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An investigation into the experiences of biracial students at Iowa State University

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An investigation into the experiences of biracial students at Iowa State University

by

Nicole Erin Sands

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Higher Education)

Major Professor: Dr. John Schuh

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2000

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This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

Nicole Erin Sands

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
For Sean,
thank you for your endless encouragement and love
during my graduate education.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE, AND TERMINOLOGY

Introduction

"In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the 16 remaining state laws against interracial marriage" (Root, 1996). Since the late 1960's the number of biracial births has increased at a phenomenal rate. Among the research that is available on biracial children, it has been suggested that the number of monoracial births has been surpassed by the number of biracial births in recent years (Root, 1996).

This increase in mixed-race births has created unrest within society. Society has been concerned with the children of interracial unions and "more often than not, this is posed in warning rather than out of curiosity" (Funderburg, 1994, p. 10). Societal concerns often are phrased in the familiar "but what about the children" verse when interracial couples are probed about their decision to have children. Biracial children, according to popular beliefs, are "destined to be confused, maladjusted, 'tragic mulattos,' the perpetual victims of a racially polarized society" (Funderburg, 1994, p. 10).

Need for the Study

Because the number of mixed-race births has been increasing substantially since the late 1960's, it is necessary for institutions of higher education to prepare for the influx of students who can not claim one single ethnicity. To address the numerous concerns related to meeting the transitional needs of mixed-race students as they attend college, it is necessary to first understand the experiences of mixed-race college students on a predominately white campus. In gaining an insight into the experiences of mixed-race college students, knowledge of their development beyond their transition to college can be obtained. These experiences may include socialization and extracurricular activity selection.
Purpose of this Investigation

The purpose of this thesis is to learn about the non-academic experiences of mixed-race, specifically biracial, undergraduate students at Iowa State University. This thesis also will explore how the racial identity formation of biracial students has been affected by their experiences at Iowa State University.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis will be based on the ideas of Root’s (1996) “border crossings.” A border crossing is defined as a biracial person’s ability to cross prescribed racial borders. “These border crossings are neither motivated by attempts to hide nor to denigrate some ethnic or racial heritage,” but rather “the process of connecting to ourselves and to others” (Root, 1996, p. xxii). By looking at how biracial students cross borders, insight into their needs and viewpoints may be understood. Root’s border crossings are summarized as follows:

Multiple Perspectives: The “ability to hold, merge, and respect multiple perspectives simultaneously” (Root, 1996, p. xxi). A biracial person who equally addresses both sides of their ethnicity equally in all situations and strives to include both pieces of their racial composition fits the definition of multiple perspectives.

Situational: The biracial person displays “situational ethnicity and situational race” (Root, 1996, p. xxi”). Biracial persons who display one part of their ethnicity or race depending on where they are and who they are with are situational.

Multiracial: Individuals who identify themselves with a “multiracial label that can not be deconstructed” (p. xxi) are multiracial. Individuals who fall under the multiracial category do not see the need to identify specifically with their racial composition, but would rather just be seen as multiracial, using one label rather than a combination of racial labels.
Chamings. Individuals may “change ways of identifying themselves over their lifetime” (p. xxii). Biracial individuals who change their racial identification over their lifetimes will decide to identify as multiple perspectives, situational or multiracial throughout their lives. Because this study focuses on undergraduate college students, the changing category does appear to apply since as students develop a sense of biracial identity, it is possible that they may change their identification once they reach adulthood or enter the college environment.

In looking at how the participants cross borders, comparisons can be made among the students in this study. By gaining insight into how biracial college students utilize border crossings, student affairs practitioners can gain an understanding of how to serve the diverse needs of the biracial student community.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, biracial will mean “the result of a coupling between two distinctly different racial persons” (Herring, 1995). The term “different racial persons” will refer to people with a difference in skin color. Consequently, an interracial marriage simply would be the union of two persons of different skin colors. A biracial person would be the product of an interracial coupling.

Mixed-race person is a term that will be used for general purposes to describe one who is not monoracial. A mixed-race person may be either biracial or multiracial.

For the purpose of this study, the one-drop rule will apply. The one-drop rule stems, I believe, from slavery times. This rule means that even if a person has one-drop of non-white (often African American) blood in their system that they are to be considered a member of that racial group.
In this study race will be defined as “the way one is responded to by others on the basis of visible characteristics, most notably skin color and facial features, and in the implication of such responses for one’s life chances and sense of identity” (Phinney, 1996, p. 919).

Colorism will be used to describe a tendency to prefer lighter skin tones over darker skin tones (Robinson, 1999).

Standardized forms is used in this study to refer to any type of form or questionnaire that utilizes check-boxes and definitions as the choices for answers to the questions on the form.

Limitations of the Study

The biracial students in this study have parents of two different racial backgrounds. This is not to say that unions of two white people can not produce children with variety in their ethnicity, such as a German woman and an Irish man. However, this study is not concerned with the mixing of the white ethnicities. The research parameters of this thesis will be limited to students whose parents are of two different racial backgrounds.

This study also will be limited to students who are citizens of the United States. By limiting the respondents to this criterion, the research will be able to reflect contemporary America more accurately. By adding international students to the study, a plethora of different variables would be related to their identity formation and transitional issues would be introduced to the study and potentially distract from the purpose of the study.

This thesis also will be limited because transracial adoptions will not be studied. Only biracial children who are related to their parents genetically will be studied in this thesis.
Lastly, this study will be limited to a specific population, undergraduate students at Iowa State University. Since only one institution is being used, the diversity and composition of this specific campus need to be taken into consideration. The students’ identity formation and transitional issues may be partly a result of the institution’s mission, philosophy, location and personnel. The population at Iowa State University also may limit the racial combinations that are available, in other words; it is unknown if each racial (skin color) combination of students can be found at Iowa State University.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Reviewing the literature for this study provided an opportunity to explore educational, sociological and psychological resources. After obtaining a collection of literature, four topics emerged as being the most relevant to the study. Categorization of biracial persons is included in the literature review to provide insight into its origin and to show how biracial persons respond to being categorized. The literature noted about skin color and families, neighborhoods and schools provides an insight into topics that seem particularly pertinent to biracial individuals. Literature describing the experiences of minority students on predominately white campuses was included to gain an understanding of the experiences of biracial students on the predominately white Iowa State campus. Racial identity development is presented to provide background knowledge into different development theories.

Categorization of Biracial Persons

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission created a system to account for the number of minorities who were employed following the Civil Rights Movement (Root, 1996). It was because of this system that the notion of categorizing individuals based on their race was developed. However, categorizing biracial individuals presents a unique situation and potentially may cause self-identification difficulties for the persons involved due to the fact that often only one racial category may be selected. This oversight in the categorization of mixed-race individuals may be due partly to the fact that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission started accounting for the minorities who were employed prior to the legalization of interracial marriages. However, since the legalization
of interracial marriages, few efforts have been made to adjust standardized forms to include individuals of mixed parentage.

**Categorization Choices**

Although many ethnicity or race check-boxes may contain a category for “other” and then provide a line to write in one’s true identity, not all biracial people feel comfortable in labeling themselves as “other” or writing in their racial composition. In fact, some biracial individuals experience feelings of being “dehumanized” by having to categorize themselves (Wilson, 1999). This “dehumanization” stems from the fact that mixed-race people often are questioned about their racial composition. It seems as though society has been unwilling to accept the fact that some individuals can not be categorized by a singular race or ethnicity. This unwillingness to expand racial categories may be due partly to a desire to keep the categorization system in a simple form. Reddy (1994) writes, “to see a biracial person simply as black is to reduce complexity” (p. 99). Although keeping the racial categorization system in a simple form may seem like a good idea, a biracial individual is forced to “deny his/her racial heritage” (Reddy, 1994, p. 99) and select one category that does not describe one’s entire background.

Herring (1995) writes that the categorization of biracial persons often is handled by “denying the issue of race and color, by encouraging the racial and ethnic identity of the most obvious physical qualities” (p. 31). By having to choose only one part of their heritage, biracial persons often experience inner conflict as “a dual racial and cultural identity negatively effects normal ethnic socialization and developmental problems for biracial children” (Herring, 1995, p. 31). Developmental theorists have emphasized the importance of “the development of a positive sense of identity” being “a major task of childhood and
adolescence” (Lyles, Yancey, Grace, & Carter, 1985, p. 150). In perpetuating the current system of racial categorization, difficulty in racial identity formation is likely for biracial individuals. By encouraging the selection of one ethnicity for categorization purposes, a feeling of unrest and confusion may be created among biracial individuals. If a biracial person has to choose one race over another, he or she is forced to disregard half of their identity, and is ultimately not giving an accurate picture of their ethnic composition.

“Much recent discussion about the identity of mixed-parentage children has centered around the issue of whether they ‘correctly’ label themselves” (Tizard & Phoenix, 1993, p. 46). To aid in labeling themselves accurately, recently, biracial people have been creating community, and in a sense, have been rallying for their rights as mixed-race individuals. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, “Njeri noted the emerging sense of community among biracial persons and the perceived need for a new racial category to describe themselves” (Gibbs, 1989, p. 324). Creating a biracial category to describe all biracial individuals will not completely solve the mis-labeling dilemma because not all biracial individuals are of the same ethnic composition. The idea of a biracial category does, however, begin to break down the prescribed racial categories that have existed since the 1960’s. “Insisting upon a biracial identity destabilizes racial categories and points up their arbitrary nature. If one is neither black nor white, but both black and white, then the boundaries between racial categories are shown to be fluid rather than rigid” (Reddy, 1994, p. 76).

Skin Color

What is skin color? Is it simply the amount of pigment in one’s epidermis? For a biracial individual the amount of pigment in the epidermis plays a major role in how they identify racially and may also impact one’s satisfaction with his or her appearance.
Incorrect Labeling

In Linda Howard’s case study in Nieto’s Affirming Diversity (1996), the darkness of her skin color caused outsiders to identify her as a race that she is not a part of, but never as a biracial or multiracial mixture of two or more races. Similarly, in a case study presented by Lyles, Yancy, Grace and Carter (1985) a young girl is categorized because of the lightness or darkness of her skin, but always categorized as African American, even though that is only half of her racial composition. Being put into the wrong racial category is not only a problem for biracial people, but also a problem for minorities in general. Elizabeth Carey (Garrod and Larimore, 1997) describes her experiences as she is often categorized as being a Native American when in fact she is Hawaiian. It seems as though any individual who is not white runs the risk of being categorized incorrectly. As far as biracial individuals are concerned, “…the reality is that anyone who looks black or has a black parent will be seen as black, and will probably perceive him/herself as black as well” (Reddy, 1994, p. 99). It seems as though the old “one-drop” rule is still in effect today.

Satisfaction with Appearance

As mentioned previously, the color of a person’s skin may affect satisfaction with their appearance. Robinson (1999) reports that among African American students, those whose skin tones were either very light or very dark were less satisfied with their appearance when compared to students whose skin tones were in the middle of the spectrum. With such a wide range of skin tones among African American students, one can only begin to imagine the breadth of skin tones that are possible among biracial students.

Colorism. Colorism among African Americans stems from conditions during slavery (Robinson, 1999). Moreover, biracial students’ skin color potentially may affect how they
perceive their environment. Renn (2000) writes that “similar physical appearance” may determine what “public spaces” that biracial college students feel comfortable in occupying on a college campus (p. 415).

Families, Neighborhoods and Schools

Many racial identity theorists have noted the importance of family in one’s ethnic identity. It is important for biracial youth to develop a sense of ethnic identity as Torres writes (as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 79), “the ethnic identity construct focuses on what people learn about their culture from family and community.” The role of family is essential to the development of a biracial person. “All of the parents wanted their children to have a positive ‘mixed’ identity, but the content of this ‘identity’ was seen as variable and open for the child to choose” (Katz, 1996, p. 173).

Family

The role of the interracial family is crucial to the fluid racial identity development of biracial children. Not only does the family teach the initial lessons about who one is, the family also provides a sense of racial identity reassurance for biracial children. As illustrated by one author, “while I was constantly reminded of how I differed from my peers…visits to my family…gave me reassurance that indeed I had a family and culture of which I could be proud” (Adams, 1997, p. 97). Wardle writes, “that interracial parents can effectively steer their children to a healthy integration of minority and majority values, attitudes and behaviors” (Wardle, 1992, p. 10). Nearly as important and influential as the family during adolescence is the impact of one’s neighborhood on their sense of racial identity development.
Neighborhood

“For many, neighborhood was where their emerging self-images were first tested.” (Funderberg, 1994, p. 80). The neighborhood environment is a child’s first taste of the real world. In a neighborhood, children will experience a variety of people, beliefs and ideas; just as in the real world. The variety of treatment of biracial children ranges as neighborhood environments vary. “As children, many biracial people were picked on for being different from their neighbors, left behind, threatened, or beat up. Others were held in high esteem, celebrated for their ‘exotic’ looks, for being physically or experientially different from their peers” (Funderberg, 1994, p. 80). As noted in First Person First Peoples by Ricardo Worl, a local “neighborhood was fun because there were many other kids like me-Indian, Filipinos and a mix of both” (Worl, 1997, p. 64-65).

Neighborhoods play an important role in the development of biracial children as “...the (interracial) families saw identity as being contingent on what choices the children make (made), where the family lives (lived) and what particular experiences the children will have” (Katz, 1996, p. 173). Similarly, Wardle suggests the impact that one’s neighborhood may have on minority and non-minority children alike as she writes, “these community organizations must also support diversity and help all children respect diversity” (Wardle, 1992, p. 16). Just as the neighborhood provides biracial individuals the opportunity “to examine their ethnicity, adolescents are likely to consider their role and position in the wider society” (Phinney & Devic-Navarro, 1997, p. 4), the school environment also is said to contribute to a biracial person’s identity development.
School

“One’s bicultrality is particularly important during middle and late adolescence, when identity issues, including ethnic identity, are highly salient” (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 140). When biracial students enter school, they will be immersed in a new culture, different from the culture of their neighborhoods. “School is fraught with opportunities to explore and experience race” (Funderberg, 1994, p. 107). As the biracial student moves through the school system, racial divisions seem to become more apparent. “In high schools and colleges, people often encounter steadfast racial divisions; de facto segregation of social clubs, fraternities, and sororities; secret societies; race-based dorm assignments; and separate orientations for students of color all communicate the normalcy of race-based isolationism” (Funderberg, 1994, p. 108).

Biracial Identity in College. Once biracial students have entered college and are separated from the comforts of their familiar neighborhood and family, solid biracial identities are likely to develop. During the college years, “biracial students are likely to embrace one culture and reject the other. As personal identity becomes more secure, biracial college students are likely to reject the expectations of others and develop a healthy biracial identity” (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 72).

Minority Students on Predominately White College Campuses

Following the Civil Rights Movement, there was a great increase in minority college enrollment. This increase in enrollment raised concerns about the inequalities in education of minority groups (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999). Research would suggest that the overall status of minority students on predominately white campuses has a long way to go before being considered completely successful (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzina,
Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen (1999) note that minority students may perceive barriers to their success as a college student and often are more critical of their college environments. Furthermore, “what is evident is that after two recent decades of bold, new societal efforts for providing equity in U.S. higher education the retention and graduation rates are uneven and unenviable” (Cheatham and Associates, 1991, p. 33) when minority and non-minority students are compared.

Social Environments for Minority Students on Predominately White Campuses

Research suggests that the fit between black students and white colleges is not always good and, also, that minority students often are thought to experience greater adjustment difficulties and lower graduation rates (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991). In a recent study Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton & Wilson found that “higher levels of social support, more comfort in the university environment, and positive self-beliefs would be associated with more positive academic persistence decisions of African American undergraduate students in a predominately White university” (1999, p. 263). Research conducted on minority students attending predominately white institutions has suggested that minority students have to put a great deal of effort into adjusting to the environment and culture of predominately white institutions before they are able to succeed socially and ultimately, academically (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991; Haralson, 1995).

As described by Loo & Rolison (1986), “Persistence for successful Black students appears to depend primarily on desocialization or how well students are able to change their cultural interaction styles to accommodate predominately White campus situations” (Haralson, 1995, p. 96). It is important for minority students on predominately white
campuses to adjust to their new environment. The greatest problems facing minority students are those stemming from not having a peer group with whom to affiliate (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991). If minority students are unable to adjust to the white campus environment, they may face additional social problems. If a minority student does not have a peer group he or she must construct their own social group, given their exclusion from the wider university community (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991). Minority students who are unable to adapt their social interaction styles to fit into the white campus culture are “characterized as being assertive, hostile, immature, non-conforming, impetuous, aloof, resentful of college rules and regulations, opinionated, distrustful of authority, self-centered, loners, uncertain of the future, interpersonally alien, critical, and uncooperative” (Haralson, 1995, 96).

The Role of Student Affairs

Due to the difficulties experienced by minority students on predominately white campuses, student affairs practitioners have created services and programs to aid in the retention and matriculation of minority students. As one study notes, “minority status alone is perceived as indicative of the need for a different kind and degree of support than that for majority group status” (Steward, O’Leary, Boatwright & Sauer, 1996, p. 97). It has been noted that “access to responsive, on-campus, social support networks are purported to be key to minority students’ academic success” (Steward, O’Leary, Boatwright & Sauer, 1996, p. 97). By providing services to assist minority students in adjusting to the predominately white institution’s environment, practitioners have hoped to integrate minority students into mainstream campus life. This attempt at integration arose because minority students often “remain on the periphery of campus life because they differ culturally from the mainstream” (Zea, Reisen, Beil & Caplan, 1997, p. 157). Being connected to campus life is an important
factor in the persistence of all students. “Social integration in the university community influenced commitment to remain in college for both ethnic minority students and the White students” (Zea, Reisen, Beil & Caplan, 1997, p. 156).

To assist in minority students’ college careers, “social support, comprised of support from family and friends and perceived mentoring” has been shown to improve persistence for African American students (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton & Wilson, 1999, p. 265). “African American students who were more likely to persist also viewed the university environment more positively, perceived greater cultural fit between themselves and the university, and experienced less academic stress” (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton & Wilson, 1999, p. 263). Creating a “cultural fit” between minority students and the university may help to ease the “serious adjustment difficulties experienced during the transition from a familiar way of life to an unfamiliar environment” (Haralson, 1995, p. 8) and the “perceptions of prejudice and discrimination had the largest negative effect on African American’s academic experiences” (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999, p. 144), both of which will aid in retaining minority students on predominately white campuses.

Adjusting to a New Environment

As minority students acclimate to the environment at predominately white campuses, it remains important for them to “maintain an ethnic identity either individually or as a group” (Davis, 1994, p. 19). This sense of ethnic identity helps minority students succeed on predominately white campuses. In fact, “the factor that most Black students reported as contributing to their survival at predominately white institutions involved some form of peer group support, followed by determination to succeed, parent/family support, and faculty support” (Haralson, 1995, p. 10). The importance of peer relationships is emphasized by
Chickering and Reisser (1993) as they state, “relationships with close friends and participation in student communities can be primary forces influencing student development in college” (p. 393).

All students need to adjust to an institution’s environment, and Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn (1999) noted that minority students adjust to college in a manner similar to non-minority students. “In view of this commonality it stands to reason that institutional policies and practices that address the students needs rather than his or her ethnicity would be effective not only in fostering tolerance among students but in retaining all students, be they minorities or non-minorities” (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999, p. 153). Cuyjet (1997) advises, “college and university administrators should concern themselves both with providing a nonthreatening environment” and engage “in a serious effort for the entire campus community…to dispel the common stereotypes” of minority students (p. 14-15).

To begin creating an environment free of “common stereotypes” and prejudices, administrators must first begin to understand what students need as they begin college. Interaction with diverse populations is said to aid in student acclimation and to build “tolerance” as further described by Chickering and Reisser. “Encounters with others who have diverse backgrounds and strongly held opinions create the context for increased tolerance and integrity” (1993, p. 392). As students acclimate to their new environment and are exposed to people who are different than they are, increased comfort with their new surroundings is felt. By continuing to understand students’ adjustment needs administrators and faculty will gain a broader understanding of the issues faced by minority students on predominantly white campuses.
As administrators and faculty become actively involved in the transitional needs of their students, they will face “encounter experiences that challenge current ways of thinking” (Robinson & Howard Hamilton, 2000, p. 93). Only then will administrators be able to facilitate minority and non-minority students “with an opportunity to move from traditional ways of perceiving the world and their place in it” (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000, p. 93). Through these “encounter experiences” and changes in the way one perceives his or her world, campus environments ultimately will begin to shift to become more inclusive and comfortable for all students. As the adjustment needs of minority students are met, there will be no reason to believe that minority students’ persistence on predominately white institutions can not rise to meet those of non-minority students.

Racial Identity Development

Several authors have discussed how students develop racial identity and the important role that identity development plays in becoming a well-rounded person (Chickering, 1969; Cross, 1991; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This discussion of racial identity development will begin with an overview of Chickering and Reisser’s ideas on identity development. Chickering and Reisser provide an overview of what identity development involves as they write, “Establishing identity certainly involves growing awareness of competencies, emotions and values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 173).

Racial Identity Development for Non-Minority Students

Under Chickering and Reisser’s assumptions (1993), to establish racial identity a student must be capable of successfully moving through the following tasks: (1) being
comfortable with one’s body and appearance; (2) being comfortable with one’s gender and sexual orientation; (3) having a sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context; (4) clarifying one’s self-concept through roles and life-styles; (5) having a sense of self in response to feedback from those whom you value; (6) having self-acceptance and self-esteem; (7) demonstrating stability and integration (pp. 182-208). The above list of tasks is not related specifically to minority students, but provide some general tasks that are important for racial identity development.

Racial Identity Development for Minority Students

In 1971 Cross compiled a series of developmental stages that were designed specifically for minorities. The model was designed to show how a minority may go through a transition to become a multicultural being. The stages are presumed to be followed in the order from beginning to end.

Cross’s model of Nigrescence has five stages which are presented below:

Stage 1: Preencounter This beginning stage presumes that a minority does not want to affiliate with their minority status. In this stage minorities see the world through a white perspective to which they try to conform.

Stage 2: Encounter In the encounter stage, a minority evaluates their place in the world because their original ideas about not being a minority have been challenged.

Stage 3: Imersion-Emersion During the Immersion-Emersion stage, a minority creates a new identity that values blackness, brownness or minority status and may cause one to devalue the majority.
Stage 4: Internalization Someone who is in the internalization phase is beginning to come to terms with their new minority mentality while starting to appreciate those who are not minorities.

Stage 5: Internalization-Commitment The minority is at peace with their identity and strives to assist others who may be oppressed.

Cross’s Nigrescene model (1971, pp. 13-31) is included in this discussion of racial identity development to show the contrast between a model constructed specifically for the minority population and one which is constructed for a seemingly non-minority population (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Racial Identity Development for Biracial Students

The above models provide insight into how racial identity development models may be set up and what type of stages or components they might include. However, to address biracial identity development, a different type of model is needed. Williams, a biracial woman, (1999) proposes that biracial people experience racial identity development models with a sense of “simultaneity” (p. 34). She clarifies by saying, “By this I mean that I experience by biracial identification as placing me in several ‘stages’ at the same time” (1999, p. 34). As the ‘stages’ in identity development models, in this case, specifically white and black identity development models are still applicable to the biracial experience, it is thought that instead of progressing through them individually, they are experienced at the same time. Williams believes that she does “not experience the two as split, but as fluid” (1999, p. 34).

A racial identity development model specific to the biracial population must describe an experience that “does not fit into dualistic constructions” (Williams, 1999, p. 34). To
experience more than one racial identity development model at the same time need not be confusing to the biracial individual. To aid in biracial identity development, Wardle (1992) suggests that “biracial individuals must continue to define who they are and how they feel about themselves, and how society views them” (p. 8). Wardle further supports the idea that multiple racial identity development models can be experienced at the same time without any harm as she says, “a biracial child must not select a traditional racial group to avoid role confusion” (1992, p. 8).

The preceding discussion’s purpose was to provide a background in racial identity development models and how they have progressed to be inclusive of the biracial population.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Methods

The research framework for this thesis employed qualitative measures. Qualitative methodology was chosen for this project because it will facilitate a rich, thick description of the biracial students' experiences. Moreover, qualitative methods are appropriate for a case study of this type in which the students will be describing how they understand their experiences. By using qualitative methodology, a better understanding of the experiences of biracial students on the Iowa State University campus can be developed.

Data Sources

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1996, p.79) as they must be biracial undergraduate students at Iowa State University. To obtain respondents, the two biracial students I knew on campus were asked to participate in the study. After I asked the biracial students whom I know to participate, I relied on snowball sampling to identify more participants. As described in Glesne and Peshkin (1992), this means that I asked the students whom I had interviewed to share the names of other biracial students whom they knew on campus (p. 27). After receiving additional names from the students whom I had already interviewed, the suggested students were contacted about participating in this study. Permission from the Iowa State University Human Subjects Committee was obtained during the spring 2000 semester. A copy of the consent form is included in the appendix.

The Number of Participants

Six students agreed to participate in this study. This number of participants worked well because it provided enough data to create themes while allowing me to finish
researching within an appropriate time frame. As the interviews were completed and themes were developed, the point of saturation was reached in that one participant’s account of his or her experiences began to sound similar to another participant’s account.

**Data Collection**

To collect data for this thesis, semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews were conducted. A series of two ½ hour to 1-hour interviews was held with each participant over the course of approximately two to three months. Interviews were conducted in quiet spaces of the Memorial Union. The questions asked during the interviews focused on gaining information about the respondent’s background, experiences, and feelings. A copy of the interview protocol is included in the appendix.

**Data Analysis**

Each interview tape was transcribed approximately 48 hours after the completion of the interview. After both interviews from one subject had been transcribed, coding and analysis began. The constant comparative method of “joint coding and analysis” allowed me to “generate theory more systematically” as opposed to “using explicit coding and analytic procedures” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 102). Coding and analyzing the data simultaneously created theories that were “integrated, consistent, plausible” and, “close to the data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 103). Self-constructed themes and “those that have been abstracted from the language of the research” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 107) both emerged from the transcripts. As the themes were compared among themselves and among each participant’s transcripts, the major findings of the study arose.
Establishing Trustworthiness

Descriptive Narratives

Through the use of lengthy quotations and descriptive narratives, my respondents’ voices are heard. Descriptive narratives were used with the hopes that the readers would be able to feel as though they have been in my respondents’ shoes (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). To learn about the experiences of biracial undergraduate students, it was important to “continue to be concerned with producing texts that explicate how we (I) claim to know what we (I) know” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 496). By conducting interviews with biracial students a variety of new information was obtained because “the spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike” (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11).

Prolonged Engagement

The interview and data analysis period took several months to complete. “The lengthy data collection period provides opportunities for interim data analyses, preliminary comparisons, and corroboration to refine ideas and to ensure the match between research-based categories and participant reality” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 405). Prolonged engagement gave me the opportunity to devote my time to building a trusting relationship with each respondent.

Member Checking and Participant Review

Member checking. Throughout the interview process, member checks were completed to ensure that I was capturing my respondents’ voices accurately and authentically. Member checking was also done so that ideas can be “rephrased and probed to obtain more complete and subtle meanings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 407).
Participant review. Because I interviewed six students, participant review was conducted. In participant review, I asked each participant “to modify any information or interpretation of the interview data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 407). During the second interview with each respondent, the transcripts from the first interview were offered for review. As the participant reviewed the transcripts, which had coding notations in the margins, I talked about what I thought were the most important aspects of the previous interview and asked if that was indeed what the participant had meant. These conversations typically were very brief and very little conflict arose with the discussion of the first interview and transcript. I felt that this was an important step as these member checks also provided me the opportunity to add to my data because the respondent sometimes would clarify or expand on what I had written or began to interpret. Following the second interview, participants were e-mailed a copy of the transcript and a message containing the emerging themes. This second member check was done via e-mail as the summer break did not provide me the opportunity to meet with each participant and I desired to keep all contact with each participant equal. As writing began, member checks continued and provided the opportunity to talk about what had been written in my preliminarily findings and to negotiate changes so that the respondents can be represented accurately (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Peer Debriefings

Peer debriefings were conducted to aid in my research efforts. Peer debriefing is an important step in the analysis of qualitative data as “the peer debriefer poses searching questions to help the researcher understand his (my) own posture and values and their (my) role in the inquiry” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 409). My peer debriefers were a first year graduate student in the Higher Education program and informally, my husband who is
biracial. By discussing my ideas and stressors both formally and informally, I was provided a time to “reduce the stress that normally accompanies field work” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, 409). Peer debriefings also helped me to learn to stay focused and think about alternative phrasing and interpretations of the data.

Audit Trail

An in-depth audit trail, “a running record of procedures” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 147), was kept. This audit trail included the tape recordings of the interviews, records of the study and notes. Following each interview, notes were taken about the interview experience. These notes, which included my feelings and thoughts on the interview that just occurred, gave me a chance to air out my feelings about the experience and note any ideas that I had about future contact with the participant. By conducting peer debriefings and member checks, keeping an in-depth audit trail, and through prolonged engagement, trustworthiness and authenticity were established.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results of this study will provide insight into the non-academic experiences of biracial students at Iowa State University. The impact of the campus environment on the students’ identity development also will be discussed.

Pseudonyms are used in place of each participant’s name and certain campus organizations (denoted by *) in results.

Background Information

Each participant described his or her immediate family. These descriptions often included their parents’ ethnicities, the number of brothers and sisters and a wide variety of general descriptors. The participants’ hometown environments also are discussed in this section. These descriptions will aid in introducing each of the participants.

The Participants’ Immediate Families

Two-parent Households

Each participant’s family situation was unique and provides insight into the racial background of the participant. Five of the six participants grew up in homes with both of their biological parents.

- My dad is Caucasian and he was born here in the U.S. I’m not sure what state. And then my mom is from Thailand and she was born there and they met when my dad was in the service and she was about 18 or 19 when they got married and she came over here. Other than that, I have an older sister and she’s 4 years older than me and she’s graduated from school and she works in Des Moines (Dan).

- I’ve got a bother and a sister. I’m the middle child, so my bother is older than I am, my brother is in grad school right now. And my sister is in high school and she’s going to be
graduating. My dad is African American and my mom is White. My father was originally from Cleveland, Ohio and he came here to Iowa State...which is where he met my mother. And she's, ah, from a smaller town in Iowa (Kiara).

- Three girls, three boys, mom is from Panama, Dad is from Trinidad (Taye).

- I have two older brothers who look exactly like me and a younger sister. Well, my mom is full-blooded Mexican, she was born around the border in the United States and she is second generation. Her parents were both born in Mexico, and her dad was in the Air Force. He came to the United States and joined the Air Force. He got the equivalent of a high school degree in Mexico, and on my dad’s side...my dad is white, Dutch. And he was born in Virginia, and his dad was also in the Air Force (Carlo).

- Well, I’m half Japanese and half German. My dad came over from Germany when he was a kid. I’m fourth generation...(on) the Japanese side of my family (Raun).

**An Untraditional Family**

Ayenna’s description of her family background varied from the other participants, as she shares:

- My mom was Welch and Italian and my father is black. My mom died when I was 15, my father’s mentally retarded so he’s incompetent to take care of me... I’ve been a ward of the court. Most of my family I don’t really have contact with; I’m sort of the biracial sheep of the family.

Although each of the participants’ families varied in their racial composition, the family unit proved to play a major role in the students’ racial identity development and sense of self-confidence.
Family Influence

Nearly all of the students reported that their family helped them to create a positive self-image and to view their biracial-ness as an asset. Some students simply said that their parents encouraged them to be their own person. Taye shares, “My parents have always just accentuated the fact of being yourself whatever that is, race never comes into it.” Kiara further explained how she feels that she was raised to be very “open minded”:

- So I feel that the way my parents raised me that I do have both, and I can see both sides and I’m very open minded about a lot of issues. I think that how my parents raised us was to accept everyone, and it was easier to do that because I had an outlet either way because of how I was raised.

Family influence played a role in how the students developed their sense of ethnic identity and self-image. A majority of the students in this study had similar experiences and thoughts about the positive influence their parents and families gave them.

Hometown Environments

Each participant described the demographics of his or her hometown environment.

Not Very Diverse

Most of the students perceived their hometown environments to have little diversity. Highlights of their descriptions of their hometowns are reported in the next two sections of this chapter.

- I kind of live in the country on a farm outside of this town of about 27-30,000 people. It’s kind of blue-collar community, but I went to school in an even smaller town next to it and that was most definitely white-collar people (Dan).
• As for the town itself, it's a predominately white town, there really isn't that much diversity. It's kind of a ritzy town with predominately white people living there (Kiara).

More Diverse

Raun thought that his hometown environment was slightly more diverse than the other students. He felt that the diversity came from the fact that the people in his hometown were more educated than most.

• It's (my hometown) like half blue collar type work... So it's a fairly well educated city. You didn’t really have (the) ignorance that you do some places about race or the dislike of Asians. So I think I was really lucky living in that type of place where there was a high level of education...when people have gone to college, they meet people of all different races and they're usually not quite as racist.

Just as the hometown environments were important in the development of the participants, the students' perceptions of diversity in their high school and college environments also may be important in their development.

Perceptions of Diversity

This section will provide information on the students’ perceptions of diversity throughout their schooling. High school diversity will be discussed first, followed by the students’ perceptions of diversity within the Iowa State community.

High School Diversity

The students discussed their high school environments. Many of the students reported their class size and the perceived amount of diversity within their schools.
Iowa high schools

Students who graduated from Iowa high schools reported the diversity of their high schools to be similar to the diversity of the schools of non-Iowa high school graduates. The four students who graduated from high schools within the state of Iowa matriculated through schools where their class size was less than 100 students. Ideas about the diversity of the Iowa high schools and the number of minority students in the students’ high schools follow.

Dan shared that “There were three (minority students) out of the whole school. Kiara reported similar diversity in her high school as she said, “I was maybe one of two other black kids in my grade all through school.” Raun provided greater detail about the diversity at his high school:

- There weren’t really a lot (of minorities). Especially our high school I guess. There is a group of blacks… one of the high schools had more blacks and ours was mainly white in the part of the city where I lived in…there was (sic) maybe only four Asian people in my graduating class, and there might have been one person who was African American, but it was mainly white.

Non-Iowa high schools

Although the class sizes may have been larger for students who graduated from non-Iowa high schools, the number or percentage of minority students in the schools was similar to Iowa high schools. As Taye and I began to talk about his high school, I asked him if there was just a handful of minority students. Taye shared that “there were probably two hands worth in the whole one hundred and eighty (students).” Ayenna was the only participant to comment on not only being one of a few minority students, but also being one of a very few
biracial students. Ayenna said that her high school was "pretty black, white, and then me."
When asked if there were many other biracial students, she stated, "there was like two others, but they pretty much were accepted in the black community."

After each of the participants finished high school, each student began his or her career at Iowa State University.

Iowa State Diversity

The students were asked to share their opinions about the diversity of Iowa State. They seemed to think that Iowa State was not very diverse, that it could be more diverse or that it is segregated into very stringent racial groups. These opinions are expressed in the following comments.

• I think there is (diversity), but I don’t think there’s enough. I mean, I can’t say that there is not diversity because we do have international students that come here. We have students that come from different parts of the United States and I just don’t think that there is a wide amount. For instance, we’ll go to class, and ever since I was a freshmen, I might be the only black student in a huge auditorium, or maybe one of two or three other minority students that would be around (Kiara).

• I didn’t really think that Iowa State was not diverse. I always thought it was pretty diverse because my dad’s a teacher and I remember he’s always had a lot of Asian students, so I thought you know, wow, Iowa State is not bad. But once I got here (I realized) my high school was a lot more diverse (Carlo).

Ayenna feels that the Iowa State community is "polarized and very cliquey." This type of environment makes it difficult for a biracial student to find a group of people with whom to associate. She describes this environment below:
• It's crazy here, I mean, it's so polarized and very cliquish, it's sort of like high school, it's very racially divided you know. The international folks hang out, the blacks hang out, the whites hang out...I don't really get into clique things, and being mixed, I sort of, like, especially in the black community, I sort of feel like there is this imperative to fit in with them and since I don't I sort of, like...they treat me like a step child (Ayenna).

The students' perceptions indicated they did not find much diversity on Iowa State's campus. What diversity they reported was separated into racial cliques.

Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The participants identified the extracurricular activities they have been involved with since they have been at Iowa State University. The first section overviews the students’ involvement in campus and community activities. This is followed by a section which highlights the students’ involvement with activities and programs sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

Campus and Community Activities

The participants were asked to identify the type of activities and organizations they became involved with during their careers at Iowa State University. Although the amount of involvement varied greatly from student to student, half of the participants were not involved in any activities that were created specifically for minority students.

The students’ involvement in campus and community activities

Some of the students had been involved in a variety of campus and community activities. The following will provide an overview of some of the students’ involvement in activities that are not affiliated specifically with the minority community.
Dan describes his involvement on campus and in the community by listing the activities he is involved in:

...all kinds of leadership things, Leadership ISU, Leadership Intro Action Program, I’ve been involved with Greek Week, been on Central Committee for that, let’s see, I was just named...well it’s officially known in two weeks, I’ll be named President of a prestigious organization on campus*, chair person in a fraternity—involved in a fraternity, Director of a campus group* things like that (Dan).

Ayenna shared that she wasn’t involved in any activities on campus or in the Ames community, but rather, she replied, “I work a lot. I go to class a lot. I don’t really...I’m not really into group things.” Similarly Raun shared, “Boy, I used to just be involved in intramural sports like basketball and tennis and volleyball. But I wouldn’t say that I volunteered for that much around here. I try to just keep busy with my studies.”

Involvement in campus and community activities extended into minority activities for two of the participants.

The students’ involvement in activities for minority students

Three of the students shared their experiences in activities that were designed with the minority population in mind. Taye, Carlo and Kiara were not only involved in activities for minority groups, but also were involved actively in many other areas of campus. The following excerpts will provide involvement information for these students.

- Vice President for United Way, Career Programming Committee for Student Alumni Association, I’m doing In-Roads right now...It’s a minority internship program, and I’m doing that in Nebraska. I’m doing the Fall Career Day. I’m doing Spanish Club, I’m doing Ballroom Dancing Organization, I’m doing, there’s 13 of them....I’m doing the
Business Council, I’m not going to remember all 13 of them so all right, and I work (Taye).

- Coming to Iowa State, I was in an ELP class last semester, which is an Extended Learning Program, or Extended Success Program and that was a lot of fun, it was all minorities...It was during the fall, it was University Studies 160 and it was like a, kind of like an awareness class....a lot of African Americans and Asians and a few Latinos and Native Americans, it was a lot of fun. Last semester, I was the MASS Rep for my dorm floor, the multicultural awareness support system representative for our dorm floor, and participated in homecoming with my fraternity. And this semester I’m a Student Leader*, I was, I am a Greek Ambassador for fall rush and also for the Greek Get Away that was just a few weeks ago, and that’s a lot of fun too, Public Relations Chair for my house, and I’m on the Alumni Relations Committee also (Carlo).

Kiara shared her involvement with campus activities, which largely stemmed from the fact that she had been an athlete at Iowa State.

- When I came up here when I was an athlete my freshmen and sophomore year, they had a program that they ran that was Minority Student Athletes in Action and what we were a part of was trying to let other students or other students on campus understand that there’s not really that much difference. They’re trying to get athletes involved in other programs so that the students won’t think that there is this big gap between the athletes and students that are on campus just going here. I haven’t really participated in a lot of organizations just because I wasn’t really aware of it at the time and when I was a freshmen and a sophomore I was involved in sports and other things that didn’t allow me the time to get involved. I do now, like, help out in other areas like tutoring.
The Students’ Involvement with Minority Student Affairs

The participants were asked if they had been involved in any activities or programs which were sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs. The responses varied from having been involved in specific programs to not even knowing where the office is located.

Involvement in minority student affairs

Two of the students mentioned being involved in minority activities when I asked if they had been involved in any activities or programs sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

- One of the scholarships I have over here is a George Washington Carver Scholarship, so we get together like once a month, and there’s like certain meetings that I have to go to for that. And next year I’m going to do NSBE, National Society for Black Engineers (Taye).

- I was last semester because of the class I took. And I kind of wish that I would participate more in that but I don’t feel like I fit in. Sometimes so it’s hard. But I do wish that I would participate in the Latino community more (Carlo).

Taye’s George Washington Carver program and Carlo’s “Early Success Program” (referred to as ELP) class are sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs. The National Society for Black Engineers is a student organization that is centered in the College of Engineering. The comments in the next section vary drastically from Carlo and Taye’s responses to being involved with the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

Not being involved in Minority Student Affairs

The participants were asked if they were involved in any programs or activities sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs. In general, they reported that they had
not been involved with this office. Although some students gave reasons why they did not participate, it is clear that the majority of the students in this study chose not to affiliate themselves with the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

Kiara simply says, “I mean, I know the programs are out there but I just haven’t really been a part of it.” Dan’s response was also simple, “not really.” Ayenna’s response, “I don’t think I’ve ever even stepped foot in that place” almost seems to have negative undertones. Raun tried to explain why he feels that he has not been involved in any programs sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs:

I guess part of that is, I feel strange to be focused...pulled out because I’m Asian. It seems that those types of programs, although it is good support and encouragement for people who are Asian, it seems to emphasize the fact that you’re different some how...and it’s very strange because I never really thought that I was different before. But I always thought that I’m the same as everyone else, and all the sudden there’s a group talking about issues to deal with being a minority and such, that just seemed kind of strange for me. I really haven’t gone to much of that stuff.

Whether or not the students participated in programs or activities sponsored by the Office of Minority Student Affairs, each student appeared to have a group of people with whom they spend time.

**Friends and Acquaintances**

The students were asked whether or not race plays any part in whom they select as friends or dating partners. A brief synopsis of the students’ high school friends is given, followed by the students’ feelings about their Iowa State friends, and finally, the students’ choice in whom they choose to date is discussed briefly.
The Students' Choice of Friends

The students selected their high school and college friends based on different criteria. It seems that since each student's high school was not very diverse and forming friendships was based on who was available to be friends with.

Friends in high school

Kiara and Raun provide examples of what it was like to form friendships in high school. Because each student in the sample grew up in either a predominately white high school or in a high school that had a moderately diverse student body, these two examples are used to introduce whom a biracial high school student may select as a friend, and whether or not race plays a part in selecting friends.

- Yeah, I had a couple of friends that were minorities and from other backgrounds but yeah, everybody I hung out with, anybody, anywhere I went, boyfriends, everything was basically predominately white (Kiara).

- Not really. It was strange. A majority of my friends were white background, or whatever you call that, and then, but I had three, actually two Asian friends and they were pretty much the only Asian people in our class. They just happened to live on the same side of the city and we had a lot in common like for music and tennis. So I guess we somehow found each other, but I wouldn’t say that I normally hung out with Asians, because I really haven’t seen myself as that different until I started looking into my background and culture (Raun).

Friends in college

Some of the students said that their preferences for friends had changed since high school. Others indicated that they had not made changes in how they select their friends.
Dan and Taye did not express any preference or thoughts on whether or not race had an impact on whom they would choose as friends. Dan stated that he did not have a preference that most of his friends “probably would just be white, Caucasian.” Taye said “No, (I don’t have a preference) I hang out with everybody.”

Contrary to Taye and Dan, some of the students reported that their preference in friends has changed since they were in high school. Some of the reasons why the students felt this change occurred stemmed from the fact that at Iowa State, the population is more diverse than the students had encountered in their high schools. The following excerpts illustrate how and why the students feel that their choice of friends has changed since high school.

- Yeah, it’s changed dramatically. When I came up here, and being an athlete, I was not surrounded, but there was, even though I don’t feel there is a large diversity here at Iowa State, it was enough diversity to change what I was used to coming from where I came from. I still, I think it’s changed in a lot of ways. My boyfriend is now African American and a lot of my friends are African American, but that doesn’t mean that it’s changed because I don’t care. I think it’s changed because of the way I’ve adapted to college and who I hang out with the most because I have more, I don’t want to say opportunity…and not that I’m trying to segregate at all but it’s just the people that I met right away when I got here. I think that actually, I try to explain to people because when I came up here going from a predominately white school, town and friends and coming up here, and now most of my friends are predominately African American or Asian or Hispanic, or other minorities, I always say that I have the best of both worlds (Kiara).
• Yeah, most of my friends are older and international. I don’t, it’s not like I’ve sought them out or anything, it’s just who I’ve fell in with. I’ve been to Europe and stuff and race doesn’t mean, it’s not a big thing like it is here. I saw people that resembled me, skin tone and all; it’s no big deal like it is here (Ayenna).

• I think it was …more from a social standpoint. There weren’t the social constraints, you know. High school is all cliquey. Just having the freedom to become friends with anyone I wanted it was great, and I’m not sure if it’s based on anything (Raun).

Because some of the students expressed opinions about the race or ethnicity of their friends, the students were also asked to share their ideas and opinions on whom they date or would enter into a relationship.

The Students’ Choice in Significant Others

Five out of six of the students stated that they did not care about the race of the person they were dating. Dan, Ayenna and Carlo simply responded by saying “no” when asked if they had a racial preference for people with whom they may have a relationship. Taye expanded on his answer and also provided a reason why some people preference one race over the other in dating situations

• I think, I mean it can with other people. I know some people that would never date anybody outside of their race. Or if they come from a certain town and they would have never thought of going out with someone who was a different race, and all the sudden they come to Iowa State and it’s like…I don’t know, let me try that out. It’s just something different for them. But I’ve always been used to just going out with different people so it wasn’t a culture shock or anything like that for me (Taye).
Raun also said that he did not care what race his significant other would be, but his mother does care.

- I don’t really care what kind of people I date, but my mother she has problems with me dating Asian women. She always thought that I would have, I think it’s because she grew up in this Scandinavian neighborhood, like blonde haired blue-eyed children. She seems to want me to date more of that type of girls because she feels very, very uncomfortable when I date Asian girls. And I have no idea why that could possibly be. It’s very strange, but I have no dating preference.

Kiara is the only student who shared her current dating experience. Although she did not directly say that she prefers to date people from one race over another, she had this to say about her current dating situation

- My boyfriend is now African American, but that doesn’t mean that it’s changed because I don’t care, I think it’s changed because of the way I’ve adapted to college and who I hang out with the most because I have more, I don’t want to say opportunity, but, and not that I’m trying to segregate at all but it’s just the people that I met right away when I got here (Kiara).

As the above excerpts show, a majority of the students did not have a preference in the ethnicity of those whom they date.

Racial Identity

The students discussed their racial identity. This discussion includes how the students identify themselves and others’ perceptions of the students’ racial identity.
Self Identification

Each of the participants has had different experiences when asked to identify their racial composition. When a person fills out a standardized form, a choice has to be made regarding his or her ethnic identity. When faced with five rigid categories (African American, Caucasian, Asian, American Indian and Hispanic) the participants said that they responded in several different ways.

Choosing to be one race

For some of the participants choosing one race on applications or other forms does not seem to be an issue. It seems that the reason for being comfortable choosing just one race may be related to the outside world’s perceptions. The following explanation will clarify this point.

Kiara shared that she prefers simply to choose “African American” when faced with rigid racial categories. She further stated, “You know I don’t have strong issues with that. I do sometimes questions whether that’s right, but especially like on this [the Iowa State admissions application] there’s really nothing else to pick.” Raun also selects one category but wishes for another choice. “I wish you could check two boxes for white and Asian, but normally I’ll check Asian, Pacific Islander.” Ayenna shared why she chooses African American on forms and does not like the idea of having an “other” identity:

• Well, I mean, you look at me and it’s obviously that I’m not white. And I say that I’m black because…for lack of anything else to do. But it would be silly for me to put that I’m white. I mean it’s silly for me to put that I’m black but, that’s what I’ve been taught to do…well in the 80’s categories were so…there was black, white, Asian, other. And
other is so…it sounds like something that you would pick up at the goodwill or something. So I’ve always just put black. It’s a habit. Other is growth sounding…

It’s like the discount rack at K-Mart. It doesn’t even sound right. 75% off other section.

Choosing other identities

A couple of participants do not like the idea of having to choose one racial category. As the following examples illustrate, deliberately filling in many blanks on categorization questions and filling “other” are the self identification choices for some biracial students.

When Taye was asked how he categorizes himself on forms where ethnic identity is required, such as the Iowa State admissions application, he replied, “I probably filled in a bunch of them (ethnicity choices).” When I asked him why he would choose several ethnicities, even some of which he is not a part of, he responded, “actually I probably put Hispanic/African American.” I then asked Taye if that was how he like to be identified racially, as Hispanic and African American. His reply, “I like to be identified by my last name.” When Dan was asked about his choice of ethnic identity on forms, he answered that he usually “put(s) other, because Amerasian wasn’t really on there.” The students have different ideas about why they identify themselves as they do. In the next section, more insight will be given into the students’ racial identity and how outsiders respond to the students’ racial composition.

Other’s Perceptions the Students’ Racial Identity

The students often are questioned about their racial composition. The following section will include information on how the students are questioned about their racial identity, being mistaken for a member of another racial group and how others react to the students’ racial composition.
• I guess there’s people that are curious about me but don’t know me very well, and they’re real polite and they won’t just speculate. They’ll ask, you know and a lot of people mistake me for Hispanic, but I’m not I’m Amerasian...I appreciate it (being asked) actually. I’d rather they ask then just assume and speculate...they just think I have a tan, all year long (Dan).

• Yeah sometimes, like if I just meet somebody, they’ll be like, because it’ll be like oh, you’ve got such pretty hair, you know, you have to be mixed with something or, you’re skin’s so pretty, something else has to be in you, what is it? I think it’s more of a curiosity not like a derogatory, trying to separate me in any kind of way. But I think it’s curiosity just to know...there is a lot of different backgrounds that I could be in and they just want to make sure or want to know. I’m not ashamed of what I am...a lot of times people will actually mistake me for being Jamaican or Puerto Rican or even Indian. And you know those kind of questions...they’ll ask me what I’m mixed with, what’s in me, what else do you have because there’s the obvious physical features that are very distinguished between me and some of my friends (Kiara).

• When I first got to Iowa State the African Americans on campus just assumed that I was African American, so...I would hang out with them. The next day if I decided to sit at a different table, I thought it was kind of strange or whatever, and then when the Hispanics found out that my mom was from Panama, they said, oh he’s Hispanic or whatever. I’m just all the above. I’ve never been harassed because of it (biracial-ness). Hypothetically speaking, if I didn’t want to answer (a racial identity question) nobody would give me a hard time because of it. Some times people ask just because they want to know, it’s really no big deal (Taye).
• I think most people don’t know what I am. Some people try to figure it out like, “hmmm what is she?” A lot of people think I’m Latina, which is funny. People try to be nice and they ask, they try to figure out, “so where were you born?”… I understand why it’s an issue, because there are so many stupid people in the world… it kind of pisses me off because I don’t wake up and say hmmm, I think I’m going to have a nice multiethnic breakfast and go put on my multiethnic clothes and go to my classes on my multiethnic feet and do multiethnic things…it’s not even an issue for me-except when people bring it up (Ayenna).

• Actually, only when I say I’m half Japanese, they’ll say “oh, that’s what I guessed”. I’m not sure why. I guess some of my friends growing up, some of them are surprised to find out that I’m half Asian. I don’t know why that is, maybe they haven’t been around people who are (Raun).

Carlo shares how different groups of people respond to him telling them that he is biracial:

• Yeah, well…every time I tell someone that, it’s like, I get a different reaction from Latino people. White people really think I’m joking, like “no you’re not.” Yeah, I am, you know, they always think I’m joking. If I tell a Latino person that, they’re like “really?” I’m like yeah. They’re like “That’s cool.”

Kiara explained why she feels like minority or biracial people may be questioned about their ethnicity more often than Caucasians.

• I think the difference between looking at minority people as compared to the predominately white or Caucasian populations, I think the difference there is it’s a little bit more distinguishable if you are looking at minorities because the skin tone color and that kind of stuff. And it’s not just blonde hair blue eyes, you can’t just go off of those
features...you have physical features that are a little more easy to pick out and I think that’s why it might happen a lot more. I see it happen to me more than I might...if I’m with a friend of mine that might be white. They don’t ask her what’s your background? Are you Norwegian? Because there is no really curiosity there to know. And I mean, I’m making assumptions, but I think that that might be part of it.

The above excerpts provide information about how the students deal with being biracial. It seems that although the students may not really like being questioned about their racial identity, they have become somewhat used to answering outsiders’ inquiries.

Not Fitting into a Racial Group

Two of the students in this study reported how they did not feel like they fit into one or both of the racial groups of which they are a part.

- I get a lot of crap from the black community because I don’t say that I’m just black when people ask me. They say that the old one-drop rule, back in slavery times, you know...But I’m not just black, I can’t just totally negate my mother. I’m an atheist and religion is really important to black folks I guess and so that’s a big thing. And I’ve never really been accepted because I’m so light. I don’t really have African American features and there’s a lot of crap inside the black community about skin color, hair...it goes back to slavery times you know. People like me would have been the house niggers and dark people would have been outside getting beaten up and raped and all that stuff...(there’s) just so much anger and hostility towards light skinned people... And light skinned people are scared and hostile toward dark skinned people because we’ve normally been treated roughly by them and it’s just a big communication problem going on. I don’t really want to be accepted in any community...there’s so few black people on
this campus that there is sort of this need for us all to act sort of similar because the
group’s so small. But with white people on this campus, there’s so many different kinds.
I mean, some white people just don’t talk to me and others…the response I’ve gotten is
varied (Ayenna).

- I know that I’m Mexican, and I feel Mexican, but I also feel white, and it’s hard because
the white people look at me as white, but the Latino students don’t accept me. I’m
Latino, and it’s hard. I mean, I’ve heard all the jokes before you know, racial slurs…and
then people say that when they’re around you because they don’t even know that I’m
Latino, and that’s always so hard. It’s so hard because the Latino community, not that
they’re shutting me out because they don’t know any better, because I don’t look
Latino…I don’t know it’s hard because they don’t think of me as one of them (Carlo).

The two narratives above describe how a biracial students may feel when they do not have a
racial group which they can affiliate with on campus. The next section will discuss what
services may be needed to help biracial students adjust to campus life and find a group with
which they can affiliate.

Services for Biracial Students

The students were asked if any additional services are needed on campus for biracial
students. The responses were varied as to what type of programs, if any, are needed.

Student Organization

Some of the students felt that having a student organization on campus for biracial
and multiracial students would be helpful. Others felt that an organization at the college
level would not be needed. Ideas about what is needed for biracial students on the Iowa State
campus are discussed in the next two sections.
Services are needed

Some of the students felt that a support network or some type of student group would help to ease the transition for biracial students.

- I think maybe one thing that could be different is offering services specifically for biracial students on their adjustments...like addressing their issues with maybe not feeling like they fit into a certain group just because they look like it...like you might have some people who are African American and white, but they look white so they’re accepted with the white community and not the black community...and maybe they’re feelings on well they want to be accepted by everyone and maybe they’re more feeling as though they are closer to the African American students but they’re not being accepted. Maybe having someone that may be biracial having classes or programs for faculty and staff to go through so that if those problems arise they’re able to handle the better situation (Kiara).

Raun explained how he found exposure to other Asian students through his major, but added that students who are in other majors may benefit from some sort of a student group:

- I think that’s a good idea (a biracial student group). Just sort of investigate their backgrounds. I found exposure to those groups through the major, it has a lot of Asian students. So I guess that would probably be good especially for a lot of majors that are mainly...well like, business doesn’t have as many Asians in it I don’t think, and just majors like that...as people who hadn’t had exposure to different cultures and people. Just as some students felt that some sort of biracial organization or network would be a good idea, other students felt that these initiatives were not needed.
Services are not needed

Some of the students felt that a group or organization for biracial students was not needed at the college level. Dan told me that he would not necessarily use the services, but would possibly assist with planning for a group. "I know that I wouldn’t need it (biracial group) for anything. I mean if it was just starting off, I might attend it to be a leader and help other students that are in the same situation, but I wouldn’t have a need for it." Similarly Ayenna shared, "Maybe for some biracial people. Not me though. Maybe when I was in high school I could have used something like that, but I’m kind of beyond all of it." The students who reported that they would not use or need any type of services for biracial students were not totally opposed to the idea of having them. Dan’s interest in helping with a group and Ayenna’s sense that some students may need services, or need them at a younger age may suggest that additional services are still needed at Iowa State, even though these specific students would not use them.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The first part of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the non-academic experiences of the biracial students in this study. In the second part of this chapter, the students’ racial identity formation will be discussed and correlated with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Summary

Each student in this study has developed a sense of racial identity. Despite the frequent inquiries by outsiders, the biracial students seemed to have very few negative thoughts about being biracial. The most overwhelming negative experience seems to be the fact that certain biracial students may be excluded from a racial group of which they are a part.

Many of the biracial students seemed to have found a peer group with which they can associate. For some this peer group stems from extra curricular activities and for others it may be a consequence of sharing a common racial background. Overall, it seems that the biracial students seemed to have found a comfort zone at Iowa State University, despite the overwhelming concerns that Iowa State does not have a very diverse population. The peer groups for the students were not, however, created by the services or programs provided by the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

Categorization of Biracial Persons

It seems inevitable that people will be categorized by their race at some point during their lives. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is somewhat of a difficult task for some biracial students. The data suggest that if all racial categorization questions contained responses that would allow individuals to fill in more than one race or simply provided an “other” choice
some of the categorization stress felt by biracial and multiracial individuals would be reduced.

**Skin Color**

Although colorism only seemed to play a part in one of the student's lives (Ayenna), each student experienced incorrect labeling as a result of the color of his or her skin. Many of the students seemed satisfied with their appearance and some of the students shared that outsiders would point out elements in their appearances that did not make them look wholly like one race or the other (such as having good hair or delicate features). It seemed as though skin color played a part in who some of the students would feel comfortable around and choose for friends.

There was only one student in the study, Taye, who was biracial with two minority backgrounds (African American and Mexican). This characteristic, I believe, aided in his identity development and lessened his confusion. Taye always will be viewed as a minority person because of his heritage. Although outsiders may label him incorrectly as a member of a specific minority group, he will not be mistaken as Caucasian. This theory also seems to hold true for biracial students who may be half-Caucasian but whose skin tones are considerably darker than what might be expected of Caucasians.

The other students in the study were half Caucasian and half minority (African American, Asian or Hispanic). The students who were half Caucasian experienced greater confusion with their skin color, and at times may be considered Caucasian instead of a member of a minority group. This paradox seems to create more confusion because the students who are able to pass as Caucasian often were subject to listening to jokes or put-downs about minority groups of which they are a part. Upon revealing their half minority
status to friends and outsiders, these biracial students’ responses often were met with disbelief and denial.

Families, Neighborhoods and Schools

Families

By and large, the students’ families were the foundations of their identity development. Family members provided answers to questions about the students’ racial inquiries and also instilled a sense of universal acceptance for people of all races. The family seemed to be overwhelmingly important in creating biracial identities. For the student who did not have a strong family network, identity development seemed more laborious. Ayenna’s racial development and acceptance with her appearance seems to have come from years of struggling with her biracial-ness and at times, feeling alone.

Neighborhood and schools

The students in the study seemed to have benefited from growing up in moderately diverse neighborhoods. Growing up in predominantly Caucasian environments seems to have prepared the students for dealing with questions about their racial identity. It is in their neighborhoods and schools where the students first realized their differences and began to develop coping mechanisms. Evidently, by time the students reached Iowa State University many of them had developed means of coping with inquiries and responses from outsiders.

Biracial Identity in College

Once the students reached college, many of them became affiliated with students from one part of their ethnic backgrounds. For some of the students I believe this was intentional, a means of exploring their minority half after spending 18 years in a predominately white environment. For others, I believe that this is something that just
happened; somehow members of the same ethnic group always seem to find each other. Biracial identity in college is further discussed in the Conclusion section.

Minority Students on Predominately White Campuses

To enhance the well being of minority students on a predominately white campus, much work still needs to be done. It does appear that the importance of such services and programs is becoming more recognized. Recent literature (Steward, O'Leary, Boatwright & Sauer, 1997; Zea, Reisen, Beil & Caplan, 1997) has noted the significance of integrating a minority student into the majority culture and also has recognized the role that a minority student’s happiness with his or her social environment may play in institutional persistence. Currently on the Iowa State University campus, there are no specific programs for biracial students and only individual counseling services to aid biracial students.

Conclusions

Non-Academic Experiences at Iowa State University

The students in this study all seemed to have found their niche at Iowa State University. For some students, this niche has been affiliating with minority or international students. For others, it has been constructed by being actively involved in a variety of campus and community organizations.

Minority students on predominately white campuses

As previously noted in Chapter 2, minority students on predominantly white campus have to put a great deal of effort into adjusting to the environment and culture of the institution before they are able to succeed socially (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991; Haralson, 1995). This was true for the students in this study, as finding a peer group to associate with was the result of a conscious effort. The students who chose to affiliate with minority and
international students on campus essentially have created “their own social and cultural networks, given their exclusion from the wider university community (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991). By aligning themselves with other minority students on campus, the students also have created a means to “maintain an ethnic identity either individually or as a group”(Davis, 1994, p. 19). The students’ creation of an ethnic identity for themselves most likely has aided in their adjustment to the Iowa State University community (Haralson, 1995).

Involvement in campus and community activities

Involvement in campus and community activities seemed to play a part in enhancing some of the students’ comfort levels and aiding in their peer group affiliation. For some of the students in the study, being actively involved in activities allowed them to create a sense of identity. These students, I believe, have become known as active participants in campus life. This involvement has impacted their choice of friends on campus. Chickering and Reiser (1993) described this importance of involvement, “relationships with close friends and participation in student communities can be primary forces influencing student development in college” (p. 393). Because some of the students in the study are involved actively on campus and not in activities for minority students, I believe that their involvement has created their peer group. In a sense, for these students involvement begat friendship—-a linear approach to Chickering and Reiser’s theory, but none the less closely paralleling their ideas.

Racial Identity Development

Racial Identity Development for Non-Minority Students

Chickering and Reiser’s theory (1993) concerning racial identity and development in college provides a good starting point for discussing the student’s racial identity
development. The biracial students in this study do not follow the progression of stages presented in this theory. The students appeared to experience several stages simultaneously and did not progress through them sequentially. Some examples of this phenomenon are illustrated below with Chickering and Reiser’s stages noted in parentheses.

Raun. Raun seems to be comfortable with his appearance (1) while also showing an interest in learning about his Japanese heritage from his grandmother and realizing the importance of being sensitive to the needs of other Asian students (3 and 4).

Ayenna. Ayenna seems to be uncomfortable with her appearance at times (1), but seems to have a strong sense of who she is (6) and appears to prefer not identifying with any racial groups in the “polarized” society she describes (7). Her preference not to identify with any racial groups seems to be the backbone of her identity. This identity, I believe, has come from several years of trying to fit into a prescribed racial group unsuccessfully.

Carlo. Carlo seems to be able to integrate both his Caucasian and Latino heritage (7) and appeared to be comfortable and secure about presenting these racial identities in different contexts depending on where he is and who he is with. However, it does not seem that Carlo is all that comfortable about defending his Latino heritage among those whom he values (5), such as the jokes that are made by his fraternity brothers. “When it comes to the student’s affective development, one generalization seems clear: students’ values, beliefs, and aspirations tend to change in the direction of the dominant values, beliefs, and aspirations of the peer group” (Astin, 1993, p. 398). Astin’s theory reaffirms the idea that Carlo presents different racial identities depending on who he is with.
Racial Development for Minority Students

Cross’s model of Nigrescence (1971) seems to be somewhat adaptable to provide a framework for the biracial students in this study, depending on how it is interpreted. In looking at how the students in this study have become involved on campus and with whom they associate, the theory may provide the following guidance.

Stage 1: preencounter. By not being involved in any activities specifically designed for minority students, one might infer that Raun and Dan are in the “preencounter” stage. I suggest this because it is in this stage where a minority student views the world through a white perspective and tries to conform to it. Both Dan and Raun may fit into this stage simply because they appear not to have actively sought out the minority environment.

Stage 2: encounter. Carlo seems to partially fit into the second stage, “encounter.” He has recently decided to explore his Latino heritage by taking the ESP class and being the MASS representative in his residence hall. It was not until he came to Iowa State that Carlo explored this side of his background openly. He seems to be evaluating his place in the minority world as he moves between the Caucasian and Latino worlds.

Stage 3: imersion-emersion. Stage 3 seems to describe Kiara’s experiences at Iowa State. “Imersion-emersion” best describes her because since arriving on campus she has surrounded herself in the African American culture. I am not aware of any devaluation of the majority culture by Kiara, but she has certainly began to put a great deal of value on her minority heritage.

Stage 4: internalization. Taye seems to experience some of the traits of the “internalization” stage. He seems to be aware of his minority status, but also will consider the possibility of interacting and befriending those who are not minorities. During our
interviews, Taye expressed that he did not have any racial preference in his choice of friends or potential significant others.

**Stage 5: internalization-commitment.** The students who thought that an organization for biracial students may be a good addition to the current services and programs provided at Iowa State may be in “Stage 5: Internalization-Commitment.” These students (Kiara, Raun, Dan and Ayenna) seem to want to help other biracial students who may be experiencing identity confusion by assisting in a campus organization or simply thinking that some sort of programming may be worthwhile.

**Racial Identity Development for Biracial Students**

After examining Chickering and Reiser’s (1993) theory of racial identity development and Cross’s (1971) theory of Nigrescene, it is apparent that biracial identity development differs from mono-racial identity development. As suggested by Williams (1999) biracial students experience identity development with a sense of “simultaneity.” Her idea of “simultaneity” suggests that biracial students may experience more than one stage of a racial identity theory at the same time. This idea of a simultaneous racial development stages is supported by Wardle (1992) who observed, “a biracial child must not select a traditional group to avoid role confusion” (p. 8). The previous theories provide a new insight into understanding how biracial students may develop their racial identity. To further explore the racial identity development of biracial students, Root’s border crossings will be examined.

**Border Crossing**

To begin the discussion of how the students’ racial identity has been impacted by their experiences at Iowa State University, Root’s “border crossings” will be examined.
Multiple perspectives

Two of the students appeared to be handling their biracial-ness by utilizing the “multiple perspectives” border crossing. Dan and Raun each seemed equally concerned with addressing both sides of their ethnicity. These students were placed in this category because they did not seem to emphasize one half of their racial composition over another. They also seemed comfortable with their minority status and sympathetic to the needs of other minority students.

Neither Dan nor Raun have been involved in activities created specifically for minority students, but rather have created well-rounded personas for themselves by being involved in organizations and intramurals and spending time on their studies.

Situational

Kiara and Carlo are “situational” in their border crossing. The need to display one part of their ethnicity over another depending on where they are and who they are with seemed deliberate in some instances and a way to connect with their minority half in other instances. Kiara was raised in a predominantly white town and attended a predominantly white high school. Upon arriving at Iowa State University, Kiara has immersed herself into the African American community. Her desire to align herself with the African American community may stem from the fact that she was unable to explore her African American heritage before coming to ISU. Because of the more diverse student body at Iowa State University, Kiara has changed her peer group to focus on the Iowa State African American environment rather than her hometown Caucasian environment. Carlo’s “situational” border crossing is different than Kiara’s. As Kiara’s border crossing seems to be somewhat of a one-sided (African American) phase she is going through or an affiliation she may keep for
an extended period of time; Carlo’s border crossing provides him the opportunity to access the Latino community and also into the Caucasian community simultaneously.

As I first began talking to Carlo, I thought that he affiliated with his Caucasian background primarily. He is actively involved in a white fraternity, as opposed to seeking out a Latino group with which to affiliate. It was not until I probed deeper that I realized that Carlo is living in two very different worlds, oftentimes simultaneously. He became involved in an ESP (Extended Success Program) and served as the MASS (Multicultural Awareness Support System) representative for his residence hall floor. Both of these activities are strongly aligned with his Latino heritage. During his involvement with these activities he was known as a Latino rather than a Caucasian. Outside of his class and his MASS representative responsibilities, he was living the role of a Caucasian male. He endures jokes about racial minorities at his fraternity because his brothers do not realize that he is Latino. Carlo seems somewhat torn between the primarily Caucasian life he leads and his desire to become more involved in the Latino community.

For both Kiara and Carlo, I feel that their skin color aids in their ability to utilize the “situational” border crossings. Kiara, by appearance, looks African American and it does not seem surprising that she would be accepted into the African American community on campus. Carlo, on the other hand, appears to be Caucasian. It is because of Carlo’s skin color that I feel he has such difficulty finding a niche on campus and feels the need to live a double life.
Multiracial

Taye and Ayenna display the characteristics of individuals who are in a “multiracial” border crossing. They do not see the need to identify specifically with their racial composition.

I believe Taye is “multiracial” because he is a combination of two minority cultures (African American and Mexican). Thus, he does not have problems with trying to fit in among Caucasians. He is always viewed as a minority. Although at times he may be mistaken for a member of a minority group of which he is not a part, Taye always is seen as a minority. While talking with him it seemed apparent that he does not like to be categorized by his race, but rather simply would like to be known “by my (his) last name.”

Ayenna’s “multiracial”-ness is driven out of anger and frustration. She has felt that she does not fit into the African American or Caucasian communities of which she is a part. She seemed adamant about not wanting to be known as any race, but yet seemed to understand why racial categorization is an issue. Ayenna is “multiracial” because she does not express an interest in affiliating with any certain race; as a consequence, she would prefer simply to exist. Again, it seems as though skin color may play a part in border crossing. By appearance, Ayenna has Caucasian features and African American features. I believe that this combination of features drives her to her “multiracial” state.

Recommendations for Practice

Expanded Racial Categories on the Admissions Application

To assist in making biracial and multiracial students feel welcome on college campuses, the first measure that should be employed is the creation of an admissions application that eliminates the racial categorization question or allows prospective students to
choose more than one race. The admissions application is one of the first pieces of literature that potential students receive. If the racial categorization question does not allow students to accurately depict their racial identity, the institution has, in a sense, already alienated them before they have even stepped foot on the campus.

Development of Programs and Services for Biracial Students

To aid in biracial student development on college campuses, student organizations and programming should be created. This programming seems to fit most logically into the auspices of the Office of Minority Student Affairs. Services that may be useful include a mentoring program, a racial exploration class or workshop (this could be similar to the ESP class, but with specific emphasis on multiracial issues rather than minority issues), and a social organization created specifically for bi or multiracial students. Although not every biracial student may need assistance in developing a healthy biracial identity, it is believed that simply providing the services would allow biracial students the opportunity to meet others whom are biracial and may even enhance awareness of multiracial issues campus-wide.

Learning Community

A learning community created specifically for biracial students may be beneficial for freshmen students at Iowa State. In creating a residential peer group with whom biracial students can affiliate with, they are likely to feel more comfortable in their new surroundings. This type of learning community would also provide the opportunity for biracial students to explore their race and learn about what services and programs are available for not only minority students, but also students of specific ethnicities.
Faculty and Staff Training

Creating an awareness of biracial students’ needs and development patterns would be useful for the faculty and staff at Iowa State. In learning about biracial students, both faculty and staff will become more sensitive to multiracial issues and concerns. This sensitivity will become increasingly important as the number of bi and multiracial students continues to increase.

Recommendations for Future Research

I believe that future research in the area of bi and multiracial college students is a necessity. Not only is this one of the most rapidly growing populations in the United States, it is a population that is not going to disappear as racial groups become more fluid and interracial relationships more proliferate. Because of the potential magnitude, bi and multiracial student issues should be at the forefront of research in higher education.

Comparison by Similar Racial Background

Beyond what I have done in this study, I believe that it is necessary to compare biracial students of similar backgrounds (e.g., African American and Caucasian) to other biracial students of similar backgrounds (e.g., Hispanic and Caucasian) to see how the two groups develop identity. In conducting a study like this, information about what each different minority background can do to aid in the development of biracial student will be gained. Such a study would assist in discovering if biracial students who are biracial with two minority backgrounds have fewer racial developmental issues than biracial students who are partly Caucasian. This study also would assist in discovering innovative means to assist the biracial college student.
Impact of Biracial Students on Educators and Administrators

Another area that I believe needs to be researched is the impact of biracial students on educators and administrators. By this I mean, does the fact that interracial marriages became legal not even 40 years ago play a part in how educators and administrators treat children of mixed parentage. A study that examines how senior educators and administrators, who experienced a time when interracial marriage was illegal, react to the children of interracial marriages could provide useful information into the treatment of this relatively new demographic. This study could possibly obtain data that would describe any differences in the treatment of biracial students when compared to other minority students or Caucasian students.

Persistence of Biracial Students in College

The third type of study that would be necessary in learning about the development of biracial students in a college environment would examine their persistence in undergraduate programs. This type of study would be able to compare and contrast the persistence and commitment to undergraduate biracial students to that of other minority groups and the majority culture. Results of this study would be useful in determining what efforts must be made on campuses to ensure that all students are encouraged to persevere and obtain their degrees.

Racial Identity Development of Adopted Biracial Students

A study that targets biracial students who have been adopted would be useful in assessing the importance of home environment on biracial identity development. It is unknown if or how biracial students whom are adopted into families who are not of the same race develop a biracial identity or develop a racial identity similar to the majority culture of
their family. Researching adopted biracial students in a college environment would provide greater insight into the importance of peers in racial identity development. This study would also provide information on whether or not it is important for the biracial student to gain knowledge of their biracial-ness, or whether belonging to the family culture is sufficient. The dynamics of the family relationships in this study could potentially provide useful information for families who may be adopting in the future.

Biracial Students in the Greek System

In examining biracial students in the Greek System, information on how a fraternity or sorority house is chosen could be obtained. This study would also provide information on whether or not biracial students actively seek out Greek houses that are created for specific minority groups (e.g., African American). Discovering how biracial students choose their Greek houses would provide crucial peer group affiliation information and also provide knowledge of how the Greek system is perceived by outsiders. Information from this study could be used to describe what biracial students experience as members of the Greek system (e.g., feeling included, reactions of their brothers and sisters to their biracial-ness, handling jokes or negative comments concerning minority groups). This study ultimately may provide insight into how to create a more inclusive Greek system on a predominantly white campus.

Institutional Type

In completing a study of biracial students at different types of institutions (e.g., Land Grant, Historically Black, Private, etc.) insight can be gained into how biracial identity is developed at each type of institution. This information would be valuable for enhancing programming at each type of institution. It is unknown whether or not any specific type of institution has implemented programming specifically created for biracial students. A study
of this type, would be useful in determining why biracial students chose a specific institutional type and how this decision has aided in their racial identity development.

International Biracial Students

This study would examine the biracial identity development of international students at US institutions. In discovering how international biracial students have developed their identity prior to matriculating at a US institution, insight can be gained into the role of biracial identity development internationally. In researching biracial international students one may assess whether or not it is more challenging to be international or biracial at a US institution. The information obtained from this study could potentially alter the programming international students. Knowledge about biracial identity development at home and in the US could be crucial for institutions of higher education, as it is unknown whether or not programming exists internationally for biracial students.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Nicole Sands, 3917 Quebec Street, Ames, IA 50014, 292-3969

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this thesis research. The purposes of this project are:

1. to gain an understanding of your experiences as a biracial student at Iowa State;
2. to provide data for my thesis

As a participant in this research project, you will be interviewed two or three times. Each interview is expected to last between 20 minutes and 1 ½ hours. Interviews will be tape recorded for accuracy. The information gained from the interviews will be used in my thesis. The following are the terms of participating in this research project:

1. The information obtained during this project will be used to write a thesis, which will be read by my thesis committee and members of the Graduate College. The thesis will not be disseminated to others without the written consent of the respondent.

2. Real names will not be used during data collection or in the written thesis.

3. The respondent has the right to withdraw at any time from the study, for any reason, and the data will be returned to the respondent upon request. Withdrawal from the study will not affect the evaluation of the respondent.

4. The respondent will receive a copy of the thesis before the final draft is written and negotiate any changes with the researcher.

5. The respondent will receive a copy of the final thesis soon after completion.

If you agree to participate in this thesis research according to the preceding terms, please sign below.

Researcher: ____________________________

Respondent: ____________________________  Date: ____________________
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your family.
2. What campus and community activities/organizations are you involved with?
3. What is your ethnic background?
4. What race would you say that most of your friends are? Those whom you date? Why do you think this is?
5. Have you been involved in activities or programs sponsored by the Minority Student Affairs Office? Which ones?
6. What did you put as your ethnicity on standardized forms? If there is an “other” box “other” box do you check? Biracial box?
7. Do people often ask you about your ethnic background? What is your response? Of what ethnic background do people think you are a part of?
8. What type of community did you grow up in? (demographic information)
9. Do you know of any other biracial students on campus?
10. How do you prefer to be known (ethnicity-wise)?
11. Do you identify with one part of your ethnic background more? Why? How?
12. Why did you choose to come to Iowa State University?
13. Is the diversity on campus different from where you grew up/your high school?
14. Since I want to learn as much as I can about being biracial, is there something that you thought I should have asked you that I didn’t?
REFERENCES


