately

White town he and his family adapted. “For us, we adapt really easy to our situations. ...it helps when you have my mom's side who is completely White...”

Although comfortable being the only racial minority in his small town, Derek shared a different story describing the dissonance he initially experienced with his fellow Black peers while at college. Derek arrived at his small, private college ready to begin his career as an athlete in both soccer and track. An “easy-going” disposition, Derek has the ability to adapt to different social situations and invite people of all races into his circle of influence. However, the same acceptance was not immediately extended to him by his fellow African American peers:

I was the only Black out on the soccer team. Most of the Black people at [my school] were on the football team and also on track. So, it was probably mostly just for a semester 'cause they didn't really know me 'cause I stuck with the soccer group so they saw me sticking with just the White kids in school 'cause I didn't know them. So I was (laugh) one of *those* ones. I did track also so once second semester hit, all those type of sly, off-handed jokes kinda just stopped 'cause they knew who I was. I'll say mainly it was probably 'cause of their perception of what they saw. I understand. You see, probably the one Black guy at the school not hanging out with any of you...that you guys don't know. And you see him with nothing but this small group of White people. I can understand their perception of it.

Derek experienced what Rockquemore and Brunisma (2008) call *push* and *pull* factors. When “individuals located within particular types of social networks, may feel pulled toward one racial identity option because of positive experiences with one group and/or may feel pushed away from another racial identity because of negative experiences” (Rockquemore and Brunisma, 2008, p. 61). This experience could have easily pushed Derek to dissociate with Black students. However, he demonstrated empathy and patience. He understood the perception he was portraying and did not

condemn the Black students' suspicions. Instead, he knew that once a relationship was developed they would come to change their minds about him.

Austin. Similarly to Derek, Austin experienced similar push and pull factors when he started his academic career at a large Midwestern public university. Coming into this new environment, Austin's ability to adapt to different racial groups was tested. When he arrived at the university, he was placed into a learning community comprised of racial minority students; the majority of whom were African American. Many of the African American students came from the same city and even attended many of the same high schools. They shared common social, academic, and cultural experiences. Austin on the other hand, arrived from a midsized city from a neighboring state. Austin, the son of a White mother and Black father, was used to being one of the few Black students in his school and community. Yet, despite being the "only one", he found his racial identity to be an advantage:

I'd say with my peers the fact that I was half Black was almost like it worked to my advantage 'cause it seemed like it was something that they were intrigued by and it seemed like something that they were interested in.

Although Austin had positive experiences with his White peers, it did not "pull" him from identifying as Black. But it was not until college that he began to question his identity and how he "performed" race. Austin admitted that at the time he was familiar with the dominant White culture and had fewer interactions with African Americans. This distance however did not cause him to question his Black identity. But once he was thrust into an unfamiliar environment with closely knitted Black students, the internal questioning began. Austin provided an eloquent explanation of the dissonance he experienced and the struggle for acceptance that ensued:

...a lot of the students had already pre-established relationships. And a lot of them were Black students. And so, just growing up in an environment where *I* was the only Black person and now I was in this place where I was living with others who had grown up with other Black students all their lives... I mean, I felt almost insecure (laugh) in my Blackness...

Reflecting on this experience, Austin was able to come to an understanding of what was occurring within him:

I was in a new environment and I was just tryin' to kind of build my nest and get comfortable with it. And I made friends with these individuals. And after while, just getting to know them I was able to find the ones who actually knew me and wanted to get to know me, and I was able to let my guard down a little bit and just be myself and a part of me wanted to be able to bring out maybe this side of me that could be perceived more as Black.

He went on to explain that while he began to feel a level of comfort with his new peer group and environment, he sensed that he needed peer groups beyond this network:

I wanted to just kind of broaden my community. I didn't want it just to be this learning community of all these students of color that I was with. I wanted to kind of expand it a little bit, so I got involved in more areas. So I joined a campus ministry. And so this was another place where I began to develop community and make friendships with people... I was in multiple communities and was finding more of a balance in the two. And so, eventually [I was] able to kinda get away from that need to change myself when I'm around this group of students 'cause they knew who I was after awhile and it just, there wasn't any pretending after awhile. It was just like...I'm myself. I grew up from Pueblo. I'm mixed. It works.

Much like Lisa, Austin's experience reflects his interest in surrounding himself in multiple, diverse communities. While he found comfort and acceptance in Black and White communities on campus, today he prefers to be surrounded by communities that are racially integrated. "I'd say the more diverse the environment, I'm more comfortable." When asked why he prefers a racially and ethnically diverse environment

he explained that he is able to “share cultural differences.” To illustrate, he described what he experiences within his church community:

...you’re communicating with people who’ve never seen or been in a Black service. We’re able to share this portion with them and then it gets really interesting and they may come from a more traditional background and we’re able to kinda show those experiences and I find it’s more enlightening.

Ethel. Like Austin, Ethel went through an evolving process of developing her social networks. Adopted as an infant by African American parents, Ethel was not aware of her racial identity until she was 25 years of age. “I didn’t *know* how to identify because I knew that I was not African-American completely. But I didn’t know what I was. I thought, as many of my friends did that I was, um, Latin derivative...” Unlike the other participants, Ethel’s situation presented unique circumstances. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) argue that “racial identities hinge on the interactional process of presenting an identity, having that identity recognized by others, and experiencing either validation or rejection” (p. 74). This process is more confounded when one is unaware of their genetic racial composition. Ethel’s experience is an example of the complexity that occurs when one’s genetic racial inheritance is unknown. To complicate matters even more, although her adoptive parents were both African American, the neighborhood she lived in was predominately White:

[The] neighborhood I lived in, there wasn’t a lot of interaction [with non-whites]. ...my parents tried to keep us involved in things like [the] Black student activities booster club. And my dad was involved in the ³Masonic Lodge, my mom was in Eastern Stars, but still peripheral involvement with our peers.

Ethel’s peer group as an adolescent was largely White because her circle of influence was

³ Masonic Lodge & Eastern Stars are both Black fraternal organizations.

her neighborhood. “Most of my friends were White ‘cause most of the people in my neighborhood that I grew up with were White...” Her exposure to diverse populations was limited to her extended family:

...our exposure to diversity was within family, and that was challenging sometimes because, [it] meant that our cultural experience was a little bit different because we kind of got acculturated with the students we went to school with and the kids in our neighborhoods. And, sometimes that was awkward because it was at a time when things were still kind of awkward racially.

It was not until junior high when a Black girl her age moved in across the street that she became friends with someone who was not White. “...that made a difference for me because there was someone I could spend time with, hang out with that was close to my own age, an African-American family, a positive role model, positive *peer* model to interact with.” Although she did not express this directly, the sentiment was that Ethel longed for someone who looked like her and her adoptive family. Her new friend fulfilled this desire.

Although this friendship brought new experiences for Ethel there was still an underlying dissonance between how she identified and this new found racial and cultural exposure. As a protective measure, Ethel “led dual identities.” According to Kich (1992) it is not uncommon for biracial children, in their struggle for acceptance, to maintain separate lives. Often times the separation occurs between friends and family. In this instance, the lines were drawn between Ethel’s peer groups. “...we spent time together, did things together, went places, shared music, conversation, interests that were different than what I shared with my other friends.” The separation between her Black and White friends persisted throughout high school as she attempted to resolve where she “fit.”

Although it is not uncommon for mixed race individuals to maneuver amongst multiple

monoracial environments (Renn, 2004), many do so as a result of developing and maintaining a healthy racial identity. However, this was not the case with Ethel. At this point in her development, mostly because she was unaware of her racial identity, she was still exploring and was not yet able to resolve the dissonance she was experiencing at this point in her young life.

Similar to Austin, it was in college that a different experience emerged for Ethel. When she arrived at the university she was exposed to “different people who came from different places and a lot more diversity.” “I was like, ‘Wow!’” This gave her an opportunity to immerse herself with her Black peers. This is significant because prior to arriving on campus, Ethel bought into the stereotype that Black students were not smart. This was part of the reason she disassociated herself with many Black students during junior high and high school. Therefore, she often practiced what Khanna and Johnson (2010) call *selective disclosure* – “selectively revealing and/or concealing particular racial identities to others” (p. 387). She shared:

I remember growing up and having a lot of friends who, particularly as I got in middle school and high school, did not know that my parents were Black. And so they didn't know what I was. And many of them had some really strong biases and, and so I remember sometimes it was this secret that I didn't want people to know.

Arriving at the university however dismantled her own views and stereotypes about the culture she inherently felt connected. She recalls feeling as though “somebody lied to me. Because you can be Black and be smart! I’m no exception to any rule!” As a result of her immersion into her racial background she went through a stage where she rejected other racial groups, particularly Whites. She admits that she “became angry.” “I went through this period of time where I had hardly *any* White friends, and was really a little

bit angry.”

Brian. Brian grew up in a predominately White, working class neighborhood. When he attended middle school he “loosened up” and realized that “there was a lot more diversity in my neighborhood.” It was in middle and high school that his network expanded to include a more diverse, multicultural peer group. While he had White and Mexican friends, he felt most comfortable with his Black male peers. He explained his preference by sharing that “my father and most of his friends were African American men from the South. All my mom’s friends were all White ladies. And so, I’m very comfortable with Black men and White women.” Brian felt comfortable amongst distinct monoracial groups, but unlike Ethel did not attempt to conceal his racial identity from his peers. Brian did however keep his distance from White males. “I was distrustful of White men. I was afraid I was gonna hear, ‘My mom don’t want me playin with niggers.’” His distrust was warranted. At an early age it was not uncommon for Brian to hear the word “nigger” used in his presence or directed at him. He recalled two specific childhood memories when he was awoken to the divisiveness of this word:

My earliest memory as a child was hearin' somebody on the CB say, "The only good nigger is a dead nigger." And seein' how it enraged my father, because a neighbor said it. I remember in fifth grade, my friend...he had a slumber party over the weekend. And on Monday, all the kids were talkin' about it. And I was like, "Well, how come I didn't get invited?" He said, "My mom don't want me playin' with niggers."

From these experiences, Brian understood at an early age that associating with “his own kind” would cause less anguish. “I didn’t have to worry about [Black] parents tellin’ ‘em they couldn’t play with me because I was Black.” His distrust also originated from a painful family experience. Brian’s family was cut off from his mother’s family

because she married Brian's father. Brian shared a gripping and distressing story about the discrimination and racism that permeating throughout his extended family:

When my grandfather died, my mom asked us to go to the funeral, me and my brother. There was gonna be a small memorial service just for family. My mom asked me, and I had really mixed emotions. I love my mom. I wanted to be there for my mom at her time of loss, but I didn't feel a sense of loss at all because I had never met him. She asked my brother. And my brother said, "I didn't know the ⁴cracker. I ain't goin' to the cracker's funeral." Well, that hurt my mom really bad. And so I decided to go then. **That** part was the most painful, difficult thing I've done in my life. So I guess...from that aspect, this is a part of that biracial piece that did have an impact on me. I wouldn't have had this experience if I didn't have a Black dad and a White mom. So I went to the funeral. And my grandmother was gonna be there, and I actually went with my uncle and the woman who is now my wife. And I was really nervous because it was gonna be the first time I was gonna be in the same room with my biological maternal grandmother. And she ignored me and never made eye contact with me. Um, never had a conversation with her. And I got through **that** part...you know the greeting room and the reception with her not makin' eye contact, pretend like I didn't exist... But when we got into the little room and it was opportunities for people to speak and hear my cousins, who all lived in other states, talk about what a great grandfather he had been...you know, fishin' trips and baseball games and birthdays. And I lived in the same city with the guy and never met him. **That** was tough to take. And so I just excused myself from the whole situation. Umm...but **that** was one of the most painful thing I've ever gone through was that experience at my grandfather's funeral.

Brian shared that he came to a place where he forgave his grandparents and would have been open to reconciling with them. Unfortunately, because of his grandmother's death, the hope for reconciliation never occurred. Despite these experiences, Brian admitted that through the years he has let his guard down when it comes to his feelings about White men. This might be due in part to his willingness to forgive his grandparents, his decision to fall in love with and marry a White woman, and/or an experience he had with

⁴ Racial epithet for White or European Americans

an elderly White woman from his home town; a stranger who offered him a gift of grace and reconciliation.

Due to a medical condition Brian had to take a leave of absence from college for one year. When he returned, problems ensued with his financial aid. Then, a woman unknown to him, stepped in:

...a woman paid for me to finish my undergraduate degree. She paid for my tuition. The only stipulation was that I keep my GPA at a certain level and that I have lunch with her. And so, I met her for lunch and we hit it off like you couldn't believe. And so, after that first meeting, I'd still go by and see her from time to time. We'd talk, you know. She had been an educator and I was goin' to be a teacher and after one of those visits I said, "You know, I was kinda scared to meet you 'cause I never knew my grandparents 'cause they didn't like the fact that I was Black. And so I thought you was gonna feel the same way about me." And she said...she was really feisty. She said, "That's OK. I'll be your grandmother now." And then she took me around the nursing home and introduced me to the people as her grandson. I guess at that point, though, I had to realize, OK, I had to let go of that prejudice because...that prejudice was gonna keep me from havin' a really great *life-changing* relationship! And so, I realized that my prejudice was based upon what most prejudice is based, on fear. I realized that, yeah, my grandparents felt that way, but not all old White people do. And so I had to let that prejudice go.

Devin. Devin's multicultural environment contributed significantly to the racial makeup of his peer and social networks. Previously, it was discussed that his parents had a home that "always [had] a lotta diversity around the house." He explained that growing up in San Diego was unique to the state he currently resides in:

...it was real diverse. Most of my friends, like one of my good buddies, I thought he was half Filipino, half Black. But I just found out that he's only a quarter Black, that his dad was half...you know, was biracial. I never knew that because his dad looks black. I had another friend who was French and Creole. He used to call it, but he was light skinned. Growin' up, it was always that somebody was mixed with somethin'. It was just different out there.

Focusing on dating, Devin described the acceptance his family had for people of all types of ethnicities and races:

I think the part that was influenced by my family was accepting others and who you can date. Like, they never put any restrictions you know, no one ever turned their nose up if I brought a Mexican girl home or somethin'...

Today his peer group is comprised of mostly Black men. He explained that it is “not by design...we just kind of found each other.”

Appearance. When examining racial identity the influence of skin color, hair texture, and other facial features are difficult to ignore because they communicate our identity to others (Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2008). However, what is communicated is not always easily defined. Everyone, regardless of racial identity must confront the issue of their appearance. One’s appearance is an interpretative signal; allowing us to place others into categories. What makes this view more conspicuous for biracial persons is that they are frequently asked, “What are you?” This question signals confusion and an inability to categorize and make sense of the person’s identity. Furthermore, it is often through one’s appearance that he or she “enters” into their race or ethnicity. It serves as a source of personal and social acceptance. For instance, Andrea describes the freedom she felt when she embraced her natural hair style. She admitted that she went through a period of her life when she was never comfortable with her hair. She describes the exhausting process she went through to keep her hair straight:

A lot of [my evolving] was centered around my hair. I was a swimmer, so I would put on four different swim caps so that if my hair was straight it would stay straight. But probably around junior year in high school I really started wearing it curly and didn’t pull it back into a pony tail and worry about what people thought. And, it was liberating.

Central to the experiences of the participants is the notion that their physical appearance creates confusion. Because of this confusion, all participants had to respond to the question, “What are you?” All shared that they had the experience of being misidentified racially and ethnically. The term “confusion” was not selected to suggest that the participants were confused. Quite the opposite is true. Instead, it was chosen to demonstrate the confusion that others attempted to impose on them whether through misidentification or stereotyping. Table 8 includes examples of significant statements for the theme, *appearance* and its related subtheme: identity confusion: “What are you?”

Table 8

Theme: Appearance

Theme	Subtheme	Example of significant statements
Appearance	<i>Identity confusion: “What are you?”</i>	<p>“I was not confused about my background...”</p> <p>“If you guys ever have kids, you know, the kids will be confused...”</p> <p>“...Black people can't get married '[to Whites] cause what about the kids?’”</p> <p>“...people don't know what the heck I am.”</p> <p>“Well, kids at school are always askin' me, 'What are you?' And I would say, 'I'm human.’”</p> <p>“I always know when the question's coming and I'm always amused by the way they dance around asking me.”</p>

Identity Confusion: “What are you?” Andrea described how her physical features created confusion for others but not necessarily for herself. She wrote, “my light complexion, thin lips, and smaller nose (minus the kinky hair) presented a picture of someone who was not quite White but was also not entirely Black.” Confused by her appearance, it was not uncommon for the White students at her university to be perplexed by her identity:

I hated that people just stared when you’re walking back and forth to class... “dude stop staring at me. If you really have a question come and ask me...” I hated that. Especially all those little folks from farm towns...just come and ask. Stop staring.

Rarely feeling confused because of his racial heritages, Dell was all too familiar with the prevailing stereotype that often surrounds children of interracial relationships:

You probably heard it come up – you *had* to – where people would talk about interracial relationships and they’d say, “Oh, the kids. They’re just gonna have it so hard. They’re gonna struggle with identity.” And I’m like, “You dummy. *Every* kid struggles with identity.”

He went on to explain, in depth, that his confusion with identity had little to do with race:

[Growing up] there was never a time where I felt not Black by Black people or I felt not Black enough. And even if I did, I wouldn't give a crap because there's never—and this goes back to my parents—there's never a time in my life where I didn't feel absolutely and phenomenally awesome. ...there were times where I really had trouble, like when I went from sixth grade to seventh grade where my whole identity shifted. I had these big glasses. I was a nerd. Had an Afro and got grief on that. But it was nothin' to do with race. It was always something else. And that never affected my fundamental belief that I was just outstanding, which I can only attribute to something my parents put in me when I was young.

Brian also pointed to the misconception that biracial children would be burdened with a life of identity confusion:

My mom used to tell me that the early question was, "Well...Black people can't get married '[to Whites] cause what about the kids? They'll be confused and all that." I mean my own self-identity questions, I don't think were great and compounded by the fact that I was biracial any more than they would have been by bein' Black or any other non-marginalized group in this country.

An interesting response came from Devin. Despite growing up in a diverse community, the misconception of being confused was generally accepted. "I would hear all the time people sayin' 'mixed kids are confused.' And so I would hear people tryin' to impose that on me." Devin explained that this belief was particularly prominent when dating. "When I was interested in females who were not Black...they would always [say] 'If you guys ever have kids, you know, the kids will be confused...'" When asked if he ever felt confused he was adamant that the assumption made him want to affirm both sides of his racial heritage. "I found it givin' me more resolve to claim both sides, you know, that I'm Black and White. I felt like if anybody tried to push me one way or the other, it made me dig my heels in more."

All the participants had to respond to the question, "What are you?" Although Devin personally identifies as biracial, he understands that he is perceived differently by others. As an adult, he understands the power of perception and has become more adaptable in how he responds to "What are you?" He shared:

Now I sort of understand that just for ease of conversation, if they need to see me as Black, then that's cool I understand that no matter how I describe myself, people are gonna see me a certain way. So it doesn't do any good to argue. I already know how I identify myself. It doesn't do any good to try to convince them to see me differently because I don't feel like that's my job. I think as I've gotten older I've become more flexible with how people describe me because, quite honest with you, I get called Mexican. I got called Puerto Rican. Since I've come out here I've been called Egyptian, Iraqi...

Similar to the other participants Devin is not offended by the question and welcomes it.

“It never bothered me, to be honest with you. It always was cool that they was interested to ask me. And that they felt comfortable to ask me. I've never got offended unless it was somebody tryin' to be offensive.” When asked how she felt when asked, “What are you?” Andrea responded:

It didn't bother me as much than if they stared. Even if they don't know how to ask it and they ask the question, I'm pretty straight forward so, I really don't like sugar coating in any way. So if you don't know how to ask that question, then I'm cool with you just walking up and asking.

Dell also understands the complexity that his physical features present to others. When asked if someone ever questioned his race, he admitted that he gets asked the “What are you question” (or that it is at least implied) now more than when he was younger:

...people don't know what the heck I am. I used to have hair and I used to have a longer nose (laugh). And so people used to think I was Puerto Rican...all that stuff. Now that I have no hair I had to have nose surgery from boxing and it's flatter, people misinterpret me for Middle Eastern, or some other form. Rarely do people come up to me and say, ‘Hey, I know you're Black.’ Or they may say somethin' like, ‘I didn't realize you were Black until you started talking.’ So even in the context of race, I'm malleable.

When asked if he was bothered by the misidentifications he experienced he stated, “Not at all. People can assume what they wanna assume. I mean, how would they know?”

Like Dell, Derek has a racially ambiguous appearance. His hair texture is relatively fine and his facial features could allow for him to pass for a race other than Black. He admits to “passing” as whatever group he is with:

I have passed for Hispanic, Asian...um, pretty much anything I can be a part of. I was just in Haiti and the guy who was hosting us was like, “So, do you have Hispanic [blood]?” I'm like, “No. Not an ounce of it.”

He went on to share how he was perceived after 9-11:

It was interesting after 9-11 just to see how many people came up to me going, "Are you Middle Eastern?" "I'm OK with it if you are! But are you?" I'm like, "Sorry, folks. You're gonna have to head a little bit farther south to get where I'm getting my culture from. But I'll go with it!" It was entertaining the very first time I'd gotten [mistaken for] Middle Eastern. I was, working at Hy-Vee in the dairy department...little old lady comes up to me while I'm stocking a shelf going, "Are you Middle Eastern?" And from that point on, I've gotten it a ton of times.

In general, Derek is laid back. He takes the same lighthearted approach when questioned about his race. He shared that when he is with his mother is not uncommon for strangers to assume and/or question if he is adopted. His family has an "old joke" they refer to when these instances occur: "Well, we're half as White as you are but a thousand times more Black." He admits that when he returns to his native California the question, "What are you?" is more prevalent. He credits this to the diversity that is inherent to the state. He explained that it is not uncommon for him to visit a shop and have a store keeper ask about his nationality. Staying true to his easy going disposition, he admits that the question does not bother him. He sees the asker as, "just curious." "[The question] never really bothered me. I don't know if it's just watching our parents' interactions with other people. Nothing's ever seemed to really bothered them, at least in our viewpoint." Lisa recalled being questioned about her identity at an early age:

I said, "Mom, what am I?" She said, "Well, honey, what do you mean?" And I said, "Well, kids at school are always askin' me, 'What are you?' And I would say, 'I'm human! Haahaa!' And they'd go, 'No, really, what are you?' 'Well, I'm a girl!'" And I'm tellin' this to my mother and she realizes, "OK, I know," *she* knew what they meant. And I said, "Well, I don't know what else to tell 'em!" And she said, "Well, honey, in America, if you're one-sixteenth Black, you're Black!" And she said, "And your dad's Black. So you're Black."

When pastoring a church in a rural community in a Great Plains state, she observed that the White parishioners were bold when questioning her race. Because there was a stronger Hispanic presence in the area, it seemed easier for them to assume she was Mexican. "...in [the small town we pastored in] they thought I was a Mexican. And they even joke, 'Can we just say you're Mexican...?' Like Derek, Lisa tends to have a gracious and forgiving disposition towards others. She loves people and is always willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. But even the aforementioned experience led her to want to strive to be in the comforts of a multicultural environment.

Austin explained that he views the question as an opportunity to educate others and to build relationships:

...number one I am a people person so I like to engage people. And I feel like if they're asking me a question like that, then they feel comfortable enough to ask me that question and knowing that I won't fire back at them because I'm offended. I do find it interesting that I do have these multiple races that I represent. It's something I like to share.

Similar to Austin, Ethel views the question as a teaching moment. She admitted that when she was younger she used to dislike the question since she tried her best to "hide" her identity and the identity of her parents. But now that she's reached a level of self-acceptance, she welcomes the question. She realizes that because of her racial ambiguity, people are "more likely to ask *real* questions...I appreciate that." She went on to share:

And even when people say, "Who are you?" I always know when the question's coming and I'm always amused by the way they dance around asking me. That I find interesting. But then when they do ask, I enjoy telling the story... so I like that question today. I appreciate the opportunity to educate, to inform, to share that story with people, to open up the opportunity, because I find that, even when they do know, they ask...they ask more questions. I think finding that I am a little bit of everything—not everything, but a little bit of a lotta things—um, gives people permission to feel like they can ask.

She also acknowledges that the question provides an opportunity for her to be reflective about her identity. This supports the notion that for many individuals identity formation is a continuous process. It serves not only as an educating tool for the questioner but also for the recipient. "...you still revisit back. Who am I? Why am I? What makes me different? All of those self-validating or not so self-validating experiences. You go through all of that."

Although Brian is not often asked the question, he did share an example when he was questioned and how he was surprised because the suggestion came from African Americans:

The funniest "what are you" question was [when] I was with another biracial cat. Dad's Black, mom's White. We were at a conference in Chicago, and we were at a table with older African-Americans. And they said to my friend, "So are you Puerto Rican? Are you Latino?" And he said, "No, I'm Black. Dad's Black, mom's White." Oh, OK. And they said, "But now *you* are, *you're* a Latino, right?" And I was like, "No, I'm same." And so, that was just funny 'cause usually, we always had this joke that Black people *know*. Maybe our hair was funny that day.

Identity work. The literature on racial identity defines identity work within the context of *passing*. Passing is a strategy used to conceal or cover the stigma attached to one's race (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). In order to pass, individuals take on a range of activities that include: (1) procuring or arranging physical settings/props, (2) cosmetic face work/arrangement of personal appearance, (3) selective association with other individuals/groups, and (4) assertion of personal identity through verbal construction or identity talk (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Items three and four of Snow and Anderson's passing criteria fit within the context of the present study. For the purposes of this study,

identity work does not stand for passing since this was not a theme that emerged from the data. I define identity work as the effort, production, and achievement in how one comes to understand their identity. Much like a job description, it is an account of how the participants “work” through the conflicts of their identity choices. Table 9 contains the theme clusters that emerged. Identity work and its subthemes, *identity claims* and *being biracial means...*, demonstrate how the participants talk about and came to understand their racial identity.

Although the participants’ environment and appearance was significant in their identity development, what is clear is that each participant is an *active agent* in shaping their identity and took responsibility for his or her identity choices. For instance, despite “knowing that he was always Black”, college proved to be a time when Dell went through the process of intellectually examining what it meant to be Black and mixed race:

[M]y period of really addressin' that was in college where you go through this very controlled high school environment into this very open space environment [with] a lot of accountability and burden. And then you try to define yourself and define new freedoms that's happening at this particular period of time. And for me, it was a lot of tryin' to figure out...not the fact as to whether or not I was Black, but what that *meant* in the context of a broader environment. There was a period where I used to argue with people. "I'm biracial. That's what I am." You know, not saying that I wasn't Black, but the fact that I should be able to identify if I so choose as a mixed person.

Table 9

Theme: Identity Work

Theme	Subtheme	Example of significant statements
Identity work		<p>“...there's no amount of white you could act for white people to ever consider you White.”</p> <p>“...I used to argue with people. ‘I'm biracial. That's what I am.’ You know, not saying that I wasn't Black, but the fact that I should be able to identify if I so choose as a mixed person.”</p> <p>“There's really no in-between. I'm Black. When I looked out, what was reflected back to me was that I was a Black man, no matter how White my mom was.”</p>
	<i>Identity claims</i>	<p>“...if people ask me what I am I say I'm biracial but if you ask me whom I identify I would tell you I'm Black.”</p> <p>“...I'll choose Black 'cause I know that there's no way I could put White.”</p> <p>“...technically I can mark either one or just one. But, if I mark just one, I'm...disavowing the other half of me.”</p> <p>“So on paper, I'm Black. But in person, I'm multiracial.”</p>
	<i>Being biracial means...</i>	<p>“It means different things at different places.”</p> <p>“We can also see the other side.”</p> <p>“Pragmatically it means that I have two cultures represented in me.”</p>

He went on to explain that in his opinion, “everybody goes through identity formation.” But that many people get “stalled in [their] personal evolution” and as a result we do not evolve past being stuck and allow it to “dictate our activities and our destination.” In his effort to not “get stuck” he had to think about what it meant to be Black, in a society that

has marginalized his race. He asked, “What did that make *of* me?” “What pieces of that do I accept?” “What pieces do I let go to become, to continue to evolve and approve and become a more self-determined person?”

Physical appearance emerged again as a mechanism for how participants made sense of their identity. Dell articulated the significance of his physical appearance:

...my definition of a Black person is if the KKK was ridin' down your block, and they started hangin' niggers, are you gonna get hung or are you not? My social reality because my skin and because of the history of America, I am perceived a certain way. And that is real.

Similar to Dell, Brian understood how his physical appearance and his environment influenced his identity choices. “There's really no in-between. I'm Black. When I looked out, what was reflected back to me was that I was a Black man, no matter how White my mom was.” In working through his identity choices, Brian shared that at an early age he had a choice to make. He wrote:

I felt pressure to choose one or the other. For my mental and emotional health, I chose to be Black. People have called me “nigger” but no one has ever called me a “cracker.” I learned early that my mom’s racial background did not entitle me to membership in the privileged, dominant White group. My father’s Black racial heritage placed me in a group that had second-class status socially, economically, and politically.

Devin recalled a period in his life when he explored his identity, and like Brian and Dell, felt that he had to make an identity choice. His exploration took place not in his native San Diego, but in Philadelphia. While in Philadelphia he identified as Black because he was bused to an all-White school. While attending this school, “it became apparent that I was Black and I was never gonna be nothin' more than Black.” But

identifying exclusively as Black was temporary. He explains how the hip-hop music of the day transformed his views about race:

A Tribe Called Quest came out and Public Enemy. Although Public Enemy was my favorite rap group at the time, I really didn't identify with the whole White devil type of thing. It just never made sense to me. It was like, if my mom is White, how could I say those things? Or how could I even believe that? Like it just didn't register.

Devin then tells a story of when he enacted his resolve to claim both sides of his racial heritage:

But I did do pushups in the military because of that thing where they had us fillin' out a census form and it said, "Choose one." And I choose both. The drill sergeant was goin' through it, and he called me up and said, "You need to fix this. You need to choose one." And I said, "I'm not choosin' one. I'm both." And he said, "No, you're Black." And I was like, "No, I'm Black and White. Look." He was like, "You're black! Change it!" And I said, "No." And then he thought I was bein' smart so he made me do pushups in front of the whole auditorium. So I did the pushups, and then he ended up changin' it 'cause I refused to change it.

With the guidance of her White mother, Lisa's, identity work came at a young age. She understood that she should be "Black and proud", and she accepted how she was perceived within the Black and multiracial community where she was raised. But while in junior high she admitted that she struggled making a decision about her identity. "I felt like, 'I have to make a decision. I have to choose my Black identity or my White identity.' And I think that went on and off through junior high..." Just as popular music played a role in how Devin came to understand race, Lisa used language as a way to make sense of her identity. "I went through a phase—like a lotta my biracial friends—we're gonna talk ghetto, talked Ebonics all the time..." According to Khanna and Johnson (2010), a function of identity work is to use language as an "identity strategy."

It is not uncommon for biracial persons to use language to connect or disconnect with their Whiteness or Blackness (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). The researchers state that Whiteness is the use of standard English or better known as, “talking White.” Blackness is the use of Ebonics or “talking Black.”

For Lisa, the conflict to make a racial identity decision emerged again as a young adult, “I went through a phase of really havin' a major chip on my shoulder and really wantin' to make *sure* everybody knew that my identity was in my Blackness.” Just like Devin, her “major chip” was short-lived and the influence of her religious beliefs was significant in transforming her views:

I kinda grew outta that and just got a little more secure as I got closer with the Lord. You know, to be frank, it's not everybody's journey, but that was my journey. As my identity was more rooted in Biblical values and not racial values, I just got more secure. So, very proud of my heritage! But [its] not my first identity.

Austin explained that he understood he was always mixed and was aware of his parents' varying races. Yet, growing up in a predominately White and Hispanic environment, he did not refer to himself as biracial or mixed. Instead “I kinda naturally would claim the African-American side of me.” Austin further explains why he personally identifies as multiracial but when choosing demographic boxes on forms, he “always marked the African-American option.” It's usually the one that I predominantly associate myself with,” stated Devin. He justified his reasons by sharing, “I feel like it's the one I'm most representative of. If it's me clarifying to people, if it's interrelational, that's where I'm more inclined to share the multiple mixes. So on paper, I'm Black. But in person, I'm multiracial.”

Ethel's process of forming an identity was unique to the participants. Previously, it was discussed that she went through a period where she struggled through her identity work by using selective disclosure, maintaining dissonance between peer groups and family, and struggling for acceptance. But when Ethel met her biological parents she went through a process of reconciling her complicated experiences and emotions. She shares a moving description of what went on through her mind as she met her biological father for the first time:

One of the things that I did feel when I met [my father], I felt more angry after meeting him than I think in any other place in my life. He was a wonderful man, and we immediately clicked. We immediately connected. I never felt so much *like* someone. I never felt so...validated as a human being. I was like, "This is where I came from. I can spend time with this man. I know this is a part of who I am" because we were just kindred spirits. *But*, I walked away thinking, "OK, the world owes me." I was thirty-three at the time—thirty-three years of White privilege. Every single time anybody has ever used a derogatory term or carded me when they shouldn't have or suspected that I might be in their store because I was stealing instead of shopping. Or not waited on me because they assumed that I couldn't afford it or any of those things. *I* was angry at *all* of those things when I met him. And I thought, "You know what? I just want a photo ID of me and my father so I can carry it around and flash it to the whole world every time they throw one of those negative stereotypes in my face. I wanna say, "You know what? Here's my membership card." "I get privilege just like you. Leave me alone." Immunity is what I want. (laugh) But it doesn't work that way.

After meeting her biological parents, Ethel explained why it was important for her to identify as more than one race. "I really felt once I met them that I truly was a part of each of them."

Identity claims. Claiming a racial identity is fundamental to a biracial person's experience. All participants reached a level in their social and psychological development where they are confident in claiming an identity. Because of the array of

experiences and each participant's ability to reflect and process how they fit within society, they have done the identity work necessary to develop and claim their racial identity. Consequently, each has a sustained identity that is self-determined. Table 10 provides how each participant racially identifies personally, how they identified on the census, and how their identities would classify using Rockquemore and Brunnsma's (2008) biracial identity classification. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008) identified four classifications for Black/White biracial identity. The *singular identity* is when the individual chooses to identify as exclusively Black or white. The *border identity* is when the individual identifies as biracial. The *protean identity* is when the individual shifts between identifying as Black, White, or biracial. Finally, the *transcendent identity* is when the individual claims no racial identity.

Table 10

Participant Racial Identification

Pseudonym	Racial Identification	Census Identification	Biracial Identity Classification
Dell	Black	Black	Singular
Brian	Black	Black	Singular
Lisa	Black	Black	Singular
Andrea	Black Biracial	Black / White	Protean
Austin	Multiracial	Black	Protean
Derek	Biracial	Black / White	Border
Ethel	Biracial	Black / White	Border
Devin	Biracial	Black / White	Border

Andrea identifies herself as a biracial female. "My mixed-race background wedges me somewhere between my milky-white, Caucasian mother and root beer-brown African American father." She further explained the depth of her identity, "if people ask me what

I am I say I'm biracial, but if you ask me whom I identify, I would tell you I'm Black."

Despite labeling herself biracial and identifying with Black culture, on the 2010 Census Andrea identified as multiple races. When asked to explain her choice she stated, "It was the first time that I could actually do that... instead of being other." She shared why choosing multiple races was significant to her experience:

I guess that was another thing that I remember growing up. I already had test anxiety...still probably do. But to basically have to go onto an application of any sort of test, CAT test where you had to write White or Black or there was no 'other' for a long time. I was basically going to make one of my parents upset cause I want to do what the test says, it says mark one. What does that mean? Okay, I have to be either White or Black but I'm really not White but...and then I'd go with the one that I felt would be the most angry so, I'll just go ahead and pick White (chuckle) or sometimes it was Black. I probably have all kinds of different CAT tests that have White, Black...

Derek was quick to share that he identifies as "mixed" and explained that when given the opportunity he will always mark both the Black and White boxes when completing forms. He explained, "...technically I can mark either one or just one. But, if I mark just one, I'm...disavowing the other half of me." He attributes his decision to becoming more conscious of his racial heritage. "I think just more me being aware of it, going 'Yeah, I'm not looking at that half of me by not checking that box. Cause in reality I am both.'" His awareness came after he heard his parents share their family history:

...hearing my parents' story and just reading more up on things. It's just kind of silly just to put one, I mean (laugh), we're becoming a more blended culture as it is, why not, I mean, it's more of onus on, 'Come on U.S. Let's change with the times and stop having these stupid stereotyped (laugh) boxes for everything.'

What Andrea and Derek experienced is not uncommon to what biracial persons encounter. To choose one race over the other sends the message that one parent is being

chosen over the other. Consequently, the biracial person feels that their loyalty is being questioned (Kich, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

After her evolution, Lisa is secure in how she racially identifies. "...if people say, "What are you?" My first response is, "I'm Black." With a sense of humor, she elaborates on why she uses the term, Black and not African American:

Today as an adult I really have a disdain for political correctness so, I joke that I won't say I'm African American 'cause it's too many syllables (laugh) and I'm too busy. OK. Black. One syllable. Easy to say. Easy to remember. (laugh) That's all I have time for. (laugh) And I'm very proud of my heritage. But I disdain the political correctness that has come up through politics and culture.

How the racial information was going to be used was influential in how Devin and Ethel racially identify on documents. Previously, it was discussed that as he matured Devin was flexible in how he racially identified. While he identifies personally as biracial, he understands that others perceive him a certain way and he is okay with being identified as Black. His situational approach also applies to how he identifies on documents:

Whenever they give me an option to choose both, I choose Black and White. If they don't give me an option, I sorta look at the source. I'll choose Black 'cause I know that there's no way I could put White if they only give me one option. If I'm on a board or somethin' like that, I know that they want diversity, and it doesn't help them if I say I'm White. I mean, so I just kinda look at the source.

Ethel describes a similar approach when selecting racial boxes:

Today I identify usually as a multiracial or other or I check all the boxes that apply. Or I've have been known to say, "Well, what box do you need me to fill 'cause there's a few that I can fill. So you pick the one that you need the quota filled on today and I'll pick it." Because I kinda (laugh) have that attitude of...whatever. 'Cause you're gonna say I am whoever **you** say I am.

Being biracial means... Despite claiming a different racial identity and experiencing different ways of forming their identity, most participants articulated what it meant to be biracial. In this subtheme, some addressed the function of being biracial. For instance, Andrea explains that she views herself as a negotiator because of the objectivity she has acquired:

Most of the people that I know who are biracial they do tend to be more in touch with being more objective people. Um...yes we may take some strong stances on issues, community needs or whatnot, but we can also see the other side and I guess being biracial means that I have an obligation to sometimes act as an intermediary. Sometimes I've noticed that a number of us taken on that role anyway. Um...we're the ones that are trying to make the peace between others.

Derek feels that being biracial means obtaining and using a skill set that others might not inherently hold:

I actually get to see reactions a lot more. I love people watching and just seeing their reactions when I come in with different groups 'cause, honestly, it's a different reaction if I'm coming in with four or five of my friends that are Black compared to me coming in with a group that's all White, compared to me coming in solo. It's very entertaining just to see how people respond...

Derek is describing his ability to cue into others' emotions. Individuals who are skilled in this area are considered to have a high level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to examine one's own and others' feelings and emotions and use that information to manage complex social interactions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Because Derek has experience in managing complex racial interactions, it could be suggested that being biracial has given him the ability to detect the emotions of others and to use that information to solve complicated social interactions.

Some participants felt they experienced and understood the best of both racial worlds. Being biracial to Derek means receiving the "best of both worlds" and "I get to

learn a lot more about different cultures. Similar to Derek, Devin believes that being biracial provides an experience of life that is unique compared to what others experience.

Furthermore, he was “just happy to be both:”

I had always felt like it gave me a different outlook on life. It let me experience things that other people wouldn't experience. I mean, even though no one likes bein' called names and things like that, I think I always felt like it gave me sort of the best of both worlds type of thing, you know. I'd always looked at it that way.

Lisa had not considered what it meant to be biracial and seemed surprised by the question, “What does it mean to you to be biracial?” After some thought she responded:

Pragmatically it means that I have two cultures represented in me, you know. Well, and more than that, my mom bein' half Indian and half white. And then my dad bein' black. I'm really grateful. I felt like I kinda got the best of both worlds.

Some described a more philosophical view when explaining what it means to be biracial.

Staying true to his singular racial identity, when articulating what it means to be biracial,

Dell first wanted to make it clear that “the better question is ‘What does it mean to be, to be Black (laugh)... with a White mom?’” Dell understands how his identity has been

shaped by his environment and the sociohistorical context:

I'm someone that has come up through a fractured sociological system called America in which a whole history and legacy of oppression was not just in the attitudes of people, but codified into law and action. And that is something that I'm still living with the legacy of, that as a biracial person in America, even post-civil rights and during Obama. And so, that's what being biracial means to me. It means that I'm carrying on the legacy of our forefathers and looking at the growth that we've had in America, but also simultaneously still looking at the failure that we *have* in America and that I live within that reality.

Brian shares a similar point of view:

...[race] impacts my appearance but I really haven't thought of myself bein' biracial so much. I've always thought of myself as bein' African-American and

the implications of having one drop of Black blood and how what that's meant historically and what that means to me in my current reality. It's just...I'm Black with light skin.

Brian also made it clear that because of economic and political marginalization that African Americans experience, he has become distrustful of the biracial identity movement:

I'm a biracial person who's been very distrustful of the biracial movement. Um, when I was in high school and I learned about the Three-Fifths Compromise that anybody with a drop of Black blood is three-fifths of a person for purposes of legislative representation and so forth. I just became very suspicious. I know that politics is always racial and there's always a racial implication or political implication to race, and so I wasn't sure if the whole biracial movement was really an act of self-identification or a movement to redefine ourselves, versus some political entity to somehow then use that data to disenfranchise or marginalize African-Americans further. I wasn't a vocal opponent but I was not a supporter.

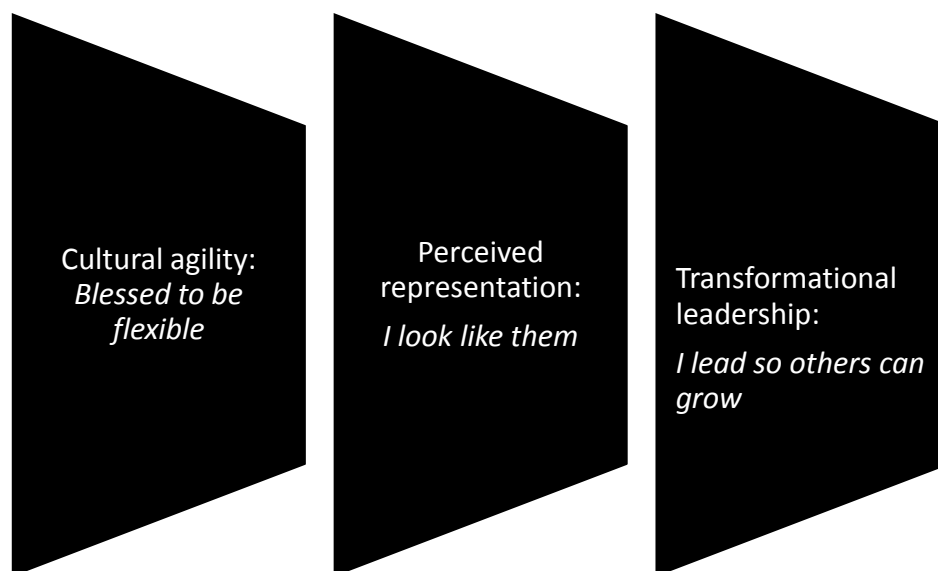
In summary, four themes emerged related to factors that influenced the participants' racial identity: family discourse, social networks, appearance, and identity work. Experiencing these factors demonstrate that all of the participants were engaged in actively processing and determining their identity, and what it means to themselves and others. In the end, all participants articulated a confident and secure racial identity, which will prove to be significant in how they experienced leadership.

The participants were eager to share a great deal of information about their racial identity development and experiences. However the breadth of information provided should not distract from the purpose of the present study, which is to describe how biracial leaders experience leadership. Now that the foundation for how the biracial leaders racially identify has been laid, the discussion will now move to the leadership results.

Transforming Leadership

From 16 transcripts, 90 significant statements in relation to the sub research question, “How does their racial identification influence their leadership experiences?” were identified. Three themes emerged: (a) *cultural agility: “Blessed to be flexible”*, (b) *perceived representation: “I look like them”*, and (c) *transformational leadership: “I lead so others can grow.”* The first two themes represent how the participants manage and view their racial identity within the context of leadership. One’s racial identity brings meaning to his or her leadership and has the power to harm or benefit their experiences. Universally, the participants were candid in sharing the advantages and disadvantages they experienced. The third theme, transformational leadership reflects the leadership style enacted by the majority of the participants. They shared how they perform leadership and their leadership values. Figure 7 displays the three themes that emerged.

Figure 7. Transforming Leadership Themes



Cultural Agility: “Blessed to be flexible”. In this theme the participants were able to navigate between different racial/ethnic groups and/or diverse professional settings regardless of their racial identification (e.g., singular, border, etc.). Cultural agility is the ability to adapt, understand, and respond to diverse environments and people. Table 11 contains examples of significant statements for the theme, *cultural agility: “Blessed to be flexible.”*

Table 11

Theme: Cultural Agility: “Blessed to be flexible”

Examples of significant statements

“I can kind of see both sides of the coin as opposed to just having one view point...”

“[Being biracial has] made me very effective at being able to engage multidimensional audiences.”

“I could fit in any of the communities, be it Black, White, Hispanic, Asian 'cause I pass for them all.”

“In a professional setting I feel like there’s a dual identity issue...”

“I can operate in a professional environment and speak a certain way and it not come off as odd or fake or phony...”

“[Students] might be more apt to connect with a side of me that's more for lack of a better term, more hip. And I can slide into that, and it's a natural part of me.”

For many of the participants navigating amongst differing communities and audiences was experienced with ease. Dell, a senior community development advisor for a large, national nonprofit, educates urban and rural communities in the areas of economic development. Specifically, his passion is to reduce the Black unemployment rate through Black entrepreneurship. He educates and empowers his community with

this message. Because of his role, he is the quintessential networker. He shares how being biracial allows for him to “transition” among diverse populations and that it has “blessed him to be flexible”:

It's made me very effective at being able to engage multidimensional audiences. I can go into the board room, and I can deal with any of them, any businessmen that we have, any president of any bank or any corporation, and I can go into the hood! And I can deal with them. So I think my biracial background has really benefitted me in the context of leadership, to be very adaptable and effective at communicating to multiple audiences.

Derek, a college athletic coach, had a similar view. “[Being biracial] helps me 'cause I could fit in any of the communities, be it Black, White, Hispanic, Asian 'cause I pass for them all. So I'll say that's the benefit...the skin tone and features, the marriage of that ...” Being able to adapt amongst different communities is significant since he recruits many high school athletes from these communities. Much like Derek, Austin, who holds a leadership position in a college admissions department at a large University, said that he is able to move “easily between, amongst the different communities 'cause I can relate to different groups pretty well.”

Because of her unique identity experience, Ethel took on the role of “chameleon” at an early age. As an adult she has a secure racial identity, yet admits that she still “likes the *insight* that being that chameleon person brings...” She discovered that she uses her racial identity to engage and educate others about cultural differences:

...there are times when you're in a group of people and they don't know who you are, and because they don't know who you are they assume that there's a possibility you could be a part of their group. I mean...when you're beige, I think people assume, this day and age, that, there's a possibility at least all or part of you, could belong in their group. And I think people are more disclosing. People

are more honest about their perceptions, their biases. They're more likely to ask *real* questions so I appreciate that.

Learning how to manage their bicultural identities was also a point of interest for some of the participants. As a professional speaker, writer, and pastor, Lisa explained that she is always aware of the perceptions of others. She describes the difference between professional talk versus Ebonics and the appropriateness of when to use each style:

I feel real strongly that when I'm speaking I wanna talk properly. But, when I'm at home, I'm so lazy. I'll let the Ebonics fly here and there. So, at home I am very secure in that identity... But when you're in public you don't throw that...

Similar to Lisa, in a professional setting, Ethel experiences a dual identity as it relates to professional and “common everyday language”:

...I think that's personified when you come from a cultural background that regardless of race, religion, or whatever influence, is different than the status quo...I think that you become bicultural more than anything. And so, that dual identity experience is more about that bicultural experience.

Devin, who once served as an executive director of a local non-profit for youth called it “code switching.” “I can operate in a professional environment and speak a certain way and it not come off as odd or fake or phony... And then, get around other people or be back at home and talk totally different.” When probed about the flexibility of being biracial, Austin shared that it allows him to connect with different people in different ways, particularly in professional settings where he might work with high school students one day and then University professionals the next:

...if I'm speaking with high school students, they might be more apt to connect with a side of me that's, for lack of a better term, more hip. And I can slide into that and it's a natural part of me. Or, I'm working with older people or alumni or

professors on campus or top faculty on campus, it may be packaged professionally...

Andrea attributes her biracial background with giving her the ability to be objective and to empathize with others. She explained how she practically applies her abilities:

I can kind of see both sides of the coin as opposed to just having one view point and not being able to understand or even think about someone else's experiences. I think it also helps you to be a bit more empathetic...

She goes on to explain that her “dual racial identity allows [her] to hold diversity in a more personal regard.” Andrea shared an example when her attempts to be objective and to “see both sides of the coin” were not welcomed by her African American colleagues. In addition to her role as a director at a community nonprofit agency, she is an ardent community volunteer. She has served as a board member for numerous organizations in her city. In this instance, she referred to an experience that occurred on a board comprised of mostly African Americans. She advocated for a more diverse board, one that would include individuals of different races including Whites. “I felt you have to look at the big scope of [our city]. You cannot have an all Black board to feel that you're effective. Especially when you're going to donors who don't look like you.” Her suggestions were met with opposition. The opposition was so strong that she resigned from the board. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. She lamented that some of her most challenging leadership experiences have been with other African American leaders:

... folks in general don't like to give up power, they'd much rather see you fail. Especially in [my city] because there are so few of us that are gaining attention because of good things that we've done, or good quality leadership skills that we possess.

Yet, Andrea understands why many African American leaders in this community struggle with an objective, independent voice. She explains that because there are so few Blacks in leadership positions they become “very self serving and end up being the gatekeepers towards advancement of others.” As a result they fail to “reach back and mentor younger professionals. Therefore, introducing another point of view, as objective as it might be, is viewed as a threat to the status quo.

Perceived representation: “I look like them.” In this theme some of the participants shared how they were representative of African Americans or people of color in their communities and/or professions. Because of the underrepresentation of leaders of color, the participants perceived themselves to be representative of African Americans. Although their biracial background allowed them to be adaptable across cultures, there was still an underlying message that they were perceived as Black and needed to be cognizant of that representation. Table 12 contains examples of significant statements for the theme, *representation: “I look like them.”*

For Dell, representing African Americans is not a perception. It is his reality. His personal and professional roles are intrinsically tied to his racial identity. He embodies his Black, singular identity through his work and the community he has chosen to live and serve. At his core, he believes he represents the type of leadership that is lacking in the Black community, “authentic, masculine, Black leadership.” He explained, “we have a greater need for leadership—Black, biracial, whatever you wanna put it. We have this huge leadership vacuum and that's where I fit in.” On the surface, one might conclude that Dell is putting his ego before the needs of his community. No so. He justifies his claim:

...that's not even bein' egotistical 'cause I'm not. I was never one of the guys that wanted to be the only one! I've always wanted to see this great community [of people] to mobilize, even if it's in an area or in a way that I disagree with. And they're just not there!

Table 12

Theme: Perceived Representation: "I look like them"

Examples of significant statements

"We have this huge [Black] leadership vacuum and that's where I fit in."

"...we wanna see people that look like us whether they're Black, biracial, or whatever!"

"I shape their minds on the minority situation..."

"...the good thing about [my city] is that when you *are* a minority and they see that potential, they jump all over it..."

"I'm hypersensitive to not *reinforcing* those stereotypes."

"I wanna be a great example, but I don't wanna live up to anybody's stereotype."

A number of the participants understood their significance as role models. In these instances, role modeling was needed to dismantle stereotypes or to empower others who "looked like them." Lisa was pleased when a biracial woman approached her after being hired at her current church:

"...she came up to me and said, 'You know, months ago I was prayin'. And I said, God, you know what? It'd be so nice to have somebody up on stage that looked like me.' Then they hired you!' (laugh) And I get it! That's the thing White people don't necessarily get. Like, why do you have to have your own magazine? Ebony or Jet or whatever. Why is it a big deal that the movies have this Black cast or whatever?"

She said, seeing people that look like you give you hope that you can move beyond the "ceiling." Austin saw that his race connected him to students. "I believe that my race

has been leveraged in a situation because we're trying to recruit a diverse student body, we're tryin' to recruit students of color.” He explains that to have a person of color on staff sends a message that his University accepts students who look like them. He explains how his race also connects him with students who are from areas that are predominately White:

Students seem to be intrigued by my ethnicity. And so it seems to give this extra connection with them 'cause I don't know if they think it's cool to be Black (laugh) or it's just something that's unknown to them so...it just seems there's a different connection that I'm able to get with students just because I come in and I'm not the same as everyone else that they're used to being around. ...so I feel like it gives me an advantage almost to be able to connect with different students.

Being a role model to Derek means shaping his athletes' views on Black, male authority figures. I shape their minds on the minority situation outside of what they just get from high school.” He explained:

I am the only minority in the athletic department. And one of the few in the entire state, I'm assuming. I probably do break some stereotypes they have, especially from your smaller communities where they don't interact nearly as much, so a lotta their viewpoints come from the grandparents, their parents and their interactions, good or bad. ...for a lot of 'em they don't necessarily get the hands-on experience with minorities in leadership roles just 'cause they just don't run into them.

Being a person of color in his community affords Devin positive recognition. He shared, “the good thing about [my city] is that when you *are* a minority and they see that potential, they jump all over it... 'cause they want that. They wanna be able to take pictures and hang their hat on it and the things like that.”

Contrary to Devin, Brian shares the alternative side to being singled out as the “Black representative” or “Black role model.” “I think I probably started on my first

board when I was twenty. It didn't take me long to figure out that sometimes I was bein' asked to serve on a board because I was Black.” He related a story when his suspicions were verified:

I'd been asked to serve on the organization. I remember thinkin', "I don't really know a lot about this," but I really had a lotta respect for the director. And so, I'd been on the board for a year. And at some point at one of the meetings, they were talkin' about new board members and their diversity initiative. This was the first time I'd heard about it. And they said, "Well, we got Brian last year as part of our diversity initiative. Who can we get this year?" And I was like, "Oh!" And then it just made sense why I was asked. I looked around. There was nobody, no other diversity. Everybody was White. So, I resigned from that organization a short time later.

He went on to explain why he resigned:

People need diversity. But my area was nothin' that had nothin' to do with [the organization]. So I really was asked to be there simply because I was Black. I mean, I wasn't bringin' anything to the table! It wasn't an area that I was passionate about or that I had any interest in.

Ethel made it clear that early in her career it was a challenge being considered the voice of the Black community as an employee in a White homogenous working environment:

Working in human services there [was] always that concept of representation. So, being young and female and any hue of brown put me in a position of constantly having to validate *everything* I said. No matter how much I knew, I had to prove it every single time. Um, and that idea of representation was so strong 'cause some of those people who had worked there, worked there for decades and were very set in their ways.

Devin currently serves as one of the few Black therapists in his city. Because of this, he is conscious of others' perceptions of him and other African Americans in his profession. He expressed the balance of being himself while not reinforcing stereotypes, “I'm conscious of that when I'm in these meetings with all these White case workers. I try

to be as delicate as possible.” As the only Black, female pastor on staff, it was brought to Lisa’s attention the “weight” that can come with being representative of racial minorities and women:

...a white woman said, “So now you not only represent the women of [our church], but you represent people of color! No pressure!” Lisa explained that while the woman “*meant* no harm” she did become (internally) defensive. “On the inside I thought I just wanna do a great job. I wanna represent Christ well. I wanna be a great example, but I don't wanna live up to anybody's stereotype. But neither do I wanna negate a stereotype. I just wanna be me!”

Transformational Leadership: “I lead so others can grow.” In this theme, participants exhibited the leadership style that is illustrative of a transformational leader. A transformational leader empowers followers to do more and be more than what they thought possible. The leader’s intent is to transform others. This is accomplished by holding a strong set of values, being idealistic, and being skillful at motivating others to accomplish goals for the greater good (Northouse, 2010). As a result, these leaders tend to be trustworthy, collaborative, and empowering. Four factors define transformational leadership. The first factor, *idealized influence*, is characterized as a leader who acts as a role model. He or she “walks the talk.” Because of their standards and moral character, followers identify with these leaders. *Inspirational motivation* is when a leader has the charisma to inspire and motivate followers to be committed to a shared vision. Through *individualized consideration*, leaders demonstrate genuine concern for the needs and feelings of followers. They delegate tasks according to followers’ strengths and needs to foster individual growth. Finally, *intellectual stimulation* is when a leader challenges others to be creative, innovative, and to question the belief of others and of themselves.

All four of these factors emerged from the data analysis. Table 13 includes these subthemes along with examples of significant statements.

Table 13

Theme: Transformational Leadership: "I lead so that others grow."

Subtheme	Example of significant statements
<i>Idealized influence</i>	"...my leadership...show by example... don't expect them to do things that you're not willing to do."
<i>Inspirational motivation</i>	"I've always been motivated by the opportunity to serve and to...make things better, particularly for young people."
<i>Individualized consideration</i>	"I'm very supportive, I'm very encouraging. ...I give them opportunities to grow and to develop <i>their</i> skills as leaders
<i>Intellectual stimulation</i>	"I like to make decisions, but I like to have some input and some feedback from the involved parties."

Idealized influence. "I would never ask somebody to do somethin' that I'm not willing to do," stated Devin. For participants like Devin, being a leader meant more than just making decisions or holding a position of status. Instead, "leading by example" so that others grow was most influential. Ethel believed it meant being available to do what others were not able to do. As the former executive director of a community center, she understood the lack of available resources. "You do everything. You're the janitor. You are the person that writes the grants, implements the program, cleans the toilets. When the alarms go off in the middle of the night, you have to be there." Derek shared that it was important for his athletes to see him leading by example. "They see it by example. ...even the smallest task, like taking ball carts out and things like that." It also meant shaping how his female athletes view male role models. "I'm the one who holds the door

for the full team when we go to eat. I order last. So they still get the perspective of what a gentleman should be treating them like.” The benefit is that “when you’re willing to do it, it’s really easy for them to do it!”

Dell realized the impact of role modeling when he was let go from a high profile leadership position. After a time of self-reflection, he became conscious of the reality that he was compartmentalizing his life. His message of economic empowerment carried little weight if he could not provide financially for his family:

I'd been more focused on changing the community than preparing my family for a stable economic future. That was a big epiphany. I was always rationalizing it that if I help change the community, it'd be better for my family in the long term 'cause of my kids, which may have been true, but I didn't have the power or the capacity to effect the change at the scale necessary to make it happen. So at the *same* time I'm doin' all this stuff for the community, I'm not makin' any money! We're goin' broke!

Lisa challenges the mentees in her leadership program to be open and authentic. She also models the behavior she expects from others.

...when we're talkin' about leadership and as it relates to your spiritual life and your personal life, you have to be honest if you're gonna grow as a leader. I set the stage so they respect me right off the bat. As time goes by we do share personal stories and I share my failures and we do bond...

Inspirational motivation. The participants also gave numerous examples of how they inspire and motivate their followers. For many of the participants, an important component of motivating others is the intrinsic reward they receive when they help others achieve what did not seem possible. As a non-profit director, resources are minimal. So when a “team with little resources, accomplish great things” that is what is most rewarding to Ethel:

True compensation is being able to look at each other at the end of the day and go, “Look what we did with our small mighty team and our resourceful selves! We channeled our inner MacGyver and we made this happen!” I recognized early on that you *can't* motivate people to *do* that if you don't value them.

For Dell it's motivating his community to take control of their identity. “When you're attempting to really reposition the community—not just externally but internally—you need to create a significant critical mass around a harmony, around a vision or identity to make any kinda change.”

Some participants talked specifically about focusing on specific gifts or areas that make their followers unique in order to motivate them. According to Lisa there is power in saying, “I see this quality either in your work style, your communication, or your personality or your character or whatever,’ and you call it out. [I've heard it called] positive labeling.” Andrea shared that she prefers to give her attention to and motivate those who tend to be overlooked, young people and women:

[I] really try to give young people an idea of how to use their privileges and give back to others or be champions for others. I try to embrace women more 'cause I know sometimes those women that dare to lead find themselves either ostracized or pushed aside especially if they're a bit more outspoken and opinionated. So, I try and support women more.

Individualized consideration. A part of transformational leadership is to show concern by giving personal attention to each follower. For some of the participants they focused on giving others opportunities to develop into leaders. Brian shared that seeing others grow is “easily the most rewarding part” of leading others. He explained that the “real testament to leadership, is if you're able to help other people grow to become leaders.” Devin echoed that same message. “I do like to give other people opportunities

to have leadership to do the same things that I did.” He shared an example when he gave his “second in command” an opportunity to grow into a leadership role. He told her:

‘I’ll send you to grant writing courses, I’m gonna give you opportunities to supervise.’ ...when the time came to [promote] her, I made her my program administrator to assistant executive director. When I left, she took over as executive director. I had pretty much groomed her for seven years to take over.

Ethel challenges her followers by:

...[helping] people identify areas where they would like to grow. I like to challenge them to take on new skill sets that they haven't tried before. I like them to feel like they can walk away from a work experience with a broader skill set than they came into it with, feeling like they learned something, they grew, that they feel valued because they got to use the skills and strengths that they brought when they came.

For Austin, he described himself as “inclusive” and “relational.” He explained that he “perceives the needs of other people... how I can help them do what they do best. I see that that’s the best way to benefit them in order to achieve the common good.”

When asked to provide an example of when this was exemplified, he shared an example of when he took the initiative to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of one of his employees. In this example Austin demonstrates that individualized concern does not have to be limited to an individual’s workplace needs. It can and should extend to their personal needs:

One of my counselors, she had to have some pretty invasive surgery done... I took that as a good time to help this person out and took some steps to kinda get them set up as far as getting someone to help them and taking care of things. And so they found that as a very compassionate thing, that I would go this extra mile to see that they're personally taken care of, not just, ‘Let's make sure your emails are answered’...just kinda more relational stuff. And this particular employee was comfortable with me just taking time to pray with 'em and that was something that they valued.

Derek also shows personal consideration by developing relationships with his athletes. “I will form the relationships with my individuals I’m in charge of, so it’s not just that authoritative figure with players. We form bonds.”

It was important for Andrea that the voice of others be heard. “I feel like in order to be really transparent and to be an effective leader, you need to hear from all of the people that are involved.” “If you make decisions how is it going to affect other people?” For her, failing to give attention to the views of others results in ineffectiveness. “I have seen too many times where people have made decisions on their own and hadn’t stopped to take the time to ask people they don’t feel they are worthy of their opinion...” Because of her experience she strives to be approachable. “I really try to be mindful of other people’s thoughts and feelings even though I may have a different agenda or difference of opinion on things.”

The participants valued teamwork as a way to demonstrate individualized concern. Many of the participants specifically focused on identifying the strengths of others to accomplish goals. Brian believes in teamwork without micromanaging. He shared, “a part of your job is to recruit a team—the *best* possible team you can get assembled. And then give them clear goals and objectives, and then set ‘em free. And then provide support, encouragement, direction as needed.” Lisa lit up when she talked about the concept of teams. She described herself as a “great team leader.” “I’m good at helpin’ people see what they’re good at and supporting them.” She explained that she finds people who “have the same vision but different gifts” and that she has no problem releasing them to do their work. “I’m very encouraging and I’m empowering to them.” Andrea is less detail oriented and more vision oriented. She understands the value of

selecting team members who compensate for her deficiencies. She relies on the strengths of team members to create the overall vision. "...that is why it is great to have a team of people that each person can really contribute by their strengths." Ethel felt that creating a diverse team, both in abilities and demographics makes for "great group think." She explained:

I think if we're all alike when we all have alike ideas and get stuck in a rut, and then we always do what we've always done. So I like to build teams and then encourage people to listen to each other and support each other so that we try a little bit of everybody's input.

Intellectual stimulation. A few of the participants commented about the importance of challenging others to think differently about their current circumstance.

Derek challenges his athletes to think beyond their athletic performances:

..the progress isn't just on the court. It's in the classroom. It's in the community. So [I've] always been really big on, 'We're gonna go do community service as a team. We're gonna go teach you ladies that there's more to life than just [your sport].

Dell commented on how he wants his community to think differently about how they acquire the resources they need to be successful entrepreneurs. He challenges his community to change their frame of reference. They need "the ability to get to the other side of the table." He explained:

I mean, that's the challenge of many Black communities and Black leaders and Black people. And by that I mean the side of the table that is the giver as opposed to the requester. The side of the table that's the funder as opposed to the borrower. We don't have anything, we don't have enough people on *this* side of it.

To accomplish this, Dell fosters intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation by creating events like the "Small Biz Day." This is an event that:

Brings the community folks that are interested or have a business, in contact with a wide range of providers and a wide range of breakouts (informational sessions), and put them together so that we can kinda facilitate this dialogue between them and the providers. And then also give them [tools] so they know what to do to go forth and do a better job with their business. I market through these channels to really target those that have been underserved. And so that was the mission. And we did that. And we saw this high level appetite amongst African-Americans.

Data Analysis “Surprises”

Throughout my analysis, a number of “surprises” emerged from the results.

Although these surprises did not emerge as dominant themes, I believe they were significant in understanding what it meant to be a biracial leader and were worth including in the discussion.

Not Black Enough. For the first surprise, the participants who identified as singular Black shared examples when they had to question if they were “Black enough.” Being Black enough meant questioning if they really understood what it meant to be Black and if they were “down” with the cause of African Americans. I expected this to occur with the participants who identified as biracial, not for those who identified as singular Black. Interestingly, for two of the participants this implication was not implied until they made tough, unpopular leadership decisions. The following are excerpts from the data to help illustrate my point.

Although Brian and Dell are firmly rooted in their Black identity, it was not until both made controversial leadership decisions that their “allegiance” to their African American community was questioned. In an effort to discredit his leadership ability, Dell explained that three rumors circulated in his community as to why he was let go from a leadership position. One rumor in particular implied that Dell was not Black enough.

“They said, ‘And Dell hates Black women’. Cause my wife is white. So now, think of what they did to me in the community. ...think of that message that they were communicating to people.” Although Dell does not directly imply that he believed he was not Black enough, he does admit to having to reconcile his identity with the race of his wife and how it would be perceived in his predominately Black community:

... I used to worry about, "what are Black people gonna think if I have a White wife?" There was that issue for awhile. ...but that was a result of internal insecurities... What I came to the conclusion is that it's really immaterial what other people think. And the last piece that I settled [of his identity] was the issue of how are Black people gonna perceive me with the message that I have with a White wife? And [then] I said, "Who gives a crap? I'm awesome. I have things to say. I'm gifted. If you respect me and you respect what I have to say, then you respect my choice and you respect my family."

Brian experienced a similar situation after he made the decision to hire a young White woman to operate the child care facility at a predominately Black community center. “I introduced her to some Black folks. And at the time they were like, ‘You hired a White girl to be the director of the [center]? You *are* brave!’” During his time as the director, he did (at times) wrestle with the perception that he was not Black enough:

I don't know if it was what other people said or if it was just somethin' I wrestled with myself, was that you're never Black enough. I couldn't never be Black enough. I couldn't *really* be Black. You know what I mean? But, I think it was always people thought it was because I was really more White... 'cause there were some people who thought, you know, "That's the reason why he [hired the child care director]." And so that was always a tension. ... you're always kinda caught in this middle ground but for most of my life, it's been negotiated just fine.

Similar to Dell, Brian perceived that the race of his wife might have sent a message about his commitment to the Black community he serves:

Where I think some people had an issue, was who my *wife* was. 'Cause my wife bein' a white woman..." So your momma, yeah, your momma's [White] but he

married some white lady!" So *that* was really more an issue for some people than others. No one ever directly said anything. ...every now and then somebody would act funny, so you wonder if that's it.

Lisa shared that when she interviewed for her current leadership position, a White board member pulled her aside. The following conversation took place:

...they said, "Now, bein' biracial some of our Black congregants they may look at you and feel like you're not Black enough. "So how will you handle that kind of a thing?" I said, "I've never been told that before. But I understand it." And I said, "I won't generate that." I remember bein' a little put off by it like, good grief, you know. I do understand, but in my mind, that's old school. This person was a little older. That, in my mind, that's, the sixties where kinda light-skinned Blacks were high yellow and that.

Lisa went onto explain that while she understood the question, the concern should be about her character. "I feel like when you go into a situation and you're just yourself and you're a lovable person, people are either gonna like you or not..."

In my opinion, these examples reveal that biracial persons feel the tension to maintain characteristics and views that maintain their group membership. Furthermore, they demonstrate the inherent dilemmas surrounding one's identity and the continuous construction of one's identity. This supports Shamir and Eilam's (2005) claim that that one's identity "is not performed in isolation, but in interaction with others which is influenced by others' responses..." (p. 413).

Colorism. Another surprise was that few of the participants expressed the privilege that their lighter skin afforded them. According to Khanna and Johnson (2010) race in America is connected to one's skin color and tone. Colorism is a system where lighter Black skin is valued more than darker Black skin. Considering the prevalence of colorism within the Black community, I was expecting the issue to emerge more than it

did. Andrea articulated her experience of what it meant to be “light-skinned” in a society that devalued darker skin. The following are samples of significant statements:

Though by definition of the one-drop rule I am defined as Black, my lighter skin has presented me with unearned privileges throughout my life.

I do not tend to view my hue as an advantage, but instead, sometimes a limitation. In conversations with colleagues and friends of darker complexion, they openly talk about their experiences and perceptions where they were treated differently than someone with light-colored skin. Some of the topics they address include who is more likely to be addressed by Caucasians when entering a room, lending practices, hailing a cab, who is depicted as being “less threatening” or deemed to be suspicious in nature, as well as, who is perceived to be more attractive by society.

I would say most people look at me as a Black female but a less intimidating one because I’m not darker skinned.

I was in college hangin out with some friends and this guy said “You are really cool for a light-skinned chick. Well usually you guys are stuck up and snotty and think you’re better than everybody.” I just sat there. I felt so mad that I was categorized. I’ve always been down to earth. [I] never really thought of myself as better than anybody else.

Devin was the only male participant who shared similar experiences. The following are samples of significant statements:

I would always hear the good hair comment growin' up. Especially growin' up in the seventies and eighties when you had your hair long and it was always a thing that people had talked about, as far as bein' biracial. That bein' biracial was good. ...bein' Black and White was preferred; it was presented like that because of the hair, because of the skin tone and all that. It was really kinda weird.

Now I *do* know, and this has been my experience, but when you have light skin, this kinda hair, you're viewed as not bein' tough. And so I do remember being picked on for that reason.

Discrimination. Lastly, explicit cases of discrimination (in relation to their leadership experiences) were not a prevalent theme. The research on leadership and race is consistent in their findings that people of color experience less job satisfaction, poorer performance evaluations, and hindrances in career advancement. Yet, if the participants did experience racial discrimination, which I am assuming they did, they did not problematize their experiences. This is significant considering this is the manner in which the leadership research on race approaches the study of racial minorities – from a problematic perspective.

Summary of Findings

This phenomenological study sought to answer the central research question: What are the leadership experiences of biracial leaders? and the sub questions: (a) How do the participants racially identify? and (b) How does their racial identification influence their leadership experiences? To summarize the themes that emerged, a textural summary was created to describe *what* the participants experienced. A summary was then developed to describe the context or setting of *how* they experienced the phenomenon. This is called a structural description. Lastly, a composite description was developed that included the textural and structural descriptions. This is the essence of being a biracial leader.

Textural description. The participants shared their experience of adapting to and managing various cultural contexts in a way that was a “natural part of who they are.” For many of the participants, this ability was a result of the identity racial formation that began at an early age. Responding to difficult questions or circumstances led the

participants to be thoughtful about their self-concept throughout adolescence and adulthood. Ethel shared that having one's racial identity questioned causes one to revisit the questions, "Who am I? Why am I? and What makes me different?" As a result, developing a secure racial identity has served, not only as a personal educational tool, but also as a tool for those they lead. For instance, instead of being offended when others questioned their race, they welcomed the inquiry as an opportunity to engage – to tell their story so that they can educate others. This allowed many of the leaders to serve as a bridge between individuals of different cultures and backgrounds; teaching them about themselves and about other worldviews and differences.

The participants viewed their leadership roles as a responsibility to not only accomplish goals, but to also help others grow. They did this by focusing on building relationships. The leaders understood that to exert influence, there was a need to be relational. The participants acknowledged that goals could not be accomplished without the creativity, skills, and knowledge of their followers. Many of the leaders established these relationships by developing a deep understanding of their followers. They concentrated on their strengths, challenged them beyond those strengths, and supported them in their efforts to become leaders. Furthermore, because the participants sought to work collaboratively with others despite differences, they encouraged their followers to develop the same type of relationships.

Being a symbol of African American leaders and/or leaders of color was another common experience. Their experiences indicated that they were often perceived as Black regardless of how they racially identified. Many embraced that perception, understanding that they had an inherent responsibility to exhibit strong Black leadership,

and to be an example to emerging leaders of color. However, while their experiences pointed to this obligation, many of the same participants struggled to embrace this perception as they felt the pressure to “just be me.”

Structural description. All of the participants experienced leadership in professional environments that were meaningful to them. Brian represents the views of most of the leaders: “I’ve never been motivated by money. I’ve always been motivated by the opportunity to serve and to make things better...[for others].” All of the participants were passionate about their experience because they were in leadership roles that allowed them to serve and develop others. It was not a coincidence that the participants were leaders in professions that focused on education, community development, religious formation, and economic enhancement.

What they experienced as a biracial leader did not present itself only in professional settings. Because their leadership was impacted by the totality of their experiences, the settings where they experienced being a biracial leader were wherever they happened to be. Their racial identity and their identities as leaders were always with them. They did not compartmentalize their lives because their racial and leadership identities could not be limited to a particular context. Therefore, where they experienced leadership was holistic. It didn’t matter if they were at home, at work, or in their neighborhoods being a biracial leader is a lifestyle.

Essence. In the present study, the essence of experiencing leadership as a biracial leader was to be authentic and transformational. The participants were authentic because they made the effort to understand how their physical appearance, life experiences, and social environments contributed to their self-concept. But what is particularly significant

is that although they understood how those elements contributed to their self-concept, the participants determined how they wanted to be defined. This process developed an inner strength and sense of character enabling them to make decisions based on their values and beliefs. Furthermore, while each leader was resolute in his or her identity, each had the capacity to adapt to diverse groups of people and settings, while still maintaining the core of who he/she was.

The participants are transformational because they are committed to causes that are greater than their own personal needs or desires. They developed strong, emotional attachments in an effort to foster high performance on the part of followers and to empower them to become leaders themselves. Because of the participants' biracial experience, they were accustomed to adapting to the needs of others. Therefore, accommodating to the needs and motives of followers was commensurate with their personal experience. Transformational leaders are also role models. Many of the participants struggled with the "weight" that came with being a representative for a racial minority group, but it was a responsibility they came to accept. Consequently, role modeling leadership behaviors was not unique to their personal experience. "Walking the talk" was an inherent part of who they were.

Sonnenschein (1999) argued that effective leaders must be self-aware; to become conscious of how they are socialized and aware of their values and perceptions. Through their descriptions of how they experience leadership, they articulated that one cannot separate who they are with what they do. For that reason, the essence of what these leaders experienced is authentic and transformational leadership.

Chapter Five: Discussion

“If you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life. With confidence, you have won even before you have started.” -- Marcus Tullius Cicero

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how biracial leaders racially identified and how those identities influenced their leadership experiences. The literature on race and leadership disproportionally focuses on the experiences of African Americans or other monoracial groups. Therefore, there was a need to examine the unique perspectives and experiences of biracial leaders. Included in this chapter are the discussion of findings, in addition to the significance of the findings, future research, limitations, and my personal reflections.

Discussion of Findings

As was discussed in Chapter Four, investigating how the leaders racially identified served as the groundwork for defining the participants' identity. Four central themes related to factors that influence their racial identity choices emerged. They are family discourse, social networks, appearance, and identity work. The results support the literature on multiracial identity development. The participants have a strong sense of self that developed through adolescence but became solidified as adults. Additionally, their racial identity development journey supported Root's (1990) findings that identity development is not a linear process, but rather it is fluid and dynamic. This experience has enabled the participants to function across differing environments and understand diverse cultures and groups (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

The results also support an ecological theory of racial identity development where one's socio-cultural, political, and familial influences form one's racial identity (Root, 1990; Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004). Additionally, three of the four variations in Rockquemore and Brunsma's (2008) biracial classification were identified. The participants identified as having a singular racial identity, a border identity, or protean identity. Transcendent identity, where an individual claims no racial identity, did not emerge from the results.

It is worth noting that although themes did emerge in how the participants racially identified, how the participants developed their racial identity was multidimensional. It was challenging to categorize the participants because each had diverse experiences and reasons for their racial identity choices. For example, differences emerged in familial dynamics. Some participants came from stable and intact families whereas others were reared in more challenging environments. Two participants were adopted and a few participants shared their parents were "part" Native American or "part" Latina but that their parent's ethnic heritage had little influence on how the participants racially identified. A number of participants were raised in or participated in the military. As a result, they moved across different regions within and outside of the United States. Other participants grew up in the same city in the Midwest for their entire lives, while several moved to the Midwest as adults. Because of these differences the results of the present study supports existing research that suggests racial identification of biracial persons differs among the biracial population, is fluid, and is dependent upon environmental and social influences (Renn, 2004; Renn & Lunceford, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).

The central purpose of the next section is on the essence of experiencing leadership as a biracial leader. Three themes emerged in relation to how biracial leaders experience leadership: (a) cultural agility: “Blessed to be flexible”, (b) perceived representation: “I look like them”, and (c) transformational leadership: “I lead so others can grow.”

Cultural agility: “Blessed to be flexible”. Bell (1990) found that Black professional women manage two distinct cultural worlds: one Black and one White. A bicultural life structure is organized in a way that she is rooted in her Black identity while assimilating into a dominate White culture. Although the participants reported finding strength by being bicultural, and experienced high levels of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction, it was also revealed that living out a bicultural identity had significant challenges. These included being perceived as a “token” hire,⁵ role overload, and⁶ role ambiguity. These challenges were due to her feeling the need to prove her competence in the White world, while struggling to maintain ties to her family and the Black community. Taken together, access to opportunities in her workplace and communities are limited. Bell’s study did not confirm what emerged in the present study. The participants experienced the tension of being a “token” (which will be addressed in more detail in the following section), but did not express the struggles of managing the push and pull factors Bell suggested. It is not that the biracial leaders did not experience these challenges. Instead, they learned at an early age how to manage these push and pull factors. Unlike the participants in Bell’s study, they did not have the pressure of learning

⁵ Role overload is defined as meeting expectations at home and at work.

⁶ Role ambiguity is defined as having less access to information pertaining to their work responsibilities.

these strategies “on the job.” In other words, the biracial leaders in the present study already “mastered” bicultural competency.

In Alfred’s (2001) study of African American women in the White academy, the participants developed strategies to manage the challenges of being bicultural. Successfully managing these worlds was a result of using the power to which they had access and developing the ability to maneuver within predominately White environments. Similar to Alfred’s findings, the participants in the present study used strategies to manage being bicultural. Many of the participants described their ability to adapt, understand, and respond to diverse environments and people. Dell explained, “I think bein' biracial has blessed me to be flexible.” Furthermore, Ethel explained that although she is “half Black”, because of her life experience she has become acculturated to the predominate White culture. It should not be presumed that the leaders’ ability to be flexible and adaptable to other cultures is inherent. However, because they learned how to adapt at an early age, it is not unexpected that as adults, managing multiple identities or cultural environments has become a natural part of who they are.

Bennett (1993) describes managing different cultures as cognitive and behavioral adaptation. These individuals welcome multiple worldviews and as a result, are able to assess situations from multiple cultural perspectives. They do not seek to substitute their culture, but “extend” their culture. Bennett explains “...that one might temporarily behave or value in a way appropriate to a different culture does not threaten the integrity or existence of one’s own cultural identity. Rather, the new ways of being are added to one’s repertoire of cultural alternatives” (p. 32). Many of the participants experienced this when they shared how they managed dual identities. Devin’s use of language

illustrates this concept, “I can operate in a professional environment and speak a certain way and it not come off as odd or fake or phony. And then, get around other people or be back at home and talk totally different.”

These studies support what emerged in the present study – biracial leaders adapt to diverse cultural environments. They are able to be successful in their roles, within dominate White cultures, while not compromising their identity.

Perceived Representation. In Kanter’s (1977) study of the interactions and perceptions of women in male dominated sales industry, it was found that minorities experience tokenism in three ways: performance pressures, boundary heightening, and role entrapment. In the present study, performance pressures and role entrapment emerged. Performance pressures are due to high visibility. It is perceived by the leaders, and often implied by the dominant culture, that if they perform poorly it will reflect badly on other African Americans. Participants echoed this concern. Ethel, Lisa, Derek, and Devin shared examples when they felt the pressure to lead in ways that would abolish negative stereotypes the dominant culture held about African Americans. Ethel shared how she felt like a token in the eyes of the White community leaders when she became the director of the [Black] community center. “Are you hearing me for my ideas? Or are you just hearing me because of what they represent and [what] you need?” She explained that in her previous roles she was not viewed as the representative of the Black community. But when she transitioned to this role, not only did she become the representative for *all* African Americans, her voice became marginalized outside of the walls of her organization.

Role entrapment emerges from stereotypes held by the larger society and used to incorporate the token into the dominants' world. This factor was particularly heightened for both Brian and Ethel. Brian removed himself from a governing board because he was chosen not for his skills and knowledge, but because he met the organizations goals to "diversify" their board. Early in her career, Ethel was hired because it was assumed that she was Latina and could speak Spanish, a skill desired by this organization. "Some of the other folks from the department who were just plain old White bureaucrats picked me 'cause I was brown and articulate." She went onto share the rumor that was circulating. "'We just hired this new girl and she's gonna be great with our Hispanic populations. In fact, I think she's bilingual.' How [they] would've thought that from my interview...?"

Similar to Alfred (2001) and Kelly (2007) many of the participants reported positive aspects of being the "only one." They positioned themselves so that they could use their biracial identity to establish commonalities amongst differing groups.

An interesting observation was that the participants did not express that they felt accountable to, or representative of other Black/White biracial persons. For those who racially identified as singular Black, the expectation that they represent other African Americans seemed reasonable. Of the participants who identified as Black/White biracial, only one participant made the distinction that she identified as Black biracial. Although the other leaders identified as the former, their experiences conveyed that they felt representative of other African Americans. Despite identifying as biracial, they still felt inherently connected to and representative of African Americans. Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, and Thompson (2007) explain:

...when placed in the position of solo status, African Americans may come to think more about their collective self. Being African American becomes a greater part of their self-definition, and they may come to believe that their actions, including good or poor performance will reflect upon their entire race. (p. 322)

Because the Black/White biracial leaders share a racial heritage and in some cases, physical characteristics with other African Americans, one could assume that they would feel representative of this group. This notion supports Cox's (1993) definition of group identity which states that it is "a personal affiliation with other people with whom one shares things in common" (p. 43). For the Black/White biracial leaders, while their group identity is affiliated with African Americans, their biracial identity positions them within differing cultural and social groups. Therefore, they understand and accept that they are perceived to be representative of African Americans, but use their ability to adapt to navigate between these two worlds.

Transformational leadership. The participants' experiences described leadership that strived to "raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led..." (Burns, 1978, p. 20). The leaders focused on their performance and how they engaged followers in an authentic, participatory way. Collectively, their leadership style and values exhibited transformational leadership. Austin's purpose in leading others reflects the views of the participants. "I find it more rewarding if I know that my investment in someone has produced good results in their lives... [to see] a development in their personality and their character."

The results demonstrated that building relationships was central to their leadership. Therefore, individualized consideration was the most salient factor across their experiences. They developed relationships by showing concern and giving personal

attention to followers. Understanding the significance of relationships, Dell admitted that his failure to develop relationships early in his career had negative consequences. He shared what he learned as a result of this “misstep:”

...at the time [I didn't] have the capacity to build relationships, which is my number one focus now because people buy things from people they know, like, and trust. And people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Because of the leaders' attention relationship building, they were able to motivate followers to perform beyond expectations. Most focused on the followers' strengths, identified challenging tasks, provided continuing educational opportunities, identified personal goals and aspirations, were attentive to differing opinions, perceived professional and personal needs, and provided continuous support.

According to Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) one of the lingering questions about transformational leadership is determining the predictors of transformational leadership. While this was not the intent of the present study, it is worth discussing reasons participants universally demonstrated transformational behaviors. One reason might be the context in which they lead. Brian shared that his motivation is to “make my sphere of the world a little better than it was when I got there.” The participants all led in organizations with a purpose similar to Brian. This supports House and Aditya's (1997) claim that leaders who are socially responsible and lead for the common good over self-interest will emerge as transformational leaders.

Consequently, van Woerkom and de Reuver (2009) suggest that because of their interest in social issues, transformational leaders perform well across cultures. In their study of managers in a Dutch multinational, van Woerkom and de Reuver (2009)

proposed that managers with multicultural personality traits are transformational leaders. What separates their research from the present study is the focus on professionals who operate in an international context instead of professionals who are multiracial or multiethnic. However, the use of the construct *multicultural personality* includes dimensions similar to what makes the participants in the present study culturally agile. A multicultural personality is defined as an individual who is culturally empathetic, open-minded, socially ambitious, emotionally stable, and flexible. Van Woerkom and de Reuver (2009) found that of these five factors, cultural empathy, open-mindedness, and social initiative were significant predictors of transformational leadership which consequently led to better performance. Therefore, the present study supports a plausible connection between the biracial leaders' ability to be culturally agile and their transformative leadership style.

Biracial Leaders: Authentic and Transformational

In an effort to further understand the essence of the participants' experience, I propose that the participants are authentic, transformational leaders. To make sense of this connection, I referred to Shamir and Eilam's (2005) work on the life-story approach to authentic leadership development. Authentic leadership is defined as: "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243).

Shamir and Eilam's four components of authentic leadership provided a clear understanding of my justification to define the participants as authentic leaders. First, "authentic leaders do not fake their leadership." As leaders they are being their true selves instead of living out the expectations of others. For instance, Brian considers courage to be an important component of effective leadership. He understood early in his career that it would be difficult to please everyone. After carefully observing others, he found that there are leaders who "wanna be popular and so they become paralyzed. And I've really tried to always guard against that." As a worship leader, Austin finds it most effective when he can be true to himself, "it just feels like more freedom to be able to be myself and not have to fit some kind of mold." He explains that when others notice how "freely [he] worships" then, "they're kind of encouraged to improve their own [worship]"

Second, authentic leaders "lead from personal conviction not for personal reward." They expect to make a difference and as a result their values align with their leadership activities and personal goals. Austin, like the other participants, values relationship building and helping others grow. He shared an example when he invested in a young person he was mentoring. "Being able to [see] practically the change and transformation in his own life and seeing things progressing in a positive direction, as far as the decisions he's making ... he's recognizing that more...."

Third, authentic leaders are "originals, not copies." "They have not been passive recipients of these social inputs. They have made these values and convictions highly personal through their lived experiences, experienced emotions, and an active process of reflection on those experiences and emotions" (Shamir & Eilam's, 2005, p. 397). The participants' were competent in their ability to self-reflect. In fact, the process of racial

identity development gave them the aptitude to contemplate who they are and what makes them unique.

Lastly, authentic leaders are “leaders whose actions are based on their values and convictions.” Furthermore, these values and convictions are transparent. Because self-reflection has become an inherent part of the leaders’ identities, they not only clearly articulate their values and convictions but lead from them as well. As the executive director of an African American community center, Brian’s values and convictions were contested when he made the decision to share the physical space of the center with another ethnic community center. In making the decision, he was attentive to not only his values but the values of the community center.

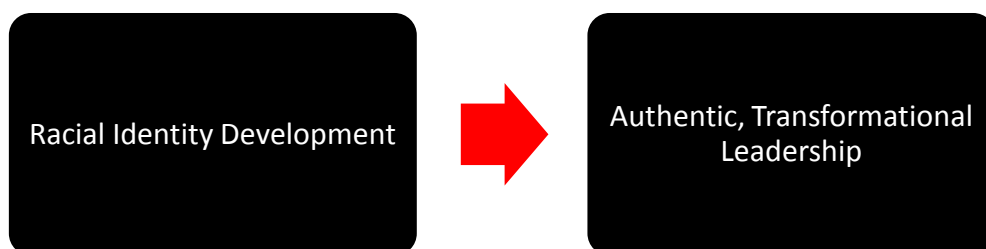
Focus on the mission. The mission says, “The [Community] Center will serve as a cornerstone for collaboration and diversity...” So, if we say our core values are diversity and collaboration, this gives us an opportunity to live out our values. It was consistent with our vision. It was consistent with our organizational core values. And I really believe that you have to model that kind of collaboration and that you can't just give lip service to it. Sometimes some leaders can talk about these great ideals that everybody can agree on. But when it comes time to really puttin' it down and makin' it happen...you're makin' new challenges for people.

It is important to specify that these four components of authentic leadership do not describe *what* the leaders do, but *who* they are. Authentic leadership is a way of being, while behaviors are transformational. The authors suggest to be effective, leaders need to lead from “strong convictions and a high level of self-concept clarity” (Shamir and Eilam, 2005, p. 399). Furthermore, their sources of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity come from processing and telling their life-stories. These stories provide a meaning system from which the leaders operate from – providing authenticity and personal significance to their leadership. Through these stories they ask “Who am I?”

and “Why am I here?” In terms of leadership, they ask “How have I become a leader?” and “Why have I become a leader?” (p. 403). The results from the present study are evidence that the biracial leaders constructed their life stories by drawing upon these questions – both in terms of race and leadership.

Because the participants in the present study lead from strong convictions and have a high level of self-concept clarity, I propose that their process of racial identity development is an antecedent to becoming authentic and transformational leaders. For an illustration of this relationship refer to Figure 8. The study participants are secure in their racial identity. Their identities are self-determined and they have a strong self-concept and self-esteem, all of which are elements of being an authentic leader. Because they are biracial, their life-stories require them to continually process who they are, what that means to them and to the outside world. This process enables them to be authentic and to lead authentically.

Figure 8. Relationship Between Racial Identity Development and Leadership



Significance of Findings

The findings in the present study were significant for several reasons. First, the results provided an understanding of the interplay between leadership and identity. The findings suggested that how a leader develops their racial identity influences, and/or is similar, to how they developed a leadership identity. The results and supporting research reinforced the notion that leaders can only fully utilize their strengths to the degree they comprehend how their internal worldviews and value systems were generated. An affirmed identity results in a confident leader who has clearly defined goals, values, and strengths. Because these processes are interrelated, it is difficult to view identity, leadership, and “life” experiences separately.

Lastly, in terms of multiracial research, the results provide insight into how adults reflect on their racial identity experience and how it has influenced their professional and personal lives. This is significant since much of the research on multiracial persons has focused on adolescents and college-aged students.

Limitations of Results

The results of the present study are based on the experiences of eight leaders. Therefore, generalizations cannot be applied beyond the participants of this study. Also, because of the limited number of participants, an analysis was not made based on gender differences. The study was also conducted in a small state located in the Midwest. It is expected that participants outside of this area would offer different experiences and/or themes. Only self-perceptions were considered in this study. To control for bias it would have been beneficial to include the perceptions of followers – particularly since the

leader-follower relationship is essential in the discussions of authentic leadership and transformational leadership. Additionally, when using semi-structured interviews, what participants shared did not always emerge in a clear, linear fashion. Therefore, the participants' stories and examples did not always unfold in a coherent process. During the interviews I viewed this as dynamic and engaging. However, when analyzing the results, organizing the data into clear, coherent themes was challenging. Interestingly, all of the participants responded in this manner. Their circular communicative style could be attributed to the racial identity process the participants experienced. Renn (2004) found that racial identity development is not a systematic pathway. Therefore, reflecting on the interview process, it is not surprising that they responded to the interview questions in a way that paralleled their racial identity experience.

Future research

Existing leadership research on racial minorities has a number of limitations. Considering that the United States' changing political, economic, and cultural landscape will mean that traditional theories of leadership will have less applicability to organizations; I propose that scholars investigate issues of race and leadership using Shamir and Eilam's (2005) life-story approach. This type of research will guide current and emerging leaders through a reflection process that could result in their understanding how to become self-aware, being attuned to one's environment, adapting to cultural differences, being authentic, and how to continually assess one's development. This research will shift the paradigm from behavior and styles to self-development.

To further understand the practicality of a leader's life-story, research should extend to include Hammer's Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to investigate the cultural competence level of biracial and/or multiracial leaders. The IDI is a valid, reliable, cross-cultural tool for assessing intercultural competence at the individual, group, and organizational level (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). This research would highlight the differences in cultural competence levels amongst various combinations of multiracial leaders. Additionally, the study could expand to identify a relationship between cultural competence, transformational leadership, and multiracial identity.

With regard to racial identity development there are a number of topics that would benefit from additional research. Concerning social and environmental influences, broadening the study to include generational differences would provide further insight into the influence of historical context on one's racial identification. For instance, Renn and Lunceford (2004) suggest that individuals who grew up when mixed-race children with one Black parent were legally mandated to identify as Black, might still continue to identify in a single monoracial category. Whereas because of the efforts of multiracial advocates and the changing racial demographics of the United States younger generations might be more comfortable identifying as biracial or multiracial instead of a singular race.

Expanding research to include participants across geographic regions and socioeconomic status would provide further insight into the identity choices of biracial individuals. Employing quantitative research methods for large-scale studies across geographic regions would allow data to be generalized to the larger biracial population.

Additionally, using a mixed methods approach would allow researchers to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data allowing the researcher to maintain the richness of data needed to describe the unique experiences of biracial persons while still generalizing results to the larger population.

Practical Implications. Traditional leadership development methods focus on skill development. However, this study highlights developmental processes that are unique to the individual and occur apart from traditional training methods. This supports Alfred's (2001) claim that identity is significant in the career development of racial and ethnic minorities. Although these findings provide a deeper understanding of what biracial leaders experience, the results should not be limited to this population. Instead, a broader audience that includes all individuals regardless of their racial identity can benefit from the findings by understanding the influence of one's life-story on how they perform leadership. Leadership educators and consultants who create spaces for developing leaders to explore their identities will find that this process can promote leadership identity development which may enhance a leader's ability to influence others. Shamir and Eilam (2005) support this claim by stating that "leadership development is to a great extent the development of self-knowledge and clarity through reflection, interpretation and revision of life-stories" (p. 413). This would prove to be particularly useful in an economy that is increasingly diverse and global.

Researcher's Reflections

As a Black/White biracial woman who has held various leadership roles, I knew at the onset that bracketing my experiences and biases would be vital. My own racial identity adventure is filled with stories of perception, prejudice, revelation, rejection, and acceptance. While preparing the research proposal I held few assumptions as to how the participants would reveal their own racial identity and describe their leadership journey. I was cognizant that each participant could have experiences and views that differed from my own. However, it was not until the research process unfolded that I realized the extent to which my suppositions, although minimal, were influential.

As each story was told I became aware that the participants' experiences were also my experiences. What I felt during these interviews was greater than sympathy or empathy. It was as if my identity was bound with their identity. Their trials were my trials and the questions I struggled with were their questions. I also came to the conclusion that it is not uncommon for all of us, regardless of racial heritage, to encounter awkward stages of identity. However, unlike having to wear awkward glasses, coping with acne, or bad hair; the participants and I shared the awkwardness of growing up with skin color, hair texture, and a family that did not reflect societal norms. And unlike the aforementioned awkward experiences, we could not grow out of our skin color, our hair texture, or that fact that one parent was Black and one was White.

As a result of these reflections, I made a concerted effort after each interview to process, examine, and reflect upon my own experience. I was not always successful in my efforts to stay impartial throughout the interview process, but instead of fearing the

inclinations I had, I instead chose to embrace the fact that I had a shared experience with the participants, while still being open to the notion that differences exist.

After analyzing the results I discovered that some of my assumptions were similar to what the participants experienced. For example, I anticipated that the participants had to resist the societal opinion that they were racially confused. Andrea summed it up best when she said, “I was not confused about my background; it was society that could not allow me to exist in this not-so-new genre.” I also assumed that the participants would experience a constant, awkward tension of being between two racial worlds. My assumptions were correct in regards to the advantages experienced by the participants such as being flexible and adaptable to diverse racial environments. But my assumptions were incorrect in assuming that they would experience a constant, awkward tension. Although a few of the participants shared some examples of this, it was not a prevailing theme. My assumptions about racial choice did not align with the participants’ experiences. I assumed that I was unique in identifying as a Black/White biracial. My assumption was based on my experience with other biracial persons in my community. However, the results were consistent with the research of Renn (2004), Rockquemore and Brunson (2008), and Root (1992) who are in agreement that mixed-race people construct a variety of racial identities.

Conclusion

Elected for a second presidential term in 2012, Barack Obama's racial identity is still a topic of interest. His expressed identification with the Black American experience coupled with his ability to appeal across racial lines continues to draw criticism and debate on how he represents himself. The discussion surrounding his racial identity, in addition to the increasing number of people who identify as more than one race, supports the need to understand biracial and multiracial leaders. The racial identity development stories of these leaders offers a unique perspective on leadership development and how to lead in socially diverse environments. The present study emphasized this need by describing the leadership experiences of Black/White biracial leaders.

It was found that the participants experienced diverse paths of racial identity development, yet shared similarities in the factors that influenced their identity choices. The messages they received from their families, their social environment, their physical appearance, and how they processed their identity development, influenced how they racially identify. Because the participants were conscious of their identity development experience, all demonstrated a strong sense of self which influenced how they experienced leadership.

As leaders, being able to successfully manage different cultural contexts was due to their biracial identity. Additionally, the participants were transforming in their leadership. Their emphasis was not on self, but on how their leadership skills could be used to benefit the needs and developmental goals of others. Furthermore, the participants were found to be authentic and transformational leaders. Their levels of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity are a result of their racial identity stories. This

process should be used as an example to emerging leaders who seek to understand self and how their sense of self can influence the ways they lead.

In closing, it is my hope that this study will serve not only as a contribution to the leadership literature and to the study of biracial and multiracial individuals, but will also help us understand leadership and leadership development through a different lens. As a result of this study, I have come to understand that influencing others cannot come from changing others first. Instead, it must first come from understanding and then changing one's self.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol I

Interview Topic: Racial Identification (identification and experiences)

- **Personal Introductions:** Introduce myself.
- **Purpose of the study:** “My dissertation research involves examining the unique perspectives and experiences of Black/White biracial leaders. This will require your participation in two separate interviews. The first interview will focus on your racial identity and experiences related to your racial identity. The second interview will focus on your leadership experiences.”
- **Provide and explain informed consent.**
- **Provide structure of the interview:** “The first interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio taped. I will also take notes throughout the interview. As a reminder, you will be given a pseudonym in the final results to maintain your confidentiality.”
- **Requesting personal artifacts / reflective journals:** “At the close of the interview I will ask you to provide me examples of personal artifacts or documents, of your choosing, that hold meaning to you, in terms of your racial identity. With your permission I will take photographs of these items or make copies of the documents to use in the analyzing the results for the final study. The photos of these artifacts and copies of the documents will be used to describe the data, not to show to others.”
- **Ask the participant if they have questions.**
- **Test audio recording equipment.**
- **Demographic Information:** “Before we begin with the interview questions, I have a few demographic questions I would first like to ask you.”
 - Age _____
 - Gender _____
 - Level of Education _____
 - Occupation _____
 - Type of organization currently employed at _____
- **Guiding Interview Questions**
 1. Tell me about yourself.
 - a. Can you describe one of your favorite memories of growing up in...
 - b. Was there a time when you found it really challenging to be living in...

- c. Tell me about the community you currently live in. Why did you choose to live in this town? How does this differ from where you grew up (if it does)?
 2. Tell me about your immediate family.
 - a. If you know, what is your biological parents' racial origin?
 3. Tell me about a time when you family openly talked about you being biracial.
 - a. If you cannot think of a time, why might this have been off limits for conversation?
 4. Tell me about a time when you did not feel accepted because you are biracial.
 - a. Tell me about a time when you did feel accepted because you are biracial.
 5. Can you think of an example of a way that your family shaped how you think about your own racial identity?
 - a. Can you think of an example of a way that your peers shaped how you think about your racial identity?
 6. How would you describe your racial identity?
 - a. What category did you choose on the 2010 U.S. Census? How did you feel about choosing this category?
 - b. If you were completing the census today, how would you respond to the question related to race?
 7. Has the way you racially identify changed over time? Describe this process
 8. Tell me about a time when someone asked you what race you are, or "what" you are.
 - a. How do you feel with others question you about your race?
 9. What does it mean to you to be biracial?
- **Request Artifacts / Journals:** "Can you show me examples of personal artifacts or documents, of your choosing, that hold meaning to you, in terms of your racial identity. With your permission I will take photographs of these items or make copies of the documents to use in the analyzing the results for the final study. The photos of these artifacts and copies of the documents will be used to describe the data, not to show to others."
 - **Closing:**
 - "Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?"
 - "Do you know of other individuals, who fit the criteria, and might be interested in participating in this study?" "Would you feel comfortable providing me with their contact information?"
 - Thank the participant for their participation.
 - Confirm the date, time and location of the second interview.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol II

Interview Topic: Leadership Experiences

- **Personal Introductions.**
- **Purpose of the study:** “As a reminder, my dissertation research involves examining the unique perspectives and experiences of Black/White biracial leaders. The first interview you participated in focused on your racial identity and experiences related to your racial identity. Today’s second interview will focus on your leadership experiences.”
- **Remind the participant of the consent form they signed at the beginning of the first interview. Ask if they have questions about the consent form.**
- **Provide structure of the interview:** “The second interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio taped. I will also take notes throughout the interview. As a reminder, you will be given a pseudonym, the same pseudonym you used in the first interview, in the final results to maintain your confidentiality.”
- **Requesting personal artifacts / reflective journals:** “Like the first interview, at the close of this interview I will ask you to provide me examples of personal artifacts or documents, of your choosing, that hold meaning to you, in terms of your leadership experiences. With your permission I will take photographs of these items or make copies of the documents to use in the analyzing the results for the final study. The photos of these artifacts and copies of the documents will be used to describe the data, not to show to others.”
- **Ask the participant if they have questions.**
- **Test audio recording equipment.**
- **Guiding Interview Questions**
 1. Tell me about your current leadership role(s).
 - a. How did you get into these roles?
 2. Describe your leadership style.
 - a. Can you describe a time when you exemplified this style in one of your leadership roles?
 - b. How might those you are leading describe you as a leader?
 - c. How do you personally define leadership?
 3. What do you find most rewarding about leading others?
 - a. Can you think of a time when this was really highlighted?
 - b. Can you describe a challenging leadership experience?

4. Tell me about a leader who has had a strong influence on you.
 - a. Describe an experience you had with this person if it is someone you know. Or, if you do not know the person, describe how you came to know about this person.
 - b. How might this person self-identify in terms of race?
 5. Reflect on our previous interview about your racial identity. Tell me about a time when your leadership role and your racial identity interacted.
- **Request Artifacts / Journals:** “Can you show me examples of personal artifacts or documents, of your choosing, that hold meaning to you, in terms of your leadership? With your permission I will take photographs of these items or make copies of the documents to use in the analyzing the results for the final study. The photos of these artifacts and copies of the documents will be used to describe the data, not to show to others.”
 - **Closing:** “Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?”
 - **Thank the participant for their participation.**
 - **Member Checking:** “I will provide you a copy of the results and will ask that you review and judge the accuracy and credibility of my findings and interpretations.”

Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent



INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Experiences of Biracial Leaders: A Phenomenological Study

Purpose of the Research:

This research project explores the experiences and perspectives of Black/White biracial leaders. The purpose is to describe how biracial leaders racially identify and how those identities influence their leadership experiences. To participate you must be 19 years of age or older. You are invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as having a unique perspective that is believed to contribute to the understanding of leadership.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require approximately 2 hours of your time. This will require your participation in two separate face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The first interview will focus on your racial identity and experiences related to your racial identity. The second interview will focus on your leadership experiences. Both interviews will be audio taped with your permission. Interviews will be held at a convenient location and time determined by you. At the end of each interview, I will ask you to show me examples of personal artifacts or documents, of your choosing, that hold meaning to you, in terms of your racial identity and leadership experiences. With your permission I will take photographs of these items or make copies of the documents to use in the analyzing the results for the final study. I will not take the original items with me at the close of the interview. The photos / copies of these artifacts or documents will be used to describe the data, not to show to others.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There is minimal risk associated with this research. Given the salience of your racial identity, there is a slight risk that someone reading the study may be able to ascertain your identity. To reduce the chances of this happening, all identifying information will be omitted from this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your given name and the names of the organizations you work or volunteer for will not be included. The cities where you work and or volunteer will also be omitted. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for three years after the study is complete. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Benefits:

This research does not include any direct benefits to you as the participant. However, as a participant in this study you may find the learning experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful for your own professional development. A copy of the final results / finished report will be provided as a benefit.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Compliance Services Office at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the researcher to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input concerning the research process, or to voice any concerns regarding the research.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your consent confirms that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

By signing below, you are confirming that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I grant permission to be audio taped.

I do NOT grant permission to be audio taped.

_____ (signature) _____ (date)

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Carmen Zafft, M.S. Principal Investigator
Gina Matkin, Ph.D. Secondary Investigator

Cell (402) 802-7520 Office: (402) 472-4940
Office: (402) 472-2807

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Services



INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

Confidentiality Agreement Transcription Services

I, Glenda Hinz, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, digital recordings and documentation received from Carmen Zafft related to her doctoral study at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln exploring the experiences of biracial leaders. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes, digital recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Carmen Zafft.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes, digital recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return study-related documents to Carmen Zafft in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices at completion of the project.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes, digital recordings and/or digital files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Glenda Hinz

Transcriber's signature Glenda Hinz

Date: 4/19/2012