

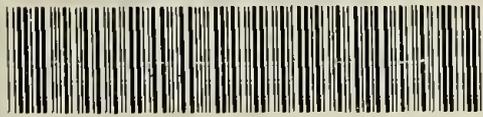


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## In their own words : mixed-heritage children in the United States.

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS: MIXED-HERITAGE CHILDREN  
IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Presented

by

DEBRA ROSS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 1995

School of Education

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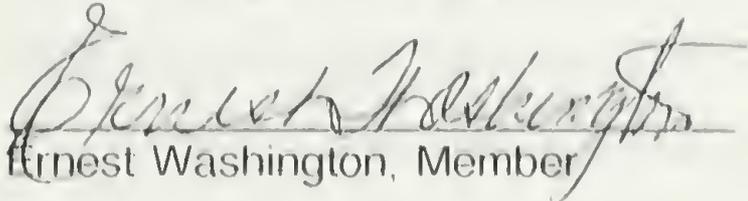
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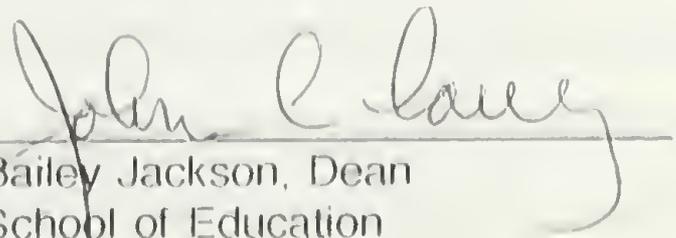
J. Kevin Nugent, Member



Ernest Washington, Member



Margaret Stephenson, Member



Bailey Jackson, Dean  
School of Education

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who helped make this such a fantastic journey. At the heart of this dissertation are the twelve participants who shared their stories with me. I thank them for their openness, and their parents for giving them permission to speak with me.

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## ABSTRACT

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: MIXED-HERITAGE CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 1995

DEBRA ROSS, B.S., S.U.N.Y. AT PLATTSBURGH

M.ED., HUNTER COLLEGE

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Brunilda De León

The United States is becoming an increasingly multiracial, multicultural and multilingual society. As social interactions among members of various ethnic groups have increased, so too have the number of mixed-heritage couples. Consequently, there are now many more children of mixed heritage in our country than ever before, and their number is likely to increase. These children have traditionally been viewed by the larger society, and presented in the social science literature, as disturbed, maladjusted or inherently pathological.

The purpose of this study was to explore from a phenomenological perspective mixed-heritage children's perceptions about themselves and their heritage. This study attempted to provide a better understanding of mixed-heritage children, by asking them directly about their perceptions and experiences. Using a case study qualitative method, data was gathered through in-depth interviews with twelve children of mixed heritage. A triangulation strategy was used for the data analysis in the search for patterns, categories and themes among participants' responses.

There were three major findings of this study. It was found that participants have positive perceptions of themselves and their mixed-heritage. It was found that participants feel that they are sometimes perceived by others in negative and stereotypical ways. It was also found that participants value the role of their family in coping with the larger society. In addition, it was found that participants have experienced racism to different degrees and that some of them have experienced extended family tension because of their parents' mixed-heritage marriage. Participants attributed several advantages to their mixed heritage, including an ability to see things from different perspectives, being open-minded to different people and situations, and being able to bridge cultures. Some of the participants identified religion and language as key values of their families. Recommendations for parents, teachers and mental health professionals were presented, in order to facilitate a better growing-up experience for children of mixed heritage and to foster delivery of more effective educational and psychological services.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview of the Topic

The United States is becoming an increasingly multiracial, multicultural and multilingual society. According to the 1990 Census, this country is undergoing radical demographic changes, with a clear trend toward its becoming a pluralistic society. It has been projected that by the year 2010, racial and ethnic minorities will become a numerical majority (Sue, 1991). As social interactions among members of various ethnic groups have increased, so too have the number of mixed-heritage couples (Alba & Golden, 1986; Lieberman & Waters, 1985). In addition, factors such as immigration and high birth and low mortality rates which have led to a growing population of people of color have, in turn, led to an increase in the number of intermarried couples (Gibbs, 1987).

This demographic dynamic and trend have resulted in a steady increase in the number of people of mixed heritage, a phenomenon described by Root (1992) as a "biracial baby boom." Yet despite the significant increase of this population, there are many myths and negative beliefs about children of mixed heritage. This demographic reality goes against the assumption, steeped in history and entrenched and fostered by our racist society, that racial "purity" is essential and that intermarriage is inherently wrong and harmful. The presence of racially-mixed people goes against this country's social order, which is based upon race, as well as diffusing boundaries between racial and ethnic groups

and challenging generally accepted notions about intergroup relations (Root, 1992).

The fields of education and mental health have not given sufficient attention to the impact of these dynamics on our life as a nation. This has been illustrated by the fact that educators and social scientists have given limited attention to children of mixed heritage. The little attention that has been given to this demographic phenomenon has been negatively reflected in the social science literature, essentially mirroring the negative societal beliefs and myths about this growing population. The existing scientific work in this area is primarily theoretical, and presents these children in a largely unfavorable light, describing them as marginal and destined for a life of misery. A close look at the main theoretical frame clearly indicates that the marginality theory (Stonequist, 1937, 1939, 1942) is one of the major conceptual frameworks that traditionally has been used to look at children of mixed heritage.

One of the major assumptions of the marginality theory is that mixed-heritage children are inherently deficient, and that it is not possible nor desirable to celebrate one's heritage. However, there is no empirical data to validate the theoretical assumption of this framework. In fact, a review of the empirical data on the topic clearly indicates a striking contrast to this negative view. Finding after finding strongly supports the idea that these children have good self-concepts and self-identity, and are just as or more adjusted than their single-heritage counterparts (Aellen & Lambert, 1969; Chang, 1974; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986; Stephan & Stephan, 1991).

Historically, any discussion of mixed-heritage children has begun with the "taboo" of intermarriage, which has been described in the social science literature as having negative effects on the children of such unions and making

them marginal or pathological (Gordon, 1964; Henriques, 1974; Ladner, 1977; Piskacek & Golub, 1973). Again, this is indicative of how our society has historically regarded such relationships, and is in keeping with the racist and prejudicial frameworks that are the very foundation of the writings in this area. Although there are no longer legal prohibitions to mixed-heritage marriages, racism is very much alive and continues to be a source of challenges to mixed-heritage children and their families. It is within this context of U.S. racism that a discussion of mixed-heritage children, and all that has been said and written about them, must be viewed. Consequently, the theoretical literature has traditionally presented a very bleak picture of mixed-heritage children, describing them as marginal and inevitably having to experience identity struggles and conflicting loyalties.

In response to this deficit perspective, literature that speaks of a different trend in the fields of education and mental health has also emerged. For example, recent authors (Gay, 1987; Ho, 1990) have written about the mixed-heritage experience from a positive perspective. Since the 1960s, with the advent of the Civil Rights' Movement, there have been significant changes in how these children were viewed and how they viewed themselves. Out of this perspective emerged a multicultural person, someone who acknowledged and celebrated all of his or her heritages. From this perspective, the focus shifted from abstract notions of intrapsychic conflict which children of mixed heritage experienced, to taking a closer look at the issues that mixed-heritage children had to face (Chang, 1974; Dien & Vinacke, 1964; Gibbs, 1987; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986).

A great deal has been written in the social science literature about the ethnic identity of children of color. Unfortunately, the identity of mixed-heritage

children has been generally ignored in both the social science literature and this society as a whole. Ignoring these children stems and evolves from the same conceptual framework, and its assumptions that children of mixed heritage will experience a confused identity or a lack of one (Gibbs, 1990; Gordon, 1964; Lyles, Yancey, Grace & Carter, 1985; Piskacek & Golub, 1973; van der Zanden, 1963). These allegations are in keeping with the overall trend of the theoretical frameworks where, again, the dearth of empirical data is indicative of a very weak scientific foundation. In addition, little attention has been given to the role of the family in contributing to healthy identity development.

This tendency to ignore the existence of children of mixed heritage in the literature also extends to their families and family life. For example, Root (1990) wrote about the critical need to study the families of mixed-heritage children, since the family environment is critical in helping their children to understand and value their heritage. Children must be given all of the cultural and historical knowledge necessary to understand their heritage, and to integrate elements of both into their emerging "self."

The literature on children of mixed heritage has traditionally focused on children of Black-White unions, in part because much of the early literature on intermarriage focused primarily on Black-White couples. Intermarriage between other groups has been and generally still is, clearly prevalent and, according to Merton (1941), "speaking literally, all marriage is intermarriage in the sense that the contractants derive from different social groups of one sort or another" (p. 362). While Irish-Italian, Greek-Swedish, Iranian-German and other "combinations" of couples certainly produce offspring of mixed heritage and warrant further study, the "taboo factor" is much less intense in society's eyes, although it may be expressed more in particular families and among certain

ethnic groups. Due to the greater oppression and hostility towards “visible minorities” in this society, having one or two such parents would take on a very different meaning for children, and this represents the focus of this dissertation. It is important to remember that much variation and diversity exists among these children and their families regarding self-definition and social meaning. The focus of this dissertation is children of mixed-heritage couples in which at least one parent is a so-called “visible minority,” and this includes children of cross-national couples, transracial adoptions, and those whose parent(s) have migrated here, who also constitute the growing number of mixed-heritage families.

Despite the fairly extensive body of social science literature on ethnic intermarriage, there is little research on children of mixed heritage. As previously indicated, the lack of interest in the social science and educational fields about children of mixed heritage is not new. Wardle (1987) noted that professionals have shown little interest in this increasing population, while methodological problems have also been discussed (Root, 1992). In a similar vein, limited attention has been given to the psychotherapeutic treatment of mixed-heritage children (Brandell, 1988). Several authors (Baptiste, 1991; Gibbs, 1987; McRoy & Freeman, 1986; Sebring, 1985) have written about the importance of mental health professionals being able to explore their feelings and attitudes about children of mixed heritage and basic issues of race, so they can confront their prejudices or stereotypical assumptions when working with mixed-heritage children and their families. In addition, some authors have described specific strategies or interventions to be implemented when working with members of this population (Baptiste, 1991; Gibbs, 1987; McRoy & Freeman, 1980; Sebring, 1985).

This society's changing demographics, increasing intermarriage rates, and growing population of people of mixed heritage point to the need for greater understanding and appreciation of the mixed-heritage experience. Historically, children of mixed heritage have been viewed in a negative light, and seen as marginal or destined for a life of misery, as reflected in both the larger society and the social science literature as a whole. Now, widely-held beliefs and assumptions have begun to be challenged, again, both in this society and in the literature. More and more educators and researchers have begun to explore the benefits of a mixed heritage, and what advantages this might give someone. In addition, educators, school psychologists, mental health clinicians and other professionals are currently under pressure to demonstrate their commitment to our pluralistic society and to better serving the needs of children and families of diverse backgrounds. Clearly, the mixed-heritage phenomenon can no longer be ignored, and there is a need to acknowledge and respond to the needs of this ever-increasing population.

The initial idea for this study emerged from the realization that there is little research on mixed-heritage children, as well as my own involvement in a mixed-heritage relationship and my concern for my then-unborn child, who would be of mixed heritage. Now that my daughter is almost two years of age, my interest in this study has become even more palpable as I have already witnessed how, even at her young age, others have attempted to define and stereotype her. This study responds to the need for research which explores children's perceptions of their mixed-heritage and the meaning it has for them, and how those perceptions can be used to develop culturally-sound educational and mental health services.

## Statement of the Problem

The study of mixed-heritage people in the United States can be considered a barometer of race relations which can offer significant insight into general and specific issues of race, as well as expanding our definition of the mixed-heritage experience. Mixed-heritage individuals highlight the racial structure of our society, since how we think of and treat them reveals much about our group stratification and ethnic hierarchy.

Over the past few decades, educators and social scientists have given limited attention to children of mixed heritage (Root, 1992; Wardle, 1987). Unfortunately the social science literature, although sparse, largely mirrors the negative societal beliefs and myths about mixed-heritage children (Gordon, 1964; Ladner, 1977; Piskacek & Golub, 1973). Much of the literature is theoretical in nature and suggests that intermarriage has negative effects on the children of such unions, and that they are destined to be marginal or pathological. Many recurrent themes in the literature relate to how these children are negatively affected by their mixed heritage, in terms of problematic self-esteem, self-concept, ethnic identity and overall adjustment, although most of the assumptions made are not substantiated by empirical research. Interestingly, the limited empirical literature in this area suggests unequivocally that children of mixed heritage are just as or more well-adjusted than their single heritage counterparts (Allen & Lambert, 1969; Chang, 1974; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986; Stephan & Stephan, 1991).

As the number of mixed-heritage children continues to increase, we need to hear their stories, to look at their perceptions and experiences, in order to have a better understanding of this population. However, nowhere in the literature are the “voices” of the children themselves found. Historically, the

mixed-heritage experience has been spoken about from the perspectives of others; never have the children been asked about their own narrative, perceptions, and experiences. In this study, I used qualitative research methods to explore the perceptions of children of mixed heritage. It is hoped that this research will help clinicians, school psychologists and other mental health professionals to more effectively serve children of mixed heritage, and that tentative hypotheses for further research in this area will be developed.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore from a phenomenological perspective mixed-heritage children's perceptions about themselves and their heritage. This study attempted to provide a better understanding of mixed-heritage children, by asking them directly about their perceptions and experiences.

The specific goals of this approach were to explore how children of mixed heritage have defined what their heritage means, and how growing up in a racist society has affected their self-concept, belief system and world view. In addition, it focused on the role that the families of mixed-heritage children have played in their lives.

It is hoped that the exploration of these issues provided insight into mixed-heritage children's experiences of growing up in the United States. It also provided information about their perceptions of their friendships, schools and families, and how they view the larger society and themselves. It is expected that the answers to the issues investigated here will have practical implications for professionals in the fields of multicultural counseling and education.

## Significance of the Study

Most research on people of mixed heritage does not focus on the perspectives of the members of this population, but on the theoretical perspectives of others or the empirical studies conducted by researchers. This is one of the very few studies that has used a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of mixed-heritage individuals, and virtually the only one to focus on children of mixed heritage. The use of phenomenological in-depth interviewing elicited the presentation of detailed descriptions of what it means to be of mixed heritage.

This study of twelve children of mixed heritage contributes to the social science research because it focused on how they view themselves, particularly in the contexts of friendships, school, community and family, areas of research that are virtually undocumented. The multicultural nature of the United States and the projected demographic changes in the population require that clinicians, school psychologists and other mental health professionals be prepared to effectively work with individuals, couples and families of different cultural backgrounds. This study contributed to the body of knowledge on multicultural counseling and educational interventions with children of mixed heritage, so that professionals can better and more appropriately serve this population and their families.

## Assumptions

This study was founded on a number of assumptions about the topic of mixed-heritage children. It was assumed that studies about ethnicity and racial issues, in societal and familial contexts, are valid educational endeavors. The decision to study children of mixed heritage reflected my assumption that the

personal experiences of these individuals might be different than those of their single-heritage counterparts. The importance of hearing “first hand” from this population was also affirmed in the approach of this study. In addition, the belief that school psychologists, clinicians and other mental health professionals have an interest in knowing more about these children and how to better serve them was an integral aspect of this research. Finally, it is within the context of a racist society that a discussion or study of mixed-heritage children must be viewed. Although there are no longer legal prohibitions to intermarriage, racism is very much alive in the United States and continues to be a source of challenges to these children and their families.

Root (1990), in discussing the hierarchy of color in the United States, made several pertinent assumptions which have relevance to this study. These assumptions are: 1) The United States, its polychromatic culture notwithstanding, divides people into “White” and “non-White” categories; 2) White is considered superior to non-White; and 3) There is a hierarchy of racial/cultural groups based upon how similar they are to middle-class White social structure and values. Our status system based on color has oppressed people of mixed heritage not only because of fears about “racial impurity,” but also because of this society’s silence and attempts to ignore the reality of this ever-increasing group.

#### Definition of Terms

In this section, operational definitions for the major concepts of this study are presented.

Mixed-heritage Couples: Married or unmarried couples where the partners are of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. While most relationships can be

considered “mixed” in one way or another, for this study the term refers specifically to couples in which at least one partner is considered to be a so-called “visible minority.” These couples have traditionally been described as interracial, intercultural and intermarried, but this term was selected in order to avoid the negative connotations associated with these earlier terms, as well as to maintain consistency with the term mixed-heritage children used here.

Visible Minority: An individual who is a member of one of the five major “minority” groups in the United States: Hispanic-American, Black-/African-American, Asian-American or Native American. Due to the greater oppression and hostility towards visible minorities in this society, having one or two such parents takes on a very different meaning for children of intercultural couples.

Mixed-Heritage Children: In this study, it refers to children of mixed-heritage couples who have at least one parent considered to be a “visible minority” (of Black-/African-American, Asian/Asian-American, Hispanic/Hispanic-American or Native American ancestry). This term was recommended by Stephan (1992), who stated that race implies a fictional biological division of groups, while heritage suggests a combination of biological and cultural factors that comprise our designations of “race” and “ethnicity.”

Culture: A practical definition for this study was adopted from Christensen (1989): “... culture consists of commonalities around which people have developed values, norms, family life-styles, social roles, and behaviors in response to historical, political, economic, and social realities” (p.275). Using

this definition, variables such as sex, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity, race, and socio-economic status all shape one's cultural reality.

Ethnicity: This is a descriptive term which refers to a sense of commonality transmitted over generations by the family and reinforced by the surrounding community. It is more than race, religion, or national and geographic origin. It involves conscious and unconscious processes that fulfill a deep psychological need for identity and historical continuity (Giordano & Giordano, 1977).

### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation includes five chapters. Chapter One provided an overview of the topic in general, as well as the purpose and significance of the specific research study conducted for this dissertation. Chapter Two is a review of the literature focusing on several areas significant to this study: mixed-heritage marriages, theoretical and empirical literature on children of mixed heritage, selected reviews on identity development, the family's role in the life of the mixed-heritage child, and issues for mental health professionals. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the methodology used for this research study and describes the procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents a demographic profile for each of the participants, as well as describing the research process and findings, particularly as they relate to the questions guiding this study. Chapter Five offers a discussion of the findings and the themes that emerged from this study, as well as offering suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Although the social science literature on mixed-heritage children is sparse, it has long suggested that mixed-heritage relationships inevitably have deleterious effects on the children of such unions, and that they are “marginal” in both social and psychological terms (Gordon, 1964; Henriques, 1974; Ladner, 1977; Piskacek & Golub, 1973). This risk for developing problems is attributed to the response of the community and significant others to intermarriage, as well as to the psychological problems of the children, parents and the increased conflict in mixed marriages (Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986).

There are several recurrent themes in the literature related to the problematic self-esteem, self-concept, ethnic identity and general adjustment of mixed-heritage children. However, much of the observations and assumptions made are not substantiated by empirical research; nor have the children themselves been asked about their experience of being of mixed heritage. I think the existing theoretical work is important, as it provides an avenue for discussion and exploration. But it is vital to look beyond the purely hypothetical, as this has perpetuated, and continues to perpetuate, stereotypes and assumptions grounded in folklore rather than fact. The small body of empirical data that does exist presents findings that are overwhelmingly positive, very much in contrast to the theoretical writings.

In this section, I have done a selected review of the social science literature on mixed-heritage couples to provide a context for this topic, and a more in-depth review and critique of the theoretical and empirical literature on

children of mixed heritage. This review of the literature includes the following: 1) review of the literature on mixed-heritage couples; 2) review of the theoretical literature on mixed-heritage children; 3) review of the empirical literature on mixed-heritage children; and 4) selected review of the literature on identity development, the family's role in the life of the mixed-heritage child, and issues for mental-health professionals.

### Literature on Mixed-Heritage Couples

All marriages can be considered "mixed," whether due to ethnic, religious, social or class differences between partners (Gordon, 1964). However, mixed-heritage relationships provoke the most disapproval or condemnation, despite the changes that have occurred in the past three decades (Ho, 1990; Porterfield, 1982). Our knowledge of these relationships has been described as "fragmentary, inadequate and fraught with contradictions" (Monahan, 1970, p.287) and, unfortunately, this description could still be used today.

Throughout history, people of different colors and national origins have intermarried or formed mixed-heritage unions, producing children who represent a combination of inherited traits (Brandell, 1988). Many groups have clear-cut rules about who may marry whom, with extreme pressure put on marrying within one's race (Porterfield, 1982). But no nation other than the United States and South Africa legally prohibited such marriages (Gordon, 1964). Much of the European-American majority holds negative attitudes about mixed-heritage relationships and the children of such pairings, which can be traced to long-held societal ideas about racial "purity" (Sebring, 1985). However, this does not reflect the history or current reality of the United States, as

European-Americans have long mixed with people of color. In 1889, Synder wrote in The Geography of Marriage about “mongrel marriages” and the “modern crime of miscegenation,” describing intermarriage as revolting and offensive to good taste. Although he discussed the long history of intermarriage and need for acceptance of the “human family,” it is largely his esthetic sensibilities that were offended by such unions.

The prohibition of matrimony among persons of diverse races is based largely on grounds of public decency...men (sic) of refined instincts will doubtless agree that it is shocking bad taste for a white man to intermarry with an African, or a Mongolian or an Indian. (p.66)

Although changes have taken place, mixed-heritage relationships are still considered problematic and more likely to fail than their single-heritage counterparts. Historically, marriage between Blacks and Whites has been the most controversial and widely condemned of all types of intermarriage in the United States (Porterfield, 1982). Anti-miscegenation laws banning marriage between Blacks and Whites were in effect as early as colonial times, and they did not disappear from many states until 1967. However, condemnation was not limited to marriages between Blacks and Whites, and similar attitudes and laws prevailed for marriages of Whites with Chinese, Japanese and American Indians. It should be noted that the anti-miscegenation laws referring to marriages between Whites and non-Whites, and not marriage between two ethnically different non-Whites, clearly pointed to the ultimate agenda of keeping Whites apart from all others (Spickard, 1989; Weinberger, 1966). In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled that such laws were unconstitutional. The case of Loving versus Virginia, the Black-White couple who fought the laws of their state which deemed them criminals, became a milestone in the fight for the civil rights of mixed-heritage couples.

As a result of changes in our legal, political and social systems, the number of mixed-heritage couples in the United States has steadily increased in the past few decades. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1988) reported that there were approximately 800,000 intercultural marriages, with just 218,000 of those between African-Americans and Whites. Clearly these numbers do not fully reflect reality, as many couples are not heterosexual or live together without being married. But despite their increase in number, society's negative attitude about intermarriage still exists. As recently as 1983, the Texas Civil Liberties Union called for the removal of three Justices of the Peace who refused to marry mixed couples (Ho, 1990).

There is a fairly extensive body of social science literature describing the problems and pathology inherent in such relationships, as well as those who enter into them (Gordon, 1964; Jeter, 1982; Spaight & Dixon, 1984). Historically, it was widely-held that people had "unconscious," pathological reasons for considering dating or marrying someone of a different ethnic background (Aldridge, 1978; Porterfield, 1973). Even now, in 1995, the pathology-centered theorizing continues to take place.

Individuals involved in mixed-heritage relationships have been described as very insecure and wanting to degrade themselves (Spaight & Dixon, 1984). Of course, this usually refers to the European-American person who has married an "inferior," a person of color. It has also been suggested that those involved in mixed-heritage relationships are rebelling against their families, most likely in response to the systemic dynamics in the family of origin or to rebel against parental authority (McGoldrick & Preto, 1984; Spaight & Dixon, 1984). McGoldrick and Preto (1984) noted that the diversity found in intermarriage can be problematic for both the couple and their children, and that

Intermarriage requires a degree of flexibility not necessary for those who marry within their own groups. Certain differences in values, emotional reactions and world view may never be bridged, and there will always be dangling ends--aspects of each spouse's heritage that cannot be integrated into the marriage. (p. 362)

Despite statements such as the above, there is no empirical evidence to support the idea that those involved in mixed-heritage relationships are rebellious, psychologically unstable, or headed for disaster. Nor is there evidence to suggest that they are "seeking a rebalance in the characteristics of their own ethnic background" (McGoldrick & Preto,1984). Although much has been written about the abnormal psychological traits of people who intermarry, research indicates just the opposite (Aldridge,1978; Porterfield,1978). In fact, several advantages of intermarriage have been discussed, including: 1) more thorough preparation before marrying, 2) greater degree of commitment on the part of the spouses, 3) greater degree of self-other differentiation, 4) greater degree of acceptance, tolerance and respect, and 5) broader opportunities for learning and growth (Falicov,1982; Ho,1984).

There are also theories suggesting that people who get involved in mixed-heritage relationships have conscious ulterior motives related to preoccupation or revenge (Petroni,1973; Spaight & Dixon,1984). This has typically been framed around the issue of African-American men and their supposed preoccupation with historically-forbidden White women, or the notion of their desire to degrade White women and seek revenge on White men (Spaight & Dixon,1984). But theories about preoccupation or revenge cannot be supported, as only a small percentage of African-American men marry

interracially and of all the ethnic groups in the United States, African-Americans have the lowest rates of intermarriage (McLemore, 1991; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990).

Still more theories, based on so-called conscious motives, stress that those who intermarry do so to attain a higher social or economic status (Davis, 1941; Spaights & Dixon, 1984). But, again, such theories are contradicted by empirical data indicating that mixed-heritage couples are almost always from similar economic, social and educational backgrounds (Aldridge, 1978; Blau, Becker & Fitzpatrick, 1984).

Mixed-heritage couples date, live together or marry for much the same reasons that their homogeneous counterparts do. Ho (1990) stated that couples entering into intermarriage may have a variety of reasons, rather than one motive which fits into neat social and psychological categories. In any case, as he pointed out, a "correct" motive for any marriage does not guarantee success.

The problem with the majority of the conceptual ideas about intermarriage is that they are unsystematic, fragmentary and speculative, often developed on the basis of individual cases or small samples (Porterfield, 1982). Although it may seem obvious that this type of information should not be viewed as characteristic of all mixed-heritage marriages or romantic attachments, there is still disdain or subtle disapproval among the general public, as well as mental health professionals.

In spite of all the negative theorizing and stereotypical assumptions related to mixed-heritage couples, much of the opposition to these relationships centers around concerns about the children.

## Theoretical Literature on Mixed-Heritage Children

### Socio-Historical Context

Almost every mixed-heritage couple has been asked the question “What about the children?” But exactly what evils are expected to befall them are rarely made explicit. In understanding current perceptions about mixed-heritage children, it is critical to consider a socio-historical perspective, the cultural and societal dynamics which were shaped and evolved over hundreds and hundreds of years. The ways in which people have been categorized into specific races has typically been done by powerful groups in order to maintain and extend their own power. Many people have believed, and still do, that everyone has one “race,” one type of “blood” that is biologically and characterologically separate from the other races (Spickard, 1992). As anthropologist M.F. Ashley Montagu (1943) stated:

Most people believe that blood is equivalent to heredity, and that blood, therefore, is that part of the organism which determines the quality of that person. By extension, it is further generally believed that the social as well as the biological status of the person is determined by the blood he (sic) has inherited (p.16).

This way of thinking and viewing others is very much apparent in racial attitudes of the past and present, particularly with respect to those of mixed heritage. It is significant that the popular attitudes and concerns of years ago focused almost exclusively on individuals of Black-White parentage, a trend which continues, for the most part, in the current social science literature.

In his discussion of how Americans viewed the “mulatto” and the notion of race mixing from 1865-1918, Mencke (1979) pointed out the inherent illogic of Americans consistently viewing mixed-heritage people as Blacks. He stated that “deeply-rooted beliefs in the permanence and distinctiveness of racial traits

have led Americans to see all who possess 'black blood' as Negroes, even if that Black blood is greatly outweighed by White." This emerged from the "one-drop rule," in which one drop of Black blood made someone an African-American. Williamson (1980) stated that "the situation of the mulatto is a fair index of the nature of race relations in America, and the central fact in that history is the evolution of the "one-drop rule." Spickard (1992) noted that this had nothing to do with blood or biology, but was implemented to maintain existing White dominance. According to Mencke (1979), by classifying mulattoes as pure Black and describing them as "mongrel," as many laws and public statements in the late seventeenth centuries did, Whites could maintain clearly delineated racial castes and the power relationships that went along with them. He went on to say that it was not interracial sex, per se, that was to be feared, since many Whites did engage in such activity, but the challenge it presented to the superiority and domination of Whites and the subordination of Blacks. In summarizing this situation, Nash (1974) commented that:

By prohibiting racial intermarriage, winking at interracial sex, and defining all mixed offspring as Black, White society found the ideal answer to its labor needs, its extracurricular and inadmissible sexual desires, its compulsion to maintain its culture purebred, the problem of maintaining, at least in theory, absolute social control (p. 290).

Clearly, at this point in history, White America had an arsenal of "evidence" to support its ideas about the mulatto's deficits. Moving into the post-antebellum period, ideas about the mulatto's natural inferiority were on their way to becoming full-fledged theories which would shape attitudes in the succeeding decades (Mencke, 1979). The first extensive, academic treatment of the mulatto was Reuter's (1918) study of The mulatto in the United States. Reuter, a sociology student of Robert Park at the University of Chicago,

examined the role of mulattos in transforming relations between Blacks and Whites in the United States. Although his purpose was to establish the fact of mulatto leadership, he went on to argue that these leaders were struggling to escape from their racial identification. Reuter attempted to be subjective, yet his prejudices were clearly revealed in his references to races as “higher” and “lower,” “advanced” and “backward,” and to cultures as “superior” and “inferior.” This seems to have set the tone for much of the early social science literature on this topic, and that to come in subsequent years.

Park (1928) coined the phrase “marginal man,” but its usage became more popular and elaborated upon by Stonequist (1937), one of his students.

Migrations, with all the incidental collisions, conflicts, and fusions of people and of cultures which they occasion, have...create(d) a situation in which the...individual--who may or may not be a mixed blood--finds himself (sic) striving to live in two diverse cultural groups...This is the ‘marginal man.’ It is in the mind of the marginal man that the conflicting cultures meet and fuse (Park, 1928, p.881)

Stonequist (1937) described a marginal person as one who is the product of two races or cultures coming together, as well as one who is “poised in psychological uncertainty between two or more social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds, one of which is often ‘dominant’ over the other; within which membership is implicitly based upon birth or ancestry; and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations” (p.8). Stonequist went on to state that someone who is marginal can be associated with both worlds, but doesn’t fully belong to either. Forced to take an “in-between” stance, these individuals develop numerous maladjusted personality traits, such as ambivalence, restlessness, moodiness and lack of self-confidence.

These “marginal” people, in attempting to adjust to their situation, were perceived as having three alternatives: 1) assimilation into the dominant group; 2) assimilation into the minority group; and 3) adjusting to a middle group. In this society, the best solution was viewed as adjusting to one’s place in the minority group (Stonequist, 1937, 1939, 1942).

It is significant that Stonequist also discussed numerous positive aspects of being a marginal person, although it is largely his negative comments that are cited when others quote him. Over the years, his view has been criticized for its simplicity and negativity (Antonovsky, 1956; Goldberg, 1941; Kerckhoff, 1955; Wright & Wright, 1972), although the notion of marginality remains in place. A major criticism was that Stonequist did not differentiate among marginal person, marginal status and marginal personality (Kerckhoff & McCormick, 1955). Clearly, being a “marginal” person doesn’t necessarily mean the inevitability of a marginal personality. According to Stonequist, it is two cultures which are in conflict that contribute to the internal conflict leading to a marginal personality.

When reviewing this body of work, it is important to consider the context of the social theories of determinism and genetic superiority of White people which were prevalent at the time. None of the aforementioned works advocated a belief in racial equality and when positive statements were made, they referred to mixed-heritage individuals’ superiority to the group of color and inferiority to Whites. In addition, these writings promoted a world view of the superiority of European culture and the assumed desire to assimilate into this dominant culture.

Ever since the marginality theory has been used as a conceptual model for looking at children of mixed heritage, an aura of hopelessness has pervaded views of them. Later work in this area focused on their many problems,

including their inevitable identity and adjustment conflicts. They are presented as lost souls with no sense of belonging and with little hope for happiness. Gordon (1964) stated that mixed marriages should be discouraged because they are unfair to children, who are the innocent victims of well-meaning parents. He wrote that children of mixed-heritage couples were certain to develop serious psychological and emotional problems, value conflicts and temperamental conduct because of the cultural differences between parents, as well as societal prejudice and discrimination.

Teicher (1962) described three case studies of interracial children receiving psychiatric services at a hospital. The findings showed that they suffered from resentment of both parents, an inability to identify with either parent, and resentment of siblings who possessed racial characteristics perceived as more favorable than their own.

Similarly, van der Zanden (1963) described mixed-heritage children as suffering from a host of identity and adjustment conflicts and lacking a strong social network. Parents were described as having an inability to foster a stable, coherent sense of identity, which would contribute to their child's ambivalence towards both social and cultural groups.

Another problematic issue discussed in the literature is the prejudice experienced by a parent when his or her child was born. Children were viewed as suffering due to their parents' inability to accept each other's ethnicity and to integrate both cultural backgrounds (Adams, 1973; Mann, 1977). McDermott and Fukunaga (1977) pointed out that a clash in cultural attitudes, values and behaviors between partners inevitably affected children negatively and produced emotional problems.

Piskacek and Golub (1973) described mixed-heritage children as “ravaged by conflict,” and wrote that such children are in conflict with their parents, society and themselves. The authors suggested that these children used compensatory mechanisms to help them achieve a stable sense of a racial identity, described as: 1) overidentification with one race as defense against identity confusion; 2) negative identification and rejection of one’s race; and 3) standstill solution leading to alienation.

In general, mixed-heritage children were presumed to experience conflicting loyalties if they identified with both ethnic backgrounds. However, they were also presumed to develop hostile feelings towards one or both parents if they did not identify with both ancestries. An underlying assumption was that it is not possible, nor desirable, to celebrate one’s multicultural heritage. Although greater social acceptance was predicted by some writers (e.g. Adams, 1973), having a “mixed” identity, an integration of both cultures, was not considered an option. Individuals who were unable or uninterested in “choosing” were perceived as ambivalent or alienated. Even more recent writings (Gibbs, 1987; 1990) took a problem-focused perspective, painting a bleak picture of the mixed-heritage child.

It should not be construed that mixed-heritage individuals have no issues to cope with, related or unrelated to their heritage, but that assumptions can no longer be made. It is likely that related issues having to do with family dynamics, social class, developmental stage and peer relationships exist. Nor should mixed-heritage individuals be viewed as inevitably troubled, a widely-held notion that has been given more attention than the optimistic view. Also, a key consideration is that many articles have been based on psychiatric and clinical reports on those of mixed-heritage who have not adjusted to their “mixed”

ancestry. Also, reactions of the minority group to the mixed-heritage child have rarely been discussed. In keeping with the many groups considered to be psychologically at-risk, research conducted on those who are resilient or resist stress has been sparse (Garmenzy,1974). However, some cultures co-exist within an individual without the presence of such conflict (Poussaint,1984; Wright and Wright, 1960) and the benefits of a mixed heritage have also been discussed (Ho,1990; Stephan & Stephan,1991).

### Benefits of a Mixed Heritage

Mixed heritage, per se, is not pathological. Rather, the oppression and reactions of a racist society create challenges or place a pathological point-of-view on psychologically healthy mixed-heritage people. In spite of the largely negative, racism-tinged social science literature, social scientists have also noted the positive aspects and potential of these individuals.

The early literature described the unique role which “marginal” people could play in the area of meditation and their inherent traits of “objectivity comprised of passivity and detachment, distance and nearness, and indifference and involvement” (Park,1928). The person of mixed heritage was perceived as having greater intelligence and of being more rational and objective. While Park (1937) described the mixed-heritage person as being “relatively more civilized,” it must be noted that the underlying implication was that he or she was relatively more civilized than the monoracial person of color.

Many changes in how mixed-heritage people were viewed, and viewed themselves, came about during the 1960s and the sociopolitical movements of Civil Rights, Black Power and immigration reform. Over the last two to three decades it has become more widely recognized that people of color, as well as

some White ethnic groups, can all be considered bicultural, and that this can be a positive, rather than a marginalizing experience (Blauner, 1972; Steinberg, 1981). Emerging from this perspective was a “multicultural” person who accepted and identified with all of his or her ancestries. A process of re-educating oneself about one’s heritage, in a positive and non-stereotypic manner, was viewed as critical. Also considered vital were the steps involved in becoming more objective about both the dominant and non-majority groups, and of synthesizing one’s views and beliefs into an authentic “whole.”

More contemporary studies of mixed-heritage people tended to discuss issues they faced, rather than taking a problem-focused stance (Chang, 1974; Dien & Vinacke, 1964; Gibbs, 1987; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986). The mixed-heritage person was now seen as having the chance to bring together two different worlds, because he or she lived in-between and beyond one’s social and cultural groups (Willie, 1973). These individuals have also been described as the children of the future, the “natural bridges between the artificial boundaries that divide the humans of the world” (Nakashima, 1992, p.173).

Several researchers have pointed out the ways in which those of mixed heritage were thought to develop a range of skills and sensitivities that allowed them to find a place within both cultures. The idea of being able to effectively function within the dominant society, while also retaining their other culture, has been discussed (Fitzgerald, 1971; McFee, 1968). Additional work has described African-Americans as bicultural and bidialectical, able to interact in two cultures and use the tools of each in order to be more socially and organizationally mobile (Valentine, 1971).

What had, in the past, been viewed as necessarily leading to a life of ambivalence, pathology and alienation, was now seen as a multifaceted

process in which one's values, beliefs and attitudes were in transition. The multicultural person was someone who viewed beliefs and attitudes as important to given solutions, and one's experiences as dependent on continual self-evolution (Adler, 1976).

Some of the benefits of bicultural socialization may be that it exposes children to a greater range of values, norms, roles and behaviors than does single-heritage socialization (Garza & Lipton, 1982). The bicultural person was seen as developing unique behaviors and modes of perception due to the integration of two distinct styles (Ramirez & Castenada, 1974). Mexican-American children were described as able to shift learning and social behaviors according to what was required of specific situations they encountered (Ramirez, 1977). Ramirez (1979) later described a model of flexibility and synthesis which highlighted the process of constant adaptation and incorporation of cultures.

To support the idea of bicultural socialization being beneficial, Stephan and Stephan (1991) drew an analogy between biculturalism and bilingualism, citing research indicating that bilingual children are more cognitively flexible and less dogmatic than monolinguals (Diaz, 1985; Lambert, 1977) and that they have more favorable intergroup attitudes than monolinguals (Lambert, 1969). They also made the case that because minority group members who become bicultural through exposure to majority group culture are better adjusted than those who are completely assimilated or solely monocultural, the bicultural experiences of mixed-heritage children should lead to more favorable intergroup behavior and attitudes, thereby reducing prejudice, stereotyping, and attributional biases.

individuals, describing their creativity, resiliency or ability to adapt to different situations (Gay,1987; Johnson & Nagoshi,1986; Poussaint,1984). It has also been found that mixed-heritage individuals feel that their mixed heritage has given them the best of two worlds, offering them access to two different sets of values, traditions and lifestyles (Hall,1992; Kich,1992). These researchers described mixed-heritage people as content and just as well-adjusted as those who are single heritage.

Poussaint (1984), in an admittedly non-scientific sample of Harvard University students, found that they were psychologically well-adjusted, competent, and comfortable with themselves. Ho (1990) described children of mixed-heritage couples as having greater opportunities and perspectives, in that they are likely to have a harmonious integration of themselves and their environment, as well as satisfying relationships. Having an opportunity to synthesize both parents' backgrounds can make these children more aware of culture than single-heritage children. Ho also described children of mixed-heritage couples as more accepting of differences in others, due to their exposure to different ways of thinking and behaving.

It is significant that some researchers and psychologists have begun to challenge the literature that fosters inappropriate perpetuation of myths and stereotypes. Yet there is still little research conducted in this area, and rarely are the children themselves asked about their experience of growing up as a person of mixed heritage. It is time to challenge the "givens" and assumptions in this area, which are often based on evidence that lacks empirical support. However, it should be mentioned that while there are undoubtedly strengths associated with a mixed-heritage, that this topic must be looked at at all is

indicative of the racist, skin-color focused society in which we live. Being a person of color, a “visible minority,” whether of mixed or single heritage is, by definition, a challenge to those living in an institutionally-White, racist society. Therefore, the functioning and mental well-being of mixed-heritage children would clearly be associated with very real issues related to racism and oppression. This must be recognized while, at the same time, questioning and challenging the research literature and the belief system which professionals in the counseling and psychology fields bring to their work which, for the most part, places mixed-heritage children in a negative, problematic light. In addition, there is a tendency to describe all mixed-heritage people as one single entity, but there is no one “type.” Rather, there are thousands of mixed-heritage children who differ significantly along historical, political, socio-economic and familial lines. This results in endless variations of feeling, thinking, acting and being, despite the overall views presented in the social science literature

### Empirical Literature on Mixed-Heritage Children

For many years, most lay-people and mental health professionals were satisfied with early explanations about this population. Few challenged the theories or tested their validity. However, interest in those of mixed heritage has recently grown and social scientists have begun to question longstanding beliefs, examining what it means socially and psychologically to be of mixed heritage.

Aellen and Lambert (1969) compared boys of mixed (French-English) and homogeneous (French; English) parentage on selected measures of ethnic identification, personality characteristics, attitudes and values, to determine the effects of mixed heritage. They found that mixed-ethnic children showed no

signs of personality disturbance or feelings of alienation, and that they identified with both ethnic groups. The authors also reported that the mixed-ethnic boys identified with their parents and perceived them as being more attentive and interested in them as family members.

Similarly, Johnson and Nagoshi (1986) compared the adjustment level of offspring of both intercultural (n=180) and within-group (n=1,024) marriages living in Hawaii. Using the 300-item Adjective Checklist, they found that mixed-heritage children did not generally differ in personality test scores. However, they noted that male offspring of across-group marriages scored higher on a factor measuring socially desirable traits and lower on a factor measuring intraception (reflection, idealism), while female offspring of across-group marriages were more extroverted.

In their 1964 study, Dein and Vinacke hypothesized that children of mixed parentage, in comparison to those of homogeneous parentage, had smaller self-ideal discrepancy scores and overall small discrepancy scores, and that self-ideal discrepancy scores are correlated with discrepancies between the ideal-self and parent of the same sex. Although the sample of Caucasian, Japanese and Japanese-Caucasian subjects was admittedly small (n=15), it was found that all three hypotheses were supported for males but not for females. Males of mixed parentage had smaller self-ideal discrepancy scores than those of homogeneous parentage, a possible indicator of higher self-esteem and better adjustment. They had, overall, smaller discrepancy scores than those of homogeneous parentage and self-ideal discrepancy scores correlated with the discrepancy between the ideal-self and the parent of the same sex. As in the preceding study cited, a difference in results due to subject gender was reported.

Chang (1974) wanted to determine whether there were any significant differences between the self-concepts of children of ethnically-different and ethnically-similar marriages. Utilizing the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scales, she found that mixed-heritage children had higher mean scores on the total Self-Concept scale and the Behavior subscale than their single-heritage counterparts. While the author noted that the subjects were from families of low socioeconomic status, she made no mention of their specific ethnic/cultural backgrounds, describing them only as children of "ethnically similar" or "ethnically different" marriages.

Parsonson (1987) examined the relationship between family ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity and children's ethnic identity. The findings showed that there was not a strong relationship between children's ethnic identity and their parents' marriage, which the researcher considers suggestive of additional factors that may be related to the development of ethnic identity.

The antecedents of ethnic identity were investigated by Stephan and Stephan (1989) to determine if people of mixed heritage are more likely to adopt a single ethnic identity. They conducted two studies with undergraduate students, one with Japanese-Americans and the other with Hispanic-Americans, to test the hypothesis that the ethnic identity of mixed-heritage subjects is associated with the following: a) exposure to cultural elements, such as language and food customs; b) observable indicators of ethnicity, such as physical resemblance to various groups; c) the status of the group or groups with which one identifies; and f) psychological identification with one's parents. The authors found that people of mixed heritage very often have multiple ethnic identities, and that predictors of ethnic identity may be similar for those of mixed and single heritage, based on a commonality of culture.

A more recent study conducted by Stephan and Stephan (1991) compared students of mixed heritage to those of single heritage, to determine whether bicultural socialization had positive or negative effects on personality, adjustment and intergroup relations. They found no evidence of negative effects of bicultural socialization and suggested that these students do not suffer ill effects because of rejection by other groups, problems in establishing identity or reconciling incommensurate cultures. The authors cited evidence that bicultural socialization has positive effects for intergroup contact and attitudes, language facility and enjoyment of the cultures of minority groups. It was also found that mixed-heritage subjects had better relations with single-heritage groups than the single-heritage groups had with one another.

In their study of children of Ashkenazi-Asian couples in Israel, Yogev and Jamsky (1983) attempted to challenge the widely-held belief that the offspring of ethnic intermarriage are socially marginal. Utilizing research data from a national sample of 14-year-old students, they looked at satisfaction with school, academic perceptions and plans, and involvement in social activities. The findings did not support the marginality thesis and suggested that mixed-heritage children's attitudes toward school, and their educational aspirations, are related to socioeconomic status and consequent academic performance, rather than being a direct function of their ethnic heritage.

Individually, the eight studies reviewed here contribute to our understanding of mixed-heritage children and certain aspects of their lives, particularly in light of the overwhelmingly positive findings. There are certain themes that consistently emerge in these studies, allowing some generalizations to be made: 1) no negative effects associated with ethnic identity - not "marginal" people; 2) may have multiple ethnic identities; 3) no

greater differences in personality and adjustment; 4) self-concepts and esteem are not necessarily lower; 5) family may have some effect; and 6) findings largely positive, in contrast to the theoretical assumptions and widely-held beliefs that these children inevitably have problems. Overall, it should be noted that the literature on mixed-heritage children has several limitations in offering a comprehensive view of the growing phenomenon of children of mixed heritage.

The literature on mixed-heritage children has made little mention of their family functioning or school-peer issues; nor has it considered class or sociocultural influences. The limited work that does exist on the topic has been conducted by researchers or theoreticians who fail to mention or downplay the fact that their findings or generalizations are based on a clinical sample. Those who do mention this are rarely deterred from applying their findings to the general population of mixed-heritage children, who are inevitably referred to as if there were one "prototype" of such a person. Half of the articles cited are one to three decades old. While this research is important to an understanding of mixed-heritage children from historical and social perspectives, it cannot be assumed that all of the themes in the earlier studies present an accurate portrayal of today's children of mixed ancestry. The socio-cultural and political milieus in which subjects were socialized have changed significantly in the past thirty years. In addition, much emphasis is placed on the individual, ignoring, for the most part, family and socio-cultural influences. Variation is not highlighted, in that socio-economic status, single-parent household and mother's or father's ethnicity are not considered relevant variables. Also, these studies do not make a distinction among different types of children, such as products of cross-national marriages, those whose parent(s) or themselves

have migrated and are living in a new area or country, and those of differing ethnic groups.

It is important to examine the existing body of social science literature on mixed-heritage individuals, in order to have a foundation for understanding how they have been perceived historically, what assumptions and findings have been reported by social scientists, and what issues may be germane to this group. However, there are clearly contrasting viewpoints that are presented.

Taking into consideration the largely negative conclusions drawn from the theoretical work presented, and the largely positive findings reported for the empirical studies cited, it is apparent that existing assumptions must be challenged and further investigation in this area is needed. While most of the early social science literature, and much that followed, presented those of mixed heritage as deficient, pathological or destined for a lifetime of turmoil, every one of the empirical research studies found them to be just as, or more, healthy than their single-heritage counterparts. Clearly, awareness of these different representations has significant implications for counselors, school psychologists and clinicians, not only with respect to how they view mixed-heritage children, but also in terms of delivery of effective services.

I will next review the selected literature on topics of significance to children of mixed heritage, which have been focused on in the social science literature. I will begin with a selected review of identity development issues. I will then present a selected review on literature related to the family's role in the life of the mixed-heritage child. I will conclude with a selected review of the literature pertaining to mixed-heritage children and mental health issues.

## Identity Development of the Mixed-Heritage Child

A child of any color who is wanted and considered as worthwhile, good and full of promise, will develop a favorable self-concept (Adams, 1973). Children of mixed-heritage couples who are brought up in a nurturing, empathic milieu can be expected to acquire stability and cohesiveness of the self and traits such as self-concept and self-resiliency, which are associated with healthy self-structure (Brandell, 1988). Identity can be viewed as one component of the self-system that includes self-awareness, self-esteem and self-recognition (Harter, 1983).

Much has been written about the ethnic identity and development of children of color. But mixed heritage identity is generally ignored by the larger society, which is also reflected in the social science literature. The general consensus of the existing, largely theoretical, literature is that children of mixed-heritage couples will experience confused identity or a lack of one (Gibbs, 1990; Ladner, 1977; Lyles, et al., 1985).

Ethnic identity refers to "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership" (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987, p.13). The word "identity" has been used as a general label for a subject that has been researched extensively. According to Milner (1975), the term has been a repository for a variety of imprecise ideas about what people are and how they view themselves. It is commonly noted that mixed-heritage children have "identity problems." Typically, what is meant is that mixed-heritage children have difficulties fitting into socially-defined categories. When "identity" is used this way, it is being viewed from an interactionist perspective. Identity then refers to

the social self, not to an aspect of one's intrinsic personality. The identity of these children is seen as resulting from interaction between individual and social definitions.

From an early age, mixed-heritage children must deal with society's perceptions, which do not necessarily coincide with the image they have drawn from their parents (Mann & Waldron, 1977). The role of racism has meant that these children will be identified with the parent of color or, if both parents are "visible minorities," the parent whose skin color is the darkest (Shackford, 1984). This, however, may not be an accurate indicator, as these individuals do not necessarily identify themselves racially by the way they look (Root, 1992).

The development of a positive sense of identity has been described as a major task of childhood and adolescence. Erikson (1959) suggested that this process was facilitated by the child's perception and internalization of the self-definitions provided by significant and generalized others in the larger society. He later (1968) related racial identity to the development of ego identity and self-esteem development, stressing the tendency of oppressed individuals to accept negative self-images and ambiguous messages which are projected onto them by the larger society, as well as their own ethnic group. A drawback of this perspective, as noted by Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990), is that it focuses on the idea of identity as a product (the "what" of behavior) as opposed to looking at the many ways that identity represents developmental processes (the "how" and "why" of behavior). While the process perspective is prevalent in theorizing about non-minority youth, this has not been the case for minority youth and the "potential sources of negative stereotypes and the Eriksonian assumptions of a negative identity among minority youth must be clarified (p. 299). These authors go on to discuss the adequacy of the construct "identity"

itself, which they feel may not be appropriately conceptualized for ethnic groups which have been researched using pathology-centered models. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) stated that for many minority youth there are limitations of traditional models of identity development, in that they: 1) ignore sociocognitive developmental processes; 2) assume homogeneity among group members; 3) overlook patterns of coping and adaptation; 4) fail to link unique ecosystem components with life-course models (which integrate historical, socio-cultural, biological and psychological components with behavioral response patterns), and, as a consequence; 5) ignore the opportunity of furthering the knowledge extant on resilience and risk for those whose daily experiences demand ongoing adaptive coping strategies as a function of ethnicity. While this refers to children of color in general, it is important to consider, particularly in light of the fact that most of the articles written on identity and mixed-heritage children include an uncritical discussion of Erikson's work (Gibbs,1987; Lyles,et al.,1985; Teicher,1968).

While significant social science literature on identity development in African-American children exists, research on identity formation in mixed-heritage children is extremely limited. The focus of the literature has been on the adoption and placement of children in racially dissimilar homes (Ladner, 1977;1982), with the literature related to identity issues in the mixed-heritage child reared in his or her biological family particularly sparse.

In the past, the only identity development models that could be applied to those of mixed heritage focused on African-American identity development (Cross,1971; Parham & Helms,1985) or Asian-American identity development (Sue & Sue,1971), general Minority Identity Development (Aktinson, Morten &

Sue, 1979; Morten & Atkinson, 1983) and deficit models of biracial identity development (Gibbs, 1987; Stonequist, 1937).

Stonequist's marginal person model, the first model of biracial identity development, is a deficit model which has clearly had an impact on the present societal and psychological view of mixed-heritage people. It suggested that one's mixed heritage adds to the problems that go along with normal identity development by facilitating insecurity and ambiguity in identification with parents, group identification with peers, and social identification.

The work of Gibbs (1987; 1990), a major contributor to this area, was an outgrowth of this deficit perspective. She proposed that adolescents experience conflicts in their efforts to resolve five major psychosocial tasks: 1) conflicts about their mixed-heritage identity; 2) conflicts about their social marginality; 3) conflicts about their sexuality and choice of sexual partners; 4) conflicts about separation from their parents; and 5) conflicts about their educational or career aspirations. Gibbs also suggested that a mixed-heritage identity may hinder the development of a well-integrated self-concept in adolescents. However, it can be argued that these issues are pertinent to most, if not all, adolescents. Gibbs does point out the importance of not making causal relationships between mixed-heritage status and psychosocial maladaptation. It is important to note that Gibbs' work, like that of her predecessors, is based largely on her work with a clinical population, biracial adolescents who were referred for psychological treatment. Although the tendency to generalize findings from one group to another is prevalent, particularly in an area with so little research, it can be problematic and generalizations should not be made. Just as we cannot view

one group (i.e. Hispanic) as homogeneous, we also cannot lump together all children of mixed heritage.

Sue and Sue (1971) used the concept of marginality in their typological model of identity in Asian-Americans. They described the personality orientations of Asian-Americans as: a) the traditionalist, whose primary allegiance is to the family; b) the marginal person who makes an effort to assimilate and acculturate to the majority group; and c) the Asian-American, who has integrated past and present and can be considered bicultural.

A major drawback of the mixed-heritage-indicates-pathology perspective is its emphasis on the individual. The notion of "marginality," if it even exists, may be related to racism and the internalized oppression experienced by those of mixed heritage. One can surmise that it is prejudice between groups and the lack of support a child feels, not cultural differences between two ancestral groups, that are the main source of difficulties. According to Cross (1987), an individual can have a healthy personal identity, despite being oriented to different reference groups. Many people view their mixed-heritage identity as something positive and see their lives as multicultural rather than marginal (Hall, 1992; Herman, 1970; Pouissant, 1984).

Cross's (1971) model is actually a process of African-American self-actualization and has some empirical support, particularly from the work of Parham and Helms (1985). Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1979) developed a model of minority identity development with five stages, although research has not supported its application to all ethnic minority groups. These stages are: 1) Conformity Stage, 2) Dissonance Stage, 3) Resistance and Immersion Stage, 4) Introspection Stage, 5) Synergetic Articulation and Awareness Stage. At

each stage, there are corresponding attitudes that form the minority person's identity and how they view the self and others.

Poston (1990) noted that these models have several limitations when applied to mixed-heritage individuals: 1) they imply that mixed-heritage people might select one group's culture over another at different stages; 2) they suggest that mixed-heritage individuals may reject their minority identity and culture and then the dominant culture, which is problematic in that they have roots in both groups; 3) they do not allow for the integration of several group identities, as the goal is integration of one identity and acceptance of others, rather than recognizing multiple identities; 4) they require a level of acceptance into the minority culture, although many mixed-heritage individuals do not experience this acceptance in either the minority or majority cultures.

In response to the limitations of minority development, African- and Asian-American identity development, and biracial deficit models, Poston (1990) created a Biracial Identity Development model in order to address their limitations when applied to mixed-heritage people. It includes five stages described as personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation and integration. Stage 1, personal identity, occurs at a young age, when children have a sense of self that is largely independent of ethnic background. Stage 2, choice of group categorization, is marked by pressure to choose an identity, usually of one ethnic group, and the mixed-heritage individual has the option of choosing a multicultural existence, emphasizing both parents' ancestries, or choosing one parent's heritage as dominant over the other. Individuals at Stage 3, enmeshment/denial, experience confusion and guilt about choosing an identity that does not fully express their background. Stage 4, appreciation, is characterized by

appreciation of one's multiple identity and broadening of reference group orientation, although there is still a tendency to identify with one group. The hallmark of integration, Stage 5, is the ability to experience wholeness and integration, to recognize and value all of one's ethnic identities and develop a secure, integrated identity.

Like previous models, this one has a life-span focus, but it is very different in that it emphasizes the uniqueness and particular challenges of identity development. While it attempts to present the developmental process of mixed-heritage individuals as healthy and non-pathological, its underlying assumptions are that conflict is necessarily associated with a mixed heritage and that such processes occur and develop solely within the individual.

Root (1990) proposed a metamodel for understanding the process of identity development for mixed-heritage individuals, which reflects a departure from traditional male-originated identity models which have one static, positive outcome. She conceptualized it as a circular, fluid model which involves different strategies: acceptance of the identity society assigns, identification with both racial groups, and identification as a new racial group. Root does not envision these as mutually exclusive, stating that they may co-exist simultaneously or one may move among them. However, she noted that it is important for mixed-heritage people to accept both (or all) of their ancestries and that they have the right to state how they want to identify themselves, even if it is not in keeping with how they look or how they are perceived by society. Also, strategies for coping with social resistance or questions about identity must be developed, so that questions inferring that there is something wrong with them will not be internalized. While this non-traditional model is appealing, research is needed to study its applicability.

The identity development of mixed-heritage children is a complex process and an important issue in counseling and cross-cultural psychology because it relates to various indicators of mental health (Morten & Atkinson, 1983; Parham & Helms, 1985; Sue, 1981). However, it has long been assumed that all individuals of mixed heritage are destined to have problems with identity, and that it is a fixed trait that will be with them for a lifetime. While some people may experience very real challenges in this area, it is time for mental health professionals, and others, to expand their thinking in this area. The identity of mixed-heritage children has typically been conceptualized as an intrapsychic construct, with some emphasis given to socio-cultural factors. But much less attention has been given to the role of the family in contributing to healthy identity development. In the next section, I will review selected literature related to how the families of mixed-heritage children may influence not only their children's identity, but also their overall well-being and adjustment.

### The Family of the Mixed-Heritage Child

Children's attitudes towards themselves are influenced by the attitudes and practices of their parents and other significant individuals in the school, home and community (McRoy & Freeman, 1986). The family environment is critical in helping mixed-heritage children to understand and value their heritage (Root, 1990). Supportive families can help children integrate the two (or more) identifications of the parents and develop a strong self-concept (Jacobs, 1992; Miller & Miller, 1990). Yet little has been written about the role that families play in the lives of their mixed-heritage children.

Johnson (1992) cited three factors as particularly important to consider: 1) family background, 2) structural factors, 3) family dynamics, and 4) attitudes.

Family background relates to education, income and occupation, while structural factors refer to living arrangements, family configuration and extended family contact. Family dynamics has to do with parenting, as well as quality and frequency of contact with extended family members. Attitudes pertains to acceptance or rejection on the part of the extended family.

Stephan and Stephan (1991) described four ways in which children of mixed-heritage families may differ from those reared in single-heritage families: 1) Their socialization is likely to be bicultural; 2) They will have more options in establishing their identities than their single-heritage counterparts; 3) They may experience an element of rejection on the part of their extended family; and 4) They may experience rejection in the larger society.

The ability of parents to value their child's mixed heritage is critical to the child (McRoy & Freeman, 1986). Jacobs (1992) identified parenting qualities that foster the development of a healthy self-concept in mixed-heritage children. These included: a) early ego-enhancing treatment; b) giving the child a mixed-heritage label; c) providing assistance in verbalizing racial material and supportive interest in expression of racial ambivalence; and d) fostering multiracial associations.

In their discussion of African-American and White parenting styles, Miller and Miller (1990) stated that intermarried couples must teach "survival skills" to their children in order to facilitate healthy bicultural adaptation. They applied Boykin and Toms (1985) conceptual framework for understanding socialization in African-American families, called the "triple quandary," to mixed-heritage (Black-White) families. According to the "triple quandary," as part of the socialization goals of African-American parents, they must integrate the values

of three competing systems: Majority values, African-American culture and a minority-group agenda.

The family itself may represent a barrier to identity formation, according to Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990). Parents may not discuss ethnic or racial issues with their children because of their own discomfort. They also noted that some parents may be focused only on rearing “human beings,” rather than acknowledging that they are socializing children who are stereotyped by the larger society solely due to their color or ethnicity.

McRoy and Zurcher (1983) discussed several factors that facilitate development of positive identity in children of mixed heritage. The children are encouraged to acknowledge and discuss their heritage with parents, parents can perceive their child’s heritage as different from their own and are willing to make changes to facilitate the development of a positive identity. They also pointed out that it is important that the family forms an identity as a mixed-heritage unit.

Jackson, McCullough and Gurin (1988) suggested that the family influences ethnic identification because it is the center of personal self-esteem and self-worth, and can protect children from the negative results of racism. Miller and Miller (1990) stated that healthy ethnic identification is a result of intensive involvement in the African-American community. They extended this reasoning to mixed-heritage children, stating that multicultural settings may offer the healthiest environment for the development of a positive ethnic identity.

Families are instrumental in protecting mixed-heritage children from society’s bigotry (Ladner, 1977). According to Piskacek and Golub (1973), “the way a child perceives himself (sic) depends on how his parents perceive him...the sense of self is derived from identification with one’s parents.” They

went on to state that peer relationships and the relationship with society strengthens and maintains the sense of self as the child grows up.

In describing the challenges of rearing a mixed-heritage child in a racist society, Lyles et al. (1985) offered several guidelines. The child should be provided with positive age-appropriate explanations of his or her parental roots, and transmission of information about race should begin once the child is racially aware and raises concerns. In addition, they stated that parents need to be aware of their own prejudice, and should avoid interpreting their child's developmental challenges in negative social terms.

According to Root (1990), the family environment plays a vital role in allowing children to understand their background and value their mixed heritage. She pointed out that many mixed-heritage families experience significant stress, often resulting from the lack of discussion about race, discrimination and coping strategies. Additionally, children may experience feelings of inferiority due to negative reactions of the extended family to the mixed-heritage couple and refusals to visit or accept the children. It is this type of abandonment, according to Root, that, however subtle or overt, contributes to mixed-heritage children feeling more insecure and different from other children and may contribute to feelings of internal oppression and self-rejection.

According to this literature, children must be given all of the cultural and historical knowledge necessary to understand their mixed heritage, and to integrate elements of both into their emerging "self." Mixed-heritage couples can foster the development of healthy, secure and confident children who are proud of their heritage and equipped to survive and flourish while living in a racist society. This is not meant to present an overly optimistic view of growing up mixed heritage in the United States. However, the time has come to

acknowledge these heretofore invisible members of society and to depathologize them. Mental health professionals, in particular, can no longer assume that these children, or adults, are “torn between two worlds” or “have the best of both worlds.” As Mass (1992) noted, instead of asking what will happen to these children, the more appropriate question to ask today would be “What is the best way to facilitate a positive growing-up experience for interracial children?” (p. 277).

### Mental Health Issues

The psychotherapeutic treatment of ethnic minority children has only recently received attention in the counseling and psychology literature, while extremely limited attention has focused on the treatment of mixed-heritage children (Brandell, 1988). Ruiz (1990) stated that the time has come for professionals to “move beyond mere interest and give the topics of ethnic identity and its counseling ramifications the utmost attention.” Gibbs (1987) noted that because most graduate schools give inadequate classroom and clinical training to minority mental health, clinicians must expand their knowledge through continued education, workshops and in-service training.

Several authors (Baptise, 1991; Gibbs, 1987; McRoy & Freeman, 1986; Sebring, 1985) have discussed how important it is for counselors, clinicians and psychologists to examine their own feelings, beliefs and attitudes about mixed-heritage couples, and basic issues of race, so they can face their prejudices or preconceived ideas when working with mixed-heritage children and their families. The importance of improving one’s knowledge about racial identity issues and related resources has also been noted (McRoy & Freeman, 1986). However, therapy should not focus solely on racial identity issues, particularly

when working with immigrants (Baptiste, 1991). Similarly, Sebring (1985) noted that while an awareness of the issues faced by mixed-heritage children is crucial to working with them, it is just as important to be aware of the limits of this one dimension.

It is vital that counselors and therapists not make assumptions based on a client's looks. According to Root (1990), mixed-heritage children's self-perception is governed not solely by racial features, but by the presence or absence of other similar people, siblings' racial features, identification with one parent over another, peer reactions and how the extended family perceives them. A child, for example, may appear "White," but this does not necessarily mean that he or she has avoided racism. Also, it is important not to generalize clients as "mixed." Just as there is no homogeneous group of Blacks, none for mixed-heritage people exists and they represent varying backgrounds, experiences and family dynamics. Other therapist assumptions may be related to stereotyping, a concern for those working with all non-majority groups, with assumptions being made about "knowing" the child's experience, although it may not accurately reflect the child's reality. In fact, several authors (Baptiste, 1991; Lyles, et al., 1985) pointed out that therapists must not automatically assume that a child's mixed heritage is of primary concern to them. McRoy and Freeman (1986) stated that problems with racial identity are not likely to be among the presenting problems of the majority of referrals of mixed-heritage children in schools.

Counselors need to be aware of the political and social pressures the client may experience, and issues of oppression and racism in the United States. They can work with clients to help them understand how they have internalized societally-biased attitudes about their ethnic backgrounds, and

help them move from an external to internal perspective of self (Poston, 1990). It is also recommended that counselors refer families to one of the increasing number of interracial organizations in the country, so they can interact with and find support from similar families (Poston, 1990).

As with every client-therapist relationship, the therapist must create a supportive environment. However, this may be particularly important when working with mixed-heritage children and their families, who may feel that others have preconceived ideas about them and do not understand their experience of being in a mixed-heritage relationship or the product of such a relationship. Baptise (1991) stated that the therapist must communicate understanding and acceptance, and allow these children and their parents to vent their anger or express any hostility they may feel. Professionals should be direct and active, and encourage clients' to vent their feelings about their mixed heritage and its meaning to them; they should also reassure clients that their feelings are valid and "normal," and that they are not paranoid or irrational (Gibbs, 1990; Sebring, 1985). Counselors should also be aware of the racial realities for all people of color growing up and living in the United States.

McRoy and Freeman (1980) emphasized intervention strategies based on an ecological perspective, in which the focus is on the connection among the school, home and community in assisting these children to develop a positive self-concept. They recommended two goals for assessment, in cases of racial identity issues: 1) to determine which factors are affecting the child's racial identity in a positive or negative manner, and 2) to identify specific supports that are available in the child's environment for developing and maintaining an overall positive image and positive racial identity. They also stated that intervention should include individual counseling with the child, family

counseling as needed, and group counseling as needed with students facing similar issues. In addition, they described additional interventions as including classroom sessions with students, consultations with teachers, and collaboration with community organizations. These authors placed the definition of the “problem,” and its resolution, not within the child but on the interaction between individual and environmental factors.

Gibbs (1987) stated that when assessing biracial adolescents, four areas must be evaluated: 1) age-appropriate developmental behaviors and concerns, in contrast to identity conflicts and problems; 2) parental and family attitudes toward their biracial identity; 3) school and community resources and social networks; and 4) peer relationships.

Mental health professionals must help mixed-heritage children to build their self-esteem as unique individuals by identifying and supporting their positive coping strategies, their abilities and their interests independent of their heritage (Adams, 1973; Lyles, et al., 1985; Sebring, 1985). These authors also noted that the clinician should encourage children to explore both sides of their ancestries, so they may positively identify with both backgrounds.

The counselor can also adopt a psychoeducational approach and provide resources that help educate clients about their parents' ethnic or cultural groups, stress their positive aspects and discuss the benefits of adopting a biracial identity (Poston, 1990). Parents and siblings should be involved in treatment if possible, in order to avoid one member of the family being perceived as the “problem child” (Adams, 1973; Lyles, et al., 1985). According to Gibbs (1987), if a teenager is confused about racial identity, it is likely that he or she received mixed signals from the immediate family. She noted the importance of exploring parental attitudes toward race in general, and

toward their child specifically, so that attitudes can be clarified and modified in order to develop a more supportive family environment. White parents, for example, may not accept society's definitions of their children and give them mixed messages about their skin color and non-White physical appearance. Some parents may try to deny their children's identity, while others may behave as if the society were truly "color blind," and minimize evidence of differential treatment. Sebring (1985) pointed out that White parents in mixed-heritage relationships may never before have had to deal with issues of racism, and that their pain and anger over seeing what their child must deal with may require that counseling be directed toward the development of coping skills.

Gibbs (1990) discussed the importance of determining how parents have attempted to expose their children to both ethnic backgrounds, as well as assessing the attitudes of relatives and close family friends. McGoldrick and Preto (1984) referred to the child's birth as symbolizing "the transformation of two cultures into a new system" (p.358). Some couples experience difficulty when a mixed-heritage relationship results in the severing of emotional and physical ties by the extended family, such as in refusals to visit or accept a marriage or the children (Root, 1990). This can subtly manifest itself in emotional cutoffs, such as grandparents treating biracial grandchildren negatively compared to other grandchildren or making negative comments about their features. Root went on to state that this encourages denial and rejection on the part of the self that has been unaccepted by the extended family, which is likely to be internalized.

Sebring (1985) discussed the need for mental health professionals to focus on prevention. She mentioned teaching parents skills to facilitate the formation of a healthy self-concept, giving the child a mixed-heritage label, and

teaching the child about his or her ancestries, as vital elements of interventions.

Sebring also stated that:

An awareness of the issues faced by interracial children is absolutely crucial to the sensitive guidance of these children toward self-esteem and racial identity. It is equally important, however to be aware of the limits of this dimension in one's self-concept. Ethnic identity is but a part of the whole person, a part that it is hoped may one day be absolved of its qualitative overtones (p.8).

The work of the researchers and social scientists presented in this chapter points to the need to explore the perceptions and perspectives of mixed-heritage children in the United States. In addition, the ways in which they define themselves and make meaning of their heritage warrants further investigation.

Table 2.1 Mixed-Heritage Children: Summary of Empirical Findings

STUDY	PURPOSE	SAMPLE	INSTRUMENT	FINDINGS
Aellen, C. & Lambert, (1969)	Compared children of both mixed and homogeneous parentage on selected measures of ethnic identification, personality characteristics, attitudes and values to determine whether a mixed heritage is harmful because of divided loyalties & unclear identifications, or that a mixed background is broadening and enriching	191 boys, ages 14-17 in Montreal (French-English and French; English)	Identity measure, Social Distance scale, Sensitivity to Others scale, anomie measure, perception of parents inventory, FIRO-B questionnaire, Achievement Orientation Scale	Mixed-ethnic boys showed no signs of personality disturbance, anomie or feelings of alienation, and they perceive parents as relatively more attentive and interested in them as family members
Chang, T.S. (1974)	Determined whether there were any significant differences between the self-concepts of children of ethnically-different marriages and the self-concepts of children of ethnically-similar marriages	349 4th, 5th & 6th graders from same Kansas school district (ethnically-similar parents = 251, ethnically-different = 98)	Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale	Children of ethnically-different marriages had higher mean scores on the total self-concept scale and the behavior subscale than children of ethnically-similar parents
Dien, D.S. & Vinacke, W.E. (1964)	Determined whether children of mixed parentage, compared to those of homogeneous parentage, have smaller self-ideal discrepancy scores; that they have overall small discrepancy scores and that self-ideal discrepancy scores are correlated with discrepancies between the ideal-self and parent of the same sex	Eight males, seven females (undergraduates, middle class)	Rating form with various traits, adapted from Osgood and Secord & Jouard	Males of mixed parentage had smaller self-ideal discrepancy scores than those of homogeneous parentage. Males of mixed parentage had overall smaller discrepancy scores than those of homogeneous parentage. Males' self-ideal discrepancy scores correlated with discrepancy between the ideal-self and parent of the same sex
Johnson, R.C. & Nagoshi, C.T. (1986)	Compared the adjustment level of offspring of both intercultural and within-group marriages	Children of within-group marriages (n=1,024) and children of mixed-heritage marriages (n=180) living in Hawaii	300 item Adjective Checklist	Children of within-group versus across-racial/ethnic marriages did not differ in personality test scores, for the most part

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Table 2.1 continued

STUDY	PURPOSE	SAMPLE	INSTRUMENT	FINDINGS
Parsonson, K. (1987)	Examined the relationship between family ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity and children's ethnic identity	301 male and female intro. psychology students (98 British, 60 Chinese, 33 Italian 110 Ukranian)	ethnicity questionnaire to determine parents' and subjects' ethnic identification (Based on Isajiw)	Weak relationship between children's ethnic identity and parents' marriage. Strong relationship found between ethnic identity and desire to marry within own ethnic group
Stephan, W.G., & Stephan, C.W. (1991)	Compared students of mixed heritage to those of single heritage, to determine whether bicultural socialization has positive or negative effects on personality, adjustment and intergroup relations	497 mixed-heritage undergrads. in Hawaii and New Mexico	questionnaire using various scales (empathy, anomie, dogmatism and ethnic attitudes)	No evidence of negative effects of bi-cultural socialization. Positive effects found for inter-group contact and attitudes, language facility and enjoyment of the culture of minority groups. Mixed-heritage students appeared to have better relations with single-heritage groups than the single-heritage groups have with one another
Stephan, C.W. & Stephan, W. G. (1989)	Investigated the antecedents of ethnic identity to determine if mixed-heritage individuals are most likely to adopt a single ethnic identity	67 University of Hawaii undergrads. (at least 25% but less than 100% Japanese in heritage/part-Hispanics, all born in the U.S.	12-page quest., with 5 measures of ethnic identity	People of mixed heritage very often have multiple identities. Predictors of ethnic identity may be similar for persons of mixed and single heritage, based on a commonality of culture
Yogev, A. & Jamshy, H. (1983)	Examined the concept of social marginality in the offspring of ethnic intermarriage	Children of Ashkenazi-Oriental couples	Data based on national research	Findings do not support marginality thesis related to children of mixed marriages in Israel

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This section of the dissertation includes a summary of research paradigms and the characteristics of qualitative research. It describes the research design used in this study, including information on data collection, selection of participants, procedures and data analysis.

This study responds to the limited work that does exist in this area (theoretical points-of-view and some empirical studies), and provides first-hand accounts of mixed-heritage children who until now have not told their stories. It also responds to the need for research that explores children's perceptions of their mixed-heritage and the meaning it has for them, and how those perceptions can be used to develop culturally-sound educational and mental health services.

#### Design of the Study

Mixed-heritage children are a largely uncharted social phenomenon. Thus, the first step in understanding mixed-heritage childrens' experience of growing up in the United States was to explore their perceptions, so that an initial conceptual map into this area of inquiry could be developed.

I conducted this research using the qualitative method of a case study approach. Jorgensen (1989) described this approach as stressing the "holistic examination of a phenomenon," one that seeks to "avoid the separation of components from the larger context to which these matters may be related." Similarly, Patton (1990) described case studies as especially useful "when one

needs to understand some special people, particular problem or unique situation in great depth.”

Qualitative research views reality as having a subjective quality, unlike other methodologies used in social science research, which view reality as being only external to the individual. This type of research, according to Merriam (1988) is “exploratory, inductive and emphasizes processes rather than ends...there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment...but observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting.” I concur with Merriam’s statement that research focused on “discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions.”

The decision to focus on children’s perceptions related to my interest in knowing how they themselves make meaning of their mixed heritage. So much information, largely negative, has been stated and written about this population, that a qualitative approach that allowed participants to speak openly about themselves and their lives was most suited to exploring the questions guiding this research.

The qualitative method used, and best suited for this research, was an open-ended interview which encouraged in-depth exploration. The experiences of these children needed first to be characterized and described before more focused hypotheses could be generated and empirically tested. In-depth interviewing has been referred to as “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) and is a data collection technique used extensively by qualitative researchers. The strength of this technique, according to McCracken (1988) is that it allows the researcher

into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience...to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do (p.9)

Little is known about mixed-heritage children's perceptions, particularly as expressed directly by them. This qualitative approach, a "conversation with a purpose," allowed participants to tell their own stories and highlighted those experiences which have been significant to them, in an attempt to explore the primary questions guiding this study.

### Research Questions

This study provided a better understanding of the experience of mixed-heritage children, by asking them directly about their perceptions. The primary questions guiding this study were the following:

- 1.) How do mixed-heritage children perceive themselves and what meaning do they give to their heritage?
- 2.) How have mixed-heritage children perceived the effects of growing up in a racist society?
- 3.) How do mixed-heritage children perceive the role of their families in helping or hindering their ability to cope with the negative attitudes and values of the larger society?

### Participants

Twelve children of mixed heritage between the ages of ten and eighteen, nine females and three males, were interviewed for this study. All of them met the criteria for the study of having at least one parent of Black-/African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American or Native American heritage.

Three of the participants fell outside of the original selection criteria I had developed, because of their being older than 16. Despite this variation from my initial plan, these participants were selected for the diversity they brought to the study, as well as my consideration of the difficulty in locating children who were willing to participate in this study.

All contacts were made within the state of Massachusetts, and the participants were interviewed individually. The sample size is small, in order to capture the depth of experiences of a few participants, rather than collecting a more general idea of the experiences of a larger number of people. Chapter Four includes a detailed demographic profile of the participants.

### Procedures

Participants were identified and contacted through informal contacts with friends and colleagues. In addition, I contacted local organizations which would be able to offer me access to potential participants. In some cases, the person who recommended someone for this study contacted them (and their parent) to determine their interest in participating. In other situations, I made the initial contact by telephone, introducing myself and describing the research study. Speaking about my daughter and my personal, as well as professional interest in this topic, helped to establish rapport. I explained that I was a graduate student and would be interviewing a number of children, and that the results would be used for a doctoral dissertation. The main purpose of this contact was to determine each child's level of interest in participating, as well as their parent(s) willingness to give them permission to participate.

These initial contacts allowed me to identify those children who met the criteria for participation and were also geographically appropriate, in terms of

proximity to my town of residence. A pilot interview was conducted with one child, in order to assess the usefulness of my questions and how they were asked. Those additional children who met the criteria and had the permission of their parent(s) were invited to participate in the study, and a mutually-convenient interview day and time were arranged. Once the consent form was signed by participants' parent(s), most of the interviews were conducted at participants' place of residence, at their convenience, usually after school or on the weekend. One of the interviews was conducted at a public library, while another took place at the participant's school library, both at their request. All interviews lasted from one to two hours, and were audiotaped and transcribed by me. During this time, I explained my interest in the topic and what I would be doing. The participants were first asked about demographic and background information, and I then proceeded with the questions included in the Interview Guide (see Appendix B, p. 107). At the completion of each interview, I recorded my observations, interpretations and reflections on the content of the session, as well as the interview process itself.

In order to protect participants' confidentiality, no names were included in the interview format. Code numbers were used to identify the audiotaped transcript. Participants were assured both verbally and in writing that their identities would be protected. (See Appendix A, p. 105, for a copy of the Informed Consent Form).

### Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were the primary method of data collection. (See Appendix B for Interview Guide). I interviewed twelve mixed-heritage children utilizing a phenomenological approach, which emerged from philosophy and sociology, and focuses on the experience of people in the world. The goal of

this paradigm, according to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), is to find ways of “understanding social phenomena from the actor’s own perspective” (p.2). This phenomenological frame fostered my understanding of the children’s perceptions from their point-of-view and in their own words. In-depth phenomenological interviewing was used to highlight how the children of mixed-heritage couples make meaning of their own heritage and how they view and understand both themselves and their experiences. This strategy is characterized as non-directive, flexible, unstructured, and non-standardized (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

This enhanced understanding of the participants’ experiences was ultimately interpreted by the researcher. I encouraged participants to speak about their experiences in an open way and used my experience counseling young children and adolescents to engage them and facilitate conversation. The goal of this was to reveal “respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions” (Patton, 1990).

### Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is a creative process which brings order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Marshall and Rossman (1989) described this process as “messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating.” McCracken (1988) stated that the analysis of data served to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondent’s view of the world in general and the topic in particular. Analysis is also undertaken to transform the interview transcripts into an orderly, structured and manageable form with some meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

My main task was to identify, code and categorize the prevalent patterns in the data. I focused on participants' perceptions of themselves and their mixed heritage, and I generated a number of themes from the data amassed. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data and it builds grounded theory. Grounded theory, an approach developed by Glazer and Strauss (1967), involves categorizing the data, developing emergent theory, and testing the theory continually against the data. An integral element of grounded theory is its ability to address new themes and ideas which emerge during the exploration of previously undocumented data. As Patton (1990) noted, "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis." But there is not just one way of organizing, analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. Patton suggested that every qualitative analyst must discover his or her own process.

As qualitative, phenomenological research, this study generated hypotheses rather than testing predictions and pre-conceived assumptions about children of mixed heritage. I thoroughly evaluated the transcriptions of taped interviews and edited the text into units of analysis, which received topical headings reflecting content. This was done by making two copies of each transcript, with the original transcript kept as the "clean" copy. The other two copies were written on and coded in the process of data analysis. I read each transcript several times to become more familiar with the children's stories. Those areas which appeared to be significant or of interest to me were noted,

and designated a coding category. Eventually, all of the transcripts were given initial codes. Once all of the transcripts were coded, the list of coding categories was reviewed and refined, in order to avoid overlap and better organize the themes which emerged from the narratives. A number of formalized themes were grounded in the data, as anticipated, and expressed within the framework of the research questions guiding this work.

### Limitations of the Study

There were a number of limitations to this study which should influence how the reader interprets and uses the findings presented here.

This research was primarily a study of one group of mixed-heritage children residing in Western Massachusetts. Although all of the participants embody a range of personalities, family backgrounds and ethnic heritages, they cannot be said to be a homogeneous group or representative of all mixed-heritage children in the United States. In addition, the ages of the participants ranged from 10 to 18, an age span that includes some developmental and cognitive realities which should be taken into consideration. The issue of gender should also be considered, since nine of the participants were female.

There were some inherent limitations arising from the type of research methodology which was implemented. A qualitative case study approach was used in order to gain a better understanding of mixed-heritage children and their life experiences. As Merriam (1988) noted, case study is well-suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. Therefore, this study presented a detailed account of a complex phenomenon rather than being predictive, as with an experimental design. Also, there was variation in the depth and content of individual narratives,

which is always expected when phenomenological interviews are conducted.

Despite my approach and subject participation, I wrote from the position of researcher and the final decision about what would be written was mine. It was also important for me to remember that I would never have complete access to participants' thinking, and that my findings are based on an incomplete picture. My choice of a topic is indicative of my biases concerning how I view children of mixed heritage, and my overall perception of this study was surely influenced by my involvement in a mixed-heritage relationship and being the parent of a mixed-heritage child. I am fully aware of my propensity to view mixed-heritage couples as just as healthy and strong as their single-heritage counterparts, and the children of such relationships as positive and able to enjoy the benefits of their mixed heritage.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The findings of this study are presented in narrative form, in order to give the reader the opportunity to hear participants' stories in their own words. The beginning of this chapter presents a demographic profile of the children who participated in this study. It then continues with a presentation of the three major themes generated through my analysis of the data. I will begin with mixed-heritage children's perceptions of themselves and their heritage. Next, I will present mixed-heritage children's views on how they are perceived by others, including their friends and teachers. Finally, I will present the family influences affecting mixed-heritage children.

#### Demographic Profile of Participants

The participants in this study were twelve children of mixed heritage, nine females and three males, who resided in Western Massachusetts. Participants' ages ranged from 10 to 18. Initially, the age limit for participation in this study was to be 16. However, based on the difficulty in finding children who met all of the criteria, and the ethnic diversity they brought to the study, I decided to include two 17-year-olds and one 18-year-old. All but one of the participants attended public school in a semi-rural town in Western Massachusetts, and their grades ranged from fifth to eleventh. The oldest participant attended a private boarding school in Eastern Massachusetts, where she is in the twelfth grade, and generally comes home to Western Massachusetts to be with her family

on the weekends. (See Table 4.1 for a detailed demographic summary of participants.)

Seven of the participants were born in Massachusetts, while two were born in other states and came here at an early age. One participant whose parents were in the army was born in Germany and came to the United States when she was six months of age. However, two of the participants spent significantly more time in places other than the continental United States. One was born in Puerto Rico and lived there until the age of ten, while another was born in Germany and lived there until the age of three.

In terms of their parents' ethnicity, all of the participants' parents met the criteria initially set for this study, with respect to being involved in a mixed-heritage relationship where at least one partner identified themselves as either Latino, Black or African-American, Asian or Asian-American or Native American. Three of the participants have parents who were not born in the United States. One participant's father was born in Somalia and one child's mother was born in Korea, while another's father was born in Germany and her mother was from Trinidad. Four of the children have parents who were born in Puerto Rico.

With respect to their own ethnicity, all of the children in this study identified themselves as being biracial or "mixed," and represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Five of the participants are European-American and African-American. Two of the children have one parent who is Asian or Asian-American, with the other parent European-American in one case and Puerto Rican in the other. Another two children have one parent who is Puerto Rican and the other European-American. One of the participants is African-American and Puerto Rican, while another is Native American and European-American.

Finally, one child has parents from Germany and Trinidad, both of whom had been born in their respective countries.

Nine of the participants are living in two-parent households, with parents who were married. Three of the children live in mother-headed households, with two having fairly regular contact with their father and the other never having known or had contact with her father.

Ten of the participants have parents who are educated professionals. They are teachers (5), professors (3), social workers (3), business professionals (5), and a nurse (1). Two of the children's parents are diversity trainers, while another's is an editor. Three of the participants have mothers who are currently attending college in degree programs for nursing, social sciences, and electrical engineering. One of the participants did not know her father and could not report on his profession.

Eleven of the participants have siblings. One stated that her brother was adopted, while another spoke about having a "half-brother" and one "half-sister." Four of the children had older siblings, five had younger siblings, and two had both older and younger brothers and sisters. One participant had no siblings.

Most of the participants in this study stated that English was the only language they spoke, and the only language spoken at home. Three of the children said they sometimes spoke another language (Spanish, German) or could understand it, but responded at home in English. Just two of the participants consistently spoke Spanish at home, and sometimes with friends.

When reviewing the participants' profiles, a number of trends emerged. The majority of the participants came from middle- to upper-middle class "intact" families where the parents were educated professionals. Those participants

who fell into the low-income category, lived in households headed by single mothers who were pursuing their education and, in all likelihood, were in a transition stage and in the future will not have a low-income status. Five of the participants had one or two parents who were born in Puerto Rico or a country other than the United States. All of the children identified themselves as being of mixed heritage, and represented a diversity of ethnic backgrounds.

### Mixed-Heritage Children's Perceptions of Themselves and Their Heritage

According to the literature and research on this topic, children of mixed heritage have typically been described in negative terms. However, findings of this study will present their voices and views about their positive self-perceptions, and how those self-perceptions help them to describe themselves, and their experiences.

The participants in this study described themselves and the meaning their mixed heritage had for them in positive terms. They consistently referred to personal characteristics which positively defined who they were and how they saw themselves, as well as the advantages they associated with their mixed heritage. Their self-references also spoke of their many abilities and skills when it comes to seeing things from different perspectives, being able to bridge cultures, and cultivating friendships with people of different backgrounds. Finally, the participants recognized that their positive self-perceptions were closely connected to their parents' diverse cultural backgrounds, which were described as a powerful source of pride and strength.

In terms of their self-descriptions, the children in this study did not provide uniform responses which allowed them to be classified into a single category. Their responses presented the researcher with a rich set of definitions which

illustrated the many positive aspects of their lives and how they described themselves. For example, in describing herself, this participant's response echoed the type of response given by the other participants:

Well, I'm pretty mellow, I think, and usually I'm pretty relaxed. When I was younger, I used to be shy, and then I guess I broke out of my shell or whatever. I really like playing sports, I like volleyball and racquetball. And I'm really a math person. and I really like working with computers...I usually know what my strengths and weaknesses are. So if people ask me 'Do you think you can do this?' I can usually say yes or no honestly. (C8)

In the same vein, this participant stated:

I'm usually pretty outspoken, usually only to adults, with students it's harder. I'm very into school, very into my education, I think my education is the most important thing in the entire world to me. I'm very smart...I'm very open-minded, and I'm into exploring new things, meeting new types of people. I like learning about people... I'm the type of person who likes to travel, I like to go to different countries and explore different cultures...I've been to Mexico for about a month and I loved it, I loved the people there...I was just very open-minded about the whole experience. I love trying new things too. What else? I love figure skating. I don't skate, don't have the coordination and will probably never skate in my life, but I just totally love the art and I just love everything about it. If there's a figure-skating program on TV, I'll be watching it 24 hours a day, everyone knows that. (C11)

Based on the analysis of participants' responses, it became clear to me during the process of data analysis that all of the children included references to their mixed heritage in their self-descriptions. It appeared that being mixed heritage was a salient feature in terms of how the children saw themselves, and because of this it was described as being part of a larger constellation having to do with their personality, areas of interest, and activities they enjoyed. Furthermore, they also spoke about feeling that they had integrated their parents' heritages, rather than having had to "choose" one over the other. The

following excerpts from their narratives will be presented to illustrate these points. As one child stated:

I would probably tell people that I'm German, and I'm African, and I'm American and Indian...all these different things. If I wanted to describe myself to them, I'd say I'm like a chocolate and vanilla twist, and you stir it up. (C4)

Similarly, this participant spoke about his background and how he would describe himself:

I don't like to say that I'm just one thing, because I'm not. So I would tell people that I'm Indian, but that I'm also French and Scottish. Because even though my mom talks a lot about Indian things and sayings and stuff like that, that's just one part of who I am. My father and his background are also a part of me, and I don't think it would be fair to just say that I'm one or the other. Besides, I think it's interesting, because not a lot of people are both, most people are just one thing. (C12)

All of the participants described themselves as being of mixed heritage.

Response analysis indicated that they all felt they had integrated their parents' heritages, rather than having to "choose" one over the other. This level of integration was a key factor in how they saw themselves and their heritage. As one child noted:

I think I've integrated both of my cultures. At home, we have a lot of the culture, because my father brings a lot of stuff, and we've been to Puerto Rico. And we have the music and the food, and he speaks Spanish, and I understand it, so I think it's very much integrated. It's just a part of me, I grew up with it. So it's not like a big deal or anything, that's just the way it is, the way it's always been...Each of my parents grew up differently. And things in their families were run differently. And so that kind of helped to make who they are now, and me and my sisters have experienced both of them, both parts of who they are, and we're a combination of them both put together. I think it's neat. (C10)

Another participant spoke about integrating her parents' heritages, and how this was fostered:

I tell people that I'm Japanese and Jewish. I've never felt that I had to choose one over the other because they were always a part of me. My mom and dad, we'd always done activities and things like that related to my culture...it was celebrating things that were my history and background, and I like that. My mom and I did Girl's Day and we also celebrated the Jewish holidays. It was just a part of me. I knew it was different, but I was proud of it. Because it gave me like an identity. But I don't really remember realizing that I was really different or my parents were...I don't really look that Japanese, so I guess you wouldn't know right off that that I was, but I don't know if I look that Jewish either. So I don't really side with one or the other. (C2)

Despite this integration of their parents' backgrounds, three of the participants mentioned feeling more comfortable or "into" one side, compared to the other. One participant, who did not know her father, was keenly aware of favoring one side over the other, as well as her early negative view of her heritage which was transformed into ethnic pride as she got older. She commented:

I didn't choose one over the other, but I'm more into my Puerto Rican side, because I'm around Puerto Rican all the time. I really don't know anything about my dad, because he was adopted, so I don't know anything about their cultural things and all that. So I don't really know a lot about my African-American side. I just know a lot about my Puerto Rican side...When I was in second grade I really had problems dealing with my two different cultures. Because I didn't want to be Black, I hated being Black when I was younger. And I wished I was just plain Puerto Rican, or White for that matter...I remember it so well. And now, I don't care that I'm Puerto Rican and Black, I'm proud that I'm Puerto Rican and Black. If nobody likes it, then they don't need to hang around with me. (C7)

In the analysis of participants' responses, it was found that all of them made references about the area or neighborhood where they had grown up.

Participants indicated that they saw this as a positive factor contributing to how they viewed themselves and significant to their self-description. One participant spoke of this:

It is nice to live in a place with different types of people. You know, from different ethnic groups or whatever. There are all kinds of people around here, and we play together and go to school and stuff. I think it's really neat to have friends who all look different and have different kinds of families, and are from different places. I'm glad, because I think it's better for kids to know lots of different people. I'm glad, and I think I'm lucky to have a chance to know so many people (C4).

This child highlighted in her statements the role played by her family's moving patterns in her self-description:

I moved around a lot when I was younger, I lived in the ghetto for a while, and then I moved into a semi-ghetto, and then I moved here, which is not really a ghetto at all, it's just...hickville. I don't mind being Puerto Rican and Black, mixed, I'm proud of it. I usually don't mention it..until people ask me, 'What are you, Black?' and I'm like, 'No, I'm Puerto Rican and Black.' And everybody just thinks I'm Black, that's why they don't ask me. But when they hear me speaking Spanish--because I speak Spanish at school and at home and stuff with my friends--and they're like, 'You're Puerto Rican, too?' And I say 'Yup.' (C7)

In her narrative, another participant made the distinction between growing up in suburban, urban and rural areas. She spoke of the impact it had not only on her self-description, but her friendships as well:

...If I was going to say to myself that I'm a Black person which, you know, I partially am, I come from a suburban background, and I'm different than those that come from an urban background, so it's a big difference. African-Americans and White-Americans can't be grouped into groups because they're like urban, suburban and rural, and I'm rural/suburban. So I'm into different types of music, and it's very hard for me to talk to some of the African-American kids at my school because they're into rap and whatnot, and I'm not really into rap. I mean, I like some rap songs but not a lot, and I don't talk the same way or walk the same way, I'm a different thing... I have some really good friends who are African-American, and I do hang out with the African-American kids, but I just don't feel as comfortable, especially when it comes to certain topics, because it's like, I wonder if they're really gonna understand what the heck I'm talking about. Yeah, I can feel more comfortable with the White kids which, sometimes I'm ashamed to say. (C11)

As part of their self-descriptions, all of the participants mentioned the advantages to being of mixed heritage, and they were consistent in their perceptions of those advantages. In their responses they described themselves as being open-minded to new people and experiences, and having the ability to see things from different perspectives. They also spoke of their ability to bridge different cultures, sometimes through speaking another language, and how this fostered the development of friendships with people of different backgrounds. This participant reflected the sentiments of many of the children in this study:

I guess I can relate to both, to all different cultures almost. Although I'm not like Indian, I feel like I can relate. And for other people that see me as different, maybe I'm more easy to relate to. I don't know... I definitely like being part of two different cultures. Because it keeps me open to both cultures, and I definitely feel like I'm learning something from both cultures and it's definitely an experience that I think I'm gaining from...I feel like I'm part of two different things and therefore part of many different things, sort of. Because I feel I can relate to many different things. (C5)

This ability to relate to different people enhanced the children's ability to make friends and enjoy relationships with people of diverse backgrounds. This child commented on how his mixed heritage fostered his ability to make friends with a variety of people:

Where I used to live, I made friends with people from Spain, from Russia, from Korea, all these people. So I think my heritage has kind of helped. There was a Korean boy who I really liked and I was friendly to him and all, and he was new to the country...and I helped him learn English, so we became really close. I wish I had his phone number or something. (C4)

Several of the participants spoke about how knowing another language helped them to relate to many different people, and was a significant resource in helping them to bridge cultures. Two of the children stated:

I don't just hang around with both races or cultures or whatever you call them. I hang around with everybody. Begali people, Cambodian people, Oriental, Asian, and so on. Also, I can talk to a lot of different people. I can talk to Puerto Rican people in Spanish, and I can talk to Black people in English, and I can talk to all these different races in English and whatever. It helps to be able to speak two different languages. (C7)

I'm more alike with more people. Because people who are Black can see me, they like associate with me. But people who know that I can speak German, they can also associate with me..like people who take German or something like that. I have a friend and she might not have gotten to know me if it wasn't for that. (C9)

The idea of being open to diversity in people and able to bridge cultures that was included in participants' self-descriptions, was expressed by several of the children as a desire to adopt children of ethnic backgrounds different from their own in the future. This participant stated the following:

I definitely know that I'm going to adopt a boy and a girl, and they're going to be of different races. I already know my whole life story. When I get older, I'm gonna make sure I go to college first. I already know the two colleges I'm gonna go to. After I graduate from both colleges, I'm gonna go to undergraduate and graduate to become a bilingual lawyer. After I have a house and I have a job, and I'm all settled down, I'm gonna adopt two children, whether I have a husband or not. I don't know when I'll be getting married, I guess that all depends on the time and the situation and everything. I want my boy to be..anything, it doesn't matter, just different from me. And my girl, I want her to be--I want him to be Vietnamese--and I want my girl to be any race, it doesn't matter, but I want her to be deaf. I just think it's neat to raise a kid that's not your own, and that's a different race than you, and bring him up believing that he is his race and my race. (C7)

All of the participants spoke about being special or feeling different from others, with this description given in positive terms. One participant felt this for the first time when she and her family were interviewed about their multiracial status a few years ago. She stated:

Three years ago, maybe it was less than that, our entire family was interviewed about being biracial. So we had a long discussion then. And it surprised me, too, because I learned more about my family than I thought...That was the first time I was actually confronted by the fact that, I mean, I always knew that I wasn't White or, but I was struck by the fact that I was different...it just means that I'm different because I'm part of two different backgrounds, and that's special, I think. (C5)

One child echoed the feelings of a number of other participants, when she enthusiastically spoke about being different and the positive meaning it had for her:

It's fun being different from everybody else, and not just being one thing only. It's exciting, it's different, because you can act Puerto Rican or you can act Black, or you can act both any time. It's just fun. I don't know how to explain it...I think that it's really neat that my parents are from different backgrounds. Because that makes me different, and I like being different from anybody else, because if everybody was the same, then this world would be really boring. (C7)

All of the participants made references in their responses to their parents' mixed-heritage relationship as a vital component of how they viewed themselves and their heritage. Participants spoke highly of their family heritage and their parents' mixed-heritage relationship. Four of the children spoke specifically about their appreciation of their parents' intermarriage, and what it meant to them to have parents of different ethnic backgrounds. This participant commented:

I think you get more exposure. Because I have my mother's heritage and then my father's...like it's extra. It's something that a lot of people don't have, that they can't experience. I think it's really good that I can know another culture. When you have that, you get to learn about it and go there maybe. Most people just know about one thing, because they haven't been exposed to another way or another culture. (C10)

Similarly, another participant spoke about what her parents' intermarriage meant to her:

I don't see my parents as Puerto Rican or Korean, I see them as my parents. I think it's a wonderful experience. I mean, it's not something you choose or anything, but I think it gives you a better outlook on life. With my parents, I never see them as two different ethnicities, because they're alike and different in a lot of ways. But I don't think it has anything to do with their ethnic backgrounds, I think it's their personalities. So, when I was little, I never saw things as Korean or Puerto Rican, so it's just...they're my parents, I love them, it doesn't matter to me whether they're Korean or Puerto Rican. They're my parents. (C8)

Several of the participants felt that neither they nor their parents could ever be considered racist, and how they saw this as a real advantage. This participant commented on being able to see things with "both eyes," and how this was the antithesis of racism:

I guess you see things with both eyes...like when there were the riots in L.A. and there was a lot of friction between Blacks and Koreans, my mom was really, I don't know, she was really sad. I could really feel for her. I see things through both eyes...I think there are a lot of advantages to being mixed, because you always look at things from two eyes in a way. And I think that when you're mixed, you'll never be racist or you'll never be mean, you'll never look down on another race. And I think that's a real advantage, because people who sort of have this ignorance and attitude or whatever, they just sort of see things to a point, where if you're mixed, you can sort of keep looking at it, I think...I don't think a mixed person would ever say one race is better than another, because if you look at your parents you never say one parent is better than another, so I don't think you could ever say that if you're mixed. (C8)

The only disadvantage associated with their mixed heritage that was mentioned by the participants, had to do with completing standardized forms. This was mentioned, almost in passing, by several of the older participants who spoke of disliking having to "check one" when taking tests or filling out forms which requested information about their background.

The children in this study have a clear sense of who they are and how they would describe themselves. However, they viewed their ethnicity as one

part of themselves, along with other parts which had to do with their interests, activities they enjoyed, and the type of person they perceived themselves to be. For many of the children, their self-description focused not only on their own mixed heritage, but on that of their parents' different backgrounds as well. Many of them viewed themselves as different, in a positive sense, or special in some way, because of their mixed heritage. The neighborhood where they resided was seen by some as playing a role in how they viewed and defined themselves. Almost all of the children felt that they hadn't had to choose one background over the other, but had integrated them both. However, a few of them reported feeling closer to one side of the family, generally because of physical proximity and greater personal contact.

The children who participated in this study spoke of numerous advantages of their mixed-heritage status. The advantages related mainly to their openness to different people and experiences, and their ability to see things from different perspectives. They also spoke of their ability to bridge cultures and connect with friends of different backgrounds. A few of the children spoke of one disadvantage, which had to do with completing standardized forms which don't reflect their mixed-heritage status. The children talked about their appreciation of their parents' mixed-heritage relationship and the benefits they derived from it, as well as the lack of prejudice on the part of their parents that this implied.

#### Mixed-Heritage Children's Views of How They are Perceived by Others

All of the participants in this study spoke about people's perceptions about them. According to the literature, these perceptions are usually based on the societal stereotypes that are often associated with participants' physical

appearance and their mixed heritage. The majority of the children spoke about people in their lives who sometimes expressed these perceptions and their negative views and, very often, these were voiced not by strangers, but by people with whom they had daily contact. Most of the children also felt they had not been exposed to overt racism and it wasn't something they'd had to struggle with, although they did experience curiosity and questions, or early negative comments or situations. The older participants (ages 15-18) were, not surprisingly, better able to reflect on past experiences in dealing with racism, while the youngest participants (ages 10-14) generally felt it was a non-issue.

Participants' views allowed the identification of three types of responses: the first speaks of how they feel they are perceived by other people in general; the second one specifically relates to their school teachers' perceptions of them; and the last one speaks about the perceptions of peers and friends.

Most of the participants indicated that a common experience for them was people's mixed reactions upon first meeting them. This participant captured that general view:

When people see me, they don't really see who I am, they think I'm just some Asian girl or something...I don't know, I think they see me as different. I mean, like if I meet someone for the first time--it usually depends who they are. Because I've gotten a lot of reactions. Like some people treat me just fine. And other people are a little bit, I'm not sure reluctant is the word, but -- kind of, back off, sort of. But it usually depends on the person. (C8)

Based on participants' responses, it appeared that they view people's perceptions about them as often based on their physical appearance. For example, this participant spoke about other people sometimes assuming that she's adopted, because of her physically favoring one parent. She noted:

People think I'm White, they don't think I'm Puerto Rican. And if they think I'm White, they just think it and I know they think that I won't say anything. But if they ask me, I'll say 'Yeah, I'm half Puerto Rican,' and they'll be surprised by it, because of my skin color...Some people think I'm adopted, because when they see my mom, because I do not look like my mother. And some people go, are you adopted? And I say no, if you see my father, you'll see that he's really my father. (C6)

Similarly, another participant spoke about people's reactions to her, which were further confounded when in public with her father. She stated:

A lot of people come up to me and think I'm Spanish, and they start talking to me in Spanish. And I'm like, I'm sorry, I don't speak Spanish. And usually it's people who weren't sure if I was biracial or Spanish. But I think most people think of me as Black. Sometimes it's uncomfortable, like when they want to know what you are and stuff. But most of the time it's fine. And in Germany it came up once, like once when we were going in, the guy looking at our passports, he was kind of suspicious that I was really related to my dad. They just kind of look at you strange, sometimes. But it doesn't bother me. (C9)

Participants stated that their first or most recent negative experience took place while in the classroom. These experiences were related to their teachers' perceptions about them, which were based, again, on the physical appearance of the child. This participant described her experience with this:

People mostly just assume I'm Black or that I'm just gonna be uncooperative or disruptive or something like that. And sometimes there are teachers who assume that I'm a stereotypical Black person or something like that, and they treat me like that. And I'm okay with that, because it doesn't hurt me, really. A lot of the times, when teachers see you they make assumptions about you because of what you look like. And usually I try to make sure that doesn't happen, because sometimes that has happened to me. So, I'm really quiet--because I am, it's not because of that. But I try to make sure that teachers know that I'm not gonna come in in a halter and start being disruptive in class. (C9)

Similarly, another participant was asked to leave an advanced class by a teacher who had erroneously assumed, based on her appearance, that she didn't speak English. She noted:

I had this teacher, I won't mention her name, she was my ninth-grade social studies teacher. I was in an advanced class, and you know when they have those parent-teacher meetings? Well, she told my mom I should be moved out, because she thought I didn't know how to speak English. And my mom was like, gr-r-r-r, so my mom said, no, forget you, so I stuck to the class and I got like a B+ or something, which wasn't my best grade, but it was a pretty good grade. She had assumed because--my mom has an accent, and I don't think she'd heard me speak, because the first day we just went through the names. It was after a couple of days or something, that she assumed I didn't speak English and should be moved down to standard or basic. So, I don't know, it does sort of blame me when a teacher says that. (C8)

Commenting on his classroom experience, this child remarked:

Sometimes in class, like if we're talking about Indians or Columbus Day or something, the teacher will ask me to say something, like to teach something about it. But I can't say what happened, I mean I don't know all about that stuff and details. I know what my mom tells me, like about her family or things, and I do know some things, but just because my mother's Indian doesn't mean I know, like to teach the class about history, about everything that happened. I don't think the teacher should do that, I don't like being picked out from everybody else in the class. She should have checked with me first or something. (C12)

In addition to dealing with teachers' stereotypical assumptions, many of the children had experienced the negative perceptions of peers and friends. All of the children in this study spoke of having friends of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. However, while they all enjoyed and appreciated these relationships, they sometimes had to deal with stereotypical views from friends. One child described an incident involving sharing with classmates photographs

from a family celebration, and their surprise and curiosity upon seeing what her family looked like. She commented:

Once I was out of school for a while, and I went to my German grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary, and there were all these pictures. And I came back and I showed them to my classes, and people were surprised that all my German relatives were White. And they just made comments, but not hurtful, like 'oh my God, they're White, but...and some people assume it sometimes. That I have different cultural backgrounds, even if they don't know it. (C9)

Another participant also commented on a friend's surprise, in this case upon learning where she had been born and grew up:

There's a friend of mine, this girl who's sort of a snob, and when I told her that I'd grown up in Puerto Rico and had lived there for ten years, she was really surprised, because I get good grades and I do well in school. So she was really surprised that I had lived there for ten years, I had lived there more than I have lived here, and I was still able to maintain myself. I mean, I could see it in her facial expression, you can sort of tell somebody's surprised, their facial expressions usually give them away..even though they don't realize it, surprise shows. (C8)

Other participants spoke about their classmates assuming they did well academically or in certain subjects, because of their ethnicity. As this participant remarked:

I participate in school a lot and, I don't mean to brag, but I get pretty good grades and I've been wondering if people think it's because I'm Japanese. You know, that whole stereotype of Asians are really smart. And I like math and science, so...I haven't really asked my friends about it, but I wonder what they think. (C2)

Not all of the comments made to the participants were as benign as these. Several of the children spoke about their classmates' negative comments related to both their ethnicity and their appearance, and many encountered racial slurs made by classmates. This participant chose to deal directly with a derogatory comment made by a classmate:

The only fight I ever got into was in fifth grade, when this kid called me a 'Jap.' I pounded him. But, you know, it really affected me, because that had been the first time. Now, kids make comments sometimes. Not about me necessarily, but about Japanese or Jewish people. Sometimes I confront them and sometimes I don't. It depends. (C2)

This participant spoke about a classmate's racial slur and how she dealt with it:

One day in fourth grade, this boy, he called me 'nigger,' and I was still experiencing withdrawal from what I really was, like from being Puerto Rican and Black, and he called me 'nigger' and I beat him up, I really hurt him...Actually, a lot of people tell me that I look Oriental, because my eyes are almond-shaped. I say, 'My eyes aren't Chinese, they're almond-shaped.' I usually laugh and I play it off, but it really bothers me. Actually, it doesn't really bother me, because my mother has Oriental-looking eyes too, except hers go up a little and mine don't, they just go slanted, like almonds. (C7)

One of the participants spoke about the pain of having to cope not only with a friend's racist attitudes, but those of her friend's father as well:

I used to have this good friend who was a racist, and that was really hard. I met her through other friends, but she became my good friend. But she and her family, they're really racist. And sometimes I'd feel like yelling at her...I don't know. And her father, one time, the first time I met him, this really shocked me, I was in the car with him and I was getting off at her house because we were going to bake some brownies for this student council project, so I was about to leave and he's like, don't worry, we let foreigners into (our neighborhood). And I was like, okay...usually when I'm with other people, it doesn't seem to matter that I'm Puerto Rican, Korean, whatever, but he made a point to make a comment. (C8)

Participants' narratives about the ways in which they view how people have perceived them, clearly reflect our societal and institutional realities. Physical appearance was a major contributor to others' perceptions of the children in this study. This was spoken about in a negative light, not surprisingly, considering this society's rigid classification of people by skin color. Issues of

racism and prejudice were experienced at different degrees of awareness. Very often, the participants were the recipients of questions expressing curiosity about their looks or about their parents' backgrounds. Some of the participants, particularly the older ones, were able to reflect on earlier, more blatant experiences with prejudice. This typically was expressed in racial slurs directed at participants or assumptions based on stereotypical views of them. Most of the children were confronted, in one way or another, by issues related to their heritage on the part of teachers and friends. Those who minimized this issue or did not see it as relevant to them, felt that the prejudice was not aimed directly at them or that they had sufficient coping skills.

#### Mixed-Heritage Children and Family Influences

Participants spoke proudly about their families and their positive influence on their lives. Children of mixed heritage, who are part of mixed-heritage families, grow up having to deal with certain issues that are unique to them. Analysis of participants' responses allowed the identification of three topics which consistently emerged in their narratives. The first of them had to do with parental preparation for dealing with issues of racism and the larger society. The second one had to do with relationships with their extended family. The third was related to some of the family's central values, specifically religion and language.

In terms of participants' responses having to do with parental preparation for dealing with the larger society, there was no consensus. Half of the children felt they had been adequately prepared, with the preparation taking the form of direct advice for some children, and a more subtle or indirect approach for others. The other half felt that they received no parental preparation and, in

some cases, that they would have preferred to have had this. These different perspectives are illustrated in the following narrative excerpts:

I think my parents prepared me. Not telling me, but like who I hang out with, who I spend time with. They like to meet people I spend time with...My parents also prepared me by making sure I wasn't ashamed of who I was. So if someone put me down, I'd have no reason to feel bad, because I'd know it wasn't a bad thing. They just made sure I knew who I was. (C2)

One child commented that her mother gave her some direct advice which she found helpful:

My mother prepared me. She told me that there's a lot of people out there that don't accept people for who they are, and they just look at you for what color skin you have, and just basic stuff like that. And she said that you have to really be aware of who you choose to hang around with, and to make sure that they really accept you for who you are, not for what they'd like you to be. (C7)

Another participant reflected the sentiments of several of the participants, when she spoke of receiving advice not when very young, but as she got older:

Sometimes I don't think they really prepared me for negative attitudes. Because they never said, people are gonna make fun of you because your eyes are smaller than theirs. So I'd probably say that they didn't prepare me, because of how they just, they never drew any lines, they never said 'you know, you might encounter this or that. Perhaps they didn't think that I would or something. But as I got older, my mom told me, you know, there's gonna be people out there that are going to judge you, and if you're gonna encounter that, you shouldn't get down on yourself or think it's you, you should realize that it's not you and it's the person, so she told me that. (C8)

Those participants who indicated that they would have liked more parental preparation, saw it as something that would have benefitted them. The oldest participant, who was 18, was the most vocal about wishing she had had more preparation in order to cope with the pain of others' cruelty:

They didn't prepare me, they didn't think that they were gonna have to. Somehow they think your little kid's gonna be so sheltered and you kind of forget about that stuff, and then reality strikes your little

kid, and your little kid comes crying home saying 'mommy, daddy, explain what these kids said to me.' So I don't really think they prepared me adequately, they just didn't tell me until later, and I think that was really stupid...it's just like a group of incidents, everything. I mean, they should tell, they should really explain to little kids, you shouldn't just keep them sheltered, because they're not going to be. And then there's that one little incident that will just, it'll just hit them, and you're going to have to explain to them anyway. So why not explain to them right before they go to school, and say people are going to say to you, are gonna look at you--you're not gonna be considered the same as everybody else, you have to deal with that. They probably have told me, I just, I have had a lot of incidents, but have grouped them into one big blob nowadays, when you're little you just kind of do that anyway. It's like, there's so many that build up, and one day you go home running... this happened, this happened, this happened and this happened two years ago. (C11)

In terms of their extended family, all of the children spoke proudly of both sides of their family. Participants explained the many factors involved in their relations with their extended family. Since some of these factors were related to geographical constraints and issues of accessibility, it appeared that contact with their extended family has influenced participants' perceptions about how close they felt to one parent's family in contrast to the other. They all spoke in generally positive terms of the closeness they shared with one side of the family or one family member in particular, usually a grandparent. This participant spoke about feeling more connected to one side of the family:

I've been living here for nine years, and I consider myself mostly American, but I was born in Germany. I feel more comfortable with my German side than I do with my Trinidad side because I know my family better and I feel really close to my grandmother...well, it's kind of complicated, because I kind of feel more German, even though I look more like my mother. (C9)

Another participant spoke of being close to her father's mother, and feeling some regret and sadness at never having met her mother's parents, who live in Korea:

I think I'd like to go to Korea one day. I've never met my cousins from there, so I'd like to meet them and see what they're like...I never met my grandparents from there. And my grandmother from Puerto Rico, I really looked up to her and I respected her, and I loved her so much. And when she died, I was just crushed. But I kind of feel bad that I didn't meet my Korean grandparents, because I think I would have gotten a lot out of them. Because I only met my grandmother from Puerto Rico, my dad's mom, because my grandfather was dead, and I really got a lot out of knowing her, like the things she taught me. And I think that if I were to have met my grandmother and granddad from Korea, I would have gotten a lot out of that, too. So I guess I feel bad that I never met them, and I sort of wish I had. And I think I want to go there, I'm learning more about Korea. (C8)

Three participants brought up the issue of dissension within their extended family. This was related to the participants' parents intermarriage, which was looked upon disapprovingly by certain family members, usually the grandparents. This theme of family disharmony was reflected in participants' comments about racist attitudes or comments which had been expressed to them. As one participant noted:

My grandmother didn't really accept my father, so that's kind of hard sometimes. When I was younger, maybe eight years old, my grandmother sometimes said something that was kind of racist, and that made me think, is one better than the other? Like, my mom was meeting someone and we were going to go out to dinner with my aunt and my two sisters and my grandmother and my grandfather... and it was terrible, because we were just eating ice cream and then my grandmother said something about my father being messy in the kitchen, and then my sister started crying, and she said 'oh, you shouldn't have said that, you hurt my feelings,' and my other sister started crying, then I started crying in the restaurant, and then, I don't know, there was no one there to defend us except my grandfather and my aunt, because my mom wasn't there. And from then on, my father didn't go to California...every other year we went. (C6)

This theme of family dissension often related to two sides of the family being culturally different, and perhaps not feeling comfortable or familiar with people

from a particular ethnic group. For one participant, this took the form of both sides of her family being 'suspicious' of members of the other side. She stated:

Sometimes, some members of the family dislike, not dislike, but they're kind of suspicious of the other family. Like, what are they like? why do you like them? and stuff. So sometimes it's difficult. I don't really understand it. It would be so much better if people could realize that just because someone's different from you, it doesn't mean they're bad or that you have to wonder what type of person they are, or something like that. (C9)

All of the participants' mentioned that they felt proud about being part of mixed-heritage families because of their rich cultural background. In talking about this, some of the participants made specific references to their family's religion and language. Further, they said that their heritage was very much connected to their exposure to the religion(s) with which they'd grown up and, to a lesser extent, their exposure to a second language. Both religion and language were each mentioned, respectively, by three of the children as being important to them, in terms of both the roles they played in their lives, and how they connected to their heritage. One participant commented:

I've been taught more about Judaism than I have about Christianity, which is my father. And I read at Passover, Hanukkah...we went up to Montreal to visit my mom's family up there and, you know, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and everything. So I've been more connected with that, that's why I feel so comfortable up there. I mean, sometimes I will feel uncomfortable because I'm not Canadian, but that's it. I've never felt that my being darker skinned than them has ever been an issue, because you really get down to the religious part of it, and you go, yeah, you're the same religion as me and that's a reason to bond. (C11)

Another participant drew a parallel between her parents not emphasizing their different religions and cultural backgrounds, and how this fostered the integration of both. She stated:

My mom is a Buddhist and my dad's Catholic. My mom has a Buddha and when we were little, we used to pray around it, and we used to go to church, and we did both things. So I never saw anything different in it, so like we would go to the temple, there was a Buddhist temple in Puerto Rico. So we'd go there, and we would meet the people, we would go to the church, we would meet the people...it was like the same thing. I didn't see anything different and I never really wondered, because my parents never really drew a line between Korean and Puerto Rican. They sort of, I don't know, I always saw them as the same, I never really saw anything different. They never really drew any lines or anything, so I never really wondered, like, what separated them or anything like that. (C8)

The children in this study were divided on the issue of parental preparation for dealing with issues related to their mixed heritage, such as racism in the larger society. Some felt that it was not necessary, as they had not been exposed to negative experiences. Others felt that parental preparation was helpful, with some of the children describing it as subtle and indirect and others describing it as more directive. A few of the participants would have liked more preparation by their parents for help in dealing with issues or experiences with which they were confronted. Participants also spoke about their extended families, in terms of feeling closer to one "side" or member of the family. Very often, this had to do with where they'd grown up and geographical constraints. They also spoke about how their parents' intermarriage contributed to or brought about family disharmony. For some of the children, religion and language were themes related to their mixed heritage and their family connections.

### Summary

The findings presented in this chapter described mixed-heritage children's stories and the meaning made of their narratives. Three major

themes emerged from the analysis of the data, which served to highlight the issues that were significant to the lives of the participants.

One of the main themes was participants' perceptions of themselves and their heritage. They all perceived themselves in positive terms and spoke of the advantages associated with their mixed heritage. Participants' positive perceptions included in their narratives a description of their heritage and their parents' backgrounds, as well as a description of their personal characteristics and areas of interest. Participants also included in their self-descriptions the area or neighborhood in which they had grown up. Among the many advantages that were described as part of their self-perceptions, participants listed: being able to see things from different perspectives, being open-minded to different people and situations, and being able to bridge cultures. They also spoke of one disadvantage, which had to do with completing standardized requiring that they place themselves into one single-heritage category. Further, they mentioned their views about feeling different, in a positive sense, which also made them feel very special. Finally, they indicated the relevance of their parents' mixed-heritage relationship in their self-description, since it has great meaning for them.

Another main theme had to do with the ways in which the participants' felt they were perceived by other people. All of the participants mentioned experiencing the comments or questions of others, while the older children reported experiencing more overt prejudice and racism. Their responses fell into three categories: perceptions held by other people in general; perceptions their school teachers had of them; and perceptions of their peers and friends.

Participants mentioned other people's reactions and the assumptions they often made upon meeting them for the first time. This typically related to

participants' physical appearance. They also spoke about teacher's perceptions about them which, again, often had to do with their physical appearance. Many of the children also had to deal with the assumptions or negative perceptions of peers and friends. Some of the participants, particularly the older ones, had had more direct experience with negative comments and racial slurs. Those who minimized this or felt it was a non-issue said that the prejudice was not directed towards them or that they had sufficient coping strategies.

The third theme was mixed-heritage children and family influences. All of the participants spoke proudly about their families and their influence on their lives. Three topics emerged from their narratives: parental preparation for dealing with the larger society; relationship with extended family; and family's central values of religion and language.

Half of the participants felt that parental preparation was not necessary, since they had not had to face negative experiences. The other half felt that parental preparation was useful to them, with some of the children describing this preparation as having been directive and others describing it as having been more indirect. Some of the participants stated that they would have liked more preparation on the part of their parents. All of the narratives included the children's extended families, and this was generally in the context of feeling closer to one side of the family or to a certain family member. This typically was related to where they had grown up, as well as geographic accessibility. They also spoke about family dissension, which was brought about by the extended family's reactions to their parents' mixed-heritage relationship. Finally, religion and values were mentioned by some of the children as being related to their mixed heritage and their family connections.

Table 4.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant Number	Age	Grade	Sex	Mother's Heritage	Father's Heritage	Parents' Marital Status	Income Level	Place of Birth	Other Languages	Siblings
1	11	6	F	European-American	African-American	Never Married	Lower-Income	U.S.	No	1
2	15	9	F	Japanese American	Jewish	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	1
3	15	10	M	European-American	African-American	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	2
4	11	5	M	European - American	African-American	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	1
5	16	11	F	European-American	Somalian	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	1
6	13	7	F	European-American	Puerto Rican	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	2

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Table 4.1 continued

Participant Number	Age	Grade	Sex	Mother's Heritage	Father's Heritage	Parents' Marital Status	Income Level	Place of Birth	Other Languages	Siblings
7	14	8	F	Puerto Rican	African-American	D	Lower-Income	Germany	Spanish	1
8 <sup>a</sup>	17	11	F	Korean	Mixed	M	Middle	Puerto Rico	Spanish	4
9	12	7	F	Trinidadian	German	M	Upper-Middle	Germany	German	0
10	17	11	F	European-American	Puerto Rican	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	Spanish	2
11	18	12	F	Caucasian, Jewish	African-American	M	Upper-Middle	U.S.	No	2
12	10	5	M	Native American	European-American	M	Middle	U.S.	No	2

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

The United States' changing demographics, increasing intermarriage rates, and growing population of people of mixed heritage point to the need for greater understanding and appreciation of the mixed-heritage phenomenon. Over the past few decades, educators and social scientists have given limited attention to children of mixed heritage and, historically, the "voices" of the children themselves have not been heard. As the number of mixed-heritage children continues to increase, there is an even greater need to hear their stories, to look at their perceptions and experiences, in order to have a better understanding of this growing population.

Twelve children of mixed heritage were interviewed, in order to explore their perceptions about themselves and their heritage. In-depth phenomenological interviewing was used to illustrate their self-perceptions, the meaning they make of their mixed heritage, and how living in a racist society has affected them. Through the process of data analysis, three major themes emerged from participants' narratives about their mixed heritage. The three themes were: 1) Mixed-heritage children's perceptions of themselves and their heritage; 2) Mixed-heritage children's views about how they are perceived by others; and 3) Mixed-heritage children and family influences.

In this chapter, I will discuss the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study and how they relate to the initial research questions which guided this study and the social science literature in this area. I will also present the new

perspectives that have emerged because of the findings of this study. I will then discuss the implications of the findings for research and practice.

### Discussion of Findings

There were three research questions guiding this study. The first question was “How do mixed-heritage children perceive themselves and what meaning do they give to their mixed heritage?” All of the participants perceived themselves and their heritage in positive terms. In their self-descriptions, all of them included their background and their mixed heritage. However, this was part of a constellation which also included a description of their personality, type of person they were, areas of interest and the activities they enjoyed, suggesting that their mixed heritage is not solely how they define themselves. They saw their mixed heritage as having many advantages, and contributing to their openness to new people and situations, their ability to see things from different perspectives, and their feeling special because of their background.

The second question which guided the design of this study was “What effect does living in a racist society have on one’s self-concept, belief system and world view?” All of the participants reported that people perceived them in certain ways or made certain assumptions about them based on their heritage or how they look. This, of course, mirrors U.S. societal attitudes, although prejudice and racism were experienced to different degrees, particularly by the older participants, who had more direct experiences with racism. However, these experiences do not appear to have affected their positive self-concepts and, in fact, it appears that they have reinforced the participants’ belief in themselves and their coping strategies. This suggests that while mixed-heritage children have been faced with the institutional and societal realities of prejudice

and racism, they have not translated this into negative self-perceptions or denial of their heritage. It appears that their mixed-heritage status has fostered a world view which has allowed them to look at situations from different perspectives, to appreciate people of diverse backgrounds, and to celebrate the view that people are not defined by their skin color and must be looked at as an integrated “whole.” Yet it must also be noted that, from a developmental perspective, it may be that the children, particularly the younger ones, haven’t been able to put into words some of the more painful or hurtful experiences they have had.

The final question posed by this study was “What has been the role of the families of mixed-heritage children in helping or hindering their ability to cope with the negative attitudes and values of the larger society?” Half of the participants stated that their families had been helpful to them in fostering their ability to cope with the larger society, with some stating that they would have liked more preparation. The other half stated that because of their life experiences, it was unnecessary for their families to help them, as they hadn’t had to deal with prejudice or negative reactions. None of the participants stated that their families had interfered with their ability to cope with the larger society. However, a few of the children did speak about the family tension related to their parents’ intermarriage, and it cannot be stated with certainty how this may have affected the participants or shaped their perceptions.

All of the participants in this study produced in their own words rich information about how they perceived themselves and their heritage. Each participant’s voice was unique and expressed his or her own perspective and experience. This perspective at times appeared to express the participants’ similar perceptions and experiences.

In the social science literature, mixed-heritage children have historically been viewed as marginal people. In fact, the marginality theory (Stonequist, 1937; 1939; 1942) has been the major conceptual framework used to look at this population. Its basic premise is that mixed-heritage children are inherently deficient and it is neither possible nor desirable to celebrate one's mixed heritage. The findings of this study do not support this view, as the participants did not describe themselves as marginal in any way, and did not view themselves as isolated or alienated. Rather, participants' narratives suggested a systemic description of themselves which speaks of their social class and sociocultural realities. Further, all of the participants spoke proudly of their mixed heritage and the benefits they derived from it, as well as their appreciation of their parents' mixed-heritage relationship.

There is literature supporting the idea that children of mixed-heritage couples are the victims of well-meaning parents, and sure to have serious value conflicts, temperamental conduct and psychological and emotional problems (Gordon, 1964). This is not supported by the participants' descriptions of themselves and their functioning. All of the children did well in school, had positive relationships with others, and looked forward to a promising future. Piskacek and Golub (1973) described mixed-heritage children as "ravaged by conflict" and certain to experience conflict with their parents, society and themselves. They were presumed to experience conflict if they identified with both of their backgrounds, and integrating both cultures was not considered an option. The children who were not interested in "choosing" were perceived as ambivalent or alienated. This literature is inconsistent with the findings of this study, as the children spoke about their celebration of both backgrounds and how they had integrated both, rather than having had to choose one over the

other. Even those few who, despite this integration, spoke of feeling more comfortable with one side, felt that it was due to growing up with one parent or having lived for several years in one parent's country-of-origin. These responses placed the issue of identity in a completely different frame, since participants' responses did not support the pathology-centered view in the literature on this topic. Participants did not verbalize their mixed-heritage membership as an identity conflict but, rather, their healthy descriptions illustrated a narrative which challenges the "discourse of conflict" so prevalent in the literature. Participants' responses and descriptions supported the literature which questioned the adequacy of the construct "identity" as it may not be appropriately conceptualized for certain ethnic groups (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

From an early age, mixed-heritage children must deal with society's perceptions, which do not necessarily coincide with their own (Mann & Waldron, 1977). This was confirmed by the findings of the study, which showed that all of the participants had had to deal with others assumptions and negative perceptions of them. In their narratives, the participants spoke about how they felt they were perceived by others in general, and by their peers and teachers. If one views the literature in this area, particularly the earlier writings, as reflecting the attitudes of the general society, it can be surmised that children of mixed heritage have not generally been perceived in a positive light or have been stereotyped by other people. This, of course, would extend to how they feel they are perceived by their classmates and teachers. All of the children reported receiving comments or questions about themselves or their heritage. Some of them spoke about racial slurs or incidents which had involved them while they were at school. Others spoke about their teachers making certain assumptions

about them, based upon how they looked. Surprisingly, racism was not an issue for about half of the participants, who felt that they had not been exposed to overt racism and that it was a non-issue for them. This may be related to the participants living in an area with people representing a variety of cultural backgrounds, who value diversity in people and pride themselves on being open-minded. There are also developmental implications, as the younger participants did not feel they had experienced racism, while the older participants were more likely to express their concerns and experiences with this.

It has become more widely recognized in the social science literature that celebrating two cultures can be a positive experience (Blauner, 1972; Steinberg, 1981). The findings of this study supported this, as all of the participants had positive perceptions of themselves and their mixed heritage. The participants did not define themselves exclusively on the basis of their heritage, but rather, they saw it as one part of the constellation that was used to describe themselves and included their interests, personality, family and neighborhood. It is interesting to note that the children's neighborhoods and how they connect to their self-perceptions, which may reflect among other things class-related issues, is a finding of this study that does not appear in the literature.

According to the later literature, children of mixed heritage do not experience personality disturbance or feelings of alienation (Aellen & Lambert, 1969; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986), and they are just as or better adjusted and have higher self-concepts (Stephan & Stephan, 1991; Chang, 1974) than their single-heritage counterparts. This literature is consistent with the findings of this study. The participants have done well at school and enjoy friendships with people of diverse backgrounds, and had not experienced problems with

personal adjustment, personality, and feelings of alienation. Some authors have focused on mixed-heritage children's resiliency and ability to adapt to different situations (Gay, 1987; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986; Poussaint, 1984), as well as their greater perspectives, awareness of culture, and acceptance of differences in others (Ho, 1990). All of the participants spoke about the many advantages they attributed to their mixed heritage, including their openness, their ability to relate to different types of people and create cultural "bridges," and their ability to see things from different perspectives.

According to the literature, children must be given all of the cultural and historical knowledge they need in order to understand their mixed heritage and to integrate aspects of both backgrounds into their sense of self which, developmentally speaking, is still emerging. The family environment has been described as being critical in helping mixed-heritage children to understand and value their heritage (Root, 1990). Their families can help them develop into healthy, secure and confident people who are proud of their heritage and able to survive and flourish, while living in a racist society. The findings of this study supported this view, as all of the children are proud of their mixed heritage and their parents' mixed-heritage relationship. It has been stated that parents of mixed-heritage children must teach them "survival skills" in order to facilitate healthy bicultural adaptation (Miller & Miller, 1990), and that parents can protect children from the negative results of racism (Jackson, McCullough & Gurin, 1988; Ladner, 1977). While the findings supported this idea to an extent, they did not completely confirm it. The children were divided with respect to their family's role in preparing them for, or protecting them from, society's bigotry. Half of them stated that parental preparation had been helpful to them. For some participants, the preparation they received was subtle or indirect, while for

others it was viewed as more directive and ongoing. All of the children noted that they had benefited from the parental preparation they received, with some reporting that they would like to have had even more. The other half felt that parental preparation was not necessary or was a non-issue, as they hadn't been exposed to racism. However, it is possible that they had received some type of preparation, which they hadn't perceived or named as such, but which may have allowed them to cope with any issues they'd had to face.

It was also noted in the literature that the extended families of mixed-heritage children may be a source of stress, due to reactions of the family to the mixed-heritage couple or refusals to visit or accept the children, and children may experience feelings of inferiority due to this (Johnson, 1992; Root, 1990; Stephan & Stephan, 1991). The findings of this study supported the idea of the extended family being a source of stress for the participants to some extent. The extended family was seen as a source of pride contributing to greater awareness of cultural issues, and it appeared that the degree of contact influenced how close they feel to one parent's family; for many of the participants, this was related to geographical constraints and limited access to extended family members. However, a few of the children brought up the issue of family tension or dissension, which had to do with their parents' mixed-heritage relationship being looked upon disapprovingly or each side of the family being wary of the other side. It is possible that this issue affected more participants, but that they were uncomfortable talking about the topic. However, this was not the central focus of this study.

Several of the participants mentioned throughout their narratives the important roles that language and religion have played in their lives and in fostering their connection to their heritage. This is neither consistent nor

inconsistent with the literature, as there is none related to religion, language or other values of the mixed-heritage family.

Overall, the findings of this study confirmed what has been stated by the empirical and theoretical literature on mixed-heritage children. The findings also challenged some of the theoretical background on the topic which is still present in the social sciences and, as a result, the study offers a new perspective based on mixed-heritage children's perceptions and experiences.

It was found that mixed-heritage children perceive themselves in positive ways and value their own mixed heritage and their parents mixed-heritage relationship, as well as the advantages associated with it. The participants have a clear sense of who they are and how they describe themselves, and do not feel they have had to choose one heritage over the other. They see their mixed-heritage as one aspect of themselves, along with other aspects included in their self-descriptions which encompass their interests, activities they enjoy, their neighborhood and the type of person they perceive themselves to be. This finding is important, because it suggests that mixed-heritage children view themselves positively and as an integrated "whole," and that their heritage is not the defining feature of how they perceive themselves. It is also important because it does not support the cultural myth that children of mixed-heritage are marginal and destined for a life of misery, and that they are unable to celebrate their different backgrounds. This may help professionals who work with children of mixed-heritage, so they can begin to see them in a more positive light.

A major finding of the study was participants' descriptions of the ways they are perceived by others. According to participants, they are sometimes perceived by others in stereotypical and negative ways, usually because of their appearance. All of them stated that they experience questions or comments

from others, while the older children experience more racism, suggesting that they have experienced racism to different degrees. This finding is important, because it speaks of the sociocultural influences affecting the daily lives of mixed-heritage children in their interactions and relationships with other people. It may help others, particularly teachers, school friends, and peers to avoid making assumptions about mixed-heritage children and to be more sensitive to their own values and biases when interacting or socializing with mixed-heritage children. It also points to how issues of race and racism are perceived and understood from a developmental perspective. It is also important because it serves as a reminder that, despite the positive perceptions the children in this study had of themselves and their heritage, it does not mean that they haven't had to struggle with having to define themselves for others or the pain of being the recipient of racial slurs. Perhaps when the participants are older, they will make meaning of their experiences in different ways and articulate any hurt or anger differently.

Another finding of this study was that participants identified the role of their families as being vital and instrumental in their lives. They stated that their parents' guidance has helped them to cope with others' perceptions and the stereotypical values of the larger society. This finding has significant implications for parents, because it points to how they can continue to foster and enhance their children's pride and positive self-perceptions.

An additional finding that arose from this study, although it was not the primary focus of inquiry, was that mixed-heritage children feel close to their extended families. Some of the children spoke about their extended families, and feeling closer to one side of the family. This finding is important, because it highlights the extended family's role as a powerful cultural transmitter where

children's confidence in themselves and pride in their heritage can be fostered. It also suggests the need for the family to reinforce their children's mixed heritage and to educate and expose children to their different backgrounds. This also relates to the issue of family dissension brought about by their parents' intermarriage, which three of the children spoke about. These negative attitudes of grandparents or other family members clearly reflect the larger society's traditional view of mixed-heritage relationships. The pain of having to deal with this and the kind of rejection it symbolizes is something that, again, may be articulated by the participants quite differently when they are older and can reflect on their growing-up experiences.

There was another finding for which participants were not in agreement, but which warrants discussion. Some of the children described religion and language as being significant in their lives and reinforcing their connection to their mixed heritage. This finding is important because it may help parents and members of society who have some type of cultural association to the children, to open a dialogue about the significance of these values, and the need to celebrate them because of the positive effects on the children's ties to their family and their mixed heritage. It is interesting that so few of the participants spoke of values such as religion and language, particularly because they are such powerful cultural transmitters. Some possible explanations for this may have to do with most of the children having been exposed to just one language (English), while for religion it may be that organized religion is not as much a part of the children's lives as it was in previous decades, or that they did not perceive it as related to their heritage.

Finally, there was another, though less significant, finding that merits discussion. This has to do with the role that geographic location plays in the

lives of the participants. Some of the children stated that the neighborhood where they lived had influenced their self-perceptions and how they defined their mixed heritage. A few of the children stated that they were not as close to one side of the family due to geographic constraints. This finding may be important to mixed-heritage families, in terms of deciding where the family will live, and how this may impact their children. It also speaks to the degree of contact that mixed-heritage children will have with extended family members and, consequently, one aspect of their heritage.

I would like to emphasize that when reviewing the findings of this study, which present the participants' largely positive perceptions, it is important to recognize the hints of pain and struggle in their narratives, despite their positive responses. The findings of this study are not meant to suggest that the participants have not grappled with some painful issues or that they will not encounter challenges in the future. Rather, from their own perspectives, the children did not see themselves in a negative light because of their mixed heritage or could not fully articulate any struggles they had faced.

### Implications for Research

The findings of this exploratory study point to several questions which remained unanswered, as well as suggesting directions for future research. The children who participated in this study ranged from ages 10 to 18. Developmentally, the older ones were better able to reflect on their early years and their experiences; would interviewing only older children have altered the findings of the study? Also, while the narratives of the participants were rich and offered insight into their own perceptions, it would be interesting to have heard the perspectives of their parents, siblings, friends and teachers to perhaps get a

more complete picture of the participants; would they have reinforced the children's stories or presented contrasting views? Also, most of the participants were females; what role does gender play in mixed-heritage children's experiences and perceptions?

Most of the children who participated in this study had professional parents and lived in a semi-suburban town which values diversity in people and is known for its liberal ideals. This raises the issue of whether participants living in a different or less diverse geographic locale would have different responses, particularly in their experiences with racism and institutional oppression. It also brings up several related questions that may offer possible explanations for their having "escaped" or not experienced overt racism. Has their skin color made them more accepted or less easily categorized as a person of color and, therefore, less susceptible to racism? Has their age played a role in that, developmentally, they haven't been faced with the issues that older adolescents and adults have or that they have processed their experiences in different ways? Is being of mixed heritage and having parents in a mixed-heritage relationship less of an issue for those children who do not have a Black parent, since they may not be perceived as favorably by society in general and possibly because of their skin color? Future research in this area might also investigate further the role played by the socioeconomic reality of the neighborhood where the children live, and how this issue of geographical location may relate to issues of socioeconomic status and cultural and educational opportunities. Additional research which focuses on some of these issues may offer great insight into this area.

Finally, when reviewing the findings and their implications for research, it is important to consider the limitations of this study, which were presented in

Chapter Three. This study explored the perceptions of twelve children and generalizations cannot be made about all children of mixed heritage. All of the participants were living in a semi-suburban area of Western Massachusetts and are not representative of children living in rural towns or large cities, or other parts of the country. The findings of this study speak to the uniqueness of the twelve children and their perceptions about themselves and their heritage. Any generalization of the findings can be used as a working hypothesis, rather than a final conclusion. The hypotheses generated from this study can be used to gain a more in-depth understanding of mixed-heritage children's perceptions and to generate ideas and methodologies for further research on this topic.

#### Implications for Practice

In terms of the implications for practice, the findings of this study could be used for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals in their commitment to facilitate a better growing-up experience for their children, a more sensitive learning environment for their students, and delivery of more effective services for their clients.

Parents need to have greater awareness of how they can foster their children's sense of pride in their heritage and how they can play a significant role in preparing them to cope with the values of the larger society. They can also look at how the extended family can foster cultural pride, as well as transmitting the values and traditions of both backgrounds. Parents need to be aware of how central values, such as religion and language, play a significant role in fostering pride in one's heritage and strengthening family connections. They may also need to give greater consideration to deciding on the neighborhood where they will live, and consider its role in their children's lives.

School personnel, such as teachers and principals, need to acknowledge the presence of mixed-heritage children and the reality that not every student fits into one single-heritage category. They must have an understanding of issues of oppression and racism in the United States, and educate students about this. Teachers, in particular, must understand their own biases, attitudes and beliefs about children of color, in general, and mixed-heritage children, specifically, so they can face their own prejudices when working with them. Also, it is important not to make generalizations, as mixed-heritage people are not a homogeneous group, and they represent varying backgrounds, experiences and family dynamics.

Counselors, school psychologists and other mental health professionals also must be aware of the racial realities for all people of color, as well as mixed-heritage children growing up in the United States. These professionals can help children of mixed heritage by identifying and supporting their abilities and their interests, independent of their heritage. They must not automatically assume that a child's heritage is their major concern and is related to the presenting issue, and they should be aware of the limits of this one dimension. Creating a supportive environment is important for all mental health professionals, but it may be especially important when working with mixed-heritage children and their families. They may feel that other people have pre-conceived ideas about them and do not understand their experience of being in a mixed-heritage relationship or the product of one. Professionals should consider referring families to local interracial organizations, so they can interact and find support from similar families

## Conclusion

This qualitative case study explored mixed-heritage children's perceptions of themselves and the meaning they make of their heritage. It was found that mixed-heritage children have positive perceptions of themselves, their heritage, and their parents' mixed-heritage relationship. All of the participants felt that they had integrated both of their heritages, and had not had to choose one over the other. It was also found that participants attributed many advantages to their mixed heritage. The participants felt that they were sometimes perceived by others in negative and stereotypical ways, although they had experienced racism to different degrees. Many of the children saw their families as being pivotal in helping them to cope with racism and the larger society. All of the participants felt close to their extended families, although geographical constraints and family dissension sometimes limited their contact. For some of the participants, religion and language were key values of the family which reinforced their connection to their mixed heritage.

APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent(s) of Participant,

My name is Debra Ross and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Due to my strong conviction that children of mixed heritage have generally not been perceived in a positive light, I have designed a study in which your child will have an opportunity to be selected to participate.

For my dissertation research, I will be looking at mixed-heritage children's perceptions and experiences of growing up in the United States. Little research has been conducted that gives mixed-heritage children an opportunity to tell their stories, to state in their own words what it means to be of dual heritage. Your child's participation in this study offers an opportunity to share his/her perceptions and experiences, as well as contributing to the limited body of knowledge in this area.

I will be interviewing approximately twelve children from the New England area, all of whom have at least one parent who is African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American or Native American. If your child chooses to participate in this study, with your permission, I will be asking him/her about issues related to being of mixed heritage. I will also be asking about personal and family background. The interview should take about one-and-a-half hours.

I am sensitive to the fact that the material discussed during the interview may be personal at times. Because the interview addresses personal experiences and may raise sensitive issues, your child can choose not to respond to a question that might be difficult to answer. At any time, your child may let me know if she/he feels uncomfortable about a particular topic, and I will inquire about this periodically throughout the interview. Your child may also withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice.

I will be tape recording our interview and transcribing the tapes for my own research analysis. Please be assured that our discussion will be kept strictly confidential. When I write up the results of this study, I will change all identifying information about your child and your family. On all transcripts, an initial or different name will be substituted for your child's. All audio-tapes will be erased once the dissertation has been completed.

Upon completion of the study, I will be available at any time to answer your questions about the whole process, as well as the outcomes of the study. I would be pleased to send you the results of the study upon your request. This study is for educational purposes, and the information obtained will be used in the dissertation.

In addition to the dissertation, some of the information that is obtained may be used in journal articles or presentations to different groups. Again, every effort will be made to protect your child's anonymity and the confidentiality of his/her participation in this study.

I hope that your child will find his/her participation interesting and enjoyable.

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I have read and understand the contents of this permission form and consent to my child's participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant's Parent and Date

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Signature of Researcher and Date

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

During the Introduction, researcher will thank participants and acknowledge the significance of their participation in the study. The purpose of the study will be explained in order to help participants feel comfortable and to establish rapport. I will explain the interview procedure and inform participants of the two phases of the interview, the actual interview and obtaining demographic information. Phenomenological interviews will be conducted to explore participants' perceptions about what it means to be of mixed heritage. In order to generate a better understanding of mixed-heritage children's perceptions, the interview will focus on the following constructs/domains: Self-definition, Community/School, Peers, Ethnicity/Culture, and Family Issues.

. . . . .

#### Demographic Information:

- 1.) How old are you?
- 2.) What grade are you in?
- 3.) Where were you born? (How long did you live there?, When did you come to the United States/Massachusetts?)
- 4.) Are your parents married?
- 5.) What is your mother's ethnic background? Your father's?
- 6.) What are your parents ages and occupations?
- 7.) Do you have siblings? What are their ages?
- 8.) What languages do you speak? What languages are spoken at home?

### Construct/Domain: Self-Definition

- 1.) How would you describe yourself to someone who wants to get to know you?
- 2.) If someone were to ask you about your background, what would be the important things to tell them? Would you mention your ethnic groups?
- 3.) How do you think others would describe you?
- 4.) Do you remember when you first asked about or wondered about
  - a) your ethnic background?
  - b) about having parents from two different racial/cultural groups?
- 5.) Which ethnic group do you feel you most resemble physically?
- 6.) In general, do you feel more comfortable with
  - a) members of one group over another,
  - b) or does it depend on the person?
- 7.) Do you feel accepted by your father's ethnic group? Your mother's ethnic group?
- 8.) Why do you think you've felt a part of (ethnic group)?
- 9.) Why do you think you haven't felt a part of (ethnic group)?
- 10.) Do you feel that you've integrated both ancestries, or have you had to "choose" one over the other?

### Construct/Domain:Community/School

- 1.) In general, what type of contact do you have with people from your mother's ethnic group? Father's ethnic group?
  - a) In your neighborhood?
  - b) In your school?
- 2.) In the way you relate to people at school or in your neighborhood, do you feel more comfortable with:
  - a) members of one group over another,
  - b) or does it depend on the person?
- 3.) Do you think that people see you as "different" because of your mixed heritage? In what ways?

- 4.) Are there other children of mixed heritage in your school, that you know of? If so, how do you relate to each other?
- 5.) In what ways do you think that your ethnic and cultural background might affect your classroom participation or involvement in school activities?
- 6.) What types of activities does your school sponsor that reflect your ethnic or cultural background?
- 7.) Is there anything that you would like your teacher or the principal to be more aware of or sensitive to, with respect to your mixed heritage?
- 8.) What would you like your teachers or other school personnel to know about your cultural background?

#### Construct/Domain: Peers

- 1.) Are your friends mostly from
  - a) your father's ethnic group?
  - b) mother's ethnic group?
  - c) or both?
- 2.) Would you say that most of your friends are from
  - a) school?
  - b) your neighborhood?
  - c) or both?
- 3.) In what ways do you think your ethnic background might affect (or has affected) your friendships?
- 4.) In what ways do you think being "mixed" has enhanced your ability to make friends?
- 5.) Do you think that your definition of friendship has something to do with your mixed heritage?
- 6.) In your daily experiences, have your friends ever asked you about
  - a) your parents' backgrounds?
  - b) your own background?

How did you respond?

- 7.) (When you are older) Would you consider dating someone from
- a) your mother's ethnic group?
  - b) your father's ethnic group?
- 8.) (When you are older) Would you consider marrying a person from
- a) your father's ethnic group?
  - b) your mother's ethnic group?

Construct/Domain: Ethnicity/Culture

- 1.) Do you feel that people make certain assumptions about you because of
- a) how you look?
  - b) your parents' different ethnic backgrounds?

What are they?

- 2.) Do people make comments or ask you questions about
- a) your parents?
  - b) what you look like?

How do you usually respond?

- 3.) Have you experienced prejudice/racism because of your mixed heritage?
- 4.) Can you remember the first time you experienced this? Most recent incident?
- 5.) Do you feel that you've had to "choose" between two heritages?
- 6.) Some people say that children of mixed heritage have the "best of both worlds"-- What has been your experience?
- 7.) What would you say are the
- a) advantages of being of mixed heritage?
  - b) disadvantages of being of mixed heritage?
- 8.) What are some things you'd like people to know about you or your experience as a child of mixed heritage?

Construct/Domain: Family

- 1.) Which ethnic group(s) would your mother identify with?
- 2.) Which ethnic group(s) would your father identify with?

- 3.) Which relatives do you spend most of your time with? Mother's or father's side?
- 4.) Do you feel closer to one parent?
- 5.) Which parent are you most similar to (in values and beliefs)?
- 6.) What holidays does your family celebrate?
- 7.) How often does your family eat foods from
  - a) your father's ethnic group?
  - b) your mother's ethnic group?
- 8.) Are other languages spoken in the home? Do you speak?
- 9.) Are/were racial issues and ethnicity discussed in your family?
- 10.) What does it mean to you to have ethnically different parents?
- 11.) Do you think your family prepared you or didn't prepare you for dealing with society's sometimes negative attitudes? How did they do that?
- 12.) How do you see yourself when you're older, when you have children?
- 13.) What will you tell your children about
  - a) your background?
  - b) about having parents of different ethnic backgrounds?
- 14.) If you were the parent of a child of mixed heritage, would you teach him/her anything special or offer any advice?

Construct/Domain: Interview Feedback

- 1.) Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you?
- 2.) Are there any other questions that you feel I should have asked you?
- 3.) Can you tell me your overall impression of the interview process and content?

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