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How Mom and Dad Use Crayons: A Study of How Parents Perceive and Negotiate Racial Identity with Their Black and White Biracial Children

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HOW MOM AND DAD USE CRAYONS:
A STUDY OF HOW PARENTS PERCEIVE AND NEGOTIATE RACIAL IDENTITY
WITH THEIR BLACK AND WHITE BIRACIAL CHILDREN

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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Doctor of Philosophy

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May
2004

This dissertation, submitted by Ronald T. Ferguson Jr. in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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(Chairperson)

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This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Dean of Graduate School

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Date

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PERMISSION

Title   How Mom and Dad Use Crayons: A Study of How Parents Perceive and
                        Negotiate Racial Identity With Their Black and White Biracial Children

Department   Teaching and Learning

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Signature   *Ronald Fey*

Date   4/22/04

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ABSTRACT

The exponential increase in interracial marriage has brought with it a group of biracial children who do not fit neatly into the current racial classification system. The purpose of this study was to understand the perception and the strategies parents take to negotiate identity with their children. Moreover, the desire is to also understand how they came to such perceptions, what those perceptions are, and how they may or may not affect what they do with their children.

This study involved 10 interracial couples that are parents of biracial children who are half African American and half European American. All children were over the age of nine years old. Subsequently, the parents were subjected to semi-structured, taped interviews.

There were three major findings in this study. First, parents were found to have traits that predisposed them to happy marriages and healthy relationships with their biracial children. Parents of biracial children were found to be open minded to race and culture. Further, the respondents reported having parents who were very supportive in both the interracial marriage and childrearing process. Second, parents of biracial children do not perceive their children in a mono-racial manner. Instead most parents see their children in a non/biracial point of view. Finally, the parents studied were engaged in purposeful and deliberate actions in an attempt to negotiate a healthy identity with their children. Strategies parents used included open dialogue, introduction of racial/cultural artifacts (i.e. books, dolls, movies, music) and event and experiences.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Respondent: "I owe a lot to my parents because they explained that [biracial-ness] to me from the beginning. They never emphasized one or the other [race] and I feel comfortable." (Ferguson, 2001).

The excerpt above is the testimonial of a young biracial woman who has come to a decision regarding what particular racial categorization to subscribe to. She expressed in the interview that her parents were heavily responsible for the type of decision she has made regarding race. In addition, she expressed a sense of comfort with the racial decision she has made.

This case is not unique. In fact, this is the type of testimonial that was reported repeatedly by biracial children in a study I conducted three years ago (Ferguson, 2001). In almost every case during those interviews, biracial children identified the actions and perspectives of their parents to be some of the most important factors in their racial identity development. The apparently strong connection between parents and the acquisition in a child's formation of identity further adds to the complexity inherent in the study of race and racial identity formation. It is due to this connection that we embark on this study.

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What is Race?

This is a study of how biracial parents influence their children's "racial" acquisition. When looking at the nature of the research question, it becomes evident that the impact of "race" in American society has a big part to play in the reason for this type of research. Due to the significant position that "race" holds in this study, it is imperative that I immediately define what is meant by race and how it will be treated in this study.

The attempt to define race in its most popular form, by physical characteristics, is incomplete at best (Bulmer & Solomos, 1999; Wardle and Janzen, 2004; Montagu, 1951: Spickard, 1999). While many have looked at race as a biological and "real" entity, this study does not acknowledge or accept the "reality" of race (Davis, 1987). It can be concluded that race in itself is purely a social construct (Montagu, 1951; Groves, 1993; Spickard, 1999). Simply put, "race" is not real. What is real and significant is that "race" exists in the minds of many Americans in our country today. "Race" has an important place in this study because many of the parents understand and can identify with the current racial classification system, and many people believe that race is real. [For definition of terms, refer to Appendix A].

Since this is a study of interracial relationships with parents of African American and European heritage, I chose to identify these "racial" categories as "Black" and "White" throughout the study. Due to the acknowledgments that one should be sensitive when labeling groups and that "race" was not real, coming to this conclusion was difficult and not taken lightly. Thus, I chose these plain color references because the terms "Black" and "White" are easily identifiable and accepted by most people.

Biracial-ness

"What are you anyway?" It is not at all unique for a biracial person to be asked this question several times in his or her life. Essentially, an inquiry such as this is, for the biracial person, unwanted. Currently, it is appropriate to call a biracial person, whose parents are of different races, "mixed" or "biracial." In many ways, this label is accurate due to the reality that they (biracial children) share a mixture of both their parent's racial heritage.

Otherwise, who a biracial person is and how their biracial-ness is to be defined depends on many different factors. For instance, racially, they are merely the amalgamation of two different racial "categories." Culturally, which is defined as a way of life for a group of people, they can borrow from all areas of their upbringing, traditions, and socio-economic status. Some may have grown up as a Hassidic Jew, while others have grown up in East Harlem and live their lives observing a predominantly Black heritage.

Biracial-ness also has a lot to do with choice. What makes biracial people unique is that these individuals possess a legitimate choice to identify with one "race" or another. Right now, there are approximately 7 million people who call themselves multiracial in this country, with millions of them being biracial (Cohn & Fears, 2001). This is a number that will undoubtedly keep rising, and changing the way we deal with race.

To be biracial in today's world is quite different then that of years past. Earlier in America's history, the choices available to biracial people were driven by larger societies' treatment of race at that time (Davis, 1987). In the early twentieth century for example, Americans of different racial groups were neatly packaged into easily

identifiable categories where all one had to do was check the appropriate box that signified their racial affiliation (Root, 1992). Within this perceived simplicity, one erroneously assumed he or she could understand the social, emotional, and cultural characteristics of members within the neatly prescribed racial categories.

Due to these perceptions, stereotypes and assumptions such as "Hispanic males are macho and dominant," and "African American males are hypersexual" have further made it easier for us to "make sense" out of our diversity (Manning & Baruth, 2000). These admittedly damaging stereotypes were easy for people to reference our world's diversity. Overall, such assumptions were incorrect at best, racist at worst.

However, in today's society, issues that used to be easy, simplistic, and socially accepted are now becoming subjective, convoluted, and questioned by society at large. The struggle lies in the existence of an antiquated racial system at odds with new forms of diversity and new ways of thinking. Clearly, we see certain "catalysts" that are responsible for the change in society's re-evaluation of race and diversity. One of these "catalysts" has been the emergence of the biracial family. These families are "pushing the envelope" of an antiquated racial system.

Biracial Parents

Who are these people? Biracial parents are like any other parents in the country, yet there is one distinction that sets them apart. Simply, these are people, who have been identified as coming from two different races that form an intimate relationship with each other. The range can be anywhere from White father and Black mother to Asian Mother and Native American father. The general idea is that the parents are individuals of certain "races" that get together and have children with members of another race.

The offspring of these relationships are biracial children. As such, the parents have a unique opportunity to influence their children's racial identity in a much bigger way than that of parents of mono-racial children. While this presents many opportunities for parents, it can also be challenging. Like many other parents, biracial parents must raise their children to be successful and responsible citizens. Unlike other parents, they have potential issues of racism, ambivalence, and the balancing of two cultures surrounding their children's lives. For two parents this would be quite the task, for single parents, the situation would be even worse. Besides the general emotions and challenges that come with parental separation, many scholars have argued that divorce or separation in an interracial relationship can have negative ramifications concerning the transmission of cultural heritage (Huffman, 1995; Gibbs & Hines, 1994).

The prevalence of interracial parents is a fairly new phenomenon. Historically, interracial relationships were widely frowned upon, if not condemned by most. As "race" was seen as a biological and "real" phenomenon, any intermixing of races was seen as a threat to the racial classification system (Davis, 1987). Coupled with the idea that any "drop" of blood from a minority group guaranteed affiliation with a minority group, many in society devised rules and laws, called miscegenation laws, that prohibited the intermixing of people of different "races" (Davis, 1987). As a result, interracial relationships for the most part were limited to situations of scandal and infidelity, such as the diabolical sexual imposition on the slave girl by the White slave master (Hall, 2000). Further, since most interracial relationships were kept in secrecy, there is no reliable data as to the historical prevalence of interracial relationships.

Currently, the statistics show the number of biracial families increasing at a fast rate. There are approximately 355,000 plus interracial married couples in this country (Rosenblatt, et, al, 1995). Truly, these types of families have grown exponentially. In 1992 for example, there were 246,000 Black, White, interracial couples compared to the 50,000,000 married couples in the United States (Rosenblatt, et, al, 1995). These numbers, when compared to a mere 65, 000 interracial couples there were in 1970, display a marked increase of about 265 % (Huffman, 1994).

All of these statistics point to an increasing population of biracial families, which in turn has fostered a "biracial baby boom" (Root, 1992). The children of these relationships represent a group who do not neatly fit into any of the prescribed racial categories in American culture. What's more, these biracial offspring have choices that were not available to biracial children historically (Davis, 1987). In the pre-civil rights era, many treated "race" as a biological reality. As such, concepts such as the "one drop rule," which would suggest any amount of "Black blood" made you fully "Black," made it difficult for anyone of mixed heritage to choose anything other than a mono-racial identity. Today, the "one drop rule" is no longer widely regarded as truth, and biracial people are now able to legitimately consider other racial choices. Parents of biracial children, who were previously constrained to rearing their children toward a mono-racial acquisition, are now free to encourage their children to explore other racial identity choices.

We now know that the acquisition of racial identity does not occur within a vacuum (Root, 1992; Nishimura, 1992). Biracial children do not come to a conclusion about their racial identity by themselves; rather there are agents of socialization that

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affect these conclusions. Parents have a special role to play in the transmission of ideas about race and culture. It is not difficult to accept the fact that parents of biracial children, as primary agents of socialization, do have a big part to play in how their children acquire a racial identity. As research has consistently validated the realm of racial choices that are now available to biracial children, the parents role becomes more important to consider (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1992).

According to Terry Huffman (1995), such racial conclusions are "negotiated" between parents and their biracial children. With such choices at their disposal, it is imperative to examine the agents of socialization who are the most important influences for such a choice. Throughout this study, the focus of inquiry will not be on biracial children themselves, but rather on their primary caretakers: their parents.

Biracial Children

When people hear about new interracial relationships, a common response to the soon-to-be parents in this union is "What about the children?"(Huffman, 1994; Root, 1995). Biologically, these children are the direct products of potentially controversial interracial relationships. Society has imposed many different pejoratives to describe the biracial child. From the "tragic mulattoes" in the times of anti-miscegenation laws to the terms "half-breed" and "mixed child" that are used today.

Many of these pejoratives are remnants of the social discontent many people had with the products of interracial relationships: biracial children. Historically, miscegenation laws outlawed interracial relationships (Davis, 1987; Wardle & Janzen 2004). These laws were put in place to maintain White racial purity (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). As such, the number of mixed marriages was very small, and mixed relationships

were often held in secret (Gibbs, 1989). Any children that resulted from these relationships were seen as products of a deviant act (Hall, 2000). Popular culture of the time viewed these children as "tragic mulattoes," or victims of an unfortunate circumstance. More damaging terms such as "trick baby" and "half breed" further reinforced the perception that mixed race relationships and biracial children were regrettable, if not scandalous affairs (Hall, 2000).

Today, biracial children continue to be put in a precarious position. Rulings such as *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)* and the passing of the *Civil Rights Act (1964)* have changed the way we handle diversity in this country (Manning & Baruth 2003). The changing tide of thought about race and interracial relationships welcomes a whole new set of perspectives on the subject. Arguably, the increase of biracial individuals in this country is so great that it threatens any remnant of a racial classification system we have left (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). Since the passing of the Supreme Court decision of *Loving vs. Virginia (1967),* that makes anti-miscegenation laws illegal, the number of biracial children has tripled (Sandor & Larson, 1994). As stated earlier, this has created a virtual "biracial baby boom" that only now are we seeing a remarkable number of biracial children who are coming to understand their racial situation in many different ways. In fact, the number of mixed race births in this country is growing at a faster rate than mono-racial births (Wardle & Janzen, 2004).

Unlike earlier eras in which the numbers of biracial children were shrouded in secrecy, demographers have now been paying attention to the growth of this group and numbers are now available. For example, the 2000 census has estimated that

approximately 4.2% of Americans under the age of 18 were listed as multi racial. This is a number that translates into millions of multi-racial children (Cohn & Fears, 2001).

Additionally, we live in an era where there are a lot more biracial children then there are biracial adults. This is evident in the percentage of children in the 2000 census that consider themselves biracial compared to the percentage of parents. Of all the children listed in the census, 4.2% of children consider themselves multiracial in relation to 1.2% of all the adults (Cohn & Fears, 2001). While revealing, the statistics reflect more than mere number growth. In addition, differences in "racial" reporting allude to the reality that older "multi-racial" people, many born in the pre-civil rights era, still subscribe to a "one drop rule" ideology regarding racial affiliation, which can account for some of the disproportionate numbers. As such, the number of multi-racial people in this country may be much higher than is reflected by the statistics.

Although the focus of the study is the parents of biracial children, the study is indirectly about the children. The reason for this is that these children negotiate with their parents. The time that parents "negotiate" race with their children is so important because it is at this time that the children go through the most critical identity development (Nishimura, 1992; Ferguson, 2001). The end result of this negotiation is the child's acquisition of race. While understanding the parent's role is of most importance in this study, an indirect component of this study is the child's racial acquisition itself.

Social Construction of Race

Although I defined what is meant by race earlier in the chapter, a further discussion of the complexities of race and how it is socially constructed is warranted.

Tiger Woods is arguably the most visible personification of the complex issues

surrounding race as a social construct in society today (Hall, 2001). Having a mixture of

Asian, White, Black, and Native American in his background, his story has displayed

how the fluid social construct that is race has an effect on US society (Hall, 2001). In his

ascent to stardom in the realm of golf, many people were quick to label Woods, who is

multiracial, as African American, Asian, or a minority that signified the rise of people

who have been barred from such high social status historically.

Instead of embracing these perceptions, Woods decided to distance himself from

any particular race whatsoever, instead leaning on his multi-racial heritage. Tiger Woods

told the world that his race was "Cablinasian", a term describing his multi racial heritage

of Black, White, Asian and Native American (Hall, 2001). Tiger Woods story is

important because it exemplifies two concepts: 1.) Race matters to people in our society.

2.) Race is a fluid social construct that can change in both meaning and definition

depending on context and circumstance.

"Race" is not dealt with in this study as a static, real entity. In this study, race is

treated as a socially constructed phenomenon. That is, race is not real, it is a notion

constructed by people for people. Specifically, race in and of itself is not anything notable

or important, but it is important in the context of a society's treatment of it. This is

echoed in Robert Park's argument, "Race Relations are not so much the relations that

exist between individuals of different races as between the consciousness of these

differences" (Root, 1992, p.332). It is the collective conscious that makes race important.

Both modern science and archaic classification systems have been unable to

adequately explain what race is and why it is important. The census bureau defines race

in a rather ambiguous manner. For example, ethnic-based definitions such as African

Americans are defined as being individuals with lineage in Sub-Saharan Africa (US

Census, 1998). This definition does not control for the marked increase in amalgamation

among "races." For example, earlier research has shown that 70% or more of all

American Blacks have White ancestors (Beigel, 1966). With such a swell of

amalgamation and interrelation with once predefined "races" in this country, how can this

definition be generalized to the diverse African American population in the United States

today?

Science makes no better conclusions. To this date scientists have not identified

any natural or scientific law that explains the meaning or existence of race; perhaps they

never will. However, there is a general consensus amongst biologists that genetically, any

differences between races are spurious at best (Hall, 2000). That is, race has no real

biological significance whatsoever. With such an assertion by physical scientists that race

is not that important in a scientific sense, we must look at a social answer for the

existence of the acute racial distinctions that we have in the United States today.

This conclusion is in direct opposition to how scholars have historically defi

race as a real and biologically important phenomenon (Bulmer & Solomos, 1999). E

scholars viewed race as a real biological construct. As such, these scholars made the

that a person's phenotype, the outward physical characteristics, and their genotypes,

internal genetic codes, were, systematic, predictable, and one in the same (Bulmer &

Solomos, 1999). However, their conclusions were erroneous, and as such, legitimize_ ...

outward racial bigotry that was rampant in the early 20th century (Bulmer & Solomos,

1999). There is no such thing as a "pure" race genetically, and with such spurious genetic difference, race is limited to nothing more than social significance.

It is important for us to understand that although "race" may be a powerful social idea, it is nevertheless socially constructed. Thus if it is socially constructed, there are "agents of socialization" that can be accounted for the adoption of racial classifications. Thus, the question becomes what are these important agents of socialization and how do they function to foster racial identity?

Negotiation of Identity

These two concepts, negotiation and identity, encompass the process in which I would like to discover. Specifically, the goal is to discover how parents negotiate a racial identity with their children. As such, it is important to delineate what is meant by identity and negotiation.

Identity stands for the culmination of what one is in the social realm (Howard, 2000). Generally, it is how a person defines him or herself within the culture, time, and population in which he or she lives. Racial identity, although only a part of a person's overall identity, is very important to consider. For example, Poston considers racial identity to be the "pride in one's race" (Poston, 1990 p. 152). Although Poston's assertions point to a general positive feeling towards a particular race, biracial persons have the choice to identify with part of their heritage, while discounting other parts (Ferguson, 2001). For the biracial person, what one "is" racially is not a given. Conversely, the biracial person legitimately has a realm of racial identity choices to choose from. For this study, his or her specific "racial" identity choice is not important,

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[i.e. a Black or White choice] but rather the journey they take with their parents to that conclusion is what is in question.

Negotiation in this study is treated as the parent's purposeful participation in the development of their children's racial identity. As stated earlier, identity formation does not occur in a vacuum, but is the result of a fluid social construct (Root, 1992; Gibbs & Hines, 1994). Thus, the agents of socialization (family, friends, acquaintances) are actively involved in shaping this socially constructed identity. Earlier research done in the area of identity formation suggests that parents "negotiate race" with the children (Huffman, 1995; Gibbs and Hines, 1994). Huffman defines negotiated identity as "the process by which biracial children, in conjunction with their parents, derive a self-defined biracial identity (Huffman, 1995, p.12). Although it is assumed that parents normally do not force their children to be White or Black, they do suggest and offer positive ideas about certain racial choices and attitudes.

Also, "negotiation" is not a "one shot deal" accomplished over coffee. Racial negotiation can often last much of the child's life. This is important because many earlier studies have identified that children acquire a racial identity early on in life, in which many of those choice turn out to be permanent (Ferguson, 2001; Gibbs & Hines, 1992).

Thus, the concept of negotiation contends that parents and children are actively involved in making choices about what group that they will identify with. It is widely accepted that the biracial child forms a racial identity. In addition, the parents themselves have their own views of their child's racial make-up. The negotiation occurs when the parent's perceptions and the children's ideas about race culminate in a healthy racial decision for the child.

What will the children choose? Although the choices run the gamut, they tend to fall into four distinct categories. In the case of a child that is a product of a Black and White relationship it would be "Black," "White," "Biracial," or "no-race" (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002). Thus, within these choices, the child, parents, and others all have a part in guiding the child to a certain racial identity conclusion. Families with biracial offspring provide a true example of such fluidity with our once simplistic racial categorization system.

In and of themselves, such choices could be regarded as inconsequential and arbitrary (an argument based on the idea that race is a social construct, containing no true difference between people). Despite such a notion, a specific racial choice can have real ramifications for the biracial child. It is widely accepted that America has "life chances" depending on what race you are born. For example, it can i what "race" you are can determine your educational paths, career opportun choices, prospective housing, etc. With such opportunities at stake, racial ide formation becomes a topic that is not inconsequential and arbitrary, but impor meaningful in our American society.

Problem Statement

Within the context of this ever-increasing group of biracial children who are born into a society where racial affiliation is important, the question remains how the agents of socialization in our society (i.e. parents, school, friends) engage and affect the racial identity choices biracial children make. Current research has pointed out that several outside factors are important in the guidance of a biracial child's racial identity (Ferguson, 2001). One of the factors that have been identified as paramount has been the

influence of the parents on biracial children. Specifically, scholars contend that the actions of these parents can be a significant factor in the conclusions that these children make about their biracial identity (Mass, 1999; Kich, 1992; Huffman, 1994; Ferguson, 2001; Wardle & Janzen, 2004; Rosenblatt, et al 1995; Ladner, 1984).

Although many studies have offered many possible hypotheses as to the dynamics that such influence has had on biracial children, very little has been done to document and ascertain exactly how parents perceive and thus negotiate the racial identity with their biracial children. For instance, one causal factor that scholars allude to as a possible determiner of racial identification is the existence of racial discrimination experienced by the child (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Ferguson, 2001). Such conclusions beg the question, if the level of discrimination that children feel during their formative years has an effect on their identification, what about the level of discrimination that is experienced by the biracial parents? How does this affect their negotiation of race with their child? How does this affect how they perceive their child?

In conclusion, prior research, such as the excerpt from a biracial girl included earlier in the chapter, suggests that a fair portion of the negotiation of a child's identity is mainly between the child and the parents. Parents, who have consciously raised their children the best they could, arguably should have the best access to information regarding the rearing of their children. Thus, understanding the nuances, complexities, and implications of such a relationship can be best understood by seeking out the parents themselves. As such, that will be the focus of this study: to understand how parents negotiate identity with their biracial children.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify, through a qualitative research design, the strategies that parents identify as useful in the negotiation of identity of their biracial children. Many scholars already agree that the prevalence of such negotiation exists, that parents are important, and the choice are real (Huffman, 1994; Kich, 1999; Rosenblatt et al, 1995; Ladner 1984). Being able to document and postulate some conclusions on what types of strategies that parents are using may be helpful in further understanding how biracial people decide on their specific racial identity.

Specific Goals of Study

There were several specific goals that I identified in relation to the problems and purpose related to this study. First, parents of biracial children will be queried on their perceptions of their children. Specifically, the researcher wants to know how they themselves have made sense of their children's racial affiliation. The hope is to uncover and document some similar types of feelings and perceptions that these parents may face when trying to make sense out of "who" and "what" that their children are.

Secondly, there is a need to understand what types of things that the parents are doing to negotiate an identity with their child. As reported in previous studies, the parents themselves have a part in the child's formation of a racial identity (Ferguson, 2001). As such, it would be beneficial to be able to see what types of activities that these parents are engaging in with their children that may lead them towards or away from a specific racial affiliation. It is also important to note that the parents do not have to necessarily be cognizant of the way that they are negotiating identity with their children. Hopefully, we

will be able to come to an understanding as to the type of influence that the parents may have as they encourage choices in their children.

Description of Study

The plan of action set to answer the aforementioned questions is as follows: The researcher interviewed 10 married, Black and White interracial couples of biracial children from the upper Midwest. Additional criteria for interview required that they be married couples, living together, who are parents of half Black, half White children who are over the age of 9 years of age (reasons for such delimitations to be discussed in methods section). Single parents of biracial children were exempt from this study. Data were collected through the use of the qualitative method of the interview. The interviews were used to examine the key points as discussed in the purpose of study. As shown in previous research on the biracial identity formation, the qualitative technique of interviewing was necessary to understanding such a rich and novel topic such as this.

A Biracial Journey

As a researcher, I was careful in the ways I conducted this study. I identified people I did not know and interviewed them in a non-threatening setting. I used in strategies that were non-coercive nor leading in any way. As much as possible, I re as many assumptions or expectations that I had about how parents may or may not been en aging their children as possible. Herein, I feel that I have achieved my responsibility as a researcher to answer a pertinent question in the area of biracial i formation: how parents perceive and negotiate race with their children.

As a biracial person, I believe the impact of this research goes far beyond the successful completion of a scholarly work that is accepted by one's peers. In this

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research, I have achieved a major milestone in my personal life and hopefully, in the lives of many other biracial people. To understand how this study affects me personally, I must go back to the past and explain where the impetus for this research came from.

I was raised in a single parent family raised by my White mother in the U_____ States Virgin Islands. My father, who was of Bahamian (Bahamas) heritage, left family when I was four years old. I was devastated by the loss of my father and t up even now when thinking of those dark times. For most of my life, I lived in a poor community with my three brothers and four sisters (8 of us total). My moth registered nurse who worked very hard at her job to support our family. Unfortu with eight children, life became very hard for her and she had to quit her job to care for us full time. Being the oldest child, seeing each additional child come into the family was both a blessing and a challenge as my mother would become more overwhelmed with the responsibilities of child-rearing. Thus, I spent many years of my life fending for myself.

Most of my life, I did not need to consult any research to understand that as biracial children grow older, they start having issues concerning their racial affiliation. Being in a primarily African American community, I felt the constant pressure to consider myself Black. My mother also corroborated what many in the Virgin Islands considered me: Black. Many times I would ask my mother, "What race am I?" and my mother would promptly tell me I was Black. In fact that is what I considered myself most of my life.

When I moved to the United States to pursue an education, I immediately was struck by intense racial distinctions that people made here. In the Virgin Islands, there are many shades of "Black" and only one shade of "White." There really was not that much

ambiguity concerning race. In the United States, people were so much more concerned about what racial category a person is in. For instance, many people in the United States would ask me "What are you?" and "are you Black or Hispanic?" Initially, I was taken aback by such an overt racial system, but I soon grew accustomed to such experiences.

For some time after that, racial acquisition was not easy for me. As questions came, I started to doubt the preconceived notions I had about my own "blackness." Fighting overt racism from "White" children and skepticism from "Black children" made it very difficult to know what "side" I stood on. At this stage of my life I was rather ambivalent about who I was racially, and as a person. Despite these hardships, I was able to maintain a "Black" identity.

It was not until graduate school that I started to objectively consider the issue of biracial-ness and how it relates to me. On a social outing I met a biracial person who was very comfortable with both sides of his race: "Terrance." I was intrigued with the level of comfort Terrance exhibited concerning both his European American and African American backgrounds. It was at this time that I realized that biracial people make different racial choices ' 'ave made a choice to be "Black," Terrance decided to be outwardly biracial; a ' . was happy with it. This provided me with the impetus to do my first study of biracial people.

In that study (Ferguson 2001), I wanted to specifically understand how biracial people could come to different racial decisions. It was not important for me to know *what* they chose, rather, it was important to know *how* they came to their racial decisions. In that study, I interviewed 15 biracial adults, all who have reported a racial decision. In the

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findings, I concluded that all biracial people went through different stages of formation and made many different decisions regarding who they were.

More importantly, within those stages, biracial people did not form their racial identity alone. Among others, parents were identified as a strong influence on many of the respondent's subsequent formation of identity. Also, biracial children who were from intact families were more likely to express positive experiences with their biracial-ness. This finding took particularly important to me. I always wondered why Terrance, who did have both parents in his home, was so happy about his racial position.

These findings forced me to take a look at my own upbringing. I always felt that my parents led me towards a particular path. My father, although gone, had a factor in my identity. When my father walked out on our family, it felt like my "Black side" was leaving. Many of my childhood days were spent thinking about my Dad, who he was, his culture, and his "Blackness."

In our single parent family, my mother was a strong influence on who I was. She instilled the sense of what I felt about race and myself. In some ways it felt like my mother and I did everything to sustain the "Blackness" that was in our family. My mother even told me once that she considered herself "Black," or "culturally Black," and that we should have no issue deciding what we were.

The culmination of my research findings and my life experiences led me to the next part of my journey. Research and personal experiences told me that biracial children make different choices about their race. Moreover, there were social agents (parents) at work that in someway, can shape what type of identity and racial experiences the child will have. I knew from my own experiences in a single parent family how this racial

formation plays out. My experiences were that I was led down a mono-racial identity. While interesting, this idea was dwarfed by the effect intact families seemed to have on their biracial children. What intrigued me was that there were many people like Terrance, from intact homes, that were not ambivalent about race, that were happy and proud of their "dual heritage."

Thus, I wanted to embark on the study to understand the motivations, perceptions, and strategies that parents used to instill such a healthy and happy identity like that, which is exhibited in my friend Terrance. Specifically, I wanted to study how intact families engaged and negotiated racial identity with their children. This question was satisfied as a result of this research.

As a biracial person, I feel that this study benefits me enormously. Since the death of our mother, I am raising my brother and two sisters, who are also biracial. They have similar questions and decisions to make. Knowing what I know, I feel that I am in a privileged position to give them the best guidance there is to offer, guidance that was cultivated from the success stories of ten intact biracial families who wish that their children adopt a healthy and happy non/mono-racial identity.

This research has truly been an important part of my life journey. While th research is an important part of my life's work in this area both personally and academically, it is by no means the end of either. I feel that this research is, in som ways, a beginning for me in both areas. As a student of race issues, it opens many o doors and research avenues for me to pursue. As a biracial person, I can consider som of my own thinking and modify areas in which I feel need to be changed. Truly, this endeavor has been a blessing to me, my family, and hopefully for you, the reader.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will begin with an examination of the theoretical orientation and

assumptions of the research in regards to issues of race and identity. As such,

perspectives such as the symbolic interactionist perspective will be discussed.

In addition, a review of the literature will be offered to survey studies and ideas

from a variety of areas relevant to the research topic. First, there will be a discussion of

the history and research surrounding interracial couples. Secondly, parental negotiation

studies will be addressed. In conclusion, a discussion of biracial studies will be offered.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the course of this research, a framework based on assumptions of the

symbolic interactionist perspective was ever present. While many may argue that all

research must be totally void of any and all subjectivity, I posit that all research is

grounded in some type of assumption or bias. Max Weber once argued about the great

difficulty involved in conducting "value free" social research (Ringer, 1998). Weber was

not arguing that no research should be treated objectively, rather, that no research is

exclusively value free from top to bottom.

Weber argued that the employment of "verstehende", which is recounting the

ideas and thoughts of the people being studied, could curb potential threats to objectivity

(Ringer, 1989). Although helpful, even Weberian techniques cannot guarantee "value free" research. Even the individual who partakes in inductive research, which attempts to make a broader understanding from very specific phenomena, has a frame of reference, a belief system, and assumptions, which drive both the type of question that will be asked as well as the appropriate choice of methodology that will be used to explore the research area. Simply, there is no research inquiry that merely starts, is conducted, and ends in a state of total and unintentional objectivity. Research does not occur within a vacuum. All research has a framework from which it draws from.

The study of parents of biracial children is no different. There are paradigms that, in some ways, determine how we define race, biracial-ness, the current problems, as well as the needed measures to confront the situation. In the process of completing this study, I did not only rely on a competent and appropriate methodological design, but also on some assumptions regarding race, biracial-ness and societies treatment of these entities.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Symbolic interactionist perspective is a category of social psychology that was first introduced by Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Lal, 1995). The symbolic interactionist perspective is defined as being the scientific study of the social interaction between individuals, of individual processes in the social stimulus, and social relations to the individual (Franklin, 1999). Moreover, symbolic interactionist perspective is guided by four main tenants: 1) It focuses on the nature of the interaction. 2) It focuses on what people do in the present, 3) Looks at how the situation is defined by the people 4) Focuses on the free will of the individual (Charon, 1989). If we were to superimpose the

main precepts of symbolic interactionist perspective onto the research of parents of biracial children, one would find a good fit between the two.

It is a study that seeks to define the situation/object as interpreted by the actors within those situations (Hewitt, 1997). The object of the interaction is very important to consider. To the symbolic interactionist, the object can be whatever the actors within the situation define as real. These objects are often called symbols. In this study, one of the objects in question is race. Race, as a symbol, has no real, inherent worth beyond that ascribed to it by the subjects in the study. Inevitably, many of the actors in this study see race as a real entity, thus having real consequences for their children. In this way, the parents, society, and the children themselves socially construct race. Thus we assume that in this study that race is a socially constructed phenomenon in which the actors agree on the reality of a symbol. In this case, it is certain racial beliefs, attitudes, and identification.

This research is one that focuses on what happens today, not yesterday. It is the power of the current situations that shapes the understandings of the actors in every situation. For example, in the case of the parents of biracial children, the focus is to look at how parents perceive their children racially, and in turn how they negotiate this racial identity with their children.

Racial attitudes are not static; rather, it is in the fluid situation that things happen that may dictate how such objects are defined. For instance, a parent who raised his or her mixed child in a poor, all Black neighborhood may feel that the power of the situation is leading them to make a racial conclusion that their children are living in a Black world and should grow up as Black. In addition, someone who grew up in the 1930s would also have very different conclusions regarding race. They may feel compelled, by their

experiences growing up in the pre-civil rights era, to negotiate a Black identity for their child.

Symbolic interactionist research is subjectivist in nature, that is, it tends to look at the individual's interpretation of an object or situation. The way people define a situation is very important. On the outset being biracial seems to be a rather straightforward situation. Choices for biracial people abound as they can either choose to be, "Black," "White," "biracial" or nothing at all. In reality, the situation is much more complex than that. As Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) point out, there are a variety of ways that biracial people define race and their biracial-ness. In the study of parents of biracial children, it was important to understand how they each differently (between parents and couples) defined race and biracial-ness with their children.

Lastly, the symbolic interactionist perspective contends that all actors are capable of making their own decisions and interpretations. One of the main things that someone using the symbolic interactionist perspective must do is concentrate on the actors themselves (Lal, 1995). The actor must be considered because it is his or her view of the object and situation that is important, not that of the researcher. These people have the free will to decide if they will accept or reject a certain interpretation of a situation, symbol, or object. As such, biracial parents are no different. For instance, it is highly doubtful that there will ever be an instrument that will effectively predict what a parent or child perceives their race to be. As autonomous thinkers, they have the free will to make their own conclusions based on their own experiences, attitudes, and dispositions. Thus, it is imperative that we understand how these parents view race when such latitude of choices is at their disposal.

Social Construction

Part of the symbolic interactionist ideology has to do with the creation of the

symbols, objects, and situations in a given society. According to this perspective,

symbols are only significant if people define them as significant. In accordance with this

principle, the social constructivist perspective, a sub perspective of symbolic

interactionist perspective, contends that life itself is surrounded by meanings that we as

human ascribe to various entities (Loseke, 1999).

It is the meaning that we attribute to something that makes it important, worthless,

shocking, or mundane. For example, in 1999, a man went to jail because he repeatedly

parked a Ryder moving truck in front of an abortion clinic. The man legally rented the

truck and merely parked it in front of the clinic. In the truck, there was no bomb, no

weapon and no visible threat. However, in the wake of the Oklahoma City federal

building bombing, such an action was interpreted as dangerous and threatening by the

clinic staff, police, and the judge. Thus such an action warranted a charge of "terrorist

threats" and a year in jail for the man. The reason was that people (i.e. the staff at the

abortion clinic and the judge and jury) defined his seemingly innocuous behavior of

parking a Ryder van as a blatant form of threatening the safety and well being of the staff

and patients who entered the building. Like race, the Ryder van was not the real issue; it

was people's interpretation of the meaning of the van in front of the building.

The parents of biracial children subscribe to some ideology concerning race and

in turn, negotiate it with their children. Simply, race in and of itself, is not biological

valid. Indeed, people have physically identifiable differences, but these are one of a

million variants that can potentially be used to stratify human beings. Hence, race is a

popular way that humans create a means to stratify themselves, by race. According to

social constructionist theory, race and being biracial are only issues in society because

people define these issues as real.

In conclusion, we assume that race is a socially constructed phenomenon. We

assume that the parents can and do negotiate some type of meaning and consequence of

race with their biracial children. Thus, it is important to bring to light these broader

conventions that the researchers involved in this study subscribe to.

The focus of this study, the inquiry into how parents perceive and negotiate their

biracial children's identity, crosses into several areas of research. While research that

specifically deals with this niche topic is rather sparse, there is a collection of research in

the interconnected areas parental negotiation research, research of biracial identity

children, and, interracial marriage research.

Interracial Marriage: Historical Overview

To better understand the changes that biracial parents have endured in our society,

a discussion of the history of interracial marriages is offered here. Historically, interracial

relationships have been somewhat of a mystery. The reason behind this is because of the

context in which race was treated pre- 1960s (Davis, 1991). Race, during most of our

American history, was treated as a fixed, real phenomenon. Social mandates such as the

"one- drop rule" and anti-miscegenation laws limited the knowledge that we have about

interracial relationships (Rosenblatt, Et al. 1995). Thus, there are few facts and figures

that can be offered to reflect the prevalence of interracial marriage (Beigel, 1966).

However, what is known is that interracial relationships have existed for most of

American history.

What is often not discussed in relation to interracial relationships is the fact that intermixing between racial groups has been going on since the very inception of this country. Early colonialists, seeking respite from oppressive governments in Europe, ventured to America to take part in a new "egalitarian" society that would treat all people fairly. During this time, records show that racial amalgamation was rampant (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). Specifically, early records show that European men, many who were single due to the lack of White women, would often engage in sexual relationships with Native American women (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). Arguably, such an amalgamation was not initially looked on as a threat, but only a representation of the new "egalitarian" society that they lived in.

Positive public opinion concerning racial intermixing quickly waned during the 1800's. In fact, the situation changed as settlers, led by protestant colonies in the north, started to subscribe to the feelings of racial purity and segregation. Feelings of racial purity inspired efforts to demarcate people by race, thus, feelings of racial superiority were soon to follow. As such, Blacks and Africans were subjugated into a lower class category, and therefore were eligible to be considered as slaves: servant to the Whites (Davis, 1991). The imposition of slavery on Blacks made any hope of natural racial intermarriage a distant dream.

Much of what is known about the beginnings of interracial relationships between Whites and Blacks occurs during the antebellum period (Davis, 1991). It was in this pre-civil war era, in which slavery was rampant, that we find the first issues of interracial relationships starting to take shape. Because of the seemingly small number of Blacks in America at the time, interracial relationships were not seen as a threat to the purity of

races (Beigel, 1966). As such the sexual exploitation of Black women was common. For instance, on the plantation, the White slave master, being all-powerful, would demand sexual intercourse from any slave women whom he desired, regardless of her consent (Beigel, 1966). Any subsequent offspring from this relationship was looked at as a new addition to the slave trade. In reality, negative ramifications were quite extensive due to such an imposition. The reality of mixed race children in a system of racial oppression would prove to be a difficult issue historically.

While the slave master was able to get away with interracial sexual impropriety, public sentiment of the time was not equally tolerant of Black men having sexual relations with White women. Fueled by racial hatred, many African American men were tortured and killed for even a rumor of a sexual encounter with White women, regardless of the accuracy of the rumor.

After the Civil War and the subsequent Emancipation Proclamation that freed Blacks from the bondage of slavery, the fear of the reality of racial intermixing was more real than ever. Films such as *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted free Blacks murdering, stealing, and raping White women, fueled the fears of what would happen if Blacks were allowed access to White women. Those fears were not arbitrary however; they were grounded in the belief that one's race, being a real entity, could become tainted. This ideology was called the "one drop rule," that people, even with the smallest mixture of blood of another race, were considered tainted and thus non-White (Davis, 1991). Early rulings such as *People vs. Hall (1854)*, which designated that all non-White categories can be considered black, and *Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896)*, which called for the separation

of races, further pronounced a feeling of a "Black threat" upon Whites (Wardle & Janzen, 2004).

Because of these fears, anti-miscegenation laws were established. Anti-miscegenation laws created an atmosphere where human treated other humans like animals. For those who subscribed to such an ideology, the negative effects of miscegenation are analogous to that of dog breeding. One of the best examples is in the breeding of purebred boxers. For example, if a boxer is an offspring of an all White boxer, the offspring are seen as tainted. In addition, White boxers are systematically killed by breeders because of the potential "taint" that they can have on the bloodline. In the same fashion, without regard for individual worth, people were relegated into a category of being a superior or subordinate status. It is known through historical record that many African Americans were killed during this time (Wardle & Janzen, 2004).

Although these laws, many of which existed into the 1960's, forbade racial intermarriage, interracial relationships continued to exist throughout the early twentieth century (Beigel, 1966; Rosenblatt Et al, 1995). For example, in 1910, records show that 73% or interracial married couples lived in states that forbade such unions (Rosenblatt Et al, 1995). Many of the early twentieth century interracial marriages were possible because of the social class disparity between the Black husband and White wife (Beigel, 1966). Specifically, most early interracial marriages consisted of a relatively higher class Black man to a lower class White women. Presumably, it was much easier for a Black man to gain a White bride if the union were to provide a chance of "upward mobility" for the White women (Beigel, 1966 p. 186). Despite the success of such unions, they were not immune to public resistance, racism and discrimination because of their relationship.

Many people were resistant to such a union during this time. Studies during this time showed that as many as 88% (97% in the South) of Whites were opposed to interracial marriage (Beigel, 1966). While resistance to interracial marriage may stifle many interracial relationships, it did not extinguish the growth of interracial couples completely.

From the onset of the early twentieth century to today, things have changed significantly. After World War II, Black men, who had taken part in the war, were welcomed back as full citizens (Davis, 1991). When many of these men came home, seemingly validated for their service and duty during the war, they found that it was much easier to marry White women, and many of them did so (Davis, 1991). The advent of the civil rights era has further made the situation even better. Civil rulings such as *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education (1954)* had changed the way Americans of different races lived and worked together (Manning and Baruth, 2003). This ruling, which essentially reversed the *Plessy vs. Ferguson (1893)* ruling, provided for the opportunity of renewed integration and relationships between African Americans. The *Civil Rights Act (1964)* shielded all people from being discriminated because of "race, creed, or color." All these developments brought about sweeping changes to American culture and psyche.

Most importantly, *Loving vs. Virginia (1967)* made it illegal for any state to outlaw marriage by race (Rosenblatt Et al, 1995). This signaled the death of all miscegenation laws and the birth of an era that welcomed interracial relationships. No longer are young couples of different racial backgrounds forced to carry on their relationships in secrecy. As reported earlier, the numbers of mixed race couples has

increased exponentially. Such an increase has forced society to re-examine the strict "one drop rule" classification system. People can and do put themselves in different race categories.

Although things have changed drastically, this does not mean that things have reached of a level of utopian perfection. Some researchers point to the difficult dynamics that still exist in the mixed race marriage. Rosenblatt et al (1995) argues that people of mixed race marriages may yet experience levels of racism and resistance, especially during the onset of the relationship. Despite the tremendous ground that has been made, there are still some people that subscribe to a "one drop rule" ideology, thus resisting any form of racial mixing. Nonetheless, in spite of such challenges, interracial couples will inevitably flourish in our country. Hopefully, as ideas of race seem archaic and irrelevant, such challenges will cease to exist altogether.

Interracial Marriage Studies

To better understand the complexities involved with in interracial marriages, a review of past and current research is offered. Studies of mixed race marriages tend to look at how such an endeavor can affect the parents of biracial children. As stated before, earlier research has suggested that parents have some part to play in their child's formation of identity (Ferguson, 2001). Therefore, an overview of interracial relationships studies is warranted.

Some scholars posed the notion that because of the increased ability for interracial relationships to occur within this country there would undoubtedly be an upsurge of curiosity and interest by member of opposite races to date and marry (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). Others point to the desire for minorities to push their way up the social caste

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system through interracial marriage (Beigel, 1966). Neither explanation has been proven to explain the rise in interracial marriage today.

To examine this potential motivation for interracial dating, Lewis, et al. (1994) studied a large sample of mixed married couple to identify key factors in their interest in individuals of other races. What Lewis et al. found was that factors outside of race were the most important factors generally for people to marry outside their race. Specifically, a factor such as the "ease of ability to talk to" was seen as important factors in desirability. Therefore it is important to note that people who are choosing to get married to others outside their "race" are not due to a fad or some motivation to break caste ranks.

Many studies have pointed to the hardships endured by individuals who are involved in interracial marriages. Invariably, they will suffer from high levels of scrutiny from both sides. According to Lewis et al (1994) families are not as supportive of interracial marriages than they are of same race marriages.

Rosenblatt (1995) describes life in interracial relationships as one that is mired in experiences of racism, skepticism, and rejection. To be in such a relationship, a person must "navigate an environment where racist opposition is always possible" (Rosenblatt, 1995 p.156). Unfortunately, this negative sentiment about the reality of living in multiracial relationship is repeated throughout the literature.

Huffman (1994) notes that within the families on both sides, there are differing levels of acceptance of the relationship. In a study of 19 mixed Black and White marriages, Huffman found that the couples reported that there was an inverse relationship regarding family acceptance of the interracial relationship (Huffman, 1994). While the

immediate family on the Black side was more likely to be accepting of the couple, the Black extended family displayed more disapproval to the relationship.

Conversely, while the White extended family of the relationship tended to display a higher degree of acceptance towards the mixed relationship, the immediate White family tended to show less acceptance, initially. Huffman argues that the families of White spouses will feel more severe levels of anguish, shame, and betrayal than the relatives of the Black spouse. Unfortunately, the children may have limited access to their extended families depending on the severity of negative response of the interracial relationship (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Couples who find themselves subjected to the greatest amount of racial scrutiny are Black-White relationships. Spickard (1989) suggests that this intense opposition exists across both groups. Part of this has to do with the perception that the Black male is overly aggressive and a hypersexual predator (True, 1979). Conversely, Black people are generally opposed to such relations due to the poor ratio of available Black men to Black women. Such poor ratios lead to anger towards White women who are potentially stealing the few eligible mates that are left (Pottersfield, 1978).

This portrait of the challenges faced by individuals involved in interracial relationships further begs the question: what effect do their experiences have on how they treat their biracial child? Also, how does the context in which extended families accept the couple's relationship factor in with the couple's perception of their biracial child's race? How do all the factors introduced in the literature review (i.e. public resistance, racist attitudes, dating motivations) affect negotiated identity? While the literature hints at possibilities, hopefully this study can satisfy such questions.

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Parental Negotiation Studies

Traditionally, race and identity studies have focused on the individual's actions and perceptions towards such phenomena (Howard, 1948; Jacobs, 1992). Today, many scholars are beginning to look at the dimensions surrounding the individual's choices (Ladner, 1984; Kich, 1992; Huffman, 1993; Ferguson 2001). In fact, the research in this study is also designed to explore such outside influences. This type of research is paramount in understanding the totality of the situation regarding race and biracial-ness.

Consistent with assumptions made in this study, parents of biracial children promote particular racial choices with their children differently. In a study of biracial parents, Ladner concluded that there were three different ways in which parents may potentially deal with the identity of their children (Ladner, 1984). According to Ladner, one way is for the parents to deny that there are any racial or color issues to deal with altogether, these types of parents tend not to deal with the issue of race altogether. Next, some parents promoted a biracial identity for their children (Ladner 1984). Finally, many biracial parents attempt to promote an African American identity for their children. Interestingly, some of Ladner's findings have been shown to be consistent with the findings within this study.

For many researchers, parental involvement and discourse is essential to the overall development of the child. Waters (1994), in a study of immigrant Africans coming to the United States, suggests that the type of perceptions held by the parents and their subsequent involvement in the child's formation of their identities, was instrumental in whether the child saw him or herself as African American or native "Black." In this study, there is a distinction made by some foreign Blacks and not others. One of the main

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reasons for such distinctions to be made is how the African parents respond to their child about race and being American. In essence, the parents can steer the child toward or away from an African American identification (Waters, 1994).

Xie and Goyte (1990) suggest similar conclusions from their studies of children with biracial parents. Xie and Goyte contend that a biracial child does have options in choosing a race. As such, the option he or she chooses is contingent on certain contexts such as the connection the parents have to their cultures, the contact the parents have with their families, etc. These variables may determine how the parents may respond and lead their children to a racial conclusion.

In interviews with biracial families, Kerwin et al, (1993) also point to variables that are good predictors of a positive racial identity in biracial children. Among other things, Kerwin et al, contend that socioeconomic status, intact families, and parents who participate in an emotional lifestyle as being good predictors of a healthy identity for biracial children. According to Kerwin, those parents who can help guide their children through the racial identity formation process are most likely to have biracial children with the lowest levels of marginality concerning their race.

Kich (1992) asserts that the parents' comfort or discomfort with issues of race is also a variable to consider. Parents who exhibit high levels of openness about race are more likely to instill positive feelings about race. Conversely, parents who are uncomfortable may send confusing messages and lead a child to feelings of ambivalence and marginality.

Others offer more prescriptive strategies for parents to shield their children from any feelings of marginality. According to McRoy and Freeman (1968), there are various

strategies that the parent can use to assist the parent to avoid painful feelings of confusion and marginality. Discussion with the parents was seen as a key factor for success in the McRoy and Freeman study. Specifically, parents should be able to create an open forum for their children to share their feelings about their identity. Parents, who are informed and who have taken the time to consider issue related to identity, can be helpful in the guidance of their biracial children towards a healthy perspective on race.

Rosenblatt (1995) suggests that, overall; parents of biracial people have been doing a good job with their biracial children (Rosenblatt, 1985). Since parents of biracial children have experienced the adversity that is accompanied with people's reactions to interracial marriages, these parents are usually empathetic of their child's social condition. As such, Rosenblatt argues that such parents should instill positive feelings about their biracial children.

Gibbs (1989) gave a similar report that substantiates Rosenblatt's and McRoy and Freeman's recommendations. In a study of 12 biracial parents and children, Gibbs found that many parents were very supportive of their biracial children. Children in the study with instrumental parents were seen to be the most successful and happy. Finally, McRoy and Freeman's suggest parents be aware of their children's needs regarding race and be wary of the potential hardships.

Huffman (1996), in a study of 19 interracial families and their children, identified that parents need to form a "negotiated identity" with their child. The negotiation of identity consists of the parents and child's shared role of acquiring a racial identity for the child (Huffman, 1996). Huffman asserts that children that have parents who play a marginal role in their identity may be ambivalent about their racial identities. Huffman

cited that the children in the study exhibited a very positive awareness about their racial identity. Huffman pointed to the strong, healthy, and active roles that the parents took part in their children identity.

Studies done with mono-racial families have provided similar results. For instance, studies of African American children's level of socialization towards a particular race, Caughy et al, (2002) contend that children whose parents emphasize and "socialize" Black pride tend to report fewer problems dealings with race in their lives. Parents in the study routinely instilled in their children coping strategies to deal with the hardship of being a member of a minority group. Additionally, parents overwhelmingly instilled an appreciation of their racial heritage in their child. Therefore, children in this study reported high levels of satisfaction and comfort with their race.

Positive influence from parents can not only aid a child to understand and adopt a healthy racial identification, but can also help young immigrant children assimilate and adopt a successful and healthy American identity. In a study of 162 Soviet and Jewish refugees, Birman et al, (2002) concluded that the parents of those children represent one of the largest predictors of successful acculturation for those children (Birmen et al, 2002). Children who reported a vast amount of support from the parents reported higher levels of assimilation and identification with American society.

Beyond a general "influence" that the parents may have on their children, the parent's race and culture may play a part as well. For example, some scholars suggest that the race and cultural background of the parents may have something to do with how the children choose which race they identify with. Citing the rapid advance and assimilation of Asian Americans, Saenz et al (1995), has found that biracial children who

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have parents who are of European and Asian descent are more likely to consider themselves White. The parents encourage their children to form an Anglo-American perspective in the way that they immerse the children in a Euro-American culture while ignoring many Asian values, traditions, etc. (Saenz et al, 1995). This can be due to the desire for the biracial child to fit into a White world. Such efforts would be consistent with the "model minority" motif that has been relegated to highly assimilated Asian Americans in this country (Manning and Baruth, 2002). Thus it can be reasonably assumed that in present studies of parents of Black and White biracial children, there will be cultural nuances and strategies that may be exclusive to these types of biracial families.

Admittedly, it is important to concede that although parents are an important part of the development of the biracial children's racial identity, they are in no way the only source of influence. Friends, teachers, counselors, and pop culture can all have an effect on the biracial children's identity acquisition. Benedetto et al (2001) has suggested that school counselors can even have an effect on forming a biracial child's identity. Benedetto cautions counselors to be wary of the influence they and others may have on biracial children especially when they are in a formative stage of identity development (Benedetto et al, 2000).

Biracial Identity Studies

Much of the literature surrounding the issues of biracial children is not specifically centered on the external influences in the acquisition of a racial identity (Horowitz 1939; Jacobs, 1992) Rather, most literature surrounding biracial children is focused on the way the children themselves tend to incorporate the social agents

themselves, thus choosing a racial identity (Poston, 1990; Kich, 1992). Specifically, most of the literature does not focus on the external forces, but on the internal decision-making and effects that these those decisions have on the child themselves. Stage based and ambivalence-based literature has been the primary focus of biracial identity literature (Kich, 1992; Benedetto, 2001).

Many biracial identity acquisition studies tended to catalog the different stages of development in which children could internalize a racial identity. J.H. Jacobs (1992), using dolls as the instrument, identified different stages of racial development. Biracial children were asked to play with a series of dolls that had different racial and ethnic characteristics. After playing with the dolls, the children were asked a series of questions that were designed to elicit their attitudes and reactions to each doll. Jacobs concluded that there were three stages that were inherent in the formation of a race consciousness in a child. The stages were pre-constancy stage, the post-constancy stage, and the biracial stage.

In the pre-color constancy stage, children are not really aware of racial classification at all. As such, children often would play freely with the dolls with no real consideration as to the racial classifications. They similar saw race in the context of likeness of color. Generally, children would match colors that were most like their own with no levels of ambivalence in doing so. The pre-color constancy stage is usually prevalent in children until the age of eight.

However, in the post-color constancy stage, the biracial child will most likely feel a bit uneasy about his or her race. These children have an internalized understanding of the basic conventions surrounding race. The reason for such uneasiness may be that they

are may feel confused about where they fit among the racial choices that are available to them. The attitudes toward the dolls in this stage were that of rejection of different types of dolls and acceptance of others based on connections with one or the other.

In the biracial stage, the children generally tend to understand the context of their situation. The children at this stage generally are able to accept their biracial heritage. According to Jacobs, children in the biracial stage have resolved all issues of ambivalence and are comfortable with whom they are.

In another stage-based study with 15 biracial children, Kich (1992) breaks the stages that biracial children go through into three specific categories. In his three stage model, Kich asserts that the children go through a much more linear path in coming to a full understanding of their biracial selves.

The first stage is one in which that the child understands that he or she is different from other children. The child can range anywhere from 3-10 years old. During this time, the child may feel confused as people express their own uncertainty about the child's racial classification. As such, the child can feel high levels of isolation and dismay.

The second stage in Kich's model addressed the child's need to fit in. These are usually children who are from the age of 8 to teenage years. At this time the child tries to pick a racial classification. The need to pick a race at this time is done for the purpose of the need for the child to do away with any confusion about his or her race.

Kich's final stage occurs in the young adulthood of the child. When the young adult finally accepts the totality of who he or she is, they become comfortable with the realization that they are truly members of neither group. This level of transcendence

beyond the racial boundaries is seen as not an end, but an ongoing and continual process that develops (Kich, 1992 p. 305).

Similar to most stage based research, Poston (1990) contends that biracial children developed a sense of self through markedly different stages. Poston developed a 5 stage model of biracial identity formation (Poston, 1990). These stages are the personal identity stage, the group identity stage, the denial stage, the appreciation stage, and the integration stage.

The first stage of identity development, according to Poston is that of has to do personal identity. This is the stage where biracial children are forming positive feelings about themselves as people. This would occur at a reasonably early age when children are first getting a sense of self. Parents and other family members are very crucial during this stage (Poston 1990).

The second stage is the group identification stage, which Poston asserts is the most difficult. At this stage, children feel forced to choose between their parents (Poston, 1990). Presumably, the child may feel that he or she is alienating one parent in favor of another.

The third stage is the denial stage. This stage occurs when the biracial child realizes that their choice is not "all inclusive" (Poston 1990). The child, having decided on one racial affiliation, inevitably learns that there is a whole side to their race and culture that they have not explored/accepted. This is also the stage that children start becoming members of different groups (Poston, 1990). Thus peer and group relations further exacerbate the feelings of denial and confusion.

The fourth stage is the appreciation stage. This stage is when the biracial person starts to appreciate both sides of their race. At this point, the biracial person still identifies with one side of their race exclusively, but opens up to exploring other parts of their heritage. This leads into the final stage of development.

Lastly, in the integration the stage, the biracial child begins to appreciate all races and cultures. The biracial person at this time begins to identify with both sides of their heritage. According to Poston's design, this would be the most ideal stage for a biracial person to attain. In some ways, the biracial child begins to transcend racial boundaries during this stage.

Korgen separates biracial identity formation by historical categories (Korgen, 1999). In a study of 64 biracial individuals, Korgen makes the distinction between biracial people who were from a pre-civil rights era time period and those who were from a post-civil rights period.

According to Korgen, biracial people who were born pre-civil rights era were still victims of the "one-drop rule." These individuals have been socialized into the highly subjugating racial classification system of the 1960s. As such, the individuals in this stage are not likely to view themselves as having the freedom to acquire any racial identity besides a minority one. Due to the oppressive nature of the classification system, such choices were virtually non-existent for these people. Respondents in the study who had grown up post-civil rights era were reported to look at race with less stringency. The individuals were able to appreciate the level of choice they had in an age that allowed an increased amount of mobility within the construct of the racial classification system

(Korgen, 1999). Therefore, individuals in this stage were more likely to pick (and be comfortable with) a biracial identity.

Ferguson (2001) reported that as biracial children navigate through the process of forming an identity, they tend to go through three distinct stages. Ferguson identified these as the ignorant stage, the ambivalent stage and the transcendence stage. In Ferguson's study of 15 biracial young adults, they reported either reaching or being at one of these stages. In the ignorant stage, the biracial respondent discussed how they had no real understanding of race. Thus they had no real negative effects due to who they were at this time. In the ambivalent stage, children became confused because of the racist experiences they experienced and the pressures to conform they felt from peers. At this stage many of the respondents reported being at a mono-racial identity. In the transcendent stage, the biracial person has gone beyond race as their "master status." At this stage race, identification of oneself with one race is of little importance to the biracial adult.

Others have not focused on the process but generally the options that are available to biracial child. Rockquemore & Brunsma (2002) suggest that there are many choices that are available to a biracial person. In their analysis of 225 biracial individuals, they identified 6 different racial choices that biracial people choose. The first is purely black, the second is pure biracial, third is pure White, fourth is proterean (a mixture) the fifth is the un-validated Black person (lives life as biracial but experiences the world as Black) and sixth is the transcendent biracial person whose life has surpassed racial identification. As in the Ferguson study, race is not their master status.

Research has shown that the reasons for the choices that they make vary greatly depending on the circumstances. For example, in my research, individuals who endure large levels of racial discrimination are likely to consider an all Black identification, while individuals reside in a two parent home where racial issues are discussed they may likely gravitate to a biracial or transcendent identity (Ferguson 2001).

Other than stage and acquisition studies, much of the literature concerning biracial children is focused on the effects that "being biracial" has on the child. Literature in this genre focuses on the difficult life that "being biracial" encompasses. While it widely assumed that biracial individuals have and will endure levels of marginality in their formation of identity, most of the literature has tends to emphasize the negative experiences (Gibbs, 1987). In addition, most literature in this area tends to be highly practitioner based and generally found in counseling and psychological areas.

Other modes of research explore this topic. The documentary "*A Question of Color*" by Sandler, explores some of the negative stereotypes biracial persons have endured not only from White society, but Black society as well. According to Sandler, who is biracial, fellow Blacks would not accept her and would consider her to be a snob, sell-out, or an elitist because the complexion of her skin closely matched that of White people (Sandler, 1992).

Nakashima (1992) also describes common stereotypes that biracial children have had to traditionally endure. Many biracial children have been seen as troublesome, sexually promiscuous, and immoral. Many of these stereotypes are "carry-overs" from a time when interracial marriages, and products of those marriages (i.e. biracial children), were seen as scandalous and shameful (Hall, 2000; Rosenblatt Et al, 1995). When these

erroneous charges are applied to a biracial child today, biracial children will inevitably feel dejected.

Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), conclude that biracial children may be the unfortunate recipients of negative stereotyping. These stereotypes can be seen as potentially damaging to the emotional and psychological well being of biracial persons. Kerwin points out that assumption like "biracial children are untrustworthy" or "biracial people are self absorbed" by society at large damaging but ever present in many people's view of biracial people.

Such damaging assumptions are not limited to laypersons. Many clinicians, scholars, and academics suggest that biracial people are a suffering, emotional "basket cases" also have subscribed to negative assumptions about biracial people. For example, Gibbs (1987) contends that biracial children feel a sense of shame and indignity in their position both as minorities and marginal people of society. In her clinical study of biracial children, Gibbs reported that many of the subjects in her study reported feelings of shame with their race and contention with their parents on who to identify with. Gibbs points out that Blacks generally feel a level of difficulty identifying with who they are because of the subordinate role that being Black has on the child. As such, Gibbs points out that such emotion will be undoubtedly exacerbated in biracial children who are enduring not only feelings of subordination, but also confusion of where they fit to begin with.

Many clinicians like Gibbs feel that biracial children have a rough life to lead, one that may lead to some emotional instability. Harris (2002) studied counselors' perceptions of the biracial child's experiences. Harris points to the claim that many of

these children will endure difficult periods of racism, they will be labeled by others and will feel high degrees of confusion as a result. Harris finds a majority of the counselors believe that biracial children are not accepted by society and almost half would not do well in society at all (Harris, 2002).

It is important to note that research like Gibbs and Harris's study suggest an inherent bias that may obscure their research endeavors. Generally, individuals in this situation are sampling clients or drawing from experiences of children who may have emotional disorders that are independent of racial concerns. It is the lack of consideration of other causal factors that is at fault with some clinical research.

Nishimura et al. (1992) suggests that children feel societal pressures to conform to society's prescribed racial identity. In a study of 37 biracial children, it was found that many children felt confused, as they were seemingly "forced" to choose an identity. What is more, the children in this study reported that their parents did not prepare them to deal with such pressure, assumptions and racism.

There is also a response to these biracial studies from researchers who feel that these studies can be potentially damaging to children. Not only do some of these "effect studies" tend to reinforce some of the commonly held stereotypes, they also attempt to generalize their findings to a population that little is known about. When put to the test many of the assertions made by such studies tend to be inconsistent and false.

For example, Wilson (1993) reports that there is a danger when scholars view biracial persons as a group that inherently have problems resulting from their "biracial condition." Wilson asserts that researchers should address the biases that are held about biracial persons before they attempt to inquire about them through such a skewed

perspective. Rockquemore & Brunsma (2002) suggest that any attempt to look at biracial

individuals through such a marginal perspective virtually "demonizes the group."

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

This chapter will provide a general discussion of the qualitative methodology as it relates to this study. In addition, this chapter will offer a context for the use of such a methodology. Furthermore, a description of the general characteristics of the study will be discussed (i.e. the sample, locations, delimitations, etc.). This will provide a context for the parameters in which this study will be conducted. Additionally, a discussion of the techniques and process used in the gathering the data will be discussed. A description of the choice of analytical methods will be covered. Finally, ethical concerns and limitation will be considered.

This study will employ techniques that are consistent with qualitative methodology. The choice to use a qualitative method was not made arbitrarily. Instead, it was chosen because it was the most useful way of looking at the research problem. A discussion of the benefits of qualitative techniques in this study is offered here.

Qualitative Research

In the beginning of this study, I was challenged with a task of choosing the most appropriate research design for my question: How parents perceive and negotiate race with their biracial children? The best way to answer this important question was through the use of the constructivist qualitative method.

Constructivist qualitative research is derived from an epistemological philosophy that contends that knowing is somewhat subjective in nature. Therefore, when using the qualitative method of the interview, the research attempts to derive meaning through induction (Mishler, 1987). Specifically, when looking at perceptions and identity formation of biracial parents, it is necessary to obtain meaning from the experiences of the individuals first. As biracial parents give testimonies that start to repeat themselves into themes, which start to develop over time, one can begin to understand the perceptions that biracial parents coupled with the part they play in their child's formation of identity.

Benefits of Qualitative Methodology

The utility of qualitative research methods as a way of understanding can be appreciated in the many different contributions it has made to this particular study. For instance, qualitative methods are helpful in getting an understanding of the contextual nature of the individual's experiences. During the interviews with the respondents, the assumption is made that a dialogue and rapport will take place that will enable the researcher to better understand why the respondent is answering questions in a certain way. As such, I was able to direct or prompt the respondent to be more specific in their answers.

In addition, the qualitative method is necessary in topics where there is little known about the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). When there are voids in a research area, efforts in the expansion of knowledge in that area can be difficult. With nothing to draw from, many niche topics tend to sink into obscurity. Aside from what is found in the included literature review, there has been very little research that has thoroughly

examined parents of biracial children. As such, there is no instrument, no refined

technique, and no reliable hypothesis from which I can draw from concerning parental

perceptions and negotiation strategies. Therefore the research must somehow create a

consistent and reliable understanding of issues within the subject of biracial children and

their parents. To date, such exhaustive and reliable research has yet to be done. Thus this

qualitative study is offered toward that goal.

Relevant data are not limited to words or numbers. The qualitative method can

also get at the non-verbal nuances that are part of qualitative methods. Specifically, there

are many things that are in a story that are nonverbal but also convey meaning (Mishler

1997). In research interviewing, short pauses, loud exclamations, even silence have

meaning that should be properly cataloged and coded. In discussing issues related to

biracial children, the assumption must be made that there will be an emotional element to

the discussion. For example, some parents of biracial children in the study would pause

or displayed great difficulties in recounting certain parts of their lives. Conversely, other

parents would laugh as they recounted humorous moments with their biracial children.

These are situations that the research could not have extrapolated from the existing

textual data. As such, the qualitative method is better equipped to handle such emotional

situations.

The qualitative method of the interview can work well with sensitive material. For

example, in the case of the face to face interview, the researcher can gauge when he or

she has gone too far or not far enough (Seidman, 1999). Information can be obtained or

kept secure based on the interpretation of the respondent by the researcher. With respect

to parents of biracial children research, a respondent may not feel compelled to share

their experiences of being a biracial parent on a mail in or telephone survey. Moreover, they may gloss over or ignore anything that was not positive. With qualitative research, there is an inherent relationship and trust shared between the researcher and the respondent (Mishler, 1997). Fundamentally, this trust between respondent and interviewer is of the utmost concern for the researcher.

Qualitative research is explicitly beneficial of understanding deep, complicated situations. Some scholars argue that qualitative techniques can get deep to the heart of people's lives while other methods merely "gloss the surface" (Greenlagh, 2002). Generally the mantra of qualitative research has been "less breadth, more depth." These arguments point to the qualitative techniques ability to look deep into a subject matter and get to the stories and relationships that may never be procured any other way.

In the case of parents of biracial children, the subject of inquiry itself is not a "one-shot" affair. Specifically, the major goal of this study is not to discover what race parents negotiated with their child, rather, how the parents negotiated any racial identity with their child. Fortunately, the qualitative method is well equipped to looking at issues of process. Qualitative methods can and should be employed when dealing with complex process related research questions (Maxwell, 1999). Such research can look at the big picture and answer not only the "what" questions, but also answer the equally important "how" questions.

Sample

The sample in this study consists of 10 sets of couples that are Black and White parents of biracial children. Eligible subjects in this study were defined as married couples from the upper Midwest, in a mixed marriage, with Black and White biracial

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children over the age of 9. Each couple in the study constituted one case. Altogether there were 20 parents interviewed in the study. There was no set number of people that were planned to be included in the study. I stopped interviewing when I felt there was a desirable degree of repetition in the interviews and themes started to "emerge." At this point it was concluded that saturation took place, and analysis could begin (Seidman, 1999).

Sample Delimitations

First and foremost, to be eligible in the study, the individuals need to be in married, intact relationships. This is important in that children of single parent families tend to have other variables involved that are not relevant to the focus of the inquiry (for example, anger from divorce, lower income from single earner home, etc.) and may in fact convolute the understanding of the process of raising biracial children. Many scholars have also suggested that having two parents in the home, who negotiate identity with their child, was potentially beneficial to the formation of a healthy identity for the child (Huffman, 1994; Ferguson, 2001). As such, one of the primary goals of the research is to understand how both parents, coming from two different racial heritages, negotiate identity with the child. In the case of single parents of biracial children, such an element would be missed.

All parents were to be of what is considered of Black or White heritage. Admittedly, there is no such thing as "full" race, or even a "true" "Black" or "White" person, but selection of respondents based on race was consistent with both their volunteered affiliation with such a group and the visible confirmation made by the

researcher that they indeed look consistent with what one would consider "White" or "Black."

Age was also an important delimitation in this study. Parents of children younger than 9 years old were not examined in this study. Prior research suggests that children younger than 9 consistently have not had experiences that have forced them to address race (Ferguson, 2001; Jacobs, 1992). As such, parents of these children would not be likely to be forming any racial identity with their child at all at this time. It is surmised that as the child grows older, encounters problems, and asks, "Who am I?" parents will start to take a more active role in their child's "racial" life.

In addition, eligible parents were to be 25 years of age or older. Obviously, adults of biracial children younger than 25 years old may have had remarkably different experiences that were the result of the situations that arose from the challenges of having a child at a very young age (if they had a 9 year old at 24, they would have had to have the child at the age of 15!) Essentially, all the respondents in this study were in their late 30's or older.

This study is also limited to parents with biracial children who are of Black and White heritage only. The reason for this requirement is that parents whose racial heritage is that of other groups (i.e. Japanese, Native American, and Hispanic) tend to have cultural nuances and concerns that are exclusive to that culture. Thus, throwing in all types of different mixtures could exacerbate an attempt at trying to gain thematic consistency of how these parents negotiate race. It can be argued that all cultures treat race differently, thus a study of children with one Native American parent and one

Japanese American parent would require a study only of how parents of such a mixture negotiate identity with their child.

Further, the respondent had to be the natural parent of the biracial child. Parents who have adopted biracial children will be excluded from the study. It is assumed that these parents have had not had experiences that are consistent with experiences with natural parents of biracial children. Therefore in the context of adopted parents, it would be hard to reach a level where themes would arise that would be consistent with the rest of the group. Hence, it is recommended that they be part of a different study entirely.

Finally, all parents in this study were from locations within North Dakota and Minnesota. Because of the limited size of the group and the difficulty in finding members that are in close proximity to one another, such travel was required. Also, it is important to note that parents of biracial children in different areas may have had some contextual differences as a result of location. For example, parents living in an all Black area of Harlem New York and parents living in Wilmer, Minnesota may have drastically different rearing practices that are only attributable to the location in which they live. Thus the location was reasonably restricted to a certain area of the Midwest. It is important, in a study such as this, to make the sample as similar as possible so as to get the best glimpse of how a group of parents negotiate identity with their children.

Sampling Method

For this study, the "snowball" sampling method will be used. The snowball sample is defined as a sampling method in which respondents and other are used to find other respondents (Creswell, 2002). This type of method is particularly useful when potential candidates are not easily located. Admittedly, parents of biracial children can be

very difficult to find. Oftentimes, especially in some parts of the country, a full list or sampling frame to work from is non-existent. Thus, there is a need for the researcher to go out and build a network of resources from which to draw eligible participants. What the researcher must first do, as was done in this study, is build a network of informants that serve as "gatekeepers" to the population (Seidman, 1999). Gatekeepers are the individuals that get you "in" to a population that may be virtually impossible to get at without there help.

In this study, I started out by identifying one set of mixed raced parents. These individuals served as the gatekeepers in this study, as they were able identify other eligible parents of biracial people for my study. Additionally, they were able to facilitate introductions and even helped schedule some of the meetings for me. Fortunately, as snowball sampling is intended to accomplish, I was able to gather enough parents of biracial children to fulfill the necessary number of respondents for the study.

Utilizing the leads given to me by the respondents, the gatekeepers led me to other parents, and in turn, to even more parents. This created the aforementioned "snowball effect" where one respondent was leading to the next and it just kept getting bigger. Eventually, I was at the limit of saturation and ended the search for more respondents, yet the snowball of once potential respondents continued to grow despite the fact that the quest for respondents had already ended.

Sample Background Questions

Background questions were asked to provide a thorough description of the sample of respondents. Questions that asked respondents about their age, career position, and economic status were included to provide descriptive information about each respondent.

Furth... questions made it possible for the respondents to give a historical record of their own lives, which proved to be a beneficial aspect of the findings. This made it possible to provide a context unto which I could make connections and comparisons between and within interviews.

The parents in this study had two factors that were important factors in their background. All the biracial parents in this study were in the middle to upper class category. In general, most of the families were in middle management or high level positions in their respective fields. All the parents in this study reported an acceptable to ideal level of family support in regards to their courtship, betrothal, and subsequent childbirth. All biracial parents reported to the researcher that their families were generally supportive and helpful. This disclosure proved to be a very important component of the assertions made in this study.

Respondent Description

The following background information is offered in the form of small "mini-stories" of the backgrounds of each of the ten biracial couples included in this study. Included in these "mini-stories" is current demographic information such as pseudonyms (names were changed to preserve anonymity), ages, general locations (specific locations are excluded), career positions, number of children, religion, social class, and years married. In addition, these "mini-stories" will provide an important background of each couple that will serve to provide a context for further findings in this study. In addition, all names have been changed.

Mike and Jan C:

Mike C. and Jan C. live in a rural town in Northeastern North Dakota. Mike is in his late 30's and Jan is also in her late 30's. Mike and Jan C. have lived in several parts of the country to due to Mike's military career. Mike is originally from New York and Jan is originally from England. Mike and Jan have two children: Jannika is 10 and Joe is 12. They report a low level of religiosity. Jan and Mike report their economic position as middle class.

Mike C. is in a middle management position in the armed forces. Mike was raised in New York, where he lived with a very close-knit extended family. Mike graduated from high school and took a military post in California. Mike had been in the military for several years when he met his wife while on tour in England. After extensive travel, Mike took a semi-permanent post in North Dakota. Mike's family, being close knit, was very supportive of his relationship and subsequent marriage to Jan. Mike is identifies himself as Black.

Jan C. is originally from England. Jan came from a very small family in a small town in England. Jan moved when she met Mike while he was on a temporary tour of duty (TTY). After the wedding, Jan became a United States citizen. After extensive travel, Jan settled with her husband and two children in North Dakota. Jan works in the armed forces in a support role. Jan reports her family and whole community in England were very supportive of mixed relationships, which made her situation an amicable one. Jan identifies herself as White.

Adam G. and Ashley G.

Adam and Ashley G. live in a central suburb area of Minneapolis Minnesota. Adam is in his mid 50's and Ashley is in her mid 40's. Adam is originally from Texas and Ashley is originally from New York. They have lived in the Minneapolis area for several years. They have a 10 year old daughter, Alexis. They report a moderate degree of religious involvement within a local non-denominational church. They have an upper class economic status.

Adam G., grew up in a large city. Adam's grandparents raised Adam, along with two siblings. Adam reports growing up in a poor, highly segregated area of Texas. Adam went on to college at Texas A&M, received a law degree from Michigan State and is now a practicing attorney. Adam met his wife soon after receiving his law degree. Adam reports that, due mostly to his age and late marriage, he did not receive much resistance from family concerning his interracial relationship. Adam identifies himself as Black.

Ashley G. grew up in an urban area of New York. Ashley grew up in a close knit, upper class family. After high school, Ashley graduated from Boston College and also received a Ph.D. from Harvard University. She is a full professor at a university in Minnesota. Although her mother passed away, she has a fair amount of contact with her family. Further, Ashley reports that her family was very supportive of her relationship with her husband. Ashley identifies herself as White.

Robin T. and Jack T.

Robin and Jack T. live in a small town in North Dakota. Robin is in her mid 40's and Jack is in her early 50's. They have lived in the area for approximately 15 years. Robin and Jack have three children: Terrell who is 21, Natasha who is 17, and Kiesha

who is 12. Robin and Jack report a high degree of involvement in a Protestant church. They are of middle class economic status.

Robin T. is originally from a small town in North Dakota. For most of her life, Robin has lived on a farm. She reports that she comes from a strong Norwegian heritage on both sides of her family. After high school, Robin went to work for many different jobs ranging from home daycare to working in other different areas. She met Jack in Minneapolis on a visit. Robin's parents were always very supportive of the courtship and union of Jack and Robin. Robin is now employed as an aide in a public school system. Robin identifies herself as White.

Jack T. is originally from Oklahoma. He reports being raised in an area of high segregation. After leaving home in his late teens, he traveled to several states before he eventually settled down in Minneapolis. It was at this time that he met Robin. During this time, Jack did not have much contact with his family. Jack went on to work at several positions in Minnesota and North Dakota. Jack is currently retired. Jack identifies himself as Black.

Chester S. and Adriana S.

Chester and Adriana S. live in a mid-sized town in North Dakota. Chester S. is in his late 40's and Adriana is in her mid 40's. They rave lived in their current residence for over 10 years. Chester and Adriana have one daughter of their own, Tessa. They also have a son who is from Adriana's previous marriage. Adriana and Chester, who are Catholic, report a moderate to level of religious involvement. Adriana and Chester are both of upper middle class status.

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Adriana S. is originally from a small town in Africa. She has lived in the United States for the last 18+ years. She met Chester while he was working in the Peace Corps. After a short courtship, they were married. Parents on both sides were very supportive. Adriana's brothers were very apprehensive of her marrying someone outside the family religion. Adriana graduated from college at a midwestern university and now works part time at a hospital. Adriana identifies herself as Black.

Chester S. grew up in a small town in North Dakota. After high school, Chester has a Bachelor's and Master's degrees from : Midwestern University. After college, Chester worked in Senegal, Africa as a Peace Corp teacher. During that time, he met his wife. Chester reports that his family was very accepting of his Adrian. Currently, Chester works as a school principal. Chester identifies himself as White.

Rasheed P. and Holly P.

Rasheed and Holly P. reside in a mid-sized town in western North Dakota. Rasheed and Holly have lived at their current residence for 4 years. Rasheed is in his early forties and Holly is in her early thirties. Rasheed and Holly have three children. They have a son, Phillip who is 12, a daughter Kate, who is 10, and another son, Paul, who is about 8. Rasheed and Holly report a high degree of involvement in the evangelical church where Rasheed is employed. They report that they are of middle class economic status.

Rasheed P. is from Washington State. Rasheed reports that he grew up in a predominantly White area where he did experience a few episodes of racism. Rasheed also reported that he came from a large, extended family. After high school, he went on to Bible College to become a music minister. Rasheed met Holly while he was giving her

family piano lessons. During their courtship, Rasheed reports that his family was very supportive of their relationship. Currently, Rasheed is a minister at a small church. Rasheed identifies himself as Black.

Holly P. is originally from larger town in eastern North Dakota. She has lived there most of her life. She reports that she comes from a small family with divorced parents. After the separation, Holly lived with her father for a short time then she lived with her mother. Since her mother was in the military, they moved frequently. During one stay, Holly met her husband. Holly's family was very supportive of her relationship with Rasheed. Currently, Holly is a homemaker as well as being very active in her husband's ministry. Holly identifies herself as White.

Roger M. and Gina M.

Roger and Gina M. live in a central area of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Roger M. is in his mid forties and Gina M. is in her early forties. Roger and Gina have been married for 14 years. They have lived in the area or several years. Roger and Gina have two children of their own: Clay, who is 12 and Cassie, who is 9. Roger also has a son, Tyrone, from a previous marriage. They report a high level of involvement in their local Lutheran church. Roger a 1 Gina are of middle class economic status.

Roger M. is originally from Buffalo, New York. Roger reports coming from an extremely large family of 11 children. After high school, Roger worked as a courier for 17 years. Roger M. met Gina through mutual friends. Most of Roger's family was supportive of his relationship with Gina. Currently, Roger is laid off from his courier position and owns his own business. Roger identifies himself as Black.

Gina M. is originally from southern Minnesota. Gina reports being from a mid sized family. After high school, Gina went on to college to be a teacher. Gina met Roger after she was out of college. Initially, Gina's father did not support the relationship with Roger. Eventually her whole family, including her father, was very supportive of the relationship. Currently, Gina is working as a teacher in a public school. Gina identifies herself as White.

Jamie H. and David H.

Jamie and David H. live in a mid sized town in North Dakota. Jamie and David have lived at their current location for several years. Jamie is in her early 40's and David is in his late 40's. Jamie and David have four children together: two older boys, Lane and Leon who are 12 and 11 respectively, a girl Erin, who is 8, and a son, Lester who is 9. Jamie reports that she has a high level of involvement in their evangelical church. They are from an upper middle class background.

Jamie H. is originally from Mobile, Alabama. Jamie reports that she is from a broken home in a "Black neighborhood" in Mobile. Jamie also reported that during her growing up, Mobile was experiencing high crime and was highly segregated. After high school, Jamie entered the military where she worked for several years. During her time in the military, Jamie met her husband David. Due to a military career, Jamie did not have much feedback from her family on her relationship. Currently, Jamie is a homemaker and teacher to her children. Jamie identifies herself as Black.

David H. is from a small town in North Dakota. David reports coming from a broken home. After high school, David went into the military. David met Jamie while they were stationed in Maine. David's family has been supportive of his relationship with

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Jamie. Currently, David is on his 24th year of military service. David identifies himself as White.

Terry B. and Barry B.

Terry and Barry B. live in a suburban area of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Terry and Barry are both in their late thirties. Terry and Barry have been married for 12 years. They have lived in the Minneapolis area for several years. Terry and Barry have two children of their own: A son, Barry who is 10 and a daughter, Jill who is 8. Terry and Barry also have an adopted daughter who is a teenager: Nikishi. Terry and Barry report a minimal amount of religious involvement. They are of middle class economic status.

Terry B. reports having grown up all over the country. Terry has lived a considerable amount of time in a predominantly Black part of Ohio. She had a very close-knit family. Terry identified that both her parents were of Finnish descent. During college, Terry met Barry. Terry's father, who was a pastor, was very supportive of their courtship and union. After marriage, they had both come back to the United States. Currently, Terry works as a market research consultant. She is identifies herself as White.

Barry B. grew up in Africa, Europe, and America. Barry B. was born in Senegal and went to school in many different countries. Barry finished his education in Minnesota. It was at this time that Barry and Terry's relationship started. Barry reported that his family was very supportive of his relationship with Terry. Barry and Terry got married and moved to Washington DC to become market researchers. Currently, Barry is a market research consultant. Barry identifies himself as Black.

Carole F. and Jerry F.

Carole and Jerry F. have lived in a western Minnesota town for several years. Carole and Jerry are both in their mid 50's. They have lived in the area for several years. Carole and Jerry have been married for 28 years. They have two grown children: Eric, 19 and Jason, 21. Carole and Jerry reported that they have been highly involved in their evangelical church. They are of middle class economic status.

Carole F. is from originally from Colorado and moved later on in life to northern Minnesota. Carole reports that she grew up there until moving to Idaho for college to train as a nurse. Shortly after receiving her nursing license, she met Jerry. Carole reports that her father was initially resistant of their relationship. Later, Carole's father was able to accept Jerry. Currently, Carole works as a registered nurse. Carole identifies herself as White.

Jerry F. is from California. Jerry reports that he grew up in a "rough part" of San Diego. Jerry also reports that he lived in a poor, single parent home. After several struggles, Jerry joined the military and served for several years. After serving being stationed in North Dakota, he met his wife, Carole. Jerry did not have much contact with any family during their relationship and much of their marriage. Currently, Jerry F. works as a security supervisor. Jerry identifies himself as Black.

Jeff and Jill Z.

Jeff and Jill Z live in a suburb in central Minnesota. Jeff is in his late 50's and Jane is in her late 40's. Jeff and Jill Z. are report that they are of middle class economic status. They have been married for over 20 years. They have one daughter, Samantha, who is 19. They report a moderate level of religiosity.

Jeff Z. grew up in an urban part of Minneapolis Minnesota. Jeff went to high school in Minnesota than went on to get both a bachelor's and masters' degree at a Midwestern university. After college, he went on to be a building construction inspector. About that time, Jeff also met his wife, Jill. Currently Jeff is in the construction inspection field. Jeff identifies himself as Black.

Jill Z. grew up in a small North Dakota town. Jill was able to complete primary and secondary school in this town. After high school, Jill went into the travel industry and has worked there to this day. Jill identifies herself as White.

Procedures

This section is offered to provide an account of the general procedures used in the recruitment of the respondents, collection of the data, and the preserving of safety, confidentiality, and ethical treatment for respondents.

Recruitment

All potential respondents were recruited in a similar manner. Eligible respondents were initially contacted via phone. This served as a polite and practical way to reach the respondents and be able to inform them about the study. On the phone, they were informed of the focus of the study as well as a description of their specific rights, primarily, that their participation in the study was not mandatory and will remain anonymous. After confirmation that the individuals fit the criterion for inclusion in the study as well as conveyed a level of agreement and desire to participate, I then set up a meeting time for the interview to occur.

Interviews

Twenty respondents were interviewed from a range of once to three times. The amount of interview time was dependent on the amount of access that was allowed with the respondent and the depth of material that the researcher was receiving. All interviewers must be aware that respondents are very busy and may not agree to a second or third interview. Throughout the course of the interviews, such concessions were made to the respondents who agreed to participate within the study.

Although it would have been preferable to interview all respondents one at a time, each couple was interviewed together. Due to the time constraints of the respondents, I decided to conduct the interviews with both parents present during both interviews. In addition, I attempted to provide each spouse with ample time to share in every question that was asked, and all topics that were covered. Fortunately, due to the relative openness and benevolent disposition of all the couples, there was no indication that any respondents were left out of the interview process. Both spouses always seemed to have plenty to say and have a general respect for each other. If an interview did not initially yield much useable and detail rich information, an attempt was made to meet with the respondent again.

The interviews themselves were in-depth but relaxed in nature. In each interview, the attempt was made to understand, through each of their stories, how they perceived their children and how they then negotiated identity with them. Thus, the respondents were probed and channeled into discussing issues related to that area.

Although the interviews were in depth and focused, they were not mechanical in nature. There were no formal rules of discourse that were imposed on the respondents.

The interview encouraged the respondents to relax and discuss their ideas freely. All of the respondents were engaged in a free flowing dialogue with the interviewer.

The interviews themselves were taped recorded. The tape recording process is essential to making sure that all that is said during the interview is carried over and preserved in the analysis phase of the process.

Interview Guide

While the interviews are free flowing, there was still the need to focus and direct the respondents toward the subject matter. I used an interview schedule during the course of the interview (included in the Appendix). These questions were not verbatim in every meeting; rather they served to direct the interviewer to keep the discussion focused on the subject area.

Generally, questions in the guide examined three different areas: parental perceptions, parental/child background, and racial negotiation practices. In each of these global areas, there were questions and prompts that required the respondent to "tell his or her story." Questions were worded in a way made it possible for respondent to give the maximum latitude of response.

Setting

The setting of the interview was integral to creating the kind of atmosphere that will allow the respondent to sit in the same place for prolonged periods of time and share their feelings, stories, and personal lives with the researcher (Seidman, 1999). Such was the case with this study. Interviews were held in areas that were comfortable and accommodating to both the respondent and the researcher. Out of their own preference, interviews were conducted in their home.

Consent and Confidentiality

All respondents were fully informed of what was required of them prior to agreeing to the interview. Furthermore, they were provided a consent form that also documented the goals, and benefits of the study (included in the Appendix).

The consent form was a written document that provided respondents information regarding the goal of the study, potential benefits, and their individual rights of anonymity, safety, and the freedom to cancel at any time. They were made aware of how to get a hold of my dissertation chair and I during the course of the study. All respondents were required to sign the consent form if they agreed to participate. Respondents were informed that this study was designed to understand how they as parents perceive and negotiate race with their Black and White biracial child.

Further, the respondents were informed that they would remain anonymous at all times in the reporting of the study. When any data was given, it was secured in a locked cabinet for a period of three years, and then it will be destroyed. Additionally, in the study report, all respondents would be given pseudonyms to mask their identity.

Analysis

This portion of the methodology is offered to document the way the data was organized and analyzed. This will include a discussion on the transcription, coding, and the thematic organization of the data into assertions (see Figure 2). In addition, this discussion will also include an explanation of the data software used in the analysis.

Record Keeping

Within this study, there was a lot of data that was received from the interviews. Such an amount of data requires a meticulous micro management of material by the

researcher (Seidman, 1999). Thus all of the interviews were stored on 90-minute cassettes. After the interviews are completed, the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim in text form on a word processor. A professional transcriptionist who was paid by the researcher conducted this process. The researcher then transferred the coded material onto the data analysis computer package, *Ethnograph, 5.0* for the purposes of coding.

Coding

While in *Ethnograph 5.0*, the data were broken up into segments and given a tag or a code word. In some ways codes can be treated as "surrogates for the text" (Seidel, 1995). Simply, the codes take the place of the textual data. These codes, which signify tiny "units of meaning" in the text, make the analysis of massive amounts of text data possible. These units of meaning, which were derived from reading line by line of text from the interviews, were given the code words based on the context of the sentence or sentences from which they came (see Figure 1 on the following page).

For example, if the father of a biracial girl said "I have always expected my daughter to excel in sports." I may label this unit of meaning, "expectations" and "sports." Naturally the text would be compared and cataloged with other units of meaning. Further if another father said, "My son is awesome, I believe he will be the best at all he does in school!" I also may code this "expectation." These two things has a similar context, the parent has some positive expectation of their biracial children.

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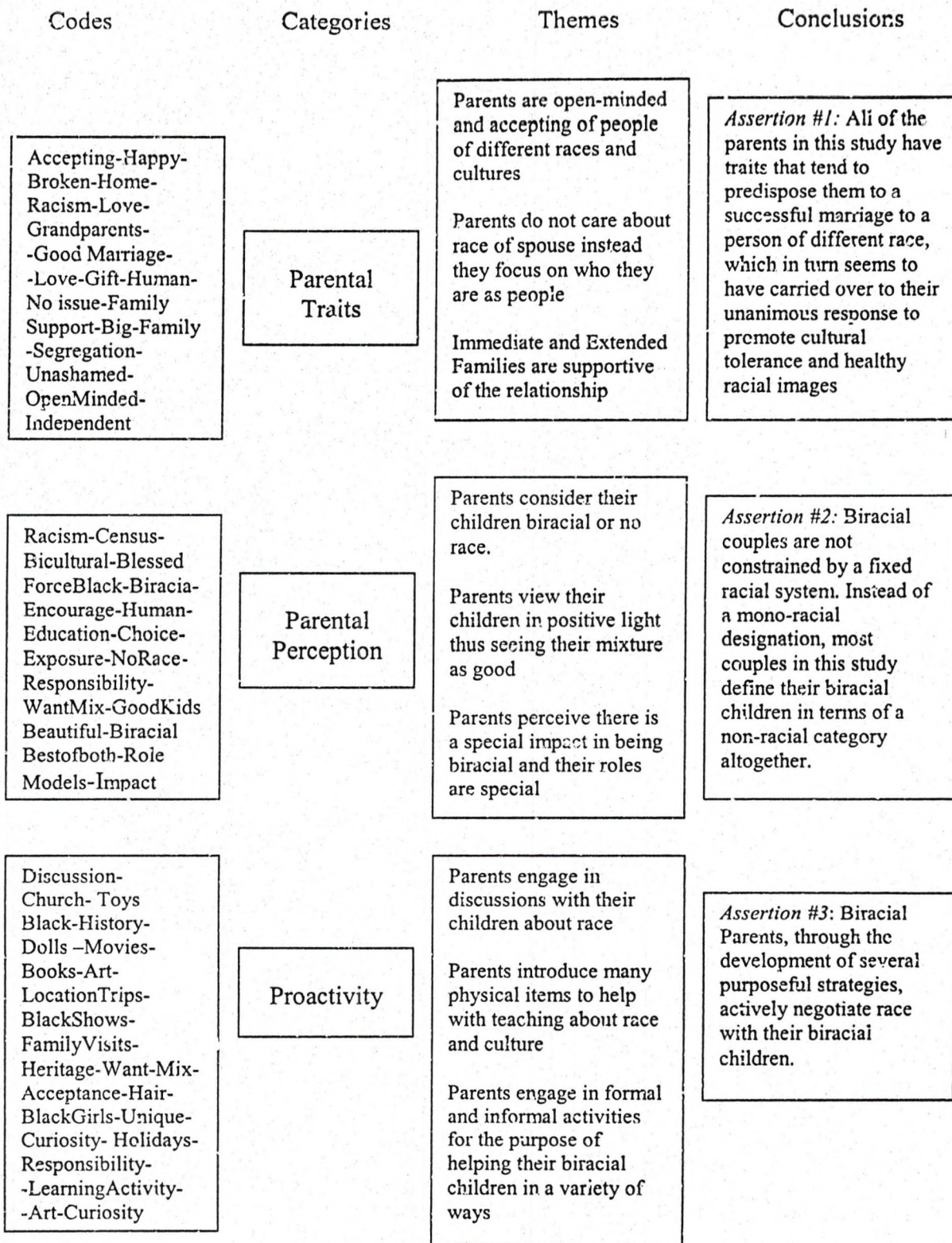| Codes	Categories	Themes	Conclusions
Accepting-Happy-Broken-Home-Racism-Love-Grandparents--Good Marriage--Love-Gift-Human-No issue-Family Support-Big-Family-Segregation-Unashamed-OpenMinded-Independent	Parental Traits	Parents are open-minded and accepting of people of different races and cultures Parents do not care about race of spouse instead they focus on who they are as people Immediate and Extended Families are supportive of the relationship	*Assertion #1:* All of the parents in this study have traits that tend to predispose them to a successful marriage to a person of different race, which in turn seems to have carried over to their unanimous response to promote cultural tolerance and healthy racial images
Racism-Census-Bicultural-Blessed ForceBlack-Biracia-Encourage-Human-Education-Choice-Exposure-NoRace-Responsibility-WantMix-GoodKids Beautiful-Biracial Bestofboth-Role Models-Impact	Parental Perception	Parents consider their children biracial or no race. Parents view their children in positive light thus seeing their mixture as good Parents perceive there is a special impact in being biracial and their roles are special	*Assertion #2:* Biracial couples are not constrained by a fixed racial system. Instead of a mono-racial designation, most couples in this study define their biracial children in terms of a non-racial category altogether.
Discussion-Church- Toys Black-History-Dolls –Movies-Books-Art-LocationTrips-BlackShows-FamilyVisits-Heritage-Want-Mix-Acceptance-Hair-BlackGirls-Unique-Curiosity- Holidays-Responsibility--LearningActivity--Art-Curiosity	Proactivity	Parents engage in discussions with their children about race Parents introduce many physical items to help with teaching about race and culture Parents engage in formal and informal activities for the purpose of helping their biracial children in a variety of ways	*Assertion #3:* Biracial Parents, through the development of several purposeful strategies, actively negotiate race with their biracial children.

Figure 1. Codes and subsequent themes.

The process described is what John Seidel (1998) considers be the process of noticing, collecting and thinking. In the noticing stage, you are finding the "units of meaning" and coding them. Later you go to the collecting stage, this is where you sort out your data completely. This can be quite complex and many researchers have considered it analogous to a puzzle (Seidel, 1998). Lastly, one moves to the thinking stage, where you "make sense out of your collection" and look for patterns and relationships (Seidel, 1998, p. 5).

The relative challenges that come with doing such an analysis cannot be stressed more. As I was 'coding' the data, it was imperative that I paid attention to each line, each sentence, for meaning and relevance to the topic at hand. The challenge got even greater as the amount of codes that were identified had to be analyzed further for emergent themes, recurrences in the data.

Thematic Organization

As respondents begin to share their stories, new information emerged as they continued sharing. Likewise, during the course of the analysis, the findings of this study also "emerged" from the data as the researcher continued to examine the codes. The codes were organized into different "like" categories. For example, the codes, "no color" "leader" and "socially Black" were all codes that fell under category of "parental perceptions. Within these categories, different themes start to emerge in the data, thus creating sub assertion from the data.

Eventually, the codes, categories and themes allowed me to make a major assertion based on the data. This major assertion leads the researcher to make a broad

explanation of the research question, how parents perceive and negotiate race with their child.

Ethnograph 5.0

The amount of pages for each interview was at least between 25-50 pages in length. Such a large amount of textual data called for something that would make the data more manageable. Hence, *Ethnograph 5.0* was chosen.

Ethnograph 5.0, developed by John Seidel and others who were interesting in the practical management of qualitative data, is a PC software package that allows the user to code, categorize, and discover thematic representations in textual data. Ethnograph 5.0 is a window driven software package that can manage several different codebooks and data files. The Ethnograph has two main platforms, the coding text editor, which sets the data up for coding, and the data viewer, which you can use to identify themes within the data. An important feature of the Ethnograph 5.0 is the codebook utility that allows the user to keep tracks of hundreds of different codes as well as their root locations in the text.

Personally, I believe this computer software package gave me the ability to organize all the data, converting it into a format that would make it easy for me to code and categorize. It also kept a good record of all the codes and categories within the data, all of which can be brought up on the computer with a touch of the button. Finally, the *Ethnograph 5.0* made it easy for me to scan the data, both codes and categories, in the search of themes to present themselves.

Limitations

No study is perfect. This is the reality that all researchers must conclude during the final analysis of their study. There is always some aspect of the research that can be

improved, modified, or discarded. The research presented here is no different. Included here are some key areas that limit the overall implication of this study.

When contemplating the merit of qualitative research, many point to issues related to validity and reliability in the research (Maxwell, 1996). Is this research truly testing what it is supposed to test? Is this research reliable? Can the findings be repeated? These are the questions/attacks that occur when research of such a subjective nature is conducted. As long as the researcher conducts the research in a responsible fashion consistent with the scientific method, there should not be a question of the legitimacy of the research endeavor.

This research is limited in several fashions. First, the location of this research limits this study to families who are in the Midwest areas. It is obvious that interracial couples from other areas of the country, where the Black population is higher, may have different experiences than the respondents in this study. Engaging in interviews with parents from New York and Chicago as well as many other places would have been helpful.

Further, this project did not focus on the difference between the male and female strategies. Although such a difference may exist, it was the shared perceptions and strategies that were of interest in the research. Also, no comparisons between younger and older parents were done in this study. The study focused mainly on parents in general, not centering on any age distinctions.

Also, important to note was that this research was limited by time and money. It would have been ideal to do a larger scale study of parents of biracial children from all over the country. Unfortunately, such a study would require massive amounts of money.

In addition, more time would have allowed for more respondents and even longer interviews. Ultimately, interviews must end somewhere, and the time used was sufficient in gaining the necessary data.

As Max Weber said, no research is value free. All researchers leave some tinge of bias on every aspect of the research. It is there by what they have read and what they have not read, what they use in the methodological phase and what they do not use, and who they are as people, and who they are not. As a biracial individual, I may have an inherent bias towards the research question. To counter any potential threat I identified people I did not know as respondents, and I did not make my biracial-ness public to respondents until after the interview. Also, I conducted the interviews with the attitude that it was "their stories" that I was going after, not my own. Thus, I offered no commentary during the interview process beyond appropriate prompts and questions.

As being both the researcher and biracial, it is important to note that I am fairly knowledgeable in the area of biracial identity formation. Due to the fact that I have already done research in the area and have been exposed to many different theories and perspectives on parental negotiation and have lived my life as a person who has made some of the choices that are in question, I did not go into this study "knowing nothing" about the research topic. As such, it is through my realization of these facts that I am best able to attempt to conduct the research in a fashion that will control for my own expectations and assumptions as much as possible.

Conclusion

The careful observance of methodological procedures in this study has culminated in identification of three major themes emerging in the interview data. These findings,

which are discussed fully in chapter 4, provide insight into how parents perceive and negotiate identity with their biracial children. The following chart documents all found assertions, sub assertions, and themes (see Table 1 below). Hopefully, this will provide a concise glimpse of the result of the inquiry into this research question

Table 1. Assertions, sub-assertions and themes.

Assertion #1: All of the parents in this study, have traits that tend to predispose them to a successful marriage of to a person of different race, which in turn seem has carried over to their unanimous to promote cultural tolerance and healthy racial images to their children. This assertion is supported by the following two themes

> Open mind
> Supportive Families

Assertion #2: Biracial couples are not constrained a fixed racial system. In fact, biracial couples are unlikely to perceive their children in a mono-racial sense. This assertion is supported by the following three themes

> Nonracial perception
> Biracial perception
> Roles and responsibilities

Assertion #3: Biracial Parents, through the development of several purposeful strategies, actively negotiate race with their biracial children by exposing them to strategies that allows the children to be aware and proud of their own diversity. This assertion is supported by the following four themes

> Discussions
> Artifacts
> Events and Experiences
> Hair Needs

Sub assertion #1: The African American parent is likely to make a social distinction in terms of how their children are identified racially. In this case parents identify a "social blackness" that may be a reality for their children.

Sub Assertion #2: There is a tendency for parents to involve their children in more African American specific activities. Although activities were centered on providing a diverse cultural experience, many activities were centered on the introduction of the African American heritage for the children.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the findings that were derived from the areas of inquiry developed in the research design. Specifically, the findings came from interviews with respondents where three different types of questions were posed: biracial parent background questions, parental racial perception questions, and parental negotiation identity questions. As such, codes, themes, and assertions that were derived from the interviews will be discussed. In addition, a synopsis of the themes, sub assertions and main assertions that were developed from the data will be offered.

The areas of inquiry in this study each have a different function. Ultimately, each area of inquiry, when taken in totality, provides a candid portrait of how parents of biracial children perceive and negotiate race with their biracial children. Background questions were useful in gaining an understanding of the population in the study. Parental perception question were essential to establishing how parents perceived their children racially. Parental negotiation of race questions was necessary in identifying the parent's role in their child's acquisition of a racial identity.

Assertions and Sub-Assertions

The following section is offered to document the assertions that have been identified throughout this study. Within this section, excerpts from respondents will be

used to substantiate the themes and assertions. Excerpts relevant to the following assertions will be discussed.

All of the parents in this study, have traits that tend to predispose them to a successful marriage of to a person of different race, which in turn seem has carried over to their unanimous to promote cultural tolerance and healthy racial images to their children. Within this group, it can be argued that the impetus of their desire for a healthy formation of race in their children points to traits and decisions that they made long before the children were ever conceived.

Intact biracial couples are unlikely to perceive their children in a mono-racial sense. No parents in this study expressed a perception or desire that that their children choose an exclusively mono-racial identity. In fact, most of the couples in this study define their biracial children in terms of a non-racial category altogether. Specifically they focus on the child's cultural background or other personal attributes and dispositions.

The African American parent is likely to make a social distinction in terms of how their children are identified racially. Meaning, although they do not consider their children in a mono-racial view, they concede to societies' imposition of such as identity.

Biracial parents were found to be "proactive" in the way they negotiated race with their children. Biracial parents, through the development of several purposeful strategies, actively negotiate race with their biracial children by exposing them: to strategies that allows the children to be aware and proud of their own diversity. Through the implementation of these strategies, the parents "negotiated" the healthy acquisition of a biracial or non-racial identity as opposed to a forceful imposition of one.

The tendency for more African American specific activities. Although activities were centered on providing a diverse cultural experience, many activities were centered on the introduction of the African American heritage for the children.

Assertion #1: Parental Traits

One important concept that was found in this study is that the perceptions and strategies that parents have concerning their biracial children do not occur in a vacuum. Admittedly, parental traits and the context of their relationships could be seen as potentially outside of the scope of their relationships with their children, but to include such observations can provide opportunities to make important connections from factors surrounding the parents' relationships. In fact, one can reasonably extrapolate from the data that there is a link between the context of the relationship between the parents and the later interactions they have with their children.

In this study, the observation was made that the parents of biracial children shared traits that were consistent with being able to negotiate a "healthy" racial identity with their children. Consistently, parents wanted to tie back what they do in their families by connecting it to the beginning stages of their relationships. With this acknowledgment in mind, consistent traits that were found in the parents' relationships will be offered here.

An Open Mind

Respondents in this study consistently reported that they had very favorable feelings about interracial marriage prior to getting married. Further, these relationships were void of adverse feelings about race or ethnicity. Both persons in the study reported having a high regard for diversity. Robin and Jack T. both express very open perceptions about themselves as they met and were eventually married. Jack T. discusses the

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independent thinking he and his wife had, despite the acknowledgement that many people

would disagree with the choices that they were making. [In the following excerpts,

parents are identified, along with their pseudonyms, by a BF or a BM, Black father,

Black mother) or a WF/WM, White mother and White father].

> Jack (Black Father): We have never really worried about what people
> thought about us being married or being together. We know that society
> doesn't like it but we've always taken it as that's their problem because
> we always say one thing to each other society pretty much controls
> everything you do but they are not gonna control who I am gonna
> marry!

Jack T. continues to discuss the "colorless" relationship he has had with Robin by

emphasizing the limited role that color has had in their growing connection to each other:

> Jack (BF): Your insides connect and your hearts connect. Your skin
> does not connect but your hearts connect and that this is relationship
> that you have got to have.

Robin T. discussing their relationship in terms that they see themselves as the people they

are and do not force each other to conform to any specific cultural or racial ideology:

> Robin (White Mother): Jack's been awesome, and we both have been
> totally who were, and he is who he is and I am who I am. We're not
> trying to be like the other persons culture; we kind of mesh. That's
> totally what I love about him I am totally who I am and I'd like to think
> he is totally who he is.

Robin T. goes on to share the ongoing unconditional acceptance that her and Jack have

had for each other:

> Robin (WM): Look at Jack and I, I mean totally different backgrounds
> but you know there's just you know, I mean, he's my soul mate there's,
> we are just so connected. And he you know he loves me
> unconditionally; we both have shown and demonstrated unconditional
> love.

Barry and Terry B. are good examples of a biracial couple that, early on, were not guided by a color consciousness when they were choosing their mate. Barry explains how he has viewed his wife:

> Barry (BF): So dating Terry or marrying Terry was just anther person [Chuckling]. And I know that this might be weird in this country but in my, in my head it never was.

The ability for the parents to be able to see past the color lines in the relationship is a strong predictor of a healthy relationship (Rosenblatt Et al, 1995). Jerry F. reports that this conclusion was paramount in his decision to marry Carole:

> Jerry (BF): As the years came and went the more I realized that too much we are judging others by what they look like, I guess when I saw my wife and when she saw me, When she saw me, uh, I don't know what she thought because the initial context she was in the shadows but she saw me and, and made a decision.

> Jerry (BF): I think that is the turning point in our relationship, my realizing that it didn't matter what she looked like; she was pretty and still is.

Some parents offer the idea that they were ignorant or indifferent to the negative connotations that are attached to interracial relationships. David H. shares here that he was not privy to the expectation that he married in a particular color line:

> David (WF): I never knew any different, that it was normal to be marrying a Black female. I didn't see that when I first met Jill but I didn't have those hidden agendas.

Jamie H. concurs with her husband's perceptions and shares that she had no care or concern for the social ramifications of marrying a person of a different race:

> Jamie (BM): It, It, you know, doesn't make a difference they [others] need to accept for who I am. I am a great person regardless of who I marry to and uh still kind of bothers me a little bit but uh as far as anything racially concerning him, no, it hasn't hurt me being married and I hope it hasn't hurt him being married to me.

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The parents of biracial children all exude a high level of racial tolerance. No parents reported a high level of confusion or ambivalence concerning choosing a mate outside their race. Respondents were not constrained to describe their partners in racial terms; instead, they discussed other factors such as personality and moral traits. In fact, there seems to be a strong connection to how these parents view themselves and how they would view their future children. However, as compelling as such traits are, such ideologies start somewhere. Parents in the study have pointed to the supportive families that they have been a part of as a reason for open ideals and a high tolerance towards interracial relationships.

Supportive Families

A curious finding in this study is that most of the extended families in this study were mostly supportive of the relationship from courtship to conception of children despite some variety in the backgrounds of the families. This is important because of the supportive roles that extended families often play in all families. Such support is even more important as we consider the role the extended families play in the rearing of the biracial children. Terry and Barry B. both report having very supportive families during their courtship and marriage. This made it easier for them to sustain a long term relationship:

> Terry (WM): That wasn't a big issue but it was more of a stumbling block maybe more so that the race thing the race thing never really came up as an issue with my parents at all. And with friends I encountered anyone object to it.

Barry B. reports that his parents were not only supportive but also possessed an anti-color perspective. Undoubtedly, this may have assisted him in his acquisition of a non-color ideology and high acceptance for diversity:

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Barry (BF): And with my family, I think it is the same thing, and I think that Terry can attest to that. They just do not think in terms of race and they never had told me, and it just never had been an issue.

Ashley G. also reports similar findings in her parents' reaction to her relationship with her husband, Adam:

Ashley (WM): I think my family was pretty much ok, I didn't get any shock or anything from them and my friends are generally open-minded so I didn't get anything from them. I think Minnesota at least the Twin Cities is pretty open in term of mixed race couples.

In similar terms, Jan C. discusses the very supportive family and community that she came from. Their acceptance made the courtship and marriage for Mike and Jan very pleasant:

Jan (WM): I think in England they are a lot more open to mixed marriages, different cultures, and (unintelligible) being around American Air bases it was quite common. It was something that was ever. ...Even coming from ([own name] it was quite common that people would Americans and people of different races. So it was never a problem and with his family the same way as far as I know (chuckles).

A few of the people interviewed for this study report coming from broken homes where one of the parents is not present in the home. In some ways, those who report coming from broken homes are given greater latitude of choices regarding their future mates. Instead of race, factors such as personality and morality are seen as important traits in picking future mates. Holly P. discusses this situation in her own life:

Holly (WM): Um my mom moved around a lot so I was around different people being in the military so it wasn't really an issue to her. Coming from a divorce family on her side to you know you more want to make a home and a marriage work that be concerned about if you were the right color. You want to be in a relationship that's good that's something you're going to be in for your life. On my dad's side they had met Rasheed ahead of time once and then met his family at his

wedding so my grand parents were more kind of I don't know about this, and I don't know what she is doing. But my fol... are more open-minded people living in [town]. In [town], North Dakota you're at least around more people that those smaller towns. I didn't have any parents say don't get married, but just are you marrying the right person, is he the guy to spend the rest of your life with?

Gina M. makes a similar claim about her parents:

> Gina (WM): I mean she [mother] was supportive of the idea that if he was a good person and I loved him then she was ok with it.

Jack T. emphasizes that the support and acceptance of the parents has been beneficial to him and how this has impacted his children today. Although it is impossible to generalize such an outcome to all the families in the study, it is fairly possible that family acceptance has been very important in the preservation of the marriage and the healthy rearing of biracial children.

> Jack (BF): But uh her family has been totally supportive and her um mother and father has been like a mother and father to me. And my kids, they know that this is their grandparent and all her cousins and relatives have been very accepting and I think my family has been the one to be more dysfunctional because I don't know any of them. And I come from a history of and I was just born in to a dysfunctional household basically. And uh that's kind of um, I think that question gets asked a lot just because we are mixed because they assume that our parents will be rejectful of us being together. I kind of assumed that too. As a matter of fact, we had been together for probably about two years before I met her mother and father. I was kind of reluctant in the beginning but I felt like, they came to my house and so I gained a lot of control but from the moment we met we have always been friends and been together and their has never been a problem at all not so far as mine colors concerned

Many couples report that their spouse's parents have become close friends and in some cases, surrogate parents to the person. Many times, this is the case for parent, who comes from a broken home to marry someone who is in a two parent, in tact home. Roger and Gina M. discuss how such a close relationship has developed in their family:

Roger (BF): I am proud to say that my mother was one of those people who thought about how wrong she was like today she called Gina her favorite daughter-in-law. And she often said I wish any child of my daughters would turn out like her. She is very proud of me and her grandkids and um and, and how my life is going now.

Gina M. reports a close relationship that was fostered early on between her father and husband:

Gina (WM): And then he and Dad got really close friends and Dad taught him a lot of things he had never been around [unintelligible] people, my dad was a farmer and if he had something he could put it together you know and he could weld it or make it or whatever and so he kind of took Roger under his wings.

Rasheed P. discusses the close relationship that his mother has with his wife, Holly:

Rasheed (BF): You know mom my loved Holly, in fact my mom is sometimes closer to Holly than she is with me or she is with my other sisters because they're so much alike. (Mumbled) but the thing I see the most is that my mom and her have such a tight relationship that I am almost jealous of her at times [Chuckling].

Many of the respondents reported that some extended family members were initially skeptical of their interracial relationship but soon became accepting. Even when concerns were rising, family members who were initially skeptical became very supportive. This was the case with Gina M:

Gina (WM): Whatever he was going to say about but my sisters and brother were very supportive, I mean it [race] didn't really matter to them. Jack was just Jack, I mean they didn't really say anything, oh he's Black or he's White or oh he's whatever. They didn't really care. I mean they cared but they didn't put up a barrier towards it at all. And once my dad got to know Jack, I mean now, they met summer they went golfing together without me, I mean it's like they don't, you know, once he got to know he was just like a regular person.

Carole F. has had a similar experience with her own father:

Carole (WM): But by the time we got married um daddy gave me away [Laughing] and after the wedding he comes out and took him by the shoulders and said you will take care of my daughter, it was so funny.

The openness of the parents to the relationships of the respondents in this study can be reasonably regarded as paramount to how they raise their children today. The extended family has played a crucial role in the socialization of the parents in this study to not perceive racial lines a something of a wall. Conversely, most of the parents in this study shared life stories that were consistent with accounts of individual family members that left lasting impressions of openness and tolerance to diversity and in turn, interracial relationships.

The communities, extended families, and ideals that parents have going into an interracial marriage do not subside as children come into the picture. On the contrary, these variable do play are part in how the family perceives their children. The thoughts, perspectives, and experiences that people have when taking on a parenting role can potentially shape racial perceptions and strategies, thus it is important that the parental traits are kept in mind.

Assertion #2: Racial Perceptions

Racial perception questions were asked so that there could be an understanding as to how they viewed their biracial children. These questions were fairly direct in nature, asking parents explicitly what they thought of their children in a racial context. Being an integral part of the research question, these questions were requisite to understanding how parents viewed their biracial kids, which in turn, could affect how they negotiate race with their biracial children.

In this study, I was able to identify several different ways that parents of biracial children perceive their children. As a result of interviews with respondents, three

different perceptions were identified: the *"racial classification perception,"* the *"parental role perception,* and the *"impact of biracial-ness perception."*

Each one of these findings offers a different dynamic of how parents perceive racial issues concerning their children. Further, these perceptions can be seen as the impetus behind how the parents engage their children about race. One can posit that these attitudes that parents are highly correlated with the specific strategies that are identified later in this study.

Racial Classification Perceptions

Parents of biracial children who were interviewed in this study have different ways of identifying their children racially. Specifically, the parents of biracial children in this study do not feel constrained to "fit" their child into any specific racial typology or category.

By virtue of the latitude of choice given to biracial children, one can expect that parents would in some ways also differ in the ways that they perceived their children in a racial sense. Although none of the parents looked at their children in a mono-racial sense, there was some difference in the way that they categorized their children racially. Some parents saw their children in a racial sense, being "biracial" or "half Black and half White." Other parents in the study saw their children as merely "humans" devoid of an explicit racial classification. The biracial parents were resistant to putting their children in any specific category.

Another interesting racial perception was determined by the level of discrimination experienced in the earlier life of the Black parent. The Black parents in this study that reported experiencing some type of discrimination or racial segregation

were much morel likely to see their children as biracial in a sense of the child being in an "in-between" category. These parents were also more likely to also have a separate, social racial consciousness where they viewed their children as mono-racial.

Half and Half

Although no parents saw their children as Black or White, some parents did still see their children existing somewhere within the current classification system. Such parents did not abandon a racial classification system altogether, rather, they were able to, in their own minds, justify putting their children into an "in-between" category. Such modifications made it possible for them to consider their children in a positive light having the best of both worlds. As such, just a few of the couples involved in this study saw their children as being "biracial." Rasheed and Holly P. describe their children as biracial and have systematically let their perceptions to be known to their children:

> Interviewer: What have you considered your children?
>
> Rasheed (BF): "They're biracial, they're two races. That is what I tell them, you aren't Black, you're not White, you are Black and White, you are two. Because they've asked they've come to places where they have asked too.
>
> Holly (WM): From what I have told my kids that they are White and Black and that they are bi-racial. I have had forms come home from the school or from whatever and you have to check what race you are and if there is no box I write in, I either check White and Black or I write in bi-racial. That's how I have seen it and that's is exactly what you are [the children] and if there is not society wise, uh, ways you know the mixture of the people that we have and is not seen right than I think people need to start being educated to see it right.

Rasheed goes on to explain the difficulties that come with putting your children in a biracial category:

> Rasheed (BF): You know the bi-racial is so huge that we so want to immerse them in the equality, we want them so much to see that that,

that we feel like it almost takes up all our energy that we almost forget that there is a whole humanity.

Adam and Ashley G. regard their children as racially mixed. They perceive their children to contain certain aspects of each parent:

> Ashley (WM): When I fill out those forms if they don't have multi-racial or bi-racial or something then I mark two things, I mark both races, or sometimes I mark other and just write in that she's bi-racial. If she and I talk about what race she is, we talk about being both races.

Other couples, such as the Jack and Robin T. also define their children as biracial. As a family, they have adopted the viewpoint that they are unique and their children are infused with the best of both backgrounds:

> Robin (WM): We've, we've always said mixed, we are a mixed relationship. I guess, I have always made a reference I'd, I would say that they are mixed, and there are times when you're philosophical and you say they're children of God (chuckling). I mean you know, it depends on the setting, I guess I guess we've always said, we've always said [mixed].

Jack also considers that his children share the "best of both worlds," Jack's perspective is that his children cannot deny either side of who they are racially:

> Jack (BF): And we tackled our differences as Black or White just as they are. My kids are half Norwegian and they are half Black. And but we talked about it and society will always call them Black because they are colored as so to speak. And no matter they say they can't be a Norwegian because Norwegians are White but I tell them you are half Norwegian no matter what they say and uh they have always been welcome and they will always be half Norwegian and half African American and that's pretty much how they go.

Only Human

A large portion of the couples involved in the interviews did not see their children as any race at all. While these parents were cognizant of the reality of the imposition of race on our population, they have chosen not to view their children in such terms. Instead,

these parents viewed their children in terms of their characters, their cultures, their traits, and their accomplishments. Barry and Terry B. describe their "non-color" perception they have of their children:

> Barry (BF): First I don't consider them any race, I don't, um I, I, it's, it's, it's interesting since I don't, since race isn't a fundamental factor in my thinking, I don't consider my children as race, in terms of race. They have friends; I see that they come home with kids from different backgrounds. I think in more terms of cultural background but um I sort of am immune, I sometimes hear my kids, especially the boy [son] refer to himself as Black, and at some levels has some racial consciousness. I think they have not reacted to it I just heard, and, and, and but the larger issue with society I suppose one could say well you know that you are raising kids that are somewhat different from the larger society.

> Terry (WM): In similar thinking I have it maybe for a different reason I don't go around thinking what race is my kids and I suppose if I fill out one of those forms I'd probably usually check Black or African American. But to me it's like putting them into a box, that I don't think defines them entirely I just think of them as kids with different cultural backgrounds and exposure to all different types of kids.

Other couples contend they perceive their children not as different or unique in a racial aspect, thus deciding not to consider specific "racial alternatives" that are there for their children. Mike and Jan C. have made a point not to place their children in any racial category:

> Mike (BF): Well J, I tell you the truth I haven't, I haven't made a point [to classify them in a race]. I know other people do but I haven't made a big point of pointing that out to them too much because I think the best reaction to a possible future situation would be one of, you know, huh? [Shrugging his shoulders to show confusion] When I say, huh? what I mean is that not to be on the side of (um) taking offense at it and not going over board and trying to understand too much. I'm trying to have them grow up in a way that what you are completely normal; nothing is wrong with it. Just like other kids grows up. And that way, I mean, I guess that if in the future if someone comes up and says hey do you know you are biracial or you're mixed? I want my kid to kind of look at them and say so but what's your point?

Jan C. also contends that her children are not a product of a racial system. Instead, Jan

has tried to just view her children only as a product of mommy and daddy, who are

lighter and darker colors, not races:

> Jan (WM): To them it's this is daddy this is mommy and daddy is
> darker and mommy is lighter. And ya know we have never made a
> point saying we're mixed and you know you're the product of that and
> we've never sat down and explained it to them. Ya know they look at
> people as people and that's how we want them to be. Ya know we
> don't want them to look for, ya know, he's Oriental or ya know, we
> want them to look at people as people and that's the way we want to be
> looked. You know and I know there is going to be situations in their
> life where people are going to look at them and just and see something
> else other than White. But I feel we are building them strong enough, in
> their own, you know in their person to be able to deal with that. I don't
> think that it will be that much of a hardship to them.

Jeff and Jill Z. also do not consider their children in any particular racial category. In fact,

they were very adamant about expressing their "non-racial" ideology during the

interviews:

> Jill (WM): My children, I do not see any color line when I see any
> color. I see them as just human. They are the most beautiful kids. Did
> you see Halle Berry? Alicia Keyes? It doesn't matter what mixed, they
> are always just beautiful kids.

Jeff Z. discusses how their perspectives are expressed to their children:

> Jeff (BF): I pretty much taught them that they could do whatever they
> want. I told them ethnicity is something that you probably want to
> know about. Census apps had made me sick because they want to know
> what you are for money. I cross it out and put in American. And now
> my kids put the same thing.

Others have decided on a non-racial identity because they contend that

categorizing their children into a racial category may be maladaptive for their children.

Roger and Gina M. do not consider their children specifically in a racial sense; instead

they look at other aspects of their persona. As can be heard in the next segment, parents

can feel very strongly regarding their aversion to the racial classification system:

> Interviewer: What race, if any, have you considered your kids?
>
> Roger (BF): I can easily answer that, for me none [race], I don't want them growing up (pause), for me you have to understand coming out of the family I came out of and the system came out of, I don't want my kids to fight the battle that has already been won. Civil rights, we got that; nobody can come along and hang me out of a tree with out facing some consequences. I hate that [racial categories]. They're Americans. They're Americans and if something happens, something could happen to my son he'd go to war he'd die, he can be killed. Same thing can happen to these two [his biracial children], it doesn't matter what color their skin is, I am a person who strongly believes uh that this issue is a dead issue that is kept alive by (pause) I don't know, it, it galls me sometimes when I sit and think how the race thing is played now a days, it's sickening me.

Instead of marking biracial on census forms like some biracial parents do who still see

their children somewhere in the racial spectrum, parents such as Gina M. mark it blank

altogether, further emphasizing the total abandonment of a racial category for their

children.

> Gina (WM): Well I was just think of, when, even when you have to, we just got back from open house from enrolling them in school last week, you have to check Black, White, Hispanic or Caucasian, you have to check all this stuff on there and or bi-racial I think that is on there too much now. (Laughing), I just always leave it blank; because it's like I don't even do it for myself. I don't fill it out, because I don't care.

Such a strong stance against a racial categorization begs an important question:

Are there marked differences in the perceptions of parents who view their children as

biracial and those who reject the idea of race altogether? Surprisingly, all the parents

report that their children's bi-cultural status is important, although, parents who see their

children as non-racial value their children's culture more than their color. Chester and

Adriana S. share that they see their biracial child in a cultural context rather than a racial

one:

> Chester (WF): She is from North Dakota so most of her friends and most of her experiences are from a local culture. Um if you talked to her on the telephone you would probably think you are talking to a person from North Dakota. She doesn't have an accent like my wife, she [His daughter] has a hard Canadian, what ever you want to call it, Midwestern accent. Um, a lot of her view, she being raised here I know she was exposed to some racism and prejudice but she is a very, very, high achieving girl and she did a good job overcoming a lot of those things. As far as do I look at her as Black or White: she's my daughter, I have never ever even thought about one thing or categorizing her, it's, I just can't do it. She's just Tessa and always has been you know when I look at her now I still remember changing her diapers when she was two months old.

Adriana emphasizes that the infusion of culture over race is very important to her.

Adriana considers her daughter to be a mixture of African and American values. To

Adriana, race is nothing more than color characteristics. Adriana discusses her own

perceptions of her biracial daughter:

> Adriana (BM): Well with me I am African and he [Chester] is an American so I consider her an African-American [culture]. When it comes to Black and White I don't really see it as a race, Black and White I think it's more a color than it is a race. So I don't really believe in that, so my daughter is African and an American.

Adriana addresses the issue further:

> Adriana (BM): It's a cultural thing; it always has been a cultural thing. I always teach her on a cultural basis not on race because I didn't grow up with a lot of race and I don't know a lot about it but I do know something about culture and I try to teach her a lot about her culture.

Other families also discuss how they look at their children purely on a cultural level.

Terry B, who by her own admission says that her family lives in a "Caucasian culture,"

contends that her children also live in a Euro-American culture rather than a Black one:

Terry (WM): If someone where to ask what race my kids were I would find that would be kind of strange, but if someone were to ask or if I were to think of what group they are culturally closest to in this country they are probably more close to the Caucasian ways of, you know, culture than they would be to the African American culture and because there is no one in this household that has the African American culture to bring to them. I mean they have some friends that are African American but they are not exposed to that every single day. I think they're exposed to the Caucasian way of doing things in talking and living life and Barry has pretty much assimilated to Caucasian way of doing things I think, so that's probably pretty much what their exposed to, with some little bits of African [culture] there.

While the cultural recognition is consistent through many of the couples, other parents adopt simpler alternatives to a racial perception. Many of the biracial parents look at their children simply as good kids with good characteristics and traits. For these parents, such traits supercede any racial ideology that they may feel compelled to impose on their children. Jamie H. illustrates that there are other considerations besides race that she holds more important. It is the child being kind, accepting, and hard working citizens that she sees as important traits:

Jamie (BM): I think my main concern is not the race they call themselves it is whether they are able to support themselves and their family and able to relate socially to any other race. I would be very hurt if they were discriminatory towards any other race. They wouldn't even have the right to discriminate another race because of their dark motif (laughing). But what I would prefer them to call themselves? Americans, I think that that is more vital than skin color. I think being an American is much more important that being British, Italian, German, you know, Asian, Hispanic. I think being America is really going to pull stock [laughing] rather than your skin color.

Jamie continues to discuss her view of her children as not being racially African American, but having the positive aspects of African American culture:

Jamie (BM): I don't consider them anything. Ok my philosophy about, my whole intent, I my motherhood and my relationship with my husband was um, I was raised totally Black in the sense of uh history,

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attitude wise, spiritually, and what I decided to do was take only the good of that and pass it on to my kids.

Many of the parents talked about their children in a general positive light.

Rasheed and Holly P. take great pride in their children, not for their race, but generally

for the people that they are:

> Rasheed (BF): I really feel like we are blessed man because our children turned out beautiful and their really gorgeous to look at. You know and it seems like I really feel they got the best of both worlds. Oh I almost forgot your question now. Um that what do we say to them when they come? My daughter, I make sure she knows first that she is a beautiful woman, I don't care what color she thinks she is, what color she made.

Like Holly and Rasheed P, Gina and Roger M. also look at their children in a positive

light. Since Roger and Gina do not force their children to any racial category, they see

their children primarily as strong yet friendly children who will be able to endure any

negative attitudes towards them concerning their race. Roger M. explains further:

> Roger (BF): I believe can't nobody hurt them [racist remarks]. They would look at that person and say it's your loss. I am a nice person and you just lost a hell of a friend. But good luck anyway.

The "Black" Parent

Another disparity found concerning the parent's perception of the situation was

identified from the data. Many of the African Americans parents were likely to concede a

hidden desire that their children will consider themselves as black. While none of these

parents reported that they accepted their children having a mono-racial identity, they did

suggest that the racial classification system that is imposed on American society might

prove to be too great for their children.

Further, parents who discussed their racial perception in such a way tend to have

personal stories that include experiences of severe discrimination, segregation, or racism.

With this finding one can posit that racial lines may be more salient or real for these parents and these parents anticipate that similar challenges may occur in their children's life.

Since the existence of a racial system is much more salient for the Black parents who have initially discussed seeing their children as biracial and attempt to fit them into the racial spectrum tend to have mixed feeling about the issues of race. Several of the Black parents have identified their children as biracial, but later said they can also see their children as black. It was found that, for the Black parents who have reported a high degree of "racial experiences" (i.e. overt racism, segregation) they have two different perceptions of their children: a personal one, which consists of how they view their children's race; and a societal one, which consists of how the general public will ultimately view their children.

While Jack T. has contended throughout the interviews that he sees his children as biracial, he also discusses a separate "social consciousness" that he has for his children. While Jack sees his children as personally biracial, he sees them in larger sense as "Black." In the following excerpt, Jack describes both perceptions that he has:

> Jack (BF): You are an African American because you look like an African American but reality is you're half Norwegian and half Black if that's what you want to get specific said African American or Black. And they're Black but they're fifty-fifty there's they have no reason to half Black. You have the mixing of the chocolate and White you come up with a colored person, which is a Black person.

Rasheed P. also illustrates this point by making a distinction between perceiving his children as Black in a social sense, but at the same time personally viewing them as biracial people. Rasheed, like all the parents who suggest that there may be a mono-racial

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imposition on their child, discusses challenges and hardships that he has experienced

growing up:

> Rasheed (BF): I, I, I tell them that [they are biracial] but in my mind, I, I, I do tend to see them as Black children. Just, all my experience has you know just seem to show me because our society is dominantly White and that a dominantly White society will see them at Black. Now the problem comes in is when we're in with Blacks and blacks will see them as mixed. Blacks won't see them as White, Blacks will see them as mixed and I think when people talk about the problem that mixed children deal with I think that has a lot to do with they really don't fit in like into any category. I known know that's the case that's just what my experiences have shown me. So I try speaking to them I tell them that they are both, you are Black and you're White. I tell them you're not fifty/fifty you are hundred/hundred you are both. And but I do tend to see them as Black children. I believe that they will have to deal with a lot of things because I grew up in a predominantly White society, like my neighborhood was White; the school I went to was White, the church I went to was White. And um since I had to deal with things I foresee, I 'm think I can see my children with having to deal with a lot of those things.

Adam G. discusses the frustration he has that ultimately, despite his best efforts to

negotiate a biracial identity for his child, society will impose an African American racial

identity for his daughter whether he likes it or not. Adam explains this further:

> Adam (BF): But I have to put on too, that my take is that people will perceive her as an African American kid um there is nothing she can do about that and I think, my own, one of the reasons she needs to be in a nurturing environment is because um when that is imposed on her, if she is going to be angry that she can't choose.

Adam goes on to discuss that although he would consider her biracial, that society itself

will consider her as Black:

> Adam (BF): It's just not fair I mean that she can't choose because there are people who um who will look at her and say that she's African American kid and not say that she's bi-racial and that's not fair to her because that's the world that she is going to have to grow up in...I think that if it was in a situation where I had to sign boxes and there wasn't bi-racial I would do other and write in bi-racial. That's what I would do, but then also recognizing when she is old enough that it's going to be

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her decision and we don't have to worry about her. But it's it's, it's, not
fair to her that she forced to be in that kind [black].

Jeff Z., having experienced segregation and the effect of the "one drop rule" in his own
life, discusses the tendency of society to "pigeon-hole" his children into a mono-racial
identity, despite his efforts to tell his children to be whatever they want to be:

> Jeff (BF): It is not what I consider them that matters, it is what the
> public considers them. It is unfortunate, but when society sees a White
> women and Black man have children, they consider those children
> black, and when a White man has children with a Black woman, they
> consider the children black. Well I just worry that my children to get a
> fair shake, or the opportunity to get a chance at something. They peg
> you and they do not even give you a fair shake.

Jamie H. also considers her children in a somewhat mono-racial sense. Jamie H
grew up around pervasive racism and poverty. Although she does not consider her
children racially, she considers that her children were raised into a White culture and as
such, as part of a White cultural experience Like parents who see their children as Black
to help confront the difficulties of racial imposition by society, Jamie views her children
as hopefully adopting a White culture to be able to avoid several of the negative aspects
that Jamie has identified as being part of Black culture.

> Jamie (BM): I guess living in the area we lived in, North Eastern,
> America, Northern Maine, is consider predominately White. So I
> considered their lifestyle, their financial, their emotional, their uh, uh,
> way of living to be White American simply because they were in
> Northern Maine. There was farmland and mostly their lifestyle was
> high quality so I consider them because they didn't live in a Black, I
> guess uh, I don't know, Black tradition. Mostly the people in the south
> are middle income, very few rich Black people, most of them are
> middle income, a lot of welfare, a lot of single moms, and the poverty
> level for kids in the south is very high. Since we were not in the region,
> my philosophy was that my kids were being raised in a White I guess
> Caucasian manner [culture], and also I guess with my husband being
> the head of the family, ok. I never considered them to be Black
> because they never were living the Black lifestyle, just being totally
> White and I made sure they are getting fed all of the good stuff.

Parental Role Perception

Besides discussing merely about the race of their children, many parents involved

in this study discussed what their roles were as parents of biracial children. Consistent

with their non or multi-racial feelings concerning their children many parents discussed

that their roles were to be parents that would help them deal with race and help them

realize their potential as people so they can transcend race.

Role Models

Many parents perceive their role that they can model for their children how to

make good decisions regarding race and diversity. Adam and Ashley G. report that they

perceive that their children make good choices as citizens:

> Ashley (WM): I want to give to her is um (pause) um help her become
> whatever it is that she wants to become um I want to model fairness,
> and kindness and moral and caring for other people. I think she sees
> that and this is something that we are so much involved in helping and
> trying to make difference in the work that we do and the volunteering
> stuff that we do and mean I think she sees that.

Roger and Gina perceive their role as one where they can model for the children good

attitudes about race and life.

> Roger (BF): I would think if we have done our job they would just give
> them that I a human being and I am an American, just a human. My
> mother is White my dad is Black and life is good.

> Gina (WM): To model what is inside is more important than what
> outside.

> Roger (BF): By letting them see that daddy is fair and honest and good.

Jerry F. also sees himself as a role model for his children. However he wishes not only to

model good citizenry to his children, but also model endurance and triumph over difficult

situations such as racism and discrimination; both of which Jerry has endured over the

years:

> Roger (BF): Sure, uh you know uh, I think, uh, a parent (pause) the children see us as that role model regardless of what we look like. And if you show them by your own behavior in the things that you do that it can be done, all right, against all odds, any kind of adversity that you might run into and now allowing that to be a factor in holding you back I believe that makes all of the difference. To a certain degree I went to college out of necessity. If I was going to get a job, I was worth anything I needed that piece of paper. I also believe- and I think I shared this with [son], if you have a college degree and you put those letters behind your name no one can take that away from you, it's permanent, you earned it, it's yours and when you die and leave this world they can't take it away from you.

Adam and Ashley G. see their role in their child's "racial" life as nurturers who can be there when they need guidance and help. For this couple, it is the constant messages that they can give their child that can create an environment where they feel cared for and accepted as children. Ultimately, Adam and Ashley want to give their daughter the widest latitude of choices racially:

> Ashley: (WM) My role is uh nurturing and helping her understand whatever questions that she has and actually take advantage of those opportunities when she's still talking to us to um to um plant messages. Even though we think now, and the messages we give to her are implanted and it's a way of being and I am repeating my self I think I want to be supportive and I want to help her answer questions of who she is but I only do that when I have opportunities because I am not going to impose, I am not going to do that.

Barry and Terry B. also see their role as being parents who do not emphasize the role of race in their children. This way the children can better adopt healthy and happy ideals about who they are:

> Terry (WM): Well I think um just by raising them with our values and family not emphasizing race in the way we raise them. When racial issues come up that they confront outside the family uh we help trying to deal with that, even taking some time to help them research that if

their curious about that or bothered by it and want to learn more about it.

Adam and Ashley G. perceive that their roles are to provide them the tools to be to be independent of racial norms. Specifically, Ashley and Adam hope that they can give their children the ability to pick friends on virtues other than race.

> Ashley (WM): My whole purpose is to help her get through life is to give her the tools to use when we are not there, and some of those when she pick the friends that she has is that she is using the right criteria, is she picking them on the basis that they are fun to be with and who are respectful of you and have something to offer, and if she gets that now she will get it latter, that's the key for me.

Parents can perceive their role as one where they can filter out any undesirable racial or cultural ideas in their children. Roger M. perceives his role as a proactive one where parents are constantly attuned to what their children are learning in schools:

> Roger (BF): "I think we keep an eye out at what they are taught in school, and once again it gets back to the parents and if we see something that's not right or we disagree with it [cultural ideas] or something like that then they only tell me and Gina. I don' believe in calling the teacher and bitching about something and just whining all the time about something I know I have a job as dad and sometime teachers can't get to everything and it's as the dad, it's up to me to come in and if it's something culturally that their doing and I don't feel comfortable about it's only on me as dad to pay attention and then to talk to them about.

Special Responsibility

Some parents find that there is a "special responsibility" that comes with raising biracial children. The White parent in the relationship mostly expressed this idea of a responsibility for a "balance" between two cultures. For instance, Robin T. discusses the unique responsibilities that she has raising her biracial children. To Robin, the parents must always be mindful of the situations that their biracial children are going through and be prepared to deal with those situations:

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Robin (WM): You have to be aware of day-to-day living. You, you, you just know them as your children. But you have to be responsible parent if you are entering in a relationship like this and just can't be bluntly about it. On one hand there just you kids on the other hand so, you know, you feel like you have a responsibility to them and to your selves. But I feel society sees my children as African American.

Robin T. goes on to discuss her special responsibility as a White woman who is raising

mixed children:

Robin (WM): And, and, I think that is a responsibility in being a wife in a mixed relationship as a White women raising bi-racial children or Black children, um that you have a level of responsibility to not ignore their ethnicity when it comes to certain physical characteristics.

Adriana and Chester S. perceive that their constant interaction is paramount in shaping

their children's healthy racial identification:

Chester (WF): I think with the interracial children you just have to, they can learn about culture when you just put them in a (Pause) well when you just allow them to interact with their parents.

Being an involved and responsible parent to a biracial child is essential to the success of

biracial child. Roger M. was able to sum this point up well with the next segment:

Roger (BF): But I think what are important are parents, the parents to me are like the key to everything to me. So you got the schools and the governments can give to school all the money in the world and get the best teachers in the world, but it all don't mean anything if the parents can't do their job and do it persistently.

Perception of Impact

Another finding was that many of the biracial parents perceived what type of

future awaited their biracial children. This finding was important because it gives a

glimpse at how some perceptions can potentially affect how they will prepare their

children for a racial world. Interestingly, parents differed on the level of challenge they

anticipated their children would experience. For instance, some parents anticipated that

their children would experience many challenges, as a biracial child while other would see a bright and inconsequential future for their children in a racial context.

In most cases, the parents who considered their children as biracial, where the Black parent reported high levels of negative racial experiences, were likely to consider their child's oncoming situation as "challenging." Adam and Ashley G. discuss the challenges they anticipate that their daughter will face, as people will try to impose a race on her:

> Ashley (WM): She [daughter] sees herself as bi-racial and I think that going to be a huge challenge because folks, I mean 99% of the people that sees in the school environment won't see her as bi-racial. Most Whites will see her as an African American and I really think that's a real and ongoing challenge. And I want to be there to help her with that any way I can. I think that is what I see happening and she will see herself as bi-racial.

Rasheed and Holly P. perceive that as their children grow older, the issues of race will be much stronger for them and potentially difficult:

> Holly (WM): When kids get older and in junior high and high school it's even rougher than grade school, I mean these kids they can get really brutal. With, and it can be very well harder for girls than boys, or harder for boys than girls, I don't know. When talking to Rasheed's sisters, one sister had a really hard time, uh, not fitting in with the White girls, being black.

Jack and Robin T. predict that their daughter will leave home for a more diverse area.

Jack and Robin feel that their daughter has already endured several challenges regarding race and will want to leave.

> Jack (BF): I think she probably, she does pretty well now but I don't know if she really wants to be here at all and I think she wants to hurry up and get through so she doesn't have to be here. And I think she being a Sister that she is and she really likes people, and she likes all kinds of people, and when they make derogatory statements about her it really hurts her. Anthony, he kind of just thinks, you're a fool.

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Jamie H. perceives that at some point society will put pressure on them to choose. Jamie

shares her frustration about her children growing up in a racial world."

> Jamie (BM): Maybe they never will [choose race], maybe they will say
> they are mixed. In our society there is pressure within the different
> races, within the Black community, within the White community, and
> in any other, you need to pick. What if they don't want to pick? They
> shouldn't have to pick. Why can't they just be mixed? And if that's
> what they choose than that's what they want to be.

Other parents viewed their children's future with race as one of endurance. All

families involved in the study conceded that there might be racial issues that children

may confront. The difference lies in how important the parents perceived those

challenges to be in their child's life. Terry and Barry B. view that despite the challenges

that may or may not occur, their children will endure and form healthy ideas:

> Terry (WM): I think they will go through times when they are
> questioning and how can White people or Europeans do that. Hopefully
> they will look at that and come out having a solid identity.

Barry B. perceives that any challenges that his children will experience as a biracial

person will "blow over" as his children grow older. To Barry and Terry, racial challenges

and pressures are like a passing phase that will overruled by what is taught in the home:

> Barry (BF): I think you know when they become teenagers and they,
> you know, from society there will be some challenges uh, perhaps of
> being who they are but being secure of maybe being different, because,
> because so far they may feel that factors of race of being more than I
> have. Uh but that doesn't necessarily, I mean, who knows how it will
> turn out, um you know I hope that we sort of, we have had an open
> household and an open sort of and things will change and things will be
> different at that age. But I think, I think you know, their teenage years
> may be more challenging but I don't necessarily I think there will be
> more other things that will be more challenging than perhaps the, the,
> other kids. I think there will be other things that will be more
> challenging. I think, you know, just being a teenager in itself will be
> more challenging than being a quote unquote bi-racial teenager I think.
> But who knows I may be completely wrong but it think the racial issue

may um may be more of an issue in the teenage years but it will probably blow over by the time they are in college.

Roger M. perceives that his children are growing up in country where free ideas about race and ethnicity are valued. As such he feels that his children will be equipped to acknowledge and withstand negative ideas about race while embracing those ideas that strengthen them. Roger explains below:

> Roger (BF): One thing I believe was thank God we have a country like this where if you want to be a racist and do something like that and something against somebody else it's your constitutional right to do that, you are free to do it. But as a person that's receiving it you have the right to walk away from it and find another avenue. And the only (mumbled) avenue on the kids I don't know how this is gong to tie in with my two youngest. I know it works well with my oldest um, I believe they will be fine, but I think how people do anything negative to them as far as racism or something like that, lot of it will depend on where they are with themselves. If they have confidence in themselves and have a strong especially a belief in God, I believe can't nobody hurt them.

Assertion #3: Proactivity

Questions concerning the negotiation of racial identity were asked of respondents in the study. These questions were centered on the way biracial parents help form their children's ideals about who they are racially. Through the data, it was evident that parents were involved with their children in some ways. Overall, the couples unanimously reported that they had various strategies that they utilized to form healthy identities with their children. This sentiment was heard throughout the interviews by couples such as Chester and Adrianna S, who report consistent efforts to be involved in the "racial acquisition" aspects of their daughter's life:

> Chester (WF): I say we both have been really involved parents, a lot. I have spent hours and hours and years talking with her about just about everything and um so you know I like to pick on a little bit of being her guide in many areas such as this [race].

All the parents in this study engaged the issue of race with their children by negotiation. That is, they did not force or impose a specific ideology on their children. Instead, the parents were able to set a balanced structure for a healthy formation of a racial identity. Huffman (1995) asserted that intact biracial families were likely to engage in such a structured, yet egalitarian practice. Specifically, as parents set the structure for a healthy racial identification, they also allowed the child wide latitude of freedom in exploring their racial persona. No children in this study were forced to conform or adhere to any specific racial ideology. However, many of the parents were adamant about their hopes that their children adopt a healthy identity about themselves and race that was not oppressive of any part of their heritage. Ashley G. explains this sentiment as she describes her desire for her children to adopt a positive biracial identity, yet conceding that the choice ultimately belongs to their daughter:

> Ashley (WM): That's what I would do [referring to her choosing of a healthy, biracial identity for her daughter], but then also recognizing when she is old enough that it's going to be her decision and we don't have to worry about her. But it' it's, it's, not fair to her that she be forced to be in that kind of category at all.

Beyond merely identifying that such a negotiation existed, this study was able to identify three main strategies in which parents attempted to negotiate a healthy belief system in their biracial children concerning race. The three main areas that were identified as strategies parents used to instill positive racial experiences were: *Dialogue*, *Artifacts*, and *Events and Experiences*.

Dialogue

During this study, parents of biracial children consistently reported that one of their main strategies for forming a healthy racial identity with their children is through

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dialogue. Parents engaged in a myriad of conversations with their children that could assist them in their acquisition of a racial "self." Specifically, there were four main types of "dialogue" that went on between parents and their biracial children: *observance of heritage, endurance through challenge, philosophy towards race,* and *inquisitive questions.* While each discussion type is different, they can add to the child's ability to adopt a healthy racial identity.

Observance of Heritage

One type of discussion that parents were likely to engage in is conversations about the children's heritage. Generally, these conversations were about the children acknowledging that they are different, the clarification of any questions they may have about their heritage, and the instillation of good feelings about where they came from. Interestingly, parents reported that their children mostly asked such questions when they were between the ages of 7 and 12. Ultimately, questions surrounding the observance of who they are as people were identified as necessary for the parents to establish a sense of belonging in the children.

Oftentimes, the dialogue was centered on making sure the children acknowledge who their parents and families are. The impetus for these types of questions often can come from children, who become confused and curious when asked about their background, tend to ask their parents to help them figure it out. Mike and Jan C. have discussed their children's heritage:

> Mike (BF): My son is more closer to my complexion and my daughter is actually closer to my wife's complexion. We've heard them talking and my son is saying I am brown and my daughter saying I am White. And I then just tell them actually no you both are the same but it's just that your complexion is darker than yours. And you got more of mommy's attributes and you got some of mine. But than I quickly

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followed up with, at the same time, my son who looks, you know, who is darker than my daughter. And I look at them and I quickly followed up with at the same time my son you, you have gotten mommy's frame more and Jessica, my daughter who likes to eat too much, you have gotten my frame more. So I quickly just show them that I, I, I try to take it right into a genetics lesson and just say that this is how it happens. You and me like to eat, we like to stay up, but then again you and mommy share a closer complexion.

In their discussions, Mike and Jan do not limit their discussions of race to a "color consciousness," instead they look at other features about them that makes them unique and important members of their family. Jamie and David H. also have had to discuss their racial heritage with their children as a result of questioning from their peers.

Jamie (BM): I had to clear this up with the kids, because I am around them the most, when they come home to ask my questions to get things straight, they had to make sure to ask me if this was my first marriage, or that is their dad and I said yeah because their parents assumed that they looked like they got my skin color and I explained that nope, he's your only dad and my only husband, this was one marriage and all of you kids are from that marriage. And my oldest son real had to go through that and he really told his friends that no we are not a second marriage or stuff like that because they all have different skin tone so it confused them.

Adam and Ashley G. conduct similar discussions with their daughter as questions come up:

Ashley (WM): We talk about the fact that she's both of us, and the fact that that might make her something that's new and um we don't have a lot of conversations about race actually, but when we have those that's what we talk about.

These discussions have been helpful for the children, as each parent makes sure the child understands that they are a product of both of them. With both parents present, it is immediately obvious to the child that he or she is the product of two physically different people. Terry and Barry B. addressed this issue with their children in this way:

Terry (WM): I said I told them that they are beautiful how they are, that they're beautiful how they look and that's the way they always look and that's the same color. And they did ask that sometime why, why, you know, why are you White and daddy is Black? And you know how did we get to be brown? You know that's because mommy's White and daddy's Black and you know that's and mommy and daddy love each other and that's why were together and we had you half way in between (laughing).

Such positive discussions were beneficial in the children accepting that mommy and daddy were physically different. For many of the parents, it was stressed that their children possessed a universal beauty: Rasheed and Holly P were able to discuss a similar type of discussion they had with their children in the following excerpts:

Rasheed (BF): I tell her you are beautiful inside and out and which she is a beautiful girl and she's probably going to be a beautiful woman. And um I made sure as her dad that I really affirmed that in her I try to do that in my sons as well. I try speaking to them I tell them that they are both, you are Black and your White. I tell them your not fifty/fifty you a hundred/hundred you are both.

Holly P. also emphasizes that their children should observe their racial heritage in a positive light. Holly points to the fact that her daughter's racial mixture was product of God and she should be proud of that:

Holly (WM): Particularly with her, um, she would look at me too and say, Mom I want to have hair like you. When she was in kindergarten she started noticing things more that way. Um and um I would tell her God made you pretty the way you are and who you are and I can wish I look like you and you can wish to look like me but you need to be pleased with who God made us to be.

Jeff and Jill Z. also report conversations with their children stressing the observance of their heritage. Specifically, they pointed out the physical heritage of the children's heritage:

Jeff (BF): I would talk to them, but I would tell them that it (hair) is typical of our ethnicity. I tell them that Black people have the big nose, and big lips, and curly hair.

Philosophy Regarding Race

Beyond helping children acknowledge and appreciate their background, many parents hoped to instill a positive ideology towards race for their children. Mostly in the adolescent years, parents in the study were able to engage their children in discussions about topics such as diversity, tolerance, and humanity. Ultimately, the parents wanted their children to adopt positive opinions about race and diversity.

In discussions with their children, Jan and Mike C. do not want their children to be guided by a color consciousness when dealing with people. Since they themselves resist any racial classification for their children, they want to pass on an ideology to their children that embrace humanity and not race:

> Mike (BF): I explained it to them. Ya know they look at people as people and that's how we want them to be. Ya know we don't want them to look for ya know he's Oriental, or ya know, we want them to look at people as people and that's the way we want to be looked at. You know and I know there is going to be situations in their life where people are going to look at them and just and see something else other than White.

Further, Mike is able to discuss the complexities that are involved in racial classification:

> Mike (BF): I have made a point of telling them this, I kind of point to someone and say what are they? Brown. What are they? White. What are they? Chinese? What are they? Spanish? I said ok now you have just shouted out two colors, a national origin, and a race. I said this, I said but don't be mad or upset or so to speak that you didn't so to speak pick the right answer because I said society in general doesn't pick the right answer. You either refer to them by color or you refer to them... that is why they stopped saying Black and started saying African American for instance. Don't say that person is Chinese, that person is Spanish, and that person is Black, you know a national origin, race, and color.

Jerry and Carole F. had also wanted their children to adopt an ideology that was devoid of a racial view of the world:

Jerry (BF): I guess it was far more important for them to grow up and believe that in who were and how they treat other people so therefore we didn't teach them to be prejudiced, um you know, we taught them to try not to be. We wanted them to see people for who they were for the person that they were in the eyes of God rather than the fact that they had different color skins.

Roger and Gina M. have had discussions with their children regarding the ability for them to choose friends on a basis that is devoid of racial considerations. The message that this family wants to pass down to their children is that they should judge people on terms of the person's character and actions. Roger and Gina mention a discussion they had with their children in the following excerpts:

Gina (WM): Pick your friends for who they are and here she comes with some of all of them. She comes with some that are White, some that are black, some that are Vietnamese, I mean so, we just say pick good friends. Pick ones that you like. Pick people that you get along with.

Later, Roger M. shares with his daughter that she can be an individual. Roger M. contends that there may be a pressure by the Black community in the area for her daughter to speak and act a specific way. Roger and Gina want their daughter to adopt an attitude that she can be herself, not having to act socially Black or socially White:

Roger (BF): We have done, you know a lot of talking, in the last year or so about, about just um you don't have to change the way you talk, you don't, depending on where you are, you know, you don't have to change the way you do things, you know you just be yourself and everyone will know you as the same no matter where you go. I think when she first started at this school she though she had to start talking like a black, talking like using slang.

Jack and Robin T. have had discussions based on the open and tolerant family beliefs. Through their discussions, James and Robin hope that their children will adopt a sense of social justice, an appreciation for diversity, and a motivation for fairness like they do. In the following excerpts, they report the context of their discussions:

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Robin (WM): Well, and like Jack says, we, we talk a lot to our kids about what our beliefs and their beliefs are and that they have to be um what you discussed, what reminded me of that she [daughter] just got done making a sign on the computer um, saying "Stand up for what you believe in even if your standing alone." You know she made it to put on her locker; it's on the bulletin board here now, I mean so we talk a lot about what they believe inside and what, what, what they think is true and standing up for being true to themselves.

Robin also reports that they try to give their children a motivation to be fair and open:

Robin (WM): And one thing we have tried to teach our kids, and Robert does this a lot too, is to give everyone a chance. You know extend a hand, extend a smile extend a good morning and that's where everything starts.

Adam and Ashley G. also have had conversations that hopefully will elicit a sense of empathy in their daughter. Issues such as slavery and subordination are used to hit home the point that these are undesirable realities of our world and in turn, we should not accept them:

Ashley (WM): We will explain how it makes us feel when we get mistreated and how um we deal with it terms of getting passed it and how it doesn't change our identity, our own personal identity. And I would talk to her about um, we have talked to her about slavery and the history about slavery here in the US and elsewhere and she has had books and we've talked about it.

Endurance through Adversity

Another type of conversation that parents in this study report to have with their biracial children are conversations that deal with enduring specific challenges surrounding their biracial-ness. Oftentimes, these discussions come in the form of a preparation for impending racial experiences as they grow older or are conciliatory in nature, due to a pre-existing difficulty or experience.

Admittedly, many of these types of discussions are more reactive then proactive, some of the parents are discussing these things with their children ahead of time to

prepare them for difficulties that they are going to face. To comfort their children, Jack and Robin Turner explain to them the universal challenges that they [their kids] and others may endure:

> Robin (WM): All that we are talking about is based on the fear of rejection. None of us want to be rejected. And, and the potential is there. And the concept of being rejected, people don't even realize that well maybe those kids are going to have a hard time. Everybody has a hard time.   We are all going to be rejected, I mean whether you are born in an all White community or an all Black community somebody is going to reject you in that community, it's just the way it's supposed to be and that's why you laugh at rejection. But know body said you're going to learn from your rejection. You are rejected and you laugh I mean you learn from that and you grow from that and you become a better person from because of that rejection.

Rasheed P. tried to prepare his child early on for rejection, racism, and real life. Through role-play like discussion, he tries to convey to his child that all people will go through challenges, and if he [son] believes in himself, he can overcome those challenges:

> Rasheed (BF): And I try to find the tools we can use with my son Joshua, who's very um, verbal, some verbal affirmation. You know, I can really slice him down with name calling if I were to try to do that. I could really do that with him and it seems to affect him differently then it would even with my older two. But we say to him and really try to speak positively to him all the time even when he has been naughty and he's done something he shouldn't do I say, I always try to say you know buddy I love you and you know that and you're a good man, your going to be a great guy. You know life is hard for everyone, you know I don't care who you are, if you're the president of the United States, or if you John D Rockefeller's great grand niece, (laughing) you know it doesn't matter if you're Bill Gate's third child, life is hard for us all.

Many parents choose to frame their discussions around racism. Although many of the discussions are different in nature, they all conclude that the child must stay strong and be proud of who they are. Evidently, being able to overcome racist experiences will better help their child cope and adopt healthy feelings about themselves. Chester and Adrianna S. explain a discussion they have had with their daughter about racism:

Chester (WF): We also had a lot of conversations about prejudice and just the fact that we feel that it's based on ignorance a lot of times especially since we are in North Dakota. Now it would be different if we were in the city or you were in an environment where there were a lot of different races and but there is not here. So most of the incidents that we run across ourselves are due to ignorance, just stupid people who don't understand um so we tried to talk to her about that. And it's always been important to us that our children have a good self-concept.

Other parents also have had lengthy discussions about enduring negative racial experiences. Some parents suggest to their children that when people have problems with them, it is not their problem and they can remove themselves from the situations. Mike and Jan C. discussed this with their children in the following:

Jan (WM): Exactly I mean you put that in the same category. You know if they don't hate you because of your skin or hate you because you are smarter you know what ever the thing. You know I know these things have different levels. I am sure they will, you know, probably will encounter it.

Mike (BF): Yeah I am just trying to teach them that if someone doesn't want to be with you for what ever reason you shouldn't want to be with them.

The parents also discussed that they have conveyed to their children that they can overcome the myriad of challenges that can come with biracialism. Generally, they explain to their children that they may have to endure people who will attempt to "pigeonhole" them into a particular racial category. Most parents in this study have suggested to their children that they can overcome the challenges and pressures of people trying to "figure them out" by believing in who they are, being proud of themselves, strong-willed, etc. Rasheed and Holly P. have tried to discuss this with their children in the following excerpt:

Rasheed (BF): I don't care what other people look at you and try to categorize you. Don't ever let anybody stop you from doing anything because you are mixed, because you are Black or White because you

are White, don't ever let them stop you from doing it, man. You just go after it. If they get in your way, go around.

Jerry F. explains that people will ask you about who you are, but you need to be proud of who you are:

> Jerry (BF): And regardless of what anybody perceives you of being based on what you look like all right, um, that's their problem, that's something they will have to deal with unless they ask you personally, you know, what's your background? Then it is all right and then you can tell them. Or who you see yourself as deals with self-esteem. Anybody can put a label on anything they want to, all right.

Roger and Gina M. report conveying similar messages to their children:

> Roger (BF): And also if someone doesn't like you you know if someone's being mean and doesn't like you because of the color of your skin or because you are clever than them because you got better hair than them. I said you got be near that person you just distant yourself from that person. It's not (pause) you, just them.

Inquisitive Questions

Lastly, some parents engaged in a line of questioning of their children about their self perception. For the most part, such discussions were limited to parents who had children who are older and may have been able to form some consistent racial identification. Chester and Adrianna S. have had such conversations with their 19 year old daughter, as they were curious about how comfortable she is with her racial identity:

> Chester (WF): She has never wished that she was White or wished that she had been White. She never had. We talked to her a few time about that and asked her if she was comfortable with who she is and with who God made her. And she said, yeah, yeah and she thinks she has taken the best of everything. She's the smartest and the most gorgeous, what ever.

For the most part, these parents were no longer aware of how their children perceived themselves and as a result, queried their children about their racial identification. Jerry G. explains further in a conversation he had with his son:

> Jerry (BF): So uh I mean, they can live with it, and I asked them what do you consider yourself as? I asked David this and he said I don't know. I said are you Black or Native American, or what? He said Dad I am me. I don't put myself in any particular category all right? and I am from a mixed heritage all right? and that's that all right. I said, ok. As long as he accepts who he is and comfortable with that then purely I don't have a problem with that. But over the years it has been kind of interesting.

Overall, parents suggested that they were able to consistently engage in conversations with their biracial children. These conversations took on four different forms as identified in the findings. At the end of the day, these conversations were imperative in the children understanding the heritage, forming healthy feelings about race and diversity, and enduring racial challenges that they may face.

Artifacts

Engaging in discussions with their children was not the only strategy that parents in this study reported that they utilized to foster a healthy racial identity in their children. Parents in this study reported introducing particular items at key points in the life of the children to foster healthy feelings about themselves and their racial make-up. It is important to note that these parents did not report introducing such items to their children arbitrarily, instead, parents perceived the items they introduced into their child's life would have a desired effect.

According to parents in this study, the "desired effect" was one of two things, either that the children were able to get a balanced view of both their African American

and European American heritage, or that they were given a virtual "rainbow" of diversity

through the items.

The parents identified five different items that they have introduced to their

children at one time or another in hopes of fostering a healthy racial identity: *Dolls/Toys,*

Television/Movies/, Food, Books, and Music and Pictures/Art. Undoubtedly, this list is in

no way an exhaustive representation of the items that all the parents have introduced to

their children, but the list does portray the common strategies that they all the families in

the study had in the healthy formation of their child's identity.

Dolls

Several of the parents reported picking dolls and other toys in the earlier years of

the child's life. Previous studies have shown that the use of dolls can aid in the

development of a biracial child's feelings about their race (Herzog, 1935). Unlike the doll

studies that used dolls primarily to gauge when children become cognizant of differences

in colors and colors like their own, parents in this study used dolls for a much different

purpose.

Some of the parents in this study exposed their children to dolls that would allow

them to be comfortable with both their African American side and their European

American side. Mostly the introduction of dolls was limited to the families with biracial

girls. Rasheed and Holly P, like many of the parents, purposely exposed her daughter to

dolls that were of both Black and White descent to provide her daughter with a

"balanced" view. Holly P. discusses her use of dolls in the following excerpts:

> Holly (WM): There's one more thing that I should bring up. Also that
> when my girl was getting toys, I was just thinking of Black dolls. I
> would get Black dolls for her. She'd have Black and White dolls, baby
> dolls, Barbie dolls stuff like that, that's the only thing I can think of that

we had in the home that we did on purpose. We have even done that for birthdays gifts for her friend is we have even given Black Barbie dolls or something different you know even in a way that how she interacts with her friend. Even in doing that it made me think even past to why not buy her Indian dolls or Japanese dolls or something to even, to even diversify that more.

Ashley G. shares her fears that her daughter would only pick dolls that reflected

European Americans, thus she made sure that she introduced dolls to her daughter that a

plethora of dolls of different colors and ethnicity:

> Ashley (WM): I was always worried that she would just pick White dolls and she would pick blond hair and blue eyed ones but over the years that has not been the case. There was a time that we had more of a say about (laughing) the toys. There was a time period where she didn't know she could choose we just put all of it in front of her, a rainbow, so she could see.

Mike and Jan C. also shared about how dolls have been an influential factor in the

development of their children's race. With the exposure to such dolls, the parents are free

to discuss the beauty and legitimacy of all dolls, and in turn, all cultures, races, and

peoples:

> Mike (BF): I looked at it as really this shouldn't be an issues but the whole problem is that ninety-five percent of dolls made out there are, are White dolls.

> Jan (WM): We just explained to her, I think, that this is a Barbie [African American Doll] and that there is nothing wrong with it. And again I always take it where I don't try to just deal with the one issue like I was talking about before. But like I said that there is Black Barbies, there's White Barbies, there is Asian Barbie's and you know I just go through the whole spectrum of that. And, and just explain it like that and tell them how again how there are so many different types of people in the world and dolls reflect that. And I, I usually finish up with do you want the doll or not?

Not all the parents were prescriptive about the dolls that their children possessed; nevertheless they still reported purchasing dolls that were very diverse. Jamie H reports her daughter has a mixture of dolls:

> Jamie (BM): Uh dolls for my daughter, she has all color dolls, she has White and Black and any other color although I am not telling her that she has to have all of these specific types of dolls.

Books

Teachers and educational scholars alike have long been aware that the way in which diversity is handled in texts can have an effect on students in the classroom (Manning and Baruth, 1999; Wardle & Janzen, 2004). Seemingly, parents of biracial children have a grasp of the hidden messages that words and illustrations in books can have on children. Thus, the use of culturally rich and balanced texts has been reported to be popular amongst parents of biracial children.

These "diverse books" were introduced to their children to provide both an exposure to different cultures and races and factual information about their children's African American and European heritage. Ashley and Adam G. discuss their efforts to provide their children with an appreciation, through books, to all cultures and races:

> Adam (BF): I really try to make certain that we really kind of, because at that time it was mostly books, we make sure that she was exposed to a rainbow. We, we, we were intentional about that and it did take an effort to do that too.

Ashley G. goes on to discuss specific types of texts that she prefers to expose her children to:

> Ashley (WM): Take the American Girls things there is a whole range of stories about American Girls and only one of those um a girl of a different race and she's Hispanic and she grows up in New Mexico and it was about the time when um you know the fight for independence was all going on down there. And the other one is Spanish and the whole family is Spanish and um, you know, I was glad to see that it

didn't matter to her in the series of books that we kept on reading to the end versus reading other ones.

Conceding that there are many negative portrayals of African Americans in society, some of the parent's would pick texts that were positive in nature and portray the rich history of the African American culture. Rasheed and Holly P. discuss their efforts to provide their children with texts that contain a positive message and history:

> Rasheed (BF): There is one thing though to, we always looked at books. I would try to order books from Scholastic or something books on Martin Luther King, books on Black musicians. His sister has sent us books on just; his mom sent us a book on a Black astronaut. She had sent me some things and wanted me to look up some things at the library and then she would pay them money to draw her a picture and send them to her that was that way to see professional Black people.

Chester and Adrianna S. express similar efforts to buy books that would expose his daughter to African heritage:

> Chester (WF): I bought all of the children's books that had something to do with African all of the time so that they would talk about African fables and proverbs and things like that. And they were a big verbal culture; the Sierra Leonian culture is very rich.

Music

Music at its core is a symbol of both diversity and similarities in the human race. Music was a primary artifact that parents used to instill positive feelings in their biracial children. Like other artifacts, music was used for the purposes of helping their children appreciate their heritage as well as giving them exposure to other cultures and perspectives. Ashley and Adam G. explain to the interviewer how music has been a source of teaching their children about their culture:

> Adam (BF): Again for me for music I look for as much diversity in music as I can find if she wants to listen to Disney or like pop, the worst of pop kids music, I remember what it was like listening to that

stuff, and I think what I look for is just a broadest diversity in styles and things.

Ashley (WM): The world music kind of stuff, I want her to hear the range of music because I really think she, the key to kids knowing that music is to know that there is a range out there and that you're not just stuck with what your very best friend says you have to listen to in terms of the teeny-bopper stuff. Which is, I remember growing up thinking that's all that there was, teenybopper stuff?

Chester and Adrianna S. have tried to provide their daughter with all types of music.

They have centered on providing their daughter with steady doses of African and

Caribbean music:

Adrianna (BM): That's all we listen to is African music (laughing).

Chester (WF): And Caribbean music and I am a big reggae guy. That's what our daughter was raised on. She was like daddy, daddy put in reggae! That was when she was two years old. Reggae was very popular in Africa and so we listen to it a lot and she's never been, um she listens to a lot of the contemporary stuff and the hip hop and stuff like that. She's interested in a lot of that but she's fairly eclectic right now I heard her listening to Cab Calloway that Mini the Mutcher.

Chester discusses how African music has played an important part of their family:

Chester (WF): Africans are just surrounded by music, if you looked in their house they have drums hanging on the walls and Africans are just surrounded by music so he has always been, I have always been uninhibited as far as that whole thing.

Parents not only introduce some music to their children, but some parents have

steered their children clear of certain types of music specifically for the purpose of

preserving the negotiation strategies that the parents have planned for their children. Such

is the case for Jamie H, who wants her children to have a positive non-racial identity.

Jamie H. reported to me that she saw some "explicitly Black music" as limited and could

potentially give their children a negative image of their African American heritage:

Jamie (BM): I consciously did [denied African American music], and I don't know whether my husband would connect, but I consciously decided not to um, um, impose or share with my kid Black music, and the reason why I did that was specifically I did not want to blemish them, on the other hand in the sense of blemishing, ok this is all Black people are about this type of music, because the music I would have introduced to them would be from the 80's and the 70's. As you know Black music is in the years and years and a decades in the making, so could I facilitate all types of Black music to them? Do I have the time to do that? Do I have the money to do that? It's not enough to turn on the radio, too. You can't turn on the radio and get all of the Black music you want. But you can go down to the cities and there it is and I have decided to let them invest their own money in that. If they want to (laughing) research Black music and everything and all that rap and everything else you go right ahead when you are an adult. I have already chosen how much I want in my life and as I am raising you. I don't want anymore in my life.

Television/Movies

A majority of the parents involved in this study reported using television and movies as a tool to develop healthy ideas about race. Specifically, parents chose particular programs and movies that they thought would benefit their children with respect to their "biracial-ness."

Parents have identified individual movies and television programs that have provided their children with healthy ideas about race and ethnicity. Parents reported that they explicitly chose many of these shows for the perceived benefit such shows would have on their children. These shows usually are chosen for their diverse casts and messages of tolerance and acceptance. Rasheed and Holly P. discuss their choice of movies such as "Sister Act" and "Remember the Titans" that are very cultural in nature:

Rasheed (BF): We got them the movie "Sister Act," they love "Sister Act" 2, and they love it for the music, they love it because again there is a lot of multi-cultural going on there. I used it for um, learning material. My son Ryan loves watching "Remember the Titans," that's a huge one. My mom said, Rasheed you need to get that.

Holly goes on to discuss a popular movie that they have their children view for the
diverse cast and ideas of tolerance that is portrayed:

> Holly (WM): One thing we have is Cinderella movie where the she
> [Cinderella] is Black. That was kind of neat because she could see how
> pretty she was you know, how her hair was, um so that was kind of
> nice. And that's what she [daughter] saw and then she wanted to look
> more like that. It was really awesome, um, the princess is Whoopie and
> the guy is in an interracial relationship. That's one thing we saw we did
> comment on that. The stepmother is White and she has a Black
> daughter and a White daughter, their stepsister and it was not an issue.
> It was like a perfect world, you know there were different problems but
> none of them would stem from the color of a persons skin.

Ashley and Adam G. also reported that they made sure that their daughter viewed the
Cinderella movie. They also report that they look for movies that make efforts to portray
messages of tolerance and diversity:

> Ashley (WM): We actually taped things like the Cinderella story for
> example and it had an Africa American girl as the main character we
> thought that was pretty unusual. We taped that and watched that with
> her because seeing fairy tales with girls of a different race is really
> quite unusual so that we did for TV and there have probably been other
> special efforts to expose her to different things.

Jack and Robin T. discuss how they have had their children watch the Cosby show. Jack
cites that it is a show that provides a positive image of African American culture:

> Jack (BF): I think that there are unfair and unjust representations of
> who African Americans are. And everybody for a while got mad at the
> Cosby show well that's not realistic, but why not? Why can't there be a
> Doctor in the family? Now my son loved it!

> Robin (WM): My son watches that show, he really likes it and, and,
> you know what I think that is really, I mean because there's re-runs and
> he still come in and Jack still watches it. I think my children like it
> because Jack is very Bill Crosby-ish with kids. Like he comes around
> and (imitates Bill Crosby) oh give me that candy and he plays around
> with them and stuff. And my kids zeroed in on that stuff because of the
> way Jack interacts with little kids. And then from that you have a nice
> guy who interacts with kids and is a good dad and is a professional.

And mom's a professional and yet they never denied the fact that they
were African American and I think it was based on jealousy.

Mike and Jan C. report that the television has been a positive influence on their children.

Citing the diverse programs on television, Jan and Mike feel that their children have been

able to feel better about themselves because of the diversity displayed in the

programming. In the following excerpt, they discuss how programs such as Disney's

"Sister, Sister," a film about two African American girls, has been a positive influence o

their child's life:

> Jan (WM): [Referring to children's comfort with themselves] Uh,
> believe it or not TV helps. I mean one of her favorite shows is Sister,
> Sister.

> Mike (BF): Yeah and she [daughter] likes that. And again it really kind
> of comes down to, we didn't so much help her come lower into the
> main stream, the television did!

> Jan (WM): Yeah! And kudos to the people that finally started to make
> sure there was a variety of television on!

Jill Z. echoes Jan's endorsement of television having a profound effect on their children's

comfort with their biracial identity:

> Jill (WM): Television has helped, where a Black and White people are
> often portrayed on television getting together. On TV, now you can see
> that. It has helped. They already know it [race] does not matter to us,
> but television has done a great job helping them.

Some programs and movies were used for both exposure and teaching about

issues such racism and discrimination. Jack and Robin T. discuss their preference to

exposing their children to programming that teach their children about racial

discrimination and injustices. :

> Jack (BF): I do try to enlighten my children. I do look at a lot of TV
> and there are maybe specials on TV that I find very, very interesting.
> CBS has something about, something about the history of slavery and I

watched that. Yeah, they also did the history of Martin Luther on there about two weeks ago. And uh so they looked at a little of that with me you know the Luther of the church. They did a special on him and they also we ended up watching a special on a Native American. And they showed the trials of one tribe and it was so different because we're looking at these Native Americans who went around their high schools and they show these kids playing basketball and how these kids were mistreated as they go play White schools and how negative it was and the name calling and the things that went on as we looked at these TV.

Mike and Jan C. also enjoy providing their children with movies that provide an opportunity for discussion and teaching on racial issues. Several of the movies that Mike has rented for his children have been open doors for the transfer of ideas about race and racial issues:

> Mike (BF): I, I then that you know instead of sitting them down and lecture them on it like I know some parent s do I would rather let them watch something that brings the issues to the forefront. And my kids ask questions and they will ask a billion questions. And then I sit and answer them and tell them about history, what used to happen before, what's even happening now, and why things are still happening now.

Rasheed and Holly P. also discuss programs that they have watched with their children because of the racial messages that were in an episode. Rasheed mentions an episode of family matters that he decided to watch with his children:

> Rasheed (BF): No, "Family Matters" was, (mumbles) the episode where they were older kids and they were talking about the prom. Did you ever see that and they were having two separate proms? And in the course of the night the Blacks were bored at their prom and the Whites were bored at their prom because neither friends were there, and then they met in the lobby and started hanging out in the lobby and they all ended up in the lobby by the end of the night just hanging out and having a good time.

Jerry F. discusses how his family watched the movie "Roots" and how that provided a chance for his children to be exposed to ideas of racism:

> Jerry (BF): I think it [Roots] was important, as far as understanding slavery, slavery all right. We watched that as a family.

Conversely, television can also foster harmful ideas about race. Jack reports that he is

cautious about the racial ideas that are being portrayed to their children via the television:

> Jack (BF): You know what I mean that's the part you got to be very careful because the way the media portrays Blacks is, has to do with, can they sell this product on the show. I don't necessarily like the way media portrays the African American of today. When I see them in my own visual eyes in and the places I have been and the cities I have lived in I see a lot of very successful African American women and a lot of very successful African American men. (With excitement in his voice) When I walk down town to the driver license departments I see both people on the other side of the counter are black. They are the ones who is taking my pictures and writing my name up and when I get on the bus all the people driving around, there are a lot of Black people driving the bus. But I am saying that we are a part of the whole system, but some times we only get pigeon holes and thugs and the languages there and it's just such, and then you get people out on the prairie that have never seen Blacks but get their images from the TV and it's not very realistic.

Jerry F. also reports being very careful about what his children watch. Jerry discusses this

further in the following excerpt:

> Jerry (BF): I should probably mention at some point that the media, TV and movies and that kind of thing tends to portray minorities in a certain light so uh have I ever said you don't want to get stigmatized by that, but rather what ever you are doing do it to the best of your ability. Uh and not let what somebody else may perceive you as being based on.

Foods

Interestingly, some of the parents reported that they used food to negotiate a

healthy racial identity with their children. Parents reported by serving them foods that

were part of both their family's cultures; they were able to give them a glimpse of both

their African American and European American heritage. Although attempting a balance,

most parents report that they try to provide their children specifically with African

American dishes. Chester and Adrianna S. report that food has been a healthy way to

expose their children to positive aspects of their culture:

> Chester (WF): Well I think with the interracial children you just have
> to, they can learn about culture when you just put them in a (Pause)
> well when you just allow them to interact with their parents. Like with
> me we mostly cook African food, all kind of African food I wanted to
> make sure she likes African Food and she loves it. She loves it. She
> loves African food. And then on vacations we go and visit our family
> and so she can interact with them and see what we do.

Carole F. describes that her children have been exposed mostly to European American

dishes. Although she does try to learn to cook many of the foods that are from Jerry's

background to give their children some exposure:

> Carole (WM): They were probably exposed more to my family than to
> his because basically my family was around and his wasn't. They
> pretty much grew up with the traditional things we did at Christmas
> time and Thanksgiving and all that kind of stuff. So um the only thing
> that they did have I learned how to cook some of the foods that Jerry
> grew up with liking. And I cook greens but I won't cook okra. But
> anyway (Laughing). Chitlins, I won't do that. I won't do those they are
> gross.

Holly P. also discusses the impact that African American food has had on the family:

> Holly (WM): Rasheed's mom has made black-eyed peas, corn bread,
> stuffing, um grits, chicken and bacon. Something I can try to do at
> home.

Jamie H. also acknowledged the importance of foods and her desire to teach African

American dishes to her daughter, but concedes that it is difficult to access ingredients that

are essential components of African American recipes:

> Jamie (BM): Because of geography and because we are here and not on
> the seacoast and there is seafood there is a bunch of recipes that I can't
> even teach her. From my background we ate squirrel, coon, possum
> and deer and what else? Just stuff you would hunt out of the woods in
> the south there is a whole variety of stuff chitins, and pig ears, and pig
> feet then I can't teach her those recipes because of up here

Pictures/Art

Although not reported by all families in the study, a few of the families report that

filling their homes with visual representations of diversity and their heritage has also

been a beneficial tool. Rasheed and Holly P. have engaged in displaying pictures of

various African American and European American family members to provide their

children with a constant reminder of their heritage:

> Holly (WM): When I first started to put things in my home, pictures,
> um, yeah a lot of family pictures around because I wanted them to see
> their relatives because we didn't live by those people. So I would have
> pictures around so we had White and Black mixture so they could see
> Black people. I also wanted some Black art for them to see.

Jack and Robin T. also portray pictures in their home. They report displaying historical

pictures to provide a sense of heritage:

> Jack (BF): And I got pictures of what African American life was like
> and so on in this country. So they pretty much got a view of what it was
> like and I talked about my high school and what it was like being in an
> all Black high school and so on and so on.

Robin T. also emphasizes the importance that pictures have played in maintaining a sense
of pride in their children about their mixed heritage:

> Robin (WM): So that's one thing, at Christmas time we always made
> sure we always took pictures at holiday time with the whole family
> because with just the kids I felt that it made it look like we were
> ashamed and we had to be off to the side. And we always wanted our
> children to be proud and to present to the family this is who we are.
> And kind of walking with your head held high and what is more
> important in any of our lives that is more important than family? And
> the family doesn't have to fit a certain mold and it can be a single
> parent family, or it can be a family of mixed raced, or mixed faiths, or
> backgrounds, or what ever because it's your family. There no
> ingredients or you know a typical family because none of us are typical
> we are all individuals. So that was one thing that was important to me
> was that our children feel that we had a sense of pride and wanted to be
> active in the community and be who we are.

Through these findings, it is obvious that parents of biracial parents are introducing physical artifacts into the lives of their biracial children purposely to provide a positive source of information about their heritage and issues surrounding race and ethnicity. Being practical, parents use everyday items such as books, television, pictures, food, and music to further instill a positive racial image for their biracial children.

Events and Experiences

Aside from discussions and physical artifacts, the parents also had specific events and experiences that they arranged for their child. For the most part, it was the events and experiences that were the most deliberate strategies chosen by the parents. While discussions and artifacts can somewhat fit nicely into the families everyday life, events and experiences were most likely to take long and thoughtful time, effort, and planning. Like the other two strategies, parents planned events and experiences that would instill a healthy racial and biracial identity within their children.

Although a variety of different types of events and experiences were found, they fell into four different strategies: living location, holiday observances, religious affiliation, and family trips. The context and perceived benefit will be explained in the following portion.

Residential Locations

An important strategy used to provide the positive experiences was the purposeful selection of residential locations that were positive and diverse. Regardless of their careers or personal ambitions, parents oftentimes deferred to choosing locations that they felt would provide the most positive experiences for their children in a general and cultural sense. What's more, making a choice of where to live oftentimes took a lot of

consideration and discussion between the parents. Since they had biracial children many

parents considered these facts immediately. Rasheed and Holly P. discuss the

considerations they had prior to making a permanent move with their children:

> Rasheed (BF): One thing, though, we were in Seattle when our son was a baby, no our son was about two and [daughter] was a baby and we were moving to Canada to B.C. and we were a little concerned about that in moving there, we plan on being there, like to be there, you want to settle somewhere when you are raising kids. And so we were praying about that. Is that the right move? Is this where we should be? Probably, it's like in Seattle a mixed cultural area to there, and we felt the Lord said, well Rasheed felt the Lord told you that where ever you are going to be, where you are going to be, teach your kids to love me and I will take care of them, I will take care of them.

Rasheed and Holly were discussing the concerns they had when they were

looking for locations for their biracial children to live. Their story was not unique in that

many of the biracial families also reported that they had similar discussions about where

to live. In fact many parents discuss locations that they have steered clear of, even when

they have had opportunities offered to them. Jack and Robin T. discuss the concerns they

had for their biracial children if they were to stay in the location that they were at:

> Jack (BF): You know we are pretty fortunate to be here in [City Name] I know it sounds weird but in a Bi-racial family depending on what community you are is how much you can thrive and survive. I don't know how well our kids would have done in LA. Any mixed kid raised on the poor side of town would probably had a rough time especially if his mother's White and she's living there and he's living their with her because you have to imagine nine time out of ten she's living in an all Black neighborhood and she'll catch a lot of hell for that. So we living up here in an all White neighborhood but the dynamics of the people themselves up here have created an atmosphere for our kids to be raised in that's positive.

Some parents did not have to speculate on the whether or not their biracial

children would have difficulties in certain areas. Some parents reported that they had

negative experiences in certain locations that caused the parents to move their children

from those locations. While no parents reported that their children were experiencing

overt racism, they were reporting that their children were feeling unwelcome, alienated,

and anxious. Ashley and Adam G. describe their experiences at a previously

homogeneous location was the direct catalyst for a move to a more diverse area:

> Ashley (WM): Yeah, it sort of shocked her, surprised her, because when we lived in [city name] were no blacks, there were no Black people, no people of color at all living in [town name] except the adopted Asian children (laughing). And that was it in terms of mixed race or a kind of diversity in her school. I didn't feel very comfortable in [town name] because it was clearly, they were very different. And abbreviated because I felt very good about having our daughter in that setting we wanted her to see more diversity and that was one of the reasons we moved to Minneapolis in addition to the fact that we wanted a city, we wanted her to experience a greater range of people and children and economics and that.

Other parents were passionate in expressing their resolve in avoiding certain

locations. A few of the parents involved identified locations that they would not reside in

because of the nature of their families' background. Mike and Jan C. explain their efforts

to stay away from the South:

> Jan (WM): We kept them away from the South (Chuckle) As much as possible!"

> Mike (BF): I am in the Air force and I moved around but I am the first to admit there are places in the U.S. that I haven't gotten told I was going to be assigned there or something like that but if it had ever come up I would have taken great steps to make sure we didn't go there for what ever reason.

Mike further discusses his resolve to stay out of the Southern part of the country:

> Mike (BF): Little Rock is out. Like I tried to tell my wife I have been to Florida and I don't think there is a racism problem in Florida. But I have been to central and south Florida, Disney world and stuff like. Now where you get into the panhandle where it borders Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and all that that might be a whole different ball game up that way.

Other families also discussed similar distastes for certain areas of the country. Jack and

Robin T. discuss this in the following excerpt:

> Jack (BF): I probably wouldn't go down south and live because I don't
> think we'd be happy there. Not because I hate it down South, just
> because I don't think, isn't that what they say about the mores of the
> people the dynamic of the people never change. There will always be a
> problem of some kind and every mixed couple that I have known that's
> went back there has always had problems. So we probably never
> moved to the South but the rest of the country we probably would.

Overwhelmingly, the parent expressed that the locations that they have chosen to

live have been beneficial to their biracial children's overall well being. Parents pointed

out that the diversity that was present in the locations in which they live was the primary

attraction for them to decide to move there. Barry and Terry B. explain further:

> Barry (BF): I think that by keeping [them in a city], we are living in
> Minneapolis and we are keeping our kids in public school in
> Minneapolis for the reason that we want them to be there to diversify
> and I want them to be having kids that look like different kinds of kids
> and the school being in that type of school where their not the only
> ones and hopefully when their older they won't be the only ones that
> look like they look. And I know that the school our teenagers are going
> to that the high school has different kinds of kids, African kids, African
> Americans kids, they have Black and Latinos kids, they have all kinds
> of kids there and so if you looking for all kinds of people you always
> find it there.

Ashley and Adam G. also discuss the benefit of the diverse area that they have chosen for

their daughter to live:

> Ashley (WM): I think that is one of the huge benefits of moving from
> where we were; I think are reaping the benefits of that because um I
> mean she is where now that she isn't separated and identified because
> of her skin, she's in a rainbow now at that school and I think she stood
> out more there [Previous Location] as compared to where she is now.

Not all the parents report living in areas that enjoy widespread diversity, yet they

consciously chose these locations for the long term benefits that they could offer their

biracial children. Although the diversity may not be pervasive, it may still be there for the

family. Jack and Robin T. discuss this point:

> Jack (BF): For as limited as this community may appear to be there are
> a lot of open minded people. This is a great community as far as that
> goes and I think with the University and the base we have more
> diversity then most North Dakota communities you know. This is a big
> plus for living here. I been by my self I wouldn't been over there, what
> I'm saying is if it would have just been me I wouldn't be in north
> Minneapolis. I never did hang out in the north I always lived in an
> integrated neighborhood because that's what I felt I wanted to be a part
> of.

> Robin (WM): And that's another good point, both of us have never
> desired to live exclusively in a one race neighborhood. We've always
> like to be around different kinds of people because you learn and grow.

Roger and Gina M. also report being very happy about where they have decided to raise

their children. They report that their decision went beyond just looking for a diverse area;

they also wanted to live in an area that their children are free to be who they want to be

without feeling any negative backlash:

> Roger (BF): That is what attracted me. There is a lot of diversity
> around here and also places where there is racism. That's what I like
> about Minnesota. That's why I tired to get a couple of my brothers and
> sisters to come here and live and because it's a totally different, it's just
> different. I think there is a difference in being diverse and [no] racism
> thing because you can be diverse and still have racism. But I, I don't
> know most of out neighbors are White and uh our kids just roam this
> place freely. And as you can see there are no fences and everybody's
> yards are connected and everybody just get together and jump in their
> tree and we all watch each other's kids.

Holidays

Holidays and other special events provided valuable opportunities for the biracial

parents. For many families, these are times where cultural traditions can be practiced on a

regular basis. As such, holiday events seem to be a good time to pass down cultural

traditions from both sides of the family. Jack and Robin T. report on how the consistent

observance of family holidays has been helpful in their children's formation of identity:

> Jack (BF): We are always on Christmas Eve by ourselves; we go to Grandma's after Christmas day but Christmas Eve we got the nice dinner and then we have program in the living room. My daughter plays the piano and Robin sings and [daughter] sings and [daughter] is a ballet dancer so she does a nice ballet. [Son] used to play the saxophone so he plays sax and I'd read Christmas stories. And then we would open up gifts afterward.

> Robin (WM): I think that what helps them feel and all little things like that are tradition so they are not so wrapped up in who is mom and who is dad but they have their family traditions to pass on. So that's another level of security and so I think in terms of who they are they, the main thing is that they can feel secure with who they are and half that self esteem and have a family base. So you know the illusion that these kids are so mixed up and they don't belong to any group or they don't belong to their own, you know

David and Jamie H. discuss how they try to take their children to as many diverse

holidays as possible:

> David (WF): I don't know I try to take them and we try to take them to a lot of different events. If you don't know you should know, I mean, they celebrate virtually every ethnic celebration on the base. I mean like Black history months and other things going on and we try to take them to as much of that stuff as possible.

Some parents point to specific holiday observances to give their children a balance of

their African American culture as well. Rasheed and Holly P. want to observe the African

American holiday, Kwanzaa, with their children:

> Rasheed (BF): One thing that I am hoping that we can do soon is Kwanzaa. Um I a learning a little bit as we go, I know my sister celebrates it, it just looks so neat I mean it looks just like a lot of fun so, you know with the birth of Christ.

Parents such as Adam and Ashley G. have been observing Kwanzaa to give their

daughter a balanced view of her heritage:

Adam (BF): We try to, um, um as a part of our family, to know we always include Kwanzaa and created our own Kwanzaa, things of our own tradition.

Ashley (WM): Part of the fact that she really is, she isn't just an African American and she isn't just White. Part of this has to do with not intentional wanting to be one thing or another but we did do the Kwanzaa and we were real intentional about that, yeah we were intentional about that.

Family Trips

Many times family trips provided many different experiences for their children. Although these were diverse experiences, each type of experience in its own way was seen a beneficial to their biracial children with respect to their racial acquisition. Many of these journeys were in the form of traveling to visit family relatives. Specifically, many of these trips to family were to the African American relatives. Unfortunately, not all of the parents were able to bring their children on such family trips because of family disconnections or financial reasons. Families that were able to take their children on trips reported that such experiences were extremely important to instill a balanced view for their child's heritage. Adam and Ashley G. discuss their frequent visits to Adam's family:

Ashley (WM): I think that one of the things we try to do is get her down to be with her cousins. And, and, most of what she gets is all osmosis, it's all I mean she is completely surrounded in it and she is enmeshed in it and it's hard to identify the color, I mean everything to hair to clothing, She has eight cousins and their all girls except just one, yeah, but they all hang out and a lot of them are her age so they all run around together so she'll fit in just fine.

With being able to "soak up" the culture through "osmosis" they are able to give their daughter a healthy look at her African American culture. Barry and Terry B. also continue to take trips to see Barry's family as a way to immerse their children in his heritage:

Barry (BF): I thinks it's a big challenge when you go and visit and it's fresh and then they've adapted quite well and then they go back to school and it's all of the American way here and we are the same way you get back into your life and then that's, that's, what it is. But we hope that through speaking the language at home and exposure, making sure that the travel back and forth um once in a while and that we adopted [daughters name] who's from there and there may be more though maybe not direct adoption, but maybe more diverse and at least sort of a travel they continue to be re-exposed and hopefully that will spark more interest. And, and, who knows what there is also going to be whether they go to college and they say their no longer interested or, or, they pursue it, in life you see both sides of these issues where kids, it also depends on at the end what their real interest is. Uh but at least we give them that exposure and down the road they can make their own decision but they seem to be very interested right now.

Despite the parent's acknowledgement of the importance of going to visit extended family, it has not always worked out for the parents. A few parents have reported making attempts at visiting relatives but those connections have been difficult. Jamie H. discusses the difficult time she had when she would take the children to visit David's family:

Jamie (BM): We hoped would have a real close relationship with our cousins and our uncles and their aunts on David's side and that never came out. I made that effort for quite few years I know in 94-95 I made the effort to visit them and I took the initiative to build a relationship with them. I felt that maybe one or two times that they might have felt uncomfortable letting their neighbors know that they had Black cousins. You know they didn't' say anything of course they are too sweet and too Christian to say anything but I could feel it. It's ok we would get together in the house and have an relationships but it was another thing if I was in [city name] and the kids went down the street to play with the other kids and that family realized that oh person in that family is inter-racial.

Family trips were not limited to visits to other family members. Parents report going on many family trips, vacations, excursions that were for the purposes of providing their children with exposure to different cultures. Rasheed and Holly P. report taking

their children to "Black churches" to enlighten their children on certain aspects of

African American culture:

> Rasheed (BF): You know one of the things we did do, we, we went to
> Gospel Tabernacle here which is a church of God in Christ, it's like the
> Black one like the Assemblies of God. It was different. Um they do
> their style different, um I even think Black churches styles are different,
> but we've taken our kids to different places and done different things
> with them because we want them to have exposures them to different
> things. Even videotapes we'll do different services at places and they'll
> watch that with us. Um they enjoyed it, they enjoy it, it was just a
> different way, and we want our kids to see there are different ways
> people do things.

Jack and Robin T. explain how a trip to an urban area was an eye opener for their

daughter. While they were going there to "experience" the diversity in the city, they

happened upon the wrong side of town:

> Jack (BF): We turned down the north end of the city. It was like
> summer there and it was like black, Black folks everywhere all over.
> My kids were just looking and saying, oh my, this is the most Black
> people I have ever seen in my life daddy. (Laughing) We ain't stopping
> here for you to look at them we gotta keep on going. (Laughing)

> Robin (WM): (laughing) He was like, girl get your head back in this
> van.

> Jack (BF): We ain't stopping in North Minneapolis. We gotta keep on
> going. We gotta check them [Black people] out south some where we
> will see them [Black people].

Jeff and Jill Z. also report that travel was important for exposing their children to

different cultures and diversity. They express the large number of trips they have taken

their children on:

> Jeff (BF): Where you come from is important and they see the
> differences and that is the way. We traveled a lot; we went to New
> York, DC, museums, etc. They get to see and meet a lot of different
> things and people and they knew not everyone is the same and they
> realized that not everyone dressed alike. I mean they, even Indians,
> they've encountered all different places, We went to NY five different

times, Harlem a few times, Hawaii four times, Arizona and Florida a few times. We went to a lot of places.

Jill Z. reports that many trips were aimed at giving their children adequate exposure to both their African American and European American heritage:

> Interviewer: Did you do anything that would give the children experiences in their own heritage?
>
> Jill (WM): Well they got about 50/50 on that; they went to visit both sides of the family and saw a lot of my family and Jeff's family, who is very dark skinned. In fact, his sister even lived in Nigeria for a while. SO they got a lot of stuff from both sides of our family. In fact, my grandfather made a family tree that took ten years to make and the children got to see that while visiting.

Some parents were interested in not only exposing their children to racial diversity, but were also interested in showing their children other differences in society. Jamie H. took her children on trips that would illustrate the cultural differences between her children's life as military dependents and the lives of children who live in a "civilian culture":

> Jamie (BM): And then we go into the city and we might visit a family in the city who they may show for them how civilians lives different versus them in the military. It was different for them, they never move, they have grandparents and cousins and uncles and they are there all in one spot and that was very stringent for my oldest son who was thirteen, he was very intrigued with that, these people never moved or you know that they had a grandma or a granddad there all the time. Um the other thing like we had went to uh, these people owned a business and their house was on top and they owned the business, and the kids worked the business downstairs and that was very shocking that they didn't get to watch TV or that their family didn't't' believe in TV or computers. Their recreation was mostly outside.

Jamie and David H. also want to bring their children to cultural events in the local community. Jamie discusses the challenges of raising four children yet finding the time for culturally stimulating events:

Jamie (BM): You know one thing that I wanted to do was uh down at the university they have a diversity program going on where they talk about one country and bring food and everything and I wanted to do that and it didn't happen, but in base here we did a geography club, the geography club was there was one count and that kid had to research the one country and tell whether they were going to do the coinage, the government, the culture, the uh physical, and each kid picked one part of that country and report about it and brought food, an looked up on the internet a dish that would come from that country. You all meet and talk about that country for a hour and a half and that's the only way I was able to get the kids exposed at the time because time management is a problem, with four kids you have to do all of their school work and work in all of these field trips so that was really a help just doing it that way. And we did El Salvador, Argentina, Egypt, China and that was the only way.

Despite some parents' best efforts to make trips that will open the eyes of their children to both sides of their racial heritage, it did not always work out as planned. Roger and Gina took their children on a trip where the goal was that their children understand the realities of slavery. Instead, they expressed their discouragement about their children's indifference towards a planned trip to a historical slave plantation in the south:

Interviewer: What types of thing did you do with your children to instill a sense of culture with your kids?

Roger (BF): I think that what we did was we went to South Carolina. We went to Charleston and that was the original place we went on vacation and they was kind of a part of me that was disappointed but then I was unhappy that my kids were totally disinterested.

Gina (WM): Oh they weren't totally disinterested, I don't think.

Roger (BF): I was expecting a little more reaction…They still had the original slave houses and stuff like that on the plantations and I tried to get into "you know at one time this country was not quite right."

Church affiliation was another important theme that came out in the research.

Mostly all the parents reported that the experiences that go along with church

involvement would be beneficial in their children forming good feelings about

themselves, racial and otherwise. Although the parents reported different creeds, they

reported that their respective religions were beneficial because they were accepting and

they embraced diversity. Jack and Robin T, discuss the accepting nature of the church

where their children attend:

> Jack (BF): The atmosphere up here would be Norwegian Lutherans and
> the history of them is very positive as far as the Norwegian people
> themselves are very accepting of all people. And the Lutheran faith it's
> self is very accepting.

Jerry and Carole F. also believe that their church attendance has helped them address the

racial issue with their children within their experiences. With vase experiences in the

church, the children have been able to feel confident in themselves despite being in a

world that may judge them for the color of their skin:

> Jerry (BF): I believe that they know who they are as a Christian and I
> believe that they seem themselves strongly in the perspective. And I
> feel glad in the sense that um my youngest son has gone to Trinity
> Bible college and my oldest is considering becoming a pastor and I
> believe that it tells her something too that our children feel strongly
> about who they are as children as Christ. Most of all, regardless of what
> they look like and if it's a question of them being somebody or
> identifying with somebody is that they see themselves as a disciple of
> Christ.

Roger and Jack T. also discuss how their religious beliefs have guided them in their

discussions with their children. Being that discussion and dialogue were identified in this

study as strategies parents preferred to use, it is no surprise that their religious affiliation

would guide those discussions.

> Jack (BF): [Dealing with a racism issue] I think the advice that I gave
> her would be the advice I would have to take for myself if I felt like she
> was feeling. And that's because I believe what I told her very strongly.
> That when ever you have that kind of moment or anything that has
> happened to you and you feel that feeling of dread or that sometimes
> you get that feeling that you get, I am sure you to have felt it, that I'm
> never going to get this, to get where I want to be. And it's so strong that
> sometimes you have to reach for a higher power.

Adam and Ashley G. have taken their daughter to a Unitarian church that has been a

sense of comfort and acceptance for their daughter. Further it has been a place of

acceptance for them. By its very nature and mission, the Unitarian church preaches

acceptance for all beliefs and peoples in its doctrine. As such this has been a good fit for

Adam an Ashley's diverse family:

> Ashley (WM): It's [Unitarianism] actually a recognition that all forms
> of beliefs are acceptable and trying to help, um, trying to help trying to
> represent a way of living rather than a way of living after life We aren't
> worried more about what you should do to have an after life, we are
> more worried about what you should do have a life that you are proud
> of. So try to find the best in all sorts of beliefs systems that um we can
> share.

As such they tie their religious beliefs into the acceptance of all cultural interpretations of

religious doctrine and people:

> Ashley (WM): You start out with the kids sort of talking about fear and
> death and life and that and moving on towards understanding that there
> are a variety of religions and what if somebody was a Mormon makes
> them any different and it all leads up to choosing what it is and
> recognizing who they are when they are about 15 or 16 guess the
> coming of age. So there is a very set culture in that church and we as I
> said we practically live there because we both volunteer there so she
> practically lives there too. It has become for her um what it is to have a
> culture and I think with her family.

Adam and Ashley's efforts to immerse their daughter in such a diverse religious system

will undoubtedly will fit somewhere into their daughter's acquisition of a racial identity.

Biracial Hair

Without prompting, many of the parents [mostly the wives] brought up the issue

of biracial hair. This was the only area that parents really found that they were frustrated

with in the negotiation of their children. Citing ambivalence and ignorance, the

uniqueness of the hair, and the difficulties with outside intervention, many parents found

the special care that went into the hair of biracial children especially that of girls, a

frustrating endeavor. Instead of a proactive effort to learn about the child's hair early,

many parents are more reactive to this phenomenon.

Uniqueness

Many parents pointed to the overall uniqueness of their biracial children's hair.

By their own admission the texture, color, and curl of a biracial child's hair runs the

gamut. The acknowledgement of this uniqueness seemed to be helpful for many of the

parents of biracial children as they attempted strategies to deal with their children's hair.

Holly P. describes a discussion she had with her mother in law:

> Holly (WM): My mother-in-law told me that having Black children you
> do their hair different. Do not do their hair like yours as far as the types
> of shampoo you use and everything and I was like ok she knows. You
> know it is very fragile and brittle; you'll kill her hair. And our kids were
> born with a fair amount of hair and she had more to work with when
> they were little, she was used to me pulling on her hair.

Holly P. discusses the wide variance in her children's hair:

> Holly (WM): Particularly with my daughter around that age [7] because
> her hair is different and she starts seeing the little girls with their hair
> different and different styles and she wants to try something different in
> her hair, it's not kinky like Rasheed's. But my son's turns out much
> more naturally curly, but hers is kind of in the middle, we just got her a

relaxer this year this make her feel like she fits in better because she can actually have her hair down and do more styles like the other kids do.

Acknowledging such uniqueness, some parents fully prepare themselves with special techniques that will assist them in their handling of biracial hair. Robin T. discusses this further:

> Robin (WM): I was very protective of their hair. I did not want, I worked really hard to, you know, I don't know every Saturday I would go to the fabric store and just buy this rolls of ribbon. Ribbon, ribbon, ribbon, and barrettes, and ponytail holders and, I don't know what to say that I was protective. I think a lot of people don't understand, um, a lot of mothers maybe of bi-racial children don't understand there is a special care for Black hair. It just pains me hurtfully when I see a little girl of color and they don't know how to do their hair.

Ambivalence

Many parents felt that there was an overall sense of confusion felt by themselves and their children. They reported that they were somewhat ill equipped to deal with the tremendous task of caring for biracial hair. For the most part, European American mothers with little or no training in African American hair maintenance, expressed these feelings. Terry B. expresses her own feelings about biracial hair:

> Terry (WM): Yeah hair is a problem. I never knew hair was a problem before but it is not a racist thing with me but um you do have to deal with African American hair especially on girls when it gets long, um, different. And I am just not equipped to do that I don't know all the things they have to do actually bi-racial hair is different that pure African American hair to so maybe African people have the same type of hair and don't have the same issues as bi-racial hair. Um and we have found, sometimes like with African it helps because they can braid it and different things but it gets knotted and it's hard to take care of. I think um eventually that my daughter will learn and is starting to learn to take care of herself and will have her own way of how she wants it to look and how to, you know, style it.

Holly P. reported that there was a time when she felt confused and ashamed about their daughter's hair. Her ignorance about the complexity of her biracial children's hair led her to avoid certain venues in fear of facing scrutiny from the Black community:

> Holly (WM): Because um being in Seattle I didn't want to go visit Black churches and being around people, maybe it's a pride issue, I didn't' want them to look at me and say oh that White women can't even style her daughter's hair what does she think she's doing? You know so I even had my own thing where I wanted, well I wanted her to look nice just period, there was also a part in me that I wanted to be able to say I can do it and I had someone say "oh that girl what is she trying to pull?" you know?

Other parents reported that their children were confused as well. Jamie H. reports her daughter's confusion over her hair texture:

> Holly (WM): My daughter has my husband's hair and grows fast and is less maintenance and uh she does have a curl and it's not a tight curl like mine. And she doesn't appreciate that and doesn't understand what she's got is a good deal and also it's bad for me to tell her that thought she should understand that my hair is just as good as hers.

Outside Intervention

In dealing with their children's hair, parents either learned how to do their children's hair themselves or deferred the responsibility of someone more knowledgeable. Oftentimes, both choices brought interesting stories.

Even if the parent opted for outside intervention with their children's hair, potential problems still remained. Jack T. reports how, in his attempt to find a barber for his son's hair, he ran into difficulty:

> Jack (BF): So I went somewhere else and I asked him do you know how to cut Black hair? I was a little nervous with his response. My son got in the chair; he did not know what he was doing. I really don't get angry easily but that just made me so mad. I think I told him if you don't know how to care for Black hair it doesn't make you a racist or something. You know what I'm saying? It's like I think they just said yeah I know how to do because they thought it was something they

thought was offensive, you know it's offensive that he's sitting in the chair and you *trying* to cut his hair.

Sometimes, parents can find people who can be very helpful in working with their children's hair. Gina M. discusses a neighbor she has identified to assist her in the maintenance and styling of her daughter's hair:

> Gina (WM): Right now our daughter has gotten her hair cut like this for school [Showing an illustration of her daughters hairstyle], she had a relaxer and uh we have a neighbor that can do the braids and she's wanted the braids all the way down she's worn it that way sometimes because she'll go over to Joanie's and she braid it for her because I can't do braids.

Shirking the need for assistance, some parents report that they go it alone in styling and grooming their children's hair. Because of this, some parents have reported meeting resistance from segments of the community. In this excerpt Ashley G. reports how she had a confrontation with a group of African American woman concerning her daughter's hairstyle:

> Ashley (WM): A couple of Black women were just [at Target] out and they meant well [Confronting her about her daughter's hair], I remember thinking later he was right. They really meant well and they were trying to help but I was completely freaked out. And it's not easy. Her hair is different hair that wouldn't have "caught" [styled like the women suggested]. It has both of our characteristics.

Jack T discusses how picky African American women are about young African American children's hair:

> Jack (BF): You know how sisters [African American women] get when they see that, that's one of the things when sister look and see Black girls hair and she don't know what to do with it.

African American Side

While references to strategies that included an overt exposure to their White side were not wholly absent from the discussions, their presence was dramatically

outnumbered by the number of accounts by parents concerning strategies for their children to be exposed to their Black heritage. In all the strategies used (such as discussions, the introduction of physical artifacts, and the exposure to events and experiences, parents reported more examples of exposure to their Black side more than anything else.

While fascinating, the supposition can be made that since the parents live in a primarily European American environments, they felt that their children were already exposed to an adequate amount of European culture because of the de facto living situation in their area.

Another possibility is that the African American parent reported that they were disenfranchised from their extended families. Such a disconnection in the family could cause the biracial parents to be more proactive and overt in their introduction of strategies based around exposure to African American heritage and culture.

Conclusion

Admittedly, the task of documenting how parents of biracial children perceive and negotiate race proved to be a difficult venture. Nevertheless, this study allowed for the discovery of exciting and important new information about the parents' efforts towards the child's negotiation of identity.

In conclusion of the study, the researcher was able to make three assertions and two sub assertions and concerning how parents of biracial children negotiate identity with their children. Naturally, two of the assertions are centered on both the parents' perception and their negotiation techniques. The last assertion explains the connection

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between the parents' perceptions and motivations that they have concerning their children

and their own position in an intact interracial relationship.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with a restatement of the research problem. This is followed

by a discussion of the major findings/themes in the contexts of relevant literature and

symbolic interactionist perspective. In addition, implications of the findings will be

considered. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

Restatement of the Problem

America is in the era of a "biracial baby boom" (Root, 1992). The increase in the

number of biracial children is attributed to the continued rise in relationships of people of

different "races" who produce children who do not fit neatly into the "archaic" racial

classification system that we have today (Rosenblatt et al, 1995).

With such a prevalence of biracial children, coupled with changing and divergent

attitudes towards race and ethnicity, the problem of racial identity formation exists.

Previous studies have shown that biracial children can and do make racial identity

decisions (Kich, 1995; Ferguson 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Interestingly,

these choices can be very positive in nature: Ferguson (2001) reported that children from

intact interracial marriages were much more likely to report positive racial experiences

and as a result, foster a biracial or non-racial identity.

Moreover, these children are not making their racial choices in a vacuum. Among

other influences, scholars have identified the parents as having a strong role in their

children's identity formation (Huffman, 1994; Ferguson; 2001). Interestingly, previous

studies contended that married couples did not forcefully impose a particular racial identity or attitude on their children; instead, parents were shown to engage their children through "negotiation" (Huffman, 1995).

With all these factors in mind, the question is raised: How do parents, who have been identified as a primary influence in their biracial children's formation of racial identity, perceive and negotiate race with their biracial children? Undoubtedly, efforts to "negotiate" an identity with their children were not done arbitrarily. Rather, it is postulated that parents would be purposeful in their strategies. Identifying what parents thought about their children racially and reporting the subsequent strategies they used to "negotiate" an identity with their children is of great importance to understanding how biracial children, from intact families, form healthy biracial and non-racial identities.

Synopsis of the Findings

There were three major findings in this study. It is important to note that each finding is not mutually exclusive nor is it sequential in any form or fashion. While the findings suggest that family traits and perceptions influence the parents to negotiate a bi/non-racial identity with their children, it can be argued that any one finding can be the cause or effect of another. Thus, they are equally important in their prospective implications for biracial children.

The first finding was that biracial parents possess traits that provide a positive beginning for the "negotiation of identity" to take place. Specifically, parents in this study were seen to already be open minded, resilient against public scrutiny, and tolerant and accepting of all diversity. The culmination of these traits are exemplified in the

reports and stories of these biracial couples who, in turn, are shown to negotiate a healthy and positive identity with their children.

The second finding is that parents of biracial children do not perceive, or wish their children to adopt, a mono-racial identity. According to the parents involved in this study, they either saw their children as biracial ("best of both worlds") or saw them as non-racial ("cultural person/human being"). This finding suggests that the parents have a mindset in place that emphasizes cultural pluralism and tolerance towards all cultures.

The third finding is that parents "purposefully" plan and execute strategies that are seen as helpful in their children being able to foster a "healthy" identity that is complete and self-assured. In this finding, parents reported that they decisively introduced their children to three different types of strategies: open dialogue, introduction of culturally diverse artifacts, and exposure to diverse events and experiences. While the context and fundamentals of each strategy was markedly different, the motives behind them remained the same: the acquisition of a healthy racial identity.

Restatement of Themes

The findings were made possible by considering the culmination of themes present in the data. Within each major assertion, several different themes were identified. A restatement of those themes is offered here.

Perception

Biracial/Non-Racial

The parent's preference to resist a mono-racial "label" or designation for their children was an emergent theme in the data. Instead, these children emphasized cultural characteristics. These parents perceived their children as "human beings" or cultural

people. Other families considered their children as biracial. Many of these parents did subscribe to the idea of a racial system, but they saw their children as not "fitting" into any of the current categories. Moreover, these parents saw their children as having the "best of both worlds." Parents that considered their children biracial also talked about the advantages their children had by being "biracial.

African American Parent

Another interesting theme came out within the perception of race. Within each couple, the African American parent was likely to discuss a "social blackness." The African American parent explained this as the inevitable imposition of a "black" label on their child because their children "look black." \

Roles/Responsibility

Another important theme that came out in the data is that parents perceived that they had a "special responsibility" to raising their children. Many of the parents reported on the important task of raising "unique" biracial children.

Due to this "unique" responsibility, many parents saw themselves as positive role models for their children. Through their acceptance of each other, parents hoped that they could model healthy ideas about race and diversity.

Impact

Many parents perceived that their children's biracial status would impact them in many ways. Parents pointed to challenges and trials that the children would have because of factors such as racism and ignorance by the public. In addition, parents discussed the possibility that their children would be pressured by outside forces.

Proactivity

Dialogue

This was an important theme that came out of the findings. Among several of the

strategies listed the parents engaged their children through planned and unplanned

discussion. The discussions were both proactive and reactive. Mostly, such conversations

took place in the household and were meant to teach the children to appreciate their

cultural heritage, instill a healthy racial philosophy, and encourage them to endure racism

and ignorance. Parents of older children reported inquiring about their older child's racial

choices.

Artifacts

Several physical artifacts were employed by the parents in the pursuit of

negotiating a healthy racial identity for their children. These "instruments" were very

diverse in nature and were used at many different stages of the children's life. While

diverse, they were all part of the strategy to instill a healthy racial experience. Artifacts

identified were dolls, books, music, television/movies, food, and pictures.

Events and Experiences

This was an important theme extracted from the research. This is due to finding

that Events and Experiences often took the most planning and action on the part of the

parents. This strategy was for the parents to place their children in different experiences,

places, and activities that would be most beneficial to feelings about themselves, being

biracial, and race and diversity. Strategies identified consisted of residential location,

church affiliation,

Hair

The theme of hair was also important, if not anticipated. Parents reported the difficult experiences that they had with their biracial daughter's hair. Many of these parents, pressure by outside forces, found temporary remedies to dealing with their child's unique hair. This finding hinted at the idea that parents did have some areas that they were unprepared to deal with.

Traits

Open-Minded

One emergent theme about the parents was that they were open-minded to ideas of culture and diversity. Moreover, these parents were not constrained to any particular racial consciousness. Since they were not guided by a racial consciousness, it is not surprise that they are in a successful interracial marriage and resist a mono-racial identity for their children.

Supportive Families

All of the couples in this study had supportive families. Their parents were supportive of the relationship, marriage, and birth of grandchildren. Any negative feelings that family members may have had mostly subsided after the birth of the children. As a result of the families support, the parents and children have open access to grandparents and other relatives, thus keeping the flow of family cultural traditions intact.

Implications of Research

The findings in this study have many implications in both the academic and family arena. The implications of this research can assuredly aid those who want to

improve the way that race is taught, negotiated, or in some cases, imposed on our children. Within this section both general and specific implications will be considered.

Positive Clues

Generally, this research portrays parents of biracial children, who are in an intact relationship, as open minded, highly accepting individuals that wish for their children to acquire a healthy bi/non-racial identity. As such, the finding implies that interracial relationships, childrearing, and negotiation are positive endeavors. The way that biracial parents perceive and negotiate race can provide valuable clues to how society at large should view race. Hopefully, the findings in this study will encourage others to take a closer look at the impact of the perceptions and strategies of biracial parents.

Understanding of Motives

This study has identified that parents perceive their children in a bi/non-racial manner. Many other studies have attempted to identify how parents perceive their biracial children's race (Root, 1992; Daniel, 1992). In fact, the findings in this research are consistent with other studies that also identify parents of biracial children as viewing their children as bi/non racial (Wardle, F. & Janzen, 2004).

Prior research has also pointed out that parents who are in the very early years of raising biracial children are likely to be ambivalent about how to perceive their children (Wardle, F. & Janzen, 2004). For example, Kerwin et al (1993), in a study of six biracial families, found that parents were distressed concerning societal pressures of adopting a mono-racial perception towards their children. For those parents, this research can be a "lighthouse" for other biracial families who are struggling in the early years of raising biracial children.

The findings here are important because there is always a need for more studies

on how parents perceive and identify the race of their child. Knowing that parents who

have been in long term marriages do not see their children as mono-racial is very

important to understanding how different family structures may view race. Moreover, the

way that parents perceive their children will largely determine how the parent

"negotiates" a racial identity with their children. Thus, by identifying their non/bi racial

perception, we can understand many of the motives behind the strategies or techniques

that the parents utilize.

An Example for Others

This study has also identified that biracial parents purposefully "plan and

execute" an identity with their children. Understanding these strategies and techniques

are immensely important for society at large. Prior research has overwhelmingly

contended that the strategies used by intact couples are a good thing (Huffman, 1994;

Ferguson, 2001; Rosenblatt et al, 1995; Kerwin, 1993). Thus, if these strategies have

been deemed as "positive," then the need to document such strategies is unduly

warranted. Hopefully, as we begin to understand the utility of each strategy further, there

will be an effort to modify these strategies for the use of all parents.

Many of the strategies in this study were consistent with strategies identified by

other researchers. For instance, while the findings in this study found open discussions

were a strategy used by parents, Terry Huffman (1995) contended that open dialogue was

a strategy that was used by many intact biracial couples. In another example, the findings

show that parents make decisions on where they will reside based on the level of

diversity their children will experience. Similarly, Kerwin et al (1993) found in their

research that the location in which their children resided was very important for biracial parents. Such corroboration is helpful in expanding the reliability of prior findings by other researchers. Admittedly, qualitative research is limited in its ability to generalize, thus corroboration is always welcome.

Biracial Families are Good!

The last finding consisted of the acknowledgement that certain traits held by the parents predisposed them to a positive identity. Namely, the parents themselves possess certain characteristics that add to a positive identity for the children. Such a finding is important because it points not only to the acts and perceptions themselves, but it considers the individuals themselves, parents of biracial children, who are in a unique situation. Unfortunately, there has been an underlying assumption that interracial couples with children are doomed to fail (Wardle, F. & Janzen, 2004). Such an assumption cannot be farther from the truth. In fact, parents in this study were identified as highly tolerant, resilient, and open-minded.

When looking at it holistically, it is easy to make a connection between who these people are (intact couples in a committed interracial marriage) and their subsequent perceptions and actions towards their children. Understanding that people who are open minded in committed marriages perceive and engage their biracial children in ways that foster healthy racial ideals makes it easier to promote ideas such as interracial marriage and childrearing and dispel many of the negative assumptions

Two Parent Families Work!

As such, one lasting impression that cannot be ignored is that two parent families tend to have a positive influence on children regarding race. In this study, all the families

interviewed, by virtue of the studies delimitations, are examples of successful marriages. As such the positive impact that a successful and enduring marriage can have on children in all areas cannot be ignored. In some ways this finding is repeated throughout the mainstream research on parenting which contends children benefit from having two parents in the home (Battle 1997; Raferty & Bibaraz, 1993).

What separated families with biracial children from families with mono-racial children is the sense of special responsibility they have to raise their children to respect and be tolerant of all race and culture as well as the purposeful exposure to strategies. In this study, most of the parents were aware of the extraneous pressures and challenges that their children would face. What's more, all of the parents reported being actively engaged in their son or daughter's engagement towards a healthy and happy racial identity, one that is void of pressure, shame, forcefulness, and ambivalence.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

This study was guided by symbolic interactionist theory. This study was not done to "test" a particular theory. Instead, it was used as the lens in which to view issues such as race, self, and identity. The "tenants" of social interactionist perspective were relevant to two main areas, that of race and the parents themselves. Underlying assumptions related to both groups are described further.

Race

It is important to conduct a study such as this through the auspices of the tenants of symbolic interactionist perspective because of how this perspective treats race and other areas of "self." For symbolic interactionism race is seen as a "symbol" that is "agreed" upon by "social actors" (Charon, 1989). Namely, race is something that all

members in society agree upon as something that is a real entity. In this study, others (parents) call upon the biracial children to make certain decisions regarding "race."

Unfortunately, race is a social construct of our society that is resistant to change. In reality, race is nothing more than a socially constructed label designating human stratification. However, in society at large, race is seen as something that is real and inherent to each and every individual. As such society has informal norms regarding racial acquisition and behavior. Fortunately, the parents involved in this study did not exhibit such strict adherence to a racial ideology or norms. In fact, the parents, while aware of racial stratifications, attempt to emphasize culture and diversity instead of any one racial identity.

Parents

Symbolic interactionism is important when considering the role the parent plays in the formation of identity. In this study parents communicated racial attitudes and ideas to their children, who in turn, will more than likely adopt their parents' specific interpretation or attitudes. The symbolic interactionist perspective emphasizes the "negotiation" of ideas between "social actors." Specifically, people communicate symbols and meaning, but generally do not force these ideas on people. This is important as symbolic interactionism is based in the idea of free will. Specifically, social actors are "autonomous" in that they accept or reject what is being communicated to them (Charon, 1989). As a result of the parent's strategies, the biracial children can accept or reject the efforts of the parents.

Recommendations for Further Research

As is the case with all research, this study was limited by several factors (time, money, manpower). In addition, the findings in this research also brought with them new questions, new perspectives, and new ways to look at the issue of biracial identity formation. These factors encompass the section, recommendation for further research. Due to these two concessions, it is important to consider and recommend extensions and new ways to address the research question. This segment of the study is offered toward that end.

New Parents

This study was delimited to parents of biracial children who had children over the age of nine. In the study, several of the families had children over the age of 15! The parents involved in this study had already become comfortable with their perceptions of their children and have modified their strategies in a way that worked for their families. It would be of immense interest to talk to parents who have biracial infants or young children.

By talking to parents of very young children, we can come to an understanding of how parents of very little children perceive race and potential strategies. Important questions to ask are: Are these parents idealistic about their children's racial acquisition, Are the parents confused about the racial make-up of their children, and What (if any) types of plans have these parents formulated to negotiate racial identity formation in their children? The newness of their experience can give us a look at where parents, both married and unmarried begin.

Single Mothers

This study was limited to intact interracial African American couples. In some

ways, intact couples have a very different experience than single-family situation.

Mostly, this is due to the fact that the environment (poverty, time, support) may override

the desires and motivation of the single parent. While this may be the case, it would still

be interesting to see how single parents of biracial children address the issues of race

amongst their children. Previous research has suggested that single parents may tend to

"over-compensate" for the missing parent's heritage and culture (Ferguson, 2001).

Talking to single parents may be helpful in corroborating such propositions. Also,

very few studies have been done on single parent families in which the single parent is

the father. It would be interesting to see how a single father may perceive and engage

their children racially.

Poor Families

All of the families in this study were of middle or upper class background. Thus,

these parents had some of the means to implement many strategies that may be out of

reach for poor couples (e.g. trips, toys, location choice). Also, poor couples could have

different ideas about race and the race of their children. Studies have shown that racial

importance and affiliation goes up as socio-economic status goes down. With this in mind

asking these parents about their perceptions and strategies would be helpful in identifying

if social class has a part to play in this subject.

Different Perceptions

Finding "discrepant evidence" can be very effective in uncovering new areas of

understanding in a particular research question (Maxwell, 1996). As such finding couples

who do attempt to help their children form a mono-racial identity would be a very interesting study. The findings of such studies (if you could find enough people that fit that category) could help uncover reasons why people would want their children to form a mono-racial identity despite the fact they have two parents in the home. Issues such as the level of physical likeness to a particular race and level of racism in community could be issues explored.

This study could also be extended to other groups and cultures. One interesting study would be to look at parents with children with African American and Native American descent. Admittedly, finding participants in this area would be difficult, but the findings would be very exciting based on the rich histories and traditions inherent to both cultures. There can also be studies of this type on several different types of mixtures, as long as the researcher is careful to delimit their study to specific groups (Japanese and European American) and not carelessly grouping cultures (Asian Americans and European Americans).

Number of Children

It can be assumed that experience with raising children could drastically change how the parents would deal with future offspring. For example, a parent with children in their teens may have very unique insights to raising children when compared to first time parents. While some of the parents in this study had one or two children, others had several biracial children.

An interesting extension to this research would be to study how strategies and perceptions of parents of biracial children with one or two children may differ from parents who have three or more biracial children. Such a comparison could help us

appreciate how experience with biracial children affects the process of raising biracial children.

Physical Characteristics

Oftentimes, parents in this study discussed that one of their children would look more like the mother, while another sibling would look more like the father. Such responses set the stage for further research into the area of physical characteristics and its relationship to perception and identity. Specifically, it would be beneficial to look at the relationships between the parents and children dependent on the children's physical characteristics (Whether they looked more White or Black).

Further, an inquiry into this area could explain other dynamics of the research question that were not thoroughly addressed in this study. For example, do parents who have a biracial child that can pass for White have a perception of a biracial identity for their children or do they attempt to impose a mono-racial identity on their children? What are the strategies and perceptions of parents who have one very Black looking Child and one very White looking child?

Adopted/Blended Families

While this study was limited to looking at Black and White parents and their natural biracial children, in the future it would be interesting to look at families where the children are not necessarily the birth children of the parents. Thus, an inquiry into how adopted or "step" parents perceive and negotiate race with their biracial children is strongly recommended as an extension to this study.

While this issue could prove to be rather complex due to the various circumstances into which a biracial child may come into such a family, it could be

beneficial to looking at how parents, who may not have traits that predispose them to an affinity for a healthy negotiation for their children, react, perceive, and deal with biracial children that they may have adopted or inherited through marriage.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to identify a how parents perceive and negotiate race with their biracial children. Ten couples, that consisted of one Black and one White parent, took part in an in depth interview with an interviewer.

The conclusion was that parents of biracial children are busy "coloring" with their children. In addition, their choice of crayon is translucent or a mixture. As this analogy suggests, parents in this study perceive their children in a specific way (bi/non-racial) and attempt to guide their children toward a particular "racial path" (through discussion, artifacts, and events and experiences). For the most part, these parents speculated that their children adopted or were likely to adopt a positive and self-assured racial identity.

Although there are many implications, the most important one is that by identifying the strategies that these parents use to foster a healthy and happy racial identity for their children, we can understand how all parents can foster positive ideas for their children. With the racial diversity increasing at an exponential rate, understanding how these parents engage their children will be extremely beneficial to future generation of parents and children of multi-racial and multi-ethnic families.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Glossary

Race: Can be defined as outward physical characteristics that represent membership in a particular category. In this study, race has been treated as a socially constructed phenomenon. That is race is "real" only in the fact that race means something to people in society.

Biracial: A person who has a parent that is in one racial category (i.e. Black) and another who is in a separate racial category (i.e. White).

Mono-racial: A person who belongs to one racial category (i.e. White).

Interracial Couple: These are people who belong to two different racial categories that are together in a committed, amorous relationship.

Culture: Culture can be defined as the way of life for a particular group of people. In this study, it is assumed that there are cultures and traditions that are inherent to both a European and African American lifestyle.

Heritage: In this study, heritage refers to the ancestral and cultural background of the person.

Racism: Negative attitudes towards a group of people based on race.

Amalgamation: Can be defined in this study as the blending of two different groups or cultures.

Anti-miscegenation laws: Laws that were passed in several states that forbid interracial relationships and marriage.

Identity: Identity is "who" we consider ourselves to be. In this study, racial identity is "who" we consider ourselves racially.

Negotiation: Negotiation in this study is treated as the parent's purposeful participation in the development of their children's racial identity.

Symbolic Interactionism: a micro sociological perspective that is defined as being the scientific study of the social interaction between individuals, of individual processes in the social stimulus, and social relations to the individual

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule

Note: These questions were used only to "guide" the interviews. As such, not every question was asked to every respondent.

Background Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. Describe your family life now.
5. How many children do you have?

Inter-racial experience questions

6. Where did you grow up? Family life? Describe it to me in detail.
7. Tell me about how you met your spouse/significant other?
8. Did anyone ever give you a hard time about your relationship?
9. How has the extended family treated your union/creation of children?
10. Tell me how the relationship is going now?

Background of biracial children questions

11. How many/Names? Describe your children.
12. Describe life with your children.
13. What are some interesting things about your kids? Provide examples.

Racial Perception Questions

14. What race do you consider your child/children?
15. How do you feel about "biracial-ness"? Explain.
16. Have you ever disagreed with anyone about the race of your child?
17. Have you ever felt differently/confused about the race of your child? Explain.
18. If someone asks you about your child's race, what do you say?

Negotiated Identity Questions

19. Has your child asked any questions about race?
20. Has your child experienced racism? How did you respond?
21. What have you told your child about their race? Provide examples.
22. Have you used any strategies with your child concerning race, if so what types?
23. How have you raised your children in this "racial world"? Provide examples.
24. What types of ideas have you instilled in your child concerning race?

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

I, Ronald Ferguson, am a graduate student in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota seeking a Ph.D. in Research Methodologies. This study is being done under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Gershman.

I am cordially inviting you to participate in a study of How Parents Perceive and Negotiate Identity with their Black and White Biracial Children. The goal of this study is to understand how parents perceive their biracial children racially. The study will also address how parents negotiate a racial identity with their child (what racial categorization they choose to live under). This study will focus specifically on interracial married couples (one parent being Black and the other being White) and their half Black and half White biracial children over the age of 8. You have been determined eligible for inclusion in this study by your own omission or by referral from someone of being and interracial married couple who have children that fit this criterion. Your participation will consist of doing one to two tape recorded interviews. These interviews will last approximately 35 minutes and should not last longer than 2 hours at a time.

In doing this study, there is minimal risk to the participants involved. All interviews will remain totally anonymous and confidential. Also, you can terminate the interview at any time.

Participation in this study will give us a better understanding of how parents perceive their biracial children. Moreover, it will help us understand the effect that the parents may have on their children's racial choice. As a whole, this will give a glimpse of how race is dealt with in a family with biracial children.

All data derived from the study will be completely anonymous. The interviewer (Ronald Ferguson) will record all data using a handheld tape recorder. Only the interviewer will have access to the tapes at any time. These tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet separate from anything that can potentially expose subject's names for a period of three years. After three years, all tapes will be destroyed. You are free to decide whether or not to participate and if you decide not to participate, you are free to terminate the interview at any time. If you have any questions you are welcome to call the investigator anytime. You are welcomed to ask any questions by calling Ronald Ferguson at 777-3149 or Dr. Kathleen Gershman at 777-3157.

I have read all the above information and will participate in this study.

Name (Please Print) _____   Date _____

Signature _____

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