ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: "THE IMPACT OF RACIAL IDENTITY ON THE
                          EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MULTIRACIAL,
                          COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES"

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While the impact of racial identity on students' educational experiences has been studied for

years, there has been little such research focused on multiracial individuals. The purpose of this

study is to explore how racial identity has shaped the educational experiences of multiracial

undergraduates, particularly in their transition to college. Transitioning into college, which often

requires entering a very different social and educational environment, can be life changing for

students, and racial identity can play a role in how students interact and identify with other

students as well as teachers. An interview based qualitative methodology was used to explore

the educational experiences of four multiracial undergraduate students. Individual face-to-face

interviews were used to learn about the four participants' experiences. Focusing on multiracial

students, who are often left out of the discussion when talking about the impact racial identity

has on various educational experiences, will contribute to research on the relationship between

racial identity and education. Study findings showed that the participants experienced few, if

any, negative effects on their educational experiences, due to their racial identity or how others

perceived them, racially. Overall, participants felt that being multiracial was an advantage in

terms of connecting with a diverse group of peers in school settings.

"THE IMPACT OF RACIAL IDENTITY ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF
MULTIRACIAL, COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES"

By

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DEDICATION

"The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the works of your hands."
Psalms 138:8

Jesus Christ

I give everything I have to you Lord, for without you I am nothing. Thank you for blessing me with all of my gifts and for putting me here on this Earth for a purpose. Guide me forever more. Give me the strength to endure. I love you!

Mom and Dad

You two have been my strength. You always answer when I call and you have been an amazing support system through this entire process. I love you both beyond what I can express through words. Continue to be amazing parents.

To Multiracial Students Struggling to find their place in the classroom

Go through YOUR process. Find YOUR place. Be YOU.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Multiracial students and their educational experiences were absent from the research

literature until the last few decades.   With the ever changing way in which individuals racially

identify and the mixing of people with different racial identities (Cornell & Hartman, 2007), this

topic is essential in understanding the experiences of all students, including those who may

identify with more than one racial category. Given the knowledge that researchers have about

the struggles that minority groups face in the classroom, it is imperative that they explore the

experiences of multiracial students because they often identify and are identified as minorities.

Before reviewing the literature, below, I define some key terms as they are used in this

thesis.

- *Biracial* - A person who identifies themselves as belonging to only two racial groups.

- *Dominant Group/Race* – The traditional socially constructed category of White.

- *Minority* – Belonging to the traditional socially constructed category of Black, Asian,
  Native American, Pacific Islander and/or Latino.

- *Multiracial* - A person who identifies themselves as belonging to more than one racial
  group. This includes biracial individuals.

- *Perceived race* – The way in which an individual is perceived racially by others based on
  their outward appearance (e.g. teachers and peers). One's perceived race may not be
  consistent with how they racially self-identify.

- *Race Mixing* - People of different races having children, to create multiracial individuals.

- *Race* - The traditional socially constructed categories of race; Black, White, Asian,
  Native American, Pacific Islander and Latino. I acknowledge that Latino is not

considered a race but for the purposes of this study I use the term Latino as comparable to racial groupings. Latino is an ethnic category that has been constructed as a racial category in the United States.

- *Single Race* - An individual whose parents both identify as the same race.

Given that the number of people who identify as multiracial has grown by 32% from 6.8 million to 9 million in the United States between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) and the current percentage of individuals who identify with more than one race is 2.4%, there has been increased attention given to this population. In the year 2000, for the first time ever, the U.S. created a new category which individuals could check called "two or more races," for those identifying with than one race. The introduction of this category reflected both official government acknowledgement of demographic shifts and societal acceptance of multiracial individuals. However, little attention has been given to the experiences of multiracial individuals in classroom settings. While researchers continue to look at the disadvantages that African American and Latino men and women face in their academic careers, multiracial students are under-researched because they fit into multiple racial identity categories (Schwartz, 1998).

Some researchers posit that multiracial individuals have an easier time than single raced individuals fitting in, socially, within multiple racial groups and have fewer academic struggles than other minority students (Chen & Hamilton, 2015). However, other researchers have found that multiracial individuals have more difficulty fitting in socially and that they have the same academic struggles as minority students (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Due to perceptions of race ascribed to multiracial individuals, often times, regardless of how they choose to identify racially or ethnically, others categorize them within a single raced group of people. In addition

to self-identification, this also has an impact on their experiences. This points to the complexity of multiracial individuals, especially in their educational experiences.

Purpose of Study

While the focus on identity and education in the research has been single raced groups of people, few studies have been conducted with multiracial men and women, examining their educational experiences, successes, or struggles. We know that racial and ethnic identity impacts education for other minorities (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Zimmerman, 2002) but we do not know how or if it impacts the educational experiences of multiracial people. Due to the small body of research focused on this population and their education, it is nearly impossible to understand their educational experiences and how or if they need additional supports. Individuals are racially categorized in the United States every day. There is a national obsession with placing people into racial categories. Historically, this categorization occurred in part designate individuals as enslaved or free during the years of slavery in this country. Not only do people want to know what they have in common with others, but they also want to know how they are different and as a result, which groups hold power in this country. Because of the emphasis on racial categorization of people, it is important to understand how racial categories can impact individuals in their daily life. Specifically, in this study, I seek to understand the impact of racial identity on the educational experiences of four multiracial, college undergraduates.

Significance of the Study

Multiracial students may not have the same struggles and successes as other students in the classroom, but it is impossible to know without more research on their experiences. With

3

new classroom approaches like culturally relevant pedagogy, educators are working towards creating a comfortable environment and effective learning strategies for students of all races, ethnicities, and cultures. How does this apply to students who fit into more than one racial category? This is an important question that must be answered so that we can understand this student population. With the ever changing racial demographics in schools today, it is important that we shift our thinking to include multiracial students into the discussion. If we are going to effectively serve this population, we cannot continue to think about racial groups as mutually exclusive. If we do not pay attention to the experiences of these students that may relate to their racial identities, administrators and teachers will be limited in their understanding of how to enhance the school experiences of the ever growing population of multiracial students.

Personal Interest

As a multiracial college student who has always identified as bi-racial (White and Black), this issue has significantly impacted me personally. In school, my teachers and peers always placed me in a category with my Black peers because of my darker skin completion compared to my White counterparts. Because of this, I have had experiences and struggles similar to those that other minority students have in the classroom. Thus, I have experienced stereotype threat (Steele, 2010), which refers to how low expectations of students' academic achievement can impact their academic performance. Some teachers had lower expectations for me than they did for White students.

Given that multiracial students are likely having very different issues in the classroom based on their perceived race, the diversity or lack of diversity in their schools or other factors, multiracial students' educational experiences deserve much more attention. Growing up in the diverse community of Ypsilanti, Michigan, I never really had to think about my race, until high

school. Being the only minority student or one of few in my AP or Honors courses, made me want to understand the impact of identity on multiracial students' educational careers, especially among people just like me: multiracial individuals.

In high school, I gravitated more towards the Black crowd, because when people saw me, they assumed that was where I belonged. Even when I did hang out with my White friends from the softball and volleyball teams, I was always the "token" Black girl, even though I am multiracial. I soon realized that even if I wanted to identify with the White side of my racial heritage, it would not be accepted by others because of my physical features, which made others see me as part of the minority. I did have a very high GPA and worked hard to maintain and prove people wrong about the stereotypes that are placed on Black students and their lack of academic success, because I often felt like I was representing the entire Black race in the classes where I was the only minority student. In situations where I got the highest score on a test or excelled in a project, it was often assumed that I had to put in more effort than my White counterparts to make the same or a higher grade than them. There was a stigma placed on the Black people in my school, and because I was perceived as Black, that stigma was placed on me too.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is an attempt to learn more about the impact that racial identity has on the educational experiences of multiracial, college undergraduates, including their transition from high school to college. The second chapter provides a review of the literature beginning with a brief discussion of the history of race and multiracial individuals in the United States.   Next, I examine the factors that influence a person's racial identity.   The review ends with a discussion of important information that is missing from the research regarding multiracial students. The

5

third chapter describes the methodology used in obtaining and analyzing the stories and experiences of the study participants. The fourth chapter examines participants' perceptions and experiences and is organized according to three findings in order to answer the study's research question. Finally, the fifth chapter offers conclusions based on the collective lived experiences of the participants, discusses the limitations of the study, and offers implications for possible actions that teachers and administrators can take to help create a healthy learning environment for multiracial students.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter is divided into five sections and provides an overview of race and racial identity and how they can impact an individual's educational experiences. First, a general history of race and race mixing in the United States will be discussed to provide context for understanding how race has impacted schooling in the United States. Next, I will discuss racial identity development among multiracial individuals. Following, I will discuss literature of the impact of racial identity on an individual's educational experiences, especially among multiracial students. Finally, situational identity will be explored in terms of multiracial individuals making a conscious decision racially identify differently in different situations

The Construction of Racial Identity and Race Mixing in America

Identity formation and development is a complex process. According to Harper (2011), "The identity dimension that receives the most attention, in terms of regulation and categorical changes, is race" (p.104). It can be more difficult to understand the racial identity of multiracial individuals than to understand the racial identity development of single-raced individuals because there are more possibilities in the ways that they might identify. It is difficult to collect accurate data on race, especially when it comes to multiracial people, because state sanctioned forms often force you to choose one racial group based on the way race has been socially constructed in the United States (Omi & Winant, 2014). The socially constructed nature of race is often difficult for people to understand because of the biological indicators they have attached to racial categories. For example, dark skin is associated with being Black and fair skin is associated with being White. Many people believe that biology has a large impact on how we

are viewed in society. However, Shih and Sanchez (2009) point out that, "the assumption that biological differences underlie racial categories is coming under great scrutiny…the use of race is no longer a biological reality" (p.3). When thinking about racial designations that are used in the United States, it is important to realize that our currently used categories have not been consistent throughout history. Obach (1999) explains that,

> "the socially constructed nature of racial categories can, in part, be demonstrated
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> by reviewing historical developments in which the commonly used racial
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> categories were established in addition to showing the way in which those
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> categories and their meanings have changed over time" (p.253).

An example of such a historical development is hypodescent (1924) or the one-drop rule by which one drop of so-called Black blood defined one, for the purposes of segregation in the Jim Crow south, as black (Spencer, 1999); choosing more than one race was not an option nor was White, if one had any African ancestry. Hypodescent, "historically limited the options of multiracial Americans, particularly those with black ancestry" (Khanna, 2012, p.318). Due to historical events that have caused separation between different groups of people based on lineage, the origins of the U.S were based on placing people from, distinguishable races into categories, permitting only "free White persons" to obtain citizenship. This social construction of race led to enduring racial classifications, including White, Black, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander. This classification system was used to legitimize discriminatory laws and Whites' enslavement of anyone with one drop of black blood, even if her or his physical appearance approximated whiteness. Another example of a historical development that supports the notion that race is socially constructed is how census data has changed. Only recently was a

multiracial box added for people who wanted to self-identify with more than one race. Previously, individuals had to choose one.

Multiracial Identity

Racial categories have been constructed as exclusionary, reflecting the assumption that everyone belongs to only one racial category. In the following review of literature on multiracial identity, the focus will be on individuals with one White parent and one parent of another race. With the social construction of race, multiracial individuals may have a difficult time being accepted into one race or another because of their perceived race, given to them based on their appearance or other social factors. According to Harris (2002), "the multiracial population has variously been defined according to how people identify themselves, how they are identified by others, how their ancestors were identified, and combinations of these criteria" (p.615). Studies show that multiracial children often use their parents' choices as a proxy for their own individual racial identity (Khanna, 2012). They accept this identity until they are old enough to think about their place in the racial categories and what that means for their lives. As a result, they may or may not assume a new racial identity. Root (1992) suggests that biracial teens, when individuals who are at least partly White, enter into a period of turmoil and possibly a "dual existence" because they feel as if they cannot fully reject White culture and immerse themselves in a minority community simply members of the minority community accept them, and Whites do not. They begin to feel guilt and anger because they are not accepted into the dominant group.

When discussing and understanding the identities of multiracial people, Rockquemore et al. (2009), "suggest that researchers should distinguish between the racial identity (personal, chosen, racial self-understanding), racial identification (how others view them), and racial categorization (chosen racial identity in different contexts) of multiracial people" (p.6).

Although this study will focus largely on the self-selected racial identity, the racial identification and categorization are important as well. This is because individuals' experiences are shaped by how people perceive them, which may shift in different contexts.

In some cases, when "minority" individuals are determining their racial identity, they go through five stages reflected in Bill Cross' (1991) theory of Black racial identity development. The theory states that individuals are first in a pre-encounter stage in which they have limited consciousness of self as an "other." Next, they have an encounter in which they realize that they are seen as belonging to a racially subordinate group; this is usually a negative encounter. The third stage is immersion/emersion in which individuals begin the search for a positive racial identity. Next, in the internalization stage, individuals reach a point where they possess a positive sense of identity. Finally, in the internalization-commitment stage, they engage in ongoing actions to express concern for their group (Cross, 1991). Often times, multiracial individuals who choose to identify with a racial minority group experience a negative encounter which may cause them to adopt a single-raced identity associated with a minority group. In cases where individuals does not experience such an encounter, they might choose to identify with the dominant/majority group because of the benefits they might receive in doing so.

Another factor that impacts a multiracial person's racial identity development is their socioeconomic status. According to Khanna (2012),

> "the middle and upper-middle classes are socialized to expect and demand
> choices in identity, and recent studies reveal that higher education and affluence is
> correlated with multiracial identities and, for black-white multiracials, a rejection
> of traditional social classification norms" (p.319).

Multiracial individuals who are in affluent neighborhoods and attend college, where they are surrounded by a diverse group of people, tend to want a choice when it comes to their identities. However, those who live with and are surrounded by people from the minority group to which they are associated are more likely to accept the fact that they are categorized with this minority group and often, want to be (Khanna, 2012). This shows that the educational attainment, SES, and interactions with others can impact how multiracial individuals identify, racially.

One last factor that impacts racial identity are peer relationships and the acceptance or lack thereof experienced through those relationships. According to DeCuir-Gunby (2009), "Because students have the need to belong, they often interact with the peers in which they feel they share the most characteristics…oftentimes in schools this common characteristic is race…because it is comforting to be surrounded by people with similar experiences and backgrounds" (p.115). Attempting to forge peer relationships based on racial identity may cause multiracial individuals some difficulty or confusion because children often look to forge these connections based similar physical characteristics.

According to Root (1992), when a multiracial person chooses to identify with a particular group, individuals within that group must accept that person and his/her physical features. If the person is not accepted, he or she could be in a state of confusion about his or her own racial identity. Multiracial individuals might not fit easily into any one racial based upon their physical features, but they may try to associate more fully with their minority status for fear of being seen as rejecting the minority group or being accused of "acting White." A study on multiracial students' well-being, found that when they are in the presence of people of the same racial mixture as them, they experience greater well-being than when they are not (Sanchez &

Garcia, 2009). Developing a racial identity is very important for multiracial individuals because in doing so, they can relate to others who share that identity.

Acceptance into a racial group has an impact on how one racially identifies. In the Black community, colorism, which is based on skin color, can prevent individuals from being accepted into a community with which they share the same racial identity. Colorism is defined as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-raced people based soley on their color" (Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013, p.6). Colorism suggests that there is a skin color hierarchy, and the people with skin tones which are closer to the dominant race receive better treatment. This directly relates to slavery, where the slave owners' multiracial children, even though they were considered Black, got preferential treatment because of the lightness of their skin. There are various studies that show lighter skinned Blacks tend to get better treatment and darker skin is considered "more threatening" (Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013, p.8). Further lighter skinned Blacks are considered to be closer to the dominant ideals of beauty in the United States. Due to colorism in the Black community, one's acceptance into the Black racial group is not always granted and skin color and tone has a large impact on divisions among Blacks. As this relates to multiracial individuals, if they self-selects their racial identity as Black, but they are seen as White or light-skinned, this could negatively impact their experience with other Black people and they could be victims of colorism. This in turn can impact that self-selected racial identity. Not only does a person's perceived racial identity have an impact on their self-selected racial identity, but also the way an individual responds to that perceived identity.

Researchers have found that most multiracial individuals who have one White parent identify with their minority heritage or they identify as biracial. Not many identify with being White, even if they are perceived to be a part of the dominant group (Root, 1996). In a study on

Black and White biracial adolescents which measured their participation in and enjoyment of the culture within both the black and white communities, findings suggested that these individuals tended to feel most comfortable with Black peers.   Most felt that they looked Black, although out of the 16 participants two indicated that they looked White. However, they all reported identifying as biracial in most circumstances and if they had to choose, the majority said that they would identify as black or biracial (Root, 1996).

All of the factors mentioned above, including rejection from the White race, acceptance into the minority group, peer relationships, educational and socioeconomic status can impact how a multiracial person identifies racially. The racial identity with which a person is comfortable is that which she/he has chosen. However, that way others view a multiracial individual may not be consistent with how she/he identifies. Thus, a person's racial identification, which is based on self-identification, could still be different than their racial identity, which can be based on their perceived race. It is important to note that if a multiracial person identifies as White, others still may see this individual as Black or some other race.

Racial Identity, Multiracial Individuals and Educational Experiences

Prior research shows that young people's racial identities can have a significant impact on their educational experiences. Racial identity can play a role in how students relate to curriculum and instruction and how they are treated by school staff and other students (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). In the U.S., much of the research on these issues has focused on Black and Latina/o students. Relatively few studies in the field of education have focused on multiracial students although research shows that their numbers are growing. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Report, the number of individuals who identify as multiracial has grown by 32% in the past decade. Because individuals of mixed racial heritage may self-identify with only one race,

13

it is likely that census counts underestimate the multiracial population. With this growing

number of multiracial individuals, it is extremely important to understand the successes or

struggles they may face based on how they choose to identify racially and how others may

identify them, particularly in school contexts.

Many researchers have looked at the connection between racial identity and academic

achievement. Fordham suggests that Blacks may have to distance themselves from the cultural

markers of Blackness in order to achieve academically because of the negative stigma around

academic achievement concerning Black students (Carter & Goodwin, 1994, p.305). With this

view on the connection between racial identity and educational achievement, multiracial

individuals may feel like they want to identify with the White or dominant race rather than the

minority group because of the reputation they have for low achievement and/or other problems

that those groups may face in the classroom setting. Although multiracial individuals may want

to self-identify as White, others may still see them as minorities based on their outward

appearance.

The social construction of race puts people in a position where they are forced to

"choose" one race with which to identify (Sanchez, 2010). For single-raced people, this may be

an easier choice to make because of their ancestry. Multiracial people often have a harder time

accepting this choice because it doesn't fully account for all of the other factors that influence

multiracial identity development. Research suggests that being forced to choose a single racial

identity can be detrimental to multiracial individuals' academic achievement. According to

Sanchez (2010), "these unique challenges [in securing membership into a racial group or groups]

have been proposed as precipitating factors in racial identity development…including poor

academic performance among multiracial people" (p.1657). Further, Shih (2009) states that,

"these types of procedures [forced choice decisions] may send the message to students that their multiracial identities are not value or recognized, causing negative effects for mood and performance" (p.9). Instead of supporting them in understanding and connecting with their multiple heritages, often, people would rather that multiracial individuals identify with a single race but this can be detrimental to their identity development and affect their academic achievement in a negative way.

Although public education is supposed to be an equalizing setting for all, many minority students in this country continue to attend substandard schools and drop out in large numbers (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). Overall, there are large differences between the educational experiences of Whites and non-Whites and depending on how they are perceived, multiracial students may face the same challenges as other students. Minority children, including multiracial students, are often at schools with fewer resources, less advanced curriculum and instruction and lower teacher expectations than their White counterparts. Studies on the attitude and dispositions of teachers show that they demonstrate differential expectations and treatment of non-White children as compared to White children (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). If teachers see multiracial students as non-White they may have the same low expectations they have for other minority students.

Teachers' and peers' perceptions of multiracial individuals' racial identity can play a major role in not only their racial identity formation but also on their classroom experiences. As stated earlier, when teachers perceive a student as belonging to one group or another, they may be placing the student in a category with which she or he does not self-identify. Good, Sanchez and Chavez (2013) studied Black/White multiracial individuals and the implications of their White ancestry for affirmative action. The findings of the study indicated that individuals with a

greater amount of White ancestry are perceived as experiencing less discrimination than people with less White ancestry. They are also seen as less likely to be categorized as minority as compared to people with less White ancestry. These perceptions were assumptions placed on these individuals based upon their perceived race. In actuality multiracial individuals may be could be experiencing more discrimination than others may acknowledge. For example, they may have negative experiences in the classroom based on stereotypes, such as stereotype threat.

Claude Steele (2003) coined the term "stereotype threat" which refers to how low expectations of students' academic achievement can impact their actual achievement. The definition of stereotype threat is, "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (Steele, 2003, p.111). For example, if a Black student is taking a test and worried about not doing well and confirming that stereotype, that worry can impact their performance on the test. If multiracial individuals choose to identify with their minority heritage or are perceived as belonging to a minority race, they may also experience stereotype threat, based on the negative views of that minority group. In choosing a minority identity, negative academic achievement could follow, which could also explain why multiracial individuals who are more affluent and have higher levels of education want identity choices so they can avoid negative stereotypes.

Situational Identity for Multiracial Individuals in the College Experiences

When it comes to racial identity for multiracial individuals, many people want to restrict them to one consistent identity. However, studies have shown that racial identity can be situational (Khanna, 2012). Race for multiracial individuals is often contextual and dependent upon time and space (Khanna, 2012). For example, a multiracial person may identify as Black within their families and as multiracial in a predominantly White university. Individuals may be

more comfortable with different identities in different situations depending on the context. This is the reason I will to explore the differences or similarities in participants' racial identities in different contexts, including their hometowns and in a college setting.

Harper (2011), discusses a recent study of 1,101 students multiracial students, the findings "revealed that the majority (66 percent) marked only one race to describe themselves when they entered college, whereas a majority (56 percent) marked two or more races to describe their background during their senior year" in high school (p.105). The findings show that at least 10% of participants shifted their racial identity between their senior year in high school and their first year in college. There are many questions that can be raised from the conclusions of the study when trying to understand the dynamics of racial identity for multiracial individuals. The shifting racial categories and changing contexts, especially in the transition from high school to college, suggest that this may be an important stage of identity development.

In another study conducted with three multiracial groups (White/Black, White/Indian, White/Asian), about racial identity at home, school, in the presence of parents/caregivers and when alone, the participants self-selected a different racial identity each time they were asked, based on where they were and who was in their presence. Some of the identities were single race and other times the participants identified with as multiracial. According to Harris (2002), "Unlike age, sex, and socioeconomic status, our models suggest that context affects racial identification for all three multiracial groups" (p.623). This shows that there are many different people and contexts that can influence a multiracial person's racial identity.

Little research has been conducted on the racial identities of multiracial individuals in the context of higher education (Renn, 2000). However, studies that exist suggest that individulas

may change their identities due to a new context and new peers in higher education. Renn (2000), states that on campus,

> "peer culture regulates group membership and where race is considered a 'master status, an identity that overrides all others in others' judgment of the self'…a sense of racial identity is therefore part of understanding oneself on campus and in society as a whole" (p.401).

In a study conducted with multiracial college students, some students felt that in the academic settings, socially comfortable spaces and the impact of peer culture were the main factors in their identity development on campus which then translated into the classroom and impacted their educational experiences. For example, students who felt socially comfortable on campus, tended to feel more comfortable in the classroom. Many study participants identified with more than one race when there many multiracial people on campus. In other situations where there were many single race people, they would often choose the racial identity that made them feel the most comfortable which was also single-raced in most cases (Renn, 2000). For multiracial students who make choices about how they want to identify racially in different situations, it is important to note what factors are salient to these decisions and why they may choose to change their racial identity based on the environment in which they are immersed.

Discussion

Much of the research on race, racial identity and the impact on educational experiences focuses on the single raced individuals (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). While the research on multiracial people is increasing, in general, more is needed to understand how these various situations, contexts, and factors help to shape racial identity and its impact on individuals' lives and educational careers. Due to the drastic changes that can characterize the transition from high

school to college, looking at racial identity, racial identification and racial categorization during this transitional period is extremely important in order to understand how racial identity can impact an individual's educational experiences.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question: *How has racial identity impacted the educational experiences of multiracial, college undergraduates, particularly in their transition from high school to college*?

Methodology

Understanding the educational experiences of multiracial undergraduates is essential to future research and classroom practice because it will allow researchers and practitioners to understand the struggles and successes that multiracial students experience in their educational careers. Presently, there is little research on this topic, especially from the perspectives of these students. For that reason, this study seeks to learn about participants' racial identity formation and its impact on their educational experiences, particularly in their transition into college, using first person narratives. In this study I used interview based qualitative methodology because I wanted to understand how participants made meaning of their experiences, and interviews allowed me to focus on the participants narratives (Creswell, 2013) and to use their lived experiences to answer the research question.

Research Site

All four participants attended a nationally accredited, public Mid-Atlantic institution that was ranked in the top 30 public colleges by *U.S. News and World Report*. This 4-year school, which I am calling **"Flagship University,"** had a Fall 2014 undergraduate enrollment of over 26,000 and a total student enrollment of roughly 37,000. According to *Forbes*, the racial makeup of the school currently was as follows; 55% White, 15% Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific

Islander, 12% Black or African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% two or more races. As with the census data, it is likely that the single-race categories at Flagship University contained some individuals who were mixed race (Deal, 2010).

Participant Criteria and Recruitment

Study participants had to meet four criteria. First, they had to be a freshman or sophomore currently enrolled in an institution of higher education. Second, they had to have begun college directly after graduating from high school, with no years off in between. This population was chosen for the study because they have most recently experienced the transition into college and can speak directly to this experience. Third, each of the participants had to have one parent who is White and one parent who is non-White. The racial composition of the students was chosen because I wanted to understand how people who have one parent from the "dominant" race in the United States and one parent in a "minority" race navigate their racial identity development. Lastly, participants had to be at least 18 years old.

I utilized a purposeful sampling technique by seeking out multicultural organizations to help identify individuals who are multiracial attending Flagship University. I emailed these organizations asking for volunteers to participate in my study (See participant recruitment email in Appendix B). I also made announcements in some classrooms to seek out students and to ask students to refer other potential participants to me by word of mouth. I also attempted to recruit participants through other avenues such as a religious organization and personal contacts outside of Flagship University. However, these strategies did not yield any participants. The desired outcome of the interviewee recruitment process was that the participants were a group of participants with different skin tones and possibly different chosen racial identities based on their various experiences. I was interested in this diversity because I wanted to see if students with

different appearances and backgrounds formed their identities in different ways. The study participants were emailed both the consent form and interview questions so they could review it prior to the day of the interview.

Introduction to Participants

Study participants include four, college freshman and sophomore who racial identified as bi-racial or multi-racial and were enrolled in "Flagship University." The first participant, "Jane" was an 18-year-old first year undecided major at Flagship University. She self-identified as multiracial. Her mother is Hispanic and Chinese and her father is White. She was born on the West Coast and at the age of two moved to a suburb in the eastern part of the United States where she lived with both of her parents before coming to Flagship University for her undergraduate degree.

The second participant, "Josh," was a 19-year-old second year undecided business major at Flagship University. He self-identified as multiracial. His mother is White and his father is Black. He lived in a suburb on the East Coast with his mother and father and then moved houses but remained in the same area with only his mother before coming to Flagship University for his undergraduate degree.

The third participant, "Mike," was an 18-year-old first year undecided major, leaning toward business management. He self-identified as multiracial. His mother is White and his father is Black. He lived in a state adjacent to the one in which Flagship University is located with his mom and dad together until the age of two when his father moved out. He primarily lived with his mother after that and visited his father on weekends. He then came to Flagship University for his undergraduate degree.

The fourth participant, "Sasha," was a 19 year old second year hearing and speech major at Flagship University. She self-identified as Black. Her mother is Black and her father is White. She lived in an urban community about 30 miles from where Flagship University was located with her mother, father, and two older brothers for her entire life before coming to Flagship University for her undergraduate degree.

Data Collection

I conducted face-to-face interviews on the Flagship University campus (three interviews in classrooms, one interview in the dining hall), using questions to encourage conversation with participants. The average interview length was approximately 45 minutes. Participants were asked a series of twenty-two open-ended questions, all pertaining to their racial background and their educational experiences. Interview questions included: "How do you identify yourself racially?", "How do you think people perceive you racially?", and "Do you think your racial identity has impacted your education throughout the years? Can you describe a situation where your racial identity was apparent in the classroom?" (See Appendix C for full list of interview questions). Participants were told that the interviews were informal, and they could use any words or terminologies needed to express themselves in a manner that made them feel most comfortable. Interviewees were encouraged to ask clarifying questions.

The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized. All participants were given a consent form that was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix A). The participants read, signed, and returned the forms to the researcher before the beginning of the study. Next, the participants were given a copy of the consent form to keep for their records.

Each interview was audio recorded (with permission from participants), and then transcribed by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to both the audio recordings and interview transcripts, and all files were saved on the researcher's computer and were password protected. The researcher also typed notes during each interview on a laptop, and saved them in the password protected computer as well. Participants self-selected their own pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

After collecting all of the data from the four interviews, I transcribed each interview using selective transcription. The interviews were transcribed almost in their entirety due to the fact that most of the information the participants provided was relevant to the research question. Once I had the transcripts for each interview, I read them several times, identifying recurring words or phrases that were common among the participants. As guided by these words and phrases, I looked for patterns of similarity and difference in participants' experiences which emerged from my conversations with them. Based on these patterns I organized the data according to themes.   Through this process I began to find connections between the participants' experiences. There were three central themes that emerged from the interviews. The first theme had to do with the many different factors that impacted participant's racial identity development throughout the years. The second theme is related to how the perceived race of the participants impacted their educational and social experiences. Finally, the last theme in which the participants had major commonalities was related to the smooth transition they experienced from high school to college. Each of these themes will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Study Limitations

Due to the nature of the study, there were a few limitations. One is that the sample size is very small. Generalizations are not possible because there are not enough participants to apply the research findings to broader populations (Creswell, 2013). Although there were only four participants, I was able to gain in-depth information on their racial identity development processes and how those processes impacted their educational experiences, which I would not have been able to gain had I used quantitative methodology.

Another limitation is the variation in how participants identified, racially, and in the racial groups with which they identified themselves and their parents. I was interested in the experiences of individuals across different racial designations and identities. I wanted to make sure there were different phenotypes and really try to gain some insight into the various lived experiences of multiracial students in general, not just one specific racial combination. However, given this variation among the participants, this study cannot make any conclusions about students with particular racial backgrounds or identities.

In the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their educational experiences from elementary school all the way through their current undergraduate education. It is possible that their recollection of their processes of education and racial identity development could have lost accuracy or detail over time. Also, participants were asked to discuss how they were racially identified by others, and there is no way of knowing for certain how others' identified them in this regard.

Lastly, it is important that I note my own biases which may have impacted the research process. It was difficult for me to let go of my own assumptions about the participants because the notion that race is based up on physical features is so deeply engrained in my own experiences. I also believe I had to be cognizant of my own experiences as the researcher. I do

believe I shared many of the same experiences as the participants and due to the nature of the

interviews as a conversational; I attempted not sway their interview responses in any way.

CHAPTER 4

Study Findings

There were three prominent findings based on the themes that emerged from the interviews. These findings were: 1) participants' racial identities were shaped by their life experiences, 2) how participants were perceived, racially, by others (especially teachers and peers) had more of an impact on their educational experiences than how they racially self-identified, and 3) participants felt that being exposed to people from many different cultures for most of their lives facilitated a smooth transition from high school to college. These three findings will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Racial identity as shaped by life experiences

The first finding is related to the factors that shaped participants' processes of racial identity development. These factors included the demographics of the neighborhoods in which they grew up and the schools they attended, who they lived with while growing up and if that changed throughout the years, and extra-curricular activities in which they participated. Each of the participants in the study identified differently, for different reasons, which were related to their everyday experiences.

As discussed in the literature review, there are many factors that shape how and why multiracial individuals identify in particular ways. For the participants, one such factor was their family and household situation. Specifically, who participants lived with while they were growing up played a major role in their racial identity.

Three of the participants self-identified as multiracial or biracial. When asked how he identified racially, Mike, who had one Black and one White parent, said, **"I think that I'm both.**

I think that's important. I'm not just one, but if I had to check and there is no 'other' then I would just say Black." This participant made it clear that he identified with both races, but knows that there is a possibility still that he might be forced to identify with only one race in certain circumstances. Multiracial people have always existed, but only recently have they been able to choose more than one race on official forms. In this specific situation, how Mike identifies racially is shaped by the option to choose more than one race on official forms.

One factor that stood out as a major influence on participant's racial identities was the people they lived with while they were growing up. Only one participant, Sasha identified as Black when asked about her racial identity. Growing up she lived with her Black mother, White father, and two older brothers. Sasha expressed that she chose to identify as Black because she was closer to her mother than her father. She said that her older brothers chose a different racial identity which demonstrates that racial make-up alone does not determine how a multiracial individual will identify her/himself. Jane also lived with both of her parents growing up. Her father was White and her mother was Hispanic. Although she had the same experience to Sasha, living in a household with both of her parents, because she was exposed to the cultures of both of her parents, she identified as multiracial rather than identifying with one race.

Mike and Josh on the other hand, lived with only one parent for the majority of their childhoods. Mike lived with his White mother but often spent time with his Black father and his father's family. He expressed that when he would go to his father's house, he would often feel more like he was Black because he was surrounded by that culture and community of people. When he was with his White mother and her side of the family, Mike discussed how different things were and how his mannerisms had to change in order to fit in with both sides of his family.

Josh, who grew up living with his White mother and did not spend much time with his father's side of the family, expressed,

Josh: I think if I would have spent more time with my dad and his family, then, well I might feel more Black than White, but because I grew up with just my mom, but obviously am not White, it makes more sense for me to just tell people that I am multiracial.

Although each of the participants had different individuals living in their households when they were growing up, it is clear that for all of them, this did impact their racial identity formation in some way. Whether it impacted their mannerisms, their ability to code-switch, or simply which race they were more comfortable around, each of the participants demonstrated how family relationships and living arrangements impacts the racial identity development process.

The process of forming a racial identity starts at a very early age. All of the participants said that they became aware of their racial identities in elementary school. While all of them grew up in fairly diverse neighborhoods, they reported that the schools they attended were primarily White. They said that, often times, others looked to them represent all minorities. Sasha said that she struggled with being the only minority in her classes. At a very early age, she had an experience with her teacher that pertained to her perceived race. Sasha expressed,

Sasha: When I was in…umm…I don't know what grade, but I was very young, we were taking one of those tests where you had to fill out all of your information on the front page. So the teacher was coming around helping us and before she said anything to me or asked any questions, she filled in "Black" for my race. Even though I identify as Black now, I can remember just feeling confused by what she had done.

Sasha then expressed that in her later years of schooling, students and teachers in her classes would look to her when anything was said about Black people, as if she knew the answers because she was half Black. She stated, "...maybe because there were just so few of us [Black students], the teachers and other students assumed we could speak for the entire race of people." Because she was singled out for being "Black," this could have influenced her to identify as Black rather than multiracial.

Another factor that impacted the participants' racial identity formation was the extra-curricular activities in which they were involved. According to the literature, the surrounding environment and peers, has an impact on how a multiracial student will choose to identify, racially. In my interview with Jane, she expressed numerous times how she would strive to make sure she was involved in diverse activities connected to her heritage as well as educating herself about other cultures. Jane said,

> Jane: When I was in high school, I was involved in lots of different organizations. From student government, to the Hispanic Choir at my school, and I even joined an Asian sport league with one of my friends. I've always wanted to be surrounded by people of different races, especially different from what I am.

Jane's identity as a multiracial individual was impacted by the cultures and different races of people with whom she interacted in her schooling. These experiences may have influenced her to choose a multiracial identity rather than a single-raced identity.

Josh had been involved in sports for his whole life. He played lacrosse and ran track & field. In these activities, he discussed how he met people of all different races and was easily able to create friendships with them because of his multiracial identity. He did report that sometimes he would get into conversations with his Black friends and they would often say

things like, "Are you going to hang out with your White friends now?" He laughed it off as a joke, but knew that there was obviously some tension there, and he often felt like he had to choose between his Black friends and his White friends. However, he expressed that because he had an equal number of both Black and White friends, he was able to easily, "be in the middle," and embrace his identity as a multiracial individual. Mike had similar experiences as Josh in his extracurricular activities as will be discussed in more detail later. It's important to note that both Josh and Mike describe their friendship groups as racially segregated. These are the kind of conditions that give rise to situational identities.

In terms of Sasha's extra-curricular activities, she expressed that she participated in cheerleading from a very early age. This activity was primarily in predominantly White schools. She said,

> Sasha: In any activity I would do, I always gravitated towards the other Black kids. Even in situations where they didn't like me or accept me because of my lighter complexion, I still felt like I would fit in more with that crowd.

Although this does not speak directly to how she formed her racial identity, it does allow us to see how Sasha was able to maintain her Black identity in a majority White school and forge relationships with people with whom she felt most comfortable.

No two participants had the same life experiences. They grew up with different people living in their households, they lived in different neighborhoods, attended different schools, and had different peer interactions. Because of these differences, there is not one specific factor or experience that could predict how they would choose to racially identify. Study findings show that for the participants, racial identity development was a complex and multifaceted process that

began at a very early age and could potentially change based on situations, demographics, and the culture in they were immersed.

The impact of perceived race vs. self-selected racial identity on educational experience

The second finding pertains to perceived race vs. a self-selected racial identity. As multiracial individuals go through racial identity development processes, they make decisions about what race or races with which they will identify and in which situations. In many cases, perceived race can have just as big of an impact as the self-selected racial identity. For example, Black and White, multiracial student who self-identifies as White, may still be but they are perceived as Black or "other," because of whatever physical features. As the literature stated, the social construction of race, as determined by phenotype is so deeply engrained in society, it is difficult for many people to look past the physical features and accept the self-selected racial identity that a multiracial person chooses. As discussed earlier, perceived race can cause students to be placed into categories with which they do not identify and, in turn, have negative effects. For example, a multiracial student who identifies as Black may face some of the same struggles as the other Black students in the class based on stereotyping by teachers.

All four of the participants had some similarities in terms of their physical features. They were all fair skinned and had brown hair, some lighter than others. However, they each identified differently overall and in particular situations. While the participants may have self-identified as Black or multiracial, each of them felt that their perceived race was White because of the experiences they had, especially in school. For example, when asked about his perceived race among his peers, Josh said,

> Josh: All the time, it started in elementary school, people would be like…more
>
> like Black people would be saying, you're not Black. White people didn't say

anything, because I'm lighter as well. The Black students noticed that I didn't fit

into their group, but the White students didn't say anything.

Josh expressed that he had many friends in different racial categories, but he felt like he was accepted into the White community because his skin was light. He felt he was "less-threatening" than darker skinned Black people, to them, which is why he was able to forge those relationships so easily. Because his peers perceived his racial identity as White, this allowed Josh to more easily identify with that part of his racial heritage and to choose multiracial rather Black as his racial identity.

Sasha discussed how her teachers and peers would perceive her in relation to her brother who was much darker skinned than her. She said,

Sasha: people at school didn't think my brother and I were related because I am so light skinned and he is so much darker than me. They didn't think we had the same parents and it used to make me upset because why would people think that all biracial people are supposed to be the same…have the same complexion, we don't.

In Sasha's case, her perceived race had a lot to do with the comparison of her to her much darker skinned brother.

The impact of perceived race was evident in an anecdote "Jane" shared with me. She said that she had a Black teacher who would praise the answers that Black or other minority students gave. Jane said,

Jane: When I would raise my hand to answer a question in class with the correct answer, she [the teacher] would just brush it off or move forward without saying anything and let someone else, most of the time someone from the minority answer after me. Because she thought I was White, she wouldn't take my answers seriously or something, or she just

didn't care to hear from anyone else but the Black kids in the class. She always talked

about how much she loved her Black racial identity and how she wanted to see all of the

minority kids succeed in class. Like…she never really said anything bad about the White

students, but she really just focused on the Black students and the other minority students

in the class…almost like the White students didn't matter as much, maybe because she

thought we didn't need any extra push to succeed or whatever.

Although this is the only example from the four participants of discrimination in the classroom

based on race, this suggests how a racial identity can impact educational experience in a negative

way, even with a student who is perceived as White.

How teachers and peers perceive multiracial students has a large impact on their

experiences. Jane expressed that, "They usually assume I'm White, but they often tell me that

they can tell I'm 'something' else but they can't tell what I am." Another participant, Sasha, said

that, "…my teachers often think I am White or something ambiguous. It has allowed me to kind

of slip through the cracks and not really be placed in any racial category." Josh also stated that

his peers saw him as White which he felt made him more approachable.

Mike, however, discussed that even though teachers and peers perceived him as White in

school, because of his mannerisms and his ability to code-switch, his Black peers outside of

school considered him Black. This speaks to the fact that perception of race is based on factors

other than simply the color of one's skin. It also highlights the notion of situational identity.

Mike expressed,

Mike: I talk different from White people and everyone can tell. I mean…people tell me

that I sound Black. When I'm at school or in a place where I need to put on my "White"

voice, [laughs] I do, but when I'm hanging out with my friends outside of school or with

my dad's family, I can really be me and just act how I want. I don't have to put on for

them, which is why they knew I was Black or at least that I had some Black in me before

I even told anyone I was bi-racial.

In different situations, Mike acts and speaks in different ways. This shows that he is embracing

more of his Black identity in situations where he feels it is more appropriate, and in school with

his teachers and White peers, he code-switched in order to appeal to them or remain more

racially neutral. Although he did not adopt a new racial identity or change how he self-identified

racially, he still makes changes to his mannerisms in order to be more comfortable in different

circumstances.

Data showed that participants not only had a self-selected racial identity but they were

perceived by teachers and peers in racialized ways that were different from their own self-

identities. Whether seen as White or 'other,' this allowed participants to be slightly ambiguous

and navigate certain situations differently than a person seen as a part of the minority. As a

result, they were not placed into categories with other minorities which may have led to

academic struggles, given the research on the educational experiences of minority students. In

social situations at school, participants were perceived by peers as White, which could have

helped them to forge relationships as well as create a more comfortable situations given that all

of them attended majority White schools. Furthermore, participants felt they were able to

succeed in most classroom situations in part because of the perception that they were White or

unidentifiable.

The transition from high school to college and prior experiences of diversity

The final finding is related to participant's transitions from high school to college.

Participants believed that this transition was easier for multiracial students who came from

diverse backgrounds, neighborhoods, or schools. When they were exposed to diversity from an early age, it was easier to find their place in a bigger more diverse environment and to keep their self-selected racial identity without any confusion about who they were. Because Flagship University is a racially and ethnically diverse institution, these participants expressed feelings of joy when coming to such a diverse place because most of them could carry with them their multiracial identities and feel comfortable doing so.

When asked about their friendships in and out of school, all of the participants made it clear that they had friends of every race. Josh and Mike both said they had a very diverse group of friends because of the extra-curricular activities in which they were involved throughout their K-12 and college experiences, such as sports and student government. They felt that this made the transition into college easy because they were able to connect with students of different races based on a common interest. Josh expressed how he did not feel pressured to seek out friendships because he already had a venue through which to forge relationships.

Jane came into Flagship University wanting to get involved in different cultural organizations. She had been involved in some of these organizations in high school and wanted to continue to learn about different races of people. Jane said,

> Jane: When I first came here I joined an intermural sports team with one of my Asian American friends. There are so many other activities and things I want to get involved with, because there are so many different organizations on campus, I just haven't chosen what exactly I want to do yet. But I have made friends in all of my classes from different backgrounds. It's nice to learn new things about different cultures directly from people who are in them.

Jane, having already interacted with a diverse group of peers through her activities in her K-12 schooling years, she wanted to do the same at Flagship University. She was not afraid to join clubs, meet new people and forge relationships with individuals that were not like her. She expressed that she tried not to look for similarities in physical features when seeking friends because she might miss out on an opportunity for a lifelong relationship.

Although none of the participants had a difficult time in their transition from high school to college, Josh and Jane most easily immersed themselves in the diversity of Flagship University because of the diverse groups of friends and experiences they had in K-12. Depending on an individuals' surroundings, their groups of friends, their teachers, and where they grew up, the transition from high school to college can be a culture shock. Although Mike had a smooth transition from high school to college, because he grew up in a different state, when he goes back to his hometown, he did express that he may act differently or embraces his Black identity more with his Black friends and his father's side of the family. Again, speaking about his situational identity, Mike said,

> Mike: I feel like it was easy for me to make friends here at [Flagship] because I got involved in extra-curriculars right away. Most of the organizations I am in and even my classes are really diverse, like pretty much every different race, you can see them there. But…like, so when I go home on breaks and stuff to visit my family and friends, I feel like I change up and possibly act more Black or really I just feel more comfortable "being Black" outside of school too.

It was clear that Mike could easily fit into different racial groupings and I did see that as he got more comfortable in the interview. I did see that as he became less cognizant of speaking Standard English, let his guard down, and used more slang which Webster defines as a type of

language that consists of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal (Webster, 2015). For him, situational identity was dictated by changing environments.

For multiracial students, changes in their racial self-identification during the transition from high school to college could be indicative of such a cultural shock. Three of the four participants kept the same racial identity as they had in high school, but one student did change her racial identity or at least what she told others about how she identified.

Due to the racial diversity at Flagship University, Sasha stated that, upon arriving at the university, she positioned herself differently, racially. She stated,

> Sasha: When I was growing up, I identified as Black because I was closer to my
>
> mom, who is Black, than my dad, who is White. Now that I am here [at Flagship]
>
> I tell people that I am mixed or biracial because I feel like a lot more people will
>
> get it or they can relate.

Sasha indicated that she had met other multiracial students at Flagship; she had never really met any other multiracial people in her early schooling. Being exposed to a more diverse population, she could identify with people who were of the same racial makeup as her. Instead of telling people she was Black, Sasha chose to express that she was multiracial at Flagship University. Because Sasha grew up in all White schools and was expected to be the minority voice, she connected more with her Black racial identity in that context. However, when coming to a more diverse community, it is evident that she had a connection to her multiracial identity as well and wanted to share that with her peers. She also expressed that Flagship University was the first school in which teachers were able to "know" her as a multiracial person without her having to tell them that she was multiracial. This also influenced her decision to change her racial identity from Black to multiracial in this context.

Participants felt that coming to a larger, more diverse environment allowed them to embrace their multiracial identities more fully than in their K-12 schools. They saw the transition into college as easy when coming from a diverse context that was consistent with Flagship University. Even though the participants were exposed to diversity throughout their lives, they people they encountered were still segregated by race. Upon coming to Flagship, they were able to experience diversity in a more integrated way, which allowed them to more fully accept their multiracial identities because of the intermingling of racial groups, which was unlike their previous experiences. For Mike there was a change in mannerisms based on the environment he was in, either at Flagship or back at home for breaks, and for Sasha there was a clear change in her self-selected racial identity in the transition from high school to college.

Summary

Through the interviews I was able to gain information on the factors that influenced the participants' racial identity development, their teachers and peers perceptions of their race and how that impacted their educational experiences socially and academically. Data also helped me to understand their racial identity development in the transition from high school to college. The participants expressed many commonalities in the factors that shaped in their racial identity development. Factors included who lived in the participants' households while they were growing up, which extra-curricular activities they were involved in, and the racial demographics of the K-12 schools they attended. For the participants, perceived racial identity had more of an impact on their educational experience than their actual self-selected racial identities. Although the participants identifying as multiracial or Black, many of their teachers and peers still perceived them as White or racially ambiguous because of their skin color and other physical features. They felt that this allowed them to forge relationships with other students from a

variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. As it relates to the transition from high school to college, all of the participants reported being able to easily transition into the culture and environment at Flagship University. While three of the participants retained the same racial identity in high school and college, Sasha shifted from identifying as Black to multiracial because of the diverse surroundings at Flagship made her feel comfortable with her multiracial identity.

Although I was surprised at how different the participants' experiences were from my own personal schooling experiences, the information I collected is very informative about the multiracial population. With the ambiguity of phenotype, the participants were able to move through their education with no real problems related to their racial identities. However, their racial identity didn't seem to have any positive effects academically. Additionally, their perceived race gave them the ability to navigate different racial groups easily in a social setting.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In order to better understand how race and racial identity impacts individuals' schooling experiences, researchers must do more to incorporate the voices of multiracial students into discussions of this issue. As there are so many racial and ethnic backgrounds among multiracial individuals, making broad conclusions may be very difficult. This study highlighted some important issues that arose when participants shared how their racial identity impacted their educational experiences throughout their academic careers. There were three general findings that emerged from the interviews: racial identity is shaped by different life experiences, perceived race showed more of an impact on educational experiences than the participants' self-selected racial identities and the transition from high school to college, was impacted with on prior experiences with diversity. This study provided some important insights into how the four multiracial participants experienced their education as a result of their racial identities.

As connected to the first finding, study participants explained their racial identity development processes. They discussed factors that led them to the racial identity they had at the time of the study. Although most of the participants reported having consistent racial identity over time, there was one, Sasha, who made a change later in life. This shows what a complex process racial identity formation can be for multiracial individuals.

Each participant made it clear that at least one factor stood out as influencing them about their racial identity decision. Sasha racial identified as Black because she was close with her mother who is Black. Jane identified as multiracial in large part because she had always been immersed in different cultures and has always seen herself as multiracial. Josh identified as multiracial and not Black because he was more connected to his mother and his mother's family than his father and his father's family (As the research points out it's not really an option for

Black/White multiracial people to identify as White). Josh had friends of all races and felt that he could easily navigate between Black and White friendship groups. Mike identified as multiracial because he was close with both sides of his family and connected to his Black side, but really thought that being biracial was important.

The second major finding, perceived race impacts education more than a self-selected racial identity, explored the participants teachers' and peers' racialized perceptions of their race. Participants shared anecdotes of their teachers assuming they were White and White friends feeling less threatened by them and more accepting of them because of their skin color. Even though Josh had friends of many races, his Black and White friends in particular, were segregated. He had to navigate between his Black and White friendship groups in order to maintain his connection to both of them at the same time. He was not able to be involved with both groups at the same time. Although most of the participants did not express feelings of discomfort from this perceived identity, they did feel as though they were simply ambiguous and went through their academic careers without being racially categorized and falling victim to racial stereotypes, because they were not fully placed into any predetermined racial category. Not being placed into a single racial category was an advantage for the participants because they did not experience negative racial stereotypes associated with a particular racial category. The participants seemed to capitalize on their White privilege because that was their perceived race. Due to the fact that they were not subjects to negative stereotypes associated with their self-selected racial identities and they were able to live as White people, their perceived race did not appear to have any negative impact on them. They accepted being categorized as White or racially ambiguous because it allowed them to have the privileges of a White person and still navigate their social lives as a multiracial person.

In terms of the last finding involving the transition from high school to college, the participants offered their feelings of discomfort or joy when coming into an environment that was very different than most of their prior schools. The wealth of diversity at Flagship allowed Sasha to embrace her multiracial identity. How participants experience this transition demonstrates how a diverse culture can help to shape the racial identity of multiracial students and allow them to feel comfortable embracing all of their racial heritage. For teachers and administrators, creating such a culture should be the goal throughout a multiracial students' entire academic career.

Although there was some great information given by the participants, I could not help but notice the differences between their experiences and my own. The perception of racial identification is quite important when discussing educational experiences. I assumed that participants' self-selected racial identities would be central to their schooling experiences, but they did not see it this way. In my own experiences, I did struggle in the classroom because of my perceived race as well as my self-selected racial identity. I was put into a category with my Black counterparts because my skin color is not light enough for me to pass as White. For these participants, there were not really any struggles, or very few because of their perceived racial identification. Only one expressed a struggle in the classroom because of her perceived race as White. As the literature states, if a student identifies as multiracial or as being part of the minority, they are likely to be exposed to the same struggles that other minority students face in the classroom (Sanchez, 2010). This was not the case with my participants. Because their perceived race was more important in the classroom, even though their self-selected racial identities would designate them as minorities, none of them were exposed to the academic or social hardships associated with being Black or some other minority.

Returning back to Cross' theory of racial identity formation, these participants did not move through the five stages. Most of them have never got to the second stage where they experienced the negative impact of being categorized as part of a minority group (Cross, 1991). Because of the participants' perceived race as White, it appears that they did not go through the same process of racial identity formation as Blacks or other minorities, but it is important to note that they did not go through the same process as Whites either (Helms, 1993). For multiracial individuals these stages might not work; they may experience processes of racial identity formation that are different from those experienced by single-raced individuals.

This study strongly suggests the need for more researchers to examine this growing population, to understand how and why multiracial individuals develop their racial identities in ways that are both similar to and different from other minority groups. Also teachers and administrators should increase their awareness of multiracial students' everyday classroom experiences in order to facilitate positive racial identity development for all of their students.

Implications

The literature review and study demonstrate the importance of understanding multiracial identity development and how it can identity impacts one's educational experiences, especially in the transition from high school into college. Situational identity and the context of higher education are areas of research that need further attention. Sasha, switching her identity from Black at home to multiracial at Flagship is one example of why further research is needed to fully comprehend the process of identity formation for a multiracial individual and the impact situational identity has on this process. Another example is how Mike code-switched and changed his mannerisms around his Black friends and family at home and in a diverse academic environment. Both of these examples allow us to see how complex racial identity really is for

multiracial individuals. According to Carter and Goodwin (1994), in order for educators and administrators to create a safe space in which multiracial students can engage in processes of identity development and identify with whichever group they choose, "It becomes imperative that educators acquire ways to cope with race as a social, educational, and personal construct" (p.292). This is the only way multiracial students will be able to truly engage in the racial identity process within the classroom setting, which is a pivotal part of life for all individuals.

K-12 and post-secondary educators need to make sure they are creating an environment that is inviting for students to explore their racial identities and that they accept and honor of any choice that the students make. They shouldn't impose their own beliefs of racial identification on students and allow students to identify as they want to. Sasha experienced this when her teacher chose to mark Black as her race based on her own beliefs without allowing Sasha to select her own racial identity which led to confusion. Educators being supportive of this racial identity process will enable multiracial individuals to create an identity that they are proud of. They will be able to perform well academically without any feelings of discomfort or any negative stereotypes. On the college/university level, student affairs and multicultural affairs should attend to this issue. Making sure that college students have activities, organizations, and safe spaces regardless of race or ethnicity is vital in creating a positive campus climate and in attracting students of all races and backgrounds. Universities that are diverse will attract a more diverse group of incoming students. It should be a goal of all colleges and universities to continue to diversify their admissions pool and racially integrate students through clubs, classes, and other avenues so that all students feel comfortable on campus with their racial identities. It is my sincere hope that the findings of this small qualitative study will be considered by other researchers as well as teachers and administrators so that multiracial students are in a

comfortable environment in which they can explore their racial identities and are respected for

the choices that they make.

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APPENDIX A - IRB CONSENT FORM

Project Title	The Impact of Racial Identity on the Educational Experiences of Multiracial, College Undergraduates
Purpose of the Study	The purpose of this study is to explore how racial identity has shaped the educational experiences of undergraduates, particularly their transition to college. Coming from high school into college, often a completely different culture can be life changing for student. I am conducting a study that will focus on this transition and would like to document the experiences of multiracial individuals. Specifically, my research question is, "How has racial identity shaped the educational experiences of multiracial undergraduate students, particularly in their transition from high school to college?" I would like to look at individuals like you, who can speak on the educational experiences they have had over the years. I am asking you to participate in the study because you have one parent who you identify as White and one parent who you identify as another race/ethnicity, and you are a freshman or sophomore currently enrolled in an institution of higher education who came directly from high school to college with no years off in between.

Procedures	You will be asked to participate in one individual interview, which I plan to audio record. We will work together to identify where the interview will be conducted. Every effort will be made to ensure that the location of the interview is accessible and not hard to get to.
	The interview will last about 60 minutes. In the interviews, I will ask you about your educational experiences in your transition from high school to college. I am interested in how your racial identity may have changed and how this may have impacted your educational experiences.
	Interview topics will include: 1.Your prior school experiences, 2.You identification of your racial identity, 3.Your current school experiences, 4.Your family, hometown and extracurricular activity demographics, 5.Any challenges or success that were faced in your educational experiences as a result of your racial identity
	You will be audio recorded throughout the entirety of the interview and the recordings will be transcribed. You may review a copy of the interview questions beforehand. I will not start the interview until I have answered all of your questions and have your permission to proceed.

Potential Risks and Discomforts	There may be some risks from participating You may have feelings of discomfort, anxiety, or sadness in discussing difficult events in the interview. You may also feel uncomfortable with that knowledge that your interview is being recorded. You can refrain from answering any question that you feel uncomfortable discussing. You will also have the opportunity to review all of your interview transcripts and to modify any responses. Finally, as stated earlier, you will be able to ask questions throughout the study and withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from you will be destroyed and not used in the study. Because you will be audio recorded this project presents some risk. To protect your identity, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (a fictitious name). I will maintain records to match your identity for accuracy. You will also be reminded that your participation is voluntary and that you can decline to answer specific questions or to end your participation at any time without penalty in this research study.
Potential Benefits	Although this research was not explicitly designed to benefit you, it does have one potential benefit. Scholars note the restorative power in allowing marginalized groups to tell their own stories. Thus, you may benefit from the opportunity to share your stories which can acknowledge and affirm your expertise and experiences as a multiracial college student. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the educational experiences of multiracial individuals in their transition from high school to college.

Confidentiality	All of the data that is collected in the study will be stored in a secure office and on a password protected computer. To protect your confidentiality, you will be asked to select a pseudonym (a fictitious name). Therefore, names will not be included in the interview data collected. If an article is written about this research project, pseudonyms will be used when referring to any study participants and participants' identities will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Audio recordings of your interviews will be transcribed (typed up) into electronic text documents. These documents will be stored on a password protected computer files and destroyed no later than ten years after the initial recording dates. Your name will not be disclosed during any of the audio or video recordings. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	Participants will be asked to agree to participate and if participants agree they will be given a $10.00 gift card as a token of appreciation from the principal investigator at the conclusion of their interview. ☐ Check here if you expect to earn $100 or more as a research participant in UMCP studies in this calendar year. You must provide your name, address and SSN to receive compensation. ☐ Check here if you do not expect to earn $100 or more as a research participant in UMCP studies in this calendar year. Your name, address, and SSN will not be collected to receive compensation.

Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you are a student at the University of Maryland, your grades or standing at the university will not be positively or negatively affected by your decision to participate or not to participate in this research project. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: **Corenne Harris** *734-883-8267* *Corenne.harris@yahoo.com*
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount Hall** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.

Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

APPENDIX B - RECRUTIMENT EMAIL

Recruitment email

Subject Line	Multiracial Educational Experiences Study
Greeting	Dear Students,
Introduction	My name is Corenne Harris and I am a graduate student here at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am currently working on my master's thesis in the Minority and Urban education program and became very interested in how racial identity impacts educational experiences for multiracial individuals. I am conducting a study that will focus on how racial identity has shaped the educational experiences of undergraduates, particularly in their transition to college. I am looking for students who meet the following criteria to participate in the study: •You are a college freshman or sophomore •You entered college within a year of graduating from high school •You have one parent whom you identify racially as white •You have one parent whom you **do not** identify as White but another race/ethnicity (e.g. Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American) I will conduct one 60 minute interview to understand the personal experiences of multiracial students in their transition to college. If you agree to participate and complete the interview, you will be given a $10.00 gift card for your participation. **Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. For more information please read the enclosed Student Consent Form.**

Message Close	Thank you for participating in this important study. Sincerely, Corenne Harris Graduate Student, University of Maryland

Participant Email

Subject Line	Multiracial Educational Experiences Study Participant
Greeting	Dear <name of student>
Introduction	Thank you for your interest in this research study. I want to make sure this is as easy as possible for you. Please list the dates, times and locations that are open and easily accessible so that we can set up the interview as soon as possible. Once the interview is complete, you will be given a $10.00 gift card for your participation. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me directly so that I can answer them for you. **Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. For more information please read the enclosed Student Consent Form.**
Message Close	Thank you for participating in this important study. Sincerely, Corenne Harris Graduate Student, University of Maryland

Date: _____

Interview Questions

What pseudonym or alias would you like to use?

How old are you?

What high school did you attend?

Who lived in your household when you were growing up?

How do you identify yourself racially and ethnically?

How do your parents identify themselves racially and ethnically? How would you racially identify your parents racially and ethnically?

Do you have siblings? If so, how do your siblings identify themselves racially and ethnically?

Tell me about where you grew up. What were the racial demographics like?

What were the races of your friends in school?

What affiliations did you have in your early schooling and now in college?

Did your family attend a church? If so, what was the racial demographic?

What is your relationship to your extended family on both sides?

Can you remember when you first became of aware of race and racial differences? Can you describe that for me?

Can you remember when you first began thinking about your own race? Can you describe that for me?

Do you feel like you faced any challenges in forming your racial identity? If so, please describe these challenges. If not, why do you think you didn't face any challenges?

When you were growing up, your parents/guardians or any other family members talk to you about race and/or your racial identity? What did they say or what did you talk about?

When you were growing up, did you and your friends ever talk to you about race and/or your racial identity? What specifically did you talk about?

Did your racial identity pose any challenges for you in the classroom in elementary school? Middles School? High School? College? If so, can you describe these for me? If not, why do you think so?

Have you struggled with your racial identity? Can you describe that for me?

How has the transition from high school to college been, in helping to form or transform that racial identity?

Have you ever felt a singled out in a classroom setting due your racial identity and the racial identity of your teachers?

Do you think this college is more of a diverse setting than where you grew up?

APPENDIX D - IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212 FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE: December 23, 2014

TO: Corenne Harris

FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [680137-1] The Impact of Racial Identity on the Educational Experiences
                           of Multiracial, College Undergraduates.

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 23, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: December 22, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # *6 & 7*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to submission to the IRB Office, this project received scientific review from the departmental IRB Liaison. This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 22, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.