Towards an understanding of the racial identity of bi-racial people: the experience of racial self-identification of African-American/Euro-American adults and the factors affecting their choices of racial identity.

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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RACIAL IDENTITY
OF BI-RACIAL PEOPLE: THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL
SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/EURO-AMERICAN
ADULTS AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR CHOICES
OF RACIAL IDENTITY

A Dissertation Presented
by
CHARMAINE WIJEYESINGHE

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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RACIAL IDENTITY OF BI-RACIAL PEOPLE: THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/EURO-AMERICAN ADULTS AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR CHOICES OF RACIAL IDENTITY

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This dissertation is dedicated to
my mother, Barbara J. Wijeyesinghe and
my father, Oscar R. Wijeyesinghe
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ABSTRACT

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RACIAL IDENTITY OF BI-RACIAL PEOPLE: THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/EURO-AMERICAN ADULTS AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR CHOICES OF RACIAL IDENTITY

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The purpose of this study was to examine how a select group of adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage came to choose or develop a sense of racial identity. The seven participants were women and men who ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-nine, and who had chosen Black, White, or Mixed racial identities. Utilizing in-depth phenomenological interviewing, participants were asked how their life experiences had led them to choose a particular racial identity, how they experienced the world in light of their chosen identity, and the meaning which they made of their choice of identity given their actual biological racial heritage.

The data was presented as in-depth profiles taken from transcripts of the interviews for each participant. In addition, themes which emerged when participants were compared
within and across chosen racial identity groups, gender groups, and age groups were highlighted. The factors which were seen as having the most influence on choice of racial identity were past and current cultural affiliations, early experiences and socialization, and physical appearance. Additional factors which played a lesser role in racial identity development included the nature and extent of individual political experiences or orientation, the nature of social values within a given historical period, the biological racial heritage of the individual, and a participant’s sense of spirituality and connection to other social identities such as gender, religion, age, and ethnic identity. An individual’s awareness of him or herself in relation to race and racism as outlined in existing racial identity development literature was described as another factor which could be utilized to understand choice of racial identity. Each of these individual factors was defined and arranged into a conceptual framework. The interconnections between some of the factors, such as culture and early socialization, were also explored.

The experiences of participants were compared with the processes of identity development outlined in select works on Black, White, and Bi-racial populations. The dissertation also presented a number of recommendations for individuals who worked with bi-racial people.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications and Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Comment on the Use of the Term &quot;Race&quot; and Racial</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification Systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on Black or African-American Identity</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Black Identity Development</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thomas Model</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cross Model</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jackson Model</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Works on Black Identity Issues</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Issues Raised by the Theories of Black</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on White Identity Development</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of White Identity Development</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hardiman Model</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Helms Model</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Profile of Participant Number Six ........................................... 209
Profile of Participant Number Seven ................................. 228

Section Three: How Racial Identities Evolved ......................... 244
Section Four: Changes in Racial Identity ......................... 246
Section Five: Themes from Within Chosen Racial Identity Groups 249

Themes from Participants Who Identified as Black ................. 249
  Influences on Choice of Identity ................................. 250
  Sense of Community ................................................. 251
  Current Sense of Identity ........................................... 252
  Strategies for Dealing with Racism ................. 253
  Relationships with Others ............................................ 254

Themes from Participant Who Identified as White ................. 256
  Influences on Choice of Identity ................................. 256
  Current Sense of Identity ............................................ 257
  Relationships with Others ............................................ 257
  Perspective on Heritage .............................................. 258
  Response to Racism .................................................. 259

Themes from Participants Who Identified as Multiple Race People 260
  Influences on Choice of Identity ................................. 260
  Current Sense of Identity ............................................ 261
  Interactions with Others .............................................. 263
  The Effect of Appearance on Experience ................. 265
  Strategies for Dealing with Racism ................. 266

Section Six: Comparison of Themes Across Chosen Racial Identity Groups 268
  Role of Early Experience on Choice of Racial Identity or Identity Development 268
  Experiences which Reflected or Contradicted Sense of Racial Identity or Heritage 271
  Influence of Appearance on Past and Present Experiences of Identity ........................................... 272
  Feelings of Being Either/Or or in the Middle .................. 273
  Strategies for Dealing with Racism ................................. 274
  Effect of Experience on Sense of Self ................................. 275

Section Seven: Themes Within and Across Gender Groups ............ 277
  Themes from the Experiences of the Women ......................... 278
  Themes from the Experiences of the Men ............................. 279
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Summary</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Definition of Factors which Affect Racial Identity Development</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Choice of Racial Identity in African-American/Euro-American Adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Analysis of Participants in Terms of Factors which Affected</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Choice of Racial Identity or which Influenced how Participants Made Meaning of Their Racial Identity or Heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Framework of Factors which Affect Racial Identity Development</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Choice of Racial Identity in African-American/Euro-American Adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Proposed Expansion of Bi-Racial Identity Development Model</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Accomodate Choice of Mono-Racial Identity by a Person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of African-American/Euro-American Heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I just don’t think of race anymore. I just think that there’s so many of us so different, and that’s what makes it so beautiful (Anne, participant).

I think it’s going to get harder and harder for people in the future to define themselves as one thing or the other. I think people will need to do it less and less. ... (My heritage) means I’m the future kind of, I guess. That I’m the beginning of the way things are going to be later on. I really hope people get used to it too. They really don’t have much choice (Cory, participant).

The concept of racial identity, or an individual’s sense of themselves as being a member of a larger racial group or groups has often been associated with achieving an understanding of race, racial classifications, and the dynamics of racism within the United States. Race is a significant variable which is considered in determining how the benefits of society are distributed and how people are responded to on the individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional level. How an individual comes to recognize the significance of his or her racial heritage and identity within this context has received increasing attention in research studies.

How adults of mixed race ancestry achieve a sense of racial identity is relatively unexplored in existing literature. The vast majority of current works on racial identity focus on the experiences of individuals whose background reflect a single racial group heritage, i.e. Black, White, Asian, etc. Studies related to issues of racial identity formation of Blacks, and more specifically, individuals of African-American descent comprise a major segment of the research in this area (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971). The study of the racial
includes works by Caditz (1976), Hardiman (1982), Hecht (1977), and Helms (1984). More recently, works which explore the identity development of other racially oppressed groups such as Latinos and Asian-Americans have appeared.

This chapter serves to introduce the research questions which formed the basis of this study, some of the literature and theories on racial identity development which are presented in Chapter II, the purpose and the significance of the study, definition of terms used in the dissertation, and some of the clarifications and delimitations of the study. This chapter concludes with a statement on the uses and misuses of the concept of race and racial classification systems.

This dissertation focussed on the choice and development of racial identity by a sample of bi-racial adults of African-American and Euro-American ancestry. More specifically, it examined what, if any, racial group or groups these individuals chose to identify with; their description of how these identities were achieved; the factors which influenced their choice of racial identity; whether their sense of racial identity changed over time, and if so, the events, experiences, people, or other variables which were significant in shaping these changes; and how they perceived and experienced the world at different periods in their lives given their chosen racial identity. In addition, it examined how these experiences compared with those noted in the stages in models of Black identity development by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976), and models of White identity development by Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984), and what is known from some of the existing literature on bi-racial people.

Much of the literature on racial identity issues evolved during or immediately after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 1970's. By analyzing these works, it is evident that theories written at this time indicated, directly or indirectly, that a number of factors
influenced an individual's development of a sense of racial identity, and that this process occurred in a sequence of identifiable stages. For example, Thomas (1971) proposed a four stage process of Black redefinition which acknowledged both the psychological and emotional impact of changing one's identity. The Cross model (1971) described a series of experiences through which an individual was "transformed from a 'Negro' into a Black American" (p. 99). Jackson's Black Identity Development model (1976) described a sequence of stages whereby a Black person passed from a stage of acceptance of White cultural and institutional values, to a new sense of integrated identity which included a new understanding of race and racism. Hardiman (1982) extracted what she saw as the generic stages of social identity development from the literature on race and gender identity development, and applied these to the experiences of Whites as they formed a sense of racial identity. The model which emerged from her work focussed on the extent to which individual Whites were aware of their racial group membership, and their role in maintaining racism within the society. Helms (1984) proposed a five stage model of White identity development which highlighted an individual's response to other Whites, Blacks, and cross-racial interactions during the course of identity development.

Works based on mono-racial populations lent guidance to my inquiry into the racial identity development of bi-racial individuals by highlighting the role that the factors of political orientation, cultural experiences, and family heritage, play in one's development of a racial identity. How factors such as appearance, cultural experiences, political involvement and family background or heritage affect the racial identity of bi-racial people has not been examined to a great degree. The role of these factors in racial identity development in general may be clarified through the exploration of the racial identity development of bi-racial people. In addition, through this examination, our current understanding of racial identity
development may be expanded to include the experiences of individuals of multi-racial heritages.

The majority of literature that did address mixed race populations focussed on the current experiences of mixed-race children, and the factors which influenced their racial identity development during the earliest years of their lives. For example, many of the works associated with the Council on Interracial Books for Children Conference in 1984 highlighted a variety of issues facing bi-racial children. Shackford (1984) and Ladner (1984) commented on the role of parents in fostering a positive racial identity in mixed race children. Shackford also noted that environmental factors such as the "limited and irrational definition of race" in the United States presented barriers to a bi-racial child’s formation of a positive racial identity (p. 4). Additional works on children by Sebring (1985) and Wardle (1987, 1989) focussed on how counsellors and educators could assist a mixed race child in developing a positive identity.

Some of the factors influencing racial identity development which were evident in the early mono-racial theories also appeared in the works on bi-racial children. Wardle (1987, 1989) encouraged educators to recognize interracial children as experiencing two distinct cultures. The role of the Black community and culture in shaping a child’s identity appeared in the works of Brody (1984), Sebring (1985), and Ladner (1984). Ladner identified different perspectives that parents often utilized when raising mixed race children, including what she termed a "bi-cultural" approach (p. 7). This author also noted that "society is ultimately going to categorize these children as Black" (p. 7-8). Although the author did not elaborate on this point, one interpretation of this statement is that it assumes that all bi-racial children of Black/White heritage will "look Black," and therefore be identified as such.
The literature on bi-racial children added to, and built on the information as to how various factors which influence mono-racial development may play themselves out in a bi-racial experience. However, the extent to which the findings from studies based on a younger population are applicable to the experience of an older, adult group has not been thoroughly explored. One of the areas for concern regarding the relevance of studies on children to adults is that most of the authors focussed on the effect of outside factors on identity development. Therefore, the child’s own experience of racial identity, as perceived and recounted by them, is generally not highlighted in these works. In addition, these relatively recent works may not be fully relevant to the lives of individuals who are now adults, and who experienced childhood at a different historical period, marked by different social, political, and economic issues. For these reasons, I contend that the literature on children is useful, but not sufficient, to account for the racial identity of individuals who are adults at this time.

Two studies of bi-racial adults (Luckett, 1987; Poussaint, 1984) also provided guidance for this dissertation (Luckett, 1987; Poston, 1990; Poussaint, 1984). Poussaint studied mixed race Harvard undergraduates and found that all of the subjects identified as Black, regardless of their actual racial heritage and physical appearance. However, this identity would fluctuate for some individuals, depending on the circumstances or environment that they were in. Physical appearance and political experiences were factors which were highlighted as affecting individuals’ sense of identity. Luckett (1987) interviewed a wider range of individuals, and paid particular attention to environmental factors which influenced identity. In her findings she noted that there were at least three significant life-periods where racial identity became an issue for her participants, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.
The works by Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1987) provided benchmarks against which the data from this study were compared. The actual identity chosen by participants in this study, the significant periods in their lives where identity became more prominent, and the effect of appearance and political experiences were utilized in analyzing and interpreting the data and provided connections to the early works through which the data from this dissertation could be compared.

In addition to the two works on adults cited above, the model of bi-racial identity development proposed by Poston (1990) was used as a source of information in the conceptualization of this study, and as a model against which the data collected from this study could be compared and analyzed. Within the five stages of this model, an individual passed from an initial stage of developing an awareness of the significance of being a member of a particular ethnic group, to a stage where he or she was pressured to choose an identity. The feelings, factors, and process related to this choice were highlighted in the middle stages of the model. Poston’s final stages reflected the individual who appreciated, and could integrate all of his or her ethnic heritages into his or her sense of identity. Factors such as physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and level of community and family support were seen as influencing an individual’s choice of racial identity, especially in the earlier stages of this model.

Poston (1990) noted that his model was "tentative and based on the scant amount of research on bi-racial individuals and information from support groups that serve this population" (p. 153). In addition to outlining a model of identity development for bi-racial individuals, Poston proposed several areas for future research, the first of which was the further examination of the process through which a bi-racial person chose an identity and the factors which influenced such a process.
While utilizing existing literature as a guide in conceptualizing, implementing and evaluating the study, this dissertation relied primarily on the words and stories related by a select group of bi-racial adults to illustrate the process of their identity development. The life experiences that were recounted were fashioned into profiles for each participant. Commonalities and themes among the stories were highlighted. A framework which illustrated the interaction of some of the factors influencing the racial identity development of bi-racial adults was also presented.

The American Heritage Dictionary (1982) defines bi-racial as "of, for, or consisting of members of two races" (p. 181). Given all of the possible combinations of different racial groups with one another, there are several groups of people who could be considered bi-racial, for example, Asian-Black, Native-American-White, Asian-Latino, etc. While people of mixed race descent may all be considered "bi-racial," they may differ significantly from each other in terms of appearance, cultural practices, and experiences in the United States, depending on which two racial and/or ethnic groups are present in any one individual. In order to provide a more in-depth presentation of information about a particular experience of identity development, I chose to examine one of the possible groups of bi-racial people. This dissertation examined the racial identity development of bi-racial adults of African-American and Euro-American ancestry. The choice of this particular population also allowed for investigation of people whose heritage includes membership in both an oppressed and an oppressor racial group (Jackson & Hardiman, 1985).

**Purpose of the Study**

The examination of the experiences associated with the development and choice of a racial identity of a select group of adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage was
the primary purpose of this dissertation. The range of identities chosen by these bi-racial individuals was explored. How these identities evolved during participants' lives was examined by reviewing their experiences associated with their racial identity over the course of their life time. How participants made sense of their chosen identity, the concepts of race and racism, and society was examined to uncover the larger meaning that participants made of life and the world given their racial identity and heritage. Within the pages of this study, a sample of African-American/Euro-American adults were given a voice to tell their individual stories of coming to develop and understand their racial identity. Themes which connected their different experiences were highlighted and discussed.

Through the analysis of the data, and the information gathered from the review of the literature, this dissertation served to clarify the role that factors such as appearance, biological heritage, early socialization, and cultural and political experiences played in the racial identity development of a select group of bi-racial people, and racial identity development in general. In addition, the findings from this study were compared to select models of Black, White, and bi-racial identity development, and literature on bi-racial adults to examine the extent to which the data matched, contradicted, or broadened what is known from these earlier works.

A combination of methodologies were utilized in this study. These included the use of family genealogical charts, personal time lines which reflected participants' choice of racial identity at different life periods, and phenomenological in-depth interviewing. Another purpose of this work was to evaluate the effectiveness of each of these techniques in studying questions related to racial identity development.

This dissertation was an exploratory work, intended to shed light on some of the major issues related to a particular set of multi-racial people. The findings of this study do
not reflect answers to all of the questions pertaining to bi-racial identity in general, or about racial identity development of the particular population under study.

**Significance of the Study**

A major contribution which this study made to the literature was its further clarification of the experience of choice or development of a racial identity in African-American/Euro-American adults, and its attention to the factors which influenced racial identity development and choice of racial identity in this population. This was done by inviting a select group of African-American/Euro-American adults to tell their life stories related to their racial identities, and to share how they made sense of their choice of identity given their experiences. The experiences recounted by participants were analyzed and presented in ways which highlighted the range of identities chosen by African-American/Euro-American adults, and some of the factors which influenced these choices. The framework which emerged from the analysis of the data furthered the understanding of how the experience of racial identity development of this group of bi-racial people could be more fully understood by attending to certain themes and factors. The understanding of the interaction and nature of the factors affecting racial identity development was broadened because of the variance in chosen identity and experience recounted by participants in this study. In addition, this dissertation answered some of the questions which arose when the concepts presented in mono-racial theories (Cross, 1971; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971) were applied to bi-racial individuals who had chosen either Black or White racial identities.

This dissertation built on the existing knowledge base derived from the literature on bi-racial children. Themes from the current body of research, such as the role of parents,
educators, early environmental factors, and appearance in shaping individuals' sense of racial identity were utilized to guide the construction and implementation of this study, and the analysis and presentation of the data. In addition, other factors which were seen as affecting racial identity development, which were not evident in previous works on bi-racial children, were identified. Since the participants in this study were all over the age of twenty, this dissertation also provided information on the experiences related to choice of racial identity which had occurred in the years beyond the period of childhood.

The primary data collection strategy utilized in this study was also noteworthy. The use of phenomenological in-depth interviewing allowed for the presentation of detailed descriptions of what it was like to be an African-American/Euro-American adult today, and the experiences and events, from the past and present, which had shaped each participant’s racial identity and world-view. In addition, the meaning that participants made of their experiences, chosen racial identity, and the world was explored. Therefore, this study addressed both the tangible and concrete aspects of each participant’s experience, as well as his or her philosophical understanding of self, others, society, and life in light of racial heritage and identity.

Unlike the work by Poussaint (1984), where participants claimed primarily Black racial identities, this dissertation included participants who chose a range of racial identities. Individuals in the sample named themselves as being Black, White, and mixed or multiple race people. Each participant spoke to the origins, nature, and meaning of his or her chosen identity. This dissertation presents in-depth details of how individuals who shared similar racial heritages, came to choose different racial identities.

A number of participants in this study chose mono-racial, usually Black, racial identities, even though their family heritage included one Black parent and one White parent.
The experiences and perspectives offered by these individuals could be utilized to broaden the
dialogue about the accuracy and the use of current terminology and categorizing systems
related to race. The experiences of bi-racial people who claimed mono-racial identities spoke
strongly to both the ambiguity and fallacy of the principles underlying the current practice of
classifying people by race, primarily through mono-racial systems.

The analysis presented in this dissertation may assist individuals in agencies such as
counselling centers, schools, and churches to understand and meet the needs of an
increasingly diverse population. The data described the experiences of multi-race people as
recounted by them, as opposed to being told about them. Therefore, by presenting the data in
the form of personal profiles taken from the interview transcripts, the reader hears each
participant tell their life story in their own words. By reviewing the stories which are
presented, helping agencies, teachers, and others may be able to understand how they can
contribute to creating a positive environment in which multi-racial people can explore,
question, choose, and embrace a sense of racial identity.

This study was also significant because of its investigation of the applicability of
selected developmental stage models of racial identity development based on mono-racial
groups (Cross, 1971; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971) to the
experiences of a different, bi-racial population. The analysis of the data in light of these
earlier theories highlighted some of the similarities and differences in the process of racial
identity development of bi-racial people who chose either a Black or a White racial identity
versus mono-racial individuals, as well as areas where the experience of racial identity
development of African-American/Euro-Americans went beyond the parameters set by the
earlier mono-racial theories.
Definition of Terms

In this section of the dissertation, definitions of some of the significant terms which appear in the study are presented.

CHOSEN RACIAL IDENTITY: An individual’s awareness and experience of his/her self as being a member of a larger racial group or category. This often includes the development of an increased awareness of race and racism in the United States. The racial category or categories which an individual chooses for themselves based on a variety of factors such as biological heritage, physical appearance, and personal experiences. For the purposes of this study, the categories suggested by Hardiman and Jackson (1980) were utilized.

ASCRIBED RACIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP: The racial group in which an individual is seen as belonging to by other individuals or the institutions of society based on a variety of factors such as biological heritage, appearance, and the social construction of race.

BI-RACIAL: Those individuals whose ethnic heritages fall into two different racial categories as proposed by Hardiman and Jackson (1980).

AFRICAN-AMERICAN: An ethnic group represented under the Black racial category as proposed by Hardiman and Jackson (1980); individuals of African ancestry who are at least second generation residents of the United States.

EURO-AMERICAN: A category representing a number of ethnic groups which fall under the White racial category as proposed by Hardiman and Jackson (1980); individuals of European ancestry who are at least second generation residents of the United States.

RACIAL OR BIOLOGICAL HERITAGE: The racial background or genetic heritage of an individual’s ancestors.
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE: The appearance of an individual which can be detected visually; characteristics which include skin color and tone, hair color and texture, facial features, and body type.

Clarifications and Delimitations of the Study

Assumptions

This study assumed that adults whose family heritages included both African-American and Euro-American ancestry would be able to speak about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to their choice of racial identity at different points in their lives. The design of this study also assumed that participants would be able to identify significant events, people, and issues which influenced their racial identity development.

The choice to study adults of bi-racial heritage reflected my assumption that personal experience and awareness of racial identity of these individuals might be different than those of individuals of mono-racial descent. I also assumed that since different combinations of racial heritages often resulted in variation in physical appearances, cultural practices, and societal stereotypes, the issues facing different groups of bi-racial people would vary depending on which two or more racial heritages were combined in a single person (i.e. Black/White, Asian/White, Latino/Black, Native American/Black, etc).

In light of these assumptions, I chose one group of adults whose heritages included two specific racial groups, Black and White, to be participants in this study. In order to provide additional focus to the dissertation, I included individuals whose heritages reflected a specific ethnic sub-group of the Black racial category, African-American, and the group of White ethnic sub-categories which comprised Euro-Americans. The sampling strategy of this study assumed that bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage would reflect a
range of chosen racial identities, including Black, White, and Mixed or Bi-racial. In addition, from my review and analysis of the literature for this dissertation, I believed that a number of factors, such as appearance, cultural background, and political experience would influence one’s sense and choice of a racial identity. This fostered my assumption that although participants shared some degree of similarity in terms of family heritage in being African-American/Euro-American, there would be some variability in their appearance, cultural and political experiences, as well as other factors that may have affected their choice of racial identity. In order to explore the effect of these and other factors which may have influenced racial identity development, it was important for me to speak with participants who reflected a range of identities and experiences. In addition to considering an individual’s chosen identity, I took into account gender and age in selecting participants in order to include both men and women of various ages in the sample.

Exclusions

The primary questions this dissertation addressed were how a selected group of adults of African-American/Euro-American origin came to identify themselves in terms of racial group membership, both currently and at different points in their lives, and how each participant came to understand his/her experience of developing a racial identity. This dissertation explored the factors which influenced, and continue to influence, a group of genetically bi-racial people’s choices around racial identity. In addition, it investigated how, if at all, racial identity influenced the manner in which participants viewed and encountered the world, and the meaning that their particular racial heritage and chosen racial identity held for them.

This study focussed on individual choices concerning racial identity, and the experience of life given these choices. As I explored these areas, a number of other issues which were
worthy of study emerged. For example during their interviews, participants often spoke about who they would choose, in terms of members of a particular racial group or groups, as partners or spouses, or the racial composition of the neighborhood in which they would prefer to live. While each of these areas could have led to an in-depth investigation of the parameters involved in such a choice, they were not extensively explored in this study. Instead, they were viewed as indicators of factors which influenced participants’ sense of racial identity, or examples of how participants understood themselves and the nature of their heritage and identity.

The questions which formed the foundation of this dissertation related to an individual’s perception of his/her racial identity at different points in life. The answers to these questions brought to light each individual participant’s personal process of choosing and understanding his/her own racial identity. The focus of this study was not on how people or organizations outside of the individual reacted to his/her choice of racial identity. While the effect of feedback from other people, groups, and society on choice of racial identity was raised by some participants during the study, attention was given primarily to how the individual responded to the external influences such as the racial heritage or identity which others ascribed to him or her, and not on the nature and dynamics of the influences themselves. This was a study of how adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage experienced themselves and the world, as opposed to how the world experienced and dealt with African-American/Euro-American adults.

During the collection of data for this dissertation, participants were asked to describe a series of "snap-shots" from different periods of their lives. These smaller experiences taken together created a collage of some of the different experiences which a select group of African-American/Euro-American adults had encountered. While the findings of this study
have allowed me to reflect on the experiences of bi-racial people and the factors which may affect their choice or development of a racial identity, the application of these results to other bi-racial populations may not capture the intricacies of the experiences of such groups, or of particular individuals within these groups.

A Comment on the Use of the Term "Race" and Racial Classification Systems

As a researcher examining the area of racial identity, it was important for me to reflect on and present some of the significant shortcomings of the term race. This section of the dissertation includes a summary of some of the criticism of the definitions and uses of the concept of race and racial categories. In addition, I present how these perspectives have been taken into account during the conduct of my research, the analysis of the data, and the presentation of the results which I received.

The practice of classifying groups of people into different racial categories reflects "a long and controversial history" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1980; Lieberman, Stevenson, & Reynolds, 1989). Over time, anthropologists, historians, geneticists, and social scientists have grappled with the definition, accuracy, and usefulness of the term race. In practice, the idea that the human family is made up of smaller sub-populations, or races, has been accepted in American culture, although the names and numbers of these smaller groups has varied between researchers and at different periods in history.

The concept of race, and the use of racial categories, has been criticized by a number of authors. Montagu (1963) argued that the validity and existence of different races had been taken for granted, and that clear measurement, research, and testing in this area was lacking. He defined race as the pool of genetic material within a specific population of people at a given time. Relative, as opposed to absolute, differences in these pools occurred as a result
of geographic isolation of groups of people during different periods of human development. Montagu (1963) noted that social barriers also contributed to the isolation of gene pools, even when different groups of people, and hence different gene pools, were no longer physically prevented from intermingling. Since race described a range of genetic material arising out of the history of a population, Montagu indicated that the term should only be applied to groups of people, and not to individuals.

The idea of race and racial groups have historically emphasized the level and importance of differences amongst people to a disproportionate degree (Montagu, 1951, 1963). This was particularly true of differences in appearance or morphology, such as body type, skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Montagu (1963) indicated that the range of human appearance was actually the result of variation in a small number of the total genes shared by all human beings. Morant (1952) and Jordan (1974) described human biology and appearance as a matter of degree, more so than the simple existence or absence of genetic material. Morant (1952) noted that "in innumerable respects all men (sic) are alike; taking a broad view, they can all be said to be built in the same pattern and endowed with the same faculties" (p. 21).

In addition to setting different human groups apart based on alleged unchanged and unchangeable features, race and racial groupings have been considered absolute and distinct concepts (Jordan, 1974; Montagu, 1951, 1963; Morant, 1952). Jordan (1974) and Montagu (1963) saw the presumed fixity of racial categories, as false, describing them instead as flexible entities. Changes in the nature or number of the categories over time depended on the level of geographical or socially imposed separation of groups. As these variables shifted, old races disappeared, and new ones emerged. Montagu (1963) noted that through this process, future races were actually "in the process of becoming" (p. 22), and that most of the
racial groups which were currently recognized were probably the result of mixture across racial groups which occurred in the past.

While indicators of race have often been identified as physical or morphological features, differences in mental and physical abilities, personality, and emotional characteristics have also been utilized to distinguish between various racial groups. Montagu (1951; 1963) and Jordan (1974) refuted this broadening of the scope of racial differences, acknowledging that this practice reflected the social uses of the concept, or what Montagu (1951) termed "myth of race" (p. 15). The major purpose of race as social construction according to Montagu was as a means of rationalizing and perpetuating oppression. In addition, non-genetic factors, such as shared culture, religion, and national origin, have been used inappropriately to classify groups of people by race (Hardiman & Jackson, 1980; Montagu, 1951).

Montagu (1951, 1963) and Hardiman and Jackson (1980) identified the concept of ethnic group as an alternative or additional way of describing groups of people. Members of ethnic groups may share common cultures, values, family practices, and language. Montagu (1963) noted that one of the benefits of using the term ethnic group, as opposed to race, was that this term did not elicit the extreme emotional effect on people that the idea of race did, given that it did not have the long history that the concept of race had in perpetuating oppression of groups and individuals. He also stressed that since race, "in the layman’s mind...defines conditions which do not in fact exist" (p. 64), a process of re-education was necessary. This process of introducing people in a more valid way of seeing human groups would be facilitated by using a totally new word and concept, that of ethnic group. Lieberman et. al. (1989) noted that the idea of ethnic groups highlighted the cultural difference between groups of people. These researchers indicated that the concept of "cline,"
or the measurement of the frequency of a genetic variable over geographic range, could be used in addition to ethnic group to account for the biological variation between groups (p. 70).

By undertaking a review of some of the significant literature on the concept of race and racial groups, I have re-evaluated my own views and understanding of the concept of race and the uses of racial categories. This process led me away from accepting racial categories as distinct and absolute. As a result, I developed a perspective on how to describe groups of people who are similar in vast number of ways, and yet who also differ in some characteristics. While I utilized the term "racial group" and names of different racial groups (i.e. Black, White, etc.), in this dissertation, I did so with the understanding that these terms described groups of people who vary, as a matter of degree, from each other. Each racial category was seen as representing a range of people at a given point in time, and not as indicators of absolute, pure strains of either genetic material or physical characteristics. Therefore the terms Black and White which appear in this dissertation should not be read to as exclusive groupings of people which have remained unchanged over the course of history.

In focusing on bi-racial people, I am not proposing that an individual can be dissected in any way into two halves, one Black and the other White. Instead, I considered bi-racial and multi-racial people as part of the full scope of racial diversity currently present in the world today. The racial background of participants was considered in the design and implementation of this study. This was done to select a sub-group of bi-racial people, those who were African-American/Euro-American, for in-depth investigation. While family heritage was used as a guideline in selecting participants, I did not presume that I could measure the absolute purity of any participant's proportions or fractions of racial heritages,
or the alleged racial purity of either of their family lines. If absolute mono-racial purity does not exist, neither do absolute fractions of such purity.

There were a number of other strategies which I employed during the course of my research which reflected a more flexible perspective on race. At different points in this study, I tried to be aware of how my own knowledge and use of the concepts of race, racial groups, and ethnic groups affected how I interacted with participants, and analyzed and presented the data which I collected. Where participants spoke about race and racial groups, I probed to access their own definitions and uses of these ideas. In analyzing participants' sense of identity, I tried to distinguish between descriptions centered around the individual, and those which could be associated with being a member of a larger group of people.

The concept of ethnic group, and related categories such as African-American, Irish, German, etc. also appear in this dissertation. Participants were selected if their ethnic background was African-American/Euro-American. They were asked to indicate the racial and ethnic makeup of their parents and their grand-parents on a Family Heritage sheet. I also paid attention to references that participants made to variables which affected their sense of identity, which could also be seen as potential indicators of their ethnic backgrounds. Such variables included cultural practices, political affiliations, language, music, food, the celebration of holidays, etc.

Some of the authors whose works are reviewed in Chapter II of this dissertation utilized the terms Black and White in describing their subjects and their theories. For example, Dizard (1970) wrote on "Black Identity, Social Class, and Black Power" (p. 195). Cross (1971) proposed a "Psychology of Black Liberation" (p. 99). Jackson (1976) developed a theory of Black identity development, and applied it to the education of Black college students. Levy (1968) proposed one of the first models of White identity development.
"White Liberals in Transition" were the focus of work done by Caditz (1976). Hardiman’s White Identity Development model (1982) outlined a sequence of stages of White awareness of self and racism. Even more recently, authors such as Chimezie (1985) and Wade (1987) wrote about identity issues using the term Black. In reviewing the literature, I became aware of a difference between the use of the term Black and the term White. While both constitute a racial category under the Hardiman and Jackson (1980) classification model, it became clear to me from the context of most of the works on Black identity, that the authors were speaking primarily of the African-American experience. An equally clear connection between a racial reference and a specific ethnic sub-group was not evident in the works on Whites.

In order to be conscious of the use of racial categories to actually refer to more specific groups in this dissertation, I used the terms African-American and Euro-American as consistently as possible in when critiquing theories, describing the methodology of the study, and presenting the results. The terms Black and White appeared in the context of the earlier works which utilized these broader categories.

In summary, I believe that it was important to clarify the use of the term race and any corresponding racial groups, as they appear in this dissertation, and to briefly acknowledge the history of the roots and misuses of these concepts. At the same time, my evolving understanding of the concept of race was balanced with an acknowledgement that the term has been, and is currently being used by individuals and society, as a way of making sense of the differences which exist between groups of people. Thus in attending to the limitations of the term race, I was careful not to overlook its use as what Hardiman and Jackson (1980) noted as "social organizer" (p. 5).
CHAPTER II

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature in the area of racial identity research revealed that the focus of attention is not evenly distributed across the different racial categories. The majority of material focussed on the racial identity development of Blacks, and more specifically, African-Americans. The racial identity development of Whites comprised a much smaller portion of the literature. Research on other groups of racially oppressed people, such as Latinos and Asian-Americans has also appeared in more recent years. Even newer in this field were works which address the issues facing bi-racial people, and children in particular, as they develop a sense of racial identity.

The selection of the areas of the research literature which I reviewed for this dissertation was directed by the specific group of bi-racial people which this study focussed on, as well as the availability of information on racial identity development. As I chose to examine the experiences related to racial identity of individuals who were African-American/Euro-American (i.e. both Black and White) it seemed important to include a review of some of the relevant theories on Black and White racial identity development. This material was used as a guide in informing me of some of the salient factors and issues which had been shown to influence racial identity development. In addition, these theories allowed for the comparison between the experiences of mono-racial descent with those of bi-racial people who shared some, but not all, of the same ethnic heritage. The theories of Black and White identity development provided the foundation for work on a new, bi-racial population.
In fact, one of the research questions of this dissertation related to the relevance of mono-racial theories to the bi-racial experience. Literature on both Black and White identity development were also included in this section because of my assumption that a genetically bi-racial person could potentially select a mono-racial identity, including that of Black or White. Therefore, the process of racial identity development for at least some African-American/Euro-American people may be adequately described by either models based on a Black or White experience.

In addition to literature on Black and White identity development, I chose to include two theories related to the development of identity around different social identities (Highlen, et. al., 1988; Jackson & Hardiman, 1985). Both models could be applied to issue related to identity development within a variety of social identities, including race.

Research on bi-racial identity development was a relatively small area of the literature. This is true, even though authors such as Croly, (1864), Mencke (1976), and Reuter (1918) have noted that material on issues related to what was once referred to as race mixing and miscegenation has been written since slavery in the United States began. However, the study of the process through which individuals who have a mixed race family heritage form a sense of racial identity is a fairly recent phenomenon, with most of the attention being paid to child populations.

The material on bi-racial issues presented in this review included works on bi-racial children, bi-racial adults, clinical issues pertaining to the treatment of bi-racial clients, and research on Black children raised in adoptive White homes. While this last category of studies did not focus on bi-racial individuals specifically, many of the themes which appeared in the literature on transracial adoption were very similar to those in the literature on issues facing bi-racial children. Therefore, the adoption studies were included as a way of
supplementing the small body of literature available on people who are actually of bi-racial heritage.

Research on Black or African-American Identity Development

The majority of studies or models of racial identity development focussed on the experiences of Black people, and more specifically, African-Americans. These models became prominent during the late 1960's and 1970's. While some of the earliest identity development stage models were being developed, other research on the changing behavior and attitudes of African-Americans was taking place. Some of these studies are presented here as an introduction to the theories of Black identity development, and as a way of highlighting the context from which these theories emerged.

During the Civil Rights movement, it was apparent that a change was taking place in the way that African-Americans saw and named themselves as individuals and as members of a racial group. Attempts to account for or explain these shifts in self and group identity formed the basis of a number of writings from this historical period. At this time, authors and researchers focussed on a range of issues, from the characteristics of the then occurring social movement (Sherif & Sherif, 1970) to the nature or process of change occurring in the identities of Black people (Dizard, 1970; Crawford & Naditch, 1970; Foster, 1971; Mosby, 1971; Sherif & Sherif, 1970; Williams, 1971). Several studies sought to describe characteristics of Blacks who had become activists in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and to compare these individuals to their non-activist brothers and sisters (Caplan, 1970; Caplan & Paige, 1970; Crawford & Naditch, 1970; Forward & Williams, 1970; Hilliard, 1972).

Certain writers of this period spoke of the need to develop a new reference point from which Black identity and the Black experience could be understood (Cross, 1971; Foster,
This new referent would reflect both what the authors saw as uniquely innate African characteristics, as well as the mechanisms developed by African-Americans to ensure their survival in the United States. The thread which tied all of these works together was their focus on accounting for, describing, or critiquing the new Black identity which had arisen out of the turbulence of that time.

In a summary of significant studies of Black militants, rioters, and activists conducted up to 1970, Caplan (1970) dispelled many of the stereotypes of urban rioters held by the larger society. In place of these false images, the author introduced his description of "the new Ghetto man" which he believed was a more accurate portrayal of individuals involved in creating change in the urban areas. Caplan concluded that:

"The militant is a viable creature in search of practical responses to arbitrary institutional constraints and preemptions which deny him the same freedom and conventional opportunities as the white majority. He is better educated but underemployed, politically disaffected but not the politically alienated. He is willing to break laws for rights already guaranteed by law, but under ordinary circumstances he is no more likely to engage in crime than his nonmilitant neighbor. He is intensely proud of being black, but neither desires revenge from whites nor is socially envious of them. He has little freedom and ownership of his own life. Indeed, this new man of the ghetto is also the man of paradox" (p. 71).

Supported by the findings of earlier research, Caplan noted that the new positive racial identity which was emerging in many Blacks was fed by a growing sense of racial consciousness and pride.

A study conducted by Dizard (1970) which focused on the group consciousness of Blacks found that most of the subjects interviewed had some minimal sense of collective racial identity. In addition, almost half of the sample had a relatively high degree of attachment to a positive group identity. Blacks who could be seen as middle class in relation to educational attainment were described as being the "chief repository of black pride" (p. 201).
The work of Forward and Williams (1970) supported the portrait of the urban rioter proposed earlier by the Blocked Opportunity Theory of Caplan and Paige (1968). This theory described riot participants as individuals who had high aspirations for themselves and who believed that they possessed the skills needed to attain personal advancement. For these individual, the dynamic of an oppressive society stood in the way of advancement, not personal shortcomings. Forward and Williams concluded that:

"...evidence does not support the notion that young black militants who endorse violence are either revolutionaries or dropouts from the system. On the contrary, young militants display those characteristics which would mark them as persons most likely to succeed within the system if success were possible for them" (p. 88).

Additional information on characteristics of Black activists appeared in the work of Hilliard (1972). This author noted that the data obtained from his study countered the prevailing notion that Black activists and the activities which took place during the Civil Rights movement were indicators of individual and group pathology. In addition, Hilliard indicated that "an independent Black Psychology-- more specifically, a psychology of Black liberation" had to be developed from which the Black experience could be more accurately gauged (p. 142).

The research of Crawford and Naditch (1970) focussed on the interaction of individual personality variables such as perceived locus of mean of control and the level of ideal and real goal discrepancy. Their results were organized into a four stage model which described psychological, societal, and behavioral responses to conditions where individuals had less access to resources in comparison to other groups. Crawford and Naditch's work was significant in that it was described by the authors as a "hypothesized typical developmental progression" that could account for individual behavior, as well as the kind of societal and political changes occurring in the cities at that time (p. 215, [emphasis added]).
descriptions of individual behavior given at each stage were mirrored in the developmental stage models of Black identity which were developed shortly after this work had been completed.

Other authors who contributed to the roots of the Black identity development models were Sherif and Sherif (1970). These theorists acknowledged the impact of a major social change movement on Black sense of self, and described a process through which Blacks achieved a new, redefined identity. The first aspect of this process was the Black person's dissociation from the White standards, institutions, and values which had formed the core of the former Black identity. In extreme cases, this turning away from the negative and inferior White-defined images was manifested in the total rejection of everything White, and even Whites themselves. The second change was the "turning toward other non-White peoples in different parts of the world especially in Africa and looking elsewhere for values to replace those they have rejected" (p. 49). This movement away from White values and the development and assertion of positive Black values was also reflected in the stages of the emerging Black identity development theories.

The call to establish a new reference point based on Black values and experiences was also raised in the works of Foster (1971) and Cross (1971). Foster contended that explanations of why Blacks failed "to become Americans" were based on economic or urbanization arguments which ignored the existence and influence of an African heritage within the Black community (p. 6). By acknowledging the survival mechanisms which the African-Americans had been able to develop and maintain from the time of slavery, one could understand why contemporary Blacks described their experience, and developed "prescriptions for living," in ways which were different from, and devalued by the larger culture (p. 9).
The establishment or recognition of a world view that incorporated these survival mechanisms with the American aspects of the Black experience was what Foster (1971) referred to when he described the need to develop the "Black Referent" (p. 9-10). Examples of these survival mechanisms included a communal as opposed to an individual orientation, a high degree of sensitivity to potentially dangerous situations, and the ability to show an empathetic understanding of other human beings and their situations. According to Foster, a new framework for viewing race relations would not place one set of values or culture over another. Instead, differences in world view would be acknowledged and valued.

Cross (1971) expanded on the concept of the Black Referent described by Foster (1971). Cross wrote that although Blacks thought and acted in ways which approached White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant standards, they were caught in "a neurotic dilemma because the Euro-American determinants of the American ideal are inherently anti-Black" (p. 97). In order to liberate Blacks, the uniqueness of the Black experience, or the relevance of a Black referent, had to be acknowledged. With this new reference point as a base, a "psychology of black liberation" could be established (p. 100). This process of liberation was outlined as a series of five steps, and will be presented as one of the developmental stage models later in this section of the dissertation.

Williams (1971) noted that the Black movement "seeks not only to preserve the basic identity of the black American, but more importantly, it seeks to foster the development of a different image, one which will erase the previous negative image ascribed to him" (p. 67). One of the ways that the personal discovery and internalization of this new image was accounted for was through the different theories of Black identity development. The writings of Foster (1971) and Cross (1971) called for the establishment of a new reference point from which the experiences of Blacks could be accurately analyzed. This challenge, coupled with
the findings from the empirical studies of Blacks done in the 1970's, set the stage for the
construction of the a number of theories of Black identity development.

Theories of Black Identity Development

The Thomas Model. Charles Thomas (1971) wrote that the social movement on the 1960’s was:

"...a corrosive operation against those harsh, oppressive elements of the social structure that have either misinterpreted the humanness of black people or compelled them to believe that psycho-socially they had infantile, or animal-like motivational systems. Such notions, so deeply embedded in life expectancies, while allowing for the adaption in order to survive, have cast black people in the role of maintaining resistance to change" (p. 17).

Thomas proposed a process of Black redefinition which acknowledged both the psychological and emotional impact of changing one’s identity. Because the self-image and definition of Black Americans were shaped by the racist values inherent in the surrounding society, Blacks existed in a state of "negromachy," remaining dependent on the White cultural climate for definition and sense of relevance (p. 103). Thomas noted that the emergence of the new Black identity reflected social-psychological development which affected both attitude and behavior. The acquisition of the new identity was a deeply felt experience "where the entire ecstatic range of emotions is called into play. It is almost as if one is alive for the first time" (p. 20). In naming oneself as part of a group and embracing communal action, a number of identity conflicts which were inherent in living under the former White defined roles were resolved.

The Thomas model outlined a four stage process of redefinition. At the first stage, a Black person was required to accept isolation and withdraw into the Black community in order to gain support and self-determination. The need to put White people down, or "rappin’ on whitey" was one of the behaviors seen as therapeutic and helpful at this stage (p. 113). In the
The Cross Model. The paradigm of Black identity development formulated by Cross (1971) and expanded by Hall, Cross, and Freedle (1972) contained several of the themes found in the Thomas model (1971). Cross described a process which was largely unconscious journey and mediated by the events occurring in the Black community at that time. At each stage of this process, Cross elaborated on the issues facing the individual, and the response given to these issues. Briefly, Stage One, or Preencounter, described a person who had internalized, and was living by "Euro-American determinants" (p. 100). The belief in the Protestant work ethic, dependency on White leadership, the emphasis on individual success over the advancement of the race, and the adoption of an assimilationist-integrationist paradigm of race relations were all indicators of Stage One belief systems.

Stage Two, Encounter, was triggered by an event that "manages to slip by or even shatter the person's current feeling about himself and his interpretation of the condition of the Negro in America" (p. 101). Both experiencing and interpreting the key event or events were part of this stage, as the individual began to reconstruct his or her world view in light of the event. By progressing through this stage, a Black person awakened an undercurrent of strong emotions, including feelings of guilt for having "left the race" or for "degrading his
Blackness" (p. 102). Guilt was soon mixed with feelings of rage as the search for a new Black identity led the individual to enter the next stage of the process.

Marked by a turning away from all that was perceived to be White, Cross’ third stage, Immersion-Emersion, was a truly a withdrawal into self and the Black community for support and redefinition. Cross noted that "the person attends political meetings, joins the Muslims, goes to rapping sessions, attends seminars and art shows that focus on Blackness. Everything of value must be Black or relevant to Blackness" (p. 102). While Blackness was deified by the individual, Whiteness was dehumanized and degraded. A person at this stage was often moved to action in the form of confronting Whites and oppressive structures. The strong feelings at this stage were tempered with reason when the individual shifted from being immersed in Blackness and having an oversimplified definition of racial issues, to the emersion part of this stage. This shift was accompanied by a change in the individual so that "control, awareness, and incorporation predominate" (p. 105).

Stage Four, Internalization, offered a number of paths the individual could take. Given that during this stage, "the individual develops an idealistic, superhuman level of expectancy toward practically anything Black...," a person who remained at this stage could maintain an emphasis on hating Whites (p. 105). Others could integrate and internalize the new identity gained from immersion-emersion experiences into their self-concept in a way that enhanced their view of self. The individual could also combine the internalized new identity with a concrete plan of action, and move into Cross’ fifth stage, Internalization-Commitment. Here, the person proceeded "beyond rhetoric and into action" in order to actively change his or her community (p. 106).

The Jackson Model. Noting that educational interventions had little relevance to the experience of Black students, Jackson (1976) developed the Black Identity Development
Theory. Although many of the themes and issues raised in this theory also appeared in the works of Thomas (1971) and Cross (1971), Jackson applied his model to educational and counselling settings as a mechanism for understanding the racial identity development of clients. In his description of each stage, Jackson provided indicators of the values and beliefs held, sources of control and validation, the goals held by the individual, and the behaviors which the individual engaged in.

Stage One of the Jackson model described a person's consciousness as one of Passive Acceptance. Here, an individual unconsciously subscribed to and internalized White cultural and institutional values, and devalued and negated anything which was Black. Looking to Whites for validation and approval, the goal of the individual at this stage was to be acceptable to Whites.

A person moved from Passive Acceptance to the second stage of Active Resistance by becoming aware that remaining in Stage One consciousness did not allow for the development of a positive personal identity. Since the image of Black Americans put forth by the larger society was based on a White, racist referent system, Stage Two of this model focussed on the rejection of White values, goals, and norms that had been previously accepted. In addition, there was a recognition of the value and power of the Black community in controlling and building its own destiny. The goals here were to "establish a separate Black nation, to acquire the power and control enjoyed by whites, to be seen as the Blackest of Blacks, and to eliminate all of the negative (white) influences on the person’s life (p. 35). As the person was ready to create new values, norms and roles for him or herself and the community, he or she was in transition to the next phase of development.

Titled Redirection, the third stage of the Black Identity Development Theory involved the investment of personal energy into two areas. First, the individual chose other Blacks
who were at Stage Three consciousness level as role models and mentors. This orientation was different from that of Stage Two in that it did not reflect a conscious rejection of White values. Instead, a person:

"...ignores the white world and dealings with the white society are kept to a minimum. The assumption that necessitates this view and behavior is that, the white society has nothing that can nurture the Stage Three Black person. And, the goodness or badness of white people is irrelevant to the establishment of a Black culture" (p. 37).

In this stage, an individual moved from reacting to White society and goals, to redirecting energy into the establishment of Black goals and values and ways for accomplishing them. In addition, the Stage Three individual made an effort to both continue to develop and nurture his or her own growing sense of positive identity and to support other Blacks undergoing redirection. After having achieved this positive identity, a person was moved to integrate the new identity with other aspects of his or her self concept.

The fourth and final stage of the Jackson models was titled Internalization, and involved the quest for a wholistic sense of self which included the new positive racial identity. This identity was integrated into other aspects of the persons sense of self. The individual was called upon "to synergistically make sense of the bi-cultural nature of his/her experience in the American society. ...He/she is able to separate those oppressive aspects of the society from those neutral or supportive aspects" (p. 42). Racism was framed as a sickness in American society" which had influenced both Blacks and Whites to various extents" (p. 44).

A person at this stage of consciousness sought to work against racism and other forms of oppression, and to facilitate "other oppressed people in their quest for personal liberation" (p. 45).
Related Works on Black Identity Issues

The identity development models of Thomas (1971), Cross (1971) and Jackson (1976) framed the process of establishing a racial identity in a racist society as a series of steps or stages through which individuals pass. This re-naming process was both personal, in that it happened to individual people, and political, in the sense that these individuals often achieved a new, critical way of understanding the processes of society. Some of the issues raised in the developmental theories were also discussed in later works. This section of the literature review presents some of the more contemporary literature related to Black racial identity.

The dichotomy of the Black existence in the United States was noted in the works of Amuzi Chimezie (1985). This author described Blacks as living in a state of "psycho-cultural duality," since being Black in the United States required the embracing of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes (p. 224). Chimezie cited examples of bi-culturality as the embracing of both the dominant and the Black dialect in language, the existence of the many different ways of styling Black hair, the range of family structures and childrearing practices which existed, and the diversity of literature and music enjoyed by Blacks. Chimezie noted that the Black cultural components of bi-culturality were generally achieved at an early age through experiences with one’s family and community. The White components of bi-culturality were adopted later, after the child had opportunities to interact with individuals and circumstances outside of the family structure.

Chimezie (1985) evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of bi-culturality, and its implication for the socialization and development of the Black child. The primary advantage noted by the author was that bi-culturality allowed the individual to survive and prosper within the dominant culture. Disadvantages were numerous, and were framed in the context of bi-culturality as "in general, not a free choice, but a condition imposed by Anglo-Saxon
cultural supremacy and maintained by a system of punishments and rewards" (p. 231). These drawbacks included the psychological toll of having to balance two contradictory cultures and the potential for political divisiveness when Blacks confronted each other for displaying the wrong standard. As Chimezie's work focussed on the cultural frame of reference of the African experience in the United States, it elaborated on the role of cultural factors influencing Black identity, more so than the developmental stage theories presented earlier.

Consistent with the analysis given by Sherif and Sherif (1970), Jacqueline Wade (1987) stressed the importance of understanding the historical context of the idea of "raceness" in examining the physical and cultural factors which fed the system of racism in this country (p. 31). Although Wade acknowledged the influence of African heritage and pride movements in creating a positive Black personality, she contended that "Blacks' self concept is still fundamentally related to a color-caste ideology generating a mosaic of biological and psychological and sociological conditions" (p. 36). This was in part due to the White-Race Centeredness of American culture, which defined White as good and Black as bad, and which influenced any interaction or social relationship in the society. The dual paths available to Blacks for "managing their Black raceness" consisted of actions of assimilation or rebellion (p. 37).

Wade, like Chimezie (1985), stressed the cultural repertoire of Blacks as reflecting the duality of responses. This bi-culturality allowed for the survival in the White world, while maintaining and celebrating different aspects of the Black community. Wade's work proposed direction for the study of Black-Black interaction, as well as Black-White interchanges. While she did write on the Black experience of bi-culturality and on the possible responses for managing Black raceness, she did not focus extensively on the development of a Black identity.
Leahcim Semaj (1981) reviewed some of the racial identity models, including those of Thomas (1971) and Cross (1971), with an emphasis on the personal circumstances of the theorists who created them. Semaj contended that the final stages of both the Cross and Thomas theories were unrealistic and dangerous states. He also disagreed with Jackson (1976), Thomas (1971), and Cross (1971) by contending that the initial Black identity was not based on anti-Black feelings and images, and that "relatively few Blacks actually experience a transformation of identity and that basically, the majority of Blacks (in the Diaspora) have not lost their culture or identity" (p. 168-169).

The identity model proposed by Semaj incorporated mental, spiritual, and physical health into a model of what he termed "extended identity" (p. 169). Within this model, individuals in the Alien Extended Self identity phase "demonstrated a Eurocentric world view," incorporating values and norms of White society into their daily lives (p. 169). Blacks in the Diffused Extended Self identity phase sought to balance African and alien, or European, world views. Lastly, individuals with a Collective Extended Self identity were grounded in an Afri-centric world view" and sought to incorporate "Africanity," or African sense of "body, mind, and spirit" in all aspects of their lives (p. 169).

The phases of Semaj’s model did not represent a developmental sequence, but distinct ways of being in the world. He indicated that the Diffused Extended Identity was the one most often encountered, and that "as this identity 'oscillates' between the Black and alien cultures the possibility exists for the individual to move towards alienation due to the material rewards and attractions of the alien society" (p. 170). Movement to a collective or revolutionary commitment stage was also possible, but less likely. The Semaj model, like the work by Chimezie (1985), used culture as a way of framing identities. The political themes
from the earlier developmental theories were more prevalent in Semaj’s work when collective and revolutionary action were noted as possible outcomes.

Another author who proposed that African-Americans had a unique way of structuring the world, as opposed to identities based on different developmental stages, was Joseph Baldwin (1981). Baldwin’s "African Survival Thrust" combined aspects of genetic commonality, social definition, cosmology, and culture in describing how Blacks interacted with the world (p. 173). His model depicted a uniquely Black personality as an inherently biological characteristic. Individual differences in degree of identification "depends upon the degree to which one’s early experience (early socialization) and institutional support systems actively nurture and reinforce the innate potential of the African Self-Extension Orientation" (p. 177). Some of the basic characteristics which Baldwin attributed to the Black personality included an emphasis on perceiving and processing information in a wholistic way, using multiple modes of sensing, a focus on expressive and wholistic communication, and attention to group and shared activities, and the belief in a "Supreme Being, a spiritual force behind life existence, natural order, etc." (p. 176). The work of Baldwin added a wholly different dimension to the previously referenced works in that his model assumed a greater level of genetic predisposition to a certain way of being. The role of culture and experience were more to facilitate or block the expression of this inborn way of interacting with, and seeing the world, rather than major influences on the development of an individual’s sense of identity.

Parham (1989) and Helms (1989) revisited Cross’ (1971) identity development model, focussing on the concept of cyclical stages of development and methodological issues related to racial identity research respectively. Parham proposed that the model could be extended by noting how an individual’s experiences at the different stages of development would vary
depending on what life cycle they were in. The different tasks associated with each age period noted in the developmental psychology literature would affect the nature of the experiences which the individual had. In addition, Parham stressed that Cross' model should be considered a cyclical one, where an individual re-cycled through the stages of development a number of times during the course of his or her lifetime. This new way of utilizing the work by Cross would de-emphasize what Parham saw as the limiting, linear nature of the original model.

Helms (1989) highlighted several of the challenges involved in researching racial identity theories, and the need to separate theory, methodology, and environmental influences during such inquiry. Specific areas for attention noted by the author included sampling techniques, reliability, and the tendency for researchers to generalize the results gained from looking at individual lives to whole segments of the population. Helms concluded her critique by proposing a number of possible solutions to these methodological dilemmas. For example, she suggested that racial identity researchers find ways to de-emphasize the racial aspects of their studies in order to minimize self-selection of the subjects in or out of the study based on stage or racial identity development. She also encouraged researchers to draw samples from several geographic settings to account for variance based on possible differences across settings.

A number of authors responded to the works of Parham (1989) and Helms (1989). Critiques offered by Akbar (1989) and Nobles (1989) reflected a belief in an Africentric way of viewing the world which was inseparable from the issues or process of identity development. Akbar (1989) wrote that the encounter which sparked the journey through the stages of development in the Cross (1971) model could be based on a positive experience which occurred in a nurturing environment, and not just in recognition of self-denial. Akbar
(1989) indicated that nigrescence, "or converting to Blackness" was a core trait (p. 258).

Historically, research methodology had focussed on attitudinal variables. The author pointed to the gap between the nature of the trait being analyzed and the methods utilized to measure it as a fundamental methodological flaw. In addition, Nobles (1989) noted that since racial identity research represented a branch of psychology rooted in a non-African perspective, that research in the area of what Helms (1989) called visible racial/ethnic minority psychology or VREG, could not be used to capture the essence of the core of an African identity.

Ponterotto (1989) encouraged the expansion of Parham's life cycle approach to include racial identity development which he proposed occurred in early childhood. The author also indicated that attention should be paid to researching the role of interracial interaction in the identity development process. Methodologically, Ponterotto called for the development of more updated tools for measuring racial identity theory and identity.

The response offered by Cross (1989) emphasized the need to see that the conditions which fostered nigrescence were not manifestations of a single, or limited number of historical periods. This was offered to contradict the belief that racial identity development was the product of the Civil Rights period only. Cross noted that application of models of nigrescence to other times in history could shed light on Black social movements which preceded the 1960's. In response to the critiques raised by Helms (1989), Cross emphasized the complexity of the concept of nigrescence, and that attempts to wrestle it into simple solutions for the purpose of scientific measurement were inappropriate. In addition, he noted that critiques of the concept and its models often focussed on flawed or weak individual studies, as opposed to trends which were evident across the research literature. Cross contended that attention to such trends or patterns would actually serve to validate the stages of nigrescence and the process of identity change.
Smith (1989) raised a number of concerns related to the study of Black racial identity development in her response to the positions offered by Parham (1989) and Helms (1989). In general, she emphasized that ethnic, as opposed to racial, identity was the concept which more accurately captured the sense of psychological meaning for individuals. Therefore, she argued that the seeking of an ethnic identity should be the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, she encouraged theorists to examine how initial stages of identity formation could be based on circumstances other than those of self-hatred. Smith noted that research and theory to date had failed to adequately explore the effect of other agents such as family and community on an individual’s process of identity development. Lastly, she directed researchers to more adequately clarify what was meant by the concept of racial identity in addition to exploring the process of its development.

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Theories of Black Identity Development

The theories of Black identity development written by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976) were similar to one another in both content and context. All of the theories were developed during the period following the Civil Rights movement. Each described issues facing a single racial group, Blacks, during the process of redefinition within a racist society. I assumed that all of these authors were writing about the experiences of African-Americans, rather than all ethnic groups which were included under the Black racial category proposed by Hardiman and Jackson (1980). Within the tenets of each theory, it was clear that the author agreed with Foster (1971) and Cross (1971) that theories of psychological health and development which were utilized prior to the development of the Black identity models were derived from a White perspective and were unable to accurately reflect the experiences of African-Americans.
The theories written by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976) characterized racial identity development as a progression through a series of identifiable stages. Although the number and names of the individual stages differed from author to author, each theory described a shift from an identity based on the internalization of the norms and values of the surrounding White society, to an identity based on a new awareness and definition of self, racial group membership, and racism. As part of this change process, there was a withdrawal from the White world, coupled with an investment into the Black community in order to gain knowledge, support, experience, and a new definition of Blackness.

Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976) did not directly address the issue of who was considered African-American or Black in their theories. However, each author pointed to some of the factors which influenced a person’s sense of racial identity. For example, Thomas criticized situations where Whites maintained control over changes which supposedly benefitted Blacks as the perpetuation of the "modern day master-slave relationship" (p. 2). From this, one could assume that at least one factor which determined whether someone was Black was that person's ability to trace ancestry to the Africans who were brought or came to the United States during the historical periods which encompassed slavery. Thomas and Cross included references to physical characteristics such as hair and skin color in their theories, possibly inferring that either genetics and/or physical appearance had some role in defining whether someone was Black. Thomas, Cross, and Jackson all included references to culture and political action in their works. In the middle stages of each of the models, Blacks were seen as exploring cultural roots and opportunities for political action.
The points summarized above are important in analyzing these three models with an eye toward their applicability to the experiences of African-American/Euro-American adults. As the theories were written to address the experiences of a single racial group, they may not be applicable at all to a mixed race population. However, since Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976) were not specific as to who would be defined as Black, the door has been left somewhat open for bi-racial people to enter and experience the process outlined by these authors. This could be particularly true of a person of African-American/Euro-American descent who chose to name him or herself Black. It may also be true if the same individual "looked Black," regardless of what racial identity that person chose. It could also be argued that because of the history of this country, a bi-racial person of African-American/Euro-American descent does not have the option to claim an identity other than Black.

If in fact an African-American/Euro-American underwent an identity development process similar to those outlined in the three Black identity theories, the question could be asked if this experience was the same as, or fundamentally different from a Black person of mono-racial descent. For example, during the period of isolation/withdrawal (Thomas, 1971), immersion (Cross, 1971), or active resistance/redirection (Jackson, 1976), would the bi-racial individual's experience of turning away from the White world be the same as someone who did not have White people in his or her immediate family? Would the bi-racial person receive the same reception from a Black community as a mono-racial Black person? As an African-American/Euro-American person emerged from the latter stages of identity development, what would his or her redefined identity look like and be called?

The questions are many as to the extent to which theories related to a single racial group which were written in the 1970s can account for the experience of a mixed race group.
who could potentially claim a number of identities. However, these earlier works may indeed be able to account for the experiences of racial identity development of some bi-racial people, especially those who choose to name themselves as Black. In addition, these earlier works helped identify some of the factors which are seen to influence racial identity development, with particular attention being paid to identity development in the context of cultural and political experiences. By examining these theories in light of the experience of bi-racial people, some of the questions noted above may be answered. In addition, these answers may clarify the process of, and factors which influence racial identity development in general.

**Research on White Identity Development**

In comparison to material related to Black identity issues, literature on White identity development was scarce. Most of the research on racial identity development relied on, and sought to categorize, the experience of racially oppressed people. This gap in the literature was noted by several of the authors who produced works related to White identity development (Dennis, 1981; Hardiman, 1984; Hecht, 1977; Helms, 1984; Jones, 1985; Pettigrew, 1981). The majority of literature on White identity issues focussed on the experiences of Whites during the Civil Rights movement. For many Whites, the issues raised during this period in history provided fertile ground for increasing one’s awareness of racism, the role of Whites in maintaining or interrupting it, and examining what it meant to be White in America. The literature in this area took a variety of forms and has a number of different focusses. Hecht (1977), Jones (1985), and Levy (1968) described the changing nature of attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions associated with White activists as they moved from being unconscious participants in the system of racism to being actively anti-racist. The work of Caditz (1976) documented White retreat from previously held liberal stances on racial
issues. The moral dilemmas posed by living in a society which espoused equality but perpetuated racism was noted in the works of Dennis (1981), Jones (1985), and Terry (1978). The impact of racism on the mental health of Whites was noted by Dennis (1981), Pettigrew (1981), and Terry (1981). Hardiman (1982) incorporated some of the insights and frameworks provided by earlier models of Black identity development and sex role socialization in her White identity development model. Helms (1984) proposed a model to explain how Whites develop a sense of racial consciousness, and how this awareness affected perceptions and interactions with both Whites and Blacks. One of the earliest writings on the topic of White identity development was a four stage sequence proposed by Levy (1968) which documented "the stages through which Whites in the (Civil Rights) Movement pass as they move toward a recognition of the mistrust directed at them" (Preface, v). Within this framework, Whites were seen as using a variety of strategies to deny the existence of mistrust between Blacks and Whites. Levy described their first response to mistrust and their inability to be exempted from it as indignation. This was followed by a period of awkwardness around Blacks as the issue of trust remained unresolved. Finally, when unconditional trust and acceptance were recognized by Whites as being impossible, these activists were left with few options for continuing their involvement with Blacks on different Civil Rights projects. Levy indicated that oftentimes the White individuals chose to phase themselves out of the Movement completely.

While Levy's (1968) framework was not an identity development model per se, it noted that awareness of one's race occurred as Whites moved through the four phases of the model. Although the level of introspection on the meaning attached to one's Whiteness was minimal, Whites at least began to think about the impact of their racial identity on different
aspects of their lives. This coming to awareness of White racial identity would appear in the early stages of the models of White identity development which followed Levy’s work.

Edward Hecht (1977) conducted in-depth interviews with individuals who had scored high on a survey measuring anti-racist behavior in order to get a closer look at the thoughts and behaviors of White, anti-racist advocates. His findings indicated that discrepancies existed between the attitudes that individuals expressed about racism, and how they felt and acted in different situations. Given these gaps, Hecht contended that the experiences of his subjects could not be adequately explained by a framework which focussed on a single dimension of experience. Therefore, the author proposed a model which included separate continua for cognitive, affective, and behavioral experiences. Of these three continua, Hecht found that the cognitive scale provided the most accurate description of the process by which individual anti-racist Whites came to understand racism.

The work of Hecht (1977) was important in that it measured a group of factors which had an impact on White involvement in anti-racist activities, and highlighted that it was possible to think, act, and feel different things while engaging in such work. The model of White identity development which would be later proposed by Hardiman (1982) contained descriptions of an individual’s feelings, activities, and thoughts at each stage of development, mirroring Hecht’s breakdown of experiences into these three categories.

The discrepancy between what one believed and how one acted was a prominent theme in the work of Caditz (1976). This author concluded that Whites who indicated that they believed in the values of equal opportunity, universal respect, and social justice could not be characterized as a single group. For example, some Whites were found to support integration, affirmative action, and equality only if certain conditions were met. Others would support integration in some, but not all, circumstances. Caditz described some White
liberals as being in role conflict when their beliefs about the positive value of integration were inconsistent with other feelings and beliefs, such as fear of Black ghettos, or that accepting Blacks into their workplace would result in the lowering of occupational standards.

Caditz's (1976) work could be seen as a model of the changing degrees of commitment of Whites who had at one time held anti-racist beliefs, but who had withdrawn some of this support when the beliefs were translated into real changes in their social situations. This reversal of commitment was noted by Terry (1978) as a digression to a lower category of White response to racism under circumstances of pressure and stress.

A number of categories for the accounting of how Whites structured their beliefs about racism, and the reasoning used to support these beliefs, were identified in a model developed by Terry (1978, 1981). For each category, the author provided different definitions of racism, the key values held, ways of interacting with others, definition of anti-racist action, and those values which constituted contradictions to the belief systems of that category. Terry's model was presented as a continuum of White belief patterns and behaviors in response to race and racism. Although it was not framed as a model through which individual Whites progressed in order to become aware of their racial identity, Terry noted that under certain circumstances, individuals adopted the belief system, values, and behaviors of the category which appeared directly above or below the one that they were at on the continuum.

Drawing from the material based on autobiographical books written by anti-racist Whites, Dennis (1981) highlighted the impact of racist socialization on the belief system of White children. One of the major factors which Dennis focussed on was the experiences that each of the authors had during childhood with receiving inadequate and distorted information about Blacks. This history led them to develop a "double social and psychological
consciousness" as they were taught to respect and show compassion for all individuals, while learning to hate and fear certain groups of people (p. 73). In addition, racist socialization resulted in pressure toward group conformity and "moral confusion and social ambivalence" (p. 78).

Dennis' (1981) work was important in that it highlighted the effect of early socialization on the identity of Whites who were later to become active anti-racists. In addition, a number of writers who came after Dennis used the methodology of gathering data through either written or oral autobiographical accounts to illustrate different stages or processes of White identity development.

From a review of the literature on White anti-racists, Jones (1985) presented a composite of the socially active anti-racist White. This author found that such people embodied the characteristics of positive sense of racial identity and self-esteem, appreciation for differences and diverse social identities, and a realization of the connection between issues of oppression and other political and social causes. In addition, Jones applied the concept of moral self-interest to data obtained from interviews of noted White anti-racist activists. She described White anti-racists as utilizing a caring orientation when approaching situations in their lives, and as having an understanding that working against racism was in their own self interest.

Theories of White Identity Development

The Hardiman Model. The Hardiman model of White Identity Development (1982) described the process through which individual Whites gained a sense of racial identity, an understanding of racism, and their individual and group role in maintaining the system of racial oppression. The model accommodated the experiences of all Whites who had been
socialized in America, not just those who had engaged in anti-racist activities. Therefore, the model can be used to understand a range of White behavior, attitude, and action around the issue of racism. Hardiman included descriptions of behaviors and attitudes that were indicators of each stage. Each of these were illustrated by material taken from autobiographical accounts of select White authors.

The White Identity Development Model began with a stage of naivete, or what Hardiman termed, a "Lack of Social Consciousness" (p. 157). Behavior at this stage was first "spontaneous, natural," as individuals "operate from their own needs, interests and curiosity" (p. 157). Whites were described as becoming "aware of racial differences and while they may not feel completely comfortable, they generally don’t feel hostile, fearful or superior. They describe an interest in understanding the differences between people and often ask questions that embarrass or threaten their elders" (p. 158). Confusion about other people’s embarrassment and discomfort often brought on feelings of anger, confusion, or frustration in the young, curious person. Hardiman suggested that this stage encompassed the life period from birth to age four or five.

As the young person was socialized by parents, peers, and societal institutions and culture, they moved into Hardiman’s second stage of development, that of Acceptance. Not only did the White individual learn certain "codes of behavior and the ideology that supports the codes," they learned to rationalize any contradictions that existed between their own beliefs and the new material they were being taught (p. 166). Therefore, a person could believe in negative stereotypes of non-White people, and still feel that he or she was personally unprejudiced, comfortable with other groups of people, and willing to help the targets of racism. In actuality, Whites at this stage avoided contact with people of color,
supported individual expressions of racism, and used political force to block measures to improve racial equality.

As Whites began to question the information which they had received during socialization, or experienced an event which brought to light the true nature of racism, they moved into Hardiman's third stage, Resistance. The development of a new understanding of racism was accompanied by feelings of guilt and anger. Due in part to these feelings and a mistrust of other Whites, individuals at this stage often sought to work and socialize with people of color. Over the course of this stage, racism was redefined as a White problem, and individuals began working with other Whites on anti-racist activities. Support of the anti-racist activities of other racial groups was not offered in a patronizing context, and Whites could understand the need and value for people of color and Whites to work in separate groups at times. Politically, the White person in Resistance understood the systemic nature of racism and confronted it at both the individual and institutional levels.

Hardiman presented two additional stages in her model, Re-Definition and Internalization, which went beyond the experiences recounted in the autobiographies which she reviewed. Re-Definition was entered into as Whites realized the need to establish a positive sense of identity and meaning to Whiteness. At this stage, Whites were able to recognize the accomplishments and positive aspects of White history and culture, and developed "a feeling of pride in group membership, but not a feeling of superiority" (p. 195). Behaviors at this stage included working with Whites and people of color on the issue of racism, exploring White culture, and working "to change White society based on White self-interest" (p. 199).

During the stage of Internalization, Whites became aware of race as one of several identities which they possessed, were able to empathize with other Whites in earlier stages of
development, and were in some cases, able to rejoin groups from which they had separated during the course of their identity development. Individuals continued to work on their own understanding of racism and other forms of oppression, and worked with others to combat these.

The Helms Model. Helms (1984) noted that research on Whites had focussed on the attitudes which Whites held about other racial groups as opposed to how they developed attitudes about themselves as racial beings. This approach, which highlighted White prejudice, provided a limited amount of information about how Whites saw and felt about their own racial group, and assumed that White prejudice was "a bipolar bias against other groups rather than multiple forms of bias lying along a continuum" (p. 155). Therefore, Helms included attention to White perceptions and attitudes towards both Blacks and Whites in her model of White racial identity and consciousness development.

The first stage of the model was entitled Contact, and occurred when the person realized that Black people existed. Helms characterized the White person as being naive about what he or she knew about Blacks, and as being "largely unaware of himself or herself as a racial being" (p. 156). The White person’s attitudes were to either ignore the differences between Blacks and Whites, or to see them as not being important. Societal pressures about cross-racial interaction caused the White person to feel discomfort. Helms noted that the individual could either withdraw from interacting with Blacks or approach Black people by becoming friends with some of them. This second option eventually led the person to the next stage of the model, as he or she became increasingly aware of the “social and political ramifications that surround Black/White cross-racial relationships” (p. 156).

The Disintegration stage was marked by the person acknowledging that he or she was White. Feelings of guilt and depression could accompany this stage, as well as the feeling of
being rejected by other Whites, especially if the person went against White norms pertaining to Blacks. Helms described three solutions the White person may pursue. These included over-identifying with Blacks, becoming "paternalistic toward particular Blacks," or returning to White culture and expectations (p. 156). Since the first two options would result in the rejection of the individual by Blacks and/or Whites, the White person entered the third stage, that of Reintegration. The individual who chose to adopt the "White values and beliefs that emphasize racial differences and encourage separation" under the third option, did not have to progress to further stages.

Helms noted that the third stage of her model most closely resembled what is usually measured as prejudice. In this stage of Reintegration, "the person becomes hostile toward Blacks and more positively biased toward his or her own racial group" (p. 156). This was illustrated by the person stereotyping Blacks, down playing similarities between Blacks and Whites, and feeling afraid and angry. The person could remain at this stage if he or she chose to withdraw or distance him or herself from interactions with Blacks. However, Helms noted that eventually factors such as economic or legal constraints might force the person to eventually interact with Blacks again. Those Whites who accepted and dealt with their Whiteness, and understood the social and political ramifications of their racial group membership could work through their feelings of anger and fear to enter the next stage of the model.

Titled Pseudo-independent, the fourth stage of Helms' model described the White person who had an "intellectual acceptance and curiosity about Blacks and Whites" (p. 156). While the person was more interested in the similarities and differences between racial groups, actual interaction with Blacks "may be limited to a few Black people who are perceived as being similar to Whites or 'special' in some way" (p. 156). Helms described
those Whites who did not have additional emotional energy to proceed, as remaining passively in the pseudo-independent stage. Whites who added affective understanding to their experiences through interaction with Blacks were able to enter the stage of Autonomy.

The final stage of the model, Autonomy, was marked by an acceptance of racial differences and similarities. In addition, the person at this stage accepted people as individuals and not members of racial groups. Cross-racial interactions were treated with "a mixture of appreciation and respect" and were sought out because the individual "values cultural diversity and is secure in his or her own racial identity" (p. 156).

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Theories of White Identity Development

The material on White identity development cited in this paper were works on the experiences of a mono-racial population. They were developed to shed light on the identity development of Whites who lived in American society. Similar to the developmental theories related to Black identity, the models based on White experiences described a sequence of stages through which an individual passed in the process of achieving a redefined sense of racial identity. The literature on Black and White identity development did not openly address who, in terms of ethnicity or mixed race background, could be considered Black or White respectively. Because of this gap in the White literature, it is not clear, especially in terms of heritage, who was covered by the different theories related to the White experience of racial identity development.

I contend that the literature on White identity issues primarily addressed the experiences of people of northern European heritage. In addition, the theories might be applicable to individuals who named themselves as White, and whose skin color and other physical features could be seen as those associated with White people, regardless of their
actual racial and ethnic heritage. It was unclear whether the experience of someone who was a member of an ethnic group which fell under the White racial group as noted by Hardiman and Jackson (1980), but who had darker skin, broader facial features, coarser hair, or other physical characteristics which stretched beyond those considered within the realm of being White, would be the same as those outlined in the White Identity Development Model.

Lastly, the extent to which the developmental models might apply to someone who appeared to be White, but was biologically of mixed race heritage and who named him or herself as something other than White, was also left unclear. Without clearer guidance as to what factors determined an individual’s racial identity under the current mono-racial theories, many of these questions, and those raised in the analysis of the Black identity models, cannot be fully addressed.

The ambiguity as to the factors which go into determining one’s racial identity presented a dilemma in the research on White identity issues. However, they also presented opportunities for exploration through research on the experiences of bi-racial individuals. For example, Hardiman (1982) referred to the appreciation and redefinition of White culture as being a part of the identity process. The opportunity exists to explore the concept of culture in more detail, for example looking at it from a smaller, ethnic standpoint. Because a person of African-American/Euro-American descent may experience a larger gap between the cultural practices associated with his or her two ethnicities than if his or her background reflected different ethnic sub-groups from within either the Black or White racial group, the influence of culture on the racial identity of the individual may be made more obvious. Hecht (1984) described Whites who moved into the final stages of her model as understanding the "social/political implications of being White in a racist society" (p. 156). The presence,
absence, or influence of such a heightened awareness of the nature of race and racism should also be examined in the context of the racial identity development of bi-racial people.

The theories of White identity development outlined the experiences of individuals who benefitted from the racist society, and who were the oppressors. By comparing these theories to the experiences of bi-racial individuals whose heritages reflect both oppressed and oppressor groups, greater understanding of the strengths and limitations of the research on Whites may be achieved. For example, the question of whether the White models apply at all to a bi-racial person’s experience may be answered. If progressing through the White identity framework is an option for a bi-racial person, then the question of whether the experience of this person is the same as that of a mono-racial person’s should also be explored. These questions, as well as the information given in the works on White identity development, served to guide the exploration of the issues related to the racial identity development of African-American/Euro-American adults undertaken by this dissertation.

**Generic Theories of Identity Development**

The Oppression/Liberation Model (Jackson & Hardiman, 1985) and the Self-Identity Development Model of Oppressed People, or SIDMOP (Highlen, et. al., 1988) represented theories of identity development which were applicable to multiple groups of people. The Jackson and Hardiman (1985) work closely mirrored their previous models of Black (Jackson, 1976) and White (Hardiman, 1982) identity development. Their Oppression/Liberation Model described the process of identity development of both the oppressed and the oppressor, and included the stages of (1.) Naive, (2.) Acceptance, (3.) Resistance, (4.) Redefinition, and (5.) Internalization. As the description of the behaviors and attitudes at each of these stages reflected those in the models cited earlier by these authors, I will not describe each stage in
detail, but will highlight areas of the Oppression/Liberation Development Model which I believe are particularly relevant or problematic to the expansion of the model to the experiences of bi-racial people.

Jackson and Hardiman (1985) noted that oppressed people in the Acceptance Stage have:

"...accepted the messages that have been given to them about the nature of their social conditions, the superiority of the dominant group members and the dominant culture, and the inferiority of subordinate peoples and cultures. Often these negative/oppressive messages are held simultaneously, and in contradiction to, the more positive messages about their social group conveyed by parents and other social peers" (p. 17).

This was an area where the application of the Jackson and Hardiman model to the experiences of bi-racial people became complex. The bi-racial person who is both Black and White has two racial heritages, and could potentially identify with one, both, or neither of them. According to the Jackson and Hardiman model, the individual would receive affirming messages about his or her dominant, White heritage, and negative messages about his or her oppressed, or Black background. Under such circumstances, an individual may choose to identify as White, and deny his or her Black heritage. He or she may identify as Black, and either deny or ignore his or her White heritage. In addition, the individual may identify as something other than Black or White, naming him or herself as mixed, bi-racial, or just a person. The factors which affected one's choice of racial identity, as well as the implications of this choice, were not clearly delineated in the Oppression/Liberation Model.

As a child, a bi-racial person may have been exposed to cultural practices which reflected one or both of his or her ethnic and racial heritages. Early socialization played a major role in the first stages of the Jackson and Hardiman model. Therefore, it is important to explore what the effect of early socialization was on the identity chosen by people whose heritages reflect more than one racial group, especially when one group is oppressor and other
is oppressed. Under the current model, the process focused on the development of an identity as either the oppressed or the oppressor. While a bi-racial person may choose a mono-racial identity, it is unclear whether the process of doing so is same as if the person were of a single racial heritage. The option to choose an identity which acknowledged both heritages is not available without expansion of the Oppression/Liberation Model.

When considering the experiences of a bi-racial population, the Jackson and Hardiman model contained a number of points in the process where the individual made a choice. For example, in the Resistance Stage, the authors noted that there was a conscious effort to develop a clearer sense of "who I am not" and "who I am" (p. 21). The choices available for an African-American/Euro-American adult could be "I'm White," "I'm Black," "I'm Neither," "I'm Both," "I am Something Other Than," etc. How such an individual comes to choose, and then define an identity within this framework has not been explored. Jackson and Hardiman noted that in the Stage of Redefinition, there was a shift of energy and attention by the oppressed person from dominants "toward a concern for primary contact and interaction with their own social group at the same stage of consciousness" (p. 21). Which group or groups the bi-racial person would choose to be with during this process was also unclear. Would the individual choose to associate with anti-racist Whites, Blacks, bi-racial people, or a combination of groups? How this choice of group is affected by factors such as appearance and response by other members to the bi-racial individual is another area which can be explored by applying this model to bi-racial people.

As a person entered the final stage of the Oppression/Liberation Model, whether as a member of the oppressed or oppressor group, he or she was concerned with applying the new found identity to various aspects of life. If one assumes that a person of bi-racial heritage could claim a number of identities, how these different identities were achieved and
internalized is a significant area for exploration. The answer to how these different experiences of identity formation compare with each other, and what issues and factors contributed to them will add clarity to the issue of bi-racial identity development, and to racial identity development in general. By examining these and other questions, I believe that critical questions as to the role of heritage in forming a racial identity can be answered. In addition, this analysis may help in distinguishing between the concepts of heritage, which is biological, and identity, which reflects psycho-social processes.

The Highlen et. al. model (1988), abbreviated as SIDMOP, was presented as a generic process of identity development of individuals from any oppressed group. The model contained thirteen stages, six of which constituted transitions from one stage to another. The authors of this framework also stressed the spiritual nature of the process of identity development. Each of the thirteen stages will not be presented in this review. However, an overview of the model is presented with an analysis of issues related to its application to bi-racial identity development.

Under the SIDMOP, the identity development process began when a person went from a state of lack of social consciousness to seeing him or herself as an individual in the world. This was followed by a stage where the person felt some discomfort over his or her own sense of self-worth. The individual eventually moved from this stage, termed Dissonance by the authors, to the stage of Immersion. The developing new identity was internalized at the next stage of the model. The Highlen et. al. model concluded with an individual achieving the stages of Integration and Transformation.

With the exception of the integration and transformation stages, I believe that the same questions noted in the critique of the Oppression/Liberation Model (Jackson & Hardiman, 1985) were relevant to this model. For example, it was unclear what messages about social
identity would be internalized by the bi-racial person at the earliest stages of racial identity
development, and from which community these messages would come from. Due to the focus
of the SIDMOP on mono-identities, the different choices which may be open to some bi-racial
people is not easily explored. For example, which community this person would seek out
during the process of immersion and redefinition is not clear. Neither is the issue of which
identity or identities a bi-racial person would emerge with at the end of the sequence of
developmental stages.

The Highlen, et. al. (1988) work was useful in that it is not race specific. Like the
Oppression/Liberation Model of Jackson and Hardiman (1985), it identified some of the tasks
which faced an oppressed person in the process of developing a positive identity within an
oppressive system. In order to be relevant to the experiences of a bi-racial person, these
theories need to be expanded to address the variation in the lives of these individuals. Some
of the areas where this variation might occur is in personal appearance, early cultural
experiences, and political ideology, especially as it relates to race and racial issues. The
process of the identity development of a person whose multiple racial heritages offered a
potentially different slate of choices regarding identity and life experiences may be different
than those of a person from a comparatively single racial heritage. The exploration and
understanding of some of these differences may serve to clarify the process of identity
development related to social groups. In addition, alternatives to the developmental models
presented thus far may emerge.
Literature on Bi-Racial People

Literature on Transracial or Interracial Adoption

Transracial adoption, or the placing of children in homes where the families were of different racial backgrounds than that of the child's, began to attract attention in the late 1960's. This practice was initially begun as a way to increase the placement rate of Black children awaiting adoptive homes. However, concerns were raised over whether Black children placed in White households would develop a sense of a Black racial identity and the skills needed to deal with racism in American society (Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987). In addition, researchers explored how transracial adoptees identified themselves in terms of race, whether the level of self-esteem differed between transracially adopted Black children and Black children adopted by Black families, and the factors which contributed to the development of what McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) termed "an appropriate racial identity," based on their actual racial heritage or heritages (p. 522).

The research of McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) involved the study of thirty White families who had adopted children of a different racial group than their own, and thirty Black families who had adopted Black children. Of the total number of adoptees studied, 45% were actually bi-racial, with 36% of the whole sample being of Black-White heritage. The researchers found that these bi-racial children were more likely to have been adopted by Whites, live in predominantly White communities, and attended predominantly White schools. Black families were more likely to have adopted children who had two Black birth parents, and to live in predominantly Black neighborhoods with predominantly Black schools.

McRoy et. al. found no significant difference in the self-esteem scores of the two groups of children. However, transracially adopted children were more likely to identify
themselves as being adopted and to use more references based on race when describing themselves. The majority of White parents who had adopted mixed-race children "stressed that their child was bi-racial, and they were reluctant to accept the notion that the child would be socially and legally defined as belonging to the black race" (p. 525). Those families that downplayed the importance of race and did not provide Black role models for the adopted children "tended to rear children who seemed to devalue or not to acknowledge a black identity" (p. 525). From their findings, the researchers identified key factors which influenced the development of a positive racial identity by the adoptees. These factors included the degree to which the family acknowledged and supported the child's Black identity and the number of Black role models available to the child in the community and the schools.

The connection between interaction with other Black people and the development of a Black racial identity was also noted in the results of a longitudinal study of adoption of Black children conducted by Shireman and Johnson (1986). These authors found that although the majority of Black children adopted into White homes knew that they were Black at age four, this sense of identity remained constant, and did not increase over the next four years. Children adopted into Black homes had a slightly lower preference for a Black identity at age four. However, when tested again at age eight, the children from the Black homes had a striking rise in Black identity preference, and had obtained a level higher than that demonstrated by the transracially adopted children. Integrating these results with demographic data, the researchers concluded that the majority of transracially adopted children were being brought up in White communities, and seemed to have a different developmental pattern regarding racial identity than their inracially adopted peers. This situation was described as affecting the identity development of the transracially adopted
children so that "after a very promising start" their sense of racial identity and pride failed to
grow and prosper" (p. 175).

Additional research on the longitudinal effects of transracial adoption was conducted
by Johnson, Shireman, and Watson (1987). These authors noted that over half of the White
parents who had adopted Black children wanted them to identify as being part of the "human
race" or as "black and white" (p. 50, [emphasis added]). Those children who were the
lightest in complexion were more likely to identify as being White. Consistent with the
findings of McRoy et. al. (1982), Shireman stressed that White parental recognition of racial
differences between themselves and their adopted children, and their willingness to teach the
children about Black heritage, were critical factors in facilitating the development of a positive
and accurate racial identity.

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Literature on Adoption

The relevance of the results of the research on transracial adoption noted above to
issues related to bi-racial identity development is evident in at least two areas. First, almost
half of the subjects in the study by McRoy et. al. (1982) were actually bi-racial. Therefore,
the findings of this study related to a certain extent to a bi-racial population. In addition, all
of the studies cited concluded that there were identifiable factors, such as parental
acknowledgement of the child’s racial heritage and access to Black role models, that affected
the racial identity of the adoptive child. These same factors were identified as being
significant in relation to racial identity by researchers examining the identity development of
bi-racial children raised in their biological homes.

McRoy et. al. (1982) and Shireman, Johnson, and Watson (1987) noted the possible
influence of phenotype and cultural experience on racial identity development. Specifically,
these studies found that exposure to role models and other aspects of Black culture were central to the establishment of a positive racial identity. The effect of physical appearance was noted by Shireman et. al. (1987), when they found that light skinned Black children were more apt to demonstrate a White identity preference than a Black preference.

Literature on Clinical and Counselling Issues Related to Bi-Racial Clients

A number of works have been written on the nature and scope of clinical and counselling issues related to the treatment of bi-racial clients. As all of the material cited in this section reflected the results of clinical contacts with subjects who sought help for a variety of personal issues, it is important to acknowledge that conclusions and insights gained from this literature may not be completely relevant to the experiences of bi-racial people in the general population.

Gibb (1987) noted in her work on identity issues facing bi-racial adolescents that the growing number of offspring from Black-White marriages had resulted in "a group of mixed race young people who resist simple racial classification and who have legitimate claims to both majority and minority social castes" (p. 265). Gibb also contended that accurate perception and acceptance of a bi-racial identity decreased as the skin color of the individual darkened. This author outlined a number of conflicts facing bi-racial adolescents, the most prominent being the development of a racial identity. Adolescents who failed to "integrate both racial heritages into a cohesive sense of racial identity" experienced a core conflict (p. 268). According to Gibb, this conflict was often illustrated by a tendency to "overidentify with the parent who is perceived as the most similar in terms of physical features, particularly in terms of skin color; ...There are also cases where the teenager identifies with the white parent as a symbol of the dominant majority, rejecting the black parent even if there is a close
physical resemblance" (p. 268). In cases where the adolescent overidentified with the Black parent, there was a corresponding rejection of White culture and identity. In attempting to find a peer group, Gibb described some bi-racial adolescents as experiencing a sense of social marginality, in that they were "often rejected by both majority and minority groups because they fit neither in terms of physical appearance, family background, and loyalty to a specific teen subculture" (p. 269).

The impact of physical appearance on an individual’s choice of racial identity was highlighted in the clinical work of Logan, Freeman, and McRoy (1987). These authors stressed that physical appearance and surname could eliminate the possibility of choice around racial identity for bi-racial adults, regardless of an individual’s racial self-definition or actual genetic makeup. In circumstances where this lack of choice was a dilemma for the individual, Logan et. al. proposed a number of possible ways for the person to respond, which were framed as a "cultural continuum" (p. 16). The first point on the continuum described what the authors termed the color blind approach where the individual denied the importance of race and culture to self-identity. Adopting this strategy was seen as a way of shielding the individual from the pain of working through racial identity issues. The cost of adopting this perspective was that the individual denied part of his or her heritage and sacrificed the support of his or her own racial community.

The second point on the continuum reflected an assimilation into the dominant culture. When this was successfully accomplished, Logan et. al. described the person as being more readily accepted by the dominant culture and more able to blend in. However, this strategy required the individual to relinquish the culture and support given by his or her other racial group.
Adopting the perspective of the third point on the continuum, that of complete assimilation into what the authors referred to as the "relevant minority culture", led to the establishment of a greater support network from one's cultural group and a greater possibility of developing a positive racial identity (p. 17). However, the cost of adopting this strategy was described by Logan et. al. as a limiting of one's access to the resources within the dominant culture, and the "loss of opportunities to learn about the positive effects of cultural diversity" (p. 17). The last point on the model reflected a bi-cultural or multi-cultural perspective. A person utilizing this approach was able to live in two or more cultures, having access to the resources offered by both, while maintaining his or her own cultural identity. The authors described the shortcomings of this stage as the possibility that the individual could fail to live successfully in two or more cultures and the possibility of increased emotional stress caused by attempts to adapt to more than one culture.

Writing on the intrapsychic needs of bi-racial children, Brandell (1988) noted that "failures of empathy that occur in childhood with one's parents" were some of the main contributors to psychological distress in bi-racial children and adults (p. 177). While all children of oppressed racial groups suffered challenges to their psychological development because of the presence of racism, bi-racial children were faced with additional and unique situations because of what the author termed the "ambiguity of their racial status" (p. 181). In order to counter these blocks to positive racial identity development, Brandell stressed the importance of providing the child with an environment where parents nurtured the child's development of healthy personal attributes, such as self-confidence and self-resiliency.

Lyles, Yancey, Grace, and Carter (1985) utilized clinical case studies to identify significant environmental factors which influenced the healthy development of racial identity for bi-racial children. The authors stressed the importance of the child's access to accurate
information about racial origin and issues of race which were appropriate to his or her age level. In addition, Lyles et. al. indicated that parents of bi-racial children needed to be aware of their own racial prejudices. The authors also recommended that counsellors who were working with bi-racial families or clients be committed to "work through the racial animosity and identity confusion with a basic knowledge of how issues of race can impact upon treatment" (p. 153).

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Literature on Clinical Issues and Counselling

The works presented from the field of counselling shared a number of themes with the research on adoption reviewed earlier. In addition, this material provided support for the consideration of such factors as physical appearance, cultural background, and political experiences when analyzing the racial identity development of bi-racial individuals. Gibb (1987) and Logan et. al. (1987) both noted the impact of skin color and other physical features on identity. The issue of the cultural perspective of the individual was raised by Gibb (1987) when she spoke of the problems associated with over identification with one racial culture. In addition, Logan et. al. (1987) presented a continuum based on the cultural perspective adopted by the individual. Other environmental factors seen as affecting identity development included the perspective taken by the parents (Brandell, 1988; Lyles et. al., 1985) and access to information on race (Lyles et. al., 1985).

The cultural continuum presented in the work of Logan et. al. (1987) was exciting in that it resulted in a model which could be used as a possible foundation for a model of bi-racial identity development. Additional information as to what circumstances moved an individual from one point on the continuum to another would be helpful in expanding this framework to a model of identity development. It is also unclear in this model if individuals
could move from one point to another as they would in the developmental models cited earlier, and if transitional stages between the four points existed. In addition, the Logan et al. work could be strengthened by a more detailed description of the behaviors and attitudes which were indicative of each point. Lastly, as the continuum stressed cultural issues, examination as to the impact of other factors such as appearance, heritage, and political experiences on choices of racial identification would also build on the foundation set by this model.

Literature on Bi-Racial Children

In 1984, the Council on Interracial Books for Children held a conference on the needs of interracial families. A number of speakers at this conference were pioneers in the area of issues affecting the children of these families, and the material generated from their presentations represented significant resources in the understanding of the bi-racial child. The majority of material focussed on either the challenges facing bi-racial children or the identification of ways to create a healthy environment in which positive racial and personal identity development could occur.

In the conference proceedings, Ladner (1984) indicated that the existing system of racial classification on the racial identity development of mixed race children did not allow them to be mixed. Instead, she noted, "society designates them as members of one group" (p. 7). Ladner saw the parents of bi-racial children as adopting three ways of naming and socializing their children. The first manner reflected a color blind perspective, where parents stressed humanness over color or race. The second approach characterized parents who socialized their children to have a bi-racial identity. The last pattern reflected those parents
who socialized their children to have a Black identity, and who oftentimes provided extensive opportunities for interactions between the family and Black communities.

In proposing the most positive way that a family could address its mixed racial heritage, Ladner (1984) preferred what she termed a "bi-cultural approach," where the child was exposed to aspects of both racial or cultural groups (p. 7). However, she cautioned that "it is extremely important that children of Black and White parents learn to cope as Black people, because society is ultimately going to categorize these children as Black" (p. 7-8). In her description of elements of a healthy environment for the identity development of bi-racial children, Ladner included such things as sensitivity to the racial community surrounding the child, an understanding and exposure to both heritages, an environment open to discussion of race and racial issues, and exposure to role models.

The impact of society on the identity formation of bi-racial children was noted during the conference by Shackford (1984). This author stressed that the system of racism in the United States set up blocks to the development of a healthy racial identity. Like Brandell (1988), Shackford noted that bi-racial children faced all of the challenges present for people of color in general, as well as barriers based on stereotypes, disapproval, and hostility generated by society's response to interracial unions. Shackford also identified some of the difficulties facing White parents of bi-racial children. These included the inability to fully understand the weight of racism and its impact on their child, and the fear of being blamed or rejected because of their child's experiences with racism. The author recommended that the White parent and the parent of color could foster a healthy environment for their children if both were comfortable with their own identities, and accepted the fact that they could not fully understand their children's experiences. Shackford stressed that ultimately, the task of selecting a racial identity rested with the child.
The Center for Interracial Books for Children conference provided the opportunity for bi-racial people to present a perspective on the bi-racial experience based on their own lives. Spivey (1984) indicated that although he and his parents identified him as Black, he embraced both cultures over time. An important factor in his identity development was the realization that the Black community included "a broad range of cultures, customs, physical characteristics and thinking" (p. 11). Brody (1984) described her experiences as a bi-racial child as having a "feeling of uniqueness" for much of her life (p. 15). She indicated that she first identified as White, then rejected everything that was White and embraced Black culture and heritage. Eventually, she saw herself as "a product of both races and realized the futility of trying to fit anyone’s expectation of me" (p. 15).

Other researchers who studied bi-racial children included Sebring (1985) and Wardle (1987, 1989). Sebring sought to sensitize counsellors to the unique needs of bi-racial children by recommending a number of specific interventions they could utilize. She noted that counsellors and teachers needed to examine their own biases and misconceptions of bi-racial children, and should not assume that these children had special needs or issues to be addressed just because of their mixed race heritage. Sebring also argued that the definition of interracial people as the product of the mixing of pure races itself was ambiguous, given the unlikelihood of the absolute purity of either of the parental lineages.

The work of Sebring (1985) was similar to that of Logan et. al. (1987) in that it described bi-racial people as facing issues related to culture, as well as those associated with race. Sebring indicated that acceptance of the bi-racial child into a Black cultural community was contingent upon "the childrens’ own acceptance of a Black identity and their overt expression of some degree of commitment to the mores of the Black community" (p. 6). The challenge of establishing a concrete ethnic identity, in addition to a healthy racial identity, was
seen as a significant life task for bi-racial children. At the same time, Sebring provided accounts which indicated that bi-racial people could also be bi-cultural, and could exhibit "remarkable flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, comfort with difference and creativity in their relationships with both the American system and the victim system" (p. 7).

Wardle (1987, 1989) sought to assist early childhood educators in understanding what she noted as the special needs of bi-racial children. In setting the context for her recommendations, the author noted that educators often blamed the problems that bi-racial children may exhibit on the fact of their racial heritage, and that helping agencies "have accepted - and often perpetuated - the culturally accepted notion that the interracial child must select the identity of one parent, usually the parent of color" (1987, p. 53). In order to create a positive environment for bi-racial children, Wardle stressed that such biases needed to be confronted in the classroom and within the educators. In addition, she suggested that professionals who worked with bi-racial children and their families receive specific training which reviewed the history of intermarriage in the United States, explored the myths about people who chose to intermarry, and portrayed the interracial family as a normal entity.

The work of Wardle (1987, 1989) also contained a number of concrete interventions which educators could make in the classroom. These included encouraging open discussions about physical differences and experiences, providing material that was reflective of both of the child's heritages and which fostered identification with both, and talking with the parents of the child to determine how they were raising the child in terms of identity. Like Sebring (1985), Wardle noted the importance of acknowledging that interracial children were not just biological entities, but " a mixture of two racial and ethnic backgrounds and traditions of both parents" (1987, p. 57).
Analysis of Issues Raised by the Literature on Bi-Racial Children

The works on bi-racial children echoed the literature on counselling in its critique of the inadequacies of the current system of racial classification to acknowledge or accommodate people of more than one racial heritage. More importantly, this body of literature identified some of the challenges facing bi-racial children, some of the unique strengths and characteristics which these children could access or develop, and ways in which parents, community, and educators could facilitate the development of a positive racial identity.

Additional information on the factors influencing racial identity development can be drawn from these works. For example, a number of authors noted the effect of physical appearance, especially skin color, on the ability to claim a bi-racial identity (Ladner, 1984; Sebring, 1985; Shackford, 1984). Even when individuals named themselves as bi-racial or interracial people, Ladner (1984) cautioned that they must be taught skills to cope as people of color. I believe that this statement is most appropriate for those bi-racial or multi-racial people whose physical characteristics would limit their ability to name themselves, and be accepted as, White in the society.

The cultural frames of reference which appeared in different works on children supported the assertion that culture also affects the identity chosen by a bi-racial person (Sebring, 1985; Wardle, 1987; 1989). However, I believe when Wardle encouraged educators to recognize interracial children as products of two distinct cultures, she assumed that the children had been exposed, to some extent, to the cultural backgrounds of both parents. I believe that this cannot be automatically implied, and that a child’s exposure to different aspects of the culture associated with his or her racial and ethnic heritages depends on the specific experiences, communities, values, and priorities of the family where the child is raised. The role of exposure to a Black community in the identity development of bi-racial
children received attention in several of the works on children (Brody, 1984; Ladner, 1984; Sebring, 1985). This is consistent with the information presented in the review of the literature from the areas of counselling and transracial adoption.

Another contribution that the research on children added to the literature was its attention to the strengths and challenges facing bi-racial people. The areas of strength noted included the ability to have a more flexible, fair, or unique perspective on the world, the ability to move between two worlds, and the possession of a feeling of uniqueness about oneself. Some of the challenges cited included the possible rejection of one or both parents by the bi-racial individual, and the inability to select a bi-racial identity in a culture based on a mono-racial orientation. In addition, people who chose to identify as bi-racial often faced difficulties inherent in embracing an identity which was fundamentally devalued by the majority culture, and in some cases, by different minority cultures as well.

The literature on bi-racial issues presented thus far has had as its focus the experiences of bi-racial children and adolescents. All of this material was conducted within the last decade. While the review and analysis of this material has increased my awareness of some of the issues related to bi-racial people, and in some instances, bi-racial identity development, I believe that findings from this research may not be fully relevant to the experiences of bi-racial adults. Factors such as political orientation and cultural experiences have been noted as having a role in identity development in different areas of the literature reviewed in this dissertation. Those individuals who are adults now grew up during a different historical periods which were marked by different societal attitudes, beliefs, events and values about race and racism. These individuals most likely had fundamentally different experiences during their childhood than people who spent their early formative years during the 1980s and
1990s. By exploring the experiences of bi-racial people of varying ages, this dissertation may clarify the effect of environmental, cultural and political issues on racial identity development.

**Literature on Bi-Racial Adults**

Information on the experiences, attitudes, and racial identity development of bi-racial adults was noticeably absent in the literature. A search of the literature uncovered two studies which utilized adults as subjects. These included a study done by Poussaint (1984) involving Harvard undergraduates as subjects, and a study utilizing participants from a broader age range conducted by Luckett (1987).

The participants in Poussaint's study (1984) were of mixed race heritage, including Black/White, Black/Asian, and West Indian/White. However, all of the participants identified themselves as being Black, regardless of racial heritage and the fact that they represented a range of skin colors. This was the only identity, according to Poussaint, that subjects felt they could embrace. Those individuals raised in Black communities felt that this environment contributed to their choice of identity. In addition, Poussaint found that adolescence was a time when racial problems began or increased in participants' lives, and when they felt the pressure to identify as Black instead of mixed or bi-racial.

While all of Poussaint's subject's initially identified as Black, a number indicated that "they sometimes did not feel that they were totally and authentically Black" or "on occasion they identified as biracial or mulatto or mixed" (p. 9). These feelings fluctuated with the environment in which subjects found themselves. For example, some subjects were less likely to speak out at politically oriented meetings on Black issues. Those individuals who went through a Black militancy period sometime in their lives reported a sense of embarrassment about having one White parent. The impact of physical appearance was addressed in the
study in that subjects were asked to rate themselves on a five point scale in terms of complexion. While Poussaint noted that "people's experiences were influenced by their complexion," he did not elaborate on this point beyond indicating that the situation was complex, and that those individuals who could move in and out of the "white world" because of their lighter complexion had different experiences than those who could not (p. 9-10). In addition, Poussaint noted that some of the lighter skinned subjects reported feeling a kind of favoritism from the world because of their complexion.

Poussaint's subjects listed a number of advantages and disadvantages of growing up as a bi-racial person. The positive aspects which were reported included the feeling of being more objective about the world and other people, being more tolerant of different groups of people, and the sense that exposure to two separate cultures allowed individuals to move easily between two worlds. The disadvantages that were noted included the presence of feelings of not belonging to either racial group, having to deal with bigotry from the White parent, and for some, the development of feelings of insecurity. Even though individuals reported some disadvantages to being bi-racial, Poussaint concluded that overall, his subjects contradicted the myth that bi-racial people were prone to identity problems, unable to succeed, and insufficient in their ability to cope in the world.

Luckett (1987) interviewed nine adults of Black/White racial heritage, who ranged in age from eighteen to thirty. The author focussed on the role of social and environmental factors in identity formation, the process of establishing a bi-racial identity, and the effect of racial labels of the subject's self esteem. Luckett's findings were organized and reported as significant chronological periods in subject's lives. Luckett found that these periods were childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, and were usually marked by either a change in awareness, behavior, or attitude about one's sense of self or racial identity.
During childhood, half of Luckett’s subjects reported having no memory of race, partly because race was not an issue discussed or dealt with by their families. The other half of the subjects remembered having open communication with their families about race, and being prepared by their families for society’s response to them as Black or bi-racial people. Subjects who were raised in predominantly Black neighborhoods reported having mostly Black friends, but as also seeking out friendships with Whites. In contrast, subjects who grew up in predominantly White areas indicated having some difficulties in making friends in general, and reported having mostly White friends. Luckett described the childhood period as one where questions about one’s race, expectations, and the rules regarding race were flexible and not fully understood. These characteristics were illustrated in the words of one of Luckett’s subjects, when he described himself as going through an "identity crisis" when living in a predominantly White environment (p. 33). He indicated that "I looked in the mirror and I wasn’t white---there was no doubt about it. But, at the same time, I was socialized white, and I acted white--so that caused conflict for me ..." (p. 33). Another subject felt some confusion in wondering who he was since one of his parents was White. He described his experience in terms of identity as "...I think I always gravitated towards the blacks more because I look more black. My color, my hair, my appearance. to the casual observer, I was black--so, I think that’s one reason why I always felt more black than white" (p. 32).

Adolescence marked the next significant point in the lives of Luckett’s subjects. During this time, they either began, or continued to think about their racial identity in response to pressure or rejection from peers. Luckett noted that a majority of the subjects began choosing a Black identity, and sought friendship with Black peers. However some subjects still saw themselves as different from these peers. The majority of subjects reported having both Black and White role models, but Luckett noted that "a few participants reported
having no role models and felt alone in their struggle in coming to terms with their racial and overall identity" (p. 38-39). Luckett indicated that because the period of adolescence exposed individuals to communities beyond the immediate family, the recognition of the importance of race to individual identities could not be overlooked.

Many of Luckett’s subjects entered predominantly White colleges and universities as young adults. Within this environment, they reported an increased pressure to identify as Black coming from Black peers. Half of the subjects reported as being viewed as Black by their friends. The other subjects believed "that their white friends perceived them as white and their black friends perceived them as black" (p. 41). While all but two of the subjects felt that society perceived them as Black, subjects described themselves as being "mixed, both black and white" (p. 42). Luckett categorized her subjects into two major groups based on their self description, those who self-identified as "either black or interracial, who had an appreciation for both parts of themselves, but who saw themselves as having a black identity, and those who labelled themselves as interracial an different" (p. 42). The young adult period was described by Luckett as being "a time for integration and resolution" around issues of racial identity (p. 47). It was marked by individual development, discovery, and acceptance of a racial identity which acknowledged both racial heritages.

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Literature on Bi-Racial Adults

The work of Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1987) provided information on the experiences of bi-racial adults at different points in their lives. The experiences reported from the early life periods were consistent with a number of the findings on bi-racial children. These included references to the significance of access to Black role models and communities, the presence of open discussion about the race, and the effect of family clarity about race and
ability to support the bi-racial child undergoing identity development. The research of Luckett and Poussaint added to the base provided by the research on children by highlighting significant issues faced by individuals after the period of childhood and adolescence.

The factors of family heritage, appearance, and cultural and political experiences which emerged from other areas of the literature also received some attention in the research of Luckett and Poussaint. For example, both researchers found that complexion influenced subjects’ experiences, and in some cases, their sense of identity. The nature and composition of early communities was seen as affecting subjects' recollection of experiences around racial issues. In addition, both authors indicated that cultural norms of naming people who had the smallest proportion of Black heritage as being Black, limited an individual’s ability to establish anything other than a Black racial identity. The impact of an individual’s political experiences on racial identity was noted by Poussaint when some of his subjects felt ashamed of having a White parent when attending Black political groups or activities. Several of Luckett’s subjects described a type of immersion into Black social or political groups which occurred during young adulthood.

The work of Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1987) represented important contributions to the understanding of issues related to the racial identity of bi-racial people. At the same time, each had issues which constrained the use of its findings to a larger population. The Poussaint study was based on the experiences of undergraduates who were attending an elite, private college in the Northeast portion of the United States. In applying the findings of his research to other groups of bi-racial people, I feel it is important to note that the experience of Poussaint’s subjects may be reflective of a certain, limited age group, and perhaps to a lesser extent, a limited socio-economic range. The Luckett study included a broader range of
subjects in terms of age and possible socio-economic class, however, she interviewed a
smaller number of total subjects.

Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1987) described their works as exploratory, and did not
propose a model which reflected a developmental progression similar to those outlined in
earlier works on Black and White identity development. However, there are similarities
between the experiences reported in the study by Luckett, and those which appeared in earlier
mono-racial works. For example, some of Luckett's subjects denied that race was an issue in
their early childhood. In adolescence, a number of individuals became aware of
discrimination and experienced a period of questioning of their racial identity. In young
adulthood, many of her subjects sought friendship and support from Black peers and groups.
By the end of this period of their lives, most of Luckett's subjects had established a sense of
racial identity which integrated both their Black and White heritages.

The Poston Model of Biracial Identity Development

Poston (1990) indicated that some of the models of racial identity development based
on single racial groups were limited in their ability to account for the experience of bi-racial
people. Some of the limitations which he cited reflected similar concerns which I raised in
my critique of the theories of Black and White identity development earlier in this chapter.
For example, Poston noted that at various stages of some of the mono-racial models, an
individual might choose the culture or values of one racial group over another. Also, the
mono-racial models were characterized by first a rejection of the minority, or targetted racial
culture, followed by a rejection of the dominant racial culture. Poston indicated that a bi-
racial person could reflect both majority and minority racial groups, and from this reference, I
assumed that the author felt that the mono-racial theories did not provide enough information
to account for this situation. In addition, Poston critiqued the mono-racial models because "self-fulfillment according to these (mono-racial) models is based on integrating one racial/ethnic identity and accepting others; it does not include recognizing multiple ethnic identities" (p. 153). Lastly, the author noted that acceptance into one's minority group, especially during the immersion phases of identity development, was not always experienced by the bi-racial person.

In light of these limitations, Poston proposed a progressive developmental model which described five stages of identity development for bi-racial individuals. Stage one, or the stage of Personal Identity, described a usually young individual's sense of self which was not really defined by ethnic background, although the child may have been aware of race and ethnicity. Identity development was based primarily on individual factors such as self-esteem which were developed from interacting with the family, as opposed to sense of belonging to a group.

When an individual was pushed to choose an identity, he or she entered the second stage, called Choice of Group Categorization. Poston noted that oftentimes, the pressure was to choose an identity based on one ethnic group. Factors which added status to the person's identity or offered support for the choice of a certain identity would influence which choice was made during this stage. In addition, Poston described "personal factors" such as physical appearance, cultural knowledge, political involvement, and personality differences as playing a role in the selection of an identity (p. 153). Poston believed that most individuals would choose a mono-ethnic identity at this stage. This was because claiming a multi-ethnic identity "requires some level of knowledge of multiple cultures and a level of cognitive development beyond that which is characteristic of this age group" (p. 154). Unfortunately, Poston did not indicate at which age group or groups this stage was likely to occur.
In the third stage of Enmeshment/Denial, the individual experienced emotions such as guilt and confusion for having chosen an identity which did not fully match his or her heritage. In addition, the individual could experience negative feelings or responses such as lack of acceptance from other groups. Poston felt that "eventually, the child must resolve the anger and guilt and learn to appreciate both parental cultures, or stay at this level" (p. 154). The author noted that with support from community and family, the person could move into the next stage of the model, which Poston termed Appreciation.

Even though the individual tended to claim a mono-ethnic identity in the fourth stage of the model, he or she began to appreciate all of his or her identities, and see him or herself as part of different groups of people. In addition, the individual may have sought to learn more about the culture of each of his or her heritages. Those individuals who could move on to experience a multicultural existence reached Poston's fifth stage of Integration, where a sense of wholeness was achieved. Beyond noting that individuals would "tend to recognize and value all of their ethnic identities," the author did not provide a detailed description of the behaviors, attitudes, or challenges facing bi-racial people at this stage of development (p. 154).

In addition to proposing a model of bi-racial identity development, Poston identified a number of assumptions which formed the basis for his work. These assumptions included the idea that outside prejudices and values would affect identity development in bi-racial individuals, that a number of factors influenced identity development in this population, that guilt and other feelings may result when the individual chose one identity over another, and that "the most difficult time of adjustment and identity confusion is during the choice phase and enmeshment/denial phase..." (p. 154). A number of these assumptions were also noted
by Poston as needing attention in future research on issues related to bi-racial identity development.

Analysis of Issues Raised by the Poston Model of Bi-Racial Identity Development

The theory proposed by Poston (1990) was an important contribution to the literature on bi-racial identity development and the issues which influenced this process. This work focussed specifically on the lives of bi-racial people, and attempted to frame the experiences of people from multiple racial heritages as a developmental stage model. In doing so, it served as an initial framework to respond to, and build upon in future works.

As noted in the presentation of the Biracial Identity Development Model, a number of the concerns noted by Poston match those which I had raised earlier in my critique of the mono-racial identity development theories. This included concern that the application of mono-racial theories to a new population may not account for complexities which may be associated with racial identity development for a person with multiple racial heritages. In addition, Poston identified a number of factors which he believed influenced identity development over the course of his model. These factors included appearance, culture, family support, influences of the immediate community, and political experiences. Many of these themes were noted by authors in both the mono-racial literature and the research on bi-racial people. Therefore, although Poston critiqued some of the mono-racial theories of identity development, he was able to take some of the issues which they introduced and include these in his model. While this represented a strength in the Poston work, it was also an area which left it open to challenge. Specifically, it seemed that the Poston theory was developed from a critique of select models of mono-racial development, some of the works related to the counselling of bi-racial adolescents and children, literature on bi-racial children, and one study
of bi-racial people. In order for Poston's model to be truly tested, additional research on the experiences of bi-racial people needs to be done and compared with the stages outlined in the theory.

Further research is also needed to add substance to the factors which Poston proposed as influencing bi-racial identity development. In addition to attending to what each of these factors brings to the process of identity development, investigations should focus on how they interact with each other to direct, enhance, or inhibit an individual's choice of a racial identity. Additional research should also focus on the question of whether all bi-racial people undergo the same process outlined by Poston, or if the process differs for various individuals or groups of individuals.

Lastly, additional inquiry should attend to whether the racial identity development of bi-racial people can best be described as a linear, developmental process, or by some other kind of model. I agree with Poston when he proposed that "biracial identity development is a complex and undefined process" (p. 153). While I endorse, and have engaged in further research on this topic, I do so with caution as to not bind the results to any pre-conceived format or kind of model.

Conclusions from the Review of the Literature

The goal of the review of the literature presented in this dissertation was to identify some of the relevant areas of research which assisted in directing this study, or shed light on the process of identity development of bi-racial adults. The theories of Black and White identity development were most useful in highlighting the political and cultural factors which influenced identity development of mono-racial groups. The more generic theories outlined a process which could be compared to the findings of this study to determine if they can
account for the experiences of an individual whose heritage constituted multiple racial groups and reflected the social groups of both the oppressor and the oppressed. The research on transracial adoption and research on bi-racial children and adults informed me of work which had been done in the field of bi-racial identity development to date. These works were useful in increasing my awareness of factors which influence racial identity development, and in guiding the construction of this study, and the analysis of the results.

Research Questions for the Dissertation in Light of the Literature Review

The questions posed in the introduction of this dissertation can be enriched and elaborated on in light of the review of the literature which I presented. In summary, this dissertation posed the following research questions:

1. What racial identity or identities do a select group of bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage choose for themselves?
2. How do these individuals describe how their chosen racial identities came about?
3. Did the racial identity of these bi-racial adults change over time, and if so, what factors influenced these changes?
4. How do the bi-racial adults in this study describe how they experience the world given their chosen racial identity or identities?

Given the insights I have gained from the review of the literature, the following questions were also addressed in this study:

5. To what extent can the experiences of a select group of African-American/Euro-American adults be explained by different theories of Black identity development (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971), and White identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984)?
6. How will the results of this dissertation compare with those from early works on bi-racial adults (Luckett, 1987; Poston, 1990; Poussaint, 1984)?

When this dissertation was first proposed, additional questions were identified for investigation and analysis. These were:

1. To what extent can the experiences of a select group of African-American/Euro-American adults be accounted for by more "generic" theories of social identity development (Highlen, et al., 1988; Jackson & Hardiman, 1985)?

2. How many of the themes found in research on bi-racial or transracially adopted children will appear in the stories re-counted by the bi-racial adults who participated in this study?

During the course of analyzing the data and planning for its presentation, I chose to put less emphasis on these two questions in order to focus the dissertation on the experiences of bi-racial adults, and the implications of these experiences for mono-racial identity development theories. This decision was made in order to set some parameters around the length and scope of the dissertation.

The need to elaborate on the experience of identity development of adults of Afro-American/Euro-American heritage, and the questions of how existing theory and research findings can be applied to these experiences directed the purpose, significance, and goals of this study. This dissertation was important in that it offered bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American ancestry a vehicle to share who they were, how they navigated their course to a particular identity, who and what influenced their journeys, and how they experienced the world and their daily lives along the way.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This section of the dissertation includes a brief overview of research paradigms, theoretical perspectives, and the characteristics of qualitative research. This summary is followed by an outline of the research design utilized in this specific study, including information on the primary data collection techniques, how access to participants was gained, sampling strategy, techniques for data collection and management, steps which were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, and thoughts on my role as researcher.

Social science research has been primarily directed by two major theoretical perspectives, positivism and phenomenology (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). According to these authors "the positivist seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena apart from the subjective states of individuals" (p. 1). This school of thought was based in the measurement of a definable reality through the use of quantitative methodology and statistical analysis (Patton, 1980). The human experience of the reality was not considered under this paradigm. Patton (1980) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984) saw natural science as providing the major influence on the positivist perspective. Patton (1980) described this paradigm as being a "hypothetico-deductive" strategy, which is utilized to predict social phenomena (p. 19).

The second major research perspective, that of phenomenology, focussed on the experience of people in the world. Emerging from the disciplines of philosophy and sociology, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) noted that the goal of this paradigm was to find ways of "understanding social phenomena from the actor's own perspective" (p. 2). Relying on
qualitative methods, the phenomenologist seeks this understanding by uncovering "the motive and beliefs behind people's action" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 2). Patton (1980) referred to this focus on understanding as being "holistic-inductive" (p. 19). He also noted that neither of the two research paradigms was inherently better than the other, and that each was useful in different circumstances. Therefore, he encouraged researchers to use what he called a "paradigm of choices," using either or both of the dominant perspectives to best achieve specific research goals (p. 20).

**Research Design of the Study**

The research questions addressed by this dissertation focussed on African-American/Euro-American adults' experience of their racial identity development. The pursuit of answers to these questions was best served by employing qualitative research methods which reflect the phenomenological paradigm.

Patton (1980) noted that qualitative methodologies uncover both "depth and detail" in peoples' experiences, with qualitative data consisting of "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts, and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records and case histories" (p. 22). In addition to providing information on experiences in subjects' own words, qualitative methodology required that researcher refrain from interpreting events through his or her own eyes and, as Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described, the researcher "suspending, or sets aside, his or her own beliefs, perspectives, and predispositions" in order to find value in the experiences of others (p. 6).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) echoed this sentiment in describing qualitative research as a search for meaning from the participant's perspective. Qualitative data were to be analyzed...
inductively, without attempting to prove or disprove a theory or hypothesis. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) indicated that theory which evolved from qualitative research did so "from the bottom up ... from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are disconnected" (p. 29). This methodology is not pursued in a laboratory, but in the settings where participants live and work.

This study utilized in-depth interviewing as the primary data collection strategy. This strategy is characterized as non-directive, flexible, unstructured, and non-standardized (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Some authors described it as a "purposeful conversation," designed to gain information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). McCracken (1988) noted that the power behind this technique was that it allowed 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. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do" (p. 9).

Little is known about the racial identity development of mixed race adults, especially as recounted directly by them. In-depth interviewing allowed participants to tell their own stories and highlight events and experiences which were important to them in choosing a racial identity. By listening to their words, I was able to better understand and describe how adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage develop, define, and make meaning of their chosen racial identity.

Phenomenological In-Depth Interviewing

Phenomenological in-depth interviewing was the primary data collection method used in this study. Seidman (1983, 1991) described a particular model of phenomenological in-depth interviewing which involved conducting a series of three interviews with each
participant. The purpose of this particular form of interviewing was "to recreate aspects of the person's present experience in the context of past experience and then to explore the meaning the participant makes of her or his experience" (1983, p. 651). The first interview focussed on the participant's life up to the present. The second interview concentrated on the present experience of the participant. The third interview sought to uncover the meaning participants made of their experiences. The model of in-depth interviewing which was developed by Seidman was the technique used in this dissertation.

**Sampling Strategy**

Patton (1980) cited two major sampling strategies employed by researchers: random and purposeful. Random sampling was utilized when a researcher wished to apply his/her findings to a larger number of people in the population of interest beyond those who actually participated in the study. Patton noted that "sample size is determined by the size of the population to which one wants to generalize, the expected amount of variation in that population, and the amount of error one is willing to accept" (p. 100). Purposeful sampling could be utilized when the focus of the research shifts from generalizing findings to a broader population to understanding specific cases in more detail.

This dissertation explored the experiences of bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage. In surveying this population, a purposeful as opposed to random sampling strategy was utilized in order to include people who had chosen a range of racial identities, including Black, White, or bi-racial. The sample size was small, with the focus being on capturing the depth of experiences of a few participants, rather than collecting a more general sense of experiences of a larger number of people. The initial criteria for selecting participants for this study included biological membership in a family where one
parent was identified as African-American (Black) and the other parent was identified as Euro-American (White). I also planned to include participants whose grandparents had the same heritage of the corresponding parent (i.e., parents of participant’s Black parent were also African-American; parents of participant’s White parent were also Euro-American) if possible. Another criterion which I initially set was that for the two most recent generations, participant and parents, individuals should have been born in, and lived the majority of their lives, in the United States.

One of the areas I hoped to explore was the range of racial identities which African-American/Euro-American adults choose to embrace, and the experiences which were associated with each of these identities. To accomplish this, I planned to ask each participant prior to the interview sessions how they currently identified in terms of racial identity. I anticipated being able to locate participants who currently identified as Black, White, and biracial. Ideally, I hoped to include at least two participants with each of these identities in the study. The sampling strategy above represented my initial plan of action. The actual number, heritages, and identities of the participants varied to some degree from this original plan.

Selection of Participants

In the initial stages of identifying and contacting potential participants, I used informal contacts with friends and colleagues to locate either people who fit the criteria which I had set, or individuals who may have been able to put me in contact with such individuals. In addition, I contacted agencies and networks which provided services to either targeted racial groups in general (i.e., service agencies for Black students on college campuses, advisors to multi-cultural student groups, etc.), or interracial couples and mixed race people specifically.
From these first contacts, I identified a number of people who may have met the criteria which I had set, and who were in close enough geographical proximity so that I could interview them and remain within the time and budget constraints I had set. For some of these potential participants, the person who recommended them for the study contacted them and made an initial inquiry as to their interest in participating in the study. In other situations, this initial contact was made by myself. The primary goal of this contact was to establish each person’s willingness to participate in the study. Information given at this time included a brief description of the topic of the study, the research techniques which would be used, and the time commitment needed should the person agree to participate and be selected for the study. During this initial contact, some participants volunteered their current racial identity. Some of the other participants were asked about their current racial identity if they had shared other information about themselves fairly openly, and I felt that they might be comfortable answering this question over the phone. Those participants for whom I did not receive information on their chosen racial identity during this initial conversation, were asked to indicate this in subsequent conversations which were held in person.

From the pool of potential participants identified, a total of seven adults were selected for the study. Some of the pertinent information on the background of the participants is provided in the Participant Summary in Table 1 on page 90. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 59, and included three men and four women. These particular individuals were selected after I considered a number of factors. All were willing and able to participate. They represented a diversity of gender and age. They offered a range of chosen identities, which included Black, White, and "mixed," "a minority person," or "a person of color." Some were raised in urban environments, some in suburban areas, and others in a more rural setting.
Table 1: Participant Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class *</th>
<th>RACE/Ethnicity of Mother</th>
<th>RACE/Ethnicity of Father</th>
<th>Chosen Racial Identity *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Lower Income</td>
<td>WHITE/ French &amp; Irish</td>
<td>BLACK/ African-American</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>WHITE/ German &amp; Irish</td>
<td>BLACK/ African-American &amp; Native American</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Lower Middle</td>
<td>WHITE/ German (born in Germany)</td>
<td>BLACK/ African-American</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>BIOLOGICAL: BLACK/African-American &amp; Hispanic</td>
<td>BIOLOGICAL: WHITE/ ethnicity unknown</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ADOPPTIVE: WHITE/German (born in Israel)</td>
<td>ADOPPTIVE: WHITE/ Russian &amp; Eastern European</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>WHITE/ English (born in England)</td>
<td>BLACK/ African-American &amp; Native American</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>BLACK &amp; NATIVE AMERICAN/ African-American &amp; Cherokee</td>
<td>WHITE/ French &amp; English</td>
<td>A Minority Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Lower Middle</td>
<td>BIOLOGICAL: WHITE/ ethnicity unknown</td>
<td>BIOLOGICAL: BLACK/ African-American</td>
<td>Not Black and not White; A Person of Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ADOPPTIVE: BLACK/ African-American</td>
<td>ADOPPTIVE: WHITE/ English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* named by participant
A number of participants chosen for this study had experiences or backgrounds which were outside of the original selection criteria I had initially developed. Some participants had Native American, in addition to Black and White heritage in their family background. Three participants had mothers and maternal grandparents who were not born or raised in the United States. Two participants were raised by adoptive parents, one in a White adoptive household with White parents, the other in a adoptive household with a Black mother and a White father.

Although this variability from the original strategy of the study existed, participants who had one or more of these differences were selected for the study for a number of reasons. For example, participant number 4 was included even though his mother was born and raised in Israel and he was raised in an adoptive, White household, because he was the only participant who identified as White. Participant number 5 was included even though her mother was not born and raised in the United States because she identified as "mixed," and she offered me the opportunity to speak with a woman who was in twenties age bracket.

Participant number 3 was included, again even though her mother was born and raised outside of this country, because her identity changed over time, and she was raised in an urban environment. Participant number 6 had a family background which included Native American heritage. He was asked to participate because of he was a man in his late fifties, and was raised in a rural, Southern environment. The decision to include each of these participants in the study was made as a compromise to the original vision of who would be included in order to include a range of ages, genders, experiences, and identities in this study. In light of this, the data collected from these participants should be read with an eye toward how these variations in their lives could have affected their choice of racial identity and how they viewed and came to understand concepts such as race and racism. This is particularly true for those
individuals who each had one parent who was not raised in the United States, since these parents' histories would reflect different experiences, cultural norms, and values, particularly around race and racism, than individuals who had been born and raised American society.

After the initial contact with each participant, a meeting between myself and the participant was scheduled. During this meeting, I reviewed in more detail the nature of the study and the amount of time and energy that participants were being asked to contribute, and answered any questions the participant had about the study. Each participant reviewed and completed the consent form (Appendix A). In addition, each participant was given a personal information sheet, called the Family Heritage Worksheet, to complete and return prior to, or at the time of their first interview. This sheet asked participants to indicate the racial and ethnic composition of their parents, grandparents, and themselves (Appendix B). The purpose of this sheet was to provide me with information about the extent to which the participant fit the family racial heritage criteria I had set for this study. In addition, completing the personal information sheet may have encouraged participants to begin to think about their racial heritage and identity, and that of their family, thus preparing them to discuss this information during the interviews. At the end of this meeting, an initial set of times and dates for the interviews was scheduled. For one participant, this "meeting" was done over the phone, as he was not located in my immediate area. He was given the opportunity to ask questions at that time, and before the first interview actually began. He completed the consent form just prior to the beginning of the first interview, and mailed the Family Heritage Worksheet to me after all of his interviews were completed.
Content and Conduct of the Interviews

Given the format of Seidman’s (1983, 1991) phenomenological interviewing technique, each participant was interviewed three times. Each interview lasted approximately ninety minutes. For two participants, four separate sessions were held. This was done because one participant’s third interview only lasted approximately forty-five minutes due to a scheduling conflict which I had not known of until I arrived for the third interview. The other instance of a fourth interview occurred because of a failure of the audio equipment during the entire third interview which was not discovered until the end of the interview. Also, participant number 5 completed interviews number 1 and 2 on the same day due to a scheduling problem.

The interview questions were the same for each participant. The first interview focussed on how the each person came to his/her current racial identity. During the second interview, participants were asked to reflect on what it was like to be a person from an African-American/Euro-American background who had chosen the racial identity which they had. The third interview concentrated on how each participant understood and made meaning of their identity.

A second personal information sheet, called the Personal History of Identity Worksheet, was completed for each participant by the researcher in the time between the first and second interviews (Appendix C). For participant number 5, this sheet was completed between interviews two and three. This sheet consisted of a time line, broken into five year intervals, which was meant to reflect each subject’s lifetime. Based on the information shared by participants in their first interview, I indicated, if possible, how each person identified racially at each interval. In addition, I noted any significant events, persons, or experiences which affected the participant’s choice of racial identity during different age periods. In completing this form, I gained a summary of how each participant identified him/herself
racially over the course of his or her life, and if and why this identity changed over time. As this sheet represented my understanding of each participant’s racial identity at different points in their lives, I solicited feedback, reactions, and corrections on my notes from each participant before the start of the second interview.

The Pilot Study

Prior to the beginning of the formal study, I conducted a pilot interview with a woman of African-American/Euro-American heritage. This pilot participant met with me for a pre-interview meeting where the design and nature of the study were discussed, and where she reviewed and completed the consent form and Family Heritage Worksheet. This participant completed the three interview sequence, with the questions reflecting the areas noted under the section on the design of the study. The Personal History of Identity Worksheet line sheet for this participant was completed in the time between the first and second interviews, and was shared and discussed with her before the start of the second interview.

The audio tapes from the pilot study were transcribed by professional transcriber. The experience of doing the pilot study helped me to assess the clarity and usefulness of the written materials and the interview questions, and to practice and evaluate my interviewing technique. As a result, I re-worked a small amount of the material related to the wording of the questions. In addition, I was able to think about the kinds of probing questions I may have to ask future participants and how I may approach these in the interviews to come.
The Role of the Researcher

Based on the work of Johnson (1975), Patton (1980) highlighted the role that positivism had played in fostering the idea that researchers were both able to, and responsible for, uncovering and reporting "the truth" about the area under study. This perspective emphasized that the researcher was free from bias and contamination by personal perspective. Patton (1980) responded to the positivist's images of the researcher by noting that "research inevitably involves personal perspective" (p. 270). His advice to the qualitative researcher was that one should focus less on reporting of the truth, and more on providing useful information about patterns which appear in the data.

McCracken (1988) noted that qualitative methods required researchers to utilize their own experiences, perspectives, and ways of thinking during the research process. He encouraged researchers to use "self as instrument" (p. 19), to make sense out of data by comparing it with their own experiences, as opposed to being distant, allegedly objective, analyzers of data. Seidman (1983) noted that the model of researcher as separate from, and having no effect on the subject, cannot be used when the goal of the research is to understand the participant's experience. He affirmed the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, noting that "who we are and what we say affects what we will hear" (p. 659).

Weber (1986) described the interview process as an invitation to a conversation. During this conversation, the researcher and participant become human beings in a dialogue and a "joint reflection on a phenomenon" (p. 65). Describing subjectivity as "a garment that cannot be removed" (p. 17), Peshkin (1988) indicated that the responsibility of the researcher was to become aware of the impact of their personal qualities on all aspects and stages of the research process, and to actively acknowledge it.
As the person conducting the research in this dissertation, I acknowledge my interest in, and involvement with the concept of bi-racial identity, and my own experiences as a bi-racial person. I was responsible for utilizing this experience as a strength where I was able, and to minimize its potential to adversely affect how I viewed the data, its analysis, and the interview process itself. The strengths of my identity and interest were in my ability to empathize with participants and their experiences. Peshkin referred to this shared sense of self as the "Ethnic-Maintenance I" identity of the researcher (p. 18). Although my racial heritage was different from that of my subjects, I was able to identify with some of the experiences which they reported to greater extent, I believe, than if I were a person of mono-racial descent.

The potential advantages of my racial heritage needed to be balanced with the possibility that I would overlook or discount important information shared by participants which did not fit with my own experience of being bi-racial. Another area which I needed to guard against in terms of my behavior during the interview was visibly reacting in inappropriate ways to participants' choices of identity or experiences which were contrary to my own.

In inviting bi-racial adults into a dialogue with me about their experiences of their racial identity, I identified myself as a bi-racial person of Asian/European heritage. I believed it was important for me to be open about my own identity so that participants were aware of who I was with respect to my racial heritage. This was particularly true because assumptions are often made about racial identity based on appearance, and I believe that participants may have mis-identified me in terms of racial heritage based on my appearance. By clarifying my own racial heritage at the outset, participants did not have to guess at my racial heritage, and to some extent, my identity. They could then take this information into account when
deciding what to share with me about their own experiences. I also hoped that by talking about my own heritage and identity, I modelled sharing about racial identity, and perhaps made the environment more open for participants to talk about their own experiences.

The effect of my own identity on the design, implementation, analysis, and evaluation of this study received on-going and specific attention. I made notes in my journal of the study when I had a personal, internal response to what a participant had shared. I also utilized my dissertation support group members as "sounding boards" when thinking about how my heritage, identity, and own experiences may be affecting how I conducted the study and analyzed the data. In addition, further commentary on the implications of my identity and heritage on this study is included in the section of this dissertation dealing with the implications of the findings on future research in the area of bi-racial identity.

By monitoring and managing the strengths and limitations of my heritage and identity during the course of the study and the writing of the dissertation, I hoped to create what Peshkin (1988) described as an "illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined. I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it..." (p. 20).

Data Collection and Data Management

Interviews with each participant were spaced at varying intervals. In general, interviews were scheduled about 5-7 days apart. With one participant, interviews 1 and 2 were done on the same day, with about a forty-five minute break in between sessions. The interviews were held in a number of environments. For three participants, the interviews were held in their homes. For two other participants, interviews were held either in my office or my home. One participant was interviewed in his office at his work place, and one
Each participant was interviewed in more public spaces, including a library and a restaurant. Each interview was recorded using an audio tape recorder. This allowed me to more fully attend to the participants during the interviews, and provided me with an accurate record of what was shared during the interview (Patton, 1980; Seidman, 1983). In addition, I believe the recorder served to remind participants that although they are sharing their experiences with me in a relatively private setting, some of their words would be presented in more public forums, such as the dissertation (Seidman, 1983). During the interviews I took notes as participants spoke. These notes tended to focus on significant words, expressions, or events which were shared, or on issues which I wanted to follow up with at a later time. These notations also contained thoughts which I had during the interview, as well as descriptions of non-verbal behavior and communication which occurred. Immediately after each interview, I took time to fill in these notes and to elaborate on my impressions of the interview, and any significant ideas, concepts, or issues which were shared. This time also served as an immediate de-briefing period for myself, when I was able to capture impressions while they were fresh in my mind.

Each audio tape was transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. At that time, an initial was substituted for the participant's name. A single log which matched initials with participant name and number was kept in a locked location and was marked "confidential." A file for each participant was created which included tapes and transcriptions of all interviews, field notes, consent forms, and any other relevant information.

McCracken (1988) noted that the analysis of data was undertaken "to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular" (p. 42). Analysis was also meant to transform the interview transcripts into an orderly, structured and manageable form with some meaning.
Qualitative research required that this analysis be inductive, where understanding is found, not by applying developed assumptions and expectations, but by allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data itself (Patton, 1980; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) noted that the challenge to the researcher was to combine "insight and intuition with an intimate familiarity with the data" (p. 130).

The data analysis strategy which I utilized took into account the need for flexibility, intuition, induction, and in-depth knowledge of the data. Two copies were made of each transcript. The original transcript was maintained as the "clean copy." The other two copies were marked on and coded in the process of data analysis and reduction. Each transcript was read over several times to allow me to become familiar with each participant's story. Any area which seemed to be relevant or interesting was highlighted with magic marker. From this review of the data, I wrote notes which summarized significant themes from the individual stories. After reading all of the transcripts for the first three participants, I wrote down a list of initial codes which could be used to label each of the sections of the transcripts that were highlighted. I then reviewed all of the transcripts again, and assigned one or more of the initial coding to each of the highlighted passages. The transcripts for the next two participants were read and highlighted. The initial list of coding categories was revised based on this review, and then the transcripts were coded from these categories. The transcripts of the final set of participants was analyzed initially using this same system.

At the completion of this initial coding of transcripts, the list of coding categories was reviewed. Areas of overlap were collapsed, and categories which were confusing or ambiguous were clarified. The purpose of the coding was not to wrestle the data into pre-existing categories, but to assist me in organizing and understanding the themes and areas which appeared in the hundreds of pages of text that resulted from the interviews.
In addition to allowing the coding categories to emerge from the transcripts, I reviewed the data in light of the themes of physical appearance, and cultural and political experiences which I had found to be significant in the existing racial identity literature. Passages which reflected these themes were noted. Again, this was done with an eye toward the caution presented by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) to not twist the data to fit patterns and themes raised by previous works. In addition to looking for areas of the transcripts which reflected these themes, I also noted those passages which seemed to contradict or negate the presence or significance of an identified theme or pattern (Patton, 1980). Coded transcripts were organized and prepared for presentation and synthesis. This included a review of the highlighted sections for relevance to an individual's sense of racial identity. Transcripts were reduced to profiles which are presented in Chapter IV. In addition, themes which emerged across participants' stories are presented and discussed.

The experiences of the participants were also compared to the stages of racial identity development outlined in the theories of Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), Jackson (1976), Hardiman (1982), Helms, (1984) and Poston (1990), as well as the literature related to bi-racial adults (Poussaint, 1984; Luckett, 1987). This was done to highlight areas which were consistent, as well as note those findings which contradicted, the information provided in the existing literature on racial identity development. In these instances, I proposed alternative explanations as part of the analysis and presentation of the data as suggested by Patton (1980) and Marshall and Rossman (1989).

Lastly, the themes and issues which emerged from the data were organized into a framework which illustrated the relationship between different variables and one's sense of racial identity and racial identity development.
Trustworthiness

The standards for measuring the validity and soundness of qualitative research must reflect the nature of the methodology and the data generated by this type of inquiry. The methods are flexible and open ended; the data gathered are rich in description and individual perception. Therefore, the application of traditional measures of research rigor, such as internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity to qualitative studies is inappropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, the qualitative researcher must find other criteria to measure the soundness of the study.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) noted that by adequately stating the parameters of the population, program, or phenomenon under study, and by offering descriptions "embedded with data derived from the setting" (p. 145), the qualitative researcher was able to address questions pertaining to the soundness and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that establishing the trustworthiness of a study involved giving attention to the factors of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility focused on whether the findings of the researcher are plausible, and reflective of the multiple realities which participants shared. Transferability reflected the extent to which the findings of the study are true in other settings. The construct of dependability related to the extent to which the researcher can document and support changes in subjects, setting, and research strategy during the course of the study. The last factor, confirmability, related to the replication of the results of the study by another researcher.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I employed a number of strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Marshall and Rossman (1989). These included on-going peer de-briefing sessions with my faculty chairperson and committee, as well as with fellow doctoral students in my support group. I also reviewed the data for negative examples,
and collected two separate sets of notes, one based on the participant's perspective, and the other reflective of my reactions and thoughts to the participants and the information which they shared with me.

The opportunity for member checks was also built into the study. For example, I asked participants to respond to my summary of what they had shared in the first interview about the development of their racial identity when I showed them the Personal History of Identity Worksheet prior to the start of the second interview. I also kept a detailed log of the study, similar to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as a "reflexive journal" (p. 327). This log documented the rationale behind research decisions during the course of the study, my thoughts about the emerging data, and my reactions to participants and the study itself. In addition, the data management system which I developed allowed me to trace my decisions about the analysis and presentation of the findings to specific sections of the data itself. I also documented the steps I took in reducing and analyzing the data during the course of the study.

The specific strategies noted above assisted me in ensuring the trustworthiness of the study by providing a detailed description of each aspect of the study, and by producing what Lincoln and Guba referred to as an "audit trail" (p. 319). For this dissertation, such a trail included interview transcripts and personal notes, summaries of the research process, and results of and rationale of the reduction of the data. By employing a number of diverse strategies, and by acknowledging and exploring my own biases and the potential impact of these and my own racial identity on the study, I constructed a base on which to build the trustworthiness of the study.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

In this chapter, the data collected from the interviews are analyzed and presented. The chapter is divided into eight sections, each of which addresses one or more of the first four research questions posed at the end of Chapter II. These questions are: 1.) What racial identity or identities do a select group of bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage choose for themselves? 2.) How do these individuals describe how their chosen racial identity or identities came about? 3.) Did the racial identity of these bi-racial adults change over time, and if so, what factors influenced these changes? and 4.) How do these bi-racial adults experience the world given their chosen racial identity?

Section One presents a summary of the current racial identity chosen by each of the participants. Section Two is composed of profiles of each participant, generated from the transcripts of their interviews. Section Three summarizes participants' descriptions of how their current racial identity or identities evolved. Section Four highlights any changes in racial identity which are apparent in the profiles, and the significant factors which participants indicated influenced these changes. Section Five highlights the similarities and differences between the experiences of participants when they are grouped into smaller categories according to their chosen racial identities. Section Six compares the experiences of participants across each of the sub-groups presented in Section Five. Sections Seven and Eight are smaller sections, and focus on comparing the experiences of participants across gender and age categories, respectively.
The other research questions, numbers five and six presented in Chapter II, focussed on the comparison of the results of this study with existing works on Black and White identity development and research on bi-racial adults. These two questions will be addressed in Chapter V of this dissertation, as part of the section on the discussion of the results of this study.

Before presenting the data, I feel that it is important to note that the data which were collected for this dissertation reflected the life experiences of seven individuals as recounted by them over the course of three or four interviews. The information which was shared was rich in amount and detail. By choosing to present the data through profiles and the analysis of themes which emerged when participants were compared all together or in different groupings, I hoped to present as much of both the quantity and quality of the seven life stories as possible. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the data from this study represented the experiences of a small, select group of adults of African-American/Euro-American descent who agreed to participate in this study. Although the data informed the experience of African-American/Euro-American adults to some extent, it was also limited by the number of experiences which were included, analyzed, and presented. This aspect of the data is especially crucial to keep in mind when the themes which emerged when participants were grouped into smaller categories, such as by chosen racial identity, gender, and age are presented in Sections Five through Eight of this chapter.

Section One: Current Racial Identities of Participants

This section presents information related to the first research question "What racial identity or identities do a select group of bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage choose for themselves?" From the information given during the interviews and on
the Family Heritage Worksheets, it was evident that participants chose a range of racial identities. Three participants, Anne Jenkins, Robin Farmer, and Agnes Barnes, identified with the racial category of Black, and the ethnic category of African-American, with Robin preferring the term Black-American. David Stein identified with the White racial category, and describes his ethnic heritage as Jewish. The Family Heritage Worksheets which he completed for both his biological and adoptive families reflected this choice of racial and ethnic background. However, in several places in his interviews, he spoke of being mixed in terms of his biological heritage.

Three of the seven participants chose mixed racial and ethnic categories in naming themselves. Jennifer Smith described herself as racially both Black and White. She noted on her Family Heritage Worksheet that her ethnicity was "a mutt," because she was a mixture of the three ethnic categories reflected in her parents’ heritages. When questioned about this during her second interview, she said she used the term mutt as a way of being sarcastic. In her interviews, Jennifer described her identity as "mixed." Cory Stewart identified with both the Black and White racial categories. On the Family Heritage Worksheet for his biological family, he described his ethnicity as Jewish and African-American. For this section of the worksheet related to his adoptive family, he indicated that he was "A Person of Color." This was also the term he often used to describe himself during the course of his interviews. Lastly, Mitchell Bennet referred to himself as "A Minority Person." He noted on his Family Heritage Worksheet that his race was Black, White, and Native American, and that his ethnic background was White, African-American, and Cherokee.
Section Two: Participant Profiles

This section presents profiles of each participant which are derived from the transcripts of all of their interviews. Each profile is preceded by a brief summary which includes the participant’s age, gender, racial heritage, and racial identity. The majority of the text in the profiles is comprised of the participants’ own words, as recorded on the transcripts of the interviews. All names which appear in the profiles, including the names of the participants, are fictitious. In order to assist the reader, text which does not reflect participants’ responses during the interviews appears in two forms in the profiles. First, editorial text which sets the context for the material that follows it appears in brackets [ ], throughout each profile. This text was included because the reader does not have the benefit of access to entire transcripts of the interviews, all of the ideas which appeared before and after the text which was selected for the profile, or the prompts and questions provided by myself as interviewer. In addition to these bracketed editorial comments, smaller sections of text were added in the body of some of the profiles. These words, enclosed in parentheses ( ), were used to fill the gaps which occurred in the transcripts due to the fact that we often do not speak in complete sentences. This text was meant to bridge any spaces in a participant’s narrative, without changing the meaning that the person was trying to convey. In addition, when participants spoke about specific details of their current communities, occupational positions, or other life variables, these references were replaced by more general text in parentheses in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Finally, a sequence of three dots was used when different sections of the transcripts were combined into a single segment of a profile, or when there were section of the participants’ narratives which were not able to be transcribed due to garbled or inaudible segments on the audio recordings of the interviews.
The order in which material is presented in the profiles reflects in general how
material was recounted by participants during the course of the interviews. This was directed
in large part by the nature and focus of each interview. In summary, the first interview was
guided by a question which asked participants to go back as far in their past as they could and
recount how they came to their current sense of racial identity. Information given during this
interview tended to focus on past experiences and early environments. The second interview
question asked participants to describe what it was like for them today as a person of African-
American/Euro-American heritage who had chosen a particular racial identity. Participants
often shared concrete examples from their day to day life to illustrate their thoughts, feelings,
and perspectives on their current life. The final interview focussed on the meaning which
participants made of their chosen identity given their heritage and experiences. Responses
during this interview often reflected more philosophical themes as opposed to concrete
examples of incidents and experiences. Frequent topics which were discussed included
participants' philosophy of life, perspective on their racial identity development over the
course of their lives, and their understanding of race, racism, and inter-racial interactions.
Profiles begin with a discussion of participants' past, with the focus being on early
environments, incidents, perceptions of identity, and historical factors which influenced racial
identity development. This is followed by more present day descriptions of how the
participants experience themselves in the world, how they see themselves in relation to others,
how their racial identity interacts with other social identities such as gender and class, factors
which continue to influence their sense of identity, and strategies which are utilized to deal
with conflict or racism. The final sections of each profile contain participants' reflections on
their lives given their experiences and chosen identity, and how they had come to understand
the concepts of racial identity, race, racism, and inter-group relations.
Lastly, profiles are grouped according to the chosen racial identity of participants. This was done to highlight the similarities and differences in the experiences of participants within a chosen identity, and to set the framework for the presentation of themes which occur in Sections Five and Six of this chapter. The first three profiles which are presented are of participants who identified as Black. These are followed by the profile of the participant who identified as White. The final three profiles which are presented reflect the experiences of participants who chose a mixed racial identity, or an identity other than either Black or White.

Profile of Participant Number One

Anne Jenkins is a working class woman who is 59 years old. Her mother is White (French and Irish), and her father is Black (African-American). She is married to a Black man and has two grown children. She identifies as Black.

[Anne describes some of her early experiences related to her sense of racial identity and the different environments that she grew up in.]

I never thought (that I’m of a mixture), I never really think of it as that. I always think of myself as just a person, that just is the way it is. Because [pause], I never really thought of it until you brought it up, [laughs], to tell you the truth. And then I started thinking, and I don’t know whether it’s that important. I constantly say that it isn’t, it isn’t that important to me.

I mean it wasn’t anything I chose. It was just a matter of fact. I mean we used to ask our mother was she our mother. My mother and father were separated so we used to ask her. She said "Yes, I’m your mother." And I said "Well, are we Black or are we White because the kids are making fun of us." She says "I consider myself Black because I married your father." And she said "since I have my children then I think of myself as Black too." She
didn’t say Black, she said Negro at that time, or colored. They would be called colored or Negro. ...My mother has always said that you’re usually what your father is, and I believe that and society makes you believe that. There’s no other way of getting around it. I’m not White. ...From that point on there was no question who I was. You knew who you were. It was made perfectly clear. ...And it was just a matter of fact that you accepted it. I mean there wasn’t anything you couldn’t accept ’cause (there were) too many, too many (Whites) where we lived, you know, you were just Black. You were, you were a Negro and it was like the most disgraceful thing you could be.

I don’t remember too much (early on) because it was a mixed neighborhood a lot in Boston. There were all kinds of people, Chinese, Jews, Black people, Syrians, a lot of Syrians, Gypsies. There was a mixture of people. There wasn’t any one. I think there was sometimes when we did go to school there were like more Blacks than Syrians and more Blacks than there were Jews. There were more Blacks than there were White people, and they would give us a fit. You had to run home from school. They’d call you names, they’d beat you up, they’d run... . You would have to run home from school to get away from them.

School was the main thing. It was horrid. When I first enrolled in school, I don’t know how old I was, but I didn’t understand the woman when she looked down at me and she said "Oh, she looks intelligent." And I didn’t understand. I said to her "What does that mean, she looks intelligent. What does that mean?" And I looked and I felt so horrible, yet I didn’t know the meaning of what she was saying. It was like well, and if you’re different when you’re a kid, you don’t want to be different. You want to be like everybody else. So I would say that was one incident that I can remember. (pause) Then the names of course.
And so then we went to the suburbs. My mother thought of going to the country we’d be healthy and out of the city for the children, and that was her main concern. She didn’t think about schools. In those days you just wouldn’t. You’d think that everything would be fine just like it is in the city. ...Mainly the (people in the suburbs) were people who had lived there all their lives. ...They were like farmers and, they were just Yankees, old time Yankees. They may have had Irish, some of them were Italian, there may have been French and I’m trying to think. I just don’t know. They were all White. We were the only Blacks.

(The kids there) didn’t believe that (my mother) was my mother. They knew that we were Black or whatever, but they just used to tease us. ...They’d say "That’s not your mother. You must be adopted" and so forth. I remember one kid and he said, he kept saying (that she wasn’t my mother) and it made me so angry, and he was quite big, and I really hit him. I socked him, and it wasn’t like me to do that. I was really hysterical, just the thought of it, that they don’t believe. That kind of made me upset. I just hit him. ...I was angry at the fact that the teasing and the aggravation and the not being able to let him know that this is really my mother, and no way in the world were you going to make this person believe that. I think it just got the better of me. ...But as you get older it doesn’t bother you.

(At school) they’d call us Hershey bar, vanilla ice cream, nigger, I’m trying to think. Sometimes my sister and I would go home and laugh, ’cause it seemed funny. I don’t know if we even talked about it to my mother, because we figured what could she do with the whole world, right? ...I mean it was just humiliating. When you got on the school bus you had that feeling, oh my God, here they go again. It was just horrid. Even my poor sister used to say "Oh, you think you’re White," because she was darker than I was, a little bit, not much. Then I used to say "No." ...I tried to explain to her that it’s not true, it’s not true,
you know. ...I don’t know why she would say that, because I mean she must have been (harassed too), I didn’t even think that she may have been just as harassed as I was.

We would tell (my mother about the harassment) and she would go to the school. I remember my mother went to the school and they said, "Well, that’s always going to be." I mean that’s the answer she would get. She wouldn’t get any response. "That’s the way it’s going to be. That’s the way things are." So you just accepted it and you accepted it all the way.

Nobody ever talked about (race or interracial couples) things like that. It was never talked about, even with my cousins and my other cousins. I think it was mentioned like my other cousins were Portuguese, half Portuguese, and the only reason it was mentioned was because I tried, I remember I was trying to talk to the grandmother and the grandmother couldn’t understand me. And we used to sing songs and my cousins would teach us songs, and then we’d dance. They had records and we’d dance to the music. I mean it’s like why talk about something that you know, feel that nothing’s going to happen?

[Anne describes the lack of role models in her early years and some of the efforts her mother made to expose her and her siblings to other cultures besides White culture.]

You know, it’s important to have somebody. There was nothing in school. I think the only thing in school was the Indians. There wasn’t a whole lot said about them. But there really was nothing there for us to identify with. And of course when we went to the movies we saw Lena Horne, but she was always like in a White setting, so it really wasn’t, I think of her and I loved her and admired her but it didn’t seem real to me. I remember, ...my mother was very, very proud to take us to a movie to see Joe Lewis. That was the biggest thing. She tried to explain to me that he was a very famous person. I guess he is, you know. ... I
didn’t think (of him) one way Black or White, but she was just trying to tell me, she felt that was nice for us.

(My mother) tried to introduce to us different people. My father’s folks would bring us music from the south, records ...blues. Very, very old blues. ...I was ashamed to play (the records) ’cause I thought anybody outside would hear them. ...I didn’t want anybody to hear me playing Black music. I figured that here we go again, you know? Like they wouldn’t want to hear it, so I never introduced it to anybody. If they came to the house I’d make sure (I didn’t play them). If I was with my family I did it. Isn’t that weird?

My mother was a happy person. She worked very hard. ...But my mother always tried to make me look very important. She always tried to give me encouragement because I was the tallest so I was really sticking out like a sore thumb. ...She always tried to make things nice. I could always feel that. I always felt that she wanted me to be important. ...So that kind of carried with me too.

[Anne talks about her feelings when she reached high school and how, looking back, how she would have liked to change things.]

Nobody associated with us until we got in high school. And then when they would come and say "Well, why don’t you come over my house?" ...My sister and I didn’t believe it. "Why don’t you come over and sleep over in our new house?" We never believed it. So it was like we never went to proms, we never went to dances. You couldn’t go to dances. I did join the basketball team but that didn’t last long. It was just like, you know, you didn’t belong and you wouldn’t be wanted. It would be the same old thing so I’d never go. It’s almost like we went to school but we didn’t know anybody. Or else if we knew someone it was like, it just wasn’t real to me, and you knew you weren’t going to have a good time. If they really made fun of you out of school then they’d really do it if you went to their affairs.
I mean you felt that. It's like they would tell us, I remember they would tell us to go home.

"Why did you come here? Why did you come in this town for?" Things like that.

I think I would, if (I could have changed things), I think I would have liked to make a difference, but how I really don't know because it seemed like they were so steeped, and it's just "You are not like us. You never will be like us so forget it," you know? And so you can't change, you can't say "Well, you know you're going to have to treat me better." You couldn't do that because their mentality wasn't there. You can think about what they are doing. I mean today it's a different story. I mean it's just not the thing to do, even though that person may be high steeped in prejudice. But I mean even when they confront it and you say "You know, you're prejudiced," they'll do everything they can to back out of it, saying "Oh, I'm not." They'll do all their little things to say they're not. Then they would say, at that time they would say "No. There's nothing got to be done about it. We've always been this way. This is the way things are."

[After high school, Anne and her sister returned to the city. She describes her experiences of being with other Black people.]

When we grew up, we moved to Boston to work, and when we met Black people they were ok towards us. They treated us fine then when we grew up. I felt like I was with my own. ...I mean the Black people accepted us more. I mean there was always some that weren't very nice, but they seemed to get over it once they found out that we were ok.

...That was in the '40's. My sister and I both lived with a family and we lived in (this section of Boston). ...(I identified as Black) right. That was with Black people. There were some people that were mixed. ...But nobody ever really talked about it. It wasn't anything you just discussed. We were all treated the same when we got older.
I got a job in a factory and there was a lot of Black people there. And I was so happy actually to see all these people, because at that time that was about the only place that you could make money at this particular place. We would all hang out together probably in a restaurant. And then on Sunday afternoons we would all go to this place, ... and it was a nice place for jazz, and it had all wonderful stars, all the famous people who were finally becoming known. ...I couldn’t believe that the music was so beautiful. It was, the sound was so different because we didn’t have a hi fi, a stereo. And then we got into where there were dances, and that’s how I met my husband. And it was a whole new life. It was like that other life never existed. I mean, ’cause when something goes wrong with me, I can forget the whole thing.

There were times when I (experienced prejudice from Blacks). It just looked like, it’s more like you were a stranger. ..."What do you want?", you know, one of those type. It’s like you were intruding. I think it’s because they didn’t know me. It’s just like the same old thing, when they don’t know you and you’re different again. You’re different on this side. It’s like there’s no where right in the middle. ...(Blacks) did call me names. I know what they called me, yellow. They’d make fun of my eyes. Different things like that. But it didn’t hurt me as much as it did when I lived in (the suburbs). ...I can’t remember (what I thought) except that it would be nice to have a little more color [laughs], you know? Not so sallow looking. Yeah, I used to think that it’d be nice (to be darker). I still think that. I would love to have a darker skin.

My (husband’s family) they, I said that I was (mixed) but they said "you are not". And so I said "Well, it doesn’t make any difference to me." I don’t think I said it right out. I think it was something that came up. They said "Your mother is Black." I think they had seen her. No, they didn’t say she was Black. They said "You’re not mixed." It didn’t
matter to me because I said it doesn’t matter that they don’t believe it. Who cares? It wasn’t really important.

[Anne talks about her thoughts about the changes that happened during the Civil Rights Movement.]

(When I think about change) I really feel good about it, because I think it’s a change for the better. We’re not going backwards, even though at times it seems like it. Even at the time when it was the civil rights situation in the ’60’s. It was sort of frightening. I didn’t know how to fight back. I wasn’t the type of person that would fight back like that. I would fight back in a different way if somebody confronted me one to one. But I never thought of protesting, because it’s like well, what am I doing? I didn’t understand what it was I was supposed to do. And then I remember a young White couple had just came back from one of the marches and had been in jail, she was very proud to mention to us that she had been in jail, the both of them. I said "Well, isn’t that crazy?" [laughs]. I couldn’t understand that, and do they really mean it? Why are they doing it? I asked myself, "why are they doing this?" But as the years go on you realize that other people feel that it’s unjust, and they don’t have to be, I mean there are White people that do feel this way. I mean there are White people who die for that cause. So those things sort of make you change your mind and say, and why didn’t I feel it?

Well, here we didn’t get too much of, too much racism. But it was so subtle and so often that it was like a normal way of life. During the ’60’s my little girl must have been about ten years old, and I had mentioned that I used to take her to dancing. And we were in Woolworth’s and they were striking because of the sit down strike. After dancing we always went and had a little soda or something. When she sat there and she’s wiggling around on the stool and she’s saying "Why don’t they wait on us Mommy? Why?" See, she didn’t
understand. How is a little kid going to understand it? And even I couldn’t understand why they were doing this. I said "Why don’t they wait on us?" 'Cause this happened when my husband and I were younger a lot. ...and I said "This is happening now?" And so the woman was in the back doing dishes, and she looked and she looked and she came out and she said, she threw down her towel and said "This is ridiculous. What would you like to have?" And so I got out of that one with my daughter, because I didn’t know how to explain it to her.

I think I should have, I think the things I really should have done is to try to understand it more. It’s like being in the forest, looking at all these trees. You don’t understand what’s going on within yourself. Raised here all my life. Coming here when I was like two years old. You don’t really understand what their feelings were in the deep South. The racism here is different. I think they’re free (in the South) now more than we are here actually.

When I first heard this hate, from the civil rights when I would watch tv and see the people in the South, the hate, and they would cry, and they were just so full of hate. It was almost like my God, she’s just consumed or he is just consumed. Why are they killing themselves like this? But they have, there’s going to come a time when you have to get over this for the simple reason that it’s killing the soul of the people that feel this way. Because it does affect children. It does affect people, other adults when this happens. It’s horrible. ...I felt like God, what is the matter with these people? She looks like she was, so much hate on tv. Then I said I don’t ever want to feel that way. I feel sorry for her. I really do. Then on the other hand when it became like Black power, the Blacks were going to Black power. I said I don’t want to be like the White man, have all the power. I didn’t want to do that either. This is what I thought they were thinking, see. I couldn’t quite figure out what they
meant by Black power. I think over time you do realize. Over time you know that different
groups of Black have different opinions. I can’t blame them for feeling the way they do.
They have been exploited. We didn’t ask to come over here. And you know, sometimes I
really feel, if I let myself I could really go off on a rampage, but I don’t want to do that,
’cause it doesn’t make sense. It’s not gonna help.

[Anne describes some of the ways that she sees herself.]

I always felt if I didn’t save myself, nobody else would. So I mean I have, I realize
that its my responsibility, no matter how much prejudice there is out there. That means
stepping back all the time, not be afraid to go into a store or ask for a job, things like that. A
lot of people would (be afraid). ...I look at other Black women and see that they’re doing
things. Most of the Black women I know are quite outstanding. I mean to be able to go on.
And I find this in a lot of Black women. They’re able to go on. Even when things are so
grim they’re able to keep going. ...Oh, many times (I’ve been able to go on). But a lot of
times, to me, when you do have that type of, for instance when my husband lost his sight and
when my child was diagnosed as hyperactive and not able to have the finance to do this or
that. But mainly sometimes when I go through those things it seems hard. I always seem to
grow a little bit more. I seem to get strength from going through it, whatever. I’m able to
face it.

If I’m afraid of something I’m going to do it anyway (laughs) even though I’m afraid.
And I think when I grew up, I think my mother influenced me a lot to be strong, because I
wasn’t a very attractive lady little girl, [laughs] terrible looking. She always tried to make me
feel good about myself. And I felt that I certainly wasn’t gonna die. I was gonna survive,
meaning that no matter what, how many names, no matter if I didn’t have the clothes like
other people had or have, I still was going to do my thing. It’s just like why should I lay
down and die? Why don’t I just keep on going? Fight for the things I believe in. Fight for what I want to do. You do lose some of your self esteem because, but I didn’t lose it all. You do, you have a tendency to be a little shy.

[Anne talks about her identity today and offers a perspective on her past, and some of the changes she has seen since then.]

I would say today in modern times (I identify as) Afro-American. ...I had mentioned that person as Black or they’re Black. And so my friend said to me the other day "They don’t say Black anymore." I says "They don’t?" "No. they say Afro-American." Well, to me it doesn’t make any difference. It’s so many titles and so many names. ...I don’t have any identity. I feel, like I did say I’m a Black American. I’m not Black anymore I’m Afro-American because I was told that that’s what I was, so it’s alright, whatever you say. ...I meant, well today I’m Afro-American [laughs], I don’t know what it will be tomorrow. But I mean it doesn’t mean anything, it doesn’t mean for me to have an identity. It doesn’t mean anything to be French and Irish and Black and so forth. ...(I’m) Afro-American [laughs]. That’s what they said. I have to have an identity. I have to be identified. So that’s what I mean. If I didn’t have any identity... (I’d be) Me. Nobody else would.

Well, actually, I know that I’m Black, so that’s obvious. Well, not always the outside world sees me, sees me that way because there are certain people in a subtle type way you can tell. You can tell that they don’t feel you’re as good as they are. ...It’s not something that’s gonna bother you. It’s not gonna bother you so much it’s gonna stop you from doing what you really want to do. ...I think, too, mainly you’re accepted and then you’re not accepted. But you’re more accepted than the other way. Other people, White people aren’t going to say you’re White and make you feel comfortable in the society. But you’re more able to be accepted in a Black community than in a White community as you’re growing up.
I mean as I was growing up as a young woman, I certainly wouldn't go in the White community and try to socialize with White kids my age, because of the way I was brought up in school and the way I went through my school. I don't believe in their sincerity. ...(And now), I mean I could never feel like I could marry someone (White), and yet I'm not prejudiced. ...It's just because I, and not unless they were Black, a person that was Black influenced and liked the music and liked the things I like. And today, there aren't a lot of people like that. ...The person probably wouldn't have the same lifestyle. Really, I like music and it's not all that easy to find a White person with soul (laughs). You know what I mean? So I mean that's the reason. I guess I'm prejudiced.

It's not important that I'm of a mixture or (that) I had a Black influence. I've had a Black influence growing up, but I've also had a White influence in my work that has been positive. So it's so difficult to really say. I wouldn't say it was a great impact, but the only impact is that I remember it more. ...I really feel pretty proud to be a Black woman. I think it's very unique for the simple reason a friend of mine who used to live near us, and her husband used to visit us, he was like Archie Bunker and she was like his wife. But they were wonderful people. She asked me, she says "Don't you wish you were born White?" and I thought that was really odd. I mean I wasn't offended because I know by this time how people think, and I really said "No, I like being what I am. I have the best of both worlds." So she didn't say anything.

I was raised up in both the Black community when I was young, the White community when I was younger, and my parents, when I did see my father and my uncles and aunts, they were all a mixture of different people. And you get to know a little bit about everything. I mean a little bit about other groups besides yourself. You get to know about the Black people, you get to know about the Portuguese people, you get to know about, well, I don't
know very much about my mother’s people, she doesn’t know either. ...But you get to know both worlds. You get to understand that there is other cultures. You get to understand that it’s alright to be Black because you can contribute and the other cultures contribute, and they contribute in many ways, in their food and art and everything else. I mean I like the diversity.

I don’t really think (my background has) had too much effect (on me). It has been a positive effect but it doesn’t, it’s not a noticeable effect to me. It’s like a natural thing. And I would say like even thirty or forty years ago, things are a lot different, different in the sense that you didn’t see mixed couples. If something happened that was a racial slur or something like that, you lived in school with it. The teachers didn’t care. And today, even thirty years ago it was pretty bad, but it was not as bad as it was when I was younger. So I can see a lot of positive effects by the races mixing, by the different cultures. They can contribute so much. They can contribute through their, just by being in it, just by the diversity, through the food, through the mixtures. And then I think, I think another thirty years from now things will be better because there will be so many people that are related to one another.

It fascinates me to see that there are so many (mixed race people) today and they don’t seem to be worried about it. There are so many different groups and different children and mixed today. You can tell that it really doesn’t, I don’t think it bothers them. ...I just think because of the so many now, that it’s not that important. I do think though that children need to be, they should have some sort of awareness in school, in appreciation for one another. And it has to begin with the teachers, I really do. A lot of times you think you’re not prejudiced but you are. I mean there are certain things you may be prejudiced against and you don’t even know it. I think some of the teachers (are), and it spills right into the kids.
[Anne shares her perspective on the idea of race and the role that religion plays in her views and her life.]

I don’t really think of it as a race. I just don’t think of race anymore. I just think that there’s so many of us so different, and that’s what makes it so beautiful. I think that, I’m thinking very hard to say, how do I feel inside. I don’t think of race anymore as I’m getting older. It doesn’t mean anything to me. I mean there’s so many nice people of all races to me now. I don’t have a bitter feeling. I never had a bitter feeling. My feeling was always hurt, but it never hindered me from doing the things I want to do. I mean as far as getting a job or going to a store or buying something. Even if I were rejected because then it was like well, that’s the way it is. I guess to me it’s so stupid for somebody to (do) that to me. My God, those people. What is the matter with them? We’re all the same. I mean we all come from the same thing. We came from God. And I can’t understand why there should be so much hate, who cares. That’s the way I feel today.

There’s so many other important things. I think about so many other things like so many other people and other places, rather than this little world that we live in here in (my town) or (in this state). There’s so many people in the world. And I notice when we were traveling one time, there are a lot of dark people in the world. Seem to be more dark people than there are White, and that kind of surprised me. And even when we went to another place where there are a lot of Jews, there are different kinds of Jews. They’re not like the Jews here. ...all the times with different colors, Asian and Black Jews. When you get to think about other people and all of the counties, you don’t think about color. We truly are one people.

I don’t know. I think it’s because I believe, maybe it’s my religious background. I think it’s because I believe we’re all from one family. We’re all the family of women, man,
God. And if God created that one, no matter how Black that person is or no matter how White that person is, then if he created us all equal, equal in the sense that we're all potential to be man above the animals through the guidance of the almighty, whatever religion you may have, then he must have meant for us to love everyone. Like in our religion, he mentions that we all must be like the flowers in the garden, not any one standing out from any other but all different hues and shapes. It's the people of all over and the similarity of the suffering from all over the world. We try to dwell on the pleasant things rather than the unpleasant things. We try to take, in the writings it says that (if) there is one thing about an individual, one negative thing about that individual, try to think of the positive things of the individual.

...If you believe in, if you believe that religion, (it) really helps me. Its like a force. It's a strength. ...It uplifts me. It makes me feel a lot better about many things, and the devastation in the world today. ...Its like living in a house with a firm foundation.

...Without my religion, I would, I couldn’t function.

And so I think that’s where I come. I’ve always liked people, all kinds of people, even when I was a kid. And I think that we’ve got to learn to love and love and live with one another. That’s the reason why I don’t really feel what’s a race. A man puts a name on it. He says "Well, this one’s gonna be English [laughs], that one’s gonna be Irish." Well, then we have Negroes, coloreds, Black power, Blacks, Afro or African-Americans, and so what? I know who I am, I think. I know who I am and it doesn’t matter. And if there’s somebody calls me Black or nigger, it doesn’t matter. ...I think man was man, animal was animal and so forth. And I think that man is the one that gives all these names, plus the need to identify certain things. When we break down man and say "Well, he’s this and he’s that", but we’re all one people. That’s certainly evident today. I believe that every one of us are related to
one another, maybe distant cousins or something. I mean that’s my belief [laughs]. It’s weird
but it’s true.

Profile of Participant Number Two

Robin Farmer is a upper middle class woman who is 32 year old. Her mother is
White (German and Irish) and her father (deceased) was Black (African-American). She is
married to a White man, and has two sons. She identifies as Black.

[Robin describes early conversations and experiences with family members which
involved or influenced her racial identification.]

I’ve always said the same thing, which is that I’m Black. And if they say, "Well,
what are your parents?" then I’d say "My father’s this, my mother’s that." That’s never
changed. I guess it’s because my parents were very clear when I was little what my
identification was or what my identity was. I remember filling out, we had a census and
maybe I was filling the blank in and my parents were telling me what to fill in. I remember
filling in the blanks that all three of us were Black. I’m just like "Oh, okay." And never
gone through any period thinking well, I’m half White or I’m only half Black, or this or that.

I remember having a conversation with my father when he told me that because of the
history of this country, that people who had any Black ancestry were considered Black, so
that there were many people who didn’t look Black at all, who had maybe one Black
grandparent, who were considered Black and tried to pass for White. He told me that he had
two cousins … who were very light skinned and had married two White guys, both of whom
were racist. And that they just passed themselves off as White and never told them about
their family and just disconnected all ties with the family. They never told their spouses. But
they’d always lived as Black until they either met these men or moved away from where the family lived. I don’t know the specifics. I always thought that was fascinating.

I was visiting (my grandmother once) and there was another family of kids like me, the mother was White and the father was Black, but they were divorced and they were really poor. ...The older girl, who was my age, was always calling the younger sister ... nigger. I was talking to my grandmother about it. I was saying "I don’t understand this. What’s going on?" And so that precipitated a conversation about race and she said "well, you’re not really all Black". ...And I said "Oh, I always say that I’m Black if somebody asks me." And she said "Well, you’re not really all Black because your mother is White." And I said "Yes, but," something like I don’t try to get any mileage on that basically, or try to ingratiate myself with anyone because of that. I said "But there are some White people on my father’s side of the family too." So she said "Oh, so you’re not even half Black if you really get specific about it." But I didn’t feel she was trying to talk me into thinking I was, she was just saying that as far as biology goes, I wasn’t all Black. But because of the social construction of race and our society, that if I wanted to identify myself as Black that was okay.

I remember my mother always used to say (when people stared at me) "Oh, (its) because they think you were beautiful." I always thought she was being honest. But I think now that what she was doing was trying to turn any possible negative feelings I might have had from people staring at me into something like a compliment, and that it had never occurred to me because I hadn’t thought about it for years until I read that (newspaper) article (on bi-racial families).

I lived with my parents in Boston and all my relatives were in the west. I remember visiting relatives on both sides during summers growing up. When I was very young, three and four, I would go and visit my grandparents on my mother’s side. They live in a
community that's predominantly White in Wisconsin. Then as I got a little older we'd go to
Indiana together as a family where my relatives, mostly Black, live. I'd go to both places
about once a year and didn't really get to know the relatives on my mother's side beyond my
aunt, uncle, couple of great aunts and uncles a little bit, and my grandparents. But there's a
very large extended family on my father's side. The people have been in one particular
county for about 200 years, so there were a lot of relatives there, lots of kids my age and ...
cousins. I'd always look forward to going to visit them and spending time with them, felt
very close to them. And that's when I really would be exposed to Black culture during my
childhood, because we usually lived in college towns and communities that had very few
Black families around when I was growing up. ...I really liked the idea of having Native
American relatives too. I guess I was on an Indian kick for a while. It went on for years,
[laughs] and I think it's still going on. And so I always wanted to find out all about the tribes
my Native American relatives were from, was there anybody that would know us, etc. etc.,
but (to) have contact with, that part of the family.

Everywhere we lived my parents would seek out any racially mixed couples or other
minorities. They had always made a concerted effort to get us together with other families,
but it wasn't, once we were together, it was no racial theme. It was just people who liked
each other and wanted to share each other's family with one another. I think that it was
probably very good for me. But there weren't many (families), and I was usually the only
Black or mixed child in school until junior high. ...I was always very happy (when we spent
time with other families). I was always very comfortable. I didn't feel as though there were
people there that I didn't know and who might have thought were looking at me funny, or
wondering about me.

125
Throughout my life I have often met people who ask me, who meet me and ask me what my background is, or stare at me and come up and ask me what my background is, which I find really irritating. ...I was different, from the second grade on. Sometimes (when people asked) it was fine ..., but other times they’d just say "Oh" and walk away. I felt sometimes as though I’d like to have some kind of a response that was not rude, but pointed enough to let them know that they weren’t being polite. ...I think that most of the time it was fine, ’cause my friends would never say anything negative or I would never hear negative comments from them.

I would say I had absolutely no sense (of racial identity at that time). My mother said (recently) that she really didn’t have a sense of me having a sense of my racial identity at that point in time either. Plus nobody ever brought it up. But my parents were, I think they were very clear from the time I was young that my identity was that I was Black. I remember, actually we still lived in (the Boston area) when Martin Luther King was killed. (My father) took me and we went to a rally the following day. I think it was a Black power rally. There were lots of speakers and people expressing anger, mostly anger. It wasn’t a grief session at all. It was a very angry, but also I think an empowering kind of get together. It was in some kind of an athletic stadium. There were probably a couple of thousand people there. That made quite an impression on me. ...But at the time I remember saying to my [laughs] dad that my mother probably wouldn’t have been welcomed there, and he said something like "Maybe, maybe not". I felt later on as I was older that he had made an effort not to give me an impression that there were any divisions that were being created because of what had happened, at least as far as our family went, or that he supported any divisions around racial lines because of what had happened.
(My family) talked about race a lot and my father was very political so we would watch the news in the evening as a family. He would always have a running commentary on his analysis of whatever events were occurring. And invariably during that time period, you know, the civil rights movement, he was very involved in both. He would give his impressions of events and often place them in a racial as well as socioeconomic context. And he talked about race a lot more than my mom did, but he would joke about it a lot. He'd make jokes about each individual child. It was an easy subject at home. He was just very lighthearted about it. I think that because of his work and his involvement in activist causes, he realized that's a very serious issue in the culture. But I think at home, he and my mother both strove to not make a big deal about it because outside of the home, some people would make a big deal about it, and they wanted to create an environment that was relaxed so we could talk about it.

[Robin describes some of the changes she experienced when her family moved from the Northeast to the Midwest.]

We moved to St. Louis when I was in the fifth grade, to an area that's a little less progressive than (the city) as far as race relations go. There I was exposed to a lot of different incidents, name calling and that sort of thing from time to time. I remember people would come up to me and say things like "Are you part nigger?" or "Are you a half breed?" You know, use really [laughs] obnoxious language. My parents always encouraged me at home when I would talk about incidents like that, to feel as though I didn't have to answer them, or I didn't have to interact with them if I didn't feel like it, and also to dismiss them and not feel that I needed to treat them politely or any other interaction with them at all. They said "Anybody who uses language like that is ignorant. We don't associate with people like that. Just forget about it."
People were always asking me what my background was like I was saying before. That kind of bugged me. Nobody else was getting asked those questions. I just felt as though people often pointed out that I was different. I think when you’re that age in 6th grade, you really want to kind of blend in with whoever you’re with. ...When I was in 5th and 6th grade, ... people knew (my background) and if I did something to make somebody mad, they would immediately start calling me names. ...When I went to 7th grade and there were a lot more Black kids in the junior high and I became friends with them. They’d ask me questions too, and sometimes I felt they asked me questions in the same kind of impersonal, not that friendly way. But I knew that they weren’t going to be racist and say something rude or follow it up with something that might precipitate an unpleasant memory for me. So I felt more comfortable with them, but I didn’t know them from the previous school, so it took quite awhile to get very friendly with those kids. I was glad once I got there. It was different.

Looking back on it, I wish now that I had just gotten more distant from my White friends that I’d followed to the junior high from my grammar school, and associated just with the Black friends that I made at the junior high, because over the years I liked them a lot better and felt that they were better people and stronger people. I felt better when I was with them. ...There wasn’t a lot of baggage on their side, whereas some of my White friends I think were from prejudiced families. I always felt I was different from (my White friends) in a way, but I wasn’t aware of it every moment. I was only aware of it when we would encounter other people who didn’t know me and started asking questions about me because they weren’t among certain tiers, I think, of the community. I was very aware that (Black friends) would use slang and different kinds of speech than I normally would, but I wouldn’t use them just to kind of like fit in or go along with them, because I felt that that would be
unnatural. I was aware that that set me apart from them. I didn’t feel that being part White made me any different from them, whereas when I would be with my White friends I would sometimes feel that being Black made me different from them because of people we would encounter along the way. But when I was with my Black friends I would sometimes feel that they had a closeness because of the way they spoke among each other that I didn’t share and didn’t try to. I lived in a completely different part of town so I wouldn’t see them unless we made a special effort to go to each other’s houses. This is still in junior high. I went to a boarding school in high school.

I knew I lived in a very different home because my parents only associated with people who were, had already passed their litmus test of being progressive and racially progressive or open minded. My father was very political. We always had lots of bumper stickers and posters and stuff up on our walls. People would come over and ask me what they meant because they were oblivious to whatever political issue we would be in favor of or against. I think my father’s being very active politically, in addition to being interracial, gave me a sense of being different, not just the racial component, but also being very political and involved.

[Robin describes how she and her parents responded to incidents of name calling, and how these experiences influence her even now.]

I think I went for several years never saying anything (when people called me names), not acknowledging, you know, that they had said anything. I’d just turn my back, or if I was with other people, I’d see if they would say anything or expect them to maybe say something in my defense. …I might feel embarrassed because I didn’t have something that I could say back to them that was, that I felt would be, you know, a good comeback. …I wouldn’t rush home and tell my parents, you know, and I’m sure many, if not most incidents by the time I
got in 6th grade were ... never something funny or particularly noteworthy, (or that I) felt like it was worth bringing up, because I don't think that I always wanted to bring it up. I can't remember any examples where I had an experience outside of the home at school, whatever, then went home and reported it because I wanted my parents' support or comfort. I was just used to it.

We had a very supportive, nurturing environment at home, but the environment outside wasn't necessarily as nurturing as the environment when we would go and visit relatives. It was a little different, and I often felt like an outsider. I think my parents really wanted to create some kind of an armor for me, you know, whereby if someone called me a name, to just dismiss them as a human being more or less, and say "Well, you don't have to deal with them ever again. Don't speak to them and don't look at them, and don't feel that you have to have any kind of interaction with them because they had already let you know that they were not worthy of your friendship or your time." I just believed (my parents) totally. I'm still the same way now. As I got older, if I had a friend who, if someone said something to me that was a racial slur, if they didn't speak up on my behalf or in my defense, which is [laughs] really putting a lot of responsibility on your friends, that was it. I decided that they'd have to be reduced to a lower tier of intimacy and friendship because I, my parents are very clear not to be friends with people who had any issues around race at all, because I think they felt I would get hurt later on. And so they, maybe unwittingly, I don't know, I think engendered a kind of almost an offensive posture on my part. Even now, if I meet somebody and they make any kind of ethnic joke, it doesn't have to be about people of color, but any other group, that's it. I just will not be friends with them.

I never identified with people that tried to coddle or be overly sensitive to people who had hangups about race, I think because of how my parents had prepared me when I was
younger. They said "Just forget about them. They don’t need sympathy. They’re making a choice, making a choice that is, you know, against the things that we stand for and believe in. Don’t be friends with them. Don’t invest any emotional energy in caring about them because they’re against you."

[Robin talks about wanting to work with people of color more, and her experiences when she is on business in the Far East.]

I’m thinking of when I went to college if there were any concerted efforts that I made to connect with people of color … and I can’t think of any special effort, but friendships of all--I believe in letting things happen naturally as opposed to feeling that I need to force something because we share a racial background. But since I’ve been in graduate school, I’ve found I’ve only been interested in working with people of color … creating friendships with faculty and students who are from target groups. That’s a new word for me. I’ve never heard (the word target used that way) before. …Having worked in business for nine years, almost exclusively with White males as my clients, worked for some White women too but not to the extent that I have with White men. I’m kind of bored with that and I feel I’ve just kind of been saturated in terms of my exposure to White culture at my work, and that I really want to make an effort to work with people of color, seek out people specifically, because I know that we’re more likely to have common values and a similar approach to the kinds of work I want to do.

(Working on my own and) running my own business, (I) was basically by myself or with my assistant, or clients or other people in general that I interacted with. Race never really came up and there were never any racial issues that were in conversation or that groups of people were talking about, or discussions. I mean it’s never come up except when I’m in (the Far East), I often tell people that I’m Black and give them music tapes of performers that
I really like and try to encourage people to have more open-minded attitudes. 'Cause I felt that the U.S. exports a lot of its racist attitudes to the Far East in the form of the kinds of television shows that they choose for distribution over there, or the kinds of news programs that they have, or choice of movies. ...People always assume I'm White (in Japan) and people ask me if I'm Chinese too since I speak Chinese. ... In terms of looking at me, I've got round eyes and I speak English and I'm from the United States, so they just assume that I'm White. ...Whereas people from China were just blown away to find out that, they just assumed that I was White, to find out that I'm Black. It's kind of fun.

I think maybe one of the reasons why I really like it (in the Far East) is that I'm in an environment that's completely not concerned with race, or my race, or their race as opposed to my race. People treat me as though I'm an outsider, being a foreigner, but they still like Americans over there. So people have always been very nice to me and I don't feel as though I'm in a racist society in the sense that, to the extent that I have those feelings from time to time here, or issues that come up during the course of a day or reading the news. When I've over there that never happens and I like that. ...And if I want to talk about some aspect of our culture that has to do with racism or sexism or whatever, I can. Friends and I have interesting conversations but I just don't have the sometimes smothered sense that I have here of being somebody who's outside of the mainstream, who has very strong objections to the mainstream in many cases, and is not really living the kind of life trying to tailor myself toward the mainstream, become more a part of the mainstream to be accepted. I mean I just kind of stand back and am critical at this point. I just think that takes a lot of energy. I think it gets tired sometimes. My father used to talk a lot about feeling tired of the struggle. He was active in the civil rights movement, etc. I don't have nearly the sense of weariness about
it, but I know what he was talking about. And when I’m in the Far East, I’m just so different in many different ways that it’s fun. It’s refreshing.

[Robin talks about choosing to identify as Black or African-American today.]

(African-American) is always how I identify my ethnicity. I don’t tend to weight my European ethnicity equally, and I think it’s because in this country people weight much more heavily on the African background because we live in a racist culture. I really don’t feel much of a sense of closeness to my European roots. That’s probably partially because if I were to go to Ireland or Germany or something where distant relatives might be, they might not be willing to acknowledge my ethnicity, or might not welcome it. And plus, I haven’t been that close with extended family on my mother’s side, and I don’t think that’s a racial thing within the family, but I think that it’s just that my father is from a big, very closely knit family and my mother’s relatives are scattered throughout Wisconsin. We’d see some sometimes, but they weren’t nearly as close.

I think of heritage here in terms of culture, aspects of culture that you feel comfortable and warm and proud of. A sense of connectedness but I think that people can create their own connections regardless of how close the blood ties or the blood lines are. Being comfortable. …For me it means identifying with aspects of both cultures that I find life supporting and nurturing, affirming etc. But I tend not to look to European culture for many of those messages. I don’t feel that there’s a predominance of those messages for me. …But at the same time, I’m aware that when biracial adults or children say things like "I’m half and half" or don’t say, or fill out (the category of) other (on forms), I feel that’s denying for some reason the Black side of their selves. And I don’t want to do that and I’m sensitive to that. …And I just want to be very clear with myself and anyone who asks me that I’m not, because I look ambiguous to some people or speak ambiguously, or have had an
experience here that’s representative more of Whites than Blacks, that I’m trying to get over and be more White than Black, ’cause that’s not where I’m at at all.

One reason why I tend not to identify myself as African-American as much as I do Black American is that I think that my family has been in this country a very long time. We don’t know where in Africa we may have originally come from, but (there are) so many practices that are tribal practices that are still going on in Africa, that are misogynist and damaging to women, that I have trouble just saying "I embrace my African heritage wholeheartedly," even though I know nothing about it. Four or five hundred years ago I had a relative from there. And I think that at least in this generation, women have a lot more freedom and choices and we’re not oppressed by a lot of feudal superstitious practices that are still prevailing in Africa against women, so that’s why I tend to feel more strongly about identify myself as being a Black American woman as opposed to an African-American. When I call myself a Black American, I feel as though it encompasses all of the reasons why people wanted to use African-American, because I support those views. It’s just that in creating the kind of other-ness by introducing the term African, I don’t feel wholly at ease yet. (Otherness) means not American basically. ...I could be talked into it. I haven’t had the conversation yet that has made me decide that I want to call myself an African. Plus it’s a mouthful and I feel that there are so many cultures in Africa, so many countries there that to call oneself an African-American it describes the continent but doesn’t tell anymore than that. I don’t know. It’s not exact enough.

[Robin talks about her current sense of community.]

I’ve made a concerted effort to, I just live in a world that I create basically. I don’t make friends or pursue friendships with people who aren’t absolutely progressive and open minded in terms of their attitudes and wouldn’t be comfortable in that kind of setting, and
don’t create that kind of setting for themselves as well. …I think that I have very sensitive antennae and I can tell when people are not entirely open or don’t have close relationships already, because I’m not interested in educating or raising the consciousness of others through friendships. If that was a job that I had as an activist or something, that would be one thing. But all of my friends are already involved in interracial relationships or had them or have friends, you know, from different races and other cultures and they don’t have to tell me about it for us to become friends. I already have a sense of who they are, the kinds of circles that they choose to travel in. …I operate very much on a nonverbal intuitive level with people, and the older I get, the more I do it. There’s just certain kinds of body language, certain kinds of nonverbal cues that I get from people at times that if they’re comfortable, if they’re interested in similar things as I am.

My community is really disparate and I’m not happy about it. …I often feel lonely, but I’m so busy that I can’t really dwell on it, so that’s probably for the best. It took me a few months to realize that I felt very isolated and [pause] … isolated (in graduate school). It took me a few months before I figured out what was going on. But it’s an all White program. There are only a couple of women faculty and they’re not women studies (or) diversity studies oriented at all. They’re very much mainstream in terms of their interests. …It’s just really a drag because at least at (the other schools that I attended), there was a large academic community and there were a lot of people of color around. Even if I didn’t know all of them or know many of them, I didn’t have a sense of being the sole representative of this particular group of which I am a member of and (that) I’m the only Black person in the program. I don’t like it because I feel as though I’m bombarded intellectually with the viewpoints of mainstream thought in the field that don’t accommodate any other views and aren’t interested in any multicultural critical perspectives. So there’s
going to be a voice that's saying "what about this and what about that?" ...(It has) to be my voice, and I think that places a lot of pressure on me, because I have to decide in every instance if I'm going to raise issues that are very important, and that there are entire departments devoted to other schools.

I think that if I had growing up more long term time living in more integrated communities, I might be better able to find and create a community for myself now. Plus my interests have been in (the Far East) for so many years that I've kind of gotten off track. ...But I feel as though I'm so entrenched in what I've been doing, and it's been very beneficial for me. I feel it's been really good. ...Sometimes I think I'd be willing to give up more of my education, professional experience in favor of more of a connected experience with Black Americans in the Black community. But I can say that now having already had the experience that I've had, and then with the place today where I feel somewhat on my own, adrift at times. But I don't know. I wouldn't be where I am now if I had a different educational and professional experience. ...So I don't know. It's just kind of a fantasy... that I think going to a college with all Black professors would be really great.

I don't think I'm able to change at this point, you know, my focus work wise or professionally. But if I were to do so, I think I'd probably have an easier time of finding, meeting, making those long term connections because I wouldn't be looking for people, but we'd just naturally meet one another. I regret that. That's kind of hard. Plus I'm married to someone who's from a background that doesn't bring a lot of people of color into the relationship either. He always has friends and people that he works with that are Black or from elsewhere. And so we make our own friends but I'd like to be more involved in the (Black) community. ...Yeah. That'd be ideal for me, that'd be great.
I feel as though I live in a White world to the extent that I don’t want to imagine giving up any more (aspects of my Black heritage) than I already have. My father’s not around, so I miss that parent, and not living in a community where his family is from. ...I miss (my father) a lot. I don’t think that by being closer, say to another relative in the family, will replace my sense of loss that I have. ...It’s like losing a major part of myself because he was such a strong influence on my values and my interests.

[Robin shares her perspective on her relationship with her husband, his family, and her children.]

I would like it if I got to see (my Black) relatives much more often, just because sometimes I have a sense of isolation, because I live in a White community and my husband is White, his family is White, his family is geographically much closer. I don’t have a strong connection to the culture that prevails in his family because they’re very emotionally distant from one another. Within their family there are a lot of typically WASP stereotypes in terms of how people relate with one another, and that’s different from the way I grew up.

My husband’s very open minded and progressive, so we have lots of interesting conversations about race and racial injustice and that sort of thing. But we don’t talk about ourselves that much. We don’t talk about how I feel being in a relationship with him because he’s White, and any perceived alienation or injustice or from his family that I might sense. We don’t really talk about it much on a personal level. ... We don’t really talk about race at all. It’s just not an issue for us. He’s totally with me and for me and sympathetic to all of views and feelings, and those are his views too. ...I would say that the emotional intimacy in our relationship is affected by his lack of history of that kind of relationship within his family. He doesn’t have the tools or the map, or any idea how to relate to me the way I’d like to relate to him. ...But my husband’s just, he’s just the way he is. He’s a product of his
upbringing. ...I feel that strongly that there’s not any artificiality there. ...(Being with my husband) reflects my experience in the world so far to a certain extent, not exclusively. ...On a symbolic level our relationship—I think just what I said. We don’t have issues around race. Just never have. I think if we had any that we wouldn’t have stayed together. ...Um, sometimes I feel as though I’m really different from his family when we’re all together, but I’m glad, because I think that his family is not being exemplary of the kind of values and goals that I set for myself, so that’s fine. I feel very good about myself around his family, but I really feel different from them. They’ve been very good to me. They’ve been very nice so I can’t complain.

I think I have a sense of heritage because I’m always trying to buy my kids stuff about Africa or Black America and tell them stories about history in ways that they probably won’t hear it in school, regrettably. I feel it’s very important that even though they’re light skinned, that they not have any misconceptions about their background. I want them to be proud of their background and see themselves as being special and different and unique, and derive self esteem and self confidence from that. That’s what I try to do for myself and I think it’s working more or less, except for some of the reservations I’ve already mentioned about feeling isolated sometimes. ...I really miss having my father around though, because he passed away seven years ago. I miss his influence and the influence that he’d have on my children, ’cause I think he’d give them a much stronger and more real sense of what our family is all about.

My youngest son [laughs], I really don’t know what he’s going to call himself when he gets older because he’s so light, that for us to try to get him to identify with his African-American heritage may be kind of a joke, at least in terms of the way he’s perceived by the rest of the community. But I don’t know. I think we’ll call him, be multiracial, something
like that. I would feel horrible if he started putting down Whites (laughs). ...He doesn't get
tanned and he's got blonde hair and blue eyes. So, my other son calls himself Black, which
is kind of fun. We've had conversations about, he said things to me like "It's interesting how
there can be one Black child and another White child in the family. How does that work?"
and things like that. ...I've gotten several comments. People ask me if I'm (my youngest
son's) mother and they're surprised, or they would say things like "Oh, I wouldn't have
guessed that he was your child" because he's so a lot lighter than I am. But I'm just amazed
that I would have a child who's so light. It's kind of a surprise. ...Everyone always says
"Oh, your son looks just like you" about the older one, and some people will say the younger
one looks just like me also, and I really laugh. Because just on the face of it we look so
obviously different, but I know they're talking about our features or similar expressions that
we have or something like that.

[Robin shares some of her perspectives about herself.]

I really revel in being able to be an independent woman and having had the
professional and financial success I've had as a Black woman in my line of work, I really
draw a lot of self esteem and self confidence from that. ...I've had a lot of freedom and been
financially independent. I really like that, and I don't think that was possible twenty or thirty
years ago. And so I really appreciate the time that I'm living in now. I enjoy having friends
from all over the world from different cultures, and the sense of ease that we have in
spending time together and mixing with one another, you know the interracial and
intercultural relationships I've had with people. I think twenty or thirty years ago they would
have been much harder to negotiate. And so I really enjoy being who I am in this time. I'm
troubled by the numerous and diverse social problems that we have in the society, and I'm
very aware of them even though I live in this wonderful enclave.
I feel that I experience things very strongly around issues involving racism and hate crimes or just unfairness in society to people because of their race. ...I'd say that (politics) play an important role in my life because I take a lot of different magazines and left magazines, and one of the reasons I decided to go back to school and not do my business anymore is because I want to be able to feel as though I was doing important work and work that would not necessarily be political work or activist kinds of work, but work I considered to be valuable given the political outlook that I have and the views that I have about the world. ... I also feel frustrated that I'm not able to do what I feel would be necessary for me to really make an effort to try to change things myself. I'm just not about to change my life or uproot my life in such a way as to go there and try to do something to help. I don't know. It might be a futile gesture ultimately anyway. ...It's hard. It hurts sometimes (pause). I feel as though there's some hypocrisy there on my part and there's not much I can do about it right now. Maybe in the future I'll have financial means or professional expertise to try to do ... to change those realities.

When I hear people say they're against affirmative action and they're worried about reverse discrimination, what I think they're saying is they feel that Whites have certain rights in our society that others are threatening and taking away from them, and they don't feel that equality is, you know, a virtuous goal to pursue. ...I often end up getting into a very long involved discussion with (people), trying to talk them out of their views by giving examples of cases in which they're wrong, or trying to extend their argument in a logical manner so they can see that what they're saying is racist or that what they're saying comes out of a sense of racial superiority or something like that. ... I kind of enjoy those conversations as long as I know they're not going to become vindictive or take a personal or hostile turn, and they never do. And I don't usually enter in those conversations unless both of us are kind of
enjoying it, arguing in a friendly way. I don’t feel as though I’ve got a crusade that I’m always trying to get in discussions with people that bring them around to my view.

[Robin talks about her sense of self given her racial heritage and her experiences.]

I really appreciate my background because I feel as though I’ve had an experience that’s been very different from most people’s. I really love both sides of my family very much and I’ve gotten a lot of things from both sides. I feel very lucky that the two families have been very accepting, in favor of my parents’ relationship, and I’ve gotten a lot of, I think, positive things from that. I like having the freedom to kind of go between both cultures as I choose and if I had to make a choice between being with all White or all Black that I think I would choose to be all Black, because I think there are so many versions that White people in this country carry historically because of their treatment of other races that I’d rather avoid that. And so I feel I get off the hook a little bit because of my father’s side of the family. There’s that experience there and I really think there’s a richness of a closeness in relationships in African-American culture that I’ve experienced that, to me at least, recommends it more highly as a culture that I would choose. I mean of course there are incredible social problems going on right now, but just in general I think that it’s great to have the benefit of both and the diversity of experiences that I’ve had, because I’m open to people of all cultures, and have relationships with people from all different cultures and stuff like that. And I think that my background is maybe more predisposed to being open and sensitive to other groups.

I think that I don’t have a sense of uncomfortableness that sometimes creeps into relationships between people of other races that come from a self consciousness about being different. I like that. That doesn’t mean that I feel comfortable with every White person or every Black person, but I think just in general race is not a factor in the relationships that I
have with people. I think that there are a lot of people that say "Oh, this is my White friend, this is my Black friend. I can’t do this or that when I’m with this person because they might feel uncomfortable, or I need to be more sensitive when I’m with them." I don’t think that I think about things like that at all. I feel free to reject aspects of either culture that I don’t like.

I don’t even try (to make sense of who I am today). There’s so many different interests and different … and different ingredients that have gone into making up who I am, especially when I try to think of myself in terms of my philosophy or my spiritual beliefs. ...(My spirituality) is a dynamic process that I’ve been involved in. …I’d like to spend more time working on the spiritual side of myself, but right now with two small children, I do the most that I can. Sometimes I go to the Community Church. Sometimes I go to Quaker meeting. There are a lot of things about (Community) church that I like. …(The messages I get are) forgiving others, forgiving members of your family for things that you feel they did to you that may have negatively affected your life or your views of yourself. Forgiving yourself for your shortcomings and the inability to live up to your expectations of yourself. Accepting others. Not promulgating a specific religious view, but accepting all people as being equal and respecting their beliefs. And we’re just trying to avoid self righteousness and being critical of others, ’cause as I said, everybody really for the most part is doing the best they can, given the set of abilities and experiences that they carry with them. I mean it’s hard work but I try to remember those things as I … let those things guide me so that I don’t dwell on negativity or negative aspects of things that occur during the day. It’s hard but those are things that I take seriously. …Just try to focus on all the blessings that we have and when things don’t go well, try not to just jump into the fray with my shirt sleeves rolled up and try to get things to work out my way. I don’t feel that that’s the way I want to go.
Since I am from multiracial background I just feel I can pick and choose as I see fit, and because I've studied China and the Far East a lot. I read books about Taoism and Zen and Tibetan Buddhism and just try to come up with a sense of myself that feels comfortable to me. I don't feel as though I'm trying to make myself into fit a stereotype or a view of how a women today should be. I think I have some silly issues that we all have about control or expectations that are too high of myself or some of those things. And maybe if I were in therapy for a long time I'd figure out that I was trying to overcompensate or whatever for being a minority in society. But in general, I feel there's so many rich aspects of many different cultures and things that I've been exposed to, that I just try to incorporate them all together into something that feels good and fits in with how I want to live and become a person that I hope to be by the time I'm through.

Profile of Participant Number Three

Agnes Barnes is a 29 years old, lower-middle class woman. Her mother is White (German) and her father (deceased) was Black (African-American). She is married to a Black man, and identifies as African-American.

[Agnes talks about her memories about growing up.]

I really didn't think about (who I was), too much at all. Earlier than five, I don't really remember any kind of discussion about it. ...The earliest time that I remember having an issue about being Black or White is visiting my grandmother in Florida when I was about five years old. I don't know if it was just my perception as a child..., but I don't know if it was her age that made her seem kind of scary and stand-offish to me. ...The whole family went. (I) sensed a tension about my parents being there and us kids, being as my mother was White. But I don't know if that was just my perception or whether that was actual reality.
...It was just like a silence, a deafening silence as they say, that I noticed, or I thought I noticed. I still don’t know.

But it wasn’t really until, I would say junior high school and high school, where it really became an issue for me, when I really started asking questions. Because my father always made sure that we grew up in neighborhoods where there was a mixture of races. We attended a church, Unitarian church which had also a mixture and it was very acceptable for biracial relationships and children and all that. (My first neighborhood) was great... mostly Puerto Rican and Black. ...The weirdest thing was not speaking Spanish and having people come up to me [laughs], asking me questions in Spanish. The elementary school I went to was fantastic. ...It was a nice time period growing up too, down there. There wasn’t a lot of racial tension like what was happening in the rest of the country. I don’t know why that was, ’cause I don’t know if I just didn’t notice it as a child. But we all played together and it was great.

I remember wondering, I guess around six or so, why my mother wasn’t Black. And I remember, I realized that I’m different than the other kids. My hair is different. I didn’t really fit in. I didn’t feel like I fit in with the Black kids in the neighborhood. And I don’t know if that was just my own thing or if it was something projected from them. There’s even just the physical difference. Then having a White mother and just being in a different kind of family situation. (My) hair was straighter. My hair was straight [laughs] when I was younger. Light skinned obviously. I didn’t talk like the, I knew another language or at least could understand another language. And just culturally. Like I said, we did a lot of travelling, and just a different kind of view. The foods, the music and just a lot of cultural differences. ...Oh, it was terrible. When I was younger it was terrible. Now I love it. It’s great [laughs]. But no, ’cause I think children basically want to fit in, basically be like
everybody else. And certainly then it wasn't as celebrated. It just wasn't as celebrated as it is now. I think the only place where it was celebrated was in my church. I felt very lonely and out of place. And I was really on my own a lot.

I knew that my father was somehow involved in some aspect (of the Civil Rights Movement), just because of his political leanings. He was a social worker, so he was dealing with stuff on a day to day basis. But my mother wasn't involved at all. We had in some ways a very sheltered kind of life because we would spend the school year here, just living day to day, going to church and doing stuff. And then as soon as school was over we'd just go over to Germany or something for the summers. My life was basically going to school, coming home, eating dinner and that was [laughs] basically it. ... Not a lot of conversation about day to day or important kind of issues or anything like that. Looking back now, I had no idea other than the little snippets on the television, what was going on with the Civil Rights Movement or any of that stuff. ...I never really had any thoughts about the events that were going on because it didn’t connect to the world that I was living in at all.

(There was) more of a variety in the second neighborhood, more of an interaction with the White people and more Asians also. The junior high school was in Chinatown. There was always an international flavor in my growing up. Since my father travelled so much, he had a lot of friends from around the world, from Sweden and Germany, and Paris and Spain. They’d come to visit from Cuba, Africa. And so for me it was a natural kind of thing to grow up in a neighborhood that was really diverse. And the only real tension I felt was between the Italians and everybody else. ...There was no major confrontation. Like we didn’t rumble or anything [laughs]. We used to play separately and we’d look at each other and call each other names from afar, and do that kind of thing. ...I don’t remember any racial epithets at all. The usual mother fucker, asshole, that kind of stuff [laughs]. But I
don’t remember ever hearing nigger. We certainly didn’t say wop or any of that kind of stuff. It was never like that. There was always this unspoken really kind of tension.

(In Sunday school), there was really an emphasis on uniqueness, and how special each one of us is, (laughs) … the whole thing. …We celebrated every holiday. We’d have seders. I used to lead the thing. We celebrated every holiday. We were really in tune with different cultures. …(I learned) tolerance, I think for, for other cultures. Appreciation of other cultures, particularly music and food. Just really a celebration of diversity. That was the main, that was the main thing. Also coupled with social action, ’cause there was a lot. For me, that was the emphasis of the church is social action, and as teenagers we had our Liberal Religious Youth, the LRY. We would participate in like the Nestle boycott and the anti-apartheid movement at that time. It was mostly like that.

I would say, I mean this was from really the beginning up until age nineteen, twenty, yeah (I identified more with White culture). I mean it meant that my friends obviously were mostly White. The men I dated were mostly White. And not the men I was attracted to, but the men I dated. I mean the music I was into. …So the music, the people I hung out with basically. … I didn’t really think about it, so it wasn’t a source of confusion for me until I would say, in my early to late teens, and especially hanging out with (my best friend) Suzanne and her brother who was my boyfriend at that point. I hung out with their family a lot in ’Jersey and they were Jewish, not practicing, but they certainly had that culture. …So I think that I just kind of tried to melt into the background more as opposed to establishing any particular identity.

In high school, (I) hung out with the parkies which were the hippies. I was the only Black person in that group. And I remember a lot of the Black students belonged to the Black Student Union, and that was really the first time that I even heard anything like that. I think
it was more me than them, but I really shied away from them, 'cause I really didn’t know
how to act or if I was going to be judged a certain way. ...I think that a lot of it was just
fear. I had been dating this White guy, was a very safe like kind of relationship. There were
no surprises. And I had never dated a Black guy. And the way they approached me, the
very verbal kind of "hey baby" kind of thing, freaked me out, 'cause it also reminded me of
in elementary school, (when a group of guys) surrounding me. It just made me feel
uncomfortable. I was the unknown. Everybody (in high school) was actually pretty cool
about it. And even the Black students, even though I wouldn’t hang out with them, we’d pass
each other in the hall you’d say "hi" like you do anyone else (laughs). ...The usual teenage
stuff was more of a concern than any race issue for me at that point, other than the issue of
boys.

[Agnes describes how she began thinking about race differently once she reached
her late teenage years.]

(If someone had asked me who I was as child) I would have said African, Black and
White, period. ... It wasn’t until probably in my late teens that I really started identifying as
African-American. As I was out in the world more and was exposed more to the issues of
being Black and being White, that’s when you have to make a choice, then you do basically.
But up until that point, I think I was very sheltered because there was such a mixture. ...I
would say in high school (I started naming myself as African-American), when they’d have
you fill out those forms when I started high school. I used to screw 'em up and fill both of
them out [laughs]. Like how dare they make me choose. (When that changed), I think that
just really coming to the realization that my skin is definitely a different color. And as I was
getting out in the world with different jobs, part-time jobs and things, I really got a sense that
other people didn’t view me as just a person, that I was this Black woman. I think that’s
probably what happened. ...So it wasn't really until I started, the dating issue started coming up, that I started thinking about (race).

Then as I got older in high school and stuff, it became an issue with my father because, he didn’t really like who I was dating. ...Well also, just as an indication, I used to talk back to him a lot, and be very articulate in my expressions. And I think that the whole issue of language definitely (was) part if what he meant. And I think it’s also part of what made me stand out from the other Black kids, the way I spoke. ...I identified, I think, more with my mother. She wasn’t as strict a disciplinarian. She wasn’t quite as scary as my father, and she was a woman. I really felt more comfortable being around White people. There wasn’t a threat or a challenge. I always somehow felt that Black people didn’t accept me because I was mixed, because I spoke differently and looked a different way. But it was mostly around the area of friendship. ...It took (my father) a while to get used to the idea that I was dating White guys. (He’d say) "You can’t go out with that person. You’ve got to stay home. You’re grounded" kind of stuff. It was never "He’s White, you can’t do that." Especially when I was dating White guys he’d accuse me of being too White and this and that. ...I’m not really exactly sure what he meant by that. Maybe because I was hanging out mostly with White people, as opposed to Black people. ... (This) just happened once. ...We were in the middle of a fight and he said it. (I said) "What is that supposed to mean?" and probably just continued fighting.

I didn’t (make sense of father’s comment). I didn’t at all. ...It was a source of confusion for a really, really long time, because I didn’t really have anything to compare it with. I mean it was just who I was, the way he raised me basically. As far as I’m concerned, he and my mother, it was really him. He was the decision maker in the family. He chose to raise me in a certain way. I wasn’t the one who married my mother. So maybe
it was his own frustration that he was dealing with, rather than me specifically. But for a long time, it was just this confusion, 'cause you don’t really know where you fit in. (I) was very comfortable around White people for a really long time, and not comfortable around Black people. And then it switched. I was really comfortable around Black people and White people. ...But most of my friends at this point are still, I mean close friends are White, my best girl friend.

I was dating White men and nobody really said anything to me about it, and I don’t know why the change came about, but I just started feeling that, why am I only dating White guys? A question started arising for me. And then I started doing a lot more reading on African-American history, really realized the political implications of interracial dating. ...I think also like my first husband and I grew up in the church together. Our parents had known each other before we were born, and he was biracial, but he had blond hair and blue eyes. And we started teaching together. ...and so we hooked up. I was about 19 years old, and really started talking a little bit more about it. And I think that I felt one of the reasons we clicked really well was that I thought, well great, this guy isn’t really White. He looks White [laughs] but he’s not really White. He can dance (laughs). But I think that was really when things started, I really started thinking about it more.

I was also started working in a record store which was really interesting. And I was at one point dating the manager, but there was a musician there, a Black musician who I had such a crush on. ...And I think that’s when I really started thinking about the differences, 'cause there was the cultural thing, like in music you listen to. I think that’s when things, around age nineteen, when things really started coming up. And then my first husband and I got married and we moved up here and I started going to school and started studying African-American Studies, and that’s when things were really jelled more. All the stuff that had just,
ideas or miscellaneous thoughts that had been floating around, just began to jell. ...(I started thinking about) the friends that I had, the men that I dated, why I was attracted to them, why I was scared of dating a Black man in my earlier years, ... I think that my tastes were just changing. I think I was just maturing. ...I don’t really know if I did come up with specific answers at that point. I don’t think that it was until a few years later that I really started thinking about it. I think I started thinking more of the political implications of it, more than anything else. ...I started thinking about, especially when my husband (and I) were married, (about) children. What did it mean to produce a child in a biracial, and I knew for me, I knew the confusion that I had felt. And I certainly didn’t want that. ...I wanted to have brown children, absolutely (pause). And at this point it doesn’t matter to me because we have friends who are, who are both Black, and their child comes out very light skinned. So obviously that could definitely (happen) in my case, and it doesn’t really matter. But I definitely want to have brown children because I did not want them to go through what I went through in terms of the confusion. ...(I also thought about) what it meant for a Black man to see me with a White man.

And I think that what probably had the major impact was learning more about African-American history and learning who I was and where my place was in society and in history. ...I always felt like there was something missing, and I didn’t know what it was. ...And I think that the thing that the history did for me was put being Black in the U.S. in a context. I mean we had all heard about slavery, amorphous kind of thing that you hear about as a child, but really delving into the experience of slavery and the political implications and the social implications was never really dealt with. ...In terms of having children, knowing that if I have a Black son, there’s definitely going to be some heavy stuff that he will have to go through just being Black and male in this country. If I were married to a White man and
had a light skinned son, that would also be for me a political implication because it would be in a sense watering down the African-American, which I don’t think needs to happen. It’s kind of a double edged sword. Because here I am half Black and half White, but I think that identifying with one’s culture and wanting to preserve that is really important. It doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ve got to separate yourself entirely. You can’t do that in this world. It’s not a way to live. But I think that it’s important to preserve that. It’s very important.

I think that learning the history, that kind of gave me a place. I knew where I stood in this in this society. ...It was just great. It was confusing at first. I’m like “why didn’t I learn this? Why was this not a part of my life?” And of course that brings up questions of my father not really talking about where he came from, and certainly not learning it at school, other than Sunday school. So I was angry. There was a lot of anger because I didn’t learn this until I was an adult. But it was also very exciting. It was like all this stuff started clicking in. It’s like I don’t really know specifically what it was, but there’s just a sense of comfortableness that you feel. It’s like yeah, yeah, identity really, identify with different things.

It was definitely a transformation because up until that point, especially given the environment that I grew up in, (I) really believed that it didn’t really matter who you dated or married. But I think that that was a little naive because I think that growing up certainly in the United States, it’s very much an issue. And I don’t think there’s really a way to get around it. I mean part of me was certainly confused and angry that that was the way it had to be, but it was also kind of comforting to finally get to that point, to that decision. Now, whether it’ll change again, I don’t know (laughs). ...It was fairly quick. Certainly once I came to that realization, it was fairly quick transf--say within a couple months really. So I
think it probably had already kind of been there. ... (It had started) before I came up here to study, which is why I chose to major in African-American studies. It solidified up here.

...And also just especially moving here, really being made aware of the difference. Like I said, in New York it was a little easier to get away with just being a person, as opposed to being a Black person. ...And (being married to a man who looked White) was fine in New York. When we came up here, it was a problem. I mean I even got from professors who I would hang out with, "Well, that's what you get for hanging out with that White boy," from Black professors. And when we'd go into a place, we'd get looked at.

(My marriage) was very difficult, and I think that he also had a lot of stuff that he didn't fully deal with about being very light skinned but really identifying himself as Black. ...(The comments) certainly made me become more aware of having this person, or being with this person who looked White. It wasn't the kind of thing that you could say "Well, he's really Black" and it shouldn't have had to say. We knew that that's not even the point. That's not the issue. He shouldn't have to say that. So it made me feel angry, but then it also, I mean all the other stuff came up about us in our relationship that kind of just ultimately ended the marriage. But that was definitely an issue. ...I don't know if I could really, if I were to marry again, if I could marry, or be in a life time commitment with a White person. There's so much cultural difference that it would be very difficult, because it would be like shutting a part of myself off that was already cut off for such a long time.

[Agnes describes how her change in awareness has affected her relationship with her best friend who is White.]

It's interesting now because my best girlfriend at the time, Suzanne, when I really was identifying more with White people and not choosing Black or White, we got along very well, became very close. And it's only in the last, I would say five or six years, where identity
issue for me has evolved, that tension between us has occurred. ...Suzanne and I can't really even talk about it. ...She came to my wedding reception (for my second marriage). (There were) a lot of Black people here. ...The next day ... Suzanne was upset. She was in a bad mood, upset about something as usual. And she mentioned something that a friend of mine who was Black insulted her. I was like "Really? That's a shame." Like I should take sides or I should do something. So (I said) "What did you say to him?" (laughs). But she said "I didn't say anything." I said "Well Suzanne, if somebody insults you, you say (something), it doesn't matter if they're Black." But she feels very intimidated, so that kind of developed in our friendship.

It certainly hurts and a lot of it for me, is not just a race thing, but is a woman thing. Because we used to have this relationship where we could tell each other anything and talk about everything and anything. And then when I got married and the friction started to occur. She really closed off a little bit, and then we got back together. But still, like she won't call just to say hi or do things like that. I find myself being the one making the effort more. ...So there was just a lot of game playing, and not just a race thing but a woman thing that I felt was not cool at all. ...I mean I understand the historical differences for our experience, and it never really occurred to me the impact the history of being a Black woman in this country, would have on the relationship with this woman. And I'm not really clear exactly the impact, but I'm sure there's something in there about what it means to be a Black woman in this society, what it means to be a White woman, and the way we're seen differently. That sort of has something to do with some of the conflict that we're going through.
My heritage doesn't come up specifically about me (with friends), but certainly Black people talk about White people a lot. And so it comes up in that sense, and certainly when you put it in its historical context, I mean what they're saying is not untrue. But it doesn't come up specifically, and they were at our reception, most of them, and so they saw my family. A lot of them, I mean not all of them, I mean none of them are 100% African, so they understand that. It's never an issue. It's never a personal issue between us.

There's no conflict at this point for me in terms of dealing with the German and then the African-American in that sense. I mean I fully identify myself as African-American. I look it, well I look different things, but that's basically it. ...Well, I think a lot of people think I'm Hispanic, because of my hair and the mustache and everything, the sideburns (laughs). 'Cause I used to get that a lot as a child. But certain other, most other African-Americans know I'm African-American. So I don't really think about it all that much. When I deal with the German side of me, it's mostly around food again, language, when I speak to my relatives over there, and certainly when I interact with my mother.

I think (identifying as African-American) has more to do with the community that I feel most comfortable in, that I identify with more. I understand and I know that I am also half German, but it's not something that has a lot to do with my day to day existence. It comes up more when I go to Germany and when I'm able to speak German. But in terms of who I am, definitely Black African-American, just because that's the culture that I live now, the food that I eat, the music that I listen to, the people that I'm around, my political beliefs certainly. ...Certainly in my business when I have to subcontract things out, like if I need an illustrator, if I need some other service performed, I try and seek out African-American businesses and I make a conscious effort to do that. And I try and cultivate more of an
African-American clientele than otherwise. I would say that day to day that that was basically it. ...A lot of that has to do with just the fact that I think that economic empowerment is very important in the African-American community. I think that that’s the one area that really needs to be cultivated more. ...See for me, I relate a lot of the relating that I do in terms of the identity is through culture, different cultural aspects. So the art that I either create or look at and appreciate, the music that I listen to, the people that I hang with, that’s too much a part of who I am. It just feels like this is where I am, this is where I should be. This is where I should have been.

(From the community I get) acceptance to a certain extent. I don’t feel self conscious about who I am a lot of the times. That allows you just to be. (I am accepted to) a certain extent. ...So no I don’t, I certainly feel comfortable being over in Germany and being around the family, it’s just not the same kind of satisfaction soul-wise that I feel identifying as African-American. ...For me, so much of being African-American is just about a rhythm of living that’s totally different. If I had to describe it someone who is not African-American, I don’t really know how I could do that coherently. But it’s just a rhythm of living that you just are. ...A certain sense of freedom too, because I think that growing up--first of all growing up with the legacy of slavery and coming through it and surviving it are very strengthening point. It’s a very strengthening sense, and I think that if I were European that I would also have a legacy of slavery but that would be a lot more negative. I think I would feel really guilty or whatever. ...It’s definitely the dominant force in my life. And I don’t know if that would be different if I lived over there, if I had grown up in Germany or live there. ...I don’t know if I had grown up there, if I would have identified, how I would have identified. Not a lot of Black people over there, and certainly not where my family is (laughs).
[Agnes talks about her racial identity in relation to her gender identity, and in her relationship with her husband and mother.]

At this point, I don’t really separate the race and gender thing. I don’t think there is any way you can do it. I mean I’m a woman and I’m a Black woman. ...Being Black is for me right now the most important thing. Someone asks me "Are you a feminist?" There are some things that I do believe in, but if it came down to say, working solely for the women’s movement or solely for both African-American struggle, than it would be the African-American struggle, ’cause I don’t think that Black women can afford to separate themselves from men as White women seem to want to do in the movement. ... (Being a Black woman) gives me a certain amount of strength, especially knowing the history of our existence in the U.S. but also in Africa and around the world, of being independent, always being workers from the day we got here to, in the United States we were always workers. ... We were given the opportunity to have that kind of sense of self through work that I think White women want. But it’s a source of strength to me to be a Black woman to know that I can survive. It means that I have certain responsibilities to Black people in general, looking after children whether they’re mine or not, making sure that the community is held together in whatever way, whether it’s active or passive. That’s basically it.

I don’t know (laughs) how I manage (my gender and race). I really don’t know. I think that certainly in my personal life here it’s definitely an issue. And I think a lot of it just has to do with wanting to be identified as a person, as opposed to being stuck in a role of wife or mother. I’m not a mother yet, but that whole role kind of pigeon hole. I mean I would rather have someone like a 50/50 thing (with my husband), where we’re sharing more of a friendship, as opposed to the stereotypical husband/wife, male/female kind of role playing. So that’s a struggle. At the same time, I really enjoy some of the things associated
with the typical or stereotypical role of being, well, I love to cook. I like having a clean house so I clean it. I don’t like cleaning it but I enjoy those kinds of things like being around children or the nurturing aspect of being a woman. But there are times when I just wish it wasn’t expected. I think that’s where a lot of the conflict comes in. ...I think (my day to day life) more has to do with being a woman than being a Black woman or biracial.

(My relationship with my husband is) interesting, never dull. The race issue is definitely one that comes up for various reasons. He grew up in a Black neighborhood in New York in the 40’s, at a very different time. The colored and White signs were still up, the segregation, ... the Civil Rights Movement, getting beat up by cops, the whole bit. So his whole experience is very different. It’s been interesting. I said that I want to go to Europe and I want to take him. He’s never been to Europe. ...And for a while he was like “I’m not interested. I’ve seen the books.” And I think a lot of it had to do with just being steeped in African-American culture and wanting to stay that way. But at the same time, I felt that that closed him off to experiences, and certainly the fact that I am half White and my family is German, that’s something that he’s got to accept period. Has been interesting. I mean in the beginning it was difficult. I mean my skills at writing and just dealing with White people in general are better. They’re just some things that he did not have access to or privilege of.

I mean this is my own thing ... I think that he was also concerned about what his friends would think about who I was and stuff. ...I’m just trying to think why he would act the way he did, and that’s really the only answer that I could come up with without saying he’s just a bigot. ...Also when we get into fights and things he’ll call me a fascist and a Nazi. ...So I mean we both know the buttons to push on each other. When that happened, I told him straight up “No, not cool at all. You either deal with who I am or you don’t,
...But I think that it's more them having to deal with their own conflict about being attracted to, being married to these Black and White women. I think it’s more their own having to adjust to that as opposed to their being bigoted, because I mean they’re certainly not. If they really were we wouldn’t really be there. And I think that their adjustment to who they’re with is where that’s coming from. ...I just basically tell him how I feel when he makes comments that I feel are derogatory, like calling me a Nazi when I’m saying something. Because I can’t tell him that that’s wrong. That’s something that he’s got to work out. But I can tell him how I feel about it. But it’s not like an either/or thing. Like if you don’t change than I’m outta here. It can’t be that. ...I get totally defensive (when he says derogatory things) just because of when you’re in a fight and you’re in, it’s like boom. But I feel strong enough in who I am and I accept that part and celebrate it also certainly. In the beginning it hurt, but at this point it’s like look, this is who I am. Deal with it, basically, and if you can’t, but that’s who I am. I enjoy it.

I guess one thing also is the discussions (with my mother that I had) as I was going through this transformation of learning about the history. I think it was probably a little difficult for her in the beginning, but we really, we sat down and we talked about things. I lent her books, and she started to become a lot more aware and open, because I don’t think she really had much of a sense at all of what it meant. She’s from Germany. There are really few Black people there. I don’t think she really knew, or fully knows what it means to be Black in this country. She’s in tune with a couple of the dynamics, but (she’s) still very, very sheltered in terms of what it really means. Of course there’s really no way she could fully know what it means, but I think that the conversations that she and I had really were good because in a sense, we were both learning together. ...I made a conscious effort not to make (our discussions) confrontational or anything, 'cause I mean, I still love my family in
Germany very much. They're still a part of my life and obviously so is my mother. So while I may not identify with being part German or part White, it's certainly an issue in my life, and I certainly appreciate it. ...That's something that I often think about because I, just being a Black woman myself, the dynamic is very different from being a White woman. And I think that I probably would not have had as much confusion about choosing between Black or White, because I think that if my mother had been a Black woman she would have been a little stronger, more independent.

[Agnes talks about her feelings about the lack of community she sometimes feels and how her experience compares with that of other African-Americans.]

Being up here and not making friends easily outside of when I was in school, and now outside of whatever work environment I have, is difficult. It's not like there aren't enough African-American people in (this area). It's just not as much of a community as I thought it would be, which is interesting. ...I think part of the reason also that I don't have a lot of friends up here is that it's difficult for me to meet people and to really open up. And a lot of that is because of various insecurities. And some of that may be related to as a child, not really being, not really fitting in any particular place, so it just becomes extra hard for me. I think I make it hard. But I also am not interested in just cultivating casual friendships, 'cause it takes so much time to really maintain a friendship that I want it to be something that's solid. Which is probably also why I haven't made as many friends up here. I have acquaintances yes, but people who I can just really hang out with, no. I've been up here basically to be in school and I've been working. ...Probably my own lack of time really to develop and nurture friendships and deeper friendships (prevents me from being part of the community). ...My base is not here. My base is in New York. ...It's nerve wracking at
times, 'cause there are times when I don't want to be the wife, I don't want to be the business woman. I just want to relax. And so I go to New York.

(My identity) is an evolving process. I think that I’m in a comfortable place right now just because my feelings of identifying as African-American and actually looking African-American kind of go hand and hand, and that’s for me was a jump. Because before, looking African-American and not feeling particularly welcome or comfortable in an entirely African-American community was a source of conflict. But now it’s just it’s very comfortable. ...It’s fine (being around African-Americans) because I know that I have a different experience from them. Even the experience that my father had, or certainly must have had, even though I don’t know all of the specifics of it, it was very different. So when he accused me of being too White, I look back on it now and it really doesn’t mean that much. It’s like this has been my experience. I grew up at a time where schools were integrated. I had all these different multicultural, multiethnic people around me. That’s just my experience. I feel very comfortable with it. I love it.

[Agnes gives her perspective on the impact that her process of racial identity development has had on herself and her life.]

I think there would be a lot more confusion on my part (if I hadn’t gone through the process). ...First of all, I’m a survivor and I did go through the process that was necessary, 'cause if I had not gone through it, I think I'd be a lot crazier than I am now so I think it’s very important. ...If you don’t know who you are, you keep going to, trying different things randomly hoping to fit something that kind of feels comfortable. And I think that’s what I was doing for a really long time, and I mean I see it just in my school career, not really knowing what I wanted to do. I knew when I was in second grade that I wanted to be a teacher, but that was never nurtured, certainly not in my family. So I started gravitating
towards these different areas. I was in a theater company for a while and did costumes. I went to a fashion school and I was just hitting, trying to keep hitting these places that I thought would make me feel comfortable as a person, as a human being. And I just kept missing. So the decisions that I made with my life around school took me a long time. I took I took about five years off before coming back to school to do African-American Studies, and that for me was a turning point. Not having a sense of identity really affects every aspect of whatever decisions you make, the people you date, whatever. ...Whether I chose to identify as African-American or as biracial or whatever, (it) was important for me to go through that process. It means that I can now move on into other areas of my life, because I think that having questions of identity and really trying to find an identity takes up a lot of time, whether conscious or subconscious. And now I can move on and actually be effective and be, have more of a contribution to like the African-American community, to my personal life.

(If I had lighter skin and straighter hair) I think it would be ten times more confusion than what I went through, 'cause I see friends going through it. I think that that would be really difficult. I mean at least I can fit into the Black community just on looks alone. But if I, for instance had blonde hair and blue eyes like my first husband did, I think that Black people would certainly not accept me as readily. I mean definitely not. And I think that being in the position of being able to pass is also painful because first of all denying a part of you, and part of it is because you’re not allowed to explore the African-American cause you weren’t accepted by that community. But then also being around White people and hearing what they have to say about Black people, which happens a lot, and that I think would be just totally, I don’t know if I could deal with it. I know a lot of people who are dealing with it successfully.
(The process) has kind of levelled off right now because I have come to the identity of being African-American. But I think there are still areas of my German heritage that I need to explore. I mean it's interesting to me at this point because I have come to the identity of African-American there's not as much confusion going on. I'm able to lead a relatively normal life [laughs] and still continue going through the process. And I think that going through the process has to do with wherever I am in my life and who I'm interacting with, what my job is. ...I think if I were going to be more steeped in a German culture that that would certainly spawn some kind of different movement. My sister for instance is getting ready to move to Germany next year, and if I were going to do that, if I were going to be around German people, I would start wondering, well what does it mean to be part German? Who are these people and what does it mean for them to be German?

As I was going through the process of learning more about myself, I did shut off the German European part of me. It was just something that I had to do in order to fully concentrate on what I was going through. ...But I'm at the point right now where I want to see (my German relatives) again. They're not getting any younger. My grandmother is getting pretty old there. I had a cousin die in the last few years. We didn't know that he was really sick or anything. ...It was like wow. For me it was a significant event because it's like, well I knew this person but I didn't really know this person. Some of that has to do with the relationship that my mother has with her family. But I just thought that I didn't really know this person. Here I am, forging ahead in this new identity and stuff, denying this as I did before. So at some point there's some kind of balance that is gonna have to be reached, and I'm in the process now of reestablishing contact with them and keeping in touch. ...There's still a lot that I have to learn (about) the history of Germany. Whether I'll ever get to that point or not I don't know, but certainly would make sense for me to do that. I mean
I've done all I could to learn all about the African, that part. ...Exactly how the German part affects me I'm not really sure. Because I would think that for instance, when I well (being) up here and being in a city like New York is different, but when I'm in a group of White people in the city I don't feel real uncomfortable. I feel I can relate to different to White people easily. I'm sure if I didn't have that German part of me, that would be a lot more difficult because I wouldn't be used to growing up around White people.

I think after going through, and still going through the quest if you will, for a sense of identity, I value that experience and I'm glad that I went through it. But at this point it's also very important for me just to be a human being. I think that, well not to minimize the process that I've gone through, and certainly not to minimize where I am right now in terms of identifying as African-American, I think it's really important for people to really be people, and to accept one another as they are. Celebrate your particular heritage and your particular history, but also be accepting of other people, because they have as much right, their history and culture is just as much valid as yours is. And that for me is where I'm going. Now it's really difficult to do. It's not easy to do (laughs). ...But what I find is that when I'm in a position, when I'm not feeling the most magnanimous or giving, it's usually because I feel bad about something in my life. So if I'm putting somebody else down, it's usually because I'm unhappy about whatever aspect of my life. And I think realizing that other people do that too is really important. So when somebody calls you a nigger or calls you a bad name, realizing that person is very unhappy. And rather than getting on the defensive, really realizing that person is unhappy and they've got a search to go through. Whether they go through it or not they need to do that. But that's basically where I am, just trying to be human as opposed to being race specific. ...I'm trying to be human. Trying to be a good human, I should say, is the task because it's not always easy to turn the other cheek as they
say, or really be loving and giving all the time to be honest. It’s not easy to do. But I don’t separate the two.

I think (looking to explore German side) will probably push me further ahead in this search really for a balance in my life and all those things. It goes back to wanting to be a human being and that isn’t necessarily one or the other. I feel a lot more comfortable being African-American because the cultural stuff is just a lot more open and familiar than the with the German. But I also enjoy German culture very much. I realize I am half German and half African-American, and I can identify more with one, but I cannot forget the other part.

Profile of Participant Number Four

David Stein is 23 years old. His biological mother was Black and Hispanic. His biological father was White. He was adopted at age 14 months into a White, Jewish household. His adoptive mother is White (German) and his adoptive father (deceased) was White (European and Russian). He lives at home with his adoptive mother and describes himself as middle class. He identifies as White. When he speaks of his mother, father, or family in his profile, he is referring to his adoptive family, unless otherwise indicated.

[David talks about his identity and some of the aspects of his early environment.]

Probably when I was first able to know what that means (I was told I was adopted). I don’t remember the age or I don’t remember if my mom sat me down and said that I was adopted. I guess she told me when I was kind of young because I knew all my life. …I guess because of the family I was (adopted) into, I never considered anything else but that I was White. I wasn’t treated any differently. (Some of) the kids in the high school I went to (would ask) every once in a while "Are you half Black?" or something like that. And that
would be the only time where someone would come up with that. ...Relatives of the family never, never thought of it like that at all.

(Hebrew) was my first language. My mom, from the day that she had me, would speak Hebrew with me. And all my relatives from her side of the family would speak Hebrew with me too. And for six months back in 1972 or something, I don’t remember the year, I went to Israel, went to kindergarten and we spoke Hebrew there. I’ve been (to Israel) like seven times already in my life. ...We weren’t religious people in that we didn’t go to church on Sunday. We did for a while. On Saturday we went. I remember at the time that it was something that would drive me nuts. ...I didn’t understand why all of a sudden we started to go to synagogue, to schul. ...Then all of a sudden my parents got this wonderful idea to send me to Sunday school. Now that on top of it took the cake, ... no cartoons (on Saturday) and then on Sunday to get up early too to go to school. I didn’t think that was right (laughs).

[David describes some of the changes that happened after his father died when he was age eight and his response to the changes.]

People thought that I was so upset (when my father died), that I was crazy and things like that, and the next thing I find out is that I’m in all these special classes for children who are disturbed or who have a special problem or something like that. And that was the least thing that I wanted, was to be involved with these classes where the children were special because all the children that I saw who were special were all crazy, and I wasn’t crazy. I just wanted to be left alone. And I remember that it was it was very difficult for me. ...And my mom took me to a psychiatrist. ...I didn’t understand why I needed to go. I remember I would sit in the room and I hated to go. I would scream and yell and throw temper tantrums going to visit these people or (the psychiatrist). ...And I remember all through elementary
school all the teachers made like a special effort to watch over me, like I always thought there was something wrong with me. Do I look funny? Do I smell funny? What’s wrong with me?

The only notion that I ever came up with is that I had curly hair. ...That’s why I thought people thought I was disturbed. Because none of my friends had curly hair. No one that I knew had curly hair. ...So I thought, if all the kids have straight hair and I have curly hair, maybe they think that I don’t know that I’m okay? Kind of like they thought it disturbed me that I had curly hair. ...That’s the only reason that I ever thought of, ’cause I was White I guess and I had curly hair. That was the only thing I knew. I didn’t know anything about Black people, because everyone White that I knew had straight hair except for my grandmother. ...I didn’t know that I was half Black or half White. I didn’t know anything. All I knew was they’d take me into these rooms because I had curly hair. I hated my curly hair more than ever. ...I remember that the kids would call me names like peach fuzz or munchie-chee ... or something stupid, ... and I figured it was something to do with my hair. No one ever came up to me and, I don’t even know a slang name for someone who’s half Black, half White ... a zebra is the closest thing I’ve ever heard of (laughs). ...It wasn’t anything that had to do with racial (things).

I kinda felt left out. I was shy and I was embarrassed. I wasn’t that shy, not shy. That’s the wrong word. ...Let’s say I would go with a bunch of children and we met friends of theirs. I was embarrassed because (of) the fact that they would hate me because of my curly hair. ...Now I kind of, I enjoy my hair. I always had this resentment kind of ... and I always will. I can’t say I won’t. I wanted to have straight hair. ...Then I would have fit in with all the children, and that’s what I wanted most, was to fit in with the other kids. And now that I’m older and mature I can fit in with everyone, but still I’ve always wanted straight
hair. I don’t know why. But when I was younger it was a complex. Obviously it disturbed the hell out of me, because the guidance counselors or something like that all thought I was a nut and they put me in special ed. classes. ...It never went away until like the end of high school, the feelings of the curly hair. ...(Now) to me a person is who they are. It’s not what they have or, if they’re a good person then it doesn’t matter what kind of hair they have. And that’s the way I should have thought, but back then I wasn’t molded yet. I was still led to believe a lot of things.

[David describes his sense of identity in his early years, and discovering that his biological mother was Black and Hispanic.]

I didn’t have a sense of identity back then yet. I was still a little kid. I was in elementary school and everything was new to me. There were people with straight hair, there were Black people at school, Puerto Rican people, all kinds of people going to these school systems. I didn’t know who I was. I didn’t know anything. ...When I say I didn’t have a sense of identity back then, it means I didn’t have any group belonging. It was just my mother, my brother and ... and that’s it.

(In high school), I was researching (my family tree) in our house and I came across my adoption papers, and I read it. ...I just wondered, wow, that’s why I have curly hair. Then I didn’t understand. (My biological mother) has straight black hair. I have curly hair. ...There was very, very, very little written about her. And then the (adopted) father, we didn’t find any (information). ...So that’s all I have right now. I don’t have anything on the father. My mom told me yes, he was White. He was from Texas and she was Black/Hispanic. She had straight black hair. ...But I really, really had no desire to go and find out who my biological parents were, because to me from when I could remember, I always had them, my adoptive parents, so why should I have any other people. (My adoptive
parents are) the ones who brought me up. They did everything for me, so why should I even think about these other people? To me it's just unappealing to think about.

I remember when I first met (one of my friends) he asked me (if I was part Black). I just said "Yeah, there's a little Black in me and I was adopted." It wasn't anything that gave me ... a chop in the heart or anything like that. They always wondered and they asked me, and I figured if they had the courage to ask me that's cool. ...Five or six times people came up and asked me that because they just didn't get it. I looked normal but then I didn't. And (they were) wondering what was wrong with me, and so they asked me. They said "Are you?" They didn't always know (I was) half Black. They'd always go "Were you adopted?" or something like that. That wasn't anything bad. ...No one cared. No one ever did care, really. I never really had an incident where someone said "Ugh" ... never.

[David describes experiences with Black peers in high school and college.]

Black kids that were there (in high school) I hated, just because they were obnoxious and loud and I just couldn't--one I hated. Hate is such a strong word I guess. ...I didn't like 'em because they were just obnoxious jerks, and I just ... these are the only type of people, they were all Black and they were always really noisy in the, big jerks would be in high school, and why would I want to be a friend of someone who's like that? ...I think there was one person in the high school that was Black that I was friends with. ...Wasn't like a one on one friendship. I never had a friendship with a friend who was Black. Until you bring it up I never thought of it like that. ...Like are my friends Black or not? But when I have to think about it, I really do think and there are none. I think it's, all the (Black) people who knew me they didn't like me or something. I don't know what it was. ...Most Black people that I knew hated me during high school or what happened in college.
I graduated from high school and I went to this college. It was in Vermont.

...Campus was just the buildings and then they had like houses (with) apartments in other parts of the town, well farther down from the school. And they put me with a Black house where all the Black people lived. There were no other Black people in the entire campus except for the basketball team. ...I lived with the basketball team in the same house and they were all Black except for one other person who was White. And what I thought was strange at the beginning was that how did they put me (in this house), I don’t remember talking to anybody about housing. I just figured they’d put me where they wanted. It was funny that I ended up in a house full of Black people, and to this day I don’t know why I was there.

Well anyhow, I never became friends with these kids and I think they resented me in some way or another. 'Cause there was another kid, the other White kid who lived in the house, we became very good friends, but he was a White kid and we would always hang out and do stuff. ...And I guess the rest of the basketball team resented that we didn’t hang out with them. ...It was strange because I made no friends living (in that house). ...All my other friends lived in other houses, so I’d always go over there to be with them and not to be with these people, because obviously they didn’t accept me. ...I never even thought to myself "well these are Black people, my God I never, what should I do?" ...And I didn’t have any quarrels with anyone in the house at all. I’m not someone who quarrels. But (I) just had this kind of feeling that they didn’t accept me, 'cause I always wanted to go over and sit with them and to talk. And I might have tried it a couple times, but it wasn’t, yeah they would include me in the conversation but not, it’s more like they let me sit at the table but they didn’t direct the conversation towards me. They’d talk about what was going on. ...I never understood why they didn’t like talking with me or anything like that. I was half Black I figured I should get in, and I liked the guys. It’s not that I hated them or anything like that.
...I don’t think they even knew (that I was half Black). ...They never asked, we never talked about it. They knew they were Black. They didn’t ask me if I was. ...They never asked me a single thing about me being White, Black. They never said anything. ...The other people in the school didn’t consider me Black either. I never understood why I didn’t fit in with them but I fit in with everyone else. And an entire year of that was difficult.

(If I could have changed something) I think that I would have changed where I lived, because if I knew at the time that I wasn’t going to have that many friends, then I wouldn’t have stayed there. I would have gone to a regular dorm and hang out with everyone else because they accepted me. And I did that. ...I’m the kind of person who likes to be with people and enjoy, and I would have wanted to not have to deal with this and feel like left out. ...It’s just really strange to feel like I’m a joke. Like that’s what I felt like in college, like I was a joke on them because I had the Black in me but I wasn’t. It’s kinda like an insult to them. Either I’d be all the way one way or all the way on the other. But in the middle is not good enough.

[David talks about interactions he has had with Whites, and some of his thoughts and feelings when incidents have occurred.]

(Today I would describe myself) probably as a normal everyday boring person who sometimes gets a little hypersensitive about what people (say) or how they go about saying things. I’m very social. I enjoy being with people. And on the other hand, I don’t understand much about how you say about being interracial. I don’t know much about it. I never had to, but otherwise I couldn’t say anything different for me than any other (person). I feel like a normal kid, a big kid. ...And people generally take to me very kindly. They don’t think of me as being a person of mixed race at all. ...They’re prejudiced but they don’t
consider me either Puerto Rican or don't consider me Black, and they say it right to my face.
And really sometimes I don't know what to say.

A great incident was when I was working down in Florida for a real estate magazine company. I went to a house with an old lady. She was in her late 70's early 80's I believe. And she was saying that well, the house was on the market for over a year because there were many Black families living in the area and nobody wanted to buy them. And she goes "Those damn niggers. They drop down property values," right to my face. Now this was just last year. I was 22. ...I don't know ... if I were to say the word nigger to (my brother), would it strike a nerve or would it not? I wouldn't know. But to me it does, and I don't understand if it's something because I know I am half, I am of mixed race, or if not. Or if it's just that I don't like prejudice on the whole. And I don't know what is what. ...I went to another interview with another lady at her house, and she said "Well, the Black people, they would never ever sell a house to them. The condo association would find some way of not letting them in." And I didn't understand. And she said "You know, you're a young man. The condos are not that expensive. You could find a nice condo right here." So what should I think? I didn't understand what should I think. Should I be honored that she doesn't consider me a minority race? Or should I feel like that she's putting my race down? ...And I still don't know when somebody is saying something that's a connotation that's not exactly very nice, I don't know what to think. Because sometimes I think, well I'm glad I'm not Black, because then these people wouldn't talk to me. But then on the other hand these people have no clue that I am Black. So where am I? I feel that sometimes it's an insult, but then I also take it like thank God I'm not (Black). It's a feeling that's very strange.

I work(ed) for (car dealership) for three years, and the mechanics there are for the hilltowns, places like that. And their speech is very limited to "those damn niggers, why do
they work around here da da da da. They take away the jobs and da da da da da."

Then they talk about Jewish people. So then all of a sudden they started to get nasty. Not that they thought they were getting nasty but just, "Oh well, you Jewish people are so rich" and they’d throw a penny across the floor and see if I’d run after it. ...And then there was another incident. ...They came up with some little slurs, or something like a zebra. That was the only time that anyone ever said anything like that to me. It just kind of got to me. ...But then after a while, it really got to the point where it was difficult to talk with these people because they always had something smart to say to me about either being Jewish, or zebra was only one person who called me that. ...It hurt me when they said that.

(After a confrontation) I just said "Well screw this. I’m not gonna deal with this anymore." So I quit and was for like a week or so, and during that time I went down to a place in (the city) where, I don’t know what it is really called. It’s like when you have racial minority something or other. ...I went down (to the Commission Against Discrimination) and I talked to them and I felt like putting a suit on (the car company) because of the mechanics, and that I couldn’t handle the job because it would upset me too much to work there with these people because these people couldn’t talk to me right. I thought that was definitely discrimination. And then I had to fill out a report, make up, tell about incidents that did happen. ... (The car company) changed managers in a week and they called me back and said "You’re the best worker we’ve ever had da da da da. We’ll change everything. We’ll give you a raise." ...I had the reports filled out and ready to go back down to (the city) to give these reports back. But I went to (the car company) to hear ’em out. So I told ’em about the incidents and told ’em this can’t happen da da da and they said well, they would take care of it. ...I was promoted to sales and I did very well ... so I decided to go back (to the
company) about a week later and I said "Okay, I'll come back." And I didn’t tell them about going down to (the city) and doing those reports. I told them only about the incidents.

I felt kind of embarrassed (going to the Commission Against Discrimination). ...I was embarrassed to go in there because first of all, would they consider me a Black person? Would they consider me a White person? What would they consider me? And I thought it could be kinda funny if my brother went down and made a (report) there. I didn’t know what to say. ...(The counsellor) was a Black lady. I have to admit that I felt more comfortable talking to her because she was Black than I would have been had I talked to someone who was White. ...Because she is Black and she could see in me that I was partly or somewhat (Black). But maybe someone who was White would not be able to know. And I thought she would understand it much better than someone who was White would. I mean a White person doesn’t really feel any discrimination towards them. And probably she knows and she could see that I was not pure White, that I had some mix. So I felt a lot better after talking with her and I felt so much, it was such a relief you don’t know. It was kind of like a breath of [inhales]. I just felt great after I talked with her because I knew I was glad that I went down there to speak to her, even though I did not file a report against this company.

[David talks about his heritage, his use of racial terms, and times when he finds himself becoming prejudiced.]

I never thought about anything about being interracial. ...It goes maybe in cycles. I mean I never think about it. But in an instance like (what happened in Florida or in college), I will think about (it) and I’ll put it back in my head and I don’t think about it ever, until like actually you brought it up. ...And I think to myself, there’s no need to have to think about being interracial because I’m a person just like every other single person there is. Everyone looks different. No one looks alike. ...I feel that it’s only sometimes the feelings that I’ve
had, like at college and down in Florida, that make me a little different from other people. That’s about it. ...I just feel like it’s normal, my feelings because yes, I am biologically different from other people, and yes I accept it. There’s no harm for me to have feelings about certain things. There’s nothing wrong with it. I’m not doing anything wrong. I’m not harming anyone. I feel that it’s a strange situation and that’s the way I feel about it.

Down in Florida I just wasn’t sure of myself. I feel uncomfortable. I don’t know what to say to these people. That is the only time that I have these feelings is like when someone says something like that. When someone says something derogatory about anything, anybody, I get a small feeling inside, even if it’s a friend saying something about a friend. I just kind of wonder, do they say this about me too? ...No one ever says anything really directed towards me. So I wouldn’t know. ...I really never thought of saying to someone after they said something ... "well, I’m half Black" ’cause I’m not someone who wants to start anything with anybody. I’m just "yeah, go ahead. I don’t have to deal with you all my life." ...I get along with people who are hicks. I get along with people who are very yuppie type people. I get along with both. It’s very easy for me to get along with those type of people. And I can join in the crowd wherever I go, and nobody considers me Black, so they I guess I just barely fit in with every crowd. Except the only crowd I don’t think I’ll ever fit in with is the Black crowd.

When you say interracial, I guess what it is is that maybe I feel hurt inside because I don’t talk like that to people. I don’t say "damn nigger" to anybody. Using the word Black is even difficult for me to use, or Afro-American. I use a name, and that’s who the person is. And if someone calls someone who’s Spanish a spic I’ll think the same thing. ...So I really don’t know maybe if it’s interracial or maybe just my feeling that maybe I am half Black. I really don’t know. ...I don’t depict people by race. I was taught never to do it.
To me a person is a person. ...I don’t feel that you should bring up someone’s heritage or race (to) describe them. ...Because to me, I never really see people as being Black or White. ...And I don’t use terminology like spic or nigger or anything like that in my vocabulary.

That’s just something I don’t say. ...Black is even strong because that’s depicting something, and White is strong too. They’re all words that are tough for me to say. ...I guess because of all the things that go on that I’ve seen, that these words all become something like a stereotype, which I don’t want to use to name people. ...The only thing I do use in my vocabulary is I swear sometimes, but everybody does.

I have to admit that sometimes when I’m in a certain situation, yes, maybe I will become prejudiced in a way that would be different from maybe other people, like my other friends. 'Cause they think a Black person walking past them on the street is a big deal. (They’ll ask) "Where did she come from?" I never think about it. But when you go into the city, that’s the way I do think about it sometimes. So when I said never I think (about race), that was a little bit too strong for the situation because I don’t like to say Black, but (I say) "you people". ...(I was in) New York City and I saw these Black kids. I would hear myself saying "these kids should get educated. It’s such a shame that they do absolutely nothing with their life" you know. ...I didn’t say Black. I said "look at all of 'em," meaning those kids who were Black. ...After I say it, I guess it’s just something, an involuntary type thing that I can’t help and that I can’t take it back. ...And so I catch myself sometimes thinking things like that. ...Sometimes I feel ashamed that I would even think like that because I am half (Black). I don’t understand why I say it. I have no clue. ...Its just something that, all the people that I hang around with, that’s the way they are, you know so it rubs off on me a little bit. I couldn’t call myself a racist because I don’t think of people, I don’t think of people, I don’t care who the person is, as long as they’re kind and they’re a nice person.
[David talks about his choice of identity and what it means to him.]

If I didn’t have to identify with a group I wouldn’t, but I’d say (clears throat) my group would be the White because I never was treated anywhere differently. I never had someone come up and speak to me in Spanish before, thinking like I do. ...People go by skin color. They really go by skin color. That’s the funny thing. If you’re dark skinned, people tend to be more leery of you. And because I’m very light skinned, people look at me as one of them, and I’ve never had like people say "Oh wow, he’s a stranger." ...So I feel like I’m just, I feel normal. I don’t feel any different being of mixed heritage. ...I feel I can go about my daily business. I can go into any place I want to and people are going to think of me as a normal White person. ...Being normal is not being retarded, not being paraplegic, just walking with both legs erect, and having friends, enjoying life, and not be treated as an object, but to be treated as a human being. That’s what being normal is. I never wanted to be an object of someone’s talk. ...and not to be something that’s someone’s going to ridicule or anything like that. ...(If I looked different than I do) I wouldn’t know what to think of myself. Now I can consider myself anything I want to. I mean I’m half way here, I’m half way there. I can do whatever I want. People accept me no matter what. It doesn’t matter who. And if I had darker skin, it would be probably harder for me when I was a kid to go through what I did. Because I was in a predominantly White neighborhood. I went to predominantly White schools in (New York).

To me (my identity) means that (I) never have to deal with any racism from people which I’m lucky that I don’t have people not want to talk to me because I’m Black or not trust me because I’m another of mixed heritage. I always feel that I’m one step ahead as far as, yes I am of mixed heritage, but I do not have to deal with any of the hardships. When I go down south or when I go into a small town, I’ve never been treated any differently than
other White people, and it's strange. ...(When I was younger) I didn't understand what it meant to be of mixed heritage. So all I thought was it was strange that I had curly hair like my grandmother did, and I didn't like it. But now that I'm twenty three, I don't feel that it's important right now for me to think about it because I don't have any problems with my daily life, with exceptions with other people.

It doesn't bother me (that people don't know my heritage from my appearance). My philosophy is what people don't know won't hurt me, so I wouldn't come out and say to someone "well look, I'm part Black and this and that. You shouldn't be saying this kind of stuff to me" 'cause it doesn't hurt me in the way, it doesn't affect my goals or what I want when people treat me normally. ...I just feel that it's important that I get where I need to go and because maybe people don't treat me so strangely, and I'll get further. It's not going to take as much effort on my part, so it doesn't matter. I feel fine that I'm the way I am right now. ...So I can do everything the White person does and did it. ...I never really thought of (being part Black as) being a benefit. I always thought of it as benefits of being part White, of being White than the benefits of being Black. ...There was never any time in my life that I thought well, maybe I would want to be Black skinned or be dark skinned. I don't think that I could. I don't think I would want to and because I just, I'm lucky that I am the way I am and that's the way I kind of feel right now. ...Sometimes I think that being dark skinned in our society has some disadvantages over White. Because I've never felt the disadvantages, I never have lost anything or felt anything different.

My concept is that everybody is something in this world. You're either from a hated group or from a group that people don't think about. ...On the whole, I'm glad that I don't have to deal with it, this racism. I never had to deal with it so [yawns], so I never really feel any different. ...I'll tell you this, I consider myself more Israeli than I do myself Black.
Because, first of all I grew up in Israel kind of. My first language was Hebrew. All my mother’s cousins, all my mother’s side of the family is Israeli or German and I was just brought up that way. I have an Israeli passport. I have an American passport, and that’s the way I was brought up. And I can speak the language fine, so I consider myself more Israeli than I would myself Black, even though biologically that’s not true, mentally that’s the way I feel.

I have to tell you that, being of mixed heritage, coming from Israeli and being Jewish all in the same time, you can be one of the most hated people on earth (laughs). With my last name being Stein too, it’s kind of, which is very German but it’s Jewish too. So I always joke with friends. I can be one of the most hated people on the earth because of what I am. ...Well, first of all Jewish people are hated everywhere in the world. Don’t ask me why. I don’t know. ...And then you go to being half Black and half White. People don’t, if they can identify it then it’s probably not one of the most wonderful things to be on earth. ...That is pretty tough (laughs).

[David explains how he would respond to inquiries in a hypothetical situation which he created or to racial incidents.]

Because of me being Jewish and then of mixed heritage, if I were to run for president boy would I take some shit from people. ...If I were campaigning, it would be difficult enough me being of all this heritage and this enormous background that I would have to have people see over to be able to become a president or something like that. This is all like hypothetical. ...If I had like an interview with a reporter, Connie Chung who would never hesitate to say "So, it seems to me that you are of mixed heritage. Would you mind explaining your background?" Someone like that, or Barbara Walters. ...Honestly to tell you, I would not know what to say to someone like Barbara Walters ever interviewed me and
came up with something like that on national tv. ...I'd have to prepare for this to go into an interview like that, because those would be some of the closest hitting questions. I wouldn't know what to say, because if I said I didn't like being Black and I like being White, more White than Black, then you'd have the Black people not very happy with me. And if you said that I didn't like being White and I wanted to be Black, then White people would think it was very interesting too.

(In this hypothetical interview) I would say my biological parents, one was White and one was Black and of course back in the sixties that was taboo. But hopefully now a days people will have more respect for the person than they have for the color, but that's probably not true, but that's what everyone wishes. ...I was born in Arkansas and I was a cute little kid, bringing that up. I'd show pictures too to show them I was cute. And I would explain to them that I grew up with a White family and I had many friends. Then I'd have to show them many pictures of all my friends (laughs). That would be to explain to them that I was a normal child. ...I wouldn't bring up things like living in (the house at) college, or I wouldn't bring up any racial things that other people say to each other, such as what happened when I worked down in real estate in Florida. I wouldn't say things like that to them about me and how I felt about it because I don't want to look one way or the other.

I wouldn't want to look one way or the other because I never was a person who wanted to make people hate me. So things like that I would always keep to a bare minimum. That's only if necessary. I never would speak to a friend of mine or a cousin or anything about racial incidents. NEVER EVER would I say anything like that. I wouldn't even say anything to my mother really. I feel that if I had a racial incident, I would never, I would be too embarrassed to tell my mother about it. I probably wouldn't say anything to any of my friends or anybody. ...I don't want to get other people involved, and I don't want to bring up
my racial heritage. ...If someone said something to me or had a racial incident or something like that, I would never say anything because it’s just something that I wouldn’t feel comfortable talking to them about just like everyday conversation. Because they don’t think of me as being different, so bringing up something like that would bring something into their minds that would say “well he is a little different.” ...I like to keep things the way they are, just not have to deal with (it).

I feel comfortable the way I am now and I don’t feel oppressed or anything like that. I feel that I’m doing the right thing. I’m living a fine little life right now, whatever I’m living and why go and change people’s views of me just because of what, just because of my biological heritage? Why should I do something like that because I mean my biological heritage is something that was back twenty three years ago. Now I’ve grown into a different person who, yes he has a biological heritage and ... I don’t live the heritage that these people would have been. I live mine, the one that I live right now. So I feel that if incidents occur, if I had someone put a swastika on my door or burn a cross in my yard, yes of course I’d call the police. I’d say something. But I never had anyone do that. ...Maybe I wouldn’t call the police or say anything. ...A burning cross on the lawn will not mean anything to me, but a Nazi (symbol) will mean more to me than anything, than any symbol in the world. A Nazi symbol means hatred to me, and that symbol, also I never really understood what the burning cross was. I never really cared what it was. ...And I still to this day don’t really know what it means, and I figure why should I find out? I’m happy the way I am.

[David talks about what his biological heritage means to him today.]

(My biological heritage means) nothing. It means only that I was born that way. It doesn’t have any affect on my life. It is simply something that happened to me when I was younger and I had to, and I’ve accepted it for what it was and now, I mean it doesn’t have
anything to do with my life or my personality at all itself. ...To me, to be interracial doesn’t mean much at all. It means yes, I was interracial but I’m still, I’m a person. It doesn’t matter what the hell kind of race I come from. I’m a person and I have feelings ... towards some things that other people don’t. ...I just was interracial and to dwell on it for myself would be stupid, because there is a very minimal, minimal part of my life that I would take time to think about it, because there are so many more things going on. And what should I do? Should I consider myself a special person? Should I consider myself less intelligent? Should I consider myself that I don’t look well enough? ...It’s stupid to me to think that way.

...I have a good time. I get the things that I need to have done. I get the things that I want, and that’s the most important part for me, not to dwell about my interracial heritage because why should I? I mean is it that important for me to understand where my biological parents came from? I don’t feel it is. I feel that it’s important for me to live the life that I am right now. I feel that I need to be with my family, to be with my friends, to be just like everyone else and things, and not to think about my interracial or something.

To some other people it might be very important to bring it out and to tell everybody they’re interracial, to bring it to everyone’s attention, but to me it’s not, it’s of minimal importance. ...When I go to the doctor’s office, they say are you Asian, African, Black or American da da da. I put White. It is not anything I even think about. What else should I say? Should (I put) I’m biologically mixed on my reports? I do not write like that. I don’t think about it either. I just do the same things that I do every day and that’s, I don’t dwell on things that have no importance to me. It really is not an important factor to me being interracial. ...Once in a while, like when those people were saying these (racist) things, I’d think about it, but that was a very small moment that I thought about it. It was not at all anything that I dwelled on for days and days all the time, that I’m so disappointed that I was
biologically not sound or something like that. I never thought of it like that. I just live my life the way it is and that’s what makes me happy, to live my life and enjoy the things that I do and get the things that I get, and to study the things that I study. That’s all I want for myself. There’s nothing else you know. ...My things that I consider myself number one important is to have a job that I enjoy, that I can grow into. To help people who are in need and for me to be able to help them. I want to be able to have a house that I call my own, that I can do anything that I please in that house. ...I want to be able to bring my kids up in a way that they will enjoy life as much as I have. And that’s my life philosophy. ...I never dwell on these about being interracial. I really never do wonder about it. Now the only time I thought about it was when you came and I did talk about it with you. I did look through the social worker’s report. I looked through that report a couple of times. I thought it was interesting, but it’s a very small part of my interesting. There are a lot of things that interest me.

[David describes the effect of going through the interviews had on him.]

(These interviews) brought up some things that I never told anybody before. I talked with you about things that because I thought it would be good for me one time to talk to somebody about these things, who because you’re going into a psychologist or psychology or something. ...I never talk with my mom about these things, and never talked with my friends about them. I’m telling you from experiences that just saw, them came and they passed. ...I guess maybe it’s been mostly a lifetime of embottlement. ...I just don’t need to spend so much, I never spent much time on dwelling about this. I think in my entire life, in these interviews, that we had spent probably about ten minutes on every single one of these things thinking about it in general. I never really thought about it. There’s a lot in there, but it was never anything that I really needed to understand.
Profile of Participant Number Five

Jennifer Smith is 26 years old and describes herself as being working class. Her mother is White (English and Irish), and her father is Black (African-American). She has one child, a son, age 7. She identifies as Mixed.

[Jennifer talks about her first memories of race, her family, and her friends.]

(My background has) always been an issue and it’s always been there, but it just depended on different times in my life how I dealt with it. And there were different times when I deal with it differently. (I was) maybe six or seven, probably kindergarten, when I started realizing different races, and that my parents were of two different races, because I don’t think I really realized before. Um, just remembering that my father was different. Because we had moved up to (town) and it’s mostly families up here at that point, and pretty much an all White town at that point. And my father was different from the other fathers. He was darker. Not much darker but [laughs] darker, different texture hair. So I remember thinking that it was really something special to have him. My cousins were different than other kids. I think that’s when I realized pretty much. I think if I grew up in a more mixed (environment) I wouldn’t have, it wouldn’t have been an issue.

I didn’t talk to my father about race until I think I was about 16, and we had a big blowout, my father and I. As a matter of fact I didn’t speak to him for a year over it. We had a difference of opinions. That was the only time we ever talked about it, was one time in my life and we had an argument. I remember my mother being real positive about it. ...I was probably around six or seven and we were talking about it. She’d tell me how lucky I was, you know, and how beautiful children of mixed races are, and how pretty she always thought I was. ...She’s always had a positive outlook on it, and always gave me, you know,
tried to feed me with positive feelings and stuff about it, no matter what was happening around me.

I think all through school I only had one White friend, and for some strange reason ... I gravitated to (Blacks). (This was in) elementary school, first, second, third grade. It’s not something that’s real consc—-that’s not a conscious thought what color your friends are. Being with (Black friends), they for some reason, maybe I was accepted more by my Black friends than White kids. So when I was around them it was never, I was always treated like Jennifer. It was never about what race (I was). This is going to sound really funny to you, but when I was always around them, having brown skin was normal to me, and when I would look in the mirror I’d see my hands and that they were so pale, and I looked in the mirror and I was different, and it would shock me at first because to me that was normal. Having brown skin (was normal). That’s all I ever saw. That’s all I was ever around, so it was never an issue until I looked in the mirror with myself and "God, you are different." And so a lot of times I would just try and cover up those feelings with other things and just not deal with it.

I have a brother. They consider us opposites. My brother kind of related more towards the White side (of the family) and kind of swayed on that side, whereas I went the opposite way. I went more towards the Black side and my cousins. ...Growing up with him was hard because I was really proud of my ethnic background, whereas he wanted to keep it all hush hush because of the way we look. He’s got blue eyes and sandy brown hair. He really didn’t want anyone to know, whereas I was the big mouth. At one point where my parents were separated, my father went to grad school after he graduated (from college) and we stayed here. So living with my mother, if you didn’t see my father around you wouldn’t really know that there was a mix there. So a lot of people didn’t know as the years went on
and my father kind of you know, only friends of the family knew him. Whereas I was very proud to tell people, my brother wasn’t.

[Jennifer describes her thoughts about her heritage and identity when she was younger.]

(At that time) I probably would have told you that I was mixed. I wouldn’t have told you one or the other, only because I couldn’t. I almost felt as if I said to you I’m Black, you’re gonna look at me, "No, you’re not" and laugh, like this girl, she’s lost it. If I told you that I was White, I always felt like that’s a cop out. You’re, that’s not the right word, a sell-out or whatever. How can you like deny your whole Black heritage, when that’s what you are? So I never could, I never was able to pick one or the other, and to this day I’m probably not. Actually now I don’t really think about it too much, but I’m not trying to choose a side. (If I looked different), I would have told you I was Black. Most of my girlfriends, the two girls that I was closest with at that time were mixed, and they had the color, if you asked them, they’d never say they were mixed. They would never say that they were White. They’d always say that they were Black, because they had it where it wouldn’t have been questioned.

(I felt) as if I needed, ... as if that there was some choice that I was supposed to make and not wanting to have to make that choice. It was really hard for me. ...And then being that all my friends were Black was hard for me because they were okay, I look White so ... I’m White. But I couldn’t do that. Then if I said well, all my friends are Black, I [pause] I act more Black, I have Black mannerisms, I just do. I, I, I am Black, and then that’s not right either. So it was really hard for me to make the choice. There was a time when someone said "Just tell people that you’re Spanish. They’ll accept that...." I had done that a
couple of times and it was never questioned. And I thought, they can accept that but they can’t accept the fact that I’m mixed.

I always either wanted to be either White or Black, one or the other. And I remember feeling like almost like I was trapped in a White person’s body. Does that sound strange to you? I think, the most beautiful women and people are Black, I think with darker skin and different features. I don’t think that blonde hair and blue eyes is beautiful at all, and a lot of people think that that’s beautiful, that’s the look. To me I think that women with brown skin, like I remember growing up and seeing a lot of my girlfriends, and just being really envious of that they had that I wanted. Like I didn’t have the skin color and I didn’t have the features that they might have had, and I didn’t have the hair that they had, and that’s what I wanted. I remember thinking, my God, they just don’t know, they don’t understand. I remember thinking, my God, they are so lucky because they can say “I’m Black” and that’s their world and that’s their whole identity, whereas I can never just come out and say I’m White or I’m Black because I’m not either or. I remember feeling real envious of that. (I felt) disappointed. And there was times I used to get angry and I just, like I said, wanted to be either White or Black, one or the other and just deal with that life, and get into that world and just—Unfortunately, I’ve always kind of stuck out in a crowd for some reason. Well, basically because I’m usually the lightest person there basically. A lot of people will take me for White, so I always stick out in a crowd. And I’ve never wanted to. I’ve always wanted to be more blended and be more with who I was with.

[Jennifer describes how she felt about herself, in light of her early struggles around her identity and heritage.]

(I had) low self esteem growing up. Just being really angry at how I turned out, and having to grow up. And of course you’re dealing with things that you’re dealing with as a
normal adolescent. And then of course added onto it there is all these other issues of race and what I look like and stuff. It kinda came in waves. There were times that I was more down on myself than others. I would tune off. I would have a tendency to kind of just shut off certain things, and I would literally do that, just shut off the whole race thing, everything. And it was like just not dealing with it. I probably needed therapy all through like [laughs] junior high and stuff.

At one point I remember reading, I don’t know how old I was, it was before junior high or around maybe that time. And I remember reading about a woman who, I think she was White, yeah. It’s real sketchy. A White woman who wanted to write a book on what it was to be Black. And so she took some pills or some injection, went to the doctor and got something done so that her skin was darker and she could pass for a Black person. I don’t know how (the doctor) did it. And I remember reading this and being like, oh my God, who was that doctor, because I want to get this shot. I want to have my skin darker or my hair coarser. ...I mean regardless of the situation that she went through, all I could think of was that’s what I want (laughs). Actually (life) probably wouldn’t have been any different, but it might, I don’t know, I might have been more at ease. A lot of times I get tense in certain situations. ...I might have been happier growing up and not so miserable, kind of feeling like trapped in this body. Maybe more accepted.

[Jennifer talks about her perception of other people’s response to her.]

It was never an issue (with friends) because they never, they never considered me White. They would always say “We don’t consider you White anyway.” I was always considered (by Whites as) the White girl that wants to be Black. Just basically that all my friends were Black and that’s what I was always around. ...And I remember being I could dance, and remember going to dances or whatever and just going out and dancing. And the
Blacks that didn’t know (would say) “she can dance, what is she?” I remember that was then the question was asked sometimes, and it was always mostly with White kids. She just wants to be Black. I never really dealt with it on that level. I never really argued the point. ...I mean I’ve heard comments that strangers have made about me, and I pretty much ignore them. Whereas my friends are usually apt to stand up for me and turn around and argue the issue with someone, I was always kind of more, I always felt that if I tried to argue the point, it was gonna be irrelevant. She’s still White. But if my friends argued the point for me, then it was like, it must be some kind of truth to what (I) was saying. I mean I have (stood up for myself) before and I’ve been totally disbelieved, like she’s out of there. She’s making it up. Because, I guess because of how I look, you know. My hair is not that same texture. I have green eyes. You know, I have features, I have a lot of, you’d have to see my family, I have my mother’s features but I have my father’s at the same time. So I guess my mother’s features stand out more on me and I’m told more that that’s what I, I was White.

It was frustrating and it hurt, you know, and to me, I think I went through a point where why does this have to be an issue? It’s always an issue. Just getting to a point in my life where thinking God, why is race gonna be the issue to the day I die? Having to stick up for myself, or having to have comments made about me, because I mean ultimately I know, being my pref-I don’t know if I want to say preference. I don’t see White men as attractive so I know that ultimately I will end up marrying a Black man. I know that that will be my life, and that will always be an issue unless people, like I said, unless people know me and they end up saying, like if someone makes a comment about “You know who I’m talking about, that White girl.” And then being that mostly I hang out around Blacks, then it sticks out. “Oh, I know who you’re talking about, that White girl.” Then usually it gets,
somebody who's in the crowd or whatever that's a friend, who will say "Oh no, she's not White."

[Jennifer describes the difference between how she felt living in a predominantly White community and when she visited her father's side of the family.]

I can remember (visiting my father's family) was always like this feeling of [sighs], this is my family and I don't have to prove anything to them, you know. I never really dealt with having to prove that I'm White or Black or that I have a mix. These were my cousins. This is my aunt, this is my uncle, this is whoever. They're my blood, they're my relatives and I don't have to worry about it. I just remember getting to my grandmother's house and feeling this weight off my shoulders, like ah, now I don't have to deal with this here.

(Nobody was) questioning why was I always around Black people, or why did I, or what are you? And I just didn't have to deal with any of those questions. These are people that love me that know the situation, and as a matter of fact, I don't think my mother being White ever came up as an issue with my cousins or my aunt or anything. You know, it was always, that's Jennifer. That's not that White girl, it's Jennifer. That's my niece or that's my granddaughter. When I was there I always felt, like probably when I was around them, I always felt as if I was probably Black.

When I would first come back (home) it was always, everything was fine. I would kind of like go (to my father's family), I'd kind of build up my self esteem and I'd feel you know, I'd reaffirm with myself that that my family is, I am part Black and this really, this is the reality. This isn't just something I'm dreaming up, which a lot of times people gave the impression that this was all just this thing that she was making up. So it was always reaffirming. And so for a couple of weeks I always felt pretty good. And then it would kind of flip back.
Jennifer recounts the time her father and she spoke about race and her racial identity.

(When) I was, I think, fifteen or sixteen, and I was in high school and going through this, you know, not wanting to deny one side or the other, my father came up to visit. He’d gone up to visit my grandmother, my uncle, you know, my father’s family. I remember everyone was there. I remember driving back, and oh, I made a comment 'cause, I had made a comment to my father about him and White women, and my father said to me, which I couldn’t believe he said to me, was that the reason that he liked White women better than Black women was because Black women think that they can wear the pants in the family, and they want to try and be the boss all the time, be the dominating figure. And I was like "Oh my God, how can you just generalize all Black women like that?" And I ran of course to the Black defense. "My God, that’s a pretty messed up thing to say. You can’t generalize all women like that." And remembering him and I got into an argument about it, ... and that was the first time I ever stood up to my father, 'cause I was always kind of intimidated by him. And I remember standing up to him, and he looked to me and he had said something. He knew I guess from talking to my mother about my friends (that) I would deal with more with the Black side and my brother was more White. And he said to me "You know, your life would be a whole lot easier if you would just live in a White world and accept that you look White so you might as well be White. C’mon, when you look in the mirror, what do you see? You don’t see a Black woman, do you? You see a White woman."

I was really like shocked and hurt. This coming from my father. This is the man that I have, in a sense over the years growing up, this is the man I protected in a way. I’ve been running to my Black side’s defense when it came to my brother, never denying it, never wanting to deny one side or the other. And then here this man was, telling me, generalizing
all Black women and telling me why he didn’t want to be with a Black woman and why he preferred White women, and telling me that my life would be easier if I would just be White, and have White friends and a White boyfriend. ’Cause at that time I was dating my son’s father. This was before he was born, obviously. But you know, if I had a White boyfriend and White friends. And I remember tears, my eyes tearing up, because I was arguing with him and I was so hurt and so angry. There was a lot of anger. (I was) feeling kind of helpless and (that) I’m not gonna win this argument. I remember arguing and my brother and my mother sitting in the car and getting real quiet, and the two of us were going at it. And I remember sitting in the back seat, looking over at my brother, and he was like, "yeah, I made the right decision and my father approves of my way of life. And see I told you," kind of that feeling. I remember the rest of the ride back was like dead silence, and nobody said a word. I remember after that I didn’t speak to him. ...I went in my room and I didn’t come out, and the next day when he was leaving I wouldn’t come out of the room and say good-bye to him. And he wouldn’t come in the room and say good-bye to me, so it was kind of like a stand off. ... Yeah, (I was) about eighteen when I spoke to him again, and then it was never back again, has never to this day been brought up.

[Jennifer talks about trying to change her appearance, and also the way she spoke so that she would appear more Black.]

Yeah, (appearance) always been an issue for me. ...That’s what (my father) said to me, "You look in the mirror, what do you see? You see a girl with light hair, light eyes, light skin," some of my mother’s features. He thinks I look like my mother and I don’t. ...My face I didn’t always have to look at. It was always my hands, and I’ve always, at one point when I was a teenager I, there was some bronzing cream or something like that, that I was putting on my hands, I remember, because I just couldn’t stand it anymore. It was, I’m
sure it probably looked pretty stupid (laughs). (It felt) temporarily, almost like you’re masking a situation. It’s like, well for now I’ll pretend. Just thinking if my hands were darker then I might be, if I tell you, if you ask me what I am and you tell me, it might not be questioned. Just a masking feeling, you know? You’re covering up, and for now I’ll pretend until tonight when I have to take my shower. But for now I’ll cover this up.

I went through a phase in college of being addicted to, honest, being addicted to tanning salons and just thinking that if through the winter time I could stay dark, then it wouldn’t be questioned that much. It’s like "oh yeah, she does have some color." I was just thinking if I could stay as dark as I could all winter, just go every day, every day and just getting as dark as I possibly could, that was another way that I used to mask. ...(I did it so) I wouldn’t be considered that White girl, that I’d be more accepted. That I could be around my friends and go to a club and I wouldn’t stick out as much. A lot of times (Black friends) would ask me, "Did you go somewheres? You’re really tan." "No, no. This is my color." "Do you have make up on?" "No, I don’t have make up on."

At one point, to kind of bring speech into it, at one point growing up I always felt that to be more Black, to have more Black in me, (I could) have the sound. It’s so embarrassing, I had this thick Black slang. Do you know what I’m talking about? The dos and the dats and the not saying things correctly, and I did all that. ...God, I must have been 19 or 20, I mean just this really terrible, I just didn’t speak properly. My best friend, ... I spoke to her on the phone I could tell that she was Black but she just spoke so, so nicely. Like wow, you can do that. And then as her and I got closer and got to be friends, I realized that you can cut a lot of that ... and you can, you know, speak normally. ...I guess (using slang) kind of made me feel, without looking in the mirror, more Black, or even if I am around Blacks I’m gonna fit in with ’em because I’m speaking like they will be, you know kids.
Language now shows me, it’s an education thing. You know, I’ve had people say to, to some of my friends or even people that I don’t really know that well, putting them down for maybe articulating correctly, you know, speaking correctly and being Black. Just because you’re Black, you’ve got to have this slang and you’ve got to sound Black. To me it just shows how much more educated certain people are than others.

I remember there was a time that my mother just got very sick of me and, actually my mother did get upset with me at one point because she, like I said, I know my father’s family and I have pictures of them. My grandmother’s given me old pictures that I have around. My mother, she said “You know, you have these pictures of your Black side, but how come you don’t have any of your White side?” And I had to kind of stop and think about it and I felt bad, and then I realized that it wasn’t, I just don’t know them. Maybe that’s why, or maybe I was trying to deny something that could be another something unconsciously. Not that, it’s funny. It’s not that I disliked my mother or anything. I just disliked the way I looked and what I wanted to be and what I identified with. I just didn’t identity with any, I didn’t identify with just White people. I, like I had tried at one point, I just couldn’t get into the music. I liked, I just felt they had no fashion. There is a whole different way of living and a way of growing up and stuff that having my brother around with his friends, that I would see and I would know from like their home life and whatever. It was just totally different. For some reason I just didn’t identity with that side. I don’t know why.

[Jennifer talks about her current perspective on her life, identity, and sense of herself.]

Unless somebody else I think challenged (my background), it wasn’t an issue. If you didn’t challenge it, you know, then it was like okay, or whatever. Everything’s so different at different times in my life. See, I mean getting to the point where I am now, I don’t, it’s
not an issue anymore. I mean it's still said, and when my son and I walk down the street, comments are made. People, like if they see my son, sometimes they'll look at me and think, she's not, she can't be all White. I'm at the point in my life where I really don't care. And I think because I'm not eighteen anymore, I'm not sixteen. My friends are adults. My friends accept me for being who I am and not what I am. You know, it's really not, it hasn't been an issue pretty much for a couple of years now with me.

I look the way I do and I can't change it and I've come to terms with that now. ...I think maybe having my son was part of, knowing that he was gonna come out obviously looking much blacker than I could ever look. It's funny that he came out as light as he did. Thinking that now I'll have this child and (my background) won't be questioned. I remember thinking that back when I was first pregnant. I mean aside from having a child, and thinking now, now it won't be questioned. Now maybe people, maybe if they see my son ... actually, I thought, maybe if they see my child and myself together, they'll leave me alone.

I couldn't honestly tell you that if my skin was darker, that I would probably have lived the same life. I guess I chose to create my world for myself, and that was a world that I was going to create for myself. I choose, well because of my feelings ... the way I live is more in the Black world. My mother's family is not here so I've never had the White side of me to be around and go to in summers or whatever, so I've always been around the Black side of my family. So there is a definite way of living. White people kind of do things different. And at least that's the way I've always seen it growing up. They kind of live their life differently. They have a whole different family interaction. They're just different. I really don't know how to explain it. It's like certain ways that, how shall I say, Whites and Blacks have, like basically, all around there is manners and there is certain etiquette that everyone should have. But for some reason I found, like I've gone with my mother to her
friends and there's certain things, like I'll go to do and my mother's "No, don't do that!" "Okay." Whereas I know if I was in a Black situation that would have been okay. I've grown up with that, so it's like well, I could do this if this was a different racial situation. ...It's just different things, cultural things that you just do, and can do and are accepted in one and not another, you know? ...There's two culture differences, even though they're American there are different culture differences.

I'm more comfortable with Black culture than I am White. I don't know, sometimes I consider the White kind of prudish and up tight, just not as relaxed culturally in different things they've been doing. (But) there are things that I need of my White culture that I need to deal with them, to interact with them. ...What I've learned from my mother I need out there, which would be called my, you know, I don't want to say White because it's not it. It's being either professional or its being formal. There's times that you need to be formal. There are times when it's appropriate to be formal and I'm not going to totally lose that and just be this ignorant woman out there. So I need both of them. (Black and White culture) both mean a lot to me and I find they both have their places in my life. And whether I was, both my parents were Black, I think that knowing to be formal and that at the appropriate times ... that it doesn't matter that you're Black or White, you should know both. ...That's kind of why I always kind of, like I said, stand back and observe because of all the times I do the wrong thing, ... or say the wrong thing to the wrong person. Sometimes things I say even to my mother, like (she says) "What are you talking about?" "I'm talking about this." "I don't understand." And literally she doesn't understand what I'm talking about, and I have to realize sometimes the slang that I might use or what I'm talking she totally doesn't get.

I always get the impression that people take me as White and most people have told me that they've taken me for White. (My ex-boyfriend says) "What makes you always feel
like you’re White is because you’re always socializing in Black crowds. Yes, if you take you and you stick you in a Black crowd in a room full of Black people, yes you look White. You’ve got light eyes. You’ve got light skin. ...I don’t see you as just being White. You don’t look that White to me." ...And he said, he was like "You’re more of an individual type person." ....So I guess it was nice to hear him say something like that. 'And I guess when I do think about it, and when I’ve been in situations with a room full of White people, I always do kind of stick out. ...I socially don’t seem to mix in with White people in a group. We don’t have the same conversation. We don’t, I mean my mannerisms seem to be different. I feel uncomfortable sometimes. When I’m in a group, say with a room full of Blacks, I still feel uncomfortable because I’m being looked at as that White girl. But I have more conversation. I can relate to conversations that are going on in the room, this is weird, and I can also participate more. ...I’m just different.

[Jennifer talks about how her heritage, identity and appearance gets dealt with in her relationships and other peoples response to her relationships.]

I have a choice whether to bow out and live the White world and just have White boyfriends and not ever be looked at twice, or I can fight for what I believe in my heart and not, not have anyone else tell me how to live or what man I’m going to date. I can totally relate to how a lot of (Black) people are looking at me (when I’m with a Black man). But, in the same context, White people look at us the same way. It’s just to me, when I hear or I see their disgusted looks, I take that as ignorance. But when it comes to Black women and them not wanting to (see White women with Black men), I can relate to what they’re saying. There’s not that many available, Black men that have any goals in life, so when you see a Black man who is somewhat successful, who is obviously intelligent, who is going someplace in life, just coming from say the Black woman’s side in me, when you see him with a White
woman it's like you know, what are you doing? What's wrong with a Black woman? Why can't you, what are you, now that you're successful you should have a White woman? ...So in that sense that's coming out of I'd say like the Black woman in me. ...So no matter what I look like, I know that when I see a Black man with a White woman, I get disgusted too. I know that sounds funny coming out of my mouth, and then when the table's turned, or when I'm walking down the street (with a Black man) and I see that reaction from a Black woman, it's like I want to say something but, you know, I know the reaction and I know what their feeling. I know where they're coming from pretty much. ...When I see say White people look, they're obviously misinterpreting the situation. But even if they weren't, I don't know. It's out of ignorance and out of racism.

As a matter of fact, the last incident that happened recently (was with) a friend of mine that I had been seeing, he lives in New Jersey. I had gone up there. We had gone into (the park). ...No one was bothering anybody. Everyone was just doing their own thing. So we were walking and we were holding hands and this look on this woman's face. We were walking forward and she was sitting ahead of us and both of us caught the look on her face and my mouth dropped. She nudged her boyfriend and she was like "That's a shame. Look at that, you know, I hate to see good looking Black brothers with White girls." She was saying this. We heard her. She wasn't trying to keep it quiet, and I kind of reacted the way I usually do, like ooh Jesus. And before I could do anything, the guy that I was with, Steven, he like exploded. He was like "Look, she's not," and he yelled it. "She's not White and na na na." And I'm like ... "calm down." I'm like "It doesn't matter," and he's like "What do you mean it doesn't matter?" ...And I had to explain. I said "I've dealt with this all my life. You really, you can't let it bother you." And he was like "Yeah, but it really bothers me. I don't consider you ... I know you're mixed but your whole way and the way
you are. I consider you more Black than White. I don’t care what you look like. I’ve talked to you.” And I’m like “Yeah, but you can’t go on defending.” I explained to him that this is like an ongoing battle that you’ve got to kind of let go of. It’s like I told you I’m like at now trying to let go.

It hurts (when that happens) but there’s nothing I can do. What am I gonna do, wear a tee shirt that says I’m not, you know, (White) (laughs). There’s nothing I can do about it. And like I have said before, I think the people that matter in my life know, and I think that’s what I’m going to be dealing with the outside world all my life. But if I bring ’em into my life or my world and let them affect me, then that’s ... but I can’t let them affect me. I just try and, I deal with it. I think some people when they’ve been told that I’m mixed, that they’re looking at me to see now what is it, what feature does she have? ...There’s a curiosity stare and just an “I hate you bitch” stare [laughs]. I’d say 85% of the time it’s usually I hate you stares, the rest of the time ... (it’s) that double look. You look at someone, they look, and then they look back. ...If it’s an honest, if I can tell that the person has no animosity towards me, there’s no hatred in the look, it depends (laughs). I do silly things. ...I do lots of things like ...I smile. ...When I know the person means no harm I won’t do anything. (Other times) I’ll end up giving them a look. To me the look (says) "you don’t bother me." But I’ve been told the look I give is like a killer look, and I never knew that (laughs), which I was told is real intimidating ... they’re intimidated by me.

(Being accepted by the Black community means) not being looked at as the enemy, because that’s basically what a White woman, not is but is kind of categorized to a Black woman as the enemy, and I’m not. Basically when there’s Black/White issues and being categorized as the enemy, as “She’s White, she’s the enemy. She doesn’t understand.” No, I do understand and I’m not your enemy, and I’m looked at as the enemy a lot of times, and
that hurts. So that’s what I mean by acceptance, just being accepted, you know, as someone who’s not your enemy. I’m not your enemy. I feel what you’re feeling. I know what you’re talking about. That type of thing.

[Jennifer talks about how the way she is seen by the Black community limits her ability to contribute to it.]

What I have to offer is a lot, but because of my physical appearance I’m not gonna be taken serious. (It’s) hard in a way that I almost want to be able to like wear a sign or something, you know. Wear a sign letting people know of my background and whatever, so that they can accept me first and then hear what I got to say. Otherwise, basically they won’t hear what I have to say. Because I remember my first meetings with the (school) that my son (Jeffrey) is involved in. There’s maybe eight or nine Black women, one Black man and there’s myself. And I remember the first maybe three meetings, no one, I was never, issues were coming up and they were talking about different things, and I’m just the kind of a person that stand back and watches anyway. But no one ever directed any questions to me. No one ever looked at me. I was just totally, because they were dealing with Black/White issues that were going on in the schools the different schools that the children went to. So they never wanted to look at me because they had to deal with well, you know, "this White lady did this and she said that" you know, so no one ever wanted to look at me. No one ever wanted to acknowledge that I was in the room, and it was really hard for me to sit there. And there were times I wanted to shout out and I just said no, I’m just going to listen to what these people have to say, what’s going on and kind of analyze it for myself before I open my big mouth. To them I was a White girl sitting there and had a mixed race child, ’cause they all knew Jeffrey.
So I remember about the third meeting I just go so frustrated and so angry, and I remember there were some issues that I had about the Black history week and stuff. And I said something and I was just kind of like listened to for a second, and then they went back. And I got really angry at one point, and I remember saying "Look, you know, I know everyone here is sitting and looking at me as (if) I’m White. You’re not directing anything at me. No one’s looking at me. You’re not even acknowledging me". …And I really got angry and I said "You know, you have no idea." And then I explained to them. I said "You know, I’m not White. My mother is White and my father is Black, but I consider myself more on the Black side. I’m more with Black issues. You’re not even giving me a chance." You know, and I got really emotional and I just said, just like blurted out all this stuff and all these issues I had, and all my issues were with them at that point. It wasn’t even with the schools or the school system. After that, their whole attitude changed. I was all of a sudden part of the group. They made me part of, they looked at me. They had no problem when, ’cause sometimes before this happened, when they were stating issues they would almost choke on trying to say White (laughs) without trying to sound racial (laughs). It was like, "That teacher, you know, that, that White lady." They had a problem saying White in front of me.

But that’s another thing where people, if I’m in a group of Blacks they’ll say "So and so, that White bitch" and then they’ll look at me. (They’ll say) "Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean like you know, you know." …And even some people who know that I’m half Black and half White will still apologize to me and still feeling uncomfortable saying it. It just depends on how close people are to me, how well they know me. And it’s really funny how people have a hard time saying White (laughs) in front of me. (That) bothers me because I want you to say what’s on your mind. I want your honest opinion of something. I want to hear what you
have to say. If you don’t like that White bitch, and that’s how you feel about her, then that’s how you feel about her, whether she be White, whether she’s Black. You know, what do I care? If she’s possible a friend of mine I might have an issue with well, she’s not a bad person, but I don’t have an issue over color, you know. Why are you apologizing, or if they’re downing White people, how sometimes that happens (laughs). You have a group of Blacks and they’re like getting on maybe an issue, a Black/White issue or “The only reason why they’re doing that is because you’re Black. If you were White da da da.” They sometimes want to say things in front of me … (but) some people (who) don’t know or are uneasy with me the way I look, will kind of like go around the issue.

There’s a lot of times when I think that they’re right in what they’re saying, is a valid point, there is an issue there, there is a problem there. If it’s something that I’ve seen and I’ve also noticed then fine, I can understand too. So I’m kind of, in my opinion I don’t pick sides. I think there’s a right and wrong and if you’re right you’re right, and if you’re wrong you’re wrong. And if there is definitely a racial issue there, I will acknowledge it. I will say you’re right, there is a problem there. There’s a White/Black issue there. And then, when there isn’t, I can’t stand it when people use that as a crutch. A lot of times people think because the way I look, or they don’t know my background, they think I’m going to take the White side. And I don’t take a White side or a Black side. I take if it’s right or wrong. You know what I’m saying? I mean if there was, if there was legitimately a problem where it was a racial issue, I would acknowledge that. But if the manager did something to one of the Black employees that had nothing to do (with race), and I’m seeing it, it was because you messed up.

I remember being, having comments being made to me (when people thought) that I was White, and having a racial remark made to me, and thinking because they thought I was
White that would be accept--like making a racial remark about a certain person and you know, really not expecting that from that person. And realizing that how really funny people could be. And at one point, thinking that all White people were like that, thinking that they all felt the same way and they all would just act as if they accepted Black people, and then behind their backs they’d go back ... and then they were just anti-Black. At different ages I responded different ways. I think as I got older I got more verbal about it. When I was younger, I would let other people do, so if there was no one out there to do my fighting for me, I don’t think I said anything. I just know that I disliked that person intensely after that.

[Jennifer shares some of her feelings about being a bi-racial person.]

It’s kind of like an inner turmoil. I get sometimes when I sit back and I watch situations like that, I think I said to you before, you get angry almost because this person can say I’m Hispanic, I’m White, I’m Black. They can say what they are and not have an, like they don’t have to go into a breakdown. Whenever you’re a multirace person, you always have to go into the breakdown, you know? Well, my mother’s this and my father’s Black and Portuguese and Cape Verdean and this and this, and you have to go through this whole run down of what your background is that people that are just Black or just White or just Spanish don’t have to go through. I’ve always kind of sat back when I was in a situation or when I have been in situations like that of just feeling, just kind of sitting back and being ..., not wanting to pick just the, wanting to be able to say "I’m Black" and not have to feel like yeah, but I’m also this, this, and this. That’s something I can’t do, so I try not to do it. So I kind of stand back and try not to have to do it.

(When people say mixed race people have the best of both worlds) usually it’s coming from someone who has totally, from the perspective of an all White person or an all Black person that’s just being really liberal, ‘cause it’s not true. I think that in my opinion,
this is not the opinion of all mixed people, in my opinion it’s hard. It all depends on how you look. If you’re light skinned and you obviously look as if you have a mix in you, that’s always going to be an issue. You know, what are you mixed with? People are always gonna ask you. ...Just in my opinion from what I’ve seen, most people of mixed races usually will consider theirselves Black. ...Some people who can’t because they obviously look, lighter eyes or too light or whatever the issue is, I think there’s a lot of pain involved in it.

Everyone growing up has issues, you know, of being an adolescent, going from five to six and going to first grade. Everyone has things that are going to happen to them in their life, and having this thrown on top of them is like heavy. In my opinion it’s like a burden. It’s a heavy thing, something that’s not fair. You didn’t get to choose this. This is what was given to you.

It’s not always the best of both worlds, because unfortunately society can’t be the best of both worlds. You are either Black or White, and if you ever look on, like we were talking about when you have to check off that box for whether you’re Black, White, Hispanic, Asian whatever, you can’t pick out Black and White. I've tried. You are told, you can only choose one. I’ve been through it, because apparently when they put stuff in the computer they can only put one, so you’re told to choose. So how is that the best of both worlds? Someone telling me if you’ve got to choose your race and you’ve got to deny one and choose one over the other, I don’t think that’s the best of both worlds. I think that that’s giving somebody like this feeling of, what’s the word? It’s, it’s a contradiction? The feeling is ..., it’s not a good feeling.

Being mixed is okay. Everyone around me accepts me and tells me how beautiful I am and I’m the best of both worlds. You haven’t gone outside that door. This is in the comfort of your home and family. It’s not like that in the real world at all. You’re always
fighting with some type of reaction somebody has to you. Just, it's a constant battle of some sort. That's just, that's my opinion. That's what I've seen. That's what I've felt, so usually unless you are dark enough that you can just say "I'm Black" and it's taken okay fine, she's Black and it's accepted, if you look, if you have a certain look, you're going to have a hard time with it.

In my opinion I think (mixed people and light skinned Blacks who identify as White) are sell outs. I may, because of the way I was brought up and who I was around, I may act Black, I may feel Black, but I still don't deny. I mean obviously I look White but I would never deny my White half of me. So I think that by denying that part of you, I think that it's awful, and I would never want that. Just in dealing with my son now who is trying to deny his Black part, I don't like it at all. I think it's sad. I really do, because they're missing out on a lot. Being Black isn't just the stereotypical um you know, the kids walking on the bee bops with the big radios. You know, the stereotypical Black. That is not Black. There's so much more being Black. There's so much more heritage. There's so much more to it than that, and I think people that just do it, they're missing out on some really special things, just really knowing anything about their culture. ...I've always felt it's a need to know (Black history) because almost as if someone's gonna challenge me for my Blackness and somebody's gonna question me or something, I'm going to know what they're talking about. I, and the funny thing about it is that I have found that most Black people that are 100% Black, well, I guess there's no 100%, they don't even know their heritage. They don't even know about their culture, which is funny that I would try and learn things, but unfortunately a lot or Black people don't know. I mean I know more than I think a lot of 'em do. It's pretty sad, but it's meant a lot to me.
(When I saw a panel of light skinned Black women on a talk show) it was kind of almost like this relief ... it was almost like to say yeah, there are other people out there like me. And for me, because of where I live, there aren’t that many. I feel like I’m by myself in this issue, when to watch it on (the talk show), seeing that there was other people. It was almost like maybe, how shall I say it. ...Say if there was a purple group of people and there was only 100 purple people in this whole world and they were scattered so that there wasn’t two purple people in any town. And if you got all the purple people together and put them on Donahue and this one purple people out here saw it, it’s like, oh my God, they’re there. It’s like reestablishing in your mind that there are other people out there like you.

[Jennifer talks about her feelings about herself now, and some of the issues she is facing with her son around his sense of racial identity.]

I can honestly say, I mean now I’m a lot happier. Now I’ve come to terms with, thank God, that I’m not crippled. I can walk, I can read, I can write. And I have a beautiful son. I have a decent life. I don’t, I do not consider myself ugly and I do not consider myself beautiful. I’m like in the middle. So I, my life right now, the way I look at it could be, you know, I could not have my son. Some accident, there’s so many things that could be so I feel very lucky. I have a decent apartment. I struggle to keep what I have, and it’s a day to day fight, and I think that’s what taking over my racial issues. ...Now my day to day struggle is trying to keep my electricity on and my phone on, and that has no race. It’s just trying to live every day.

I think right now the only time that race is an issue in my life is where my son is concerned, because he’s having a real identity crisis right now. ...Jeffrey, has no, he knows of colors but he really doesn’t understand race. And he’s having a hard time because he has no idea what I am, because we’ve talked about it. He knows that his grandfather is Black and
he knows his grandmother is White. And he, like I said he’s with my mother every weekend, and he, he just loves his grandmother. And she’s White. And I think he wants to be what she is. ...Then he won’t admit that he’s Black, but he’s brown. "I’m not Black, I’m brown." (he says). I really try to explain "Yes, Jeffrey, your skin is brown but your background, what you are ... is Black." When I go to pick him up at the ... club which is all Black and Hispanic, (the kids ask) "That’s your mom?" Some of them still think I’m his sister. ..."Is that your mom? Is that your mom? Are you White? Is your mom White?” And he doesn’t answer them. I watched him this one day he was in the cafeteria. And the little girl, the girl was saying "That’s your mom? Is that your mom or your sister, your mom or your sister?" ..."Yeah, it’s my mom." "Oh. She White? She White?" And Jeffrey was not answering her. "She White? Are you White?" And Jeffrey is still not answering her. And Jeffrey’s walking from the table, and I see him look up and look at me at the door, and he wouldn’t answer her. He never answered the girl. ...So and he gets stuff every day. There’s a part of me that is, a physical part of me was standing there, and there was like two other parts of me standing next to me. There was the part of me that if (he) says White I’m going to have to interject. I’m going to have to. ...And if he says Black, then being able to step back and say okay, you did it right.

I sometimes feel like I confuse the issue more when I come into the picture. I guess when I’m not in the picture of the club, it’s not an issue. It’s not a question. They’re looking at him and they’re taking him for face value. But as soon as I come into the picture "Your mom’s here," and most of the kids know when I walk in the door Jeffrey’s mom’s here, ... and look for Jeffrey. So it’s kind of hard for him to deal with. I don’t know if I’m making it better. ...And, and it’s really, it’s ironic because I’m the one who’s constantly drumming into him, "Jeffrey, you are Black," and explaining to him that’s why your
grandfather's Black and I'm their child, so that makes me mixed. I said "You know your
father is Black, so if your father is Black and I'm mixed with Black, that makes you a little
bit White but you still are Black." And I try to teach him that just because you say Black
we're not talking about the color Black. ...And some of it he gets and some of it he doesn't.
Sometimes I think he's totally not getting it and then he'll come out with a question, have a
question or something ... slowly we're getting it. I don't know where we're going to end up.
Hopefully ... positive.

What I went through was painful enough. For him probably maybe deep down inside
wanting to be White and then probably being teased in school is going to hurt him, and
there's nothing that I can do. I can't stop it. It's gonna happen. I can't guard him ... the
pain's gonna be there and I know what the pain is gonna feel. I've felt it before but in a
different way. It hurts even now he's only seven that he's going to go through. (I tell) him
that he's okay and reassuring him. He's going to go through those things which is all on top
of, so I want to be there like my mother was, reassuring ... there are choices that he does,
that he doesn't have to make. ... his life and things will sort themselves out. He's going to
have to deal with it and I'm just hoping that through growing up, as long as I teach him the
right way and I give him the right tools emotionally to deal with what he's going to have to
go through, then he'll be able to deal with it. ...It's funny. I remember Jeffrey being about
not even a year. I remember somebody Black saying, "I just can't, I don't know why people
do this to children, have interracial relations and then give birth to these children...". And
lo and behold, I wonder if she's right? This woman who I thought was totally ignorant at the
time, was she right thinking that.
Jennifer offers a perspective on how her heritage and identity affects her view of the world.

Um, as far as me I’m doing okay. I’m doing alright. It’s made me a stronger person. But it’s been a battle. It’s been, it’s been really hard. I feel for small children coming up. ...Just not ’cause I know, I guess not everyone’s experience is the same as mine, but I’m sure it’s similar and I’m sure there’s the pain. Obviously from these women on this panel (on the talk show), there’s the same pain, there’s the same issues. So I guess my experience has been rough but it makes me a better person like I said. I don’t know. I guess I, I know the good and bad in both worlds. I can relate I think differently to different things that are happening, and like I said earlier, I take things that are right for right or wrong. ...Through all the turmoil and things that I’ve gone through, ... (its) made me a stronger person and also a more aware person. I think I’m more aware of life, of racial issues, of my environment. I’m more aware I think that the normal person.

Because of the strong Black women in my family, and also my mother being a strong White woman, I feel as if I’m a better person than the average person who doesn’t have any exposure. (I mean) better as far as not judging people. I’m not out to judge people. I’m not out to place labels on people. I am real open. Not much shocks me. I don’t have a very high shock value. I’m more open to anything. If you make a remark about a gay person, that really bothers me. ...I feel what life you live is yours, whether you’re a ... religious person. That’s what you’ve chosen to do, that’s what you want to be. If you’re gay that’s what you want to be, if you’re lesbian that’s what you want to be, fine, as long as you’re happy. That’s the way I look at it. Don’t try and push anything on me, because I’m the way I want to be, and I’m not going to push anything on you, you know. As far as I’m concerned, as long as we can be happy in this world together, people wouldn’t try and push
their values and their morals onto other people. Everyone has their own standards of morals and values, and I think that’s what they should live by. As long as you’re not hurting anybody. In that way I feel I’m a better person, you know.

Racial wise I don’t think there’s a better race. I’m not one of these people that say Black is beautiful and all other races aren’t. There is no one race that is any better than any other. …There’s good and bad in both races, in all races. There’s not just two races … we’re all human. We all live different lifestyles and we all live in our own little world. There’s no one better than any other. Like well, like I am not a Farakhan follower at all. I think what he’s doing is wrong. I think he’s doing the same thing, I think he does the same thing that the White man’s been doing for years, but he’s trying to say it’s okay because it’s with a Black man. I think it’s wrong. I think if Malcolm X or Martin Luther King were alive they wouldn’t be in agreement with him.

So that’s just my opinion, and I get a lot of flack from that ’cause everyone is so pro Farakhan … (laughs). But in general, like I said, I think I’m a better, I feel I’m a more well rounded person just because I worked through my, my … Black days when I was anti-White. I don’t have to, and it doesn’t make me more White because I don’t agree with Farakhan. I guess I’ve been told "Oh, it’s just the White in you." No it’s not. It’s the human being in me that disagrees with (him).

Profile of Participant Number Six

Mitchell Bennett is a 58 year old, middle class man. His mother is Black and Native American (African-American and Cherokee) and his father (deceased) was White (French and English). He identifies as a minority person.
[Mitchell describes his family background, early environment, and people’s response to him and his family.]

I was raised on a farm. On this farm it was my dad’s family, which was White, several sharecroppers, which one other family was a White family, and three families were Black. And the home that we lived in was shared with my dad. At that time (he went) back and forth (from our house to) his mother’s plantation so to speak. ...My dad was a very powerful man. If he hadn’t been, this couldn’t have happened because everything was segregated. But no one would indicate anything against him, and we were known as his family. My mother told me stories about how they became united man and wife, but through a ceremony that they did themselves.

My mother’s family thought (my parent’s situation) was great because she was so well taken care of, but my dad’s family thought that it was just outrageous. But they accepted it because my dad was the oldest in the family and what he wanted he got. ...You know my dad would take me to his (mother’s) house and I noticed the way his sister, the one who never got married, she was kind of wishy washy. Once I noticed this when I (was) somewhere around eight, nine, ten years old. My grandmother, his mother was a very sweet lady. She was always just as nice as pie. But like I say, we were confined right there in a little spot. If we had left (the farm) and gone someplace together, I feel there would have been some kind of resentment.

My mother, she was a religious woman and her side of the family accepted us as real whole people I’d say. You just didn’t feel as an outcast on her side of the family. We participated in the churches of the Black neighborhood and schooling. Everything in that way of life was done with the Blacks. I don’t think I’ve ever visited the reservations with my parents, my mother or anyone else, just with my brother and friends, younger people.
...(The reservation) was just north of us about sixteen miles, and I had some friends there that we got along real well together. My looks fit right in with the boys on the reservation. But I didn’t really practice the Indian ways (when I was on the farm).

In school, in the early school years, there were some people who did not fully accept me as being Black, and they told me so. Call me names, you know. I was a pretty good athlete so I didn’t get laughed at, started to grow up and didn’t get a lot of flak from anybody because I could take care of myself very well. But when I was a little small, in fourth, fifth and sixth grade I remember going through quite a bit. On the other hand, I think I knew as many people on the Black side as I knew on the White side, and I never really had any complications with anyone. I’d rather give up something, walk away.

I kinda felt like I was kinda caught in between, sort of like in the middle of the road. At that time, my mother had never said to me that I was, talked about my birth records. We talked about our heritage occasionally, but it wasn’t a topic we pursued that much. ...I can’t even imagine anyone asking me (what my heritage was when I was young) because everyone knew, everyone and we’re talking about a population of less than 1,000 the township thirty six square miles. If someone had asked me ... I would have probably said half White, half Black (laughs). I don’t know what I would have said.

Most of my close friends on the farm were White friends: my cousins, first cousins. My uncle on my father side joined with ours so it was his children that we mostly grew up together. ...The railroad ran in between our properties and Danny and Billy were cousins who I grew up with. ...And we were back and forth. I mean they stayed with us at our house and I’d stay at his house, (we were) similar age in childhood. Grew up very close with (my uncle’s) family. But things started to change after I got into my teens. We started to grow apart. And I don’t know what really caused that. But I know after I went into the
service, between seventeen and eighteen I went into the service and I came back it was almost like we were total strangers. ...So to this day I still haven’t figured that one out.

[Mitchell describes some of the incidents which involved his heritage and members of his father’s family, and how he responded.]

Danny and I were about the same age. He was something like about two months older than myself. ...I must have been about eight, something around eight, six, seven, eight (when) ... he said, and this kind of threw me for a loop, he said "Did you ever notice that your hands not as White as mine?" And I said "No, what does that have to do with anything?" He said "Well, doesn’t that make you feel funny about things?" (I said) "No, not really." And he says "Well, you’re not as White as I am." And I can remember thinking, what happened to him? Why did he say that, you know? Was it something that he heard inside the house sometime? ...Here he was isolated from the White world as much as I on this farm, and he had to catch it from someway. It wasn’t like he was watching television. There was no televisions (laughs) so he got it from somewhere. And I often wondered where. I kept thinking that he must have gotten it from his parents, but that was the first time. (One of my father’s sisters) always projected some kind of distance feeling. ...Later on, my aunt got a little upset with me. This was in (19)72, she said something that I always thought. She said that I was not a whole person, that I had Black blood in me and that I could never be a real person and on and on. ...(My father’s) other sisters, they were very friendly, but they were never with me the way they were with the other kids, you know, Danny and Billy. ...I was not accepted as a White man, so I don’t want to give you the wrong impression. I felt that I was not accepted as a whole person. I know they treated me nice but there were some things said by my cousins that always reminded me that I was not you know White like they were. ...But my dad, he took me everywhere. It wasn’t like he
was trying to hide me. But I just didn’t feel full like my cousins told me. One of those things that kept ringing a bell. ...There was a little difference and I could sense it. So I guess that kind of grew up in me and I had to at some points accept, well, I’m different. What is it that’s different? You can’t ignore that if you ever want to become a reliable person. You can go on searching all your life and never find yourself. (If) you really want to know yourself you have to know all of these little things, accept ’em. So I think I accepted this as being different, but not taking away from me in any way. I can outperform any one of ’em, any person in the family. I was better in sports, better in anything [laugh], so that didn’t bother me much. It’s just that I knew that legal things that the law deals with, I would never be equal with the others.

(It was) very depressing, very depressing. I think that was the hardest thing to come to grips. And spiritual, I had no problems because I know it’s what you make yourself to be. Physical activities you get out what you put in. But man’s laws, you’re limited by what it is, and if it’s not administered fairly, what can you do? Well, accept it. And I feel that they’re based on people’s feelings and majority rule. Of course a lot of things have changed. You can see the change is good. However it still doesn’t erase the fact that that old feeling is there. I’m talking about the feeling of one race against another race, equality.

After around ten or eleven, somewhere in there, my mother started to have doubts about my inheritance, the farm. She said it was going to be difficult because there were so many things against it. Even though it was planned and said in the beginning that I would inherit (the farm), she had doubts about it. And I think those things bothered her too. I didn’t worry about that. I either do or I don’t. That’s the way I figure. It started to tend to go away from us mixed family of inheriting the land of a White (person). So when I left home, I didn’t think I was leaving anything. ...When he fathered me, (my father) had no
idea whatsoever that times would change to the point where I could inherit his property and I remember my cousin Billy saying that he was going to inherit my dad’s property. You know why? Because he was White and he figured I was mixed.

[When he was twelve, Mitchell experienced a significant event which would change his life. He describes the event and how it affected him.]

My mother would take us to church every Sunday. We would go through this kindergarten process right up until we became an adult, Sunday school so to speak. ...But when I became around eleven, going to Sunday school and church meetings and so forth, I got to thinking that I needed something for a foundation in my life. And when I became twelve years old I went to a revival meeting and accepted Christ as my savior at that time. I had a few visions and got baptized, and ever since then, I built my life around that, which I credited my mother with a lot because she was the one who got me pointed in that direction. And I just don’t think I could’ve been a complete person if I hadn’t done this, I wonder what would have happened.

Things changed a lot right after I became a follower of Christ. I began to think about what I did and I’d think about it before I do it. ...It seemed to me like I should be more restricted. Being so young and wanting to participate in these activities I felt the urge taking me beyond what I knew I should be doing. And I disobey(ed) but in the end, I had to wear it off ’cause it would stay on my mind till I felt free. And I’m not talking about anything bad. I’m talking about going to these joints and dancing and having a drink you know or dating a lot of girls (laughs). That’s the badest thing I ever done I guess. ...(My faith) kept me thinking that I was not perfect. And that there would always be a need for forgiveness in my life. And I would always have to repent. But through it all, I become stronger and you know someday my resistance would catch stronger and I’d be a better person. I think that has
become true. I feel now that I can resist things that I could not. I don't have urges or roaming desires to fly off to the moon. I'm more content. So I think my soul went down to a process which has led me to where I am.

[Mitchell describes how things began to change as he left the environment of the farm. He also shares some of his experiences when he was inducted into the military in his late teens.]

In my birth records, it's says that I'm a Cherokee Indian. I can't explain to you why that was done that way but that's the way it is. I found this out when I when I was inducted into the service. ...We had to bring our birth records with us and there it was. ... and they put me into this category (of Cherokee Indian). ...When I went in service, if I hadn't had my records with me, I probably would have said (my category was) Black because then I was beginning to, at an age where things started to make a lot more sense. ...I think I began to feel a little more comfortable with the Black people farther away from the plantation than I did with the White people. And the reason was 'cause I think they kinda accepted me and more friendliness without questioning why are you this or what are you or this and that, like they'd want to put you through the ringer. ...I felt that the Blacks are minority. I feel a lot more comfortable passing with the minorities. So if I had to decide when I went into the service, I would decide that.

Then I began to meet people that were away from this little plantation and they started treating me different. I met people who walked up to me and just (say) "I know you, you're Cherokee Indian." (I'd say) "well how do you know that?" I reminded them of someone that they knew. I know a lot of the Cherokees. I like the way they feel about things. ...So the ones that I'd known seemed to have that basic feeling of concern about their fellow man, and not forceful. So I mean I can relate to that. So they're religious, so I kind of identify with
that. I don’t know if it’s right or wrong, but they tell me that I have some (Cherokee) blood in me so I can’t think of anything that I’d prefer to change it to. It is minority for sure.

The Whites that didn’t know me always wanted to know how come you’re not really White. You could be White but you look different. And I had people say that too, mistake me to be every kind of thing. I remember Danny and myself and another friend of mine going to other towns. A friend of mine, he was White, and we go into this family’s house. There’s "Wow, look at the tan he has!" And then the guy says "Yeah, he’s just back from Florida." Well I know that wasn’t the truth, you know, but yet it was something to pacify the people. I didn’t like that. I didn’t think that was something that had to be. I started to think maybe this isn’t such a good idea. Maybe I ought to find something that’s more suitable for me. I don’t want to be every time I go someplace and be upsetting my system over the fact that everybody wants to know what I am and this and that. So there must be a common ground somewhere. And I think that’s when I found more or less with the people that I fit more into. It wasn’t always a question of you look so much different from us. (It was more) hey, he’s a nice guy. …The Indians (were the common ground), the Cherokees.

When we went into basic training, we were all in the same areas in training. But it seemed that there was some kind of separation in barrack assignment, and I was assigned to a barracks with more or less Caucasians. I think there was one Japanese and there was one other Indian fellow that was from Dakota, someplace. …It was something to get used to but I was used to Whites all my life because I did grow up on the farm. But some of ’em, most of ’em seemed to take to me okay, but there was always a few that would avoid me for some reason as if they didn’t see through the same eyes as the other people there. And that’s something I didn’t like. But when we got out of training we were separated. The White guys along with myself and the Japanese fellow, we were sent to Korea and the Black guys were
sent to Europe. I felt that was kind of strange. ...I didn’t understand. I would have liked to
gone to Europe but I went to Korea. Put a tour of duty in there. Came out of that alive, not
too well but alive.

[Mitchell describes some of the experiences he had once he returned from Korea.]

When I came back to the States, I was sent to Texas and then again, there was a very
segregated area, but I was with Whites and so I had to act as White. Most of the places that I
went they didn’t even question (my race). But there was always an occasion when someone
would call the cops, "Check this guy out." And he would look at me (and say), "Ah, he’s
okay." But it’d still happen. ...You know I go into the theater with the White guys because
that’s who I’m with. I’m working with ’em. I’m doing this all day. I’ve been with them
through all of this time, and this is what we’re doing. We’re going places together and
occasionally it would happen. You go into an area where I guess no Blacks were supposed to
be, and when you come out you look and you can tell, I can tell right away there was
something going on. But I never had anyone come up and just lay their hands (and say)
"Hey, you can’t do that."

People all over the south were very, very touchy about things. (We’re) talking about
the late fifties. It’s very touchy in the south. It wasn’t so on the farm but it was so all over.
...Not that I was afraid of anything. It’s just that you know, being in strange territories
where people don’t know you, I didn’t know how they were gonna accept me, based on some
of the experiences that I had. And I remember driving back from Texas in my car down
Route 81 coming across from Georgia. My clutch burned out and so I had to spend the night
in this little small town where there probably is no Blacks ever been there. And I wondered
how, and these people paid me no attention at all. It was just like I was another guy. But
you still, you don’t know, I never knew how they was gonna be.
[Mitchell talks about when he met and married his first wife and started a family.]

(When) I came home (from Korea), there was something wrong. I don’t know what it was but I couldn’t become reconciled at home. So I wondered what was it that was driving me nuts. Was it the after effect of Korea or was it this or that? And my and dad and I talked about it and he said "Why don’t you take a trip someplace." That time I took a trip to upstate New York. I met this girl up there. ...I started to take her out and I started dating her. ...She was Irish and French. ...I talked to my parents about it and they got a little upset, told me to come home. ...I had to make my own decision and I didn’t want to ask them to send more money ... so I went and I signed back up for the army. ...I did take her home and my dad accepted her very graciously. But no one else in their family, in (his) immediate family there did. ...I married a Yankee and I wasn’t supposed to do that. My mother loved her. She got along great with her. Everybody on my mother’s side treated her like she was just a perfect person, but that’s the way she treated them. But she never really hit it off with my dad’s side of the family, and that’s strange. Seemed like it would have been just the other way around.

I had started family. I got married around in my early twenties, very early twenties. So during this period I was dealing with a young family, young children you know, children born as soon as I got out of the service which was around (19)57. ...(We had) six children ... three boys and three girls. We had 'em in five years. ...I had 'em all at once so it kept us pretty busy. ...I accepted a position with a company (in) New York. ...But after I think about three years, the company decided to move to Massachusetts, and during that time like I say, before that (I) was concentrating more or less on the raising, the starting and raising of the family and my position with this company. ...(They) asked me if I’d consider coming to
Massachusetts and I told them yes. We came up and looked the place over, looked around, found a house and moved up. One of my responsibilities at that time was to train the personnel in the company and that’s when I got the idea that I should go back and do some more schooling. ...So that was not an easy thing, studying, working. ...But the people, as far as racial concerns, the girl I married is White so we socialized more or less with the White people. The friends that I moved up with, that came up (from New York) were those White people except for Joe. He was from Canada. He was Canadian but he was Black.

My major concern when we were having the kids was to try to make things as pleasant as possible for them. And I knew that they would run into obstacles along the way the same as I did, and hopefully they would be able to handle that. ...We never sat down and had discussions about racial issues (with the children). I remember when my oldest daughter came home one day and she had had a problem in school ... some of the students I guess started saying certain things, calling ’em Black. ...I never really found out exactly what the problems were, what they came from but she was the darkest of the family and the rest of the kids, unless you knew something, you didn’t think anything of ’em, because they were light. ...Her hair was bushier than, the others’ hair was straight and shiny and straighter. But anyway she had more of a problem than the other kids. So when you talk about race, I know certain things make a difference. See I look more Indian than she. I didn’t have the problems as much as she had. I relate this to looking Black and it bothers me, you know that people are that way. ...I guess she felt the same as I do about that. She didn’t want anyone to label her. She didn’t mind being Black but she just didn’t want anyone labeling her that way. She wanted to be Black. She’d accept it on her own. Just have people accept her as a person. ...I just tell her "Look, look at me. I’ve been called just about everything in the book. It’s never really took anything away from me, interfered with my feelings. Then again
my feelings, I have to learn to deal with them ... instead try to accept. You know these things are reality and not let 'em bother you so much. You're a young person. It's not going to stop you from being what you want to be." Anyway we talked. She did well. Grew up and finished her school and now she's doing well.

[Mitchell describes how people responded to him and his family once they had moved to Massachusetts.]

The majority of people were very nice. ...Most of the people just accepted the family as an okay family. ...But there was always someone, regardless of who you knew, just were not going to accept it that way. ...The thing is, I always noticed when going to church or someplace, there's always someone who has to single you out to try to find out what kind of racial background you come from. And that can be annoying sometime, because you like to go in and just fit in as a person. Some people won't let it happen. ...I've had people come up and ask me if I .... all kinds of things. They don't just say "Are you, what are you?" "You know you look like you have this or that (in you)." ...I don't mind them asking, but there was one thing that I took offense to. To have someone come up and tell me what I was without first knowing. I just thought that was kind of rude.

My first wife's uncle by marriage was from Louisiana. ...He came up and he said to me that I was a niggah. That's what he said. (I said) "Oh, so you know that for a fact?" He says "I can just tell by lookin' at ya." (I said) "good." He had the right to his own belief, but that was one of the instances, and probably one of the first and only people that came up and said something like that. Usually they want to feel that they know what they're talking about and they'll say something, but it's not like that. ...I myself would have far more respect for the other man and I would never place anyone in such a position. And you would
hope that others wouldn’t do it to you. Like I say, there’s all kinds of people and some of them don’t think about what they do or say and sometimes they hurt other people.

[Mitchell talks about the role of religion has in guiding his views on race and dealing with racism.]

I used to hate to listen to one person putting the other person down, whether it’s in a joking sense or whether it’s real serious. I think the time could be much better spent by saying something kind to another person rather than something nasty. ...(When I was twelve years old) as I told you, I went to the revival meeting and this led to my becoming, as I relate to it, converted from a regular sinner to a more careful person. ...That’s when I feel my life really started to develop, and I learned from that point how to handle situations from every side regardless of who it is, and to look at a person and see the same thing in any person, regardless of their color. To me, color is only just on top of the skin, and I started thinking that a better way to analyze a person would be through the personality rather than what they looked like. And if I felt that there was something within this person that we’re destined not to be together or be friends or whatever, then (I) move away from that rather than create a war over it. Give him space. And its worked for me. But learning how to deal with different personalities and accepting different personalities I think has been one of the best things that I ever accomplished. ...And I feel that accepting Christ as a base in my life, as the main core for my life, really gave me an understanding of all of this. And even today I’m still adding and developing.

I think there’s a large part of me I relate my religious beliefs. And I’m somewhat dependent, I came to depend upon that part to take me over certain bridges, kind of like something that I draw on when I need strength of something. ...I think the significant thing in my life was that for me, that I accepted Christ at an early age and read the scriptures and
tried to formulate my life around that. I'm not saying that I've been perfect. I'm saying that when I did something, I did it with this in mind or within me so that it was acting sort of as a guide for me and gave me peace of mind, tranquility one needs in their life. I didn't have sleepless nights. ...I've been able to smile at a lot of things people frown at. So I think that you need to know that, and this is basically why I am the way that I am today, easygoing. Try to be understanding of other people. ...Many times I've felt the elements that developed in my life from my religious beliefs gave me the courage and the strength to deal with the racial issues, the difference in equality and the shortfalls. It doesn't stop me from trying to be better or trying to reach the higher goals. ...I was never content in the sense that okay I don't want to do more because one should go through life--one should continue to improve, try in every way.

[Mitchell shares his perspective on himself, interactions between Blacks and Whites, and racial discrimination.]

I think most of my satisfaction comes from knowing that I can think openly and talk openly with any of these denominations, race and not feel that I have to hold back anything or I just feel a part of it. So I can't say that I'm against this or I'm against that because I'm a part of it. So I can openly honestly think of all of those (heritages that I have) and evaluate them honestly for what I feel is wrong with this or what I feel is right about this, and not have any hangups [laughs]. That's the way I feel. I certainly wouldn't criticize one to the other unless I felt that it was just. And I wouldn't take sides with one. I'd just be against the other. So I guess there must have been a reason for my being the way I am. I think I try to be somewhat a role model when I'm dealing with people. I try to treat them the way that I would like to be treated. And I try to do more for them then I would ever expect them to do
for me. I try not to hold grudges, even if a person does wrong, and come back in good faith. I try not to even think of the wrong that was done. I’m comfortable with it.

My experience with the Blacks and the Whites, and I’m being honest, I was right in the midst of it growing up, (it was) like cat and dog. ...They just, something about they don’t like about each other, and I always thought it was jealousy was the way it appeared to me, that the Whites were afraid that the Blacks may become better or something, ... and they wanted to keep this from happening. And you’d be surprised the conversations that I witnessed on both sides. One is as bad as the other. ...I felt when I was with the Whites, they talked about certain things and the Blacks would come into the conversation, and they would always be a negative about the Blacks. I didn’t feel that I could stand up and defend anyone. It wouldn’t have done any good. It would just make it more difficult for me. So a lot of times I listened to these things helplessly without being able to really say what I would like to say. And then vice versa. On the other hand, I’d be participating in a conversation or a group of people, you gonna find someone in there who just totally don’t care for White people. And in that instant ... I’m wondering, what would it take to erase all in this negative about each other. Of course I never had any real major problems because I learned to accept it, and just kind of be neutral. ...I don’t want to be judged and I don’t want to place judgment on anyone or any race, because that’s not what I’m about. I try not to judge, because I don’t want to be judged by some of the things. But I think it’s human and I think it’s sometime a fun and game thing to amuse people. Some take it more seriously than others but I think people are people myself. Just because they have different looks, different skin colors, to me it doesn’t mean anything.

I can talk about it and feel okay because I know I’m a large part of both (Black and White), so I’m not talking about it from a dislike from either point of view. I’m talking from
a point, from what I see clear. And perhaps it's very difficult for anyone to see that unless they can honestly relate to both sides. I feel that there was a struggle to dominate and they did dominate. The Whites did dominate Blacks. And there's a struggle (by the Blacks) to get away from that and come up. I kind of sensed that Blacks would like to dominate the Whites and kind of show them a bit of their own medicine so to speak. Where does it stop though?

But there is a segment of people (mixed race people) that's in between that I think has been somewhat overlooked. And that can be a little somewhat depressing. I've seen it since I've been here. ...When I filled out my (Affirmative Action Questionnaire), I checked (laughs) listen to me, I checked Black, I checked White, and I checked Native American. I got a letter. I got a letter for 'em saying "You cannot do that. You have to check one or the other." ...That's not right because you're telling me that I have to leave part of me out. I can only claim a part of me. I don't think it's right. I think all one is saying is look, I identify somewhat with all of these because I've been raised with these people and they're part of me. But you get a letter saying "you can't do that." ...Why couldn't I have been neither one or the other? I see that affirmative action supports the Blacks to the point where forcing it upward more, okay? I see the Whites okay starting to back off because of this kind of pressure and so forth. So certain number of Blacks are getting these opportunities and breaks and so forth. I'm not against this, believe me. I'm just talking what I see. And it's working. But there is a certain group of people and you look at 'em, "well this guy could be this or that." And they kind of overlook him. We never had to help him. ...And I don't think the laws have changed to support the in between race the way they do the Black race. Like I said, they needed to be changed. But also there's a segment of people also need to have the feeling projected to them that we know that you have been unjustly dealt with also, and that you need this kind of support or these avenues that you can seek out this kind of
support. Make it even for them. ...I mean these people need their equal rights too.

...Everybody should be able to feel that everything is equal for all mankind. I know that’s a
large order and will never be, but...

It’s a lot easier today than it was yesterday, I mean yesteryears. Today I think the
minority person stands a much better chance to succeed. ...I love the changes (that have
happened). You know (pause) to be limited by the law the way the Blacks were in
comparison to the Whites. It’s just mind sickening to have a sign put up that you can’t go
into this restaurant or you, you know, you can’t go into this side of the bus station or this
side of a depot station. That’s so asinine. I think seeing these things change is really
gratifying and I guess you’d say it’s magnificent, marvelous. Love it (laughs). ...I think
(minority people) are more carefully watched than just the average (person). I think they
have to always remember that the best foot forward. Somebody’s always watching.
...They’re watching minority people because they would like to discredit them if they can.
And I think it’s very important for all minorities to know that and you know, just let the light
shine. Do the best, make it look good. Let the people know that minority people are just as
good as ... ...Of course (I’ve experienced this). I’ve been told this. I’ve been told that
"Hey, people watch you more than they do anyone else." You have to be, you have to be
careful about what you do. You have to be, you have to try to be better than the average
because you set examples because people watch you all the time, and I know it’s true.

[Mitchell talks about which racial heritage he would have chosen at different
periods in his life and his perspective on his current racial identity.]

(In terms of my heritage) different periods in my life I would have told you different
things. Now I wouldn’t change because the understanding has surfaced. When in my
younger years when I was somewhat tormented by some of the things, I would have said
something different. ...If you take a kid and you put on this side of him hot coals and over here you put ice cream and all this glamorous stuff, and you ask him which way would you like to go, you know the young mind is gonna follow after what he feels is satisfying at that time. What I’m trying to say is, on the Black side of the family there was poverty and there was a confusion and there was not very much of anything. But on the White side there was plenty of everything. That’s where we got our livelihood. That’s where we got our food and clothes, and this is where we learned more about, let’s face the facts. That’s just the way it was. So at that time, I would have given up the Black heritage and probably gone after the White, not analyzing the way the people were, whether they were right or wrong, the way they treated others and so forth. It took years of accumulating this, doing research in my mind, in my soul, in books, in other people’s behavior to finally conclude in my mind that something’s missing. ...The missing parts were lack of opportunity, the lack of funds, the lack of medical, the lack of the education system and the way, there’s just no comparison. The White side has far more to offer than, than the Black side. ...The scale isn’t balanced. One side is up and the other one is down. I knew I wanted to just get on the easy side of the scale.

Like I told you, we didn’t deal that much with the Cherokees. I developed that after I reached the early teenage years. I started dealing with my Cherokee brothers and so forth. And I felt good being with them because it seemed like we kind of think more or less on the same level, rather than just the scale (between Blacks and Whites) like that. ...(Today) I feel good about having a Native American heritage, but I feel bad that I haven’t put more time into the practice of it. I had this (tattoo of an Indian head) put on (my arm) just before I went to Korea. I think it was to remind me that look, you know, you are part of this and whether you practice it or not you should always remember. ...And I think the Cherokee people being
humble so to speak, and I like to think of myself as being a humble person rather than a bully type. ...I think that’s the main thing, the feeling, the attitude, the ability to comprehend or to feel honesty. And just to say to myself I didn’t influence the Whites to be the way they are. I didn’t influence the Blacks to be the way they are. If there is a fight between them then it’s not me. I didn’t do it. And that not only with the White and Blacks, but that’s true with anyone. So to give (my Cherokee heritage) up I would be giving up (laughs), I wouldn’t want to give that feeling up. I like that feeling of being neutral and I didn’t have the feeling that I’m really the forcer on either side. ...I’m a mixture and I get off a lot easier by being a Cherokee than I do by being either Black or White because I have more the complexion of a Cherokee. I have the disposition more or less, and most people tell me, they can tell by the way I act.

But at this time I would not change anything. In fact I cherish the thought that I was chosen to come to this earth as who I am. And that I could not have said in earlier years. It took time to make me realize that. It’s very important for a person to be who they are. We didn’t choose that, that was chosen for us. And to do the very best that you can possibly do and be a witness to all things that you see. ’Cause once it’s recorded it’s there forever. And we have to face that again. So I’ve repented over the fact that I felt that way when I was younger, and I’m sorry about that. But I was young and wanted to have things as easy as possible, and as much available to me as they were for others that I knew, and I know it wasn’t so. But God gave me strength and knowledge and eventually the wisdom to understand that. ...I started to evaluate this between fifteen and twenty five somewhere. By thirty I had realized that, you know, I’m not going to change me.

I guess I’ve reached some kind of satisfaction. I’m working on my life and based on my feelings of people and things, I like the way I feel about people. And there’s this world
and there's a world to come. I'd much rather have that feeling than to have some of the feelings that I see projected from certain incidents and some of the articles I read in the paper about what people are doing to other people. I'd much rather be feeling the way I feel than to be out there looking for someone to zap 'em out or something, you know? I feel I'm at peace with myself, and if I can feel at peace with myself, then I can be at peace with others.

(Through my life), I do whatever it is that I have to do to help someone, not to hurt them. It came from like I was telling you, the early start, for what you were exposed to in the early stages of your life. ...I was very much wanted though I was mixed. I was still much wanted by my dad. He wanted a son and my mother, she cherished me. So that was perceived into me. But as I started to grow and started to comprehend, I realized that things were different for me. Now this could have gone, I could have turned into bitterness. Thank God it didn't. I wonder where would I be if it had. But it didn't turn into bitterness. Now when I went through a few more years I realized that hey, I need something more to develop, because I cannot develop what my mother is and what my dad is 'cause there's too much difference. So that's when Christ came into my life and thereafter as I built my, the foundation on that it never changes. People may change, things may change but that will never change.

Profile of Participant Number Seven

Cory Stewart is a 21 year old man who just graduated from college and is working as a production assistant in various film projects. He considers himself lower middle class at this time. His biological mother was White and his biological father was Black. He was adopted at age 3 months into an interracial family. His adoptive mother is Black (African-American) and his adoptive father is White (English). He identifies as a Person of Color.
When he speaks about his family in his profile, he is referring to his adopted family unless otherwise indicated.

[Cory describes how he identifies, and some of his memories about his early years.]

I guess I would say (that I identify as) a person or color or some sort of thing like that. I wouldn’t say I was Black and I wouldn’t say I was White. That’s the most descriptive answer. ...It has more for me to do with how I started to realized how other people see me. I grew up in (town) and looking back on it, it seemed very sheltered and there were certain times when being Black became an issue, but for the most part it wasn’t at all. And it didn’t become an issue until I was in high school really.

My parents specifically chose (town) to live in because of the way that they would be treated and I would be treated. They wanted that sort of environment for me, which I’m very happy that I had. (In my neighborhood) there were a real lot of kids living on that street, and all like within ten years of age of each other. There were some very blue collar families. As I got older it became a matter of an issue of class kind of. ...I was completely blind to (the class differences). But there were not any other Black kids on my street. (In this town) at the time, there weren’t very many other Black kids. ...(My family) was different, but if people don’t treat it like it’s different, then it isn’t different almost, and that seems to be the way it was. I mean if there’s a problem and people choose to ignore it, then it kind of disappears. ...It just didn’t seem, it wasn’t an issue.

Part of the reason why my parents chose (this town) was because my dad’s sister was already there raising her family. ...A lot of the time I was over at my cousin’s house. ...And on my mom’s side, her parents lived in New Jersey and that was like a Thanksgiving, Easter thing that we would do, either they would come up or we would go down. ...Those
would be like really big occasions with like her cousins and their kids and everybody. But as people got older and divorced and stuff and moved away, that’s become much more smaller.

I really specifically remember a lot of the things, the objects from my house. ...I don’t know what is typical for Black parents, because I’m not around many. A friend of mine in high school, his parents, well it’s because his parents teach (Black Studies) at (the college). So their house is like decorated with all these Afrocentric sort of art work and paintings and stuff all over the walls. And (my family) never had art period.

None of my friends in elementary school were Black. There was, for the most part, I don’t remember any other Black kids. ...It was fine (having all white friends). I think if I had stayed in Staten Island for a long period of time, say for like a couple of years of elementary school, then moved (to the town where I grew up), then I would have had a problem in that I would have clashed or I would have, I don’t know. I wouldn’t have been able to handle the change. But there was no change. That was what I knew. ...I think when I was a kid it was much harder to tell that I was Black. And I think that if like my skin had been a lot darker, that I probably would have run into more, I don’t want to say racism, but let’s say more problems.

When my parents were together, and even for part of the time that they weren’t, we went to the Cape every summer, and my skin was very dark ’cause I’d be on the beach all the time and my skin was much, much darker than it is (now). My hair was blond because it would be bleached. Looking back on it, I wonder what people thought. But I had like a big (a)’fro for a while and my teeth were all fucked up. I was much smaller. The thing was, I was really cute as a kid, I think, but my hair was much lighter too in color. ...When I was that young, I really can’t remember (people asking me about who I was). Either people don’t
seem very concerned about kids' identities or else kids just don't have them, I think, except for in movies.

(My sense of self) wasn't racial. ...I really did not consider myself anything (racial) for a long time. I didn't know what the word nigger or the word honkie meant until I was like ten or eleven or something. I remember a friend of mine saying it and me not knowing what it meant. Kind of seems good but kind of seems bad at the same time. I mean I didn't need to know. ...I thought I was Cory Stewart from (my town). I was just this little kid trying to get through elementary school I suppose. I was in special ed classes through kindergarten and elementary school ... I guess I was diagnosed as mildly dyslexic. ...When I asked my dad about that, he said that they thought it was because my parents were getting divorced. My whole elementary school career, my parents were separated and then divorced and stuff like that. ...Special ed classes) were pretty bad. When you're a kid, more than anything, you want to not stand out, and it automatically labels you and made you stand out from the other kids, which is not what you wanted at the time.

[Cory recounts experiences where he either made a connection between being Black and himself, or noticed the way his mother's family acted at different times.]

I think at one point Roots was on (television) when I was really young. The whole series was on. This is when my parents were separated. ...(I was) watching Roots and somehow making the connection that this was the past that my mother and myself and Blacks shared, and realizing that I guess. And also part of that was not understanding the whole situation with the past. I didn't understand why people have done that. That doesn't make sense. ...I remember putting it together that because this person (in Roots) was Black, that he had these chains around his neck, and me realizing that because my mother and I were Black, that these chains could be around our necks also. ...(I felt) confused. It didn't make sense as
a kid. Why, why are they doing that? ...But it seems mostly because of the environment that I was growing up in, (I) got that realization so late. And that if I had lived someplace else, like if I had grown up.... I was born in Staten Island. My family lived there for like two years. If we had stayed there, that realization would have (come) much earlier.

I don’t remember at what point that I realized that when my mother was around her family, or when they were all together, that the way that she spoke changed. They put on these like, I don’t know what, like a dialect. I don’t know what sort of dialect it is. They speak in a certain way. And it always kind of confused me when I was younger that they would do this. That my mom would suddenly start talking so much louder than she usually did (laughs) or that my uncle, he was a priest, would start talking like in a certain way sort of. ...I asked my aunt one time, "Why is it (that) you guys do this?" I didn’t like it that they did it because I thought it was really fake, because they put on these accents as if they come from like a very uneducated, very poor sort of background. And to say that it’s a Black inner city accent is wrong because there’s White people who I hear talk like that too. I think that accent has much more to do with class. Anyway, it annoyed me that they would put this on. And my aunt said that she felt it was alright that they did this because they were actually educated and that they were just fooling around having fun, which I bought and I still do. But it annoys me that there are people who talk like that because they are uneducated I suppose. Just seems kind of wrong to me. ...I remember once my mom’s family (were) calling each other niggers and how its okay within the family and not (outside of the family). Like today, that’s not acceptable. ...I remember my mom having to explain to me why it was okay to call people (nigger) and me not understanding ...Actually now, if (my mom is) with a group of other Black people, then she will talk like that. I’m used to it now. And I actually do it myself now in fact, since I’ve moved to (the city). ...(Usually with this friend)
we talk like my mom talks with her family kind of, but much more updated and tamer. Like we would never say nigger to each other the way my mom and her family did. ...It's not so much like a dialect, its more the words that we'd use.

[Cory describes himself during adolescence.]

(In junior high I was) standard issue miserable adolescent youth sort of. That was pretty accurate at the time. ...(In terms of race), I probably would have checked both (when filling out the forms). Like if there was Black or White (categories on the forms) I would have checked both, which is usually what I, like on my SAT forms, my college applications, that was what I did. ...During junior high my mom had been doing her dissertation and part of high school. ...And before it was a popular issue, like before working mothers and single parent families were an issue, that's what I was. That's what I grew up with. There was never anybody home when I got home from school, like from elementary school on.

High school is pretty tough. ...Our high school was very cliquey and I had these two cliques that I sort of oscillated in between. One was very, very well bred, artistic, played classical instruments and studied, and they were all in advanced classes and stuff. The other group was this kind of partying group. ...And I would hang out with them every once in a while. ...There was nobody Black in either clique. ...Sophomore year there was this one kid who was Indian who hung out with the well educated clique and then he moved away. ...I noticed the difference more between the Black kids with different backgrounds than the Black kids with backgrounds similar to mine I guess. ...There were the (Black) kids who came from like the (Program) and they were different sort of outlooks personality-wise and stuff. Just very, I don't know. They were just different. ...Looking back, my values seemed very demented, but they seemed much cooler and much tougher I suppose than me, which was kind of important. Like you want to be cool and stuff. I mean I had my friends and they had
their friends ... like they hung out with other Black kids whereas I didn’t because my friends had been my friends for so long already beforehand.

[Cory describes how he felt moving from the rural college town where he grew up to the city where he went to college.]

I went to (Arts College in the city). When I first got to school, I thought like this is it. I’m in college and away from home. When I first got here like the first month or so I was completely miserable. I didn’t know anybody. ...I moved into (this section of the city) and I remember the second day I was there ... I was riding all around (on my bicycle). I rode to ... like right on the edge of the projects. ...It’s just a very rough looking area. I continuously rode my bike through there and never had a problem. I don’t know. It was like complete culture shock having moved from (my town), like living near the projects. ...There were little kids running around speaking Spanish. Lots of poor people, just seeing like how the places that you only hear about, you know. It was weird. ...It was hard. The whole thing was just like hell. I was so homesick. But I’m really glad I moved out here.

[Cory talks about his interests in working in film.]

Working in film, I’ve come to realize how few people of color there are. On (this one show), there was me and this other guy in our department, there were like four or five people of color in a crew of like seventy. Maybe six people of color, and only two, three of us are Black. ...I look at like statistics and stuff, and like you know one out of every twenty one Black males will be like killed by another Black male. One out of every ten Black males is on probation or incarcerated. And just like the statistics just mounting up against me, and I feel more and more like I have something to prove almost, or to work towards. I really want to be successful. I don’t know how I want to go about changing things, but I want to participate in that in some way.

234
I'm interested in discovering things that I think would be good movies. Or in turning them into movies. As a producer that's what I'd like to do. But I'm also interested in what other people have seen in things too. ...The slew of current Black topic movies that are coming out are interesting to me but they don't, like Jungle Fever. When I first saw it, I liked it a lot. And then I saw it again and I realized that it didn't really apply to my life a whole lot as much as I thought it did at first. I've never dated anybody who's Black and that seems really weird to me. ...(Weird) means kind of something that I wonder about. I wonder about patterns in my life. I wonder (if) my not getting along with my mother at all in high school had anything to do with me not dating any women of color. That might be completely off base, but I wonder. I think it's good to like wonder about things. ... I look at and I want to be aware of the (patterns in my life). Not knowing about my biological parents, I worry about like was one of my parents an alcoholic or do they have heart disease or diabetes and stuff like that.

[Cory talks about how his heritage, racial identity, and appearance affect different aspects of his life.]

They were shooting videos here in Boston and I got a call from the production manager woman, she got four Black (production assistants to work on the videos). ...And they specifically requested Black production assistants, which I was just like floored, because that's just never happened. I was sought out because I was Black and it's just the greatest feeling. ...I didn't get to work on these videos, but (my friend) did and he thought that was great that the majority of the crew was Black. ...The idea of working on an all Black crew really appealed to me, or mostly Black crew. ...I think it would just be a really different working environment. ...I would think that a Black crew would be almost more fun, more easy going. ...Maybe that's wrong. There's also the feeling when you're working on
something, that everybody is working towards this one goal and that’s a really special feeling, especially, I’ve never been on a Black crew, but if the crew is Black, that you have something to prove. ...I don’t know that it would be (more easy going) for me. It would be a matter of how I was perceived on a crew. Because I could be perceived as White on an all Black crew, or I could be perceived as Black. I’m caught in that situation. My friend is all Black. He doesn’t have that problem.

Most people, I think, think that I am something. Most people don’t think I’m White but a lot of people don’t think I’m Black. But they also don’t think I’m mixed. I don’t know. Some people thought I’m Puerto Rican. Some people thought I was like Middle Eastern. People think I’m all different things. ...(I know because) ’cause they tell me afterwards. ...

...My face throws it off and my hair certainly right now throws it off too. I think, when I had short hair, I think it was much harder. People assumed I was White. And I think now (my appearance is) much more confusing. And as I get older, I think my face is changing and making it, I don’t know, harder to tell also. I think it means that people have to look at me hard and try and figure out what I am. ...

People ask me two questions: people ask me what am I and how did I get my (dreadlocks) like that? And that’s the two questions. ...I stand out a lot, but most of the time it’s positive the way I stand out. ...I look at standing out much differently then when I was a kid. I don’t see how people can stand normal things. Things that are normal bore me to death. ...Like how can people stand not being individuals? It strikes me as very strange, and I like the idea of being an individual. Not yelling it out, not like being a punker and being completely out there. But functioning in the real world, but at the same time, not going along with everybody else.

One (example) that stands out that was pretty recent was (when) I was in Montreal. In Montreal, people look at me, my girlfriend and I, ’cause we’re an odd looking couple.
She's like 4'9" and blonde and blue eyed, and I'm like all over the place. And we were in Montreal and this woman asked me what I was, and I said I was Black and White. And she asked "well, what kind of Black are you?" And that question can be seen in two different ways: what kind of Black are you, like from the Islands or from Africa proper, or from America Black; or it could be perceived as, are you Black and very Afro-centered Black or are you a Black person playing it White? I took it as she meant (if I was) from the Islands. And I had never thought of that, 'cause I don't know my biological father, that maybe he was from like Jamaica or the Caribbean or something. It never occurred to me. My perspective on (the other way to interpret the question) is that it's a really hard question because it hurts, it hurts me a lot when people tell me I'm not Black. I want to punch them in the face and kill them. 'Cause like the things, like the prejudice that I've experienced comes from both sides, and there's nothing that I can do about it. I've never played it White. I always, if someone is like being a bigot in front of me, I will stand up and I will say "I'm Black, shut up" or you know, I will stand up for myself. And I don't know that that's all I'm supposed to do, or if I'm supposed to do less. I don't really know that.

I was working on this music video and there was this old Black guy who was like a bum. ...He said something about his kids, his grandchildren not being able to tell the difference between Black and White. I said "Wow that's great." Because in a perfect world, people wouldn't have those divisions. In my mind, people wouldn't have those divisions. And he said "Maybe that's alright for you, but me, me I can't pass that way." And that was just like, ugh. You old fool. ...I can't (pass). I can't, it's just not something that I was brought up to do. ...(Black people) can look at me and say I can pass, but they don't know. They don't know (long pause), they don't know what it's like to be in my shoes. ...Sometimes it's really hard.
I wonder how people, were the situation reversed, (would) let it be known that they were Black. Say there’s a person who’s obviously Black, and you made them White but they were still Black, like their skin was White but they were still Black. How would they stand up in a normal situation, just living their life, and let people know that they were Black? You can’t just walk around with like a pin on you that says "I’m Black." You can’t just jump up and down all the time and yell "I’m Black" at the top of your lungs. You can only, if somebody is like being a bigot and a racist and an asshole, you can only tell them to shut the fuck up. If someone is asking you what your heritage is, you can tell them, but you can only do it to a certain extent before you become like this militant asshole, and that’s not who I am. I mean if I ever bought new clothes ... I don’t know, maybe I could wear like the African National Congress colors or something and then people would realize hey, he’s Black. But that’s not who I am. I don’t do that. I’m not a ... subversive. I’m not, I like read about politics and I know what’s going on. The country’s fucked but I don’t, like I just want to work and make movies and stuff.

I would rather almost sometimes be one or the other as opposed to both (Black and White), just so that everybody, including myself, knew where one another stood. ...It would make my life easier also. Instead of being like an insider and an outsider, a lot of the time I’m both at the same time. Like in film, I went to art school, but I work in main stream. And racially, I’m Black and White, but I’m also Jewish. ...I didn’t know I was Jewish until a couple of years ago. My mom told me. My biological mother is Jewish, so technically, like in the Jewish religion, that makes me Jewish. ...So I’m an insider and an outsider, like all the time. If I’m with a group of Blacks, I could be an outsider because I’m Jewish. If I’m with a group of Whites, I could be an outsider because I’m Jewish or I could be an outsider because I’m Black. Instead of it being that way, (if I was one or the other) I would have a
group of people who I would always know that I, or ideally, this isn’t really true, I would be accepted by because I was racially attuned to them. ...(I’d rather have it so) that my skin color would be dark enough that there wouldn’t be a mistake, or that I would be light enough that there wouldn’t be a mistake. ...(But) I could be completely Black and still be so light that I would be confused (as being White). You know how some Blacks have like freckles and very light skin. ...(I wish I had) something that made me obviously one way or the other. I think that would be easier. I wouldn’t have to take it from both sides. I’d only have to take it from one.

I was at this party once. The party (was in this section of the city), which is like, whenever I have to go on a shoot in (this section), I get nervous. ...And these four drunk, high school assholes crashed the party. ...And they were talking about how they hated niggers who live in the projects near them. And I could have gotten up and started fighting with them, or I could have ... and the girl who I was with was holding me very tightly, like "you’re not going to get up." And I was just grinding my teeth. ...It was just like the weirdest, most awkward situation and knowing that they didn’t ... I don’t think that they thought I was Black. But I wanted to fucking kick the shit.... What do you do? ...You try and make (the feelings and thoughts) more constructive I suppose. You try and focus your energies on things. You try and let those people who are thinking that way alone. If someone is thinking like that then I try and make it their problem and not mine. I think (that’s) the best thing I can do because it doesn’t do me any good to get into a fight. It’s hard to make that energy work in a different way. You want to fight back just as much. You want to hate just as much as they hate. It doesn’t do anybody any good.

You don’t go around thinking about what you look like or the color of your skin or that stuff all the time, because you’re thinking about other things. You don’t think about it
until someone makes a comment or if you're in some sort of situation. ...The majority of my life isn't spent thinking about racial anything. It's spent thinking about paychecks, and money, and moving, and day to day sort of things. On occasion, when my life gets interrupted by something racial, it affects me. It usually makes me angry and makes me think about the fact that it's not really, it's my problem. But it's even more the other person's problem, and I think that's an important thing to keep in mind when thinking about racism, is that it's the person who's the racist problem more than it is the person who's affected by it, unless like it's institutional racism in which case you're screwed. ...I don't think about (my appearance), I don't think about it hardly at all quite frankly. Got too many other things on my mind. Money and making movies and watching movies and what do I have to do the next day, and working.

[Cory describes some of the factors which influence how he identifies racially.]

I guess (how I identify racially) is a matter of the situation. ...I identify as Black a lot of the time when I'm in a situation, like (in) a group of rich White people. My stepmother's family is from (this town). And sometimes I'll be down there at a family party or something. I'll feel like, what the hell am I doing here? ...I just feel completely Black. I don't feel like completely Black, I don't know what that feels like, but I feel just out of place. ...I like meeting other Blacks who have the same sort of background as I do. Like suburbs and like middle class. I feel much more at ease as opposed to being with Blacks from the inner city. I feel more at ease just in general with people with the same background. I find that I get along much better with them. I don't like rich people, rich kids which I find I don't trust them a lot of the time. ...Usually my first impression of a person is very accurate and I usually try and go with that because, 'cause I'll find out things about them later that will back up what my first impression was.
I think it’s really hard to identify yourself unless you have people who are doing it for you to some extent. I don’t know. Maybe I’m a really shallow person or something, but I don’t come up with things like (identity) on my own unless I have some sort of input in the first place from other people. …The idea of self meaning is derived from how other people, like you wouldn’t have any self meaning unless you had feedback from other people. …(My skin color) means that I have to be pretty sure with myself, which I guess I feel for the most part I am. I find that there is constantly things that can make you emotionally feel like you’ve been kicked in the stomach. Like you’ll find out somebody died or you’ll find something out about yourself that you didn’t know, which will throw everything that you thought about yourself off. And you’ll have to reevaluate. …And I think being secure with who I am, and my skin color, and how I look, my personality, is something that I’m constantly reassessing. I don’t see how people are able to, maybe when you get older, remain sort of static with who they are.

(I would describe my sense of self today as) plate tectonics I guess, like a constantly shifting moving ground. I have my off days and I have my really up days. …I try and keep it sort of even and steady, ’cause work is so like all over the place. I need to have anchors a lot of the time. …I think that’s the most secure you can have. …I need something that’s shifting like that. But I always have to leave yourself enough sort of reserve so that you can bounce back when you get kicked in the stomach. To like have a bedrock sort of bottom, and then have certain top areas be able to undulate I guess. My bedrock I guess would probably be my family, my girlfriend, my close friends, (where I grew up). …It seems to help me make decisions to see old places and faces and stuff.

[Cory gives his perspective on race and racism given his experiences.]
It's good to be me. I like who I am and I like the fact that [pause], I think it's going to get harder and harder for people in the future to define themselves as one thing or the other. I think people will need to do it less and less. ...(My heritage) means I'm the future kind of, I guess. That I'm the beginning of the way things are going to be later on. I really hope people get used to it too. They don't really have much choice. ...I think about that you're not going to be able to say, "That Black guy" or "That White guy." You're going to have to come up with some sort of other description for somebody (other) than the color of their skin. You're going to have to say like "The guy in the blue shirt." It'll be really weird. ...It means that racism on both sides will have to end. That people will have to get along.

(Prejudice coming from Black people) disappoints me. For some reason I'm under the impression that Blacks aren't supposed to be racist. Like I suppose that's a really dumb idea but it seems like Blacks are just as racist as Whites, if not more in some cases. ...(Black racism to me is) just not being accepted. Being called White. ...It means they're stupid. It means they're not looking at the bigger sort of picture of things I guess. ...The bigger picture is that everyone is going to be, either be half of something, a quarter of something. ...That people's outward appearance is no longer going to reflect what they're like inside. It's gonna have to start being based on where they're from, or the way they speak, and their class status.

I don't make sense of (the concept of race today). ...(The) only way to really know what somebody is (racially) is to ask them. (Using skin color to determine race is) a pain in the ass. I wish like everyone was like color blind or something, just couldn't tell ... special contact lenses. ...I don't know. (Then) I guess you'd have to base all your hatred on religion or something (laughs). Have to come up with a different way to hate each other and kill each other instead of just being racist about skin color. ...You get yourself into trouble
when you base stuff—I mean I’ve worked in places, ... we were shooting once and we had to go to the (Union), like this Union hall. And two of like the Whitest guys, like they’re old men (were there). I was nervous about being in there. (The two men) were fine. I can’t go around and think everyone is out to get me because they’re White, and I can’t think everyone else is out to get me because they’re Black. I have to go on what’s happening at the time, and how they are responding to me and how we’re interacting.

Each person has these experiences which teach them how to interact. My memories that I have aren’t shared by anybody else I suppose. And for somebody to tell me that I am a certain way because of my skin color or because of my lack of skin color, without knowing, without having my experiences, seems like the dumbest, like stupidest thing for a person to do. ...I suppose if somebody has known me for a really long time, then I respect them and I’ll take what they say at a much higher level. But for someone who I’ve just met to call me like Whitey or something, when that comes out that’s like completely stupid.

People will talk about the Black experience as if there was one certain experience of being Black. And for me that’s very frustrating 'cause I don’t think people really think about it when they say it sometimes. ’Cause you can be like perceived as White by Blacks and as Black by Whites and that can be very confusing. ...I guess (my own experience) tells me that there isn’t one (Black experience). That it’s kind of, that it’s a lie. That there’s like for every Black person, there is a different experience. For every person of color, there is a different experience. It tells me that mine is mine and it’s not like any, well it might be like somebody else’s, but it’s not somebody else’s. It’s mine. ...(My experience is) good because I think it’ll help me deal. If I have kids, to be able to relate to them what I went through and what I think that they’re going through. ...I guess, what’s the saying, what doesn’t kill you
makes you stronger. I guess I relate it that way. ...I guess I use it to make myself stronger, to help make that bedrock even stronger.

I wish I could come back. Let's say that the planet doesn't blow itself up and the economy doesn't collapse and like things sort of continue on this sort of stream, like the greenhouse effect doesn't take hold and kill us all. Let's say that people just continue living normal. I'd really like to come back (in) a couple hundred years and see racially what people look like, 'cause I think that would be really interesting, to see how it works itself out. It certainly has to because you can't just keep on killing each other. ...I think people have to realize that everybody basically wants the same thing.

Section Three: How Racial Identities Evolved

This section summarizes how each participant characterized how his or her racial identity developed. The information that is presented is taken from material shared by participants in their interviews, and from their Personal History of Identity Worksheets.

Two of the participants who identified as Black were told in their early years who they were in terms of racial group by one or both parents. This was accepted as either something that couldn't be changed, in the case of Anne Jenkins, or the reality given the historical and political context of race in the United States by Robin Farmer. This initial designation as Black was reinforced by each woman's experiences in the world, and remained the racial group with which they named themselves in their current life. Anne Jenkins believed today, however, that the concept of race and racial identity had little meaning in her life, and if she didn't have to have an identity, she wouldn't.

David Stein also believed that his early experiences and upbringing affected his choice of racial identity. His adoption into a White family, his not being "treated any differently" by
other family members, and his lack of knowledge of his biological heritage until his teenage years contributed to him naming himself as White. He also described his early environment as reflecting Jewish culture, and felt that he now considered himself more Israeli than Black. Because of his appearance, David believed that most people saw and treated him as if he were not of mixed race heritage. While David sometimes experienced incidents which brought up uncomfortable feelings for him, he felt that his biological heritage had to do with his past, and that it was important for him to continue to live the way that he did now in order to get what he wanted in his life. Like Anne, he indicated that he wouldn’t identify with any racial group if he didn’t have to.

Because he was "a large part of both," Mitchell Barnes described himself as a minority person who was able to relate to both his Black and White heritages. In addition, since his background reflected Native American heritage and he related to many of the characteristics he associated with Cherokee people, this heritage was included in his sense of racial identity. Mitchell noted that the early environment in which he was raised played a part in how he saw himself today. This included being cherished by his parents, not being accepted fully as either Black or White, and feeling the need for a common ground outside of the fighting between Blacks and Whites which he found with the Cherokees. At different points in his life, he felt more comfortable associating and identifying with one racial group over the others because of the way he was treated or was coming to understand legal and social issues. However, he believed that given all of his experience, although he did not choose to be of mixed race heritage, today it was important for him to be who he was.

Jennifer Smith’s and Cory Stewart’s choices of racial identity reflected their experience of not wanting to choose one side of their heritage over the other. Jennifer remembered getting positive messages about being a mixed race person from her mother early
in her life. Even though Jennifer felt Black in terms of how she lived her life, other factors such as her appearance, her experiences with Blacks and Whites, and her feelings that she does not want to deny part of her heritage, led her to identify as Mixed. Cory indicated that his awareness of himself in terms of race was related to his realization of how other people saw him. Because he believed his appearance made it difficult for others to identify his background, he felt that it was important for him to "be pretty sure" of himself. He described his identity as changing depending on the situation and how others perceive him, but indicated that he could not pass as a White person because of the way that he was raised. He believed that if he had stayed in New York for a longer period of time before moving to a predominantly White community, perhaps his realization of himself as being Black would have come sooner than it did.

Agnes Barnes described her current racial identity as being the product of a transformation which she underwent in young adulthood. Prior to this period, because of her early environment and experiences, she saw herself as a person who was both Black and White. After undergoing a process which included learning about the history and politics of race in the United States and reevaluating some of her past behaviors and attitudes, Agnes came to embrace an African-American identity. She also noted that becoming aware of the difficulty of being seen as just a person outside of her home environment, and the response of others to her and her first husband, influenced her sense of identity. At this point in her life, Agnes described the importance for her "just to be a human being."

Section Four: Changes in Racial Identity

The third research question in this dissertation explores whether participants’ sense of racial identity changed over time and the factors which influenced these changes. This section
presents information derived from participant profiles and the descriptions of identity development summarized in Section Three.

Five out of the seven participants in this study described their sense of racial identity in ways which did not reflect major changes in their choice of identity over the course of their lives. While a number of these participants did not have a sense of themselves as belonging to a racial group early in their lives, once they became aware of their identity, whether it was chosen or assigned, that identity remained relatively unchanged through time. Anne Jenkins identified with the group that her mother told her she belonged to, although the name of that group has changed from Negro to Afro-American. In her life, people did not speak about being of mixed race heritage, and when people did not believe that she was of mixed heritage in the past, it did not matter to her. Robin Farmer did not experience a period of thinking of herself as half White and half Black, and stressed that she did not feel as close a sense of affiliation with her European ancestry as she did with her African background. David Stein had always considered himself White, even when he became aware that his biological make up included African-American, and what he termed "Hispanic" heritages.

Jennifer Smith identified as mixed for most of her life, however she noted that "it just depended on different times in my life how I dealt with it." Some of the ways she dealt with her sense of identity included changing her appearance by wearing make-up or going to tanning salons, or adopting Black slang. This did not change her identity, but was done so that she would feel like she fit in more with her Black friends and would not have her heritage questioned. Jennifer felt that if her appearance had allowed her to, she would have identified as Black at some points in her life. She also alluded to a period of her life when she was "anti-White," but did not indicate that she identified as Black during this time. Cory Stewart noted that while he did not think of himself in racial terms for a long time, he
checked boxes for both Black and White on his college applications. Although how he named himself remained fairly consistent over time, he described himself as feeling more Black in certain situations.

The experiences of two of the participants did reflect times in their lives when their sense of racial identity changed. This change began for both Agnes Barnes and Mitchell Bennett as they were maturing in their early environments, and continued once they had left those environments. Mitchell realized the differences between himself and his White cousins in terms of how they were treated by his father's family and in relation to legal matters while he was still on the farm. As he ventured away from his home when he was older, he also noticed that people treated him differently. Agnes described her tastes as changing, and herself as maturing when she began to notice differences in the culture that she had felt comfortable with in the past and Black culture. Once Mitchell and Agnes left their respective early environments, they both had experiences which led them to be more comfortable identifying as Black. Mitchell felt more easily accepted by Blacks, and since he could empathize with the feelings of discrimination that Blacks felt, he was more comfortable "passing with the minorities." For Agnes, finding a place for herself in society by studying African-American history, and thinking about the political implications of interracial relationships and having mixed race children, fueled her journey to an African-American identity. She described this change in her identity as a transformation which occurred fairly quickly once it had begun.

At another point in his life, Mitchell felt that he had found a "common ground" among the Cherokees, where he did not feel there was the imbalance in the scale of what people had and didn't have that he had seen between the Black and White sides of his family. Mitchell also believed that this group reflected values such as honesty, humbleness, and
neutrality which he associated with himself. Mitchell felt that his religion had ultimately led him to a place where he accepted and identified with all three of his racial heritages. Agnes described her development as continuing in her current life. While she identified as African-American, she said that she was "still going through the quest ... for a sense of identity," and stressed the importance of her just being a human being.

Section Five: Themes from Within Chosen Racial Identity Groups

This section examines themes and patterns in the experiences of participants who chose the same or similar racial identities. Participants who chose a Black racial identity are presented first. This is followed by a summary of the major themes which characterized the experience of the participant who identified as White. This section concludes with the presentation of some of the themes seen in the experiences of participants whose identities reflected more than one racial category.

Themes from Participants Who Identified as Black

All three of the participants who chose a Black racial identity were women. As noted in Section Three of this chapter, Anne Jenkins and Robin Farmer were told by their parents that they were Black when they were children. The other woman, Agnes Barnes, developed a Black racial identity later in her life. Some of the themes and patterns which stand out when the experiences of these three women are compared are the different factors which influenced their choice of identity, their sense of community, their sense of identity today, strategies which they used to deal with racism, and how they characterized some of the significant relationships in their lives. Each of these themes are developed and presented separately.
Influences on Choice of Identity. Both Anne and Robin spoke of the clear influence their parents had on their being named as Black in their early years. Agnes did not have the same kind of discussions with either of her parents that Anne and Robin did, but she noted that her father’s comments about her dating White men were a source of confusion for her for a long time. Later in her life, she came to ask herself similar questions when she was undergoing her transformation in racial identity.

At some point in their lives, all three of the women in this group experienced geographical moves to predominantly White environments, or environments which were seen as less progressive than their previous communities. Each woman commented on how this change caused her to experience different incidents related to her racial heritage. Robin moved to St. Louis and experienced incidents of name calling and inquiries into her background. In response to this, she began developing "an armor" and "an offensive posture" towards people who made comments and jokes related to ethnicity or race. Anne experienced harassment from residents when her family left a more racially mixed city environment and moved to a White suburb, where who she was as a Black person "was made perfectly clear." She described herself as feeling isolated there, and eventually declining invitations to different affairs because she doubted the sincerity with which they were made. Agnes realized that it was harder "to get away with just being a person" when she left New York City and went to a more rural, White setting to begin her undergraduate studies.

The social and political context of race in the United States factored into how each woman came to name herself as Black or African-American in different ways. Robin had discussions with her father and grandmother about the social construction of race, and how her African-American heritage meant that she was Black. Agnes stressed the role that learning American history from an African-American perspective played in her identity.
development. She noted that another factor which sparked the process that led to the change in her racial identity was thinking about the issues associated with having mixed race relationships and children in a more political context. Anne described herself as not fully understanding or knowing how to respond to the Civil Rights Movement. In her earlier years, she was aware that she was "just Black" as a matter of fact, based on how society named and responded to her.

Each of these three participants made reference to her physical appearance during her interviews. Agnes described herself as fitting into the Black community "just on looks alone." Anne mentioned that she couldn’t get around the fact that she was not White. She specifically referred to her appearance when she spoke about wanting to have darker skin now, and at earlier points in her life. Robin described herself as needing to be clear with herself and others about her identity because she felt that she looked "ambiguous." She also referenced appearance when she spoke about the racial identity of her sons given their physical characteristics, and how people sometimes responded to her when she was seen with one or both of them.

_Sense of Community._ All of the women who identified as Black felt that their sense of community and culture had influenced their lives. In most cases, these factors were evident when these participants spoke about how they defined themselves or received acceptance and support from others. When Anne moved to the city and began to work and socialize with Blacks, she felt like she "was with my own." Even in the present, she described being more accepted by Blacks than by Whites. Robin and Agnes both described their heritage or identity as being heavily influenced by the culture and community that they felt connected to. While Robin identified with aspects of both White and Black culture, she noted that she did not find many messages in European culture that were supportive and affirming of her. As she still
lived in a predominantly White environment, she described her current sense of community as "disparate," and sometimes found herself feeling "somewhat on my own, adrift at times."

Agnes knew that she was half White, but described that heritage as not being relevant to her day to day life. Instead, she saw being African-American as "a rhythm of living that's totally different," that could give her "satisfaction soul-wise" that identifying with her White heritage could not. Like Anne, she also described feeling more accepted by the Black community.

Both Anne and Agnes indicated that at this point in their lives, the cultural differences that they felt between Blacks and Whites would keep them from being in a relationship with a White person.

During early periods in their lives, all of these women experienced being either seen as, or feeling different from other Blacks. Anne had some Blacks make comments about her complexion and her eyes. Agnes described feeling different from some of her Black peers when she was younger because of her appearance, her European cultural and language background, and the way that she spoke. Robin also felt that language patterns, her family environment, and living in a different neighborhood set her apart from other Black children when she was in junior high school. Looking back on her life, she wished that she had associated more with Black peers or was exposed to environments where she had greater opportunity to be with other Black people. Currently both Agnes and Robin cited a lack of time as presenting barriers to their developing more solid ties with the Black communities in their areas. Agnes also connected her early experiences of not fitting in with her current feeling that it was difficult for her to meet and open up to new people.

Current Sense of Identity. Given the strong connection between their sense of identity and the culture which they preferred, Agnes and Robin currently saw themselves as Black, with Agnes naming herself African-American and Robin preferring the name of Black.
American. While neither of these two women denied their White heritage, they believed that it had little relevance to their day to day lives. Robin felt that if she had to choose one heritage over the other, she would choose to be Black, and that the heritage of her father's side of her family let her "off the hook a little bit" for the mistreatment of other races done by Whites. Agnes also noted that if she were European, she would still have a connection to the legacy of slavery, but in a different, more negative sense. Anne described herself as being either a Black American or Afro-American, but stressed that having an identity was not important to her today. Although she and Agnes spoke about being Black and finding acceptance in the Black community, they both indicated that it is important for them to be human beings, and not human beings of a particular race.

Each of the women in this group of participants made references to her gender, sometimes naming herself as a Black or African-American woman, at different points in her interviews. Anne found strength from what she saw in other Black women which helped her to keep going, even in the face of hardship. Agnes described her sense of being a Black woman as providing her with a source of strength as well as a sense of responsibility for the Black community. A number of challenges in her current life centered around finding a balance between her race and her gender. Robin felt self-esteem and confidence from her success as a Black woman in the business world. She was also concerned with misogynist practices which she saw as occurring in different African cultures.

**Strategies for Dealing with Racism.** During their interviews, all three women shared some of the strategies that they had used to help them to deal with issues of race or racism in their lives. Anne and Robin went for long periods of time not confronting or talking about incidents when they were younger. Later, Anne described herself as realizing that nobody could save her but herself, and how she challenged herself to take risks such as applying for a
job or going into a certain store, even though she was afraid at the time. She felt sorry for people who she described as being so full of hate around racism, and knew that she didn’t want to feel that way herself. Today, she credited her religion with giving her strength to deal with racism, and for bringing her to the understanding that all people were the same and equal. Agnes echoed this sentiment in her feeling that people should celebrate their own heritage while accepting the heritages of others. She believed that people who put others down were unhappy with some aspect of their own lives. In her business life, she tried to seek out African-American clients and service providers in order to contribute to the economic empowerment of the African-American community. Robin enjoyed engaging others in conversations when she heard people being racist. She described herself as living in a world which she had created, relying on her intuition and "sensitive antennae" to determine who she would be friends with. She was frustrated because she was not able to do what she believed was necessary to actually change some of the realities she attributed to race and racism. She also felt that her spiritual beliefs helped her to forgive herself, forgive and accept others, and not dwell on negative things or occurrences which happened in her life.

**Relationships with Others.** Various relationships came into focus as each woman described her past and present life. All of the women spoke about their relationship with their mothers, or the influence their mothers had had on their lives. Anne and Robin had early experiences where their mothers were identified as being Black, although they were actually White. Anne’s mother told her that she considered herself Black because she had married and had children with Anne’s father. Robin remembered filling out census forms where her mother’s racial group was listed as Black. However, Robin noted that it was her father who was the parent who had the most impact on her interests. Both Anne and Robin recounted the efforts their mother’s made to make them feel special, or to shield them from racism. Agnes
described herself as identifying more with her mother at the time when she felt more comfortable "being around White people." While she was undergoing her transformation in racial identity, she felt that her discussions with her mother about race in the United States were times when they were learning African-American history together. Because she experienced a different dynamic between Black women and White women, Agnes believed in retrospect that perhaps she wouldn't have experienced so much confusion about her identity if her mother had been Black.

Robin and Agnes made references to the relationships that they had with their husbands. Agnes described her heritage as being an issue in this relationship when she discussed wanting to go to Europe with her husband or when they were fighting. She believed that his perspective and experiences had closed him off to seeing other cultures. She sometimes wondered how he felt being attracted to and married to a bi-racial woman, and believed that it was something that he had to work out. Today, Agnes was attempting to manage gender issues and gender roles with her husband. Robin believed that being married to a White man "reflects my experience in the world so far to a certain extent." While she felt that she and her husband didn't have issues around race, she noted that the environment in which her husband had been raised affected how he could relate to her.

Robin did feel a sense of heritage when she exposed her two children to things which reflected African or African-American culture and history. By doing this, she hoped to instill a sense of knowledge and pride about their background in them. Although not yet a mother, Agnes expressed two opinions on how she would like her children to look. When she described undergoing her transformation, she remembered wanting to have brown children so that they wouldn't have "to go through what I went through in terms of confusion" about their racial identities. When she spoke about herself today, she indicated that now it didn't matter
what her children looked like. However, she felt that having a light skinned child with a
White man would result in a dilution of African-American heritage which she did not favor.

In terms of general interactions with Whites or people from other racial groups, Robin
did not find herself being self-conscious or uncomfortable, and felt that race was not an issue
in her friendships. Agnes felt that she could interact with White people fairly easily,
especially when she was in New York. This she attributed both to her heritage, and the
culturally diverse nature of her early environment.

Themes from Participant Who Identified as White

David Stein was the only participant in this study who identified as White. Therefore,
the themes noted in this section are those which summarize thoughts or experiences which he
described as being significantly related to how he identified in terms of racial group, or
incidents or perspectives which he raised a number of times during his interviews. Some of
the themes are similar to those presented in the previous section on participants who identified
as Black.

Influences on Choice of Identity. As noted in Section Three, David’s choice of
identity was closely tied to being adopted into a White, Jewish household and being treated
the same as others in that family. In addition to his early cultural environment and his
perception of his physical appearance, David felt that a number of other factors had
influenced his choice of identity. In his early years, David described himself as wanting to fit
in with other children. This theme was present in his sense of himself today when he
indicated that he didn’t want people to hate him or see him as being different. By identifying
as White and not disclosing information about the racial heritage of his biological parents,
David felt that people would not know his heritage, and would not look at, or treat him
differently. While David mostly believed that people saw him as being White, he described himself as feeling more comfortable speaking with a Black person when he went to the Commission Against Discrimination because "she could see in me that I was partly or somewhat" Black, and therefore would be able to understand how he felt discriminated against.

Although David sometimes experienced uncomfortable feelings when incidents occurred, he saw himself as generally being happy and not feeling oppressed. David believed that others relied on skin color to determine someone's race, and since he had a light complexion, he was seen as White by others. He described himself as being able to "do everything the White person does." He felt normal, and that he was able to live his life the way he wanted to.

**Current Sense of Identity.** David believed that he could consider himself anything he wanted to in terms of his identity, since he saw himself as "I'm half way here, I'm half way there." Because he identified as White and and saw himself as looking White, he felt that he did not have to deal with racism, or people being suspect of him because he was part Black. He described himself as not living the heritage that his biological parents would have lived. Given the heritage he had lived since being with his adopted family, he felt he was more an Israeli than a Black person. David believed that his chosen racial identity allowed him to be normal and like everybody else. However, he noted that the feelings he had when incidents happened or when he heard a racial slur, set him apart from other Whites. David did feel that if he didn’t have to have a racial group identity, he wouldn’t.

**Relationships with Others.** In several places in his profile, David spoke about liking to be with people. He described himself as having an easy time getting along with different types of people, but felt that he wouldn’t ever be able to be a part of "the Black crowd."
David experienced being ostracized by Blacks in both high school and college, even though in college he felt that he should have been accepted because he was half Black. David believed that most Whites saw him as White, and that he had never been treated differently than other Whites. In the few instances when White peers had asked about his heritage, David described people as not caring about what his heritage was once they were told.

David felt that he did not use race as a way of identifying a person. He instead preferred to use a person's name, or to identify them by what they were wearing at the time. He felt that words which described racial groups, such as Black and White, embodied stereotypes and were hard for him to say. David did not talk with other people, including his mother, about situations related to race which he had experienced. He explained that he would feel embarrassed, and wouldn't want to get other people involved since this would draw attention to his mixed race heritage. When David encountered negative comments made by Whites about Blacks, he felt that he did not know what to say or how to respond.

Perspective on Heritage. David stressed that his biological heritage was not important to him in his day to day life. He described it as something that happened in the past which he had accepted. When he needed to indicate his racial background on forms, he wrote that he was White. David noted that he did have feelings "toward some things that other people don't," and he wondered if these feelings were related to his heritage, or his being a person who didn't like to use racial or racist terms. He also believed his mixed racial heritage contributed to the ways that he could be hated by others, and was something that people would have to see over or beyond in order for him to succeed. He felt he received benefits for being part White and not for being part Black. David also believed that it was more important to live his life the way he did now, than to think about or dwell on his heritage. While he did not think about his identity or heritage often, he described himself as
experiencing cycles of feelings when incidents occurred, where he reflected on the situation and his response, and then pushed these thoughts into the back of his head where they were not thought about again. David felt that he didn’t know or understand about being of mixed heritage, and that this was something that he didn’t really have to understand.

Response to Racism. Although David did not speak about strategies which he used to deal with racism, he did describe his response to different incidents involving race or racism. In most cases, this description focussed on how he felt, or his thoughts when he was not sure what to feel or how to respond to incidents. When a White person said something negative about Blacks in front of him, David described himself as having conflicting feelings. While at times he felt embarrassed or insulted because someone was "putting my race down," he also experienced relief that the person could not tell from his appearance that he had Black heritage, or feelings of happiness and thanks that he was not Black. In this context, he characterized himself as being "a little hypersensitive about what people (say) or how they go about saying things". David believed that his feelings were normal given the situation he was in. When these feelings came up, he thought about them or the incident for a only a brief time, and did not discuss them with anyone else. He described his feelings as "mostly a lifetime of embottlement."

David felt that he generally did not characterize people by race. However, he has experienced times when he was aware of his own prejudice around race. He described the thoughts that he has had as being "an involuntary type thing that I can’t help and that I can’t take back." David didn’t understand why he had these views, especially in light of his racial heritage, and attributed them to him being around others who were racist.
Themes from Participants Who Identified as Multiple Race People.

The participants who did not identify with only one racial group chose a variety of different ways to describe themselves and their sense of racial identity. Jennifer Smith referred to herself as a person who was mixed. Cory Stewart named himself as a person of color who was not Black or White. Mitchell Bennet described himself as a minority person. The themes which ran across the life stories which were recounted by these three participants help to highlight both the sameness and variety in their experiences.

Influences on Choice of Identity. All three of the participants noted that their early environment had some effect on their racial identity development. Mitchell described his father’s position and the isolation of the farm as offering his family the opportunity to be together. This physical separation from the larger society and his interactions with both Blacks and Whites gave him the freedom to identify as half Black and half White in his early years. Jennifer felt that if her early environment had not been almost exclusively White, her family and identity development would have been less of an issue. Although she was not conscious of the race of her friends, she found herself being more accepted by Black peers than Whites, and feeling that having brown skin was normal. Cory believed that his parents selected the town where he spent most of his youth because of the way he and his family would be treated, and that within this environment, he did not have to develop a sense of racial identity in the early years of his life.

Mitchell and Cory both believed that how they were seen or treated by others had influenced their sense of identity at different points in their lives. Mitchell described feeling caught in between Blacks and Whites, and that he was not fully accepted as being White or Black when he was young. As he spent more time away from the farm in later years, he felt more comfortable identifying with Black people because he felt more accepted by them. Cory
saw his current sense of racial identity as reflecting to some extent what others saw in him. He described the experience of being seen as White by Blacks and as Black by Whites as confusing.

In some way, each of the participants in this group felt that it was important to acknowledge all of their racial heritages. Mitchell believed that since he was a large part of both Black and White, he could identify with both heritages and was able to understand how these two groups saw the other. Because it offered him a middle, more neutral ground, Mitchell also identified with, and valued his Cherokee heritage. Jennifer appreciated the two cultures which her heritages offered her, and noted that even though she identified more with Black culture, White culture also had a place in her life. Cory felt that he couldn’t pass as White because of the way he felt and the way he was raised.

Lastly, all of the participants believed that their appearance affected their sense of racial identity to varying degrees. Mitchell felt that his complexion was similar to that of Cherokee people, and that this helped him to identify with his Native American heritage. Cory felt that because of changes in his face and hair, it was becoming harder for people to identify his heritage from his appearance. Jennifer stressed that given her appearance, she could not identify as Black, because doing so would not be accepted or believed.

Due to the amount of information shared on the topic of appearance by these participants, the influence of appearance on their sense of identity is developed as a separate theme later in this section.

Current Sense of Identity. Beyond the names chosen for their identities, each of the participants described his or her sense of identity today in different terms. Mitchell felt that through God and his faith, he had come to a place of peace within himself about who he was. Jennifer also described herself as being resolved about her racial identity. She attributed this
to her age and maturity, and the fact that day to day life issues had become more prominent in her life. Where race was an issue in Jennifer’s life now was in her relationship with her son and his racial identity development. Like Jennifer, Cory noted that general life issues were most prominent in his life now, and that issues related to his identity came up usually when he experienced or observed an incident related to race or racism. His sense of identity changed in different situations, with him feeling more Black when in a group of wealthy Whites. In addition, he described his sense of self as still evolving and shifting, and felt that his identity and heritage were indicators of “the way things are going to be later on.”

All of the participants felt that their experiences had made them stronger, and able to make contributions the Black community or to serve as role models for others. Both Mitchell and Jennifer felt that their experiences allowed them to evaluate situations, especially those dealing with issues or conflicts between Blacks and Whites, more openly. Mitchell felt that through this way of thinking, and his ability to be truthful and neutral, he could be a role model for others. Jennifer also saw herself as a potential role model, especially given her knowledge of history, Black heritage and Black culture. Cory felt that his future success in film may help him to participate in changing things in the future, and that his experiences had shown him that there was no single experience of being Black.

The theme of being either one race or the other appeared in different contexts within each of these three participants’ stories. Mitchell described how he was not allowed to check three racial categories on forms related to his job. He felt that as a mixed race person, he did not have access to such benefits as Affirmative Action and other legal routes designed to combat discrimination, and that mixed race populations should have rights too. Jennifer believed that if she had been either Black or White, she would have been able to live and deal with life as a mono-racial person more easily than having to try and manage life as a mixed
race person. Today, she felt "by myself with this issue" because there weren't many people of mixed race heritage in her community, and she did not have a connection with others who had experienced what she had during her life. Cory felt that he should be one race or the other, or at least appear more one way or the other, so that he and others would be less confused about who he was. He believed that this would give him acceptance by a group because he "was racially attuned to them," and that then he would only experience racism from one, as opposed to both sides. Even though he had had experiences where Blacks had said that he could pass, or where Whites had mistaken him for being White, Cory felt that he could not pass because of the way he was raised. He felt that Blacks who believed that he could pass "don't know what its like to be in my shoes." Jennifer also noted that she could choose to live as a White person, but instead chose to fight for the life and relationships she wanted to have.

**Interactions with Others.** Perhaps the experience which was most shared by Mitchell, Jennifer, and Cory was that of having people ask them who or what they were in terms of their racial heritage. Mitchell felt that such inquiries could be annoying, and prevented him from being just a person. Jennifer felt like there were different kinds of inquiring stares, with some being genuinely curious while others were more hostile in intent. Cory was mostly asked by others about his appearance, his hair, and his heritage.

Jennifer and Cory described themselves as not being fully a part of a particular racial community. Related to his feelings about being one race or the other, Cory described himself as being both an insider and an outsider because of his mixed racial heritage, and the fact that he was Jewish by birth. Some of the ways that he had felt prejudice coming from Blacks was by not being accepted or by being called White. He thought that he may be more comfortable in a predominantly Black work environment, but believed that this would depend on whether
he was perceived as Black by the rest of the people on the work crew. Jennifer felt angry at times because people with a single racial background could speak about themselves and their identities without having to explain that they also had several different heritages. As a person with a mixed race background, she often found herself holding back, because she couldn’t just say that she was Black. She experienced herself as sticking out when she was in a group of Whites because of cultural differences, and because of her physical appearance when she was in a group of Blacks. It was important for Jennifer that she not be seen as the enemy, especially by Black women.

All three of these participants had experiences in groups where they felt that their racial heritage was not acknowledged. This was often characterized by people making remarks about either Blacks or Whites in front of them, without regard or awareness of their heritage or feelings. Cory described a party where a group of men made derogatory remarks about Blacks in their neighborhood. Jennifer had experienced both Whites making negative comments about Blacks and Blacks making negative comments about Whites in front of her. She had also been ignored when she was in a group of Black people, because others had assumed that she was White. She noticed that some Blacks, even those who knew her background, had trouble saying White in front of her. Mitchell had also been in situations where both Blacks and Whites were speaking negatively about each other. In these situations he described himself as being neutral because he didn’t want to judge one race over the other. Similarly, Jennifer believed that her experiences helped her to not pick sides in a conflict between Whites and Blacks, and to analyze the situation based on right versus wrong, as opposed to which race was on which side. However, sometimes when Jennifer had disagreed with what was seen as the Black perspective, she had been told that she was doing so from the White side of her heritage.
The major relationship where race was currently an issue for Jennifer was with her son Jeffrey. Based on her own experience, she believed that he would feel pain around his racial heritage, and she wanted to be able to support him when this happened. Mitchell was also concerned about the obstacles his children would face, and used his own experiences as an example for his daughter to learn from when she was being harassed at school.

Each of the participants shared their thoughts on the relationships that they had had through dating, marriage, or being with partners. Cory wondered about his pattern of dating only White women, and if this was a source of tension between himself and his mother when he was in high school. One of the areas where Jennifer had experienced tension in her life was in her relationships with Black men. While the response from Black women frustrated and hurt her, she understood their perspective, since she believed that they saw her as being a White woman with a Black man. Mitchell's family's response to his first wife surprised him. He thought that his father's family should have accepted her more because she was White, and that with the exception of his father, no one on the White side of his family embraced her because she was a "Yankee."

The Effect of Appearance on Experience. References to appearance were present in each of the profiles of participants who identified as mixed race people, with this theme being most prominent in Jennifer's story. Jennifer described her appearance as being a major issue in her earlier life, and something which still affected how she was seen by others today. In more recent times, she had accepted the way that she looked, and believed that even if her skin color had been darker, her life may not have been much different that it had been. While she spoke about being a role model in the Black community, she realized that her appearance remained a barrier to her being fully accepted in this role. Cory also spoke extensively about his appearance, especially in the context of how someone like him could
communicate what his or her heritage was when it was not readily apparent from external characteristics. Both he and Jennifer described the challenge of letting their heritage be known to the outside world as a source of frustration. Cory believed that if he looked more one way or the other, then his life would be easier because he and others would "know where one another stood" in terms of sense of group belonging. Since Cory described himself as deriving his sense of identity from feedback of others, he felt that he had to be secure with his identity while constantly evaluating it. At the same time, he felt that his appearance was changing, and that he stood out physically as an individual in a positive way. Mitchell had had the experience of people approaching him and telling him that they recognized him as a Cherokee because of his appearance. Mitchell felt that his appearance, as well as his disposition, reflected his Native American heritage and helped him to identify with his Native American background today.

All three participants felt that appearance, particularly skin color, influenced how people were treated in general. Cory believed that for every person of color, there was a different experience, which was partially influenced by how the person was seen by others. He wished that people were color blind so that hatred based on skin color would end. Jennifer felt that the experience of individual bi-racial people would be affected by how they looked, and that if someone of a mixed racial heritage was light skinned, "it's always going to be an issue." In addition, she believed that having light skin may limit how a person could identify in terms of their race. From his experience with his daughter, Mitchell was aware that physical features, including skin color, affected how someone was treated by others.

Strategies for Dealing with Racism. Each of the participants in this section described different ways in which they responded to incidents of racism. While some of these were
shared by two or three of the participants, others reflected strategies which were more unique to the individual. Some of the shared and individual strategies are presented in this section.

Mitchell and Jennifer both described themselves as people who didn't pick sides in disputes between Blacks and Whites. In these situations, Mitchell tried to stay neutral. Over the course of his life, he described himself as accepting some inequalities, without feeling as if they had taken anything away from him as a person. Jennifer would sometimes sit back and listen to a discussion which was going on, or would engage in the discussion weighing the issue based on what she saw as right or wrong, and not based on the racial groups being discussed at the time.

The need to analyze situations without regarding a person's race was something that Mitchell and Cory mentioned. Cory felt that he couldn't prejudge how people would treat him because of their race, and that instead, he tried to go on how people responded and interacted with him. His vision of the future was that all people would be of mixed racial heritage, and what people looked like on the outside would not reflect the kind of person who they were on the inside. Mitchell felt that a better way of judging people was by their personality as opposed to the color of their skin.

When Cory had experienced incidents of racism, he described himself as trying to make his feelings of anger more constructive. He also tried to leave people who held racist beliefs alone, and to see the racism which they expressed as their problem and not his. Getting distance from people with whom he differed was also a strategy which Mitchell used. His ability to deal with and accept different personalities was something he attributed to his faith, and believed that his accepting Christ as his savior early in his life had given him the strength and courage to deal with inequalities which he had faced.
One philosophy which helped Cory deal with the racism which he experienced from Blacks was to see his own experiences as unique and to acknowledge that each person of color had an experience which was different from others. He believed his experience had made him stronger, and would help him if he had children in the future. Jennifer also drew strength from her experience, and felt that by going through the "turmoil" which she had in her life, she had become a better and more aware person.

Section Six: Comparison of Themes Across Chosen Racial Identity Groups

This section presents themes and patterns which appeared in experiences across the three racial groupings created in Section Five. Some of the themes which were presented under separate racial identity groups before are now combined and presented as themes which are evident in more than one identity category. Examples of such themes are the role of early experience in influencing identity, experiences related to identity, and strategies for dealing with racism. Other themes presented in this section either did not receive specific attention in Section Five, or were used previously to describe a particular sub-group of participants. Examples of these themes include the effect of participants' experience on their sense of self, and references to being either one race or the other, or being in the middle of two races.

Role of Early Experience on Choice of Racial Identity or Identity Development

All of the participants believed that some aspect of their early experience or environment affected how they identified in terms of race today. A variety of specific environmental factors appeared in each of the stories shared. One factor which was common to six of the seven participants was the information, interactions, or messages which the person had received from his or her parents about racial heritage or identity. In this context,
most of the participants spoke about their mothers as having the most effect on their sense of identity or heritage, and early sense of self-esteem. At least three of the women, Anne, Jennifer, and Robin had experienced times when their mothers had tried to make them feel special. Mitchell described being cherished by his mother. David received much of his early culture from his mother. Agnes identified more with her mother than her father in her earlier years. Relationships with fathers were mentioned in some of the stories. Robin's father helped her to understand the political nature of race and society, and encouraged her interests in the Far East. Mitchell's father provided positive messages about how special and wanted Mitchell had been as a child. Both Agnes and Jennifer had a significant event related to their racial identity which happened between themselves and their fathers during their teenage years. For Agnes, this incident was a source of confusion for a number of years. The comments made by Jennifer's father reinforced what she saw as the discrepancy between her sense of racial identity and her appearance.

The effect of the communities and environments outside of the home were often mentioned as influencing participants' sense of racial identity or self in the early years of life. Mitchell's isolation in a small community of both Blacks and Whites allowed him to identify with his Black and White heritages during the 1930s and 1940s. The mixed environments which Agnes, Robin, and Anne were surrounded by, before they each moved to communities which were more White, were described as being positive and accepting. Cory felt that because his community did not treat him or his family differently, his racial heritage was not an issue when he was young. David attributed being placed in special education classes and counselling sessions to the fact that he had curly hair. When others teased him, David felt left out, self conscious and embarrassed, particularly about his hair. Jennifer felt more accepted by her Black friends when she was young, and was seen by White peers as the
White girl who wanted to be Black. In summary, some aspects of early environments were supportive of one's heritage or developing identity, ignorant of it, or challenging to it, depending on the circumstances presented to each individual.

Another aspect of participants' early life which frequently appeared in the profiles was their interaction with extended family members. Jennifer felt that the times that she spent visiting her Black relatives gave her an opportunity to build up her self-esteem and to re-affirm her heritage. She did not have the opportunity for the same kind of interaction with her mother's family because they lived in England. Agnes did visit her European relatives when she was growing up. While she described herself as shutting off contact with them during her period of racial identity transformation, she felt that she needed to re-establish contact with them at this point in her life. Robin was exposed to more of her relatives on the Black side of her extended family than the White side when she was young. She felt that this stronger connection was one of the things which led her to identify as African-American today. David's acceptance by his extended adoptive family helped him to feel fully a part of that family, and to be exposed to Jewish culture in his early years. Because he had been Jewish for most of his life and that his mother was Israeli, David identified more as an Israeli than a person of Black heritage. Anne felt that being with her extended family on her father's side exposed her to Black and Portuguese people and culture, and helped her to understand how these and other cultures contributed to the diversity in the world. Mitchell felt that when he was young, he was accepted as a whole person by his Black extended family, but not by his White family.

From these summaries, it is apparent that interactions with extended families served as opportunities for the participants to explore heritage and culture, receive acceptance or in
some cases rejection, and to develop a sense of self, based on both the positive and the	negative messages which were received.

Experiences which Reflected or Contradicted Sense of Racial Identity or Heritage

Regardless of how individual participants identified themselves in terms of race over
the course of their lives, most had had some experiences which reinforced their heritage or
chosen identity, and others which called those identities into question. One way in which this
occurred was when participants were reminded at some point in their lives that they were
different from Blacks, Whites, or both. For example, Anne and Robin were both called racial
epithets which were associated with being Black. At the same time, they both experienced
situations where they were identified as being different from other Blacks. Anne described
how Blacks had commented on her appearance, and Robin described situations where she was
asked by Blacks, as well as Whites, what her heritage was. Agnes, Cory, and Jennifer felt at
some time in their lives that they looked different from Blacks. Cory and Jennifer also felt
that although they had light complexions, Whites often knew that they were not White. While
David identified as White and believed most others saw him this way, he described his hair
and his occasional uncomfortable feelings as setting him apart from Whites. Even though he
did not identify with or talk about his Black heritage, in some instances others had raised this
issue with him through inquiries or by calling him a zebra. Robin was seen as White when
she travelled in the Far East, and felt even in the United States that her appearance could be
seen as ambiguous, and not clearly reflective of a person of African-American heritage.
Mitchell felt that people had assumed that he was "all kinds of things." Agnes had been seen
as being Hispanic, both as a child and an adult, and Jennifer felt that people would accept
being told that she was Spanish, but not that she was part Black.
All of the participants spoke about times in their lives when they did not want to be different, but wanted to fit in. Most of these references reflected experiences in childhood. Reasons cited for not fitting in included the nature of one’s family, family heritage, special educational needs, or appearance. While this feeling was prevalent in earlier years, the sense of being set apart from others continued to affect Agnes in her current life, as she believed that the challenge she felt around making friends now may have been related to early feelings of not fitting in with her Black peers.

A number of participants felt that regardless of the racial identity which they had chosen, they had had a unique experience because of their background or heritage. David experienced his difference from other Whites through his feelings. Cory and Agnes described themselves as having a different experience than other people with African-American heritage. Robin believed that her experience was unique from most people’s because of her interaction with both sides of her family. Anne felt that through her life, she had had "the best of both worlds." This concept was challenged by Jennifer when she described her experience as having been hard, but not necessarily reflective of the experience of all bi-racial people. Mitchell believed that he could see interactions and conflicts between Blacks and Whites from a unique vantage point, one which may have been difficult to access by someone who could not "honestly relate to both sides."

Influence of Appearance on Past and Present Experiences of Identity

As noted in the preceding section, each of the participants had felt or had been seen as different from Blacks or Whites. This often took the form of inquiries from others about the person’s heritage, or remarks related to his or her appearance. In addition to these situations, a number of the participants noted that their appearance affected their racial identity in some
way. For example, Agnes felt that because of her appearance, she could identify with, and be accepted by the Black community. She also speculated that her own process of identity development would have been more difficult if she had been in a position where she could have passed as a member of another racial group based on her physical characteristics.

Jennifer felt that there was a lot of pain associated with being a bi-racial person who could not identify as Black because of a light complexion. In her own experience, Jennifer’s skin color and features had prevented her from being able to identify as Black. On the other hand, David felt that he could identify as White regardless of his actual racial heritage, because of the way he looked. Anne believed that although it was obvious that she was Black, the outside world did not always see her as being a part of this racial group.

Feelings of Being Either/Or or in the Middle

The majority of participants made some reference to being either one race or the other, or being in the middle of two races. David felt that when he was in college, being in the middle in terms of his heritage was not enough for him to gain acceptance from the Black men who lived in his house. When he was young, Mitchell felt caught in the middle between Blacks and Whites in terms of his heritage. As an adult, he questioned why he couldn’t have been one race or the other in the context of Affirmative Action forms and access to related services. Because of her experience of not being able to indicate all of her racial heritages on forms, Jennifer believed that society let a person be either Black or White, but not both. At earlier periods in her life, Jennifer wanted to be either Black or White, and felt that she was supposed to make a choice between her heritages which she did not want to make. The theme of choice also appeared in Agnes’ story, when she described herself as having to choose one identity over the other once she got out into the world. Cory also felt that at different points
in his life he had wished he was either Black or White, or at least have "something that made
me obviously one way or the other" so that his life would have been easier.

Strategies For Dealing with Racism

Some of the main strategies used by participants to deal with racism were to put the
responsibility for an act of racism on the person who had committed it, to dwell on the
positive aspects of life, and to avoid people who were not accepting or aware of racial issues.
Some of the thoughts shared by Cory and Agnes illustrate the first strategy. When people
expressed racist thoughts, Cory tried to "make it their problem and not mine" in order to
avoid getting into a fight or feeling the kind of hate he believed that they felt. Agnes felt that
her own experience had helped her to see that when people were being negative toward
others, it was because they were unhappy with themselves and "they've got a search to go
through."

Four participants felt that dwelling on the positive parts of life or a particular situation
helped them to deal with negative issues or experiences. Robin focussed on "all of the
blessings" she had in life. Anne’s religion guided her to think of the positive in people and to
forget about the negative parts of them. Mitchell responded to people who tried and settle a
wrong with him in good faith by not focussing on "the wrong that was done," or holding
grudges. Cory tried to channel the feelings that came up due to incidents into something
more constructive than feelings of hate.

Avoidance of people who were either racist or not reaffirming was also a strategy used
by participants. Cory tried to leave such people alone. Mitchell gave people whose
personalities were a barrier to him being friends with them space and distance. Robin used
her "sensitive antennae" to determine if someone would be comfortable in the world she had
created, and able to be her friend.

Robin, Anne and Mitchell all used their faith to guide and support them. The image
of religion as a foundation of strength and understanding was used by both Anne and
Mitchell. The message of forgiveness which Robin received from her church helped her to
avoid being critical of others.

**Effect of Experience on Sense of Self**

While each of the participants in this study had had different experiences as a bi-racial
or multi-racial person, a number of them described some of the overall effects of their
experience in similar ways. A theme which appeared in some form in all of the stories was
that of the humanness of people. Anne, Jennifer, and Mitchell used this theme when they
emphasized the connectedness of people regardless of their race. Anne felt that mankind put
names on groups of people, but given the mixes in the racial background of people today and
her belief that all people were created equal by God, she believed that "we truly are one
people." Mitchell’s faith had also led him to believe that race and color were only external
characteristics of a person, and that all people should be seen as the same. As Agnes’ quest
conterning her identity continued, she believed it had become important for her to try to "be
human as opposed to being race specific." She felt that people should accept each other,
while acknowledging the differences in each person’s histories or heritages. Robin also
subscribed to this philosophy, and believed that her spirituality had helped her to accept
people as being equal. David felt that his racial heritage was not important because he was a
person, and wanted to be treated like a human being. He also did not use color to identify
people because he believed that "a person is a person," and not a person of a particular race.
Cory felt that issues around mixed race people would have to be worked out in the future, and that this would be facilitated if others understood that "everybody basically wants the same thing." He described the perfect world as one in which divisions based on race did not exist.

Those participants who specifically indicated that they were exposed to aspects of Black and White culture as they were growing up felt that they could appreciate both of these, regardless of how they identified racially. Anne, Robin, and Agnes all described liking the diversity of people and cultures which they had been exposed to in their lives. Jennifer felt that knowing both Black and White culture had given her a broader range of skills to apply in the world. Mitchell felt that his interactions with both Whites and Blacks allowed him to know how to be part of both of these groups.

A majority of the participants described their life experience as making them stronger in some way. These descriptions contained a variety of images. Anne and Agnes saw themselves as women who could survive in life. Mitchell spoke of having been given strength through his faith to deal with issues in his life. Cory described his experience as "what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger," and felt that he would be able to use his experience to relate to his children that he may have in the future. Jennifer believed that while she was alright today, her life had been "a battle." In addition to making her strong, her experiences had made her more open, non-judgmental, and more aware than the average person of racial issues and other forms of injustice.

The theme of having a more fair viewpoint was also apparent in several of the other participants lives. Mitchell didn’t judge one race over the other and felt that he, like Jennifer, could judge racial issues based on what he saw as right or wrong without having "hangups" about race. Robin felt that she had the freedom to move in between Black and White culture and to pick those characteristics from each which she liked, and reject those which she didn’t.
Agnes saw each persons' history and culture as being valid. Anne's belief in equality for all reflected her experience with her faith, and her desire not to feel the same hate that she saw in others during the Civil Rights Movement.

Section Seven: Themes Within and Across Gender Groups

This section and the one which follows it focus on the interaction of other social identities with participants’ sense of racial identity. Section Seven highlights racial identity development within the context of gender by dividing participants female and male groups and comparing experiences within and between these two groups. Section Eight presents themes which emerged when participants were compared based on their age. While there was a narrow range of experiences which were shared from any one gender or age category, there were themes or patterns which emerged from the profiles when participants were grouped by gender and age. Some of these reflected issues which appeared in Sections Five and Six of this Chapter.

Information in this section highlights themes in participants’ experience which emerged from comparisons between the same and opposite genders. Four of the seven participants in this study were women and three were men. Three out of the four women, Anne, Robin, and Agnes identified as Black, and one, Jennifer, identified as mixed. Two of the men identified with all of their racial heritages, with Cory referring to himself as a person of color and Mitchell naming himself a minority person. The third man, David, identified as White.
Themes from the Experiences of the Women

When the experiences of the female participants are looked at together, two prominent themes were evident. First, references to either having strong women role models who were Black and/or White appeared in three out of the four profiles. Oftentimes, family members were identified as specific role models. Jennifer, Robin, and Anne all spoke about the positive relationship they had with their mothers, and how this influenced their sense of self. In addition to her mother, Jennifer credited the strong women in her father’s family with making her a better and more aware person. Although Agnes did not describe her mother specifically as a role model, she saw her mother as the parent to whom she felt closest, and identified with more before the start of her transformation. Through the discussions that they had during her transformation, Agnes felt that she and her mother were learning about Black history together. References to role models outside of family members were made by Anne and Agnes when they spoke about seeing strength in other Black women whom they had known or learned about.

The second theme involved the inclusion of gender, as well as race, in each woman’s description of her sense of self. Each of the female participants spoke about herself as a woman, a Black woman, or a person trying to deal with life issues which were related to being a woman today. Anne appreciated the quality of being “able to go on” that she found in herself and in other Black women. Robin enjoyed her life as a successful Black businesswoman, and was concerned with practices in different African cultures which oppressed women. While Agnes felt being Black was her priority now, she saw herself as a Black woman and the issues in her day to day life being more related to her gender than her racial heritage. Jennifer made several references to aspects of her life where her gender came into play. She described the effect women role models had had on her life. Many of the
issues involving appearance that she spoke about revolved around her looking more like a White woman than a Black woman, and feeling that Black women were the most beautiful. She described how people responded to her when they saw her with a Black man. In the context of these reactions, Jennifer felt that "the Black woman in me" helped her to empathize with Black women who were critical of her, while understanding that they were misreading the situation and her heritage. The only time race was an issue in Jennifer's current life was in her role as a mother to her son. She was troubled by the pain her son would feel dealing with his racial identity, and wanted to be supportive and reassuring for him like her mother was for her.

Themes from the Experiences of the Men

Few references to gender, being a man, or being a man of mixed race heritage appeared in the stories recounted by the male participants. One way to account for the lack of references to sense of gender identity was that the focus of the interviews was on racial identity, and that unless specifically asked about their gender, the men did not feel that their gender identity was as integral to their lives as it was for the women participants. Like the women in this study, each of the men mentioned some aspect of his relationships with his mother in his profile. These references tended to highlight the role that mothers had played in their racial identity development, as opposed to their gender identity development. In addition, Cory wondered if his not dating women of color affected his relationship with his mother earlier in his life.

When the lives of the three men are compared, references to one's fathers appeared most prominently in Mitchell's life story. Mitchell described his relationship with his father, how he was very much wanted as a son, and how he was a part of life on his father's farm.
One of the reasons that David probably did not speak extensively about his father was because his father had passed away when he was quite young. Cory also had less access to his father because of his parents' separation and divorce when he was growing up.

The theme of physical abilities or physical responses to incidents appeared in the profiles of Mitchell and Cory respectively. Mitchell described himself as being an athlete in his earlier years, and that his ability in sports prevented him from being joked about and allowed him to "take care of myself very well." In a few places in his profile, Cory described himself as wanting to punch or fight people who said that he was not Black, or who said racist things in his presence.

Families, in terms of existing or future children, were addressed by each of the men. Mitchell wanted to make things pleasant for his children and used his own experiences to provide an example for his daughter on how to respond to racism. Cory and David each expressed the wish to have a family of their own in the future. Cory felt that using himself as an example may help him understand and assist his children work through the issues that they may face.

Comparison Between the Experiences of the Women and the Men

A summary of some of the more visible patterns which are evident when the experiences of the women and men who participated in this study are compared are presented in this section. In general, the women included more references to their relationships, whether these were with families, children, partners or spouses, or communities than did the men. While the women named themselves as part of a racial group and a gender group, the men tended to focus on their racial identity, and did not speak about themselves as men. These patterns could be attributable to a number of factors, including gender awareness,
gender differences in communication, and gender role expectations. The need for further research in the area of the influence of gender and gender identity on establishing a racial identity will be discussed in Chapter V of this dissertation.

Section Eight: Themes Within and Across Age Groups

When participants are compared by age, two clear patterns and themes emerged. At times these themes appeared fairly clearly in the profiles. At others, they were evident in the inferences which could be made from the different descriptions which participants gave of their lives. Before presenting the themes, the age categories used in this section are introduced.

Participants were separated into three age groups. Anne and Mitchell were 59 and 58 years old respectively, and were grouped together in the older participant category. As they represented ages which spanned the mid to late twenties and early thirties, Jennifer, Agnes, and Robin were placed together in the mid-age group. Cory and David were grouped together as the young participant group, given that their ages fell into the early to mid twenties age bracket.

The two main themes presented in this section are the influence of the existing societal norms and values at a given period of time on the racial identity of participants, and the perspectives presented by participants based on the experiences they had had over the course of their lives. Each of these themes will be presented separately.

The Effect of Societal Norms and Values on Racial Identity Development

Within the stories told by participants, there were examples of how society influenced participants’ racial identity development or choice of racial identity. Since participants’ lives
encompassed several time periods in American society and culture, their experiences illustrated not only changes or maturation within themselves, but within society as well.

Anne’s and Mitchell’s early life occurred in the 1930’s and 1940’s, where segregation was enforced in the South and the North to differing degrees. Anne was told by her mother that she was Black. What it meant to be Black during her early years was communicated to her, and reinforced by the community around her. Within this environment, which she described as being steeped in prejudice, Anne felt that she didn’t belong and that she couldn’t change people’s attitudes. The response to incidents which she experienced was “that’s the way it’s going to be. That’s the way things are.” Mitchell’s early environment served as a buffer for some of the issues around race which were occurring in the larger society. However, this buffer did not protect him from experiencing a lack of opportunity or legal inequality based on race. Once he left the isolation of the farm, he felt more comfortable passing with Blacks than Whites. He described being assigned to White barracks, and at times having to act White in order to get into segregated movie theaters and trains with the Whites with whom he was working and living.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Anne saw herself as not knowing what to do or how to fight back on a large scale. She described racism in the North at that time as subtle and occurring often, and “that it was like a normal way of life.” In more modern times, Anne felt that things had changed from the time when she was young. Some of the changes she had seen were an increase in inter-racial couples and mixed race people and children who were not concerned about their heritage. In addition, she felt that people’s response to racism had changed, and that now being prejudiced was not as acceptable as it had been earlier. Mitchell described himself as feeling great about the changes he had witnessed over time, and believed that his father could not have imagined that changes would have occurred which
would allow Mitchell to inherit his farm. Mitchell believed that mixed race people had been overlooked in terms of benefits such as Affirmative Action and other legal remedies which combat discrimination, and that these protections should be expanded to cover the rights of mixed race people in the future. Even in light of the changes he had seen, Mitchell still felt that racism existed, and gave the example of minority people being watched more closely than others at work to illustrate this. He believed that minorities had to perform better than others in order to not be discredited, and should be role models for others.

The middle group of participants described lives in ways which were different from those recounted by the older participants. Robin, Agnes, and Jennifer all attended non-segregated schools, and lived in mixed race families in integrated or non-segregated neighborhoods. Robin and Agnes both had had success as independent business women. Robin believed that such opportunities would have been harder to manage two or three decades ago. Agnes described her experience as being different from those of her husband and her father because she had been raised in a different time period than they were. Jennifer, who was often seen as White, probably received a different kind of response now when she was with her son or with a Black man in public than she would have during the time when Anne or Mitchell were young adults. This could have also been true for Robin’s relationship with her husband and sons.

All of the participants in either the middle or young age group grew up and lived in a time when programs such as *Roots* and talk shows addressing the experience of light skinned Black women were aired on national television. Also, from the experiences of the younger participants, it appeared to be easier in more modern times to identify as a person of mixed race heritage. A difference between Jennifer’s experience and that of Cory from the younger group was that Jennifer was not able to indicate both her Black and White on forms which she
had to fill out, while Cory did check both of these categories on forms for college testing and college admissions.

The two participants in the youngest age group had fewer years in which to interact with society and the world. The opportunities which they had had so far in their lives reflected some of the changes in societal values, norms, and opportunities which had occurred over the past few decades. Cory felt that he could identify himself as a person who was both Black and White. While this could be a function of the accepting environment in which he was raised, his ability to put both racial categories on forms without having this be questioned or rejected seemed to reflect a change beyond his immediate home community. Clearly his beginning career in film was an example of an opportunity which was probably not available, or at least not easily accessible, to individuals in the oldest participant age bracket. The issue of changes in society was raised specifically by David when he spoke about his response to a hypothetical, public interview concerning his racial heritage. In making reference to his biological parents, David described his parent’s relationship as "of course back in the sixties, that was taboo," and that in more modern times, hopefully people would judge a person for who they were and not on their color. In addition, other aspects of David’s life may have been different had he lived at an earlier period in American history and society. His ability to be adopted into a White household and to claim a White identity may or may not have been influenced by when he was born and raised. His ability to indicate that he was White on forms which he filled out in his doctor’s office may also have been more limited in earlier times, or there may have been more inquiry into his biological background before this was accepted.
Perspectives from the Different Age Groups

Participants in each of the different age categories held some different perspectives of their racial identities. For Anne and Mitchell, their racial heritage, racial identity, or people's responses to them were things to be accepted, lived with, and seen as unchangeable. Both of these participants felt that they had acknowledged the limitations presented by society and individuals, without feeling hindered, or that something was being taken away from them as people. Religion played a central role in Anne's and Mitchell's lives, helping them to accept others and to deal with racism.

Another similarity in the perspectives shared by Anne and Mitchell was their opinion that Blacks would like to dominate or have power over Whites. Anne felt that this was true when she heard about Black Power during the Civil Rights Movement. She believed that there were different opinions held by Blacks, and that she herself could "go off on a rampage," but felt that this would not help or make sense to do. Mitchell believed that there was a time when Blacks wanted to dominate Whites in response to being dominated themselves, but wondered in this context where the conflicts between Blacks and Whites would end.

The women who made up the middle age group saw themselves both in terms of their race and gender. This could have been the result of these women growing up during the time of feminism and increased attention to women's rights, although Anne from the older participant group also made references to herself as a woman. Certainly some of the benefits available to these participants reflected opportunities gained by women and racial groups during the course of their life time. Both of the women who identified as Black spoke about their commitment to political issues. Agnes felt that it was important to preserve Black culture and heritage, as well as cultivate Black economic empowerment. Robin was exposed
which reflected left political themes and considered her sense of commitment to racial issues when making decisions around her education. All of the women in this age bracket felt that although they may have chosen a certain racial identity, they also appreciated aspects of both sides of their heritages.

The perspective shared by the youngest participants regarding their racial heritage centered around the importance that they had attributed to the concept of race. For David, his racial heritage and the race of others were generally not seen to be important. He described himself as not seeing people by their color because of the environment in which he was raised. While on the surface, this perspective was similar to those shared by Anne and Mitchell, it differed in a few ways. Anne’s and Mitchell’s perspectives seemed to have developed after significant life experience, and was connected to their faith. The sentiment expressed by David was more in the context of not wanting to make people aware of his racial heritage, because he felt people made judgements based on skin color and "because I’m very light skinned, people look at me as one of them." The ideas expressed by Cory reflected the theme that race and skin color would be less important in society in the future. He believed that in the coming years, race would be less and less useful as a way to categorize people, since everyone would be a mixture of heritages. He saw his heritage as reflecting the future, and felt that the trend of not being able to use color as an identifier meant that "racism on both sides will have to end."
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This dissertation focusses on the experiences of racial identity development of a select group of bi-racial adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage. This chapter begins the task of making sense of the experiences recounted by the participants in this study by identifying and elaborating on the factors or circumstances which were described as influencing their sense of racial identity or their racial identity development. Some of these factors received attention in earlier research, and were highlighted in my analysis of selected works on Black and White identity development and bi-racial people reviewed in Chapter II of this dissertation. Others emerged from the data gathered during the course of this study.

Section One of this chapter presents definitions and specific examples taken from the participant profiles of each of the factors which influenced the racial identity of participants in this study. The factors are then organized into a schematic framework. The connections or interactions between some of the factors are also explored in this section. The schematic framework is then applied to each of the participants in this study to illustrate its usefulness in drawing out additional meaning about how bi-racial individuals come to choose a certain racial identity or set of identities for themselves. Section Two presents a portrait of bi-racial people and their racial identity development in light of the findings of this study. Section Three examines the experiences of those participants who chose a mono-racial identity in light of the models of Black identity development (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971), and White identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984) which were reviewed in
Chapter II. This comparison is done to examine the applicability of these theories to the experiences of individuals who identified themselves as either Black or White in terms of racial group membership, even though their racial heritage reflected both of these racial categories. Section Four compares the data from this study with the significant themes raised by the research on bi-racial adults conducted by Poussaint (1984), Luckett (1987), and Poston (1990). An analysis of the research methodology used in this study is presented in Section Five. Section Six discusses the implications of the results of this study for people working with bi-racial adults. Section Seven highlights some of the areas for future research in the area of bi-racial identity development. Section Eight is the final section of this chapter, and contains the conclusions which I have drawn from the findings of this dissertation and my experiences as the researcher who conducted this study.

Section One: Factors Influencing Racial Identity Development and Choice of Racial Identity

The participants in this study provided detailed descriptions of the factors which influenced how each of them came to choose a particular racial identity and racial group membership. One of the contributions which this study makes to the field of racial identity literature is its clarification of what some of these factors were, how they appeared in the actual life experiences of a select group of African-American/Euro-American adults, and how they affected or influenced the racial identity development or choice of racial identity of the participants in this study. This section presents information on these factors and some of the interconnection between them that were evident in the data. It concludes by illustrating the different factors present in the experiences of each participant, and how these factors can be used to further understand each participant’s choice of racial identity.
As noted in Chapter II of this dissertation, literature on mono-racial populations focussed primarily on the process of identity development, and gave less attention to defining and elaborating on the factors which were associated with this process. However, these works included direct references, or references by implication, to several factors which were involved in an individual’s process of achieving a sense of racial identity. The factors which emerged most notably as affecting racial identity development were culture (Chimezie, 1985; Cross 1971; Jackson, 1976; Thomas 1971; Wade, 1987), appearance (Cross, 1971; Thomas, 1971), early experiences and socialization (Cross, 1971; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1976; Smith, 1989; Thomas, 1971), and political experiences (Cross, 1971; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971). Factors which were identified as being related to identity development, but which received less attention than those noted above included biological heritage (Baldwin, 1981; Thomas, 1971) and spirituality (Semaj, 1981).

The models proposed by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), Jackson (1976), Hardiman (1982), Helms (1984), and Poston (1990) were composed of stages in the process of developing a sense of self-awareness within a system of racism. After examining these models in light of the data from this study, I believe that the stage or stages that an individual is in within the type of process which these models described can be considered as another factor which influences choice of racial identity. I would name this factor as an individual’s level of awareness of personal identity development, race, and racism within the social system in the United States. Therefore, I included the stage or stages that I placed each participant at in the Black or White identity development models, and Poston’s model of bi-racial identity development as another factor in the schematic framework which is presented later in this chapter.
The stages of identity development outlined in the models cited earlier affect how an individual identified him or herself in terms of race and racial group membership at a given point in his or her life. At the beginning of this study, I had included this kind of awareness of self, race, and racism within the factor of political experience. Through working with the data and discussing my thoughts with my doctoral committee members, I now feel that this awareness is something which is not necessarily tied to one's experiences with political groups or causes, the result of the development of a sense of political identity, or a process undergone by Whites in order to avoid ownership of racial privilege. However, for some individuals, the journey through the developmental stages proposed by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), Jackson (1976), Hardiman (1982), Helms (1984), or Poston (1990) could and would be associated with their political outlook, values, or affiliations.

Research studies on bi-racial adults made references to factors which influenced identity development in this population. These included the effect of appearance (Hall, 1980; Poussaint, 1984), and age (Hall, 1980; Luckett, 1989). In addition, work by Hall (1980) indicated that the factors of ethnicity and community would affect racial identity development in bi-racial people.

Each of the factors extracted from the mono-racial and bi-racial theories of identity development and works on bi-racial adults appeared in the data of this study. References to past and present cultural experiences, appearance, early experiences and socialization, political experiences, biological heritage, spirituality, age, ethnic identity, and sense of community were evident to differing degrees when the participant profiles were reviewed together. In addition, the level to which one was aware of self, racial identity, race and racism, as illustrated in the different stage models of identity development was also helpful in understanding how each participant came to choose his or her own racial identity. In this
study, the actual nature of these factors and their influence on identity formation was
developed to a greater degree than they were in previous works. In addition, other factors
which affected racial identity development, beyond those cited in existing literature, appeared
in the data from this study. These factors included the effect of other social identities on
perception or experience of racial identity, various situational variables, and the socio-
historical context of society in which the individual lived. All of the factors which affected
racial identity development or a participant’s choice of racial identity in this study are
combined and illustrated in the schematic framework presented in Figure 1 on page 292.
Definitions and examples of each factor appear in Table 2 on pages 293-295. The effect of
each factor on racial identity development is summarized below.

The Role of Culture in Racial Identity Development

The concept of culture which appeared in earlier models on Black and White identity
development (Cross, 1971; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1971)
tended to focus on the norms of society through which a person was socialized to accept the
existing racist social system, or on an individual’s turning away from the dominant culture
and exploring connections to other cultural communities. The results of this dissertation
confirmed Hall’s (1980) findings that the culture of the home environment affected the racial
identity development of bi-racial people. Several participants spoke about the effect of being
exposed to different aspects of culture, mainly through the family, had on their early sense of
identity. Descriptions of what culture looked like during early years of participants’ lives
included the kinds of music which were listened to, the use of certain languages or dialects,
the books that were read, the holidays which were celebrated, the topics and issues discussed,
Figure 1: Framework of Factors which Affect Racial Identity Development or Choice of Racial Identity in African-American/Euro-American Adults
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>GENERAL EXAMPLES FROM THE DATA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Aspects of a person's past and/or present environment which communicate values, norms, traditions, history and meaning related to being a member of a particular racial or ethnic group, or which result in an individual feeling connected to a particular racial or ethnic group.</td>
<td>music played; language or dialects used; books read; holidays celebrated; food eaten; communities in which one was raised or felt comfortable in; knowledge or use of behavioral patterns which reflect different levels of formality and structure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Experiences and Socialization</td>
<td>Experiences and interactions with individuals and groups in childhood or early adulthood which communicate what a person's racial heritage or identity means in the context of the family, surrounding community, and society.</td>
<td>interactions with family members and extended family members; exposure to aspects of racial and ethnic culture; involvement in or witnessing of incidents; inquiries from others; experiences of acceptance or rejection by members of a particular racial or ethnic group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>The physical characteristics of an individual which can be detected visually.</td>
<td>skin color and tone; hair color and texture; eye color and shape; size and shape of facial features; gross body structure and body types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Experiences/Orientation</td>
<td>Past or present experiences of a person as an individual or as a member or affiliate of a group, organization, or social or political cause which involves an increased awareness of the structure or functioning of the American social and economic system, particularly as it relates to race and racism.</td>
<td>Considering race when making business related decisions; considering the implication of interracial dating for the racial heritage of African-Americans or the Black community; perspective on clothing and other ways people communicate their racial heritage or political outlook; purchasing magazines which represent a progressive viewpoint; supporting causes which further progressive change in society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: continued

| Individual Awareness of Self in Relation to Race and Racism | Level and extent to which an individual sees him or herself as a member of a racial group and the extent to which self definition is based on societal definitions, norms, and values of that racial group or on a sense of redefined identity achieved through a personal development process similar to those outlined in theories of Thomas, 1971; Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; and Poston, 1990. |
| Biological Heritage | The racial background or genetic heritage of an individual's immediate and distant ancestors. |
| Spirituality | The degree to which an individual believes in, seeks meaning from, or is guided by a sense of spirit or higher power, or a sense of connection between all human beings. |
| Socio-Historical Context of Society | Aspects of society which surround an individual and communicate messages about race, racial groups, racial heritage, and ascribed and chosen racial identity at a given time period in history. Regarding bi-racial identity in particular, aspects of society and culture which communicate the acceptance or rejection of a person embracing a bi-racial heritage or identity. Related to the age of an individual in terms of the social context into which they were born, raised, and in which they currently live. |
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| Descriptions which each participant gave of how he or she came to choose their current racial identity and sense of racial group membership. Indicators of the different stages of racial identity development given by the models cited, including believing that race was only one aspect of one's identity, feeling that people are people and that race is not important in life, and that all people are connected, even though racial differences exist. |
| The different racial and ethnic groups represented in each participant's biological family. |
| Belief in faith or religion which emphasized the connection between all people regardless of race; acceptance of one's racial heritages as something which was chosen for the person by a higher being or power; belief that there was a reason for being created as the person one was; relying on religion or faith for strength to deal with racism or personal shortcomings, or as a way of coming to a sense of peace or personal satisfaction with self. |
| Being assigned a racial identity or racial group membership because of the legal and social institutions of society at a given time period; legal restrictions related to inheritance based on racial heritage; organizational or institutional practices which require a person to indicate only single racial heritage on forms or applications; the ability to indicate all racial heritages on applications; the norms and values of society related to mixed race people, such as that to claim a mixed race identity is to deny one or both of the person's biological heritages. |

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the people to whom the young person was exposed, and interactions with extended family members. One of the initiators of change in racial identity over time was a shift in the culture to which a person felt more closely tied to or in tune with, as illustrated in the experiences which Agnes shared in her profile.

References to culture appeared in the descriptions which a number of participants gave of their current sense of themselves. Agnes, Robin, Anne, Jennifer, and David spoke of feeling more strongly connected to either Black or White culture, and gave examples such as music, food, sense of community, general ways of being, and to some extent political affiliations, to illustrate what they considered to be cultural manifestations of their identity.

The community in which one felt accepted, at home with, or more similar to was also a significant theme in the data. While a particular community was comprised of individuals, it was often the norms, values, attitudes, language, political ideology, behaviors, or the general culture or climate of the group which made different participants feel comfortable and wanted. Also, for some participants, their sense of identity shifted when the community in which they were in changed, as when Cory and Jennifer described feeling more Black when they were in certain groups of Whites. The participants in this study had a variety of experiences with different communities. For participants who identified as Black, Black communities or groups felt more accepting and nurturing than White communities. David, who identified as White, felt that he had not been accepted by different groups of Blacks which he had encountered during his life. For Mitchell, it was his feeling of connection with the disposition and ways of being that he had seen among the Cherokees that provided him with a vehicle through which he could identify with his Native American heritage.

The culture which a person experienced in his or her early and/or current years was one of the strongest influences on the racial identity development of the participants in this
study. The only other factors which seemed to receive as much attention in the life stories which participants told were physical appearance and early socialization, with individual descriptions of the latter factor often including references to different aspects of early cultural environments.

The Role of Early Experiences and Socialization in Racial Identity Development

Participants described the times when they had interactions with family or extended family members as opportunities where they were exposed to different aspects of culture or cultural experiences which were often associated with a particular racial or ethnic group. These early experiences, as well as the kind of messages that the family members provided the young person about his or her racial heritage or identity, affected participants' early sense of themselves. Although the family background of all of the participants included African-American/Euro-American heritage, for many of them their early experiences with their families led them to embrace a variety of identities. Some participants were told by their parents when they were young that they were Black, and this was the name that was accepted by them at that time. For others, parents saw them as mixed race people. In this context, individual participants often defined themselves as being both Black and White, at least until exposure to additional messages from the surrounding society made them question this identity or their ability to openly claim a mixed race heritage. The participants who received little or no information about his or her racial heritage, or what it meant to be a person of mixed race heritage in childhood, felt that their identity developed later, when racial identity became more of an issue due to outside influences, or when access to information about race, racism, or racial heritage which was not known previously, became available.
It is clear from the data that in addition to parental or family influences, the interaction that participants had with aspects of their surrounding community and the larger society also influenced their sense of self and the formation of their racial identity. Incidents with peers, teachers, or other individuals served to acknowledge, confirm, or contradict each participant's chosen identity. For a number of participants, inquiries as to what one's heritage was carried a variety of messages, including "you are different," "you are unique," or "you are not really one of us." For participants who had chosen mono-racial identities, such inquiries served as a reminder that their identities were not fully reflective of their biological heritage. An example of such an interaction in the data can be seen in the conversation which Robin had with her grandmother about Robin referring to herself as being Black in light of the racial make up of her family. Participants who placed different values on their different heritages experienced times of inquiries and contradictions related to their chosen identity in different ways. For example, if an individual felt only positively about one heritage and discounted, disliked, or had some other less positive feeling about the other, such inquiries could be a source of embarrassment, shame, or dissonance. This was apparent in David's story where, although he noted that he did not feel "a chop in the heart" when friends inquired about his background, he described inquiries about his heritage in a hypothetical interview as "some of the closest hitting questions." In addition, he stressed that he would not tell others if he encountered a racial incident because he would not want to draw attention to or talk about his racial heritage, which was different from his actual chosen racial identity.

In addition to inquiries, some participants spoke about the message which they had received which communicated that they could only choose a racial identity based on one of their racial heritages. This was noted in the data when participants spoke about having to fill out forms, having to respond to questions of "are you Black or are you White," or feeling
that they had to choose sides on an issue related to race, racism, or racial differences. In some cases, how individuals made sense out of such situations, and the different pressures which they felt at the time, affected which racial identity they chose. In this study, both Jennifer and Mitchell cited times when they had been told that they could not fill out sections of forms related to their racial background by indicating multiple racial groups as times when circumstances beyond themselves made it hard to claim a multiple race identity.

Regardless of the racial make-up of their early, immediate community, all of the participants noted that they had interactions with both Blacks and Whites at some point in their lives. A number of participants indicated that they had been treated differently by both Blacks and Whites, and had experienced incidents where individuals of both races communicated to them their bias toward bi-racial people. For example, Agnes recalled her husband making negative references to her German heritage during a fight. Cory felt that Blacks who said that he could pass "don't know what it's like to be in my shoes." Mitchell was told by his aunt that he was not a "whole person" because of his Black heritage. Therefore, the messages that both Black and White individuals and groups developed and espoused about bi-racial people became part of the network of messages which participants could take into account when they established or thought about their choice of racial identity.

The larger society beyond immediate community also had an impact on the racial identity development of participants. How race, racial heritage, racial identity, and interracial families were dealt with and depicted by the larger culture of society, added to the environment which surrounded each participant. In addition to having an effect on the bi-racial person, I also believe that much of this information was also absorbed by many individuals in society, and influenced how they saw, thought about, and interacted with bi-racial people. The nature of societal messages about bi-racial people has evolved and changed
over time. At one point in history, a person could not really claim a bi-racial or White identity or heritage if that heritage included African-American background. As Anne said in her profile, at the time when she was growing up, she could say that she was Black or a Negro, but not something else. This experience can be contrasted with that of Cory, who more recently was able to check both Black and White on his college applications. In addition, a number of participants noted that they had received messages which implied that to embrace a mono-racial identity was to deny the other part of their racial heritage. For some bi-racial people in general, this conclusion may be true. However, it was not the case in the majority of stories shared by participants in this study, especially those who identified as Black.

In summary, many of the participants were surrounded from birth by messages about race and identity. These came from their families, their communities, and society. These images, when combined, formed a system of socialization as to who the bi-racial person was and could be in the world. Where these were in harmony with each other and the identity chosen by the bi-racial person, there was less confusion around issues of heritage and identity. Where these messages collided with chosen identity or perception of self, there were more opportunities for problems or issues to arise.

The Role of Physical Appearance in Racial Identity Development

One of the strongest influences on both racial identity development and the ability to claim a particular racial identity which was evident in the data was a person’s physical appearance. From the stories told by participants, it was clear that appearance was often used as a primary indicator of a person’s heritage. If a participant "looked Black" or "looked White," and chose either a mixed race identity or an identity which did not match his or her
external physical features, then he or she was often confronted by experiences or messages which contradicted his or her sense of racial identity. Participants often indicated that these experiences were accompanied by some level of feelings, the level and nature of which were determined by the extent to which the individual felt comfortable with, and accepting of his or her identity or heritage. This range of feelings could be seen in Jennifer’s experience, where she felt disappointed at how she looked in her earlier years, but now had accepted her appearance as part of who she was. She also saw her appearance as a barrier to her full participation as a role model in the Black community. David noted that one of the incidents which created discomfort for him at one of his jobs was when a co-worker called him a zebra. Since it was unlikely that David had shared information about his racial heritage with his co-workers, the man who had used the expression “zebra” could have relied on David’s physical appearance to determine that David had a mixed race heritage. For those participants who chose a mono-racial identity which was consistent with their appearance, physical features were seen as an asset and a way of being accepted by others.

Two of the factors which participants considered when choosing a particular racial identity were physical appearance, and their experiences in society based on that appearance. When their experiences in the world didn’t match their sense of identity or heritage, a variety of issues emerged. Several participants in this study described ignoring the discrepancy between how they looked and their choice of racial identity until it was brought up by others through inquiries or incidents. Others experienced this conflict as a major challenge at different points in their lives. As much as appearance could assure acceptance into a particular racial group or community, it could also be a source of rejection, speculation, and frustration, especially if it was a barrier to a person claiming a particular racial identity which he or she wished to. However, unlike biological heritage, appearance could be, and was
altered to some degree by some of the participants in order to address discrepancies in identity, heritage, and physical features. Jennifer used different methods to darken her skin. When Cory’s hair was styled in dreadlocks, he believed that it made it more difficult for others to identify him as White, although Cory indicated that he did not purposefully style his hair this way in order to emphasize his Black heritage.

Several researchers who studied bi-racial children noted that these children would face challenges because of their physical appearance (Ladner, 1984; Shackford, 1984; Wardle, 1987, 1989). In most of these cases, the authors either overtly or covertly referenced physical features, especially skin color, as affecting ability to claim certain racial identities. I believe that the majority of this literature reflected the assumption that all bi-racial people of Black/White heritage would look more like "people of color" than they did White people. In this study, four of the seven participants spoke about times when they were seen by others as being White based on their appearance. My own assumptions while planning this study was that I would find people who "looked Black" but who were actually bi-racial, and not people of these combined heritages who "looked White." I learned by conducting this research that there are bi-racial people in the world who appear from gross physical features to be White, and that these individuals’ experiences may have been overlooked, or not received adequate attention in prior works on bi-racial issues. Therefore, this study illustrated that not only could society attempt to classify African-American/Euro-American’s as Black based on appearance, but in some cases, could attempt to classify them as White based on the same criteria. The participants in this study attested to both the acceptance they had received when this external classification was consistent with their chosen identity, and the confusion which they experienced when external labels did not reflect their own choice of racial identity.
The Effect of Political Experiences and Orientation on Racial Identity Development

In some instances, participants' political affiliations, beliefs, or orientation had an effect on how they either identified racially, or made meaning of their racial identities. Political orientation could be shaped by access to information early in life about the political nature of society, as in Robin's case, or by the issues one felt were important to support or value as adults. For example, both Robin and Agnes described seeking out Blacks or other people of color in their business dealings. Agnes spoke about the importance of supporting economic empowerment in the Black community. Agnes and Jennifer included references to the politics and impact of interracial dating on the Black community. From these examples, it was clear that for some of the participants in this study, the larger political meaning and ramifications of race and racism in society or the political outlook of a particular racial community were taken into account when making particular life decisions. At the same time, other participants spoke about striking a balance between Black empowerment and the injustices of the past. Both Anne and Mitchell felt that although Blacks had suffered discrimination, they could be seen as trying to go beyond empowerment and seeking to overpower Whites. Cory felt that having to focus on being Black, or having to constantly explain his heritage or act in ways which made his heritage known would make him a "militant," something which he did not want to be.

As the researcher conducting this study, I had expected to find a stronger connection between claiming a certain racial identity and participants' personal political orientation. This expectation was partly driven by my experience with others and my interpretation of some of the factors present in the mono-racial theories. I believe this discrepancy between expected and actual influence of political orientation was related to some degree to the effect of historical events and societal climate on the extent to which claiming a certain racial identity
was seen or done as part of a political statement or action. Neither of the two oldest participants were active in the Civil Rights Movement. The three participants who were in the middle age category grew up during this period of time. The youngest participants were born at the very end of the major time of marches, protests, and overt violence associated with the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Perhaps the level of political meaning a person attributed to his or her racial identity was connected to the level of political discourse, movements, or eras which are occurring during his or her life time. Therefore, as historical movements differed, so did perhaps the level of the effect or importance of political ideology on racial identity development or choice of racial identity.

The Effect of Individual Awareness of Self in Relation to Race and Racism on Racial Identity Development

The stage or stages of racial identity development as mapped out in the theories of Black, White, and bi-racial identity development reviewed in this dissertation was another factor which influenced how some participants came to name themselves in terms of racial group membership. I chose to apply the models written by Thomas (1971), Cross (1971), and Jackson (1976) to the experiences of participants who chose a Black racial identity and the theories of Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984) to the experiences of the participant who chose a White racial identity. The experiences of all of the participants were examined through the model of bi-racial identity development proposed by Poston (1990). These models are applied to the experiences of participants in Sections Three and Four of this chapter. At this point, some general observations can be made on how the process of developing an awareness of self within a system of racism could be considered as a factor which influenced racial identity development in participants in this study.
The blueprints laid out by the models cited in the previous paragraph contributed to my understanding of why some of the participants chose the racial identity that they did. For example, I would place David, who identified as White, in the Passive Acceptance stage of Hardiman’s (1982) White Identity Development Model. However, if he was in the stage of Redefinition or Internalization in this model, perhaps his choice of racial identity would change to be more reflective of his heritage. The same could be true for Agnes, who I would characterize as moving out of Jackson’s (1976) stage of Redirection and into Internalization. Agnes noted at the end of her profile that if she reconnected with her German heritage, which she shut off while undergoing the process which led her to a Black identity, her racial identity may change. Poston’s (1990) model could account for some, but not all of the experiences of the participants in this study. I believe that the stage or stages of racial identity development that a participant was at in Poston’s model of bi-racial identity development, and the mono-racial models of identity development for those participants who chose a mono-racial identity, could be used as a factor to shed light on how a participant came to choose a particular racial identity or set of identities over others.

The Role of Biological Heritage in Racial Identity Development

Biological heritage was another factor which affected the racial identity development of participants. However, in this study, it was less significant than either appearance or culture in influencing a person’s choice of identity. Biology, or "whom one’s parents were" was seen as the core factor in choosing an identity, as it seemed to be in Cory’s life, or something which had happened in the past which had no relevance to one’s current life, as in the case of David. Three of the participants acknowledged that their heritage was African-American and Euro-American, but named themselves as Black for other reasons. For
Jennifer, her heritage was a major connection to being bi-racial because of her light complexion and hair color. Therefore, within the lives of participants, biological heritage was both consistent with chosen identity, or in conflict with it.

Heritage, as defined by extended family members, also meant that some participants had interactions with both sides of their family which provided information about who they were, and access to different cultural experiences. In the profiles, Anne spoke about the songs and dances she learned from her cousins. Cory remembered how his mother spoke differently when she was with her family. Robin described the visits her family made to her Black relatives as times when she was exposed to Black culture. Therefore, heritage could be seen as a door through which a person experienced other factors, which in turn could influence sense or choice of racial identity. For some participants, the messages and sense of community provided through their Black family heritage was more relevant to their experience than those which they received from the White side of their family. Given the family in which he was raised, David felt more like an Israeli, and that his biological heritage was the only thing which made him bi-racial, or "half Black." Both Agnes and Jennifer noted that part of what affected their racial identity development was having less of a physical connection to the White side of their families due to the fact that most of their White relatives lived in Europe.

Biological heritage also influenced the appearance of participants in that their genetic make up provided the initial map of their physical appearance. The participants in this study illustrated part of the vast range of physical characteristics which are reflected in bi-racial individuals. From conducting this study, I was reminded that African-American/Euro-Americans can have dark skin and coarse hair, but they also can have very light skin and
eyes, and blonde, straight hair. Every shade, texture, and realm of features lie in between the extremes of both Black and White populations.

Unlike appearance, participants could not change their biological heritage. However, for some, their heritage could not be readily determined, or was mis-identified based on their physical appearance. In the data, this was evident when biologically bi-racial people were seen as being either Black or White. In addition, heritage was masked, or made to look "more one way of the other" by some participants. In this study, Jennifer’s early attempts at changing her skin color were examples of an individual changing her appearance to be more consistent with her sense of identity. In addition, Cory felt that styling his hair as dreadlocks made it harder for people to identify him as White. Mitchell’s tatoo of an Indian head could also communicate to others that his background included Native American heritage.

The Effect of Spirituality on Racial Identity Development

Spirituality was cited by some participants as having a role in defining their sense of racial identity and how they responded to issues of race and racism. However, it played a lesser role in racial identity development than the previously described factors. Religion was seen by Anne as a way of connecting all people together, and fostered her feeling that race was no longer important since all people were members of the human race in the eyes of God. Other participants, such as Robin and Mitchell relied on their religion, faith, or sense of spirituality as a source of strength and understanding. Therefore, religion or a spiritual component in one’s life was seen as affecting the level to which he or she viewed the differences between races, and how he or she saw self and others as members of the larger human race. In addition, spiritual or religious practices, celebrations, or rituals could also be a significant part of an individual’s cultural experience or background, and could be one of
The aspects of the person's past or present environment which affected racial identity development.

The Effect of Age and Socio-Historical Context on Racial Identity Development

The effect that participants' age had on their choice of racial identity can be seen in at least three ways from the data. First, as each participant went through life, he or she had increasing numbers of experiences which provided information, messages, and interactions which could have affected his or her racial identity development. Participants who were older, or who had spent significant amounts of time thinking about their racial identity may have had a different sense of their racial identity than the younger individuals in this study. Another characteristic which is often associated with age is personal level of maturity, an increase in which is often seen as a by-product of increases in chronological age. This variable of maturity could be seen in the data in Jennifer's story, when she related how she had come to terms with her identity and her appearance, and with Agnes when she described her tastes as maturing when she began her transition. The third aspect of age which was evident in the data was that as all of the participants lived, grew, and matured, they did so in an environment where society and culture were also evolving due to movement into different historical periods. This was evident in the data when participants were grouped into age categories and their experiences compared across these groupings. For participants in the older age category in this study, there were fewer options to claim a mixed heritage or identity in the larger society where ascribed identities reflected mono-racial groups. Even some of the participants in the middle age group received messages that their Black heritage meant that they were identified with the Black racial category by their family and/or society because of the particular history of the United States. Anne, the oldest participant in this
study, spoke about the changes that she had seen in terms of numbers of mixed race people and the attitudes which she felt that they held. Cory was able to check both Black and White categories on his college applications, something that Jennifer, who was only five years older than he was, was not able to do. Cory believed that it would become increasingly harder to name people by single racial categories, and that he was a symbol of things as they would be in the future.

Although some changes in societal values around interracial relationships and bi-racial people have occurred, I believe that the data also showed that to a large extent, factors in either a participant’s community or the larger society still communicated the message that a bi-racial person could choose only one racial group to identify with. This included being pressured by family or peers to choose a mono-racial identity, being required to check only a single box on forms indicating racial heritage, being able to enter certain situations or groups of people based on one racial group and not the other, or the experiencing of cultural differences between Blacks and Whites as being too wide to allow for identification with both.

The Effect of Other Personal Social Identities on Racial Identity Development

The presence of other social identities beside race, such as gender and class, in the profiles presented in Chapter IV indicated that some of the participants in this study experienced the world as the sum of many parts, which included but was not limited to their racial identity and heritage. Although this area was not examined in depth in this dissertation, some connection between racial identity and other social identities could be seen in how participants referred to themselves and the issues facing them in their lives.

All of the female participants in this study included references to themselves as women, and to the strong role models which they had seen in Black women. Additional
research is needed to tease out any influences that the process of developing a gender identity has on the development of a racial identity, and visa versa. Clarifying the interaction between gender and racial identity would help to answer questions such as how, if at all, Agnes' experiences or sense of her racial identity would have been different if she had worked out issues of being a woman before going through her transformation based on her racial identity. In addition, all of the female participants had mothers who were White, and both Cory and Mitchell were raised by mothers who were Black. Since in this study, all of the same gender parents of participants were White, future research should include more diversity in terms of which parent was White and which was Black, which in turn may further clarify the interaction between gender issues and the choice or development of a racial identity.

In this study, Cory and Jennifer both spoke about class issues, describing economic concerns as often being more prominent in their lives today than issues around their racial identity. In this context, one could wonder how the experiences of these two individuals would differ if they did not have to worry about meeting the economic requirements of day to day life. The question of how the presence of absence of economic security, in both past and present life affects racial identity development in bi-racial people is an area which needs more attention.

Participants' religious identities were raised in at least four of the profiles. For Anne and Mitchell, their faith was a significant factor in their lives. Through her faith, Ann felt that race was no longer important to her, and Mitchell felt that his faith had helped him to claim and appreciate all of his different racial heritages. While Robin did not indicate that her religious beliefs or practice affected how she identified, she believed that these factors helped her to accept others and not dwell on the negative things that happened in her life. Because of his cultural experiences, which reflect the religious and ethnic heritage of his adopted
parents, David embraced an identity based on an Israeli heritage, rather than the racial heritages of his biological parents. Therefore, the role of faith, religion, and the cultural practices and values associated with these also warrant closer attention in future works.

When speaking about certain aspects of their lives, some of the participants seemed to not separate their racial identity from some of their other social identities. In this study, the social identities besides race which were discussed were gender, class, religion, and to some extent, age. In considering bi-racial people as whole people, I believe that in the future, more attention should be given to how their other identities, including those which did not receive in-depth attention in this study such as sexual orientation and disability status, serve to facilitate or block the development of a particular racial identity or set of identities.

The Effect of Ethnic Identity on Racial Identity Development

Another factor which was apparent in the data was the effect that awareness of, and attachment to particular ethnic heritages and identities had on the choice of racial identity of some of the participants. Mitchell spoke about values embodied in the way that Cherokees lived, which he admired and empathized with. David spoke about being an Israeli. Agnes felt that if she were in Germany, being German may have been more relevant to her day to day life than it was now. Both Agnes and Robin described themselves as feeling less affiliation with their European heritages because of how they named themselves and had experienced life in the United States.

References to ethnic identity were not present in the profiles to the extent, and in the same amount of detail, as the other factors which were discussed previously. Perhaps such attention was lacking because the focus of this study was racial identity development. Ethnic heritage was utilized by me as the researcher as a way of narrowing the scope of potential
participants for this study, of identifying participants who were eligible given these
parameters, and of making sense of some of the experiences which participants had
encountered in their lives. The interaction between a person’s ethnic heritage and their racial
identity development is an area which could and should be explored in future studies on this
population.

Comments on the Framework

Section One of this chapter has focussed to this point on outlining and developing the
major factors which were cited by participants as influencing their sense of racial identity. It
is important to note the framework which I designed to illustrate these factors is based on the
experiences of a small, select sample of African-American/Euro-American adults who were
willing to be participants in this particular research study. When examining the data in light
of the framework, it is apparent that none of the participant profiles included all of these
factors. In addition, the different factors appeared in varying degrees across participants,
meaning that for each person, some variables were more important than others in shaping
identity. Even in the case of the factors which were most prominent, those of appearance,
socialization, and cultural experiences, there was variation as to the extent to which each of
these contributed to the choice of a particular identity from participant to participant.
Therefore, it should not be assumed that all of these factors have an impact on each bi-racial
person’s choice of identity, or that the degree of influence of any one factor or group of
factors is the same from person to person.

The existence of individual differences between people is another area which needs to
be discussed in relation to the model. As Hall (1980) noted, individual personality differences
play a role in determining which racial identity is chosen by bi-racial people. I also believe
this is true, and that although individuals may have similar patterns when their experiences are examined in light of the framework which I have proposed, they may in fact choose different racial identities based on individual preferences or differences in personalities. In addition, like members of any, single racial group, bi-racial people should also be considered as individuals who do not necessarily all experience the world, race, racism, and their identities in the same way. This is especially important given that there are many different combinations of races and ethnicities which are evident in mixed race people. Therefore, cultural practices, family norms and values, communities, and historical experiences of different groups should be taken into account when the many possible experiences of bi-racial people are examined.

As noted in the descriptions given for each of the factors, I see some of them as being connected, or interacting with others. For example, early cultural experiences are part of a participant’s early environment in which he or she was socialized. The particular socio-historical time periods during which a participant lived is related to when he or she was born, and hence connected to age. One of the goals of this study was to identify, examine, and illustrate some of the factors which influenced racial identity development from the perspective of African-American/Euro-American adults. In analyzing and presenting the data from this study, the idea that racial identity development involved a number of factors working together was re-affirmed in my mind. The connections which I feel can be made from the analysis of the data of this study were noted in the descriptions of the factors which were presented earlier. Further research into the existence and nature of these and other connections is needed. However, it is important to indicate that although all of these connections have not been fully explored, the experience of identity development is a process which entails the interactions between several variables and factors. While the factors appear
as separate categories in the framework, this does not imply that they are factors which
operate in isolation from all of the others during the process of racial identity development.

The framework which I have developed and presented in this section can be used to
help understand the experience of racial identity development of bi-racial people. I do not
believe that it can or should be used as a diagnostic or predictive tool around racial identity
development. Instead, I see its value as being able to see the many different pieces which
contribute to the development of a racial identity in bi-racial people. In this way, the richness
of an individual’s experience can emerge, and be understood as a whole in a more concrete
and detailed way. Where experiences or chosen identities differ from person to person, the
framework can help explain how some of these differences could occur. The focus of the
framework is not to fragment experiences, but to capture the themes which emerged from the
lives of the participants in this study.

While the framework presents a number of factors which were evident in the data, I
believe that racial identity development or choice of racial identity is affected by factors which
do not appear in the model, and that people have experienced one or more of the factors in
ways which I have not accounted for in my definitions of the factors. I do not see the
framework as being a complete listing of factors affecting identity development in bi-racial
adults. Instead, I see it much like the prior theories on mono-racial identity development, as
a foundation from which new questions, research, and answers may be built. In this process,
some of the factors in the framework may be further developed, while others may be removed
or re-structured.

The last part of this section compares the experiences of the participants in this study
to the framework of factors which was proposed earlier. This analysis is presented as a chart
in Table 3 on page 315. The purpose of this summary is to illustrate how the framework can
Table 3: Analysis of Participants in Terms of Factors which Affected **Current** Choice of Racial Identity or which Influenced how Participants Made Meaning of Their Racial Identity or Heritage.

<table>
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<th>4</th>
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<td>X</td>
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**Key**

X = factor which participant indicated had a **significant** effect on personal choice of racial identity.

x = factor which participant indicated had a **lesser** effect on personal choice of racial identity.

0 = factor which was not noted by participant as having had an effect on personal choice of racial identity.

* = stage of racial identity development assigned by researcher.
be applied to actual life experiences to further the understanding of what factors were most prominent in influencing an individual’s choice of racial identity, and racial identity development in bi-racial people on a more general level.

Section Two: Summary of Insights About the Racial Identity of Participants

This section presents some of the insights into the racial identity development of bi-racial adults which I have gained from conducting this study. This analysis presents additional details on the experiences of the seven African-American/Euro-American adults who shared their lives with me over the course of this study.

From the stories, perspectives and opinions which were shared during the interviews, it is clear to me that African-American/Euro-American adults have a range of experiences, claim a number of racial identities, and experience the world in a variety of ways. Therefore, it is hard to characterize these individuals or their experiences into one group or as people whose experiences can easily be captured by a model based on stages of racial identity development. The diversity in experience which was evident in the lives of the participants in this dissertation can be partially accounted for by the number of factors which influenced their sense of racial identity, some of which were noted in the framework presented in Section One of this chapter. Within many of these individual factors, there exists a range to which the factor can be expressed or experienced. For example, physical appearance can vary greatly between individuals who have similar racial heritages. In addition, in many cases the factors influence and interact with each other. In order to more fully understand the personal experience of racial identity development, the cumulative effect of these interactions needs to be taken into account. While existing models of mono-racial identity development make
reference to some of these factors, they do not address the degree to which these factors affect how an individual moves through the different stages of identity development.

From working with the data from this study over the past year, I believe that if a model of bi-racial identity development were to be able to capture the complexity of the experiences which I have encountered, it may have to be created on more than two dimensions. A multi-dimensional framework would allow for the integration of the factors affecting identity development with possible stages of development, and may also be able to depict the interaction which occurs between some of the factors. While such a model could be developed, I believe the time and energy it would take to do so might be better spent on designing and conducting other research on bi-racial identity issues. From my experience, I have come to rely less on models which view identity development of bi-racial people, and of adults in particular, as a developmental sequence of stages. I now feel that there is incredible value in listening to a person’s life experience, drawing out the meaning that the person makes of his or her experiences, and understanding how a person has come to claim a particular racial identity. Whether this is best done for bi-racial adults within a stage model framework, or another type of matrix or model is not fully clear to me. However, I feel that attempting to mold rich and diverse experiences into frameworks which were not designed to attend to all of this richness, is to sacrifice much of the meaning that an individual makes of his or her life, and therefore, much of the meaning of a person’s sense of racial identity.

From listening to the meaning which seven individuals gave to their own experiences, I have learned a number of things which I believe can be spoken about in more general terms concerning the racial identities of African-American/Euro-American adults. First and foremost, I have come to understand that the experience of racial identity development of bi-racial adults is not a single experience, but many experiences. In addition, I have learned that
being of bi-racial heritage has different meanings for different people. For some, heritage and its relation to identity is an evolving process to be explored. For others, having mixed race ancestry is something that is acknowledged, but not seen as important or relevant to day to day life. Still for others, bi-racial heritage is something to be ignored or hidden. The perspective which a person chooses is determined to some degree by how they experienced a number of different factors in their lives. How a racial identity is achieved can encompass a number of different kinds of experiences. For some individuals, racial identity is the result of a personal transformation. It can also be described as the end product of coming to peace with ones self as an individual in the world. Chosen racial identity is described by others as just who they are, based on the sum of all of their thoughts and experiences. Still yet, racial identity for others is the acceptance of what was assigned to them at a certain point in life.

Because someone is bi-racial does not necessarily mean that he or she is obsessed or burdened with working out issues related to his or her racial identity. For some individuals, defining a sense of identity is a prominent issue in current life. For others, their identity or heritage is something which is raised by others through inquiries or incidents. In addition, there are people of bi-racial heritage for which racial identity or heritage is not an acknowledged factor at all in their lives. Therefore, I have learned not to assume that a certain biological heritage results in a whole host of issues about identity or set of unusual experiences. Many of the participants in this study did name their life experiences as unique in some way. The importance which they attributed to this uniqueness varied.

Given the stories which were shared through the profiles, I believe that bi-racial people experience their overall lives in a number of ways. For some, life as a multi-race person is having the "best of both worlds." Others want to be one race or the other, or feel that heritage and identity are burdens to be worked through. I believe that the variations in
view of self, heritage and identity depends partly on whether an individual’s chosen identity matches how an individual is named by others, personal sense of self, and physical appearance. Where these factors are congruent, the bi-racial person is able to live life as a person of his or her chosen identity. I believe that this is particularly true of bi-racial people who both choose a mono-racial identity and who are viewed as mono-racial people by others. These individuals may find themselves in situations, however, where their heritages or experience set them apart from the group with which they have identified with. This was particularly evident in the data when participants spoke of being present when either Blacks or Whites were speaking negatively about the other group, or when they were questioned about their appearance or family background. Those bi-racial individuals who want to choose a certain identity, but are limited in doing so because of factors beyond their control, such as appearance or societal definitions of race, may experience conflict or frustration at different points in their lives. Regardless of the overall perspective which each of them held, the majority of individuals who participated in this study indicated that their experiences had been a source of strength, courage, or learning which remained with them in present day.

African-American/Euro-American individuals who choose a multi- or mixed race identity may have to address a variety of issues during their lives. At the personal and interpersonal level, they may feel or be told by others that claiming an identity which reflects both heritages is to not accept one or both of their racial backgrounds fully. If they are open about their choice of identity, then they may experience feelings of not belonging to either the Black or White community, or being caught in the middle of these two communities. In terms of dealing with others, people of African-American/Euro-American heritage may actually experience rejection, or lack of full acceptance by the Black or White community, or both. At the societal level, bi-racial people are often confronted with having to choose one
heritage over the other in very concrete as well as abstract ways. On forms and applications, people often have to check single racial categories to record their heritages, unless they are willing to name themselves as "other." Examples of more abstract ways in which a person is affected includes living in a society which reflects the assumption that people are mono-racial, or that if a person is of multiple race heritage, his or her category and identity is determined by only one of them. I believe this assumption that a person is expected to be "either one race of the other" is partly due to the physical, cultural, and political distances seen to exist between different racial groups in this society. Therefore, to be a person of two heritages, Black and White for example, is to be a person who can't possibly embody the societal images of both of these groups at the same time. Those who choose to name themselves in a way which reflects all of their heritages are seen as being confused, divisive, or not facing reality. Those who do not look predominantly White or Black are named as exotic or unusual, as opposed to being seen as part of the natural range of physical appearances which exist. Lastly, in the absence of role models or positive images within surrounding communities or the larger society, bi-racial people still face the task of defining who they are in a relative vacuum of information and images. In light of this, a number of the norms and institutions of our culture and communities need to be re-evaluated and revised to recognize and accommodate the experiences of bi-racial people. Such changes would include having broader categories on forms which indicate racial heritage information, depicting more mixed race people in books, the media, and public forums, providing opportunities for bi- or multi-racial people to come together to discuss their experiences, and accepting mixed race people who choose a mono-racial identity into the communities of their chosen race.
In this section of the dissertation, the experiences of participants who chose a mono-racial identity are compared with the stages in selected models of Black Identity Development (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Thomas, 1972) and White Identity Development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984). Before this analysis is presented, I feel it is important to reiterate some of the issues and precautions related to applying these theories to the experiences of bi-racial people. The theories of Black and White identity development listed above were based on the experiences of mono-racial groups. They were used in this dissertation as examples of frameworks of racial identity development which existed in current literature. The authors of these works did not specifically indicate the factor or group of factors which would determine if a person was Black or White, and therefore able to undergo the process outlined by the mono-racial models. I accepted these omissions as invitations to explore the relevance of the theories to, or their usefulness in making sense of, the experiences of people whose racial heritages were actually bi-racial, but who claimed either Black or White racial identities. This examination was not conducted with the expectation that the models should or could be relevant to a bi-racial population. In fact, one of the areas of inquiry of this study was related to the extent to which the models could be applied to the experience of bi-racial people. In addition, if the models could be used to shed light on the experiences of racial identity development of this new population, I wanted to examine how the experiences of bi-racial people were similar and different when compared with those based on the experiences of mono-racial people described in the models.

Participants whose experiences were compared to the mono-racial models of identity development in this section of the dissertation were those individuals who chose either a Black or a White racial identity. Participants who chose identities which reflected multiple racial
groups were not included in this section, mainly because in the absence of at least a monoracial identity, there was little on which to build a connection between these participants and the models based on the experiences of mono-racial groups.

Three of the participants in this study, Anne, Robin, and Agnes, identified as Black or African-American. Of these women, Agnes most clearly reflected the identity development process outlined in the models of Black identity development, including a period of time when she was immersed in the Black community and history in order to redefine her sense of self in the world. From the experiences which she shared, I see her being a person in the stage of Internalization in the Cross (1971) model and the stage of Redirection in the Jackson (1976) model. In order to get to this stage, Agnes described herself as studying African-American history, being involved with different aspects of African-American culture, and being a part of the African-American community. These experiences were similar to those described in Cross' stage of Immersion and Jackson's stage of Redirection. For Agnes, the turning toward the Black community for redefinition and support also entailed what she described as shutting off her connection to her European heritage. Therefore, the experience of African-American adults who identify as Black and who move through these middle stages of the Black identity development models may be different from those of Black people of mono-racial descent, in that a turning away from all that is White, could also entail the need to turn away from part of one's family and heritage. Agnes felt that this was necessary for her to do while she was undergoing her transformation in identity "in order to fully concentrate on what I was going through." In noting that she felt comfortable being with African-Americans, Agnes recognized that she had had a different experience than they had, even though she identified as Black.
In more recent times, Agnes described part of her quest as including the possibility of re-connecting with aspects of her White heritage which she had shut off during her period of transition. As noted earlier, because the mono-racial models were not geared toward the bi-racial experience, they did not include the possibility of a re-integration of another racial heritage into overall sense of self. Therefore, if Agnes chose to embrace a multi-racial identity in the future, this phase of her experience would be outside of what is currently described in the Black identity development models.

Although Anne's and Robin's experiences did not reflect movement between the mono-racial stages of development as clearly as Agnes' did, from what they shared I see each of them as most closely exemplifying the characteristics of Jackson's stages of Redirection and Internalization to varying degrees. Anne noted that when she moved to the city and began to meet and socialize with other Blacks, she felt that she was with her own. Although she described herself as not knowing how to respond during the Civil Rights Movement, she spoke about seeing racism as a disease which consumed White people, and Black Power as a reaction to White racism which wasn't appropriate either. Although she described herself as at times being able to "really go off on a rampage" when she thought about racism, she did not speak about hating, putting down, or isolating herself from Whites. Anne moved from feeling disgrace about her Black heritage to a place where she felt pride and strength as a Black woman. I am unsure of what constituted the significant event or events in Anne's life which sparked an "encounter" under the Cross (1971) model. It may have been her moving to the city, watching the Civil Rights Movement unfold, or finding her religion. Each of these were significant events in her life, but which one or group of them was the primary mover in how she came to name racism and her racial identity is unclear to me. As Anne now believed that race was no longer very important in her life and described herself as
focussing on the similarities in people, I feel she would be moving into Jackson’s stage of Internalization.

Of the three participants who identified as Black, Robin’s story is perhaps the hardest to understand in terms of the Black identity development models. Her description of herself reflected an understanding of the political and economic nature of race and racism in the United States. She wanted to have a community which included more people of color or Blacks, but she did not make conscious efforts to put herself in such communities, or reject or withdraw from relationships with Whites. She named herself as Black because of her close feelings of connection to this heritage and culture. At this time in her life, she felt free to embrace the positive aspects of both Black and White culture, and to reject those which she did not like. Given this perspective, and since she referred to herself in terms of her identity as a woman, I see her as being in Jackson’s Internalization Stage. While she described herself as rejecting mainstream, White values, her life did not reflect a rejection of relationships with Whites, or a predominantly White community. Therefore, I am not sure that the models written by Jackson (1976), Cross (1971), or Thomas (1971) fit her experience as well as that of other participants who identified as Black, or of Blacks of mono-racial heritage.

While four of the participants in this study felt that at times they had been seen as White by others, only David chose to identify as White. The two theories of White identity development reviewed in Chapter II of this dissertation were framed as processes through which Whites pass in order to develop a new, non-racist consciousness and identity. In these theories, it was unclear as to who was White, in terms of chosen or ascribed identity, and therefore able to undergo such a process of redefinition. Given this situation, I chose to apply
the Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984) models only to the experience of David, who named himself as White.

Within the framework of the Hardiman (1982) model, I believe that David most closely resembled the characteristics of the stage of Passive Acceptance because he emphasized that he did not view people by race and therefore was not racist, downplayed the effect of race in society, found himself at times holding Blacks responsible for lack of opportunity and education, and saw his ability to be seen as a White person as a benefit and protecting him from having to experience racism. David also had little interaction with people of color, and believed that the only group that he would not be able to fit into was the Black group. In Helms’ model, I believe that David fit into more than one stage, largely because of the different experiences he had had in his life. David had both avoided having interactions with Blacks, a behavior indicative of the first stage of the model, and had been put in situations where this avoidance was difficult, such as when he lived in a predominantly Black residence hall in college. Given this latter experience, as well as incidents which he described in his profile, David could have been in the third stage of the model, Reintegration, as he chose to embrace White values and beliefs about racial differences, did not confront Whites who used racial epithets, and preferred to be separate from Blacks. Although David did not exhibit extremely hostile feelings towards Blacks, he described Black peers in high school as "obnoxious jerks" and felt that all of the Blacks whom he had known in high school had hated him. In addition, he sometimes found himself stereotyping Blacks, and feeling that "people are people" and that he was like any other White person, with the exception of the feelings he had when he heard a racial epithet. Even though David’s attitudes and beliefs could put him in different stages, his strategy of dealing with race and inter-racial interactions was the same: to avoid being with Blacks or other people of color, to minimize the
differences between racial groups, and to acknowledge but not address the feelings which he experienced during incidents.

In addition to the attitudes and feelings noted above, David's beliefs about his Black heritage can also be used to understand his stage of White identity development in light of the Helms' model. Each time that David described his mixed race heritage, he used neutral or negative terms. He stressed that his biological heritage had no meaning or relevance in his current life. When he made references to how he should think about his heritage, he used terms such as "biologically not sound," "less intelligent," and "that I don't look well enough." In addition, he felt that there were no benefits to being part Black. In applying stereotypical or negative value to the Black part of his heritage, David's attitudes reflected the second stage of Helm's model.

The major challenge to the application of the theories of Black and White identity development to the participants in this study was that I believe these models were written to address the experiences of individuals from single racial groups. Certain dilemmas arose when I used these models to reflect on the experiences of individuals who were bi-racial, but chose mono-racial identities. For example, the concepts of heritage, appearance, ascribed and chosen racial identity could all be considered when determining which of the mono-racial models would apply to any one participant. However, given the diversity in appearances, and chosen and ascribed identities evident in even the small number of participants utilized in this study, the assignment of a person into one group of models based on one or more of these factors might contradict where they would be placed if other factors had been considered. For example, all of the participants had similar racial heritages. Utilizing either the Black or White identity development models to frame their experience would not acknowledge the identities chosen by a number of the participants, the identities which were ascribed to some
of them based on their physical appearance, or their mixed biological heritage. Not applying
the models at all to any of the individuals in this study would overlook the fact that four out
of the seven participants chose, and believed that they lived, mono-racial identities in most
aspects of their lives. Utilizing chosen racial identity as the sole factor in determining
whether certain mono-racial models, as they are currently written, applied to participants
would not recognize potential differences between the experiences of a bi-racial person who
identified as Black and a mono-racial Black person.

It is unclear to me which single concept, or combination of the concepts of heritage,
ascribed identity, or chosen identity should be considered the deciding one in determining
which racial identity model was most appropriate for each participant, or if there are other
factors besides those cited which could shed light on this area. In the analysis of some of the
participants within the context of mono-racial models presented earlier, I used the concept of
chosen identity to decide which model I would apply to each participant. This was done
mostly because chosen racial identity, and participants’ experience of these racial identities in
the world were the primary areas of focus of this study. While only those participants who
chose a mono-racial identity were compared with the mono-racial theories of identity
development, the concept of ascribed racial identity also received significant attention in this
study, and was evident in participants’ descriptions of how they responded to feedback from
others and society around their racial identities and heritages, and how they believed that
society responded to them. For the most part, the participants who did choose mono-racial
identities believed that others saw them as mono-racial individuals.

One of the factors which fed my decision to not apply the mono-racial identity
development models to the three participants who chose multiple race identities was that I
believe the value of the models would be lessened by applying them to the experiences of
people who, for whatever reason, did not consider themselves part of the group that the models pertained to. However, I also acknowledge that there was a danger in relying on chosen racial identity to determine, in general, if a mono-racial model should be used to understand the experiences of a particular participant’s experience, mainly because one could deny privilege based on a White heritage or identity by rejecting a White racial identity or the White identity development models. In addition, a person’s chosen identity could be in large part in conflict with ascribed identity, so that no matter how an individual named him or herself, he or she would be treated by society as if they were someone other than whom he or she claimed to be.

Those participants who chose a mono-racial identity and whose experiences were analyzed using the different stages of the mono-racial models also had experiences, attitudes, or perceptions which did not easily fit into the processes described by these theories. I believe that many of these situations were primarily related to participants’ history as bi-racial people. For example, Robin and Anne did not experience a turning away from Whites, although they both felt closer to Black culture and believed that the world responded to them as Black people. Both maintained close relationships with their mothers who were White, and Robin married a White man. David referred to the fact that the feelings which he sometimes had set him apart from other Whites, although he was unsure if these feelings were connected to his heritage or to his not liking people using racial terms. The question is then, were these differences in experiences a matter of degree which could be accommodated by the mono-racial theories, or were they major factors which set the experiences of these participants apart from individuals of mono-racial heritage? If the former perspective is adopted, then the mono-racial theories can be used as a way of making sense of the identity development of these participants. Perhaps the greatest contribution which these theories made to the analysis
of the data was in their outlining of a process through which an individual became aware of issues of race, racism, and racial identity within American society. Within this context, I believe that the examination of the experiences of the participants who chose mono-racial identities within frameworks of the mono-racial models helped to shed light on how these participants came to identify with the racial group that they chose.

The application of the mono-racial models of identity development to the experiences of bi-racial people who claimed a multiple race identity was more challenging. This was mainly due to the fact that these earlier works were not written to accommodate the development of an identity based on more than one racial group, and could not address some of the major issues evident in the stories of participants who fell into this group. These issues included the role of appearance, culture, community, and individual differences in shaping identity. For this reason, and the others noted earlier in this section, I did not attempt to place the three participants who chose multiple race identities into any of the stages within the mono-racial theories. Instead, I chose to compare their experiences, and those of participant who chose mono-racial identities, with the model proposed by Poston (1990) in the following section of this chapter.

Section Four: Comparison of Findings to Research on Bi-Racial Adults

In this section, the findings from this dissertation are compared with the works by Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1989). In addition, the model of bi-racial identity development proposed by Poston (1990) will be applied to the experiences recounted by participants in this study.

Many of the factors which were noted by Poussaint (1984) and Luckett (1987) as influencing racial identity development in bi-racial adults also appeared in the stories of the
participants from this study. These factors included physical appearance, nature of early communities, and experiences with political groups. Unlike the individuals in Poussaint's research, some of the participants in this study chose racial identities other than Black. Some of the participants did experience situational changes in identity which were described by Poussaint. A number of the advantages of being bi-racial noted by Poussaint's participants were similar to those cited by participants in this dissertation.

One of the ways in which Luckett (1987) organized her data was by life periods related to age and the issues facing a bi-racial person at each of these given periods. Like individuals in the Luckett study, childhood was a time where many of the participants in this dissertation either received information about race and racial identity from their families or did not receive information which focused on race or racial identity issues. Luckett noted that the adolescent period was a time when individuals ventured beyond the confines of the family environment and often felt more pressure to choose a racial identity. In this study, the lives of Agnes, Mitchell, Jennifer, Cory, and even David reflected some level of increased awareness of racial identity issues at this age. Conflicts around racial identity were seen to be resolved during the young adult period in Luckett's work. Two of the participants in this study, Anne and Robin, experienced conflicts not necessarily around their racial identity, but people's response to them as people of color at this time. Cory and David, who were both in their early twenties, seemed to still be thinking through issues related to their identity, with David being more certain that his identity was White and would not change. The remaining participants all described coming to terms with their identity in this life period. For Jennifer, this process was closely tied to feeling resolved around issues of her appearance.

Poston's (1990) model contained five stages through which a bi-racial person passed during the development of a bi-racial identity. These stages were 1.) Personal Identity, 2.)
Choice of Group Categorization, 3.) Enmeshment/Denial, 4.) Appreciation, and 5.) Integration. In the concluding sections of Poston’s work, the author noted that additional research needed to be done to further elaborate on the process of racial identity development of bi-racial people, and the factors which influenced this process. In addition, Poston believed that the existence of stages of identity development and the movement between these stages should be examined by future study.

The application of Poston’s framework to the experiences of participants in this study accomplishes a number of goals. First, this analysis illustrates the meaningfulness that this particular model could bring to the actual experiences of a group of African-American/Euro-American adults, and the extent to which some of obstacles presented when the mono-racial works were used to analyze the data, could be overcome by using a model that was specifically geared to a mixed race population. Section One of this chapter identified, defined, and elaborated on several factors which influenced racial identity development, addressing Poston’s recommendation that factors such as these receive additional attention. Lastly, the analysis of the results of this study utilizing a model which is framed as a developmental sequence of stages of bi-racial identity development may shed further light on whether this type of framework is the best one to describe or account for the experience of racial identity development of bi-racial adults.

The experiences of the participants in this study reflected to differing degrees, the characteristics and stages in Poston’s model. In many cases, there was a firm fit between the behaviors and attitudes which Poston proposed at each stage and what a participant experienced. In other places, the complex nature of an individual’s choices or experiences were not well captured in any one of Poston’s stages. Before presenting an evaluation of the
strengths and limitations of this model in light of the data from this study, I will indicate where I see each participant falling in this model.

All of the participants noted that they did not have a sense of identity or understanding of themselves as racial beings early in life, therefore mirroring what Poston described in Stage One of his theory. Participants became aware of racial differences and began seeing themselves as being members of a particular racial group or groups at different ages. For some participants, such as Anne, Robin, and Mitchell, this awareness came earlier in life due to incidents or inquiries. Jennifer came to this realization when she began to notice differences between her family and others in the community, and between herself and her Black friends and White peers. For Cory, Agnes, and David, the development of a sense and meaning of a racial identity seemed to occur later, in the mid to late teenage years. In addition, participants moved on to Poston’s second stage, Choice of Group Categorization at different periods in their lives.

In the second stage of his model, Poston described people as being forced to choose a racial identity, usually based on one ethnic group. Citing work by Hall (1980), Poston noted that factors such as make up of community, influence of parents, cultural experiences, appearance, age, political activities, and individual personality differences influenced a person’s choice of identity at this stage. As noted earlier, each of these factors appeared in one or more of the profiles presented in this dissertation. Although Poston described this period could be "a time of crisis and alienation for the individual," this was not so for all of the participants in this study. Anne and Jennifer had their identities established early, and often had people respond to them based on people’s perceptions of them as Blacks. Many of the participants did express strong emotions about this period in their lives. Mitchell described his coming to realize the legal limitations placed on him because of his heritage as
one of the hardest things he had to deal with in his life. Jennifer spoke about her frustration at her inability to identify as Black because of her appearance, and how feeling that she had to choose between her heritages was hard for her because she did not want to deny either side of her family. Agnes included references to feeling both anger and excitement during her transformation. Cory’s spoke about feeling angry, not about his choice of identity, but at the assumptions which people made about him and his experiences. These emotions led him to feel that sometimes he wished he was more obviously either Black or White in terms of appearance, so he would have a group to which he belonged. Even given these thoughts, Cory still chose an identity which was neither Black nor White because of the way he was raised in his family. Technically, David did not have to choose an identity until he discovered information about his biological heritage when he was in high school. Given his experiences up until that point in his life, once he had this information, he continued to identify as White.

While many of the experiences of participants were similar to what Poston described as occurring in the second stage of the model, a few variations between the data and the model are evident. For some participants, selection of a racial identity was less a conscious choice and more acceptance and growth into the racial heritage that was assigned to them. For all participants, this was not a time of crisis. Poston noted that it was unusual for a person to choose an identity which was reflective of all of his or her heritages because of lack of knowledge of multiple cultures and cognitive development. However, two participants, Cory and Jennifer, did choose a multi-racial identity at this stage, based on the factors of early socialization by their families and appearance. Lastly, some of the feelings of frustration described by Poston as occurring at this stage could be a reflection of a person having to identify as a member of a group because of surrounding issues or factors, as well as
not being able to identify as a member of a group because of these same factors. Jennifer’s inability to identify as Black because of her physical appearance is an example of this latter source of frustration.

When the third stage of the Poston model is applied to participants, additional issues arise. Poston noted that a person at this stage experienced "confusion and guilt at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one’s background. In addition, individuals at this level often experience feelings of guilt, self-hatred, and lack of acceptance from one or more groups" (p. 154). Since Jennifer and Cory did not choose one heritage over the other in terms of their racial identity, their identities were expressive of their backgrounds. Anne and Robin, while identifying as Black women, did not describe themselves in ways which reflected guilt or confusion. David had strong feelings about his choice of identity which were evident in his words and the intensity of his voice when he spoke about this issue. This was particularly evident when he described having feelings which set him apart from other Whites and that his biological heritage meant nothing to him today. While I feel uncomfortable framing those feelings as guilt based on my perceptions, I would describe them as intense and attached to the choices around his heritage and identity which he had made up to this point in his life.

The issue of lack of acceptance in a particular community seemed to be a major issue in Cory’s life. In situations where he had encountered prejudice or racism, he described himself as feeling anger, confusion about what his response should be, and disappointment, particular at prejudice which was directed towards him by Blacks. Cory’s feelings of frustration and anger usually were directed toward the response of others, and were generally not related to his choice of identity. As his identity and sense of himself were things which he was constantly reconsidering, there was the possibility that his chosen identity may change.
in the future. He already experienced a shift in identity to some extent when he found himself in certain situations.

Some of the feelings which Poston described being present at the third stage of the model were evident in the profiles of Agnes and Mitchell. Part of what had spurred Agnes on to reestablish contact with her German relatives was realizing that she had been denying the presence of her German heritage while she underwent her transformation. She did not name this realization as being in response to feelings of guilty for having focussed on her African-American heritage. In addition, she made references to feelings which evolved in her relationship with her first husband which matched some of the descriptions of feelings about family members which Poston described at this stage. Mitchell felt that he had repented for wanting to give up his Black heritage earlier in his life, and that he had resolved his feelings about this by age thirty.

I believe that all of the participants who identified as Black in this study fit into Poston’s fourth stage of Appreciation. Anne and Robin felt that they had experienced a lot of diversity in people and culture because of their backgrounds and that this situation had had a positive effect on them. Agnes’ thinking about re-connecting with her European relatives reflects one of the behaviors which was indicative of this stage.

Poston’s fifth stage, that of Integration, is most evident in the experiences of Jennifer, Mitchell, and to some extent, Cory. All of these participants chose a multi-racial identity. Jennifer and Mitchell in particular described how they valued different aspects of their heritage and culture. I believe Cory was at this stage in terms of how he saw and named himself, but since he seemed to be working through issues related to how others viewed and responded to him, he may actually have been at stage two or three of the model.
Critique of Poston's Model in Light of the Data

The Poston (1990) Model of Biracial Identity Development is helpful to some degree in framing the experiences or racial identity development of African-American/Euro-American adults. My experience of applying this model to the data collected for this study has allowed me to identify certain strengths and limitations of this model. In terms of strengths, Poston’s framework cited a number of specific factors such as appearance, cultural experiences, and political experiences which could affect racial identity development in bi-racial people. This discussion of the factors was a needed addition to the field of racial identity research. In fact, many of these factors were reflected in the profiles of the participants in this study. While Poston made note of these factors, he did not elaborate or define them or their effect on racial identity development adequately, or indicate that there was a range in how each factor could be experienced or expressed, which in turn would also affect how each influenced identity development.

Another strength of Poston’s work was its attention to the various choices facing a bi-racial person during the process of identity development. However, I feel that the option to choose a multi-racial or multi-ethnic identity in stages 2-4 did not receive adequate attention. In addition, the ability to choose, develop, and sustain a healthy mono-racial identity through all of the stages was also not presented as an option in the model. From the data collected for this dissertation, it was evident that bi-racial people could claim a mono-racial identity based on what felt most relevant to their life experience, without having to deny aspects of their other heritage. As noted above, the three participants who chose a Black racial identity in this study, for the most part did not experience feelings of guilt or confusion for having chosen this identity over one which reflected their actual biological heritages. While Anne and Robin felt that they had been exposed to experiences which reflected both of their
heritages, they appeared grounded and comfortable in their identity as Black women. Agnes’ experience was similar, although she left the door open for her identity to change in the future.

From applying the data from this study to Poston’s model, I have come to understand this framework as a model which outlined a process a person could undergo in route to claiming a multiple race identity. The model is equipped to a much lesser degree to address the experience of those mixed race people who claim and live a mono-racial identity in a positive and healthy way. Therefore, Poston’s work is fundamentally a model of bi-racial identity development, and secondarily a model of identity development of bi-racial people. While it contributed to the understanding of the experience of identity development of some bi-racial people, it did not adequately address the diversity in the identities chosen and lived by multiple race people.

Poston acknowledged that his model required further testing, with particular attention to the relevance of the factors to identity development and the existence of the stages which he outlined. I believe that the research generated by this dissertation has added meaning and definition to many of the factors which Poston believed influenced racial identity development. My own experiences with examining this model and the models of mono-racial identity development in light of the data which I collected have allowed me to develop insights into the usefulness of such frameworks in making sense of the experience of racial identity development of bi-racial people. When I was beginning to conceptualize this study and the results which might come from it, I believed that the data may in fact fit into a stage model of identity development. After applying several of these models based on both mono-racial and multi-racial populations, I have come to the following conclusions. If stage models of racial identity development are to be made more reflective of the diversity in identities
chosen by bi-racial people, I recommend that Poston’s model be further developed to include processes through bi-racial individuals could develop and claim positive, mono-racial identities. I propose that these processes would begin at Poston’s second stage, that of Choice of Group Categorization. Therefore, a branching would occur at Poston’s second stage, illustrated in Figure 2 on page 339, which uses the racial heritages of the participants in this study as an example. In this new framework, an African-American/Euro-American individual could embark on a process of establishing a Black, White, or bi-racial identity based on the person’s experience of both chosen and ascribed racial identity. I believe that this expansion of Poston’s model would be better able to address the experience of bi-racial people who choose to live in the world as mono-racial people. What a process of mono-racial identity development for bi-racial people would look like needs to be answered by future work in this field which utilizes a larger number of experiences than those examined in this study. The validity and usefulness of such a combination of processes should also be pursued in future research.

The final insight which I have gained related to the use of developmental stage models to account for the experience of bi-racial people is that perhaps these lives are better served and understood outside of frameworks which are oriented as sequences of racial identity development. Having been a witness to seven very original experiences during the course of interviewing participants, I have seen first hand how some of these lives were connected, and as importantly, how each was unique. The profiles which were presented in Chapter IV of this dissertation attested to a degree of the diversity which bi-racial people experience in their lives. I now believe that such complexity is not done justice when it is attempted to be understood entirely within the context of developmental stage models. While such models are helpful to some degree in understanding factors which influence identity development or the
Development of a Black Racial Identity

(process or model to be developed through future research)

Personal Identity
(Poston-Stage One)

Choice of Group Categorization
(Poston-Stage Two)

Development of a Bi-Racial Identity
(Poston-Stages 3-5)

Development of a White Racial Identity
(process or model to be developed through future research)

Figure 2: Proposed Expansion of Bi-Racial Identity Development Model (Poston, 1990) to Accommodate Choice of Mono-Racial Identity by a Person of African-American/Euro-American Heritage.
choices which an individual may make around his or her identity, they are not sufficient in their current form to fully capture or explain the experiences related to racial identity in bi-racial people. At this time, I would suggest that they be used in conjunction with other frameworks, such as the one which I presented in Section One of this chapter, in order to increase their capacity to capture the similarities and differences in these experiences.

Section Five: Evaluation of the Research Methodology Utilized in the Study

In this section, I present an evaluation of the methodology utilized in this study. These research methods included phenomenological in-depth interviewing, and the use of Family Heritage Worksheets and Personal History of Identity Worksheets.

Because of the exploratory nature of this dissertation and the research questions which guided it, I believe that the selection of phenomenological in-depth interviewing as the primary data collection tool in this study was a wise and appropriate choice. Having worked with the life stories which this methodology generated, I believe that I could not have achieved the richness in detail and depth of experiences which I did had I used a more directive technique. Phenomenological interviewing required that I saw each participant as an individual, and to listened to each story as a unique experience of the world. My own assumptions about the experience of being bi-racial had to take a back seat as I relied on the words and thoughts of participants to make sense of their process of choosing a particular identity. In addition, the repeated and prolonged contact with participants which developed through the use of this research technique allowed me to establish a rapport with them which I believed helped create an environment conducive to sharing personal stories and perspectives.
The challenge of creating meaning from the pages and pages of written transcripts generated by the interviews was also a learning experience for me. By working with all of the data in the process of winnowing it down, I became intimately familiar with what each participant had shared. This knowledge was immensely useful as I began to make connections both within a particular life story and between all of the stories which were shared. My struggle in deciding what sections of transcripts were integral to a participant’s sense of racial identity and most relevant for inclusion in the profiles was often an arduous, but necessary task. The challenge which I experienced was wanting to present the stories in as much detail and depth as possible in order to remain true to the lives which the profiles were meant to capture, while highlighting and presenting the data in a way which addressed the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. As I made each of many small decisions, especially as the dissertation grew longer and longer, I learned to trust my instincts and myself as a responsible researcher. I wanted so much to bring the worlds and lives which I had had the privilege of knowing through my role as interviewer to the reader. The experience of reducing and presenting the data of this study has taught me that this could never truly be, and that my task was not to recreate these moments exactly as they had occurred, but to share with others as true a version of them as I could on paper.

One of the major contribution which I see this dissertation making to the field of racial identity research is its identification, definition, and elaboration of factors which influence the development of a racial identity. The use of an in-depth interviewing technique allowed the details surrounding these factors to emerge. Using this as a foundation, I believe that future research can employ more focussed techniques with a larger pool of participants. In addition, I feel that there was value in understanding the experience of identity development of bi-racial people from the perspective of the individuals who experienced it. Therefore, the profiles
presented in this dissertation are opportunities to learn from, and not just about bi-racial people.

I believe the two other data collection techniques utilized in this study served supportive and secondary functions to the interviews. The primary value that the Family Heritage Worksheet had was in verifying the racial and ethnic background of the people who participated in this study. In addition, it served as a stimulus for conversation about chosen identity, especially for those participants who noted on this sheet that their heritage was either Black or White, but not both. I feel that the Personal History of Identity Worksheet was the least useful data collection piece used in this study. On the one hand, it was a way of checking what I had heard during the first interview with participants. However, I believe that sharing it at the beginning of the second interview often took up valuable time and energy, and took the participant back into the past as opposed to preparing them to share their present experiences during the rest of the second interview. All of the significant events which were noted on these timelines were also documented and available on the transcripts. Therefore, unless I was specifically focussing on significant life periods where change in identity took place, I would not use this instrument again, or if I did, I would ask the participant to fill it out him or herself as a way to spark thinking about their experiences in the past.

Section Six: Implications of Findings for Work with Bi-Racial Adults

This section discusses some of the implications of this dissertation and the Framework of Factors Which Affect Racial Identity Development or Choice of Racial Identity presented in Section One have for people who work with bi-racial adults. Given the findings and the way I have come to understand the data from this study, I have generated the following list of
issues which people who are interested in understanding bi-racial identity issues or working with bi-racial people should be aware of.

1. Bi-racial people choose a number of identities, including identities which reflect single or multiple racial groups.

2. The choice of a mono-racial identity does not necessarily imply a denial, in a negative sense, of one of the person's racial heritages. Such a choice can be driven by the fact that a mono-racial chosen identity is more consistent with the racial identity that is ascribed to the individual than a bi-racial chosen identity is. In addition, the way that an individual experiences the world, and is experienced by the world, may be more indicative of a mono-racial identity.

3. Bi-racial people who choose a racial identity which reflects all or a number of their racial heritages are not always motivated by attempts to gain privilege from their dominant racial heritage.

4. The choice of a racial identity is affected by a number of factors, many of which are outlined in the framework presented earlier in this chapter.

5. Choosing a racial identity was, or is, for some individuals an evolving process. This is especially true as people try to make sense of themselves in relation to a world which is predominantly based on mono-racial standards. How a person identified in terms of race in younger years may or may not be how he or she identifies today or will identify tomorrow.

6. The choice of a racial identity may or may not match the identity ascribed to the bi-racial person by either other individuals or society. Oftentimes others make assumptions about a bi-racial person's heritage or identity without having any or accurate information about these issues. One participant noted that the only way to know what someone is racially was to ask the person. However, in light of the experiences shared by a number of
participants in this study, such inquiries are best made in a caring way or in the context of a developing relationship, and not as a way to answer impersonal curiosity.

7. Instances where there are discrepancies between factors affecting a person’s racial identity development or sense of self, or between a given factor and choice of racial identity which a bi-racial person has not already explored, can serve as opportunities for the individual to be encouraged to examine and re-evaluate the meaning this discrepancy has for his or her racial identity. For example, if an individual’s physical appearance does not match his or her chosen racial identity, exploring the meaning this difference has for the individual in a non-judgmental way may help the individual to understand his or her choice of identity in a larger context, be able to address this issue in the future, or further his or her thinking about racial identity.

8. Racial identity and issues related to racial identity development may or may not be relevant issues in a bi-racial person’s life at any given point. Oftentimes, a bi-racial person is not thinking about who he or she is, how he or she looks, or what group or groups he or she belongs to. In addition, issues related to other social identities such as gender, or life issues such as work, raising children, or paying bills may be more prominent than racial identity issues in a person’s life.

9. For every bi-racial person, there is a different experience, some or all of which may be similar to, or different from, those of other bi-racial people or mono-racial people. The meaning which each individual makes of his or her experiences is unique to that individual. This meaning making process, while often overlooked, can provide rich insights into the experience of a particular person who represents part of the overall range of bi-racial people. Therefore, while it is helpful to apply models and frameworks to the lives of bi-racial people in order to understand some of the issues facing them on a large scale, these models
must be sensitive to the differences in experiences which reflect the diversity within any given individual.

10. From the analysis of the data of this dissertation, the most salient factors which influence racial identity in the lives of African-American/Euro-American adults were physical appearance, early experiences and socialization, and past and present cultural experiences. All of the participants in this study who identified as Black and two of the participants who identified as mixed race people indicated that they appreciated the diversity of experiences which they had had growing up, and that such experiences had helped them to interact with people from both racial groups. Given this, opportunities to experience cultural manifestations which reflect both racial heritages is important, not only in the development of a racial identity, but in the development of life skills. A bi-racial person’s openness to such events will also be mediated by other factors, such as individual awareness of self in relation to race.

One of the outcomes of this dissertation was the development of a framework of factors which influence racial identity development or choice of racial identity. I believe this framework is useful in working with bi-racial people, and adults in particular. It is primarily a tool to assist in making meaning out of an individual’s experiences around his or her racial identity. This meaning can be used to clarify for a bi-racial person how he or she came to choose a particular identity. In addition, I see this tool being useful in helping bi-racial individuals, and individuals in general understand how people who share similar racial heritages can choose racial identities that are different from each others. I believe that one of the greatest strengths of this framework is that it puts an experience into a context without having it judged as right or wrong, more developed or less developed, or true or false. Therefore, it allows an experience to exist for what it is, not what it should be. From a place
understanding an experience better, a person working with bi-racial individuals may be in a more informed place from which to offer assistance.

When the Framework of Factors which Affect Racial Identity Development or Choice of Racial Identity in Bi-Racial Adults was presented in Section One of this chapter, I offered a number of comments on it. I wish to summarize some of these issues again with an eye toward advising people who may utilize this framework when working with bi-racial people.

1. The framework is a descriptive model, developed as a way of understanding the experiences or racial identity development of bi-racial individuals, particularly adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage.

2. The framework is not a diagnostic tool, or an instrument which measures the level of identity development of an individual.

3. Each of the factors presented in the framework may not be relevant to every experience or person, and may be present to differing degrees in the experiences of each individual.

4. The framework represents some of the factors which affect racial identity development of bi-racial people. It is not a complete list of such factors. When others are identified, they should be evaluated for relevance to this model, and added to it where appropriate.

5. Further research is needed in order to map out the interaction which may exist between factors, and between factors and the development of a racial identity.

6. This framework may be useful in understanding the experience of other groups of mixed race people besides African-American/Euro-American adults, and even possibly people of mono-racial descent. However, additional research on these other populations is needed to determine the relevance of this framework to other populations.

346
Section Seven: Areas for Future Research

In various places in this chapter, I have noted that additional investigation of the factors and issues raised in this dissertation and in the area of bi-racial identity development in general is needed. In this section, I will summarize some of the major areas where such research would be particularly helpful.

Future research should included attention to the specific factors affecting racial identity development in African-American/Euro-American adults. For example, additional studies could focus on clarifying or further testing the relationships between the factors identified in the framework presented in this dissertation and racial identity development, as well on further defining those variables, such as spirituality and sense of ethnic identity, which were noted as affecting racial identity to a lesser degree by the participants of this study. Also, further research related to the framework should attempt to focus on uncovering and describing the interactions which occur between some of the factors, and on identifying additional factors which either did not arise from the data from this study, or were not apparent from the analysis of the data which was presented. In addition, research on this population could result in the creation of models of mono-racial identity development for bi-racial people, or the expansion of Poston’s (1990) model of bi-racial identity development to accommodate choices of mono-racial identities proposed in Figure 2.

Studies utilizing a greater number of participants are needed to more fully examine the presence and effect of certain factors on racial identity development of bi-racial people. Since the majority of participants in this study lived most of their lives in Northern states, obtaining the perspectives of bi-racial people from a greater range of geographical diversity should be a priority in research works to come. Such studies could use a variety of research techniques including phenomenological in-depth interviewing, more directed individual interviews,
focussed group discussions, and surveys. By using a combination of individual and group approaches, a comparison could be made between how a person describes his or her racial identity and heritage when speaking with one other person and when speaking with other bi-racial people.

Research into the racial identity development of other groups of bi-racial people is critical. I have learned from my own research that even a small group of people with very similar family heritages represent a wide range of experiences. This range can only increase when other heritages, histories, and cultures are introduced by increasing the mixes of ethnic and racial diversity under consideration. While the framework which emerged from this dissertation may be helpful in understanding the experience of other mixed race populations, it must be analyzed in the context of specific data gathered from these different populations.

In addition to investigating the application of the results of this study to other African-American/Euro-Americans and other mixed race populations, I believe that future research should also examine the application of the framework of factors presented in this chapter to the experiences of mono-racial people. This suggestion is offered in light of the fact that most of the factors presented in the framework were evident in existing works on Black and White mono-racial identity development. In addition, there is nothing inherent in any of the factors which would restrict it from being used to make sense of a mono-racial experience. That is to say, none of the factors are overtly or covertly tied exclusively to a bi-racial heritage or identity.

The interactions between an individual's other social identities on his or her sense of racial identity warrants attention in future research. While this dissertation included some attention to issues of gender, age, class, and religion, the investigation of the effects of these
variables, as well as a person's sexual orientation, disability status, and ethnicity on choice of racial identity at a given period in time would be another contribution to this area of research.

Section Eight: Conclusions

This study found that many of the factors noted in existing literature on Black, White, and bi-racial identity development influenced how adults of African-American/Euro-American heritage come to choose a racial identity or several identities, and make sense of themselves in the world. While the factors of appearance, early socialization and experience, and past and present cultural experiences seemed to have a greater influence in guiding this process, other experiences and personal choices were also parts which contributed to making up the whole of the person's sense of racial identity.

The participants in this study chose many different identities for some of the same, and for different reasons. For some, naming themselves in terms of their identity in light of their heritage had been a life long journey. For others, it was something that just was the reality which they lived. The range of identities chosen and experiences had in light of these choices can be partially explained by models of racial identity development based on single groups, and by Poston's (1990) model of bi-racial identity development. However, having spent over a year collecting, analyzing, and working with the lives which were shared with me by participants, I am far less apt to see the experience of identity development of bi-racial people as something to be tracked through a sequence of identifiable stages. This is because I feel that such models may not be able to adequately address richness of the diversity of experiences and choices which were evident, even within seven life stories with which I have worked. Instead, I have been challenged to be more open to truly hearing, understanding, and appreciating the many choices facing bi-racial people, without seeing these experiences as
indicators of stages of personal growth, health, or development. Through this research, I have learned to lessen my reliance on stages and categories, and have reconnected with the value of listening for the sole purpose of accepting and understanding. As I am convinced that research and inquiry into the experiences of bi-racial people will continue in the future, I share these thoughts as a way to appreciate the gifts which I have had the pleasure to receive from those who chose to share their lives with me over the course of this study.
APPENDIX A
WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

My name is Charmaine Wijeyesinghe and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The focus of the research for my dissertation is the experiences of bi-racial adults from African-American and Euro-American (Black/White) backgrounds, related to their sense of racial identity over the course of their lives. I am interviewing African-American/Euro-American adults from the New England area who represent a range of age groups. You are one of approximately eight participants.

As a participant in this study, you are being asked to engage in three in-depth interviews. Each will be approximately ninety minutes in length. The first interview will focus on how you currently identify in terms of racial identity, and how you came to choose this identity. The second interview will focus on what it is like to be a bi-racial person who has chosen the racial identity that you have. The third interview will ask you to describe what it means to you to be a person with your chosen racial identity. The goal of the interviews is to allow me to understand your experiences through your own words. Each interview will be tape recorded. The audio-tapes of each interview will be transcribed word for word by a transcriber. On all transcripts, an initial or different name will be substituted for your own. The sheet which matches participant’s name with the initial or new name, and all audio-tapes will be kept in a locked location. This sheet will be destroyed, and the audio-tapes erased, once the dissertation has been completed.

Prior to the interviews, you will be asked to complete this consent form and a sheet about the racial and ethnic background of your family. In addition, I will fill out a sheet in between the time of your first and second interview. This sheet will be my understanding of your choice of racial identity at different points in your life based on what you said during the first interview. You will be able to comment on this sheet, and to make any corrections or changes which you feel are needed. These sheets will provide me with additional information about your experiences around your racial identity. The sheets may also be used during the interview to add clarification to your family background or your experiences. The information from the two sheets will be used as part of the data from this study.
Little has been written about how bi-racial adults come to a sense of racial identity, what factors influence their choice of identity, and what it means to be a bi-racial person in American society today. During the course of this study, I will be looking for themes and significant issues in what you share about your experiences as a bi-racial person; how you currently identify racially; how you came to this identity; what factors influenced your choices about your identity; and what it means for you to have a certain racial identity. The experiences which you recount will be used in the dissertation. This material will be presented in a number of ways, including quotes, or "profiles" of your life in your own words. In addition to the dissertation, material which is shared may be used in journal articles, presentations to different groups, and classroom instruction. In addition, this dissertation may lead to the writing of a book or articles on bi-racial identity.

In all presentations of the material which I collect, I will not utilize your name or the names of people that you share with me. The transcripts of the audio-tapes of the interview will be marked with initials, and not names, next to each passage. I will make every effort to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your participation in this study.

You may withdraw from participating in this study at any time in the process. In addition, you may request to review the transcripts of the interviews and withdraw your consent to have specific sections of the transcripts used in the presentation of the dissertation or in other settings. Should I wish to use any material which you share in ways other than those described in this form, I will request your written consent in advance.

In signing this form, you are authorizing me to use the material collected as described above. In addition, you are acknowledging that all documents, including audio-tapes and transcripts will become the property of myself.

I, [signature of participant] have read the above statement and agree to participate in this study under the conditions stated above.

[signature of interviewer] [date]

353
Family Heritage Worksheet

Directions: For each person in the family tree below, please, indicate racial and ethnic heritage.
Racial groups are, for example: Black, White, Asian, Native American, Latino/Hispanic
Ethnic groups are, for instance: African-American, Haitian, Chinese, Korean,
Irish, German, Polish, Cherokee, Iroquois, Puerto Rican, Mexican
You can indicate more than one racial/ethnic category for each person if needed.
If you do not know, please, indicate so.

Your mother's mother:
Race:
Ethnicity:

Your mother's father:
Race:
Ethnicity:

Your father's mother:
Race:
Ethnicity:

Your father's father:
Race:
Ethnicity:

Your mother:
Race:
Ethnicity:

Your father:
Race:
Ethnicity:

YOU
Race:
Ethnicity:
Personal History of Identity Worksheet

Participant Name:  
Date of Interview #1:  
Date(s) of Worksheet Construction:  
Date of Interview #2:

years of age 5 10 15 20

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  

identities:  
comments:  


359


