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# BIRACIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

by

ANDRA MARIE BASU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

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Abstract

BIRACIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

by

Andra Marie Basu

Advisor: Vita Rabinowitz

The goal of the present study was to explore the relationship between social context and identity for biracial individuals. Specifically, it was proposed that a biracial woman's identification choice will relate to her construction and choices of social context Fourteen biracial college women participated in the study, which used multiple methodologies including the use of personal narratives, focus groups, and personal interviews. Results revealed that participants' identity choices did influence their choices and constructions of social contexts, particularly at the school they all attended. Yet while identification choices did influence participants' perceptions about their social contexts, other factors such as social barriers also influenced them. Family played a role in their identification choices as well, but siblings were found to be more influential than parents. In addition, results showed that educators and biracial mentors had a significant impact on participants. Implications of the findings for parents, educators and future researchers are discussed.

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Finally, I would like to thank the women who agreed to participate in this project. I thank them for sharing their life stories and experiences with me. Their insightful comments and thoughtful viewpoints brought to light a complex picture of biracial identity and social context. Without their openness and willingness to share their thoughts, this project would not have been possible.

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# Biracial Identity and Social Context

The number of biracial infants born in the United States has been increasing rapidly in recent years. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the number of monoracial children born has climbed at a rate of 15% since the 1970s, while the number of biracial children born has grown more than 260% (Root, 1996). Both educators and counselors have attempted to work with this growing population, in order to develop policies to meet their needs. Several researchers have also begun to explore the process of identity development in biracial children (Wardle, 1992) adolescents (Gibbs, 1987) and adults (Hall, 1992).

The growing number of biracial children and adults in the United States has also led to an increase in the dialogues about mixed-race issues in both academia and the mainstream media (Streeter, 1996). With entertainers such as Mariah Carey and Keanu Reeves and athletes like Tiger Woods gaining popularity, multiracial persons are quickly becoming a much more visible population. As the popular press attempts to classify these individuals, students at colleges and universities across the United States are forming groups specifically for biracial persons, such as the Multiethnic/Interracial Students' Coalition (MISC) formed at the University of California at Berkeley. The emergence of campus groups, community organizations, academic research, and political activism of biracial Americans has led to what some now call "the mixed-race movement" (Nakashima, 1996).

The development of the "mixed-race movement" represents a dramatic shift in the discourse about biracial Americans and how they are perceived. The transformation from

having the biracial population define their own identity, as opposed to having others impose it on them, makes this a particularly important time for researchers to consider this group. Biracial Americans who challenge societal definitions of race force psychologists to re-examine societal norms of compulsory essentialism or the notion that a person can only be a member of one racial group.

At this point in history, researchers are just beginning to explore the many issues facing biracial Americans. They have looked at the identity development and the psychosocial adjustment of biracial persons. One area that has not been examined in depth, however, is the relationship of social context to the identification processes that biracial persons experience. The goals of the present study are 1) to present some of the issues facing researchers who work with biracial populations 2) to review the relevant research concerning biracial individuals and 3) to explore the relationship between social context and identity and to suggest ways in which a biracial person's identification relates to his or her construction and choices of social context.

## Biracial Populations: History, Demographics and Definitions

Before describing the existing research on biracial populations, I would first like to note some of the specific factors that one needs to take into account when studying biracial individuals, including both the history and the unique aspects of this particular population.

### *Historical Influences and Demographic Trends*

Historically, "race mixing" in the United States between blacks and whites dates back to the early colonial period where it existed in the "context of southern American slavery under thoroughly unequal and brutally coercive circumstances" (Williams, 1996, p. 195). Relationships between European and African-Americans continued throughout the Civil War, Reconstruction, and legalized segregation. By the 1920s, the African-American community could be viewed as a predominantly mixed-race group, yet due to the legal implementation of "one-drop" hypodescent policies, which classified these mixed-race persons as African-American, the number of biracial individuals was suppressed (Williams, 1996). In 1967, when laws prohibiting interracial marriages were finally struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, the number of interracial marriages increased and subsequently the number of biracial children. However, interracial relationships had been part of U.S. history long before this time.

Although, as Williams (1996) explains, "race in [the United States] is fundamentally based on a black-white binary system ....[with] white at the top, black at the bottom" (p. 199), Asian-Americans and other persons of color have also been subject to systematic exclusion based on their race. In California, in particular, laws prohibiting relationships between European-Americans and Asians were passed as early as 1660 and continued to be enforced throughout the 1800s and the early 20th century. In response to the numerous relationships between European-Americans and Filipinos, a judge was quoted in 1930 as saying "if this present state of affairs continues, there [will] be 40,000 half-breeds in California within the next ten years" (Williams, 1996, p. 198).

Discrimination against Asian-Americans continued throughout the 20th century, particularly during World War II with the placement of Japanese Americans into internment camps. Yet interracial relationships between European-Americans and Japanese Americans continued, such that currently more children of Japanese-American heritage are born to interracial couples than same-race couples (Root, 1995).

Although the focus of the present paper is on biracial individuals living in the United States, it is also important to consider the experiences of biracial persons living in other parts of the world. As Alcoff (1995) explains, historically, "in North America, race mixing [has been] generally perceived with abhorrence" (p. 265), yet this is not the case in Latin America. In Latin America, "racial discrimination was made illegal, because such practices of discrimination obviously could not work in countries where as few as five percent of the population were *not* mestizo of some varied racial combination" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 265).

A similar situation is present in Hawaii, where in 1989, "racially and ethnically mixed people were the largest segment of the Hawaiian population" (Davis, 1995, p. 116). Hawaii has differed historically from the rest of the United States in that, as Davis (1995) explains, "racially mixed people in Hawaii, rather than being assigned membership in any parent group, are perceived and respected as persons with roots in two or more ancestral groups" (p. 116). As the demographics in the rest of the United States continue to change, and the biracial population increases, policy makers may look to Hawaii for a model where " racially mixed" people are respected and treated equally by all groups.

It is estimated that the number of biracial persons living in the United States is currently between one and ten million (Poston, 1990). This figure is expected to increase

in future years even if rates of interracial marriage remain stable (Root, 1996). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by the year 2050, the representative face of America will no longer be white, partly due to an increase in a self-identified multiracial population (Root, 1996). Root (1996) notes that increases in the biracial population have been found to occur across racial groups. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (1992) states that while the number of monoracial black infants has increased 27% and the number of monoracial white infants has increased 15%, the number of black/white biracial infants has grown almost 500%. According to the 1990 Census reports, there were 39% more biracial Japanese/white infants born than monoracial Japanese infants born that year. In Native American communities, there were reportedly 40% more biracial infants born than monoracial infants. These trends have also been shown to be present in other Asian American and Pacific Islander groups (Root, 1996).

It is difficult to determine the exact size of the biracial population because the National Center for Health Statistics classifies children at birth according to their mother's race (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). The race of the child's father, which may be the same as or different from the mother's race, is ignored. Additionally, the U.S. Census form has no specific category for multiracial individuals (such as "other"). However, the federal government recently ruled that Americans may now identify themselves as members of more than one race on government forms ("Multiracial Americans," 1997). Several grassroots organizations, including the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), are attempting to address this issue by lobbying for changes in public racial categories to include mixed-race designations (Zack, 1995).

Although the above organizations are part of an active movement of interracial families and multiracial individuals who are becoming more assertive about their rights and responsibilities, some people believe that the inclusion of a biracial category on federal government forms will jeopardize federal funding to specific minority groups (Wardle, 1992). This fear is partially due to the fact that federal funding of social and educational programs is based on levels of minority involvement, which could decrease with the inclusion of a biracial classification. Additionally, minorities who support this point of view believe that those who "cross racial or ethnic lines to marry are rejecting a pride and ownership in their own group" (Wardle, 1992, p. 164). Regardless of an individual's beliefs, however, it is clear that modern interracial families must deal with a number of different societal pressures.

***Issues of Definition***

How is the term "biracial" best defined? Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) state that the word "biracial" is most often used "to describe first-generation offspring of parents of different races..[and] it most appropriately signifies the presence of two racial backgrounds in a nonjudgmental manner" (p. 201). These authors further explain that the term "multiracial" is "sometimes used interchangeably with [the word] biracial ... [but that it] describes a person integrating *two or more* different heritages" (p. 201). (To be consistent with prior work conducted on this topic, I will use the term biracial in the present paper.) One potential problem with this type of terminology is that it may reify the category of race. More specifically, it suggests that all other people are, in fact, racially "pure", although there is no scientific research in the field of genetics to support such a

claim (Zack 1995). Zack (1995) instead argues that racial classifications are simply useful in rationalizing the oppression of groups of people.

Is biracial equivalent to biethnic? Biracial and biethnic individuals have been viewed differently historically. For instance, in the past, a child of an Italian-American and an Irish-American parent may have faced difficulties as a result of being socially rejected by a particular ethnic group, yet his or her parents would not have been sent to prison, as many interracial couples were. Currently, in the United States, an interracial couple may still have difficulty leasing an apartment, while an interethnic couple may encounter fewer problems (although, it is not clear if this is due to the fact that the couple is interracial or if it is a result of racial discrimination against the person of color). Authors may choose to use the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably, yet due to the issues outlined above I will focus specifically on biracial identity rather than biethnic identity.

The diversity of this population is also an issue. Although much of prior work has focused on people who have one black and one white parent, this subgroup actually represents only one part of the total biracial population (Poston, 1990). Different issues will be faced by biracial persons depending, in some part, on their particular heritage. The degree of racial discrimination faced by individuals of white and Asian backgrounds, for example, compared to that faced by people of white and black heritage may differ depending on the norms of the society in which they live (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). There is also some evidence that children of white and Asian backgrounds living in the United States are more likely to be accepted into white society than children of white and black heritage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). In a recent ethnographic study, Williams

(1996) describes the experience of a biracial Asian/European American man who captures this particular phenomenon perfectly with the following story:

> "the other day, I was speeding on the freeway and the LAPD stopped me. I get stopped by the cops all the time. That's when I have to stress that I'm Japanese or white or both...My name isn't Spanish...It's a common black or white last name so it's kind of ambiguous...[The cop] asked me if I was a gang member or if I had drugs in my truck. The cop starts calling into his headquarters, "One Mexican, 25-year old, male...After the cop was done, I said, "Excuse me sir," real politely, "I'm not Mexican. My father is white and my mother is Japanese." From that moment on, the cop changed. I don't know if he was embarrassed because he misidentified me or because as a Japanese/white man, [he could not] see me as a drug dealer or gang member. My speech can also be considered nonethnic, which contrasts to my Latino-looking appearance....I really have to manipulate myself and project different selves in order to survive in a society that treats brown and black males like shit" (p. 207).

## Identity and Biracial Persons

Much of the existing research concerning biracial populations has been initiated by educators and counselors working with this particular population. As a result, the majority of this work has focused on the psychosocial adjustment of biracial persons. There are a few researchers, however, who have specifically investigated the identity choices of biracial persons. Cauce, Hiraga, Mason, Aguilar, Ordonez and Gonzales (1992) considered biracial adolescents' identity choices in their study of twenty-two people (ages eleven to thirteen) living in a Seattle community. Seventeen (10 female) participants had one black parent and one white parent and five (4 female) participants had one white parent and one Asian parent. The researchers did not specifically ask the adolescents about their identity choices, but rather inferred it from the recruitment procedures in the study. The researchers specifically recruited adolescents, who were either Asian-American or African-American. It was only later when the researchers went

to interview the participants' parents that they realized that twenty percent of their sample included people who could be classified as biracial, even though they appeared to identify with only one particular racial group.

Gibbs and Hines (1992) also studied biracial adolescents' identity choices, in their study of 12 San Francisco residents (6 female, 6 male), ranging from age thirteen to eighteen, who had one black and one white parent. All of the participants were from middle-class families. When asked how they saw themselves racially, six said "mixed," two said "black," one said "African-American," and two participants were unsure how to respond. When the respondents were asked how they generally labeled themselves, however, the majority said "mixed."

Hall (1992) investigated identity choices more systematically in her study of 30 biracial adults (15 female, 15 male) with black fathers and Japanese mothers living in the Los Angeles area. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-two. When answering a forced choice question about their ethnic identity, eighteen respondents chose "black", ten chose "other", one chose Japanese, and one did not answer the question. The ten respondents who chose the "other" category told the interviewer that they "did not wish to be categorized simply as black or Japanese, which would deny one of their cultures" (p. 254). The respondent who identified as Japanese stated that she did so because she had resided in Japan for most of her life. When respondents were asked to rate themselves separately on two scales, however, in terms of their "blackness" and "Japaneseness", twenty-six participants rated themselves as high on both scales, suggesting that most believed that both were important identities, even though when they were forced to choose they may only identify with one group.

Phinney and Alipuria (1996) investigated this possibility more systematically in their examination of the self-labels of biracial high school and college students. Using data collected from two large surveys, the authors first considered the "spontaneous ethnic self-label" of 47 racially mixed university students in comparison to 345 monoethnic students. All the students were born in the United States and attended two large state universities in southern California. Their ages ranged from 17 to 24. The biracial students' parents were from two clearly distinguishable racial groups including: Latino, Asian American, African American, Native American, or non-Latino white. The Latino/white combination was the most prevalent. Twenty percent of the biracial students used a spontaneous self-label indicating their mixed heritage, while eighty percent used a monoethnic self-label. However, these results may be due to the way in which the self-labels were assessed, as respondents may not have realized that they had the option to use a mixed heritage self-label.

Phinney and Alipuria (1996) examined this phenomenon in their study of 194 racially mixed high school students, who were compared to 696 monoethnic students. All students were born in the United States. The authors identified what they termed "16 different combinations" in their sample of biracial adolescents. The most prevalent subgroups were black/mixed (n=44), Latino/white (n=23), black/Indian (n=21), black/Latino (n=18), and black/white (n=14). Thirty four percent of the students used a spontaneous self-label indicating their mixed heritage, while sixty six percent of the respondents used a monoethnic label. In the overall sample, the label that was used most frequently was black, and the label that was used second most frequently was the label of

another minority group or mixed. The label that was used least frequently was white. This finding is interesting in that it suggests that many of the biracial students in this sample preferred to identify with a monoethnic minority group or a mixed group rather than with the monoethnic white group. However, this may be due to the fact that white students were the minority group in the high schools that these students attended. The present study will attempt to investigate this possibility by questioning participants about the racial composition of the communities they are part of.

In addition to the spontaneous self labels, Phinney and Alipuria also asked respondents to select their racial group membership from a list of options, which included a mixed heritage option. With the exception of the Indian self-label, all the monoethnic self-labels were used about half as often in this question as they were in the spontaneous self-label question. There was an increase from 66 to 124 in the number of students who used the mixed label. This finding suggests the importance of using multiple methods to assess the self-labels of biracial persons. Based on the results of the spontaneous self-label question, the authors may have mistakenly assumed that the majority of their sample identified with a monoethnic group. However, based on the results of the checklist question, it appears that most of the high school students preferred to identify as "mixed" if they knew they had the option.

In contrast to the researchers discussed thus far, who defined identity in terms of a choice on a checklist or a spontaneous self-label, several researchers have proposed more general models of biracial persons' identity development. Based in part on Cross' (1987) earlier model of ethnic identity, Poston (1990) suggests that biracial individuals go

through stages in their identity development, including a stage in which they may feel forced to choose one group over another and a final stage in which they "recognize and value all of their ethnic or racial identities" (p. 154). Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) also propose a stage model of biracial identity development, in which they consider both a child's initial racial awareness and reaction to peer groups. However, they still utilize a stage model, which presents identity as a static concept that, once achieved, is not expected to fluctuate a great deal. Additionally, both stage models assume that all biracial persons will ultimately achieve the same type of identity and that their development of this identity will not vary. While the researchers who propose stage models may recognize the importance of social contextual factors in relation to a biracial person's identity, these factors are not addressed explicitly in their work. It is possible, though, that like the ethnic identity researchers who initially proposed stage models (Cross, 1978) and later did discuss the impact of social contextual factors like family, peers, schools (Ogbu, 1985) and historical events (Cross, 1985), biracial identity researchers may expand their models.

Some authors who study biracial populations have already begun to recognize the importance of social context. For example, Root (1996) constructs the identification process in much broader fluid terms than those who propose stage models. She has suggested several ways in which those who are biracial "experience, negotiate and reconstruct" the borders between races. The first way in which biracial persons may experience the border is to perceive themselves as existing between two groups, as opposed to being strictly a member of one group or another, according to Root. In other words, a biracial person, who has a black and a white parent may think, "I'm black," "I'm

white," and "I'm biracial" all at the same time. The statement that these biracial individuals have "both feet in both groups" differs from the proposal that the individual is "straddling two worlds in a one-foot-in, one-foot-out metaphor that fractionalizes the [biracial] person's existence" (Root, 1996, p. xxi).

The second manner with which biracial persons manage racial borders, in Root's view, is to situate themselves within a particular group for an extended period of time, moving into the other group occasionally. A biracial individual may choose to "create a home in one camp for an extended period of time and make forays into other camps from time to time...even [moving] camp at some point in time" (Root, 1996, xxii). The main point behind this statement is that biracial people can change the way in which they identify themselves during their lifetime (Root, 1996).

Finally, the third way in which biracial people may negotiate the border, according to Root, is to control the salience of their various identities, depending on the situation. A biracial individual may shift various identities to the foreground and background as they cross between and among different social contexts defined by race (Root, 1996). In a sense, they practice "situational race" by manipulating the extent to which a particular aspect of their identity is salient depending on the social context (Root, 1996).

## Social Context

Before examining the ways in which Root's three proposed identification processes may influence a biracial person's construction and choices of social context,

however, I would first like to review some of the important social contexts that prior researchers have investigated.

### *Neighborhood*

Several researchers have found evidence to suggest that the neighborhood one grows up in may have an impact on one's identification choices. More specifically, in her study of biracial adults with black fathers and Japanese mothers, Hall (1992) found a relationship between the racial composition of participants' neighborhood and their identity choice. Respondents were more likely to identify as black if they had a predominance of black neighbors. Although, it is not clear if the neighborhood, influenced their identity or if their identity led them to choose a particular residence. This question will be considered in more depth in the next section.

In a related study, Waters (1990) also considered the relationship of identity to neighborhood. While she did not study biracial adults, the author did examine the ethnic identifications of adults living in integrated suburbs versus those who lived in segregated urban areas. She found that white Americans who grew up in the integrated suburbs did not have a clear sense of their identities, as compared to those who lived in the city. The former group felt that they were missing a strong ethnic neighborhood identity and even stated that "everyone's ethnicity seems pretty much the same" (Waters, 1990, p. 100) in integrated suburbs.

Other researchers (Cauce et al., 1992; Gibbs & Hines, 1992) did not consider the influence of neighborhood on identification. However, the biracial adolescents in their studies did state that it was "easier" to grow up in a more integrated environment. The

biracial adults interviewed by Funderburg (1994), who had one black and one white parent, expanded on this point by stating that they felt more comfortable in integrated neighborhoods, schools and workplaces. The reason for this view was that they experienced more discrimination in segregated environments.

### *Schools*

Another important social context that prior researchers have considered in their study of biracial persons is schools. Phinney and Alipuria (1996) compared the spontaneous self-labels of those who attended an ethnically diverse campus to those who went to a predominantly white university. Those who attended the school with a majority of white students were more likely to self-label as white. Yet, it is not clear if these students, who self-labeled as white, (and primarily had one white parent and one Latino parent) gained greater acceptance from their peers and experienced less discrimination than those who did not self-label this way. It is also unknown whether the students who chose to attend the predominantly white school were more likely to self-label as white than those who chose to attend the ethnically diverse school before attending college. This question will be explored in more detail in the next section.

The racial composition of one's school may have an impact on biracial persons at an early age, however, long before a person is of college age. McGuire, McGuire, Child and Fujioka (1978) present evidence to support this notion even though they did not specifically focus on biracial children. The researchers found that, when asked to describe themselves, children are more likely to view race as salient if they are among the minority group in a school, which may influence their self-concept and identification choices.

### *Friendships*

One of the factors that may effect the impact of schools and/or neighborhoods on biracial persons' identifications is the friendships they form within those contexts. Gibbs and Hines (1992) found that most of the adolescents in their study reported having racially mixed groups of friends, regardless of their identification choices. Hall (1992), on the other hand, stated that the participants in her study were more likely to have black friends than Japanese friends. Additionally, she found a slight tendency for participants to claim a black identification if the majority of their friends were black. (It is unclear, though, if the identification or the friends came first.) Highlighting an important component of social context, Kerwin and her colleagues (1993) found that, in terms of friendships, children felt much more pressured to choose affiliation with one racial group if the two racial groups they were part of were informally segregated in a school.

### *Family*

A potential moderator of the impact of social context on biracial individuals' identity is their family members. Kerwin and her collaborators (1993) found that parents differed in how they dealt with issues facing biracial children. Some parents talked a great deal with their children about these issues whereas others never mentioned them. Miller and Miller (1990) argue that parents need to teach their biracial children racial awareness and coping skills for functioning in both a majority and minority culture (McRoy & Hall, 1996). The amount of family discussion needed may depend on the

particular nature of the social context in which the child lives. This point will be explored in the next section.

## Social Context and Identity

Prior work with biracial populations has clearly demonstrated that social context does have some relationship to identity. However, previous researchers have not explored the specific nature of that relationship. In the present study, I propose that a biracial person's particular type of identification will directly relate to his or her construction of and choices of social contexts. I base this proposal, in part, on the work of Vygotsky (1994). In his discussion of the relationship between what he called "the environment" and child development, he states that in order to understand this relationship one needs to consider the child's stage of development as well as his or her interpretation of the environment. Vygotsky would argue that it is not the environment per se that influences a person, but rather the factors in the environment which are "refracted through the prism" of the person's experience. In other words, a person may be in the same situation as someone else but experience it very differently, as in the case of children from the same family. In terms of the current study, I propose that how a biracial person interprets his or her social context depends on his or her choice of identity at that point in time. Additionally, as Vygotsky also explained, I believe it is important to view social context not as a "static entity" but rather as "changeable and dynamic."

Root (1996) proposed three types of identification choices for biracial persons, and, in the present study, I will attempt to expand her model by explaining the relationship between those choices and one's construction and choices of social context. In Root's

view, the first type of identity that a biracial person may choose is to identify with one particular group for an extended period of time. A biracial person who chooses this identity may be expected to seek out and construct social contexts which seem to confirm this identity. On the other hand, the second form of identity that Root suggests biracial persons may choose is to adopt two identities but control the salience of these identities. Individuals who choose this identity may look for several different types of social contexts that reinforce the different aspects of their identities. For example, if a person has an Asian and a white parent, he or she may have two distinct groups of friends with members of both parents' ethnic groups. Yet, this person may also experience more discomfort when these two groups come into contact with each other. The third type of identity that Root proposes biracial persons may choose to adopt is one where they take on several identities at once in an attempt to "exist between groups." A person who chooses this type of identity may seek out social contexts where this identity will be reaffirmed, perhaps by looking for social contexts in which other biracial persons are present, such as in some of the groups being formed on college campuses across the country.

In order to examine the relationship between social context and identity, participants in the current study were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of their identity and the social contexts in their lives. This information enabled me to investigate the relationship between their descriptions of their identity and their constructions and feelings toward the social contexts in their lives.

In terms of identity, participants were asked how they identified themselves to others. Do they identify themselves differently with different groups of people? If they do, how so? Participants were also questioned about how the people in the social

contexts they are part of identify them. For example, how do they think their friends identify them and how do they wish they would identify them?

In regards to context, participants were asked to write and then talk about the situations in which they feel the most and the least comfortable. They were also interviewed about several specific social contexts, such as those including their friends, peers and coworkers. They were asked if they feel pressured to affiliate with members of one ethnic group over another in these contexts. Additionally, they were asked about the context including family members. Specifically, have their parents talked to them about being biracial? If so, what did they say? Do participants think their parents influenced their identification choices? What do participants think about their siblings' identification choices?

Participants were also questioned about their experiences with discriminating comments. Specifically, they were asked if others had made discriminating comments to them about their background and how they handled it when they had these experiences. They were asked, as well, about their experiences with the "what are you" question in their social contexts. Williams (1996) has found that biracial persons have different ways of dealing with this type of question. Some examples include the following:

> "What are you? Boy, that's a question I try to dodge every day of my life. Maybe, even several times a day. I don't mind getting asked, but I don't like to answer it. I try to feel out the person, you know, their motives and stuff. I think [I get asked] cuz I look pretty mixed, like I could be anything. I also think it has to do with my name [an Anglicized surname], my so-called standard-sounding English .... Yet, I look sort of white, but not really. Not enough to be black, not enough to be white. I'm not easily identifiable. I really think that what I represent turns other people's worlds upside down. Some [people] get really angry at me for not giving them the answer they want to hear, insisting that I belong to this group or that group. It's their problem, not mine. It took me a while to understand that, but now that I know, I have the power to determine ...who I am and how they are going to respond to me ....I've decided that I'll never let others make me feel crappy about myself when they are the ones who are asking a highly personal question about the very essence of who I am" (p. 204).

> "Yeah, people ask me all the time, what are you? Some of my friends get really sick of it. But I can't help it if people ask. I don't know what it is about my looks that provokes this question ...the other day, this person, I think he was white, he said, "Are you a Euroasian?" I never heard that term so I busted out laughing ...I replied by saying that my dad is Filipino and my mom is Swedish and German. I feel like I don't have my own racial identity. I have a racial identity through my parents. For me, being mixed is really a positive thing. Some people ...usually of color ...say I'm being treated like an exotic object, but I don't see it that way" (p. 206).

In addition to being interviewed about their own personal experiences, participants in the present study were also asked to take part in a small focus group with other biracial students. Focus groups have been suggested as a useful tool for researchers for a number of reasons, including the fact that they are more naturalistic than other methods, they offer an opportunity for meaning-making among participants, and they give more power to participants than other methodologies (Wilkinson, 1998). The purpose of using focus groups in the current study was to create a specific type of social context that participants may or may not have experienced before, one that includes other biracial persons.

Participants were asked to discuss how they felt about issues such as the media's portrayal of biracial persons, the U.S. Census debate about including a "biracial" category, as well as the things they like and dislike about being biracial. They were also asked to talk about the advice they would give to incoming biracial freshmen at their school, if they would join a biracial students' group, and the questions they would like to ask other biracial people. My role as a researcher in the focus groups was to pose questions to participants, but also to act as a mediator for the discussion, by encouraging all of the participants to express their opinions and to ask follow-up questions. A number of the topics in the discussion were brought up by the participants, rather than the researcher, giving them more control over the discussion. These topics will be discussed in the results and discussion section. Following their participation in the focus groups, students were asked how they felt about the experience. For example, when did they feel comfortable and when did they feel uncomfortable and why?

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in the present study included women from many different backgrounds (see Appendix D) including the following: three of the women had one black and one white parent, four of the women had one Latino and one white parent, two of the women had one Latino and one Asian parent, three of the women had one black and one Latino parent, one woman had one white and one Asian parent, and one woman had one black and one Native American parent. (Two of the participants had a parent whose

background was also mixed, however they had a primary group membership that differed from that of the participant's other parent.) The ages of the participants varied, specifically eleven of the participants were between the ages of 18-24 and three of the participants were between the ages of 34-43. I chose to focus solely on women's experiences because there is some evidence (Kerwin et al., 1993) that gender may impact biracial persons' identification choices. For the present study, I wanted to focus on the differences that exist between persons of similar racial backgrounds, who make different identification choices, rather than focusing on gender differences. I chose to study women rather than men because I feel that women's experiences have been historically neglected in psychological research.

All of the women in the study were students attending a local urban college who were recruited through flyers posted around the campus and through word of mouth. The participants included four freshman, two sophomores, three juniors, and five seniors (see Appendix E). The reason for including students from only one school was so that I could compare the participants' experiences in a social context that was common to all of them. Additionally, I chose to study women in college because it has been shown to be an environment that fosters the exploration of one's racial/ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). Based partially on Erikson's (1968) and Marcia's (1980) discussion of identity development in adolescents and young adults, Phinney proposes that college students fall into one of three categories in their ethnic identity search. These categories include those who have just started exploring their ethnic identity, those who are in the midst of searching for their identity, and those who feel they have a clear sense of their identity (Phinney, 1990).

***The School***

Participants in the present study attended a local urban college located in a major metropolitan city in the northeast part of the U.S. The college is comprised of a diverse group of students who represent a range of racial and ethnic groups. The majority of the students are from lower middle class and middle class backgrounds, and most live in locations throughout the city, as opposed to in a dormitory. The students tend to divide their time between school, work, friends and family, all of which they were questioned about in the present study.

***Procedure***

Multiple methods were used in the present study. All of the participants were first asked to write narratives about their experiences, to participate in a focus group with several other participants, and finally to take part in an interview with me. In their written narratives, participants were asked to write about situations where they felt most and least comfortable, in order to examine their perceptions of different social contexts. (See Appendix A).

In the focus groups, participants were asked to be part of a context that most had not had a great deal of experience with, namely one that included other biracial women. Three focus groups were conducted comprised of 2-6 participants each, lasting from 1-2 hours. Participants were asked to grant permission to the interviewer to use a tape recorder during the focus group and their subsequent personal interviews. All of the focus groups and personal interviews were conducted in the school library. Topics of discussion in the focus groups included the census debate, the media's portrayal of biracial persons, and what participants loved and hated to hear about being biracial. Participants also

brought up a number of other topics which will be discussed in the next section. A complete list of all focus group questions and activities can be found in Appendix A. Two of the participants did not take part in a focus group, but were asked about the topics discussed in the groups in their personal interviews.

Following their completion of the focus groups, participants were asked to take part in a 1-2 hour structured interview in which they were asked a series of questions about their lives and experiences as biracial women. They were asked more specific questions about their identity, and the important social contexts in their lives including school, work and family. They were questioned about the backgrounds of people in these environments, as well as how they identified themselves to different groups of people and how they thought others identified them. They were also questioned about situations when they chose to reveal their identity to others and situations when they did not. Additionally, they were asked if they felt pressured to affiliate with a particular group among their friends or in the classroom and about the role their parents and siblings may have played in their identification choices. Participants were also asked about the narratives they wrote and how they felt about the focus group they participated in. A complete list of all interview questions can be found in Appendix B, as well as the demographic items participants were asked to complete prior to their interview. Other topics that arose in the personal interviews will be discussed in the next section. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and participants had the choice to withdraw at any time. Following their completion of the study, all participants were paid ten dollars.

*Analyses*

Following the completion of the focus groups and interviews, each one was transcribed verbatim into typed pages. An initial reading of the transcripts then took place. The qualitative analyses of the data included both the coding of the data (i.e. highlighting and "tagging" passages of importance) and the interpretation of the data slices created by the coding strategies. This method is suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) in order to make the data more manageable, as well as to allow one to re-conceptualize the data. A list of coding categories can be found in Appendix C. The interpretive analysis of the data included both a focus on the research questions outlined above (content analyses) as well as a search for themes which arose in the interview or focus group that were not considered beforehand (thematic analyses) (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

In terms of the research questions, in the content analysis, transcripts were coded for evidence of the three different types of identification processes that Root (1996) defined as ways of managing the borders between races. In other words, was there evidence that participants engaged in identification processes that follow Root's proposed three categories including: those who "exist between groups," those who practice "situational race," and those who situate themselves with members of one group for a long period of time. Additionally, do those who claim one of these types of identities participate in social contexts that affirm these identities? Where do they feel most and least comfortable and why?

In addition to the primary research questions that relate to the relationship between identification and social contexts, other themes were considered as well. For instance, how does one's family possibly influence views about identification and choices about context? What, if anything, did participants' parents tell them? And what about their siblings? Secondly, what sorts of differences emerge between the women of different backgrounds? Are there similarities in the experiences of all of these biracial women?

Themes that were not considered prior to the interviews and focus groups were also analyzed in the thematic analyses. These themes were coded for due to the fact that a number of participants discussed them, and stressed their importance. For example, many participants noted social barriers which prevented them from feeling comfortable in a particular community, regardless of their identification choices. These barriers were coded for and will be discussed in the next section. Additionally, there were some themes which were more likely to be found in the participants' narratives or in the focus group transcripts than in those of the personal interviews. These themes were coded for and will be discussed in the next section as well.

In the analyses of the focus group transcripts, the coding strategy also included an emphasis on the dialogue between participants. Were there similarities or differences in participants' responses? Did different issues arise among the different focus groups? And how did participants feel about their experience in the focus groups? All of these questions were considered in the analysis of the data.

For each of the themes uncovered in the data, representative quotations were chosen from the transcripts that illustrated the viewpoint of the participants about a particular issue. However, quotes which demonstrated conflicting opinions were also

selected to present the opposing views about a topic. Additionally, statements which sharply contrasted those made by the majority of the participants were chosen to show an alternative perspective that existed among participants. Some participants felt more comfortable speaking in the focus groups and in their personal interviews than others, but a concerted effort was made to include quotations from all participants in the results section.

## Results and Discussion

### *Family: Parents, Siblings and Children*

> "I think [my parents] influenced my identity by not stressing a specific nationality. ....they've never told me this is what you [are].....I think by encouraging me to learn about my cultures, participating in cultural events...was their way of saying listen you're everything, you're not just one thing."

There has been a great deal of research focusing on the impact of family on biracial children's identity (Kerwin et al., 1993). While the main focus of the present study was on social contexts outside of the family, there were several themes that were considered, relating to this issue, that participants were questioned about.

Specifically, participants were questioned about their parents. What did their parents tell them about being biracial? And how did they think it impacted their identity? With one exception, participants' parents did not discuss their identity with them while they were growing up. As one woman explained:

> "My parents are funny people, if you don't mention it, it doesn't exist. Like recently, as we got older, they would say if people can't accept you..[who] cares...but it's really too late, it's like what are you talking about."

Two of the participants did have discussions with their parents about the fact that they were biracial, but only when other children at school made comments to them about it. These comments were usually negative, and one participant described how her mother tried to comfort and console her when she was upset by them.

> "She explained it that when people are together, it doesn't make a difference who they are....just as long as...they have love and communication, that's what is most important...that you're brought up by loving parents.....don't worry about people, [they] will be rude and ignorant."

While some parents taught their daughters how to deal with discrimination, others influenced their children in a more indirect way by their own behavior. Two women explained:

> "[My mother] was always a loving person...[and] she would talk about embracing all kinds of people. So that's where I got my temperament and mentality about embracing all kinds of people."

> "I'm very open-minded, because I have practically every race in my family, every religion....so it's like, I have a lot of tolerance. And I just feel like a part of a lot of different cultures, and I feel more....at ease when I'm around different people."

Both of these women felt that their parents had taught them tolerance and acceptance toward all groups, as opposed to specifically discussing their own identity as biracial people. This perspective seemed to lead participants to adopt either a biracial identity or one that included strong ties to two groups.

Another way that participants felt their parents influenced them was by educating them about their own cultures. Learning about their parents' backgrounds seemed particularly important to most of the participants in the study. Those who didn't often sought it out on their own, and those who did appreciated it. One woman described her experience, stating that:

> "I think [my parents] influenced my identity by not stressing a specific nationality. ....they've never told me this is what you [are].....I think by encouraging me to learn about my cultures, participating in cultural events...was their way of saying listen you're everything, you're not just one thing."

This woman, like others in the study, was glad that her parents encouraged her to learn more about her own heritage and that cultural events were part of her family life.

Participants did not always agree with their parents though, particularly on the issue of racial prejudice. One woman described how she disagrees with her mother:

> "My mom, she's totally like you should see the person, the individual...[race] doesn't matter, [and] she gets upset when it [comes up]. Her and I often clash on that I guess because she doesn't have to worry about it, so she doesn't really get it....so when I'm like [it matters], she's like, it doesn't."

While this woman tried to educate her mother on the reality of everyday racism, other women in the study were confronted with their parents' own racism and prejudice. One woman explained:

> "To [my mom] it was always very positive that I was so light skinned....I think she was proud of the fact that I was Italian and Puerto Rican.....in a snobbish way ...I think it does sort of give me that attitude like I am special, but at the same time I don't like that she does it. Because I find it, you know, prejudiced."

This woman felt that her mother favored her for the wrong reasons and continued to struggle with it. Whereas, for another woman in the study, she seemed to be inheriting her mother's racial prejudice. She explained:

> "My mom, she tells me not to tell people that my dad is black....she doesn't want me to go out with anyone black because she doesn't like black people now... ....she wants me to go out with white people, have white friends...my mom, she makes me think sometimes that black people are not good."

The racism of this woman's mother had led her to deny her own identity and a part of herself, although she did talk about her own ambivalence, suggesting that her mother had not completely convinced her. Ironically, she was one of the few participants whose parent talked to her about her background, and it appeared to have a negative influence.

While previous research (Kerwin et al., 1993) has suggested that biracial women may be more likely to identify with their mothers than their fathers, this was not necessarily the case in the present study. Both parents seemed to have an equal role in influencing their daughters' identity regardless of whether they were from a majority or minority group, as defined by societal norms. For five of the participants, their mothers did play a much larger role in their lives, but only because they were not able to speak with their fathers, due to their absence or death. However, even in these situations, participants often sought out to learn about their father's identity on their own, and did not simply adopt their mother's racial identity.

While participants' parents did not talk to them about their identity, for the most part, siblings seemed to play a much larger role in how participants conceptualized their identity. All but two of the participants in the study had siblings, and they influenced them

in different ways. One of themes that emerged when participants talked about their sisters and brothers was that siblings were people to share common experiences with. For instance, when people would make comments to participants, they could go home and talk about it with their siblings. One woman explained:

> "Sometimes it's just the funny things, like we'll talk about [the man next door], what rude comment he made that day. It's a constant thing of you know what somebody at work had said....usually we just joke about it, I don't know how it comes up."

For this woman, her sisters and brothers served as a support system for her and each other in dealing with the discriminatory comments made by others. Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating that:

> "I'm more close to my sister than I am to my mother...she brought me up, and she raised me....We talk about things that people say to general stuff to personal stuff. You know I tell her pretty much everything about me."

Participants felt that siblings influenced them by serving as role models, and helping them cope with discrimination. However, participants also talked about how they influenced their sisters and brothers. One woman talked about how she felt that her half brother, who was not biracial, had a greater understanding and acceptance toward other races because of their relationship. Another participant talked about how she tried to encourage her sister to learn more about her heritage.

> "Like I'll say listen to this tape or have you tried this food or things like that. Like I bring it to her. But I never openly told her oh I really don't think you are part of your heritage, and I think you need to learn more about it. We don't really talk openly about it, but I guess [bringing things to her] that's my way of saying it."

Other participants talked about encouraging other biracial people to learn more about their background, which will be discussed in the section on mentoring.

In addition to sharing experiences and serving as role models, though, participants also talked about the differences in their experiences as compared to their siblings. One woman explained:

> "[My brother], he really doesn't care. He wasn't exposed to the cultures as I was, though, so he doesn't really have a clue. He's totally, when it comes to Spanish or Puerto Rican culture, he's totally Americanized."

Due to the fact that her brother was not exposed to his heritage in the same way that she was, this woman felt that he did not struggle with his identity or choose the same identity that she did. Different environments also led some participants to face more discrimination than their siblings. As one woman stated:

> "I was actually talking to my brother.....and we had different experiences.... when we were in elementary school. I was teased in elementary school and he wasn't....because he went to a different elementary school than I did. He went to an elementary school that was minorities...and I went to an elementary school that was mostly all Irish, so I felt it more."

Changes in the social contexts where families lived meant differences in what children were exposed to, and could lead to differences in how siblings identified themselves.

However, close to half of the participants felt that their siblings identified differently than they did regardless of the social context they grew up in. This was a source of tension in some of the participants' families, but it also allowed them to see

different ways for them to identify themselves. One woman explained:

> "Well, there's two of them, my brother and my sister. And my older brother, ....he chose to completely, well [maybe] not completely, identify with my father's family....And my sister, she does both....she can identify....with my father's group....or my mother's group."

This woman identified primarily with her mother's background, although her sister felt that she should explore more of her father's background. Yet, all three siblings identified differently even though they had been exposed to both cultures by both parents. Other participants described a somewhat similar situation. One woman explained that:

> "[My sister and I] went on our separate paths....my sister stayed in the black community...I think she's realized that she has paid a heavy price for that.... [because] it was never a community that she was part of, it would just be her and her boyfriend, and then it would be his friends....and my thing was like.... just trying to be around all different kinds of people, so I would get hurt more.. ....where she wouldn't expose herself to all the different dynamics."

The women who felt that their siblings identified differently than they did found it difficult to talk with their brothers and sisters about this issue at times. But most felt that as they got older, they were more likely to feel that they understood their siblings' identity choices, as well as feeling that their siblings understood them.

While both parents and siblings influenced participants in a variety of ways, participants were also confronted with their identity through other significant family members, their children. Two of the women who participated in study had children, and both felt that it made them think about their own identity choices. One of the women explained:

> "Now all of a sudden I'm not only trying to define myself, I'm trying to define my daughter, so that [is] hard."

When enrolling her daughter in school, this woman was asked to classify her daughter as a member of a group, just as she had been expected to classify herself. When asked to identify herself, she would say she was a "German Bengali," and her daughter now identifies herself as a "German Bengali Palestinian." Her daughter asked her many questions about her background, similar to the other woman in the study who had children. She stated that:

> "My son, he's very curious. He wants to know every detail of my background. He says well that means I'm part of that too. I said yes it does. And he goes to school and tells people. It seems like it interests him a great deal....and he's made me feel that it's nice to be diverse. I've begun to enjoy it actually....I sort of like revel in it, and I didn't [when I was younger]."

Family members, whether it is parents, siblings, or children seemed to provide participants with a place to discuss issues related to their identity, and in some cases, social support. Since most participants did not grow up with other biracial individuals, this seemed to be particularly important, as will be discussed in a later section on mentoring.

For parents who are currently raising biracial children, the best advice, according the participants in the present study, appears to be that they should talk to their children about their background. Additionally, participants appreciated it when their parents encouraged them to learn about their background and value all of their heritage, not just the one pertaining to a particular group. Parents need to reflect on and in some cases re-conceptualize their notions of ingroups and outgroups when talking with their biracial children. Siblings were also very important to participants in the study for a variety of

reasons. In addition to sharing stories and helping each other, siblings sometimes became exemplars for the different identification choices available to biracial individuals. Participants' siblings did not always make the same identification choices as they did, but participants were able to learn a great deal from their siblings. Social psychologists have suggested that people often evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others, in the form of a social comparison. Future research is needed to investigate the social comparisons of biracial persons to their siblings and how these comparisons influence their identities.

While both parents and siblings were important family members that influenced all participants, it is also important for future work to consider biracial women's other family members as they continue to change and grow. Only two of the women in the present study had children, but their children had forced them to re-evaluate and reconsider their own identification choices, as their children struggled to make their own choices. Researchers who study biracial individuals may wish to examine the impact of relationship partners and children on their identity. For instance, what lessons will they pass on to the next generation? Participants in the present study had started to think about this question when they talked about mentoring, but it would be important to see how biracial mothers teach their children.

*Educational Experiences: High School Versus College*

> "It would be that people of every race hung out together.....like Italian girls had their own clique.....and the Spanish girls would hang out, and the black girls would hang out, so it was almost like I couldn't fit."

While the themes of identity choices and social contexts, social barriers (which will be discussed in the next section) and family were evident throughout participants' interviews, focus groups, and personal narratives, there were some themes which emerged primarily in the focus groups. Some issues seemed to have universal relevance to all participants so it was not too surprising that they came up in this particular setting. One theme that had not been considered prior to the focus groups was the topic of high school versus college and how the participants felt these environments differed.

For the most part, almost all participants had a negative view of high school, primarily because of the social cliques that existed and because they often felt pressure to choose to affiliate with one group over another. One participant talked about her experience:

> "There were like cliques, and we had three different lunch rooms....Asian people, [white people, and black people]....the first six tables.....all the black people would be concentrated there...and you were expected to sit at those front tables if you were black.....and you couldn't sit anywhere else....or they would act funny toward you."

Other participants told similar stories, and seemed to connect with each other about the trials and tribulations of their high school experiences. In response to the story told above, another participant told her own story:

> "It would be that people of every race hung out together.....like Italian girls had their own clique.....and the Spanish girls would hang out, and the black girls would hang out, so it was almost like I couldn't fit."

Participants had different ways of dealing with the social cliques that existed in their high schools, but one strategy involved creating their own group. One woman explained that:

> "I always felt like I wasn't Spanish enough to be with the Spanish girls or Italian enough to be with the Italian girls....It was just a very uncomfortable environment to be in and to have to kind of fit in either group.....I never felt like it, so I just kind of made my own friends elsewhere."

For other women in the study, it was not possible to create a separate more diverse group of friends, and they often felt isolated at that point in their lives. One woman recounted how:

> "I stopped eating lunch in the cafeteria....because I would walk in and I wouldn't know what table to sit with.....I had all my white friends.....they would say come over here....I had my Latino friends that I had grown up with.....[who would say] sit with us, and I had the African American group which was actually very large,...and they were like where's she going to sit.....And it got to a point where I couldn't deal with it, if I sat at the wrong table they wouldn't talk to me."

This woman became active in student government during the later part of her high school career and ate in her student office as a way to avoid the cafeteria problem. Another woman found that being involved in sports was an effective strategy for her. She stated that:

> "The group of whites didn't want me in their group, the group of blacks didn't want me in their group, the group of Hispanics didn't want me in their group... so it was very hard to try and find your way and I was in a mixed school..... ...I found that when I went into a sport, and I played a sport really well, then I became popular....then I was accepted."

Other women in the study did not share this experience, but it may be important in terms of the gender differences that may exist among biracial adolescents. While participation in athletics was not an option chosen by most of the women in the study, two of the women did find that a key source of support for them in high school was other biracial students. They explained:

> "Sometimes like in high school, I felt really left out, because I'd see the cliques after school.....they'd be laughing....you kind of miss that.....but you can't be with that....'cause they kind of shun you. And we [another biracial student] would talk about that."

> "I think it was the idea that I met more people that were also in my predicament. We just had a lot in common. And you know we went through the same experiences, and I felt a lot more comfortable."

One of the reasons participants found others who were also biracial to be a source of comfort has to do with the mentoring function that will be discussed in a later section. But, it should also be noted that participants did not necessarily become best friends with other biracial students, and even felt like other biracial students were only talking to them because of their background.

While high school proved to be particularly difficult for participants, they had more positive views about the college they attended. The diversity of the student population was important to them, partially because it seemed to make their lives "easier" than in high school. Two of the women in a focus group talked about why they thought this was true.

> "Where I went to high school it was predominantly African American and Hispanic, so I kind of took more criticism there then I would here [in college]. Because the Caucasian group was so small, people wanted to put me in that category.....it's more difficult if you are in a situation where there is predominantly one race than here, because there is so many different things... Just the people I hang out with...there is someone from every different nationality."

> "[In high school] because the minority groups were so small, which was the opposite of your situation, everyone wanted to claim me.....you know here it's just not like that.....I think they are very receptive to people of all different backgrounds....all the organizations, I think they are...very inclusive of everyone."

Other participants also talked about not feeling the pressure to choose one group over another like they did in high school, as well as the freedom they felt in college to be friends with many different people. Two women explained:

> "In college it's different, especially here....because you have such a diverse population....you don't feel like you're pulled....in high school you're basically expected to hang out with the same people every day.....here it's more about your interest.....like my friends that I made here are more because of their major and our similar interest."

> "I don't feel funny [here]. I can walk down the hall and talk to whoever I want, and nobody is going to look at me funny. I don't have to hear [comments] from people, they don't even care....which is good."

Participants generally felt that they had had a good experience in the college, but they also pointed out that it was still segregated in many ways. One woman summarized the view of others when she stated that:

> "I don't really go to the clubs that much. They try to say that they are like, open, like the Caribbean club....but they've once again managed to separate people, we've got the [Puerto Rican] club, the hip-hop club, the Korean club.....there's cliques here too, ....it's not as bad, but it's still there."

Many of the clubs at the school were "race clubs" as one participant defined them, and only two of the participants felt comfortable participating in these clubs. There were a number of reasons that participants gave for not wanting to be a member of these clubs, such as not having time to spend at the college, but most seemed to feel that they were too segregated and too specific. One described her viewpoint:

> "Take it literally, that's what I do. [The clubs] are basically what they put out.... the Korean club is going to be Korean people who only speak Korean, and there's not going to be any other [group]."

In addition to some participants feeling that the school clubs were segregated, others felt that the school environment itself was divided into separate groups. One woman, who worked in the college library explained:

> "Like you can tell, the Indians for example, they're in [the basement floor], you know, and they have this whole group desk going on and they're there. And other ethnic groups might be [segregated] on the upper floors. But I've noticed that everybody has their niche within the library."

While participants did discuss the segregation that existed within the college, they also talked about the educational opportunities that were available to them to learn more about their backgrounds. Since participants' parents did not tell them very much, in general, about their heritage, many of the women took courses and planned to go abroad to educate themselves. One woman talked about why she appreciated some of the courses offered by the college.

> "I always feel like I've been pushed in one direction by educators. [It] sometimes makes me angry that I wasn't seeing the other side....In the Black and Puerto Rican Studies classes....I totally identify with the course and with the professor and with everything. ....I'm not a very easily influenced person....usually it's kind of hard for me to agree with like...so-called radical views. I think it's because of always being pushed...to think only [one] way."

This woman felt that she was being introduced to an alternative perspective from the mainstream discourse that had dominated her education before college. Additionally, like other women in the study, the cultural studies courses at the school had allowed her to learn about her own background. These courses were often mentioned as one of the best things about the college. However, there was one drawback to these courses, in that participants sometimes felt like they were being forced to choose one group over another. One woman explained:

> "I took a class, the African American woman, and it went into different varieties of African American people, and the backgrounds they come from....And it was just assumed that I should classify myself as that...and just assume that whatever else you are just is part of [that] whole mix."

Participants believed that they were expected not only to claim a specific group identity, but also to adopt a specific ideology in some of the courses they took. But overall, they personally did not feel pressure to do that, and often did not do what others expected them to do.

While previous researchers (McGuire et al., 1978; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996) have considered the impact of racial composition of one's school on students' identity, they have not examined specifically what occurs in this particular social context. Kerwin and her colleagues (1993) did find that the biracial children in their study felt more pressure to

choose affiliation with one group if the two racial groups they were part of were informally segregated in a school. The present study also found evidence to show this, but rather than choosing one group over another, the participants seemed to feel isolated as adolescents attending informally segregated high schools. In college, participants felt that they had much more flexibility. Phinney (1990) has suggested that college is a time when many people begin to explore their racial identity, but for the participants in the present study that seemed to have been a life long process that began long before they became undergraduates. Participants talked about the freedom that they felt in college to "talk to whoever they wanted to" and to learn about their own background. They were able to feel part of a community in college, which some of them had not experienced before but were searching for. Acceptance and appreciation of all of their backgrounds was important to many participants.

Educators working with biracial students need to consider the impact of social cliques and course curriculum on their students. The best advice, according to the participants in the present study, seems to be that an atmosphere of openness and tolerance is promoted where issues can be discussed even if people disagree. It is also important for those in education to try not to categorize their students into a particular group and realize that a number of their students are biracial. Educators needs to support different types of biracial backgrounds explicitly, which does not always happen in schools' promotion of diversity and multicultural education. Participants valued their teachers who served as role models, but they also wanted to study with people who respected and acknowledged all of their heritage.

*Challenges and Celebrations of Identity*

> "My English teacher had asked the class to bring in pictures of daughter and father portraits.....first each student was asked to...give a brief talk....When I finished my talk, my teacher asked to see my picture. She said, 'oh *that's* your father!' and when I passed around my picture, several students questioned out loud was this really my father?"

Another theme that emerged in the present study centered around the issue of identity. Yet rather than focusing on participants' personal identity choices, as will be discussed in the next section, this theme related to how others perceived the women in the study. Whether it occurred on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, all of the participants were questioned at some time about their identity. Participants discussed this issue in their interviews, focus groups, and personal narratives. But it seemed to be particularly salient in their narratives, where they were asked to write about situations where they felt comfortable, and situations where they felt uncomfortable.

It was easier for participants to think of situations where they felt uncomfortable, and they often described several different types of situations. A number of the situations they described included scenarios where others attempted to challenge their identity. One participant described her experience:

> "Once when I was working overseas, a girl demanded to know what I was. And I said African-American, and she said 'Oh no, because of your hair, you can't be black.'"

Participants talked about others challenging their identity, whether is was

a physical characteristic like their hair, their knowledge of a language, their skin color, or their knowledge of certain cultural traditions. Others would tell them that they were not a member of a certain group, or that they could not be because of a variety of reasons. These comments made participants uncomfortable, and it was difficult for them to know how to respond.

It was particularly difficult for participants to know how to respond to challenges to their identity when they were children. Participants talked about specific incidents that occurred when they were younger, such as the following experience that one woman shared:

> "My English teacher had asked the class to bring in pictures of daughter and father portraits.....first each student was asked to...give a brief talk....When I finished my talk, my teacher asked to see my picture. She said, 'oh *that's* your father!' and when I passed around my picture, several students questioned out loud was this really my father?"

Being asked if one of their parents was their "real" parent was a common experience for participants. Like being told that they did not look like a member of a specific group, participants were often challenged and received looks of disbelief when they said that this parent was indeed their biological parent.

Another challenge that participants faced was how to deal with others categorizing them into one group, often in a discriminatory manner. One participant talked about her experience growing up:

> "When I was a child, I hung out with mostly African-Americans or dark-skinned Puerto Ricans, and they always made me feel like an outsider. They called me names like: [racial slur], snow white (which I didn't mind) and white cheese (which I hated)."

Participants had to learn how to deal with racism and discrimination from an early age, when it was directed at them. However, they also have had to decide how to respond when someone makes a discriminatory comment against them, but does not realize it because they don't know their background. Some participants tried to educate others when they encountered racism, while others chose to ignore it and say nothing. Almost all participants chose not to reveal their background unless they were directly asked, or they thought it would be useful in the conversation they were having with someone.

As much as participants have had to cope with challenges to their identity and discrimination, they also talked about occasions where others seemed to celebrate and appreciate their identity, particularly when they were asked to describe a situation where they felt comfortable. One woman described a particular instance:

> "I was in a restaurant in Berlin, Germany, and a man came and asked me if I was from Israel. I said no, and he said you look like a woman from everywhere in the world."

Receiving positive comments from people when they revealed their background, was less likely to occur for participants, but they appreciated it when it did happen. One woman explained:

> "Sometimes when I tell people what my racial background is they are like wow, that's so cool! This makes me feel good, because I'm different."

Celebrations of identity as opposed to challenges were one of the benefits of being biracial that participants described. The majority of participants were proud of their backgrounds, and were happy when they encountered others who shared their enthusiasm for who they

were. They preferred to be in environments where their identity would be supported, and others would question them in an interested way, as opposed to the infamous "what are you" question that participants often encountered. One of the reasons participants seemed to favor having a biracial students' group at their school (which will be discussed in a later section) was because of the fact that they wanted to be with a group of people who would celebrate and appreciate their different backgrounds.

While the focus of the present study was on biracial women and their perceptions about themselves, the encounters they often had with others perhaps reveal more about society than the participants themselves. Future researchers may want to consider how people who live in Hawaii or Latin America, where there is a majority of biracial individuals, view their biracial populations, as compared to how they are viewed in many parts of the United States. For even in the diverse environment that the participants in the present study lived in, they were consistently questioned and challenged about their background.

In addition to the challenges participants faced, however, they also experienced celebrations of their identities. Regardless of what they had experienced growing up in school and in their families, almost all of the participants valued their heritage and culture and considered it a positive rather than a negative thing. Overall, participants believed that not only should their own personal identity be accepted and appreciated, but that the identities of all biracial people should be viewed the same way. As one women exclaimed at the end of her focus group: "I feel proud of being part of brave people....we are all a product of brave people!"

*Identification Choices and Social Contexts*

> "I don't want to be more one anything than anything else, I have like six different things that I am...two major ones and I don't feel like I have to pick one thing, 'cause I'm like Irish, English & Jamaican....& if I see the West Indian Day Parade, I'll go to it & I'll go to the St. Patrick's Day Parade too...I have all these things in me and I don't want to have to limit myself...I'd like to explore everything that I am...& [not to] have to stick to one thing."

Root (1996) proposed three different types of identification choices for biracial persons including those who choose to situate themselves with one group for an extended period of time, those who have strong bonds to two groups, and those who choose to claim a third alternative type of "biracial" identity. Evidence for all three of these proposed identification choices were found in the present study. Specifically, four of the women showed evidence of identifying primarily with one group, three of the women showed strong ties to two groups, and seven of the women tended to identify with a separate biracial group.

The women who tended to situate themselves with one group for an extended period of time did not necessarily deny their ties to another group, and they, for the most part, simply felt more comfortable with one group for a variety of reasons, which will be explained. One woman of Asian and Latino heritage stated that:

> "whenever somebody asks me what I am, I always say oh yeah I'm Korean & then I wait for them to ask further, are you full Korean,...and I'm like...I'm half Hispanic.....why do I mutter that....maybe it's out of guilt or like not being familiar with that background....I just wish I didn't miss out on like my other half."

This woman had not been exposed through family or friends to her Puerto Rican heritage, and she went on to say that "genetically, I'm [part] Puerto Rican, but culturally, I'm totally Korean." Similarly, another woman who had chosen to identify herself primarily with one group explained:

> "I usually just say I'm Hispanic, but I always add that my father is Italian....I always feel like I have to explain because I know there's something a little different about me.....I feel very uncomfortable when people ask me how [I] identify...because I always feel ...[that] I was raised Puerto Rican, but I can't deny that I have...other blood."

Both of these women identified themselves primarily with one group and felt most comfortable with that group. They sought out social contexts, in school and among friends that affirmed this identity, as one pointed out:

> "I'm so used to associating with Asian people that I just can't approach other people. My first instinct would be to make friends with an Asian person rather than someone who is not Asian....But I guess maybe it's out of fear or just not knowing how to get out of that mold."

While these two women did not have the exposure growing up to their "other half," another woman in the study did have exposure from both of her parents to both of their cultures. However, it seemed to be the social barriers, that will be discussed in the next section, rather than lack of knowledge that led her to primarily identify with one group. All three of these women, though, were beginning to think about branching out to another group. Specifically one explained:

> "I took Italian in school, because I never got to be part of that culture, because my father was not part of my family...in my house, we were Puerto Rican, so I always felt very at home in that Puerto Rican culture. I always considered myself a Puerto Rican."

This woman was planning to go to Italy at some point to learn more about her Italian heritage even though she currently felt more comfortable with one group over another. One of the other women, who had originally joined the Korean students' group at school, had also begun to reach out to her peers in her classes who were not Asian.

Another woman, who was also struggling with her identity, but currently identified with one group explained:

> "I just tell [people] I'm Russian & they just look at me....and then I tell them that my dad, he's not Russian...he's black...sometimes I don't tell people.... because my mom tells me not to....because they might look different at me... [she says to] tell them something else.....most of my friends don't know about my father's background."

This woman, unlike any of the other participants in the study, was the only one who actually lied about her background at times and appeared to be choosing one group over another. However even she showed some ambivalence and stated that:

> "Sometimes I feel like I should be friends with people from other races. But then I think that the friends I have now, they wouldn't want to be friends with [people from other groups]."

Rather than lack of exposure or knowledge about one group, this woman seemed to be responding to pressure from her mother and friends in choosing to identify with one particular group.

There were also a few women in the study who attempted to identify with two

groups, although most in the study felt this was a difficult identification choice to make, as it was often a problem to be accepted by both groups, and it could make a person feel split apart. Of those who did try to do so, one woman explained:

> "I am both, two races, so I would like to represent and be a part of both. It's really hard though."

One of the reasons that participants may have found this to be hard was that it requires a great deal of effort and energy to connect with members of two groups. To seek out people from a specific group, who may or may not be accepting of you, and to learn about a group's culture and traditions involves a great deal of dedication by a biracial person. For the participants who made this choice, though, they seemed to view it as worth the extra effort and felt fortunate to be part of two different groups. One woman who made this choice stated that when she identifies herself to others, she says the following:

> "I tell them I'm half Thai and half Puerto Rican. Me and my sister, we make this little name for ourselves. We call ourselves Thai Ricans."

She was a member of both the Asian and Latino student groups in high school and planned on visiting and learning about the culture in both Thailand and Puerto Rico. Keeping two identities appeared to involve a great deal of effort, and included her actively seeking friends from both groups.

In terms of keeping two identities, some of the women did practice "situational race," by emphasizing their commonalties with a particular group when they met them. For example, when one woman was asked if she identified differently with different groups

of people, such as saying she is Latina, when she meets others who are of a similar background, she responded:

> "sometimes I do, yeah it's kind of weird...it's like an emphasis, and I don't think I do it consciously....it's like that part of me, that's what we have in common so that's what we talk about. But if people come out and specifically ask me, I just say both."

Rather than having two separate groups of friends growing up, this woman also explained how different contexts in her life had allowed her to emphasize different aspects of her background.

> "When I was younger....I would hang out with more of the Italians, that's [who] was in the neighborhood. And then when I went home...my culture was more Colombian, so it was kind of weird. It was almost like you...kind of like switch ...[between the two groups].

For another woman in the study, switching between two groups translated into having friends from one group, and coworkers from another, allowing her to have her identification with a group become more salient depending on who she was with. She explained the advantages of being able to identify with two groups, by stating that:

> "I like that I can feel comfortable in both cultures...if I'm in a car of all white women, and we go into a neighborhood that's more minorities...I feel fine, I can get out of the car and talk to whoever I want...whereas, some people might be like, lock your doors...or vice versa, if I'm with a group of minorities I feel fine hanging out and talking with someone who is not a minority."

Many of the women in the study, however, chose to adopt an alternative

"biracial" type of identity, in which they saw themselves as something unique and different from being simply a member of two groups. Rather than trying to establish ties with two different groups, they searched for a third alternative type of group. One woman explained:

> "It's funny I was just thinking about this...I don't say I'm Puerto Rican and Trinidadian, I always answer that my mother is from Puerto Rico and my father is from Trinidad....I think...because it's like a combination of the two. And I don't want to say them separately, so I justify it by saying my mother, my father."

Several of the women in the study echoed this sentiment, as well as explaining how they came to this perception of themselves, one woman reflected as follows:

> "I guess my ...last year in high school, I stopped looking for something to identify with. I stopped looking to find out which one I was....you know trying to balance between the two and realize that what I am is what I am & that's what makes me me. The fact that I'm both and I don't have to choose."

The women who adopted this stance also surrounded themselves with others who shared their perspectives. Two women explained:

> "Since I came to [college], I have Chinese friends....Ecuadorian, Salvadorian, Dominican, Colombian, Italian, all different nationalities.....like the U.N."

> "I'm in ...a coed fraternity, and we're a multicultural, multiracial group. But... it's really funny because I've had talks with them about [being biracial]....and they're pretty open about it."

While some of the women sought out environments where they would be accepted and not be categorized, others created their own diverse environments. One woman, along

with another biracial student, coordinated the UNITY club, which she described.

> "The mentality is basically the one that we abide by ourselves, that there are dividers, there are borders, but we want to eradicate them....kind of make unity...be the force that blends [all groups] together...to make one big coalition."

This woman had, in essence, created a social context in which her identity would be reaffirmed and accepted. She also said that she felt comforted by the presence of other biracial people and would often seek them out.

The women in the study who chose to adopt a "biracial" identity also appeared to feel particularly strongly about their identity choice as opposed to some of the other participants in the study who made different choices. One woman explained:

> "I don't want to be more one anything than anything else, I have like six different things that I am...two major ones and I don't feel like I have to pick one thing, 'cause I'm like Irish, English & Jamaican....& if I see the West Indian Day Parade, I'll go to it & I'll go to the St. Patrick's Day Parade too...I have all these things in me and I don't want to have to limit myself...I'd like to explore everything that I am...& [not to] have to stick to one thing."

This woman consistently challenged societal norms which tried to classify and categorize her and felt that she should be viewed and accepted for all of her background. Like some of the other women in the study who also took this position, her views are the most similar to those participating in what has been called the "mixed-race" movement that is occurring on college campuses across the country. The underlying belief that appears to be part of the movement is that all biracial persons should identify this way, and that

seemed to be the feeling of a number of the participants as well, which will be discussed in a later section on mentoring.

Root (1996) conceptualized identity in much broader fluid terms, than those who proposed stage models for identity development in biracial individuals (Poston, 1990; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). She proposed that biracial persons could continually shift how they identified themselves. The participants in the present study appeared to demonstrate this, as some of those who identified primarily with one group seemed as though they could shift to identifying with two groups or with a separate biracial group in the future. Additionally, those who identified with two groups were constantly shifting their identifications and also talked as though they could, at some point, identify with a separate biracial group too. Identification, for the majority of the participants in the study, appeared to be continually evolving process.

In addition to differences in identification choices, the participants in the present study also expressed differences in their conceptions of the meaning of race. Those who chose to adopt a "biracial" identity rejected societal norms and definitions of race as a discrete category. In contrast, those who chose to identify with one or two groups appeared to accept these norms to some extent, in the sense that they chose to affiliate with existing groups rather than to create a separate group that challenged societal views. However, other factors besides identification choices may have influenced these choices, as will be discussed in a later section.

The present study also brought to light some of the issues related to social contexts. As was originally proposed, it is not the context per se that is always important, but rather how the person perceives the context through their own personal lens that

matters. For instance, a biracial person who identifies primarily with one group may feel much more comfortable in a segregated environment comprised of the group that the person affiliates with than a biracial person who adopts a "biracial" identification. All of the participants in the study attended the same college that was located in a diverse integrated environment. But, the participants' perceptions and choices in that context varied a great deal. Previous researchers (Hall, 1992; Funderburg, 1994) have suggested that biracial individuals may prefer an integrated environment, and while this may be true, one needs to consider the person's identification choice and the structure of the social context to understand how it may be perceived.

*Social Barriers*

> "I think that [speaking Spanish] is...more of an issue than anything....Because that's the only thing that [Latino people] have. ...If you come [to the U.S.], ...the only thing you have is the culture and the language. And even the culture here ...is not like it is if you grew up in the island....so you try to hold onto something and it's like an insult if you don't speak the language. It's like you are trying to deny who you are....like you're trying to become mainstream."

All of the women in the study, regardless of their identification choices, showed some evidence of constructing and seeking out social contexts that affirmed their identity rather than challenged it. However, it is important to note that, while identification choices played a part in participants' construction and choices of social contexts, it was definitely not the only factor. For often there were particular barriers to the social contexts in which the women could participate. Specifically, their knowledge of the language of some cultures, as well as aspects of their physical characteristics, often strictly

limited their acceptance into certain groups. This issue had not been considered prior to the focus groups and interviews, yet due to the fact that it was of such great importance to participants, it quickly became a major theme in the study.

Close to two thirds of the participants in the study had a parent of Latino heritage. In particular, a number of the women had a parent who was Puerto Rican. Due to this fact, knowledge of Spanish turned out to be a sort of litmus test for acceptance into this community. One woman, who did not speak Spanish, described her experience:

> "Let's say I'm talking to a group of Hispanic people....[when] I give them my [first] name,...they expect me to speak Spanish.....and then when I don't speak Spanish fluently ...they are sort of like taken aback...if you don't speak Spanish.. you can't get close to a lot of Hispanic people."

Like other women in the study, this woman found it difficult to be accepted in the Latino community and to make friends in this group, due to the fact that she had not been raised to speak Spanish. One woman commented on one of the possible reasons for others' negative reaction to those who don't speak Spanish.

> "I think that [speaking Spanish] is...more of an issue than anything....Because that's the only thing that [Latino people] have. ...If you come [to the U.S.], ...the only thing you have is the culture and the language. And even the culture here ...is not like it is if you grew up in the island....so you try to hold onto something and it's like an insult if you don't speak the language. It's like you are trying to deny who you are....like you're trying to become mainstream."

This reaction, which other participants experienced, was particularly troubling to them because of the fact that they did not feel they were denying their identity or culture. When

asked about the link between the language and the culture, responses differed. Some felt that there was more to culture than language.

> "I mean language is a big part of culture...but there are other things that go along with it..."
>
> "Language is just the way you speak, it's not folklore, dance, food and stuff like that."

However, the two women who had been raised bilingual, felt that language and culture were closely inter-linked.

> "In Latino culture.....language is something that they pride themselves in...and it's almost like some people are looked down upon....[if] they don't speak Spanish.....like a lot of people say to my mom, it's good that you taught them to speak Spanish. And I think it is an important part of the culture and I'm glad I do. But I think a lot of emphasis is placed on it sometimes. And some people, ...feel bad if they haven't learned it."

While close to half of the women in the study, who had not learned Spanish as children, did study it in school, they simply felt that it was not the same. They could understand the language, but often had a great deal of difficulty speaking it and felt bad that they did not know the language. They felt deprived, like they were letting others down, and were often angry at parents for not teaching them. One of the women who did learn as a child commented that:

> "when I see people who are Hispanic...and they don't speak Spanish...I'm always like....that's a pity....I think [they] have a responsibility to learn more about [their] culture."

This particular perspective seemed to be in opposition to what other participants felt, who did not speak Spanish fluently. For while they may have wished they did, they did not

feel that they were any "less Latino" because of the fact that they didn't.

One of the reasons that many of the participants did not speak Spanish is because their parents did not want to be disrespectful to their spouses. One woman explained:

> "Our mother didn't speak Spanish, so was it only going to be between the kids and [our dad]? And since his family was not here, there's really no excuse for us to have a secret language and my mother to not be involved."

The way in which parents taught their children about their culture was discussed in an earlier section. Yet, in this case, a parent's decision about teaching their children Spanish seemed to be a determining factor in their later acceptance into the Latino community. Although, it was not always the parents who made this decision. One woman's mother attempted to teach her Spanish as a little girl and this was her reaction:

> "I didn't want to because of my father, I was his little girl. And I wanted to speak with....the West Indian accent, and I wanted to be just like him and I thought Spanish would destroy that identity. So I told my mom not to [teach] me. And now it's like I'm struggling to learn the language and teach myself."

Even if participants' parents had attempted to teach them Spanish, their children may have resisted, or the parent may have risked the child feeling alienated from her other identity.

For other women in the study, who had a parent who was black, their hair rather than their knowledge of a language, proved to be the biggest social barrier they encountered. Women of both African American and West Indian descent addressed this issue. One woman explained:

> "A lot of....black women have a hard time with me because of the hair. This is an experience that I can't share....I don't have African structured hair, so I don't know that whole experience that black women go through. So I couldn't fit in, I could only go up to a point....It hurt because [I] couldn't go all the way in...and the hair experience for black women is a total unifying experience."

This experience saddened women in the study who wanted to bond with other black women, but found that it was often difficult to do so. One of the women explained why she thought others had such strong reactions to her hair:

> "I don't know if you know a lot about the African American culture, but hair is a very big thing. And to see a woman who identifies as being black and seeing her have *that hair*, it creates such jealousy and hostility and anger."

Participants talked about what they perceived as jealousy from other women, about their hair texture, which they believed was due in part to competition for black men. In other words, they felt that other women believed that black men would prefer them because of their hair texture. However, this became such an issue for some participants that they attempted to change their hair. Two women described their experiences.

> "I had cut all my hair off because the tension was lower, the harassment, the aggravation was just much much lower. Nobody bothered [me] because I have brown skin, I'm supposed to have this short hair. When it [became] long, then people start looking....hair is a big deal."

> "I went through a whole thing where I would put chemicals in it to try to straighten it so I could look more like a Latina, you know be accepted by them ....but then I decided no I want to go natural so that the African American community would see....look at my roots they really are like yours you know ..It was just hard. Now I basically accept the way my hair is & I just answer the questions, yes it's real, yes it's mine, yes the color is real."

One of the reasons that participants focused on this issue is that they were often confronted with it on a daily basis. One woman described her experience:

> "Some [people] I just have to stay away from because they're just persistent on it. Some of them will come up and put their hands in [my hair] just to make sure."

This proved to be a no-win situation for participants, like the women who did not speak Spanish, because while they wanted to be accepted into certain communities, they often encountered difficulties which forced them to withdraw. While all of the women were quick to point out that not everyone in a particular group demonstrated these behaviors and that they had friends who did not, it was a significant factor in their choices about social contexts. As one woman explained:

> "I'm [drawn] to people who are also ostracized or the other. So it kind of becomes a bonding...somewhere along the line they just didn't feel like they could be with the mainstream."

Participants search for similar others was a common theme that will be discussed in the section on mentoring. However, for women of black and Latino heritage, hair and knowledge of Spanish were the social barriers which prevented them, at times, from participating in certain social contexts. There may have been a similar social barrier for women of Asian heritage, but it did not surface in the present study. All of the women of Asian heritage in the study mentioned religion, but it seemed to be more of an issue within their own families rather than with friends and peers.

The presence of social barriers in a social context is a topic that requires further investigation. For while a biracial person's identification choice may influence his or her

choices and construction of a social context, social barriers may impact that process as well as societal definitions of "race". It is important to learn more about why social barriers are present in certain communities and to understand how biracial people deal with them. Are there certain "markers" that ensure acceptance into particular groups? Historically, race has been defined in terms of physical characteristics, such as skin color, and more recently, it has been viewed as a social construction. But future researchers may want to consider how members of a particular racial group view themselves, in terms of specific types of "group characteristics" such as knowledge of a particular language. Studying social barriers may lead to greater insight into understanding biracial person's choices as well as their behavior in social contexts.

Social barriers also represent a departure from the main focus of the present study, how biracial women perceive themselves, to how others identify them. Social psychologists have studied the concepts of ingroups and outgroups, the former being comprised of those who are similar to one's own group and the latter including those who are dissimilar from one's group, and biracial people often challenge those boundaries, (in particular, biracial people who identify with an alternative "biracial group"). Constructing social barriers may be a way for people to maintain their conceptions of who is in their ingroup and outgroup. It is, therefore, important to examine how those who strongly identify with a particular group react to a biracial person who has only one parent from that group. The creation of a social barrier may be a way for a person who strongly identifies with a group to cope with any threat that the person feels a biracial individual poses to that group. Future research is needed to conceptualize this possibility, as well as to examine how biracial people cope with the fact that their own

personal perceptions of themselves may contradict how others perceive them. Research on people with concealable identities (Frable, 1993) suggests that it can have both positive (feeling unique) and negative (feeling marginalized) consequences.

It is also important to point out that while social barriers was not the primary focus of the present study, it may be that the types of questions posed to participants encouraged them to focus on this particular topic. They were asked not only about how they identified themselves to others, but also how they felt others identified them. This line of questioning may have led participants to focus on any possible discrepancies that existed due to social barriers. Further research is needed to examine perceptions of biracial persons on this issue.

*Mentoring*

> "I never really encounter many biracial [people], especially women...so it was good to finally meet somebody.....we came from different backgrounds, ....but we still related in the same way about the same cultural issues."

While participants discussed a number of issues in their focus groups, such as their experiences in high school and college, one of the reasons for having participants engage in these groups was to examine the interactions between participants. One of the themes that emerged from these interactions, that was not considered prior to the focus groups, was the issue of mentoring among biracial individuals. In other words, how do biracial people attempt to help and guide other biracial persons? In one of the focus groups, one of the participants talked about how difficult it was for her to make friends outside a

particular racial group. When she said this, another participant strongly urged her to try, she told her:

> "you gotta think that not every person is going to judge you by your skin color or your background or anything like that....'cause that's the same way I felt in high school 'cause I had pressure to go make friends with the black people.....but I would go talk to them, and I didn't like the way they acted.....the way they treated me.....and it was like, you know what, I'm just going to approach everybody and anybody and if you want to be friends, good and if you don't...oh well.....Now I can go just about anywhere and be friends with just about anyone."

In addition to telling her to expand her social circle, she also encouraged the other participant to learn more about her heritage through classes and her family. The interaction was as follows:

> "You've gotta go out and read.....you know go talk to your dad."
>
> "Yeah."
>
> "That would be a really important thing for you to do. 'Cause that would probably make you feel a lot more comfortable with who you are. Talking to your family....[to] know where you come from and who you are."

The interaction appeared to have an effect on both participants. The participant who was having a hard time expanding her social circle, said that she thought about taking Spanish, studying abroad, and making friends with people from other groups after participating in the focus group. The woman who was playing the role of advisor seemed to be influenced as well, as she said that she felt saddened by the fact that this woman felt she had to limit herself to "one thing." While she did point out that she thought a biracial person could do that if he or she chose to, she felt that one should have the opportunity to

make friends and learn about other groups if she wanted to.

Other participants also took on the role of mentor in the focus groups. One woman suggested that the readings she had done were very helpful to her, and she thought they might be useful for others. She explained that:

> "what was really important and helpful to me and healing...[was to] do a lot of reading...you know, outside the norm....A lot of black women writers write about mixed race people....and it can really help....so that you can understand what it's been for you.....when I started reading a lot of books and getting a lot of truth about what really went on historically and politically, it helped to start the healing and....to feel like, I can be here....right."

Almost all of the women who participated in the study had struggled with their identity at some point, and this struggle seemed to create a common bond. The participants seemed to be interested in either mentoring or advising other biracial persons who were struggling, or they seemed to be looking for people with whom they could discuss the issues that they were struggling with.

The process of mentoring occurred between siblings and in families as well, as previously explained. One woman, who was active in a coed diverse fraternity, explained that it was her sister who introduced her to this group where she felt most comfortable. Other women in the study talked about discussing common experiences with their siblings and learning from their experiences. One woman talked about how she hoped to mentor her cousin's biracial daughter. She said the following:

> "I just want to hang out with her daughter to be like a positive role model. Like just ask her, how do you feel....what do kids say to you? ....just to say like the same thing happened to me....I would tell my cousin to pay attention to the things her children are doing."

The need to make sure that the next generation of biracial individuals had mentors was prevalent among many of the participants, as they appeared to feel that this was something they lacked growing up.

The opportunity to mentor and be mentored by other biracial people was one of the reasons why most of the women in the study were very positive about their focus group experiences. The majority of the women had had little or no interaction with other biracial persons up until their participation in the study and found it to be very enlightening. Several of them discussed the experience in their personal interviews.

> "I never really encounter many biracial [people], especially women...so it was good to finally meet somebody.....we came from different backgrounds, ....but we still related in the same way about the same cultural issues."

> "I actually enjoyed [the focus group] a lot....it was like comforting. And there was actually someone in the group who was Italian and Puerto Rican, which I think in my whole life, I've met like one other person who was Italian and Puerto Rican...and she was saying the same things [as me].....so that was really sort of weird."

> "I felt really exhilarated.....what was shocking to me was that I was hearing people talk about feelings that they had...that I've had....and that felt really good. The level of sensitivity was something that impressed me....'cause you know ...this whole idea of racial purity and knowing who you are and all that stuff, and here's women who are obviously a mixture of two who have real sensitive loving hearts. ....I felt very connected and ...included, which was very important.....it's the kind of thing where [with certain experiences you wonder] am I making this up, am I making too much of this, is it real?...And I found out it was real."

This feeling of connectedness to other participants was present in all of the focus groups, and the majority of participants said that they would "check out" a biracial students' group

at the college if one existed. When they were asked if they would join such a group, participants in one of the focus groups said the following:

> "I would join it just to be supportive to any other person. So they wouldn't feel pressured from anyone."
>
> "I would join just to be able to discuss what other issues people had encountered, how you deal with them."
>
> "If we had a discussion like this in the club [I would join]."
>
> "You could learn more about yourself."

Whether it was the need to be mentored or to mentor, most participants reacted positively about the idea of such a group, and some wished that they had had such a group when they attended high school. One woman, who had never thought about attending such a group before, much to her sister's dismay, discussed how participating in the focus group had made her rethink her point of view.

> "I started to think that it might be nice to talk to other people, which I never thought about before, who come from similar backgrounds like myself...do others share the things I've always kept secret to myself....it would be nice to just see how they feel.....[my sister] has always been wanting to talk about it, and I never really did. I guess that's the way I've felt most of my life."

It may have been the sense of isolation that most participants seemed to experience at some point in their lives that led them to appreciate the feeling of connection or process of mentoring that occurred in the focus group. Some had experienced it with their siblings while others had not, yet whatever the reason was, all participants were clearly impacted by their participation in the focus groups in some way.

Educators, parents and counselors who work with biracial individuals need to consider the impact of mentoring on this population. Participants in the present study, both directly and indirectly, stressed its importance through their comments about the focus groups. Those who are part of the current mixed-race movement might also consider mentoring an issue that they could promote. The web sites that are currently in existence, run by biracial and multiracial student groups, could serve as a vehicle for mentoring for biracial people who do not have access to anyone in their current environment. Whether it is in person or over the Internet, mentoring among biracial individuals required further investigation.

*Other Themes: Gender, the Census and the Media*

> "There's always the question of choose one...like when I was in elementary school ....whatever your father was, that was what you were, so they would make you check that....[in college], they send out a form.....it doesn't say what are you..... [but] they make you check off one....and we're not on there."

There were several other issues that were also discussed by participants in the focus groups they participated in. One of these issues was gender, specifically in terms of how the participants believed that men perceived them as biracial women. In two of the focus groups, participants talked about their perceptions of how men perceived them. The two groups had very different viewpoints, with one group's point of view sharply contrasting the other.

In the first group, four women discussed the ways in which they believed some men perceived them:

"I think with women, there's this *exotic other* that men are attracted to."

"Yeah, let's go further and say *sex slave*."

"Yeah."

"Because the whole biracial, mixed, mulatto conjures up a lot of promiscuous sexual images of the incredibly beautiful available...and you know this object."

"Yeah, subservient, it's always subservient things."

"Subservient, confused, tragic...that whole myth.....so that's definitely associated with women."

"And skin color. They always approach me and say, oh, you have exotic skin color, what is exotic? What does exotic skin color mean?"

"I don't like the word exotic, I'm not a fruit."

"Exotic is for women too, they wouldn't say that to a man."

The women in this group brought up several issues: the issue of being seen as an object, the myth of being viewed as "confused" and "sexually available", and the problems with being defined by terms like "exotic." The participants in this group felt that these issues were unique to them as biracial women and did not feel that biracial men received the same treatment. They felt that terms like "exotic" were limiting and wanted to be seen as human beings, not as some "object" to be conquered by men.

The views of the women in that group were quite different from those in another focus group, though, who didn't mind when others perceived them as "exotic". Two women discussed the issue:

> "I feel like socially, like, guys are really attracted to [biracial women]....it's like exotic, they find it exotic. It's like comparing a rose to a....."
>
> "An exotic flower."
>
> "Yeah, it's like a wild flower. It's like something new and something creative. Yeah, I get like, oh, I can see the Italian in you, or I can see the Puerto Rican in you. And it's like something interesting, something they want to get to know."
>
> "Especially since they are attracted to the visual right away, it's like they see something."
>
> "It's not typical. [When guys approach me that way], I like it [laughs] I use it to my advantage."

The women in this group had a much more positive view of how men perceived them and didn't seem to take offense to it or find it limiting. In fact, one of the woman seemed to see it as an advantage, something that made her special and different from other women. While she did not appear to have encountered men who perceived her as "confused" or as a "sex slave," she did not see a problem with the term "exotic" and even used it herself. The term seemed to have different connotations for the women in the two groups, with some of the women seeing it as a compliment, and others viewing it as insulting and degrading.

Previous researchers (Kerwin et al. 1993) have suggested that there may be gender differences in biracial persons' experiences. While this was not the central focus of the present study, which concentrated on biracial women's experiences, participants did touch on some of the ways in which they felt their lives differed from biracial men. Some felt that they were more likely to be objectified, and it is important for future work to consider how biracial women deal with this type of objectification when it occurs. Future research is also needed to compare more specifically how biracial women's

experiences are similar and different from those of biracial men.

While participants showed some disagreement about the role of their gender, there was more consensus on the issue of the census among participants in the three focus groups. All of them agreed, regardless of their identity choices, that one should have the option to check more than one category or to check "other" on forms like the census. Three of the women in one of the focus groups discussed their views about the current census debate:

> "It makes me feel like an alien, like I'm other...I'm not human. I check both."
>
> "I think we should be able to just check whatever....not just one."
>
> "I'm an anthropology major, and we discuss this in a lot of our classes....It's like race does not exist, define race.....I feel like [the categories] are very arbitrary."
>
> "I'm a little offended when people say it doesn't matter...then why are you asking ...it's important, it matters, only because people make it matter."

Two of the women in a different focus group also took issue with the census and didn't feel that they should have to choose one category. They discussed their views:

> "I usually just put other and don't explain...let them guess. I don't like that at all, especially since the fact that supposedly, from what I've heard, race is defined by color."
>
> "There's always the question of choose one...like when I was in elementary school ....whatever your father was, that was what you were, so they would make you check that....[in college], they send out a form.....it doesn't say what are you..... [but] they make you check off one....and we're not on there."

In addition to believing that they should not be forced to choose one category, the

participants also seemed to challenge the ideology underlying forms like the census. For example, they felt that the categories were decided arbitrarily and questioned what the concept of race meant. One woman suggested that it was socially constructed when she explained that "it matters, because people make it matter." The women in the study seemed to agree with the agenda of those in the "mixed-race" movement, who feel that the census must be changed to be more inclusive of biracial individuals.

The women who participated in the study also weighed in on how they felt about the media's portrayal of biracial individuals. The overall opinion seemed to be that the media was not doing a good job for a variety of reasons. Four women from different focus groups, expressed their views:

> "The media doesn't do a great job...What always annoys me is, you know, you see all those commercials with a black guy and a black girl, white guy with a white girl....you never ever see a black guy with a white girl, a white guy with a black girl in the commercials.....they don't do a really great job....they're scared."
>
> "I was very upset when the media asked Tiger Woods to choose, like to not acknowledge his mother who had raised him....he was like supposed to say I'm black, I'm not, you know Asian."
>
> "I think it's good to have somebody to identify to, but I think the media stresses that fact too much. Like, Tiger Woods was stressed so much as being biracial and not enough as being who he was and being, you know, a great golf player."
>
> "I know we are talking about these people in context....but even when you mention these names, that's automatically what my mind goes to, [that they are biracial] like Mariah Carey, black and white, okay.....and it's the media that's doing it....they are forcing the fact that they are biracial....I don't know what the benefit is."

Participants were critical of the media on three issues: they felt they didn't have enough interracial couples and biracial children, they thought that the media was trying to put

people like Tiger Woods into a category, and they believed that the media stressed the fact that someone was biracial too much. In general, the consensus was that there was a great deal of room for improvement in the media. Participants did not have good things to say about the media, which perhaps could make it an important issue for the movement of biracial persons across the country to consider.

## General Discussion

### *Methodology, Themes and Future Research*

The present study used multiple methodologies to explore the topic of identity and social context among biracial college women. Each of the methodologies complemented the others and brought to light specific themes. The focus groups, for example, were particularly important in the present study, due to the fact that they represented a unique type of social context for the participants, one that included only biracial women. It was within this context that the themes of educational experiences and mentoring were brought to the surface, as they appeared to have universal relevance for the participants. Being part of the focus groups also proved to be an added advantage for the women who participated in the study, as it gave them a sense of belonging that they often do not feel in many social contexts.

Future researchers may want to consider using focus groups when studying topics like biracial identity or other topics that have not been widely examined. This particular method enables one to uncover themes that had not been previously considered and gives more power to the participants to articulate what the important themes are from their

perspective. Focus groups also allow researchers to examine the dialogue that occurs between participants, which can bring to light participants' different viewpoints.

In the present study, it was actually in the participants' interviews that conflicting views were most likely to appear. Participants seemed to be less likely to disagree openly with others in the focus groups than they were in their personal interviews. For example, participants had different opinions about the relationship of language and culture in the Latino community, but most of the discussions about social barriers came up in the interviews rather than the focus groups. This could be due to the fact that participants had had some time to think about the different topics that were discussed and had an opportunity to think about and articulate their own point of view. But it also seemed important that the interview did come after the focus groups, as this order gave participants the chance to talk about and evaluate this particular social context and the issues that came up in it. Participants seemed to feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics in their personal interviews than in the focus groups or their narratives.

In their narratives, participants wrote about a number of experiences in which others challenged and/or celebrated their identity. The narratives, therefore, revealed a great deal about others' perceptions of participants, as opposed to their perceptions of themselves. Just as participants' discussion of social barriers in their interviews demonstrated, the information brought forth in the narratives showed more about society than about the participants. Each of the methodologies used in the present study brought to light a particular theme, even though some themes, such as identity, were present throughout all the methods. The results of the present study provide support for the argument that researchers should use a variety of complementary methods in their work.

While the use of multiple methods represents one of the strengths of the present study, another strength of the study was the way in which it expanded on the existing literature on biracial identity. Much of the existing research on this topic focuses on participants' choices on a checklist (Cauce et al., 1992; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996) or on proposing stage theories of biracial persons' identity development (Poston, 1990; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). The present study provides support for Root's (1996) model, in that it demonstrates that the identification process among biracial persons occurs in much broader fluid terms. Identity is not a constant state that, once achieved, will not fluctuate. Additionally, biracial individuals may show a great deal of variation in the identification choices that they make. One choice is not necessarily better than the other, they are simply different choices based on a variety of factors.

The present study also extends the current literature by shifting the focus to the relationship of identity to social context. Rather than focusing solely on the individual, the results of the study show the importance of considering social context when examining biracial identity. Social context is shown to be more than a literal concept, by incorporating social barriers and mentoring along with more traditional notions of context, such as schools and neighborhoods. Future researchers may want to consider context in much broader situational terms rather than simply looking at physical contexts.

Future researchers also may wish to consider some of the other themes that were revealed in the present study related to social context and biracial identity. Previous researchers (Kerwin et al., 1993; McRoy & Hall, 1996) have considered the impact of parents on biracial children's identification choices, however they have not considered the impact of siblings. The present study provides strong evidence that siblings are a powerful

force in the identification process of biracial persons, whether it is through the mentoring process or through modeling of different identification choices. Future researchers' consideration of family influences on identity must include siblings as well as parents.

In addition to siblings, future researchers also might consider social barriers in their examination of biracial persons' identification choices. In the past, researchers have focused on physical appearance as a possible factor in identification choice. The present study suggests that appearance may not be a factor in determining a biracial person's identification choice, but rather part of a social barrier that influences others' categorization of biracial individuals. Participants discussed how they were challenged about their background because of their appearance or more specifically, a physical characteristic they did or did not possess, such as the texture of their hair. These challenges angered and troubled participants, regardless of their identification choice, but they did not appear to influence how participants felt about themselves.

Earlier research has also focused a great deal on the psychosocial adjustment of biracial individuals, however the present study suggests that members of the biracial population are, in fact, quite resilient. Faced with daily challenges to their background, social barriers, and a lack of peer groups in some cases, participants showed themselves to be quite strong and powerful women. Many of them challenged societal norms and constructed their own identities and social groups. Additionally, they showed a willingness to help others cope with the obstacles they faced growing up. Many of the participants sounded like potential members of the mixed-race movement, demonstrating both their strength and their resiliency.

Future researchers also may address a number of other themes that were uncovered in the present study. One of the themes that came up in the study, was the issue of gender differences among biracial individuals. All of the participants in the study were women, and it would be interesting to examine if biracial college men had similar experiences to them. Do the men make the same types of identity choices and do they face the same types of social barriers and challenges to their identity that the women in the present study did? Additionally, what are the main differences in their experiences as compared to biracial women?

One of the limitations of the present study is that it focused on undergraduate biracial women. Participants talked about their experiences in high school and as children, but it is important to talk to young women and girls at different ages to examine their experiences as they occur. The women in the study had a number of different recommendations for how to improve biracial students' experiences in high school, yet how would high school students react to these suggestions or their implementation? What would educators working with biracial students think? Future research with biracial people of all ages is needed to investigate these questions.

Finally, another limitation of the present study that has implications for future research is the fact that the study focused on biracial students attending school in a diverse urban multiracial context. Even within this type of context, participants faced a number of social barriers and challenges to their identity. One can only imagine what types of challenges students in a more segregated context would face. Are there differences in the identity choices made by and available to biracial students in college in a non-diverse environment as compared to those in a more integrated setting? Do biracial students who

live in a more segregated setting feel forced to choose affiliation with one group over another, as some of the participants in the present study felt they did in high school? What is the impact of living in an urban versus a suburban versus a rural environment? These are just some of the issues that future researchers need to investigate to understand biracial identity and social context and the many themes that are related to it. The present study shed some light on some of these issues, but it also served to highlight a number of different questions that require further examination.

More specifically, one of the main issues that was revealed in the present study was the question of how people perceive biracial individuals. While the focus of the study was on how participants viewed themselves, they talked a great deal about their experiences with others and their perceptions of these encounters. But, what are the perceptions of those who challenge or do not accept biracial people? Why do people often ask "what are you"? And why do certain people construct social barriers to membership in their community? As the number of biracial and multiracial people continues to increase in the United States, these are questions that need to be addressed. For in order to understand social context, one needs to focus not only on a person's perception of the context, but also on the people within that larger context.

Future research is needed to examine perceptions of biracial individuals in a wider social context. For example, how do individuals' views about interracial relationships impact their attitudes toward biracial persons? How do perceptions differ in communities where there are a large number of biracial and multiracial individuals versus ones where there is a small number? What happens when the demographics in a particular community begin to change? Do attitudes toward biracial persons change along with them? These

are just a few of the questions that future work may address. For as the population of biracial people continues to grow, educators, counselors, and parents will look toward researchers to help them understand what is happening in the larger social context, as well as among the group of biracial individuals they are interested in helping.

# Appendix A

Focus Groups:

Part I: Narratives

Participants will be asked to write two short narratives. For the first narrative, they will be asked to write about a situation in which they felt very uncomfortable, and for the second narrative, they will be asked to write about a situation in which they felt very comfortable. For both narratives, participants will be asked to describe the situations and to discuss their feelings about it. Participants will be questioned about these narratives in their personal interviews.

Part II: Focus Group Activities

1. Participants will be asked to write down on an index card the "top 10 things" that they hate to hear about being biracial. The participants will then discuss their responses with the group.

2. Participants will be asked to write down the "top 10 things" that they love about being biracial and then discuss their responses with the group.

3. Participants will also be asked to state what advice they would give to incoming biracial college freshmen at their school.

4. Participants will be asked about their views of the current effort to include a "biracial category" on U.S. Government Census forms.

5. Participants will be questioned about some of the famous biracial persons in the entertainment industry and asked to comment on the media's portrayal of biracial people.

6. Participants will be asked to write down and comment about the "top 3 things" they would like to ask a biracial person.

7. Participants will be asked to discuss situations in which others did not know about their background. When do they choose to reveal their identity and when do they choose not to?

8. Participants will be asked about their siblings and how they identify themselves.

9. Participants will be asked if they would consider joining a biracial students' group at their school, why or why not?

Appendix B

***Please complete the following items:***

Age: _____

Year in school: _____

Mother's ethnic/racial group: _____

Father's ethnic/racial group: _____

Mother's highest educational degree & occupation: _____

Father's highest educational degree & occupation: _____

Birthplace: _____

Your ethnic/racial group: _____

Interview Questions:

1. How did you feel about the focus group you participated in? Were there times when you felt comfortable or uncomfortable?

2. I would now like to ask you about the short narratives you wrote. (Participants will be asked questions specific to their stories.)

3. In general, how do you identify yourself to others? Do you identify yourself differently with different groups of people? If yes, how so? Are there situations when you chose to reveal your background and those when you did not?

4. Can you tell me about an experience when others questioned you about your background? If yes, tell me about it.

   Can you think of instances in which others made discriminating comments to you about your background? If yes, tell me about it.

5. At what point in your life did you first realize you were biracial?

6. At this point, I would like to ask you several questions about the important people in your life. I would like to start by asking you about your friends.

   Do you generally affiliate with one particular group of friends or do you have different groups of friends?

   Are the majority of your friends from a particular ethnic group?

   Do you ever feel pressured to affiliate with a particular groups of friends over another?

   How do you think your friends identify you?

   How do you wish they would identify you?

7. How about your peers at school? Did you ever feel that you were being forced to choose a position in a classroom debate here?

8. If you are currently working, tell me about your coworkers.

9. I would now like to ask you a few questions about your family. Specifically, did your parents ever talk to you about being biracial? If yes, what did they tell you?

   How do you think they may have influenced your identity?

   If you have siblings, how do they identify themselves?

# Appendix C

Coding Categories:

1. Identity choices - based on Root's (1996) model

    a) Identify with one group
    b) Identify with two groups
    c) Identify with a separate "biracial" group

2. Social barriers - theme emerged from the data in interviews and focus groups

    a) knowledge of Spanish - for participants with a Latino parent
    b) texture of hair - for participants with an African/American or West Indian parent

3. Family - based partially on Kerwin et al. (1993)

    a) parents' discussion of participants' background/how to cope with discrimination
    b) siblings' discussion of issues related to participants' identity
    c) children's questions about mothers' background

4. High school vs. college education - theme emerged from the data in focus groups

    a) high school social experiences with peers/classroom experiences
    b) college social experiences/classroom experiences

5. Mentoring - theme emerged from the data in interviews

    a) mentoring experiences in the past
    b) desire to be a mentor in the future
    c) focus group experiences

6. The media & the census (Root, 1996) & gender (Kerwin et al., 1993)

    a) views about the media's portrayal of biracial persons
    b) views about the current census debate
    c) views about gender differences/issues

7. Challenges & celebrations of identity - theme emerged from the data in narratives

    a) situations where participants were questioned/challenged about their identity
    b) situations where others celebrated participants' identity

# Appendix D

Table 1

Description of Participants' Racial Backgrounds

| Background | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Black/White | 3 |
| Latino/White | 4 |
| Latino/Asian | 2 |
| Black/Latino | 3 |
| Asian/White | 1 |
| Black/Native American | 1 |

# Appendix E

Table 2

Description of Participants' Class Standing

| Class Standing at the College | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Freshman | 4 |
| Sophomore | 2 |
| Junior | 3 |
| Senior | 5 |

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