

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Lauren S. Plaza for the degree of Master of Science in College Student Services Administration presented on April 19, 2011.

Title: College Students' Multiracial Identity Perceptions and Experiences of Programs and Associations

Abstract approved:

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This thesis examined the identity transitions that occurred prior to enrollment at a predominantly, White, large, public research university and after completing at least one year of college for students who identify as multiracial. As a secondary purpose, this thesis also examined whether these students sought support through groups that are similar to their ethnic and cultural identities. Using a sample of 10 interviews and a review of the secondary research literature, the principal findings of this thesis are that multiracial students identify differently based on their age, physical appearance, and consciousness about their racialized heritage. Participation in student programs and associations was examined in conjunction with student identity development. In order to encourage success for the multiracial students at a large, public, research institution, the findings from this research suggest that there is a need to expand existing monoracial programs to include broader definitions of racialized categories. There is also a need to develop new programs and associations that are specifically targeted to multiracial students. By making these changes university administrators may be able to support the adjustment and transition to college for students who are often not included in one of the five recognized racial categories.

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College Students' Multiracial Identity Perceptions and Experiences of Programs and  
Associations

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Lauren S. Plaza, Author

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# College Students' Multiracial Identity Perceptions and Experiences of Programs and Associations

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Student population at institutions of higher education in the United States is growing at accelerated rates (NCES, 2011). From 2000 to 2008, undergraduate student enrollment increased by 24% to 16.4 million students. It is projected that undergraduate enrollment will continue to increase, reaching 19.0 million in 2019 (NCES, 2011). There has also been an increase in minority student enrollment, between 1976 and 2004, the percentage of total minority undergraduate students increased from 17% to 32% (NCES, 2011).

Campuses are becoming more racially diverse with the increased enrollment of monoracial groups. Another group who has also increased its enrollment is students who now identify as biracial, multiracial or mixed. This group is one of the fastest growing populations on college campuses (Jones & Jones, 2010). Multiracial students are often assumed to experience the same adversities and needs of those who belong to monoracial groups (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Many culturally based programs and services have been designed to support monoracial identity groups and are not concerned with the unique needs of multiracial students (Roper & McAloney, 2010). This change in the student demography has prompted national dialogue in colleges and universities in order to better understand and serve multiracial students (Wong & Buckner, 2008).

### United States Data and National Trends

Students of color have started enrolling in colleges at an increasing rate; from 1976 to 2008 the percentage of American college students who identified as Hispanic students rose from 3% to 12%, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 7%, the percentage of Black students rose from 9% to 14% and the percentage of nonresident aliens, for whom “race”/ethnicity made up 3% of the total enrollment in 2008 (US Department of Education, 2009).

Policy surrounding racial classification has changed over time and is governed by Statistical Directive 15 of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB, 1994). The purpose of this directive was to ensure that all federal agencies, such as schools and the Bureau of the Census, report data in consistent categories. The directive originally defined four racial categories: (a) White, (b) Black, (c) Asian/Pacific Islander, and (d) American Indian/Alaskan Native. The directive required that each person be counted in only one of these groups. Because “race” and ethnicity are considered separate and distinct identities, Hispanic or Latino origin was a separate question. Thus, in addition to the indicated “race” or “races,” respondents were categorized by group membership in one of two ethnicities, which were Hispanic or Latino *or* Not Hispanic or Latino (OMB, 1994). A fundamental policy change occurred in 1997 when the OMB revised Statistical Directive 15, which expanded to include five racial categories: (a) American Indian/Alaska Native, (b) Asian, (c) Black/African American, (d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and (e) White. For the first time a federal agency could offer the option to choose more than one racial category and to classify those who did so as belonging to multiple racial categories in the 2000 U.S. Census. This policy directive

was ground breaking for multiracial people, as historically they had been forced to reject many aspects of their identity on paper and in practice (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008).

The number of biracial, multiracial or mixed people in the U.S. has risen dramatically since the anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1967 that prohibited mixed “race” marriages (Evans, Forney, Guido, & Pattonet, 1998). According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, of the 6.8 million people who indicated that they identified with one or more racial categories, 40% of these mixed “race” Americans were under eighteen years old (Shang, 2008). This information suggests that there has been a notable shift in the demographic profile of the United States. This demographic shift suggests that the number of increasingly diverse students who are graduating from secondary schools may go on to enroll in higher educational institutions (Shang, 2008). The proportion of students who are enrolling in higher education and who are assumed to be multiracial has increased dramatically from 3.2% in 1991 to 5.9% in 2001 (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). According to the United States Census Bureau, by the middle of this century the number of people that identify themselves as being of two or more “races” is projected to rise from 5.2 million to 16.2 million (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010). This change in the demography of the U.S. population is one of the many predictors of increased numbers of multiracial students attending college in the next fifty years.

As the American population becomes more diverse because of the dilution of ethnic and racial barriers, interracial marriages, immigration and international adoption, the university student population is beginning to also reflect this transformation within

its student body; university campuses are becoming more diverse both racially and culturally (Shang, 2008).

### **Higher Education and Multiracial Students**

Traditional university campuses were originally created to educate young, White middle to upper class males (Rudolph, 1990). Since then, women and under-represented students have gradually become a more visible presence in higher education since the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). Universities have improved educational opportunities for students of color; regardless of “race” (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004).

Members of the dominant culture and other monoracial groups (to a lesser extent) typically enjoy privilege on university campuses across the country and may also be unconscious of their own racial identities (McIntosh, 1988). Whiteness is the default “norm” on many campuses in the United States. The culture of Whiteness means that White Euro-American values and standards are part of the hegemony that is entrenched into the everyday running of the campus and the activities that go on at the campus (Davis, 1983).

Programs and associations in higher educational institutions are characteristically designed to support and maintain student retention and are intended primarily for the benefit of the five formally mentioned U.S. Office of Management and Budget racial categories. Most recognized groups have a designated space where they feel accepted and can gather and converse about commonalities, and shared ideals. Many universities offer ethnic studies classes that address the historical and

contemporary aspects of each group that allows for further discussion about recognized groups.

“Multiracial students are attending college at a time when problems of racial injustice remain unsolved” (Shang, 2009, p.6). The multiracial student population consists of many variations of “races” and ethnicities. Within these subgroups individuals may consistently have to negotiate the terms of their identities depending on their circumstances, and so individuals may have unique opinions about political, religious and social beliefs (Jones & Jones, 2010).

Self-identified multiracial students may find adjusting to these traditional campuses uncomfortable and awkward. They may be expected to fit into racial groups with which they may not share common values and identity development concerns (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Multiracial students may not have specific support services or faculty to counsel and advocate for this group (Wong & Buckner, 2008).

Student transition, success and the degree to which they feel welcome has become a very serious subject for most universities in the United States (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Approximately 50% of students entering a four year institution will graduate in approximately six years (US Department of Education, 2009). The federal and state government funding to universities is being slowly eroded; as a result many university administrators have developed innovative programs to attract students each year. Colleges are becoming very competitive, offering more than just an academic education. Advertising high end amenities in the hope of attracting prospective students such as state-of-the-art residence halls, recreational facilities and gourmet restaurants on campus, have all contributed to this new business model culture which emphasizes high

student/customer satisfaction often at the detriment of academic standards and programs (Ingels, Dalton, & LoGerfo, 2008). Though these incentives are important for all students, the particular needs of students who identify as multiracial and who may be dealing with issues of identity, mattering, and support are not necessarily addressed by institutional changes (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Practical programs that address concrete issues of retention and success are few and far between, particularly for this unique cohort who may be maneuvering between two or more worlds (Schlossberg, 1989).

Multiracial students do not have the same experiences as other students of color who come from monoracial groups (Jones & Jones, 2010). They are expected to explain their identity but must choose one; they may not be accepted as multiracial by the community and may feel excluded from monoracial groups (Jones & Jones, 2010). These typically marginalized students may find themselves in tenuous situations in which retention continues to be an institutional concern (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). Multiracial students may face challenges such as feeling pulled between or excluded from various monoracial groups and disconnected from other students and the institution (Jones & Jones, 2010). Multiracial students often face horizontal hostility because they do not quite fit into any of the five racial categories and are excluded by their peers from group activities (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Most college campuses have offices and cultural centers that are designed to serve the needs of students who have been historically under-represented in the United States (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Often, students who identify as multiracial feel that they are not accepted in the racial groups with which they identify and so the lack of feeling

connected can create feelings of marginalization (Roper & McAloney, 2010).

Contributing to the feeling of marginalization is the way in which multiracial students' physical appearance influences the group memberships that they may seek (King, 2008). However, multiracial students may still often feel that they are excluded from groups if they are not able to explore their various cultural identities within these groups (King, 2008). Though universities have made substantial progress implementing programs to support students of color, multiracial students often face many racial identity barriers (Jones & Jones, 2010). These barriers may include their sometimes indistinct physical appearances that do not permit them to claim a racial group and never feeling as though they are completely accepted because of their ambiguous phenotypes (Jones & Jones, 2010).

### **Research Topic and Proposed Thesis**

The researcher chose to examine the identity transitions that may occur prior to enrollment at predominantly, White, large, public research university and after completing at least one year of college for students who identify as multiracial. Specific emphasis was placed on multiracial identity issues that pertain to this emerging group and the particular ways in which they seek out support through programs and associations. The researcher also examined what support based programs are needed for multiracial students at predominantly, White, large, public research universities.

This thesis focused on the experiences of 10 self-identified multiracial students and their experiences being enrolled at a traditionally White Euro-American institution. The study looked at the ways in which students identified themselves prior to being admitted to the university and after they have been immersed in a predominantly White



Euro-American campus for at least one year (this time period allowed for students to become more knowledgeable of the programs and associations on the campus). The study also examined whether these students sought support through groups that are similar to their ethnic and cultural identities.

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What are the identity experiences of students who identify as multiracial at a predominantly White institution? (b) How do these experiences differ after one year of being on campus from who they identified as prior to admittance to predominantly White, large, public research university? (c) What campus resources including programs and associations do multiracial students access to gain support and aid in their college experience?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following section provides definitions for several key terms used in this thesis, which include definitions obtained from existing literature and theory.

- Diversity - “individuals representing a variety of different attributes and characteristics” (Talbot, 1996, p.7).
- Hegemony - Preponderant influence over others; the political, ideological, economic, or cultural power exerted by a dominant group over other groups (The Merriam Webster Dictionary, 1998).
- Identity - “[T]he process by which individuals define themselves with regard to racial classification in their social contexts” (Ortiz & Santos, 2009, p.361).
- Minority - An individual who has been stigmatized on the basis of racial and ethnic, or biological characteristics (Scott & Marshall, 2005).

- Monoracial – Refers to any person who claims a single racial heritage (Root, 1996).
- Multiracial - Refers to any person who identifies with two or more “races” who are born to parents of different “races” or are of mixed “race” themselves (Evans et al., 1998).
- “Race” – Phenotypical differentiation not based on any genetic or biologically valid distinction between the genetic make-up of differently identified races (Scott & Marshall, 2005).
- Phenotype - The set of observable characteristics of an individual resulting from the interaction of its genotype with the environment (Scott & Marshall, 2005).
- Racialization -The societal process by which a group is categorized as a race (Scott & Marshall, 2005).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The pressure to identify as Black or White has been ever-present in Africa and Europe long before “America” was discovered (Spencer, 1997). There is some relationship to the biological makeup of these groups however, there has never really been a pure “race” and so “race” is merely a sociopolitical construct which has been maintained by the powerful to sustain their privilege (Spencer, 1997). In the United States, those who have privilege maintain that “race” defines the nature of people and that those who identify as Black and White are viewed as opposites; because of this, group intermixing has been historically prohibited (Spencer, 1997).

In the past, mixed-“race” people had few choices with regards to their racial identification as they have been classified in one of the recognized monoracial groups, forcing them to accept a single racial identity (Healy, 2009). A great deal has been written about students who self identify in one of the five racialized categories in the United States: (a) American Indian or Alaskan Native, (b) Asian, (c) Black/African American, (d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and, (e) White (Apple, 1982; Bordas, 2007; Horse, 2001; Norguera, 2008). Less is known about those students who identify as multiracial (Brown, 2009; Jones & Jones, 2010; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2008; Roper & McAloney, 2010).

This literature review examines both historical and current scholarly articles, books, and other sources that provide data and trends regarding students who identify in the above racial categories on various college campuses in the United States. This literature review also examines whether college students utilize ethnically-based

programs and associations and if there is a need for separate spaces to adjust and develop so they may ultimately feel comfortable and welcomed (King, 2008).

This review of the literature will be examined in four parts: (a) the history of higher education and access for students of color, (b) national data pertaining to the enrollment of students of color and multiracial students, (c) multiracial students on college campuses and related theories and, (d) assessment of current services and programs offered to students in higher education who identify as multiracial. A wide range of resources were used to acquire the information in order to demonstrate the existing research. Many journal articles were sourced from Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) EBSCO Host, a large, public research institution's Inter Library Loans, and text books that were used in former graduate coursework.

### **History of Higher Education and Access for Students of Color**

Historically, access to higher education has been reserved for those who were relatively privileged. Those who were given the opportunity to become educated had often been part of a dominant male, White Euro-American culture of middle- and upper-class standing (Rudolph, 1990). Consideration of racial, ethnic and cultural differences was not historically woven into the ideologies of these higher educational institutions and so students of color were excluded from becoming educated (Rudolph, 1990). It was not until the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution that slavery was officially abolished in 1865 and African Americans were allowed to become educated (Zinn, 2003).

However, many educational institutions opposed integrated schooling and in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the court ruled that separate but equal was

constitutional. Blacks were to be educated in a comparable facility to Whites with equal resources; however, Blacks did not receive a comparable educational facility. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, (1896) was challenged repeatedly by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and by 1938, the Supreme Court had, in a number of cases, struck down laws where segregated facilities proved to be unequal (Smith & Tutwiler, 2005).

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill enabled millions of World War II veterans to enroll in colleges and universities in the aftermath of World War II (Roach, 1997). A total of 7.8 million veterans or 50.5% of the World War II veteran population received training or education under the GI Bill (Roach, 1997). Many African Americans soldiers that returned from war qualified for the bill which enabled them to earn a college degree and have a better chance to move into the middle class (Roach, 1997). However, most Black service men could not enroll in most White institutions. In 1940, enrollment at all Black colleges was 1.08% of the total U.S. college enrollment; in 1950, it had risen to 3.6%, according to the Biennial Survey of Education, 1948-1950 (Roach, 1997). Despite a desire for post secondary education many returning African American GI's could not find a university to gain admission (Roach, 1997).

Educational institutions were still segregated until *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, (1954) was upheld. Eight-year-old Linda Brown, an African-American girl, had been denied permission to attend an elementary school five blocks from her home in Topeka, Kansas. School officials refused to register her at the nearby school, assigning her instead to a school for non-White students 21 blocks from her home. The

court held that school segregation had a detrimental effect on colored children and so Plessy v. Ferguson, (1896) was reversed (Smith & Tutwiler, 2005). Since the civil rights movements in the 1960s, the education opportunities for students of color have improved reflecting increasing enrollment in higher education (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, (1954) decision changed the way in which people of color accessed education in higher level institutions ultimately increasing the number of students of color on college campuses.

Since the 1970s many universities have begun implementing specific facilitative programs for racially underrepresented students (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). There have been a small number of social changes that have occurred since the affirmative action policies in the 1960s that have resulted in recognizing the value of diversity in American universities and colleges, as many people have acknowledged the injustice of denying people of color opportunities for equal education (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). Although well intentioned, these recruitment and retention programs designed for students of color have been designed to serve the five traditional census-identified racial groups (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004) however, little has been done for those who identify as multiracial (Roper & McAloney, 2010).

Historically, there has been enormous pressure for students of color to conform to the norms and values that are traditionally associated with White Euro-American College campuses (Noguera, 2008). White Euro-American students typically have more social and cultural capital as they have been prepared for their college experience while growing up and arrive with invisible advantages such as friendship alliances, time management skills, and an individualistic socialization which puts them at an advantage

at an institution that values these skills (Noguera, 2008). Students of color have typically come from schools that lack resources such as funding, exceptional teachers, and extra curricular activities (Noguera, 2008). These students may be unprepared to join the ranks with their White Euro-American college peers who may be generally more equipped with higher test scores, general social capital and cultural capital (Noguera, 2008).

### **National Data**

According to recent censuses, the U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse primarily as a result of immigration (NCES, 2011). With a growing, diverse population, there have been significant changes in the demography of Americans. In 2005 the number of non-Hispanic Whites declined as a proportion of the entire population to 67%, the African American population grew slightly to 13%, American Indian and Alaskan Native remained consistent at 1%, the Asian population increased to 4%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander remained at less than 1% of the population, Hispanics increased to 14%, and those who identified as two or more “races” increased to 1.5% (US Census Bureau, 2011). It is projected that the multiracial population will climb to 21% by 2050 (Brown, 2009).

Nationally 68% of college-bound students are White; however there has been an increase in enrollment of students who come from under-represented communities (NSSE, 2010). These demographic changes in the U.S indicated that more minorities and under-represented students are now entering four year universities (Roper & McAloney, 2010).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) enrollment has increased for each minority group:

In 2004, the total minority enrollment reached 4,696,000, or 32 percent of total undergraduate enrollment. Asians/Pacific Islanders had the fastest rate of increase between 1976 and 2004 (461 percent); their enrollment increased from 169,000 to 950,000. During the same time period, Hispanic enrollment increased from 353,000 to 1,667,000, a 372 percent increase; American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment increased from 70,000 to 160,000, a 130 percent increase; and Black enrollment increased from 943,000 to 1,918,000, a 103 percent increase. The enrollment of each of the minority groups rose at a faster rate than that of Whites, which increased from 7,740,000 to 9,771,000, a 26 percent increase (NCES, 2011).

The number of multiracial people in the U.S. has risen dramatically since the anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1967 which decriminalized inter-racial marriages (Evans, et al., 1998). In 2007, the Department of Education issued “Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting and Reporting Data on Racial and Ethnic Data,” this change of policy permitted students to indicate two or more “races” on official forms (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008, p.94,). Institutions are now trying to keep track of the various multiracial and monoracial groups of students that are enrolling on college campuses (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). However, there is a wide variation in the way college administrators across the country collect racial and ethnic data of students who identify with more than one “race” resulting in little uniformity with regards to collecting and recording student data (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

For example, there are many variations of the five traditional racial/ethnic categories which can become very convoluted and cumbersome as most institutional forms contain some variation of the five recognized groups (Kellogg & Niskodé 2008). Beyond this basic structure many differences exist. Students may be asked to check one box or multiple boxes, or select a multiracial or equivalent category (Kellogg &



Niskodé 2008). In a 2005 survey of 298 U.S. colleges and universities, only 27% offered a multiracial category for students to check, and only 3% consistently reported the data (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008).

Because of this shift in the student demography, the need for inclusion is becoming more vital and the requirement for new programs, learning environments and services to support a more diverse population is rapidly becoming a necessity (Harper, 2008). Many student programs such as cultural centers, bridge programs, and multicultural centers are still structured around the traditional paradigm of monoracial categories and campus support services for students of color (Cheng & Lee, 2009). These monoracial programs are often structured around the five original racial categories: (a) White, (b) Black or African American, (c) American Indian or Alaska Native, (d) Asian, (e) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Cheng & Lee, 2009). Educators must now re-evaluate these programs and not assume that the social and academic needs of multiracial students are the same as those who identify monoracially (Brown, 2009)

### **Multiracial Students on College Campuses and Related Theories**

Multiracial students are unique to racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to which their parents have an affiliation (Brown, 2009). Multiracial students are caught between at least two ethnic boundaries and do not fit into specific ethnic groups because of their mixed racial identification (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Some multiracial students often face societal and familial pressure to claim one primary heritage yet experience exclusion when they do so (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Multiracial students are also often expected to assimilate into a White Euro-American cultural world with values and

beliefs, lifestyles, and cultural characteristics that may have very little in common with their own. Socio-economic factors, language and behaviors may be also distinctive of multiracial students and may be uncharacteristic of monoracial students (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). Multiracial students are also often submerged into an environment that may be unfamiliar and sometimes hostile towards many of them which may promote feelings of disenfranchisement, alienation, and invisibility on university campuses (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991).

It is necessary for universities to take steps to ensure that the organizational structure also supports the needs of multiracial students by first recognizing that this is a unique group who have distinct differences than monoracial groups, that their physical appearance may not always reflect the racial group that they identify with and that all multiracial students do not have the same growing up experiences (King, 2008).

Theory is the attempt to formulate an explanation based on observed data. In order to substantiate this thesis, it is important to delve into the theoretical models that will help answer the thesis questions and explain some of the researcher's observations. In the following section, five models of identity development that pertain to multiracial students will be reviewed in order to develop general themes. The models are: (a) Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) concepts of marginality and mattering, (b) Charmaine Wijeyesinghe's (2001) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI), (c) Maria P. Root's (1996) border crossing model, (d) Kristen Renn's (2008) five patterns of identity among multiracial students, (e) Rockquemore and Brunsma's (2008) mixed race identity model.

### **Marginality and Mattering**

The first model by Nancy K. Schlossberg (1989) suggests that there are many variables that are interrelated that can be attributed to individuals' lives which may determine their success. These variables include (a) attention, (b) importance, (c) ego-extension, (d) dependence, and (e) appreciation. Attention is considered to be the most basic form of mattering; individuals actually command the interests of others and if unnoticed individuals may feel alienated. In the importance level, individuals hope or believe that others care about them, and that others are concerned with what they want, think or do. In the ego-extension level, individuals believe that their accomplishments or failures will be internalized by others as their successes or failures. The dependence level refers to how individuals behaviors are influenced by other people, and so individuals are dependent on the need to be needed. In the appreciation level, individuals feel that it is important to feel appreciated.

Schlossberg's (1989) theory refers to the concepts of *marginality* and *mattering* which encompass these variables and the connection that we desire as human beings. The feeling of marginality is a result of perceiving that one does not belong or fit in within a certain group or community. This feeling may be permanent, especially if individuals feel that they are trapped between two worlds and must identify by paralleling two cultures. With respect to "race," these individuals may have to self identify as monoracial according to the situation that is presented to them in order to feel as though they matter or "fit." According to Schlossberg, more purposefully designed programs and activities can promote the quality of community.

Many students that live a bi-cultural life may "feel permanently locked between two worlds" and experience feelings of marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 6).

Multiracial students enrolled in college often experience issues that stem from having a dual identity where they are expected to acculturate into the dominant White Euro-American culture or most likely be excluded from most participatory social functions (Schlossberg, 1989). Multiracial students also live a bi-cultural life having to shift from one identity to the next depending on circumstances in order to feel as though they matter. Student support, both academically and socially, is also pertinent to the success of students through identifiable cultural associations. Multiracial students may not have the luxury of identifying with one cultural association. Because multiracial students may define themselves as bi-cultural, bi-racial or multiracial, they may not feel a sense of belonging or may see themselves as outcasts from these distinct monoracial groups (King, 2008).

Mattering may also promote successful transitions through connection and support which may also encourage feelings of personal worth (Schlossberg, 1989). Feelings of mattering also promote better coping skills with the many transitions and events associated with attending college. Those who feel that they matter will ultimately have a better chance of succeeding which could imply that feelings of mattering may lead to an individual being able to transition more positively to a new situation and ultimately becoming more successful (Schlossberg, 1989).

### **Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI)**

Charmaine Wijeyesinghe's (2001) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) is an identity model that is based on students who identified as both Black and White. The theory is structured around racial identity factors instead of stages of development and assumes that racial identity is a choice determined by each individual and not

assigned by society. This model identifies eight factors that impact the choice of racial identity and assumes that there is no one or correct choice for those individuals who identify as multiracial. Interactions with peers, teachers, and others outside of the family may lead individuals to change, question, or influence choice of identity. All of these factors create a structure of socialization which can have a strong effect on racial identity and may result in choosing another racial identity.

The eight factors of the FMMI model include: (a) Racial Ancestry, (b) Early Experience and Socialization, (c) Cultural Attachment, (d) Physical Appearance, (e) Historical Context, (f) Political Awareness and (g) Orientation, (h) Other Social Identities, and Spirituality (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Racial Ancestry refers to multiracial individuals' racial groups that are part of their ancestry and the racial makeup of their families. Early Experience and Socialization refers to having exposure to/and interaction with extended family members; sharing various cultural aspects such as food music, celebration of cultural holidays; and language where family members may provide safety and support. Cultural Attachment refers to the choices of multiracial individuals to cling to the cultural traditions in which they have been involved throughout childhood which encompass their background. Physical Appearance is a strong determinant regarding multiracial identities. Phenotypical characteristics are compelling reasons as to why multiracial individuals choose their identity. Social and Historical Context focuses on the way multiracial identity may be affected by social reactions to "race", racism, interracial relationships and the historical place of multiracial people in society. Political Awareness and Orientation refers to individuals' choices that may be based on certain political and economic factors which may make

meaning of their identity. Other Social Identities-identity may also encompass gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic class. These social identities may become the definitive choice of racial identity or to choose not to identify racially. Spirituality refers to individuals finding a sanctuary from racism which may help to sustain them through the process of racial identity. Spirituality may influence their choice of identity through spiritual beliefs, traditions and experiences.

Wijeyesinghe's (2001) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) states that there are internal factors that influence individuals' choices of identity. This model represents the individuals' internal meaning-making process that may be fluid and that a multiracial individual may base their identity choice on some of these factors as they are interrelated. This fluidity may change due to identity development that encompasses: age, physical appearance, and experiences that may apply to psychological, sociological, and environmental models for understanding the identities of multiracial college students.

### **Border Crossing**

In the third model, Maria P. Root (1996) suggested that students who are multiracial are continuously border crossing and proposed a theory of identity formation that does not depend on a linear progression but relies on individuals' abilities to be comfortable with their definition of themselves at any given moment while crossing identity borders. These individuals use multiple perspectives or are purposefully situational in their identity based on their skin color, gender or geography. Root stated that individuals can bridge borders by straddling both worlds and suggests four ways of thinking about this concept: (a) individuals to be wholly immersed and accepted by both cultures, (b) individuals can shift multiracial identities in particular environments to

highlight one identity that is most beneficial to them at the time, (c) individuals stay on the border suggesting that they do not want to be defined or want to create a new identity, and (d) individuals immerse themselves into one identity for a long period of time to adapt to personal needs.

Root's model examines the intersection of psychological and sociological adjustment of mixed-“race” people and the effects on multiracial individuals based on race, gender, and geography. Root suggests that individuals who are continuously border crossing between at least two cultural identities, are also continually acculturating to adapt their personal needs. Multiracial individuals may find that they are constantly negotiating multiple perspectives in order to feel that they are socially accepted in order to function in mainstream cultural domains.

### **Five Patterns of Identity**

Kristen Renn (2008) identified five patterns of identity among multiracial students on the premise that college provides opportunities for identity exploration through academic, social, and peer associations. The five patterns are: (a) a student holds a monoracial identity in which the individual chooses one heritage background in which to identify, (b) a student holds multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to the situation, (c) a student holds an identity in which the student does not elect a specific heritage but is distinctly multiracial, (d) a student holds an extra racial identity by deconstructing “race” or opting out of identification with U.S. racial categories which may be seen as artificial, and (e) a student holds a situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts.

Renn (2008) also notes that societal stereotypes label individuals because of their phenotype which may strongly influence their own identity and how they interpret themselves. These individuals must now negotiate and interpret their assigned identity to suit the stereotypes that are linked to their appearance. These assigned identities may influence their choices regarding which programs and associations they join and whether they choose other multiracial friends and allies.

### **Mixed Race Identity Model**

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) stated that their mixed “race” identity model has four categories and is based on biracial individuals of Black and White descent: (a) border identity states that individuals define themselves as belonging to a third and separate category: (b) singular identity states that these individuals see themselves as exclusively Black or exclusively White and not biracial: (c) transcendent identity states that these individuals reject the whole notion of “race” along with the categories of Black and White and insist that they should be seen as unique individuals: (d) in the protean level, individuals change their being as they move from group to group and through various social contexts of everyday life.

Root (1996), Renn (2008), and Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) all suggest that multiracial individuals go through common phases of identity development. Generally speaking, these individuals typically start off with monoracial identities then eventually develop multiracial identities. As they mature and become more comfortable with their multiracial identity, they eventually become comfortable crossing borders based on each unique situation.

### **Assessment of Current Services and Programs**



Nationally, universities are now expecting that more students of color will be enrolling in their institutions (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). The projection for the year 2000 was that there would be more African American, Latino, and students of diverse backgrounds than ever before (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). However, since most colleges do not have any long term experience with diverse populations, they may be inadequately prepared to deal with the inevitable demographic shift (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). Twenty years later, colleges are still challenged to meet the needs of the traditionally recognized monoracial groups (Roper & McAloney, 2010). As a result universities still follow a traditional model; multiracial groups are often marginalized and not included in the culture, curriculum, and the day to day activities at the university (Roper & McAloney, 2010).

Many institutions use designated minority recruiters to attract different racial groups to their campus (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). The College Assistance Migrant Program targets students whose parents are migrant workers. On the West Coast these students are typically of Hispanic background and so administrators are characteristically Hispanic and tend to recruit from predominantly Spanish speaking enclaves. Students from similar backgrounds that do not belong to the Spanish speaking population are not sought after for recruitment and may feel inhibited to inquire about this program (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Multicultural or Inter-Cultural centers also endorse programs and scholarships for the recognized groups such as the Ujima Black Connect Program where events are designed to welcome Black freshmen and transfer students. American Indian Initiatives offices offer the American Indian College Fund and American Indian Scholarships as do Casa Latino that offer

scholarships including as the Hispanic College Fund and Scholarships for Hispanics. Nationally, specific programs and scholarships for multiracial students are limited to a very small amount (Norguera, 2008).

Colleges and universities in the United States are beginning to research new ways to support multiracial students both academically and socially; these services may ultimately aid in their transition from their home life to college campus life with the intent to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). Some multiracial students may have come from a more communal environment where decision making was typically left to their family or close community members (Renn, 2008). Once arriving on a college campus, multiracial students are faced with making decisions on their own and may lack the support of their community members (Renn, 2008). It is at this point in time that students may seek out support through programs and associations to aid in their transition (Renn, 2008).

In order to alleviate this potential cultural and racial divide, many universities are now beginning to address the increasing diversity issues by introducing racial/ethnic awareness training of faculty, staff, and students. These changes may help to promote a more conscientious campus community (Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Pope, 1993). Student Affairs departments are now challenged to rethink the existing structure and develop more inclusive programs and associations through the use of multicultural programs and individual awareness (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Educators are obliged to create a safe and welcoming climate for multiracial students in existing monoracial organizations, as well as to support the growing number of organizations for multiracial students (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). Student organizations are typically focused on the

recognized monoracial cultural groups that provide support and services that aid in their college transition (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Multiracial students who seek out support from these cultural groups often report not being received in a positive manner from monoracial groups (Jones & Jones, 2010).

Institutions that have existing programs and associations for monoracial students may help to increase the enrollment of the number of multiracial students (Kayes, 2006). However, they may be unsuccessful in retaining these students as they do not create programs to support multiracial students as most of these programs, classes, and training are targeted to monoracial students (Kayes, 2006).

Some universities have had some success regarding recruitment of multicultural students through awareness programs, particularly within student affairs that have generated an increasing awareness for cultural differences (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). However; this is just the beginning of a new dimension of programming. Some institutions have expanded their curricula to include multiracial issues such as offering courses about the anthropology of mixed “race” and courses about mixed “race” descent (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). These courses may facilitate the softening of rigid racial categories and provide the cognitive tools to understand the complexity of racial identity (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

People of color in the United States have had a history of adversity and hardship in most aspects of their lives. It was not until many breakthrough court decisions for African Americans that other groups have benefitted. The long and hard fought battles in the United States, waged by African Americans have resulted in obtaining an

education equal to those from the dominant culture. Today many people of color have the option to identify as multiracial (King, 2008). The United States Census of 2000 has allowed individuals to identify and be counted in two or more “race” categories (King, 2008) who are now considered to be the fastest growing population in the United States (Brown, 2009).

Multiracial identity is complex and multifaceted. Individuals may choose to identify as multiracial for various reasons which include but are not limited to their phenotype, their ancestry, and the ways in which others perceive them or may be situational. Multiracial college students are fast becoming a large sub-group within the definition of students of color in the United States. Of the 2.6 million new students expected in 2015 (Shang, 2008), it is estimated that 21% will identify as multiracial students by 2050 (Brown, 2009).

Higher educational institutions are now faced with a new demographic that is in need of unique services, programs, and associations that will promote the success and well-being of multiracial students (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Universities and colleges are now charged with the task of transforming their institutions into more inclusive establishments not only for students who identify within one ethnicity but for the growing number of students that self identify as multiracial to support their full identities (Roper & McAloney, 2010).

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

This study examined college students' multiracial identity perceptions and experiences of programs and associations. This chapter will detail (a) the research design overview, (b) subjective participant recruitment process, (c) data analysis, and (d) limitations and other factors that may have affected the data collection and research. The goal of this research was to examine the identity development of multiracial students prior to enrolling at a large, predominantly White, research institution and whether they identified differently after being enrolled for at least one year. As a secondary purpose, the researcher hoped to find further insight regarding the ways in which identity changes once a student has enrolled at a predominantly White, large, public research university and whether participants chose to become a part of any ethnically-based programs or associations.

Specifically, this study explored the following research questions: (a) What are the identity experiences of students who identify as multiracial at a predominantly White institution? (b) How do these experiences differ after one year of being on campus from who they identified as prior to admittance to a predominantly White, large, public research university? (c) What campus resources including programs and associations do multiracial students access to gain support and aid in their college experience?

#### **Research Design Overview**

In order to accomplish these goals, a qualitative research design was developed for this study. This particular research method was used as it was important to hear individuals' perceptions of their identities, how they may have changed over time, as

well as which programs and associations they accessed. This approach also enabled the researcher to probe and ask for clarification regarding the participants' experiences. A qualitative research design was chosen as the intent of qualitative inquiry was "not to generalize a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 203). This method also encompassed a holistic approach that included reporting multiple perspectives by identifying the many themes involved that ultimately created a larger picture (Creswell, 2005).

The researcher developed and utilized questions intended to explore how multiracial students who have been on a predominantly White Euro-American campus for the duration of at least one year racially identify. The researcher also examined whether their identity choice(s) had changed during the course of their enrollment. The researcher also investigated whether these students accessed traditional monoracial programs and associations or if they chose to seek out ethnically-based programs and associations.

Initially the goal of the researcher was to recruit a total of 12 college students who self-identified as multiracial at a predominantly White, large, public research university. The quantity of 12 self-identified multiracial students was determined by the researcher given the constraints of time to conduct interviews and complete data analysis within nine months. The researcher also believed that 12 participants would elicit adequate data for purposes of answering the research questions. It was anticipated that the participants who identify as multiracial, would be both male and female of equal gender distribution, and would range from sophomore to graduate standing. However, those who chose to participate in the study did not reflect the researcher's

expectation as the gender distribution was unequal with only one male choosing to participate in this study. The age distribution was also skewed with a large number of older-than-average participants. The interviews took place in the fall of 2010 at predominantly White, large, public research university.

### **Participants and Recruitment Methods**

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in mid-October, 2010 a recruitment email briefly describing the study and outlining the expectations was sent to potential student participants. One general e-mail invitation was sent out to all students involved in educational support programs and through cultural student services offices' list-serves (Appendix A). These offices were chosen as it was determined by the researcher that a more diverse pool of participants might be achieved via their email lists. The e-mail introduced the researcher and described the nature of the research and also suggested that the respondents must meet the described participation criteria (Appendix A).

Those students who responded to the initial e-mail (Appendix A) and who indicated that they were interested in being part of the study were then sent another e-mail requesting that they fill out an electronic eligibility survey (Appendix B). This survey consisted of eight questions with five being demographic questions. This allowed the researcher to verify the eligibility of participants and to collect more in depth information regarding the respondents' self reported racial identity and whether they had chosen to participate in any ethnically-based programs and associations. It is important to note that choosing an ethnically-based program or association was not a determining factor of whether the respondent was accepted into the study.

The participants were required to meet three specific criteria: (a) they must have been enrolled at a predominantly White, large, public research university for at least one year, (b) they must have been 18 years or older and, (c) students had to self identify as biracial, multiracial, or mixed. There were no limitations regarding gender or racial mixture. The researcher specifically chose to interview students who had been on the campus for at least one year because their experiences would be better suited to answering research questions about changes in identity and ethnically-based campus resources. The participants in this study consisted of a total of 10 individuals. These individuals identified as: (a) one male, (b) eight females (c) and one participant who chose not to disclose gender. The class year ranged from sophomores to graduate students.

The 10 participants who were selected were then contacted for a one-hour interview that was audio-recorded at the time of the interview and later transcribed in November and December of 2010. Initially there were 12 respondents who replied to the eligibility survey; however because of logistical difficulties coordinating meeting times, only 10 respondents were ultimately interviewed. The interview questions consisted of 10 open ended questions (Appendix C). The aim of the interview was to acquire a more detailed and descriptive perspective from the participants. Locations of the interviews were based on where was convenient for the participants. All interviews took place in private locations in order for the identity of the participants to remain confidential.

Prior to starting the interview each participant was asked to look over and sign an Informed Consent document (Appendix D). They were assured that their identities



would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question during the interview without prejudice. The participants were also given the choice of selecting their own personal pseudonym. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes to one hour.

Each question was developed by the researcher based on a review of the literature and each participant was asked the same set of initial questions during the interview (Appendix C). Some participants were asked for clarification by the researcher regarding some of their responses, and in some cases the researcher asked related probing questions to acquire a better understanding of the participants' experiences. During the course of the interviews, the participants were free to decline any questions or ask the researcher for clarification. Once the interviews ended the interviewees were asked if they had any additional comments or questions. The participants were also asked if they could be contacted by the researcher if further clarification or additional information was needed. The interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken by the researcher to ensure that as many details as possible were captured.

### **Data Analysis**

In December 2010 all interviews were analyzed using the strategy of the constant comparative method of analysis which is a strategy of data analysis that calls for making repeated comparison and asking questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From the collected data, the key points were coded, which were extracted from the transcribed text. The codes were grouped into themes. The researcher then identified the themes or subject matter that had common elements related to the research questions and that gave

the researcher a general sense of the design, ideas, and the organization of the information. The categories were then formed, which then enabled the researcher to form and report general hypotheses (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### **Personal Disclosure**

As the researcher of this study, I have biases, perspectives, and my own opinions about this topic. My interest in this topic stems from my own experience at a predominantly White, large, public research university. I identify as a female, multiracial, graduate student and acknowledge the adversities that I had to overcome. I enrolled at a predominantly White, large, public research university as an older than average transfer student from Toronto, Canada. I had little understanding about the demographics in a predominantly White, American higher educational institution as I had attended a public commuter institution that was extremely diverse. I did not join any, or take part in any, programs or associations. As an undergraduate I felt marginalized by my phenotype, age, and nationality. It was extremely difficult for me to feel as though I belonged at the institution as I could not find anyone who identified with my Caribbean ethnic background or the values I shared as a multiracial, older than average woman returning to finish an undergraduate degree after approximately 20 years.

For the past four years I have also worked with students of color, developing programs that will assist in their transition from their home life to a college campus. I have also championed many diversity initiatives including infusing more readings about diversity into first year orientation classes. I have also developed workshops and mentoring programs that focus on diversity and sensitivity towards students of color.

It is very important to me to be objective while conducting this research. Because of my multiracial identity, I can relate to many of the participants' views and opinions; however, I am able to remain impartial. I strove to compare the findings of this research to the literature without bias and state the findings only.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study examined multiracial students' identity prior to enrolling at a predominantly White, large, public research university and after spending at least one year at the institution. As a secondary purpose, the researcher hoped to find further insight regarding the ways in which identity changes once a student has enrolled at a predominantly White, large, public research university and whether participants chose to become a part of any ethnically-based programs or associations.

The researcher interviewed 10 participants that qualified for the study through an initial eligibility survey (Appendix B). Once the participant pool was chosen, the subjects were required to sign an Informed Consent form (Appendix D) which explained the risks and confidentiality agreement. After the Informed Consent document was signed, the interviews commenced immediately for approximately one hour. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher incorporated a constant comparative method which enabled repeated comparison and by asking questions from the data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher was then able to look for themes and common elements that could be categorized.

Though there were limitations to the sample, the researcher was able to interview the participants in a timely matter. The time frame from sending out the initial general e-mail to completing the interview process took four weeks. The researcher

took approximately two weeks to transcribe the interviews and an additional two weeks to code all of them. The findings of this research will follow in chapter four.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter will include a brief overview of the data collection methodology, a general summary of the participants in this study, and a detailed presentation of the findings based on the narrative data collected. The findings are organized into five theme areas: (a) agents of early socialization, (b) multiracial identity as situational, (c) phenotype as a factor of marginalization, and (d) participation in ethnically-based programs and association and, (e) friendship networks and acceptance. These themes will be examined and discussed using direct quotes from the participants in this chapter and will be used to respond to the specific research questions. It is important to note that these themes traverse almost every participant experiences however; the researcher has chosen the most illustrative explanations to demonstrate each theme.

### **Data Collection**

The key research questions that guided this study were: (a) What are the identity experiences of students who identify as multiracial at a predominantly White institution? (b) How do these experiences differ after one year of being on campus from who they identified as prior to admittance to predominantly White, large, public research university? (c) What campus resources including programs and associations do multiracial students access to gain support and aid in their college experience?

### **Participants in the Study**

The 10 participants in this study ranged from sophomores to first-year graduate students, their ages ranged from 19 to 54. Eight of the participants identified as female, one identified as male and one chose not to respond to the question about gender. All participants identified with two or more “races” after being enrolled for at least one

year. Five participants felt that the demographics of the institution prior to admittance was important. Eight of the participants reported feeling marginalized because of their physical appearance. Four participants identified their closest friends as White Euro-Americans; two identified their closest friends as mixed; two identified their friends as multiracial; one identified her closest friends as diverse and one identified his closest friends as Black or people of color.

Table 1 is a summary of the demographic profile of the participants and basic information that probed into identity related questions and whether the participants sought out ethnically-based programs and/or associations for academic and/or social support.

Table 1

*Participant Summary*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year in school	Identity prior to enrolling at OSU	Identity after one year at OSU	Identification of "racial" category after one year at OSU	Importance of racial makeup prior OSU admittance	Felt marginalized because of physical appearance at OSU	Racial makeup of closest friends at OSU	Participation in ethnically based clubs and assoc.
Demitria	35	Female	SR	Hispanic	Multiracial	Hispanic/White American	Yes	Yes	White	1
Lane	46	Female	SR	White	Multiracial	Indian/White American	No	Yes	Multiracial	1
Sunrae	54	Female	PB	White	Mixed	Indian/White	No	Yes	Multiracial	2
Casey	20	Female	JR	Did not identify	Biracial	African American/White American	Yes	Yes	Mixed	4
Rita	51	Female	GR	White	Mixed	Indian/White African American/Asian/White	Yes	Yes	Mixed	3
Ann	27	Female	GR	Biracial	Multiracial	White	No	Yes	Multiracial	5
Lincoln	24	N/R	GR	Asian	Biracial	Asian/White	Yes	Yes	White	1
Patrick	19	Male	SO	White	Biracial	Asian/White	No	Yes	Black or people of color	1
Marjorie	20	Female	JR	White	Biracial	Asian/White	No	No	White	5
Ellen	19	Female	SO	White	White	Hispanic/White	Yes	No	White	0

**Summary of participants**

Demitria is a 35-year-old self-identified female and was born in Mexico. As a young adult in Mexico, Demitria identified as Mexican though she did not see the need to do so unless someone asked about her ethnicity. Demitria identifies as multiracial because her mother is of Euro-Spanish descent while her father identifies as Mexican, Mestizo.

Lane is a 46-year-old self-identified female who is originally from a very small town in western Oregon. Though she spent time with her father's side of the family who identified as originating from mixed bands of Native Americans and was conscious of her ethnic heritage, from childhood through her teenage years, Lane identified as White or Caucasian. As a young adult, Lane began to identify as multiracial.

Sunrae is a 54 year-old self-identified female from Oregon. Sunrae was very conscious of her father's identity as a Cherokee Indian while she was growing up however, because she looked more like her White mother, she identified as White until she was a teenager. As a young adult Sunrae began to identify as biracial:

Casey is a 20-year-old self-identified female from California. Casey was never conscious of her racial identity as her extended family is very diverse; her mother is White and her father is African American. Casey has always been surrounded by people of color. Casey now identifies as biracial.

Rita is a 51-year-old self-identified female who is from Oregon. Rita identified as White while growing up as she was afraid to identify with her fathers Native American heritage as there were many social stigmas attached to that group. Rita's mother, who is White, insisted that she identify only as White because she felt that

“passing” would make Rita’s life easier. As Rita reached her early twenties she began to identify as mixed.

Ann is a 27-year-old self-identified female who is from a small town in western, Oregon. Ann’s mother is White and her father is mixed with African American and South East Asian heritage. Ann has always been conscious of her racial identity because her White grandparents held a distain for her mixed “race” and often refused to interact with Ann and her family while she was growing up. Ann has identified as multiracial since she was a teenager.

Lincoln is a 24 year-old gender-neutral individual from the East Coast. Lincoln’s father identifies as Asian while Lincoln’s mother is White. While growing up, Lincoln identified as Asian because of Lincoln’s physical features that were noticeably Asian. Lincoln only began to identify as biracial a couple of years ago.

Patrick is a 19-year-old self-identified male from northern Oregon. Patrick’s father identifies as Japanese and his mother is White. While Patrick was growing up, he identified as White because of his physical features that were more White than Asian. Patrick recently began identifying as biracial.

Marjorie is a 20-year-old self-identified female from Oregon. Marjorie’s mother is Asian and her father is White. While growing up, Marjorie’s strong Asian physical features meant that her school mates saw her as Asian. Despite their labeling, Marjorie maintained her self identity as White. Marjorie only recently began identifying as multiracial.

Ellen is a 19-year-old self-identified female from a large city in Oregon. Ellen’s Mother is White and her father is Latino. Ellen grew up very aware of her Mexican and



White racial mix but chose to identify as White because she grew up around mainly White people and her physical features are predominately White. Ellen still identifies as White despite being at university for more than one year.

Students' identity formation can be divided into categories regarding whether their multiracial self identification differed after one year of being enrolled at a predominantly White, large, public research university. Seven participants who identified as monoracial prior to enrolling at the university, after one year or more at the institution, identified as mixed, biracial or multiracial. One student did not change her racial identification as biracial after at least one year at the university. One student chose not to identify any racial background but after one year identified as biracial. One student identified as White both before and after being at the university for at least one year. This student did acknowledge her biracial identity but did not choose to identify as biracial.

### **Agents of Early Socialization**

Lane, Sunrae, Rita, Patrick, Marjorie and Ellen grew up identifying as White. They all seemed to be influenced by those individuals who were closest to them as children and young adults. Parents seemed to be the primary influence followed by extended family and peers. Age was also a factor regarding self identity as the older than average participants appeared to have a clearer consciousness about their racial identity whereas younger participants were still transitioning from simple dichotomous definitions of their racial identity to ones that were more complex.

For example, Rita, who identified as American Indian and White, discussed her childhood growing up in the 1950s and the 1960s. She stated that most of the people she

grew up with did not know about Native American history. During this time period most people used derogatory remarks towards Native American people which made it difficult for Rita to identify as mixed:

A lot of people are very unaware of indigenous history. That's the biggest thing, indigenous history and um...you know comments like...Indians need to just get over it especially around Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, it's painful because people make assumptions based on untruths. And then you know, mixed Indians are what you are and stuff like that. It's awful. I think a lot of it is because, well from my era, I was born in the late 50s. It was totally uncool to be anything but White and so my mother did work very hard to make me be White and so there's that history of mistrust, history of how people of color are seen in the 50s and 60s and 70s that still affects me today and then I still see it everywhere I go you know hearing people, and listening to them and then the media, everything so it's just easier to pass.

Rita's reflection on her growing up experience was typical of five of the interviewees in this study who were raised by single mothers. Single mothers who were White or phenotypically light skinned often encouraged their mixed "race" children to embrace their White identity and White culture in general. By doing this, these mothers established patterns for these children that continued well into their adulthood.

Patrick, who identified as Japanese and White, also grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood and in a household where identifying as White was encouraged by his parents. Patrick found it easier to identify as White than identifying as Asian or biracial:

While I was growing up, I actually identified as White. I grew up in a White family, a White household, White neighborhood, a White school, probably we had about four people that identified as people of color. I didn't really know too many other Japanese people except my family. It wasn't until I went to this institution, in my second year that I identified as biracial.

Patrick's sentiment suggests that his social environment encouraged his White identity while growing up. All of Patrick's institutional interactions encouraged him to embrace

White identity. These factors gave Patrick a sense of false consciousness about his identity in which he only identified with one aspect of his heritage.

Sunrae, 54 grew up with a White mother and spent time with her mother's family. Though she knew that she was of mixed "race" she looked more like her Native American father and chose to identify as White:

Within my family, I look more like my father so I looked Whiter than everybody else. And so it was kind of a weird mix. In fact, I used to get teased about it. So it was a mix. I mean, we did hang out with other native people. So it was identified as White but knew I was not all the way.

Sunrae's account of her growing up experience reveals that though she acknowledged her Native American roots and was cognizant of her mixed heritage. Sunrae's statement also reveals that her social environment like Patrick's encouraged her to identify as White.

Ellen, 19, grew up around mostly White people that included her mother, extended family, and friends. Ellen did not interact with individuals from other racial groups. Ellen knew that she was biracial, but did not socialize with "Hispanics" unless she was with her father's family:

I grew up around like all like mainly Caucasian people, and I did not really interact with, like Hispanics, unless it was like with my family, so I felt more felt more Caucasian. I have Mexican heritage, but it was not part of my main -- I was not raised like that.

Ellen's reflection suggests a similar pattern to Patrick, Rita, and Sunrae. Ellen was also socialized in a very White environment that led to her embracing a White identity more than her Hispanic heritage. This growing up experience still remains with Ellen today as she acknowledges her Mexican heritage symbolically but still chooses to identify as White.

Rita, Patrick, Sunrae and Ellen all grew up with at least one parent who identified as White. Each participant stated that they did not identify, interact, or have many friends that belonged to a multiracial group. All of these participants spoke about their growing up environment which included: their home, school and neighborhoods as predominantly White. This homogeneous socialization contributed to their lack of awareness about their multiracial identity.

### **Multiracial Identity as Situational**

Most of the participants who initially identified with their dominant monoracial identity also found that once they had spent at least one year at a predominantly White, large, public research university, their perceptions about their own identity changed. These individuals began to identify with at least two racial categories but also stated that their identities could be situational; choosing one identity over the other depending on the circumstances.

Marjorie grew up in a family that was a mixture of Asian and White. She was very conscious of her Chinese heritage and was very interested in the Asian culture but still chose to identify as White while attending high school:

Now that I'm here I feel pretty independent. Now if I ever feel in an uncomfortable situation, whether that's because of my identity or not I usually hang out with certain friend groups or I'll decompress and I'll take long walks and watch largely stupid movies and just take a few hours for myself and reassess how I'm feeling afterwards.

Marjorie felt that once she had been on campus for at least one year, her identity became more complex. No longer did she only see herself as White, she began to identify as multiracial. This transition occurred because of two factors: (a) she became immersed in a campus that was much more racially diverse than her previous school and neighborhood, and (b) she was no longer seen as White by the dominant monoracial

White students on campus. Marjorie experienced a feeling of rejection, as a result, she began to reconsider her previous White identity and now identifies as biracial.

Ann, 27, identifies as multiracial with a mixture of African American, South East Asian and White. Ann also stated that her identity is situational depending on who she is with and her own state of mind. Ann stated:

I have never been White enough or Black enough. I often find myself as the token Black or the White person in my circles. Depending on my mood, I might say that I am White one day, Black the next day and biracial on another day and multiracial yet on another day. I get very discouraged and sometimes sad that I have to choose a race and that I am not accepted as a whole person.

Ann stated that her racial identity is always changing due to her situation and mood.

Ann is purposely situational in her identity and uses multiple perspectives to emphasize any one of her racial compositions. Ann's identity is fluid, which permits her to benefit from different situations.

Patrick stated that when he was younger, he ignored his Japanese identity.

Patrick now states that his identity choices are also situational especially around holidays when his family partakes in symbolic Japanese traditions. Patrick stated that his identity is dependent on the group who he is with at the time:

Actually it was more situational. When I was with my dad's side of the family, I definitely took in my Japanese heritage and I was able to actually grasp that especially around New Years because we do a lot of traditional things. When I'm with a group of people who identify as White, I notice a difference. However, when I was younger and tried to ignore it, when I was with a group of people of color I'd identify myself as White so I was glorifying the White identity.

Patrick also felt that he used his racial ambiguity to his advantage. Patrick traversed the boundaries of his racial dichotomies as a means to maintain a feeling of belonging to both communities, benefitting from each situation.

Lincoln stated that Lincoln's racial identity changes depending on who asks about Lincoln's racial identity. Lincoln states that there is not a prescribed method as to how Lincoln chooses Lincoln's identity:

When my Chinese roommate asked me, she asked me specifically what kind of Asian are you? So I let her know Chinese as well and depending on the situation I can't really come up with an algorithm for why I would pick a different one, sometimes I keep it more vague and just say Asian. Sometimes I'd say White instead of Italian usually I play with people. But when I was in any sort of more Asian group because there was about five of us in high school, I would feel more White than if I was in my White friends group I was always more Asian. So I was kind of an outsider in each one. Never -- I don't think when I was in high school I tried to not be who I was.

Lincoln stated that Lincoln's identity is very fluid and situational that not only crosses racial borders but is inclusive of Lincoln's Italian heritage depending on the circumstances. Like Marjorie, Ann and Patrick, Lincoln also claimed various racial identities in order to benefit from the prescribed situation.

Marjorie, Ann, Patrick, and Lincoln all felt that their identity choices are situational and fluid. Each participant had different reasons why they chose to identify as one "race" and not the other at different times. Marjorie chose her identity to fit in with her friends at school. Ann's mood was what motivated her to switch from one identity to another, and Patrick chose one identity over the other to share various cultural experiences depending on who he was with at the time.

### **Phenotype as a Factor for Marginalization**

Many of the participants also stated that they felt marginalized because of their physical appearance after being at a predominantly White, large, public research university after at least one year. Feeling marginalized, many of these respondents felt like the White world they expected to continue functioning in no longer existed as a

social space where they were given White privilege. For the first time many of these individuals were also in contact with large numbers of non-White monoracial groups. Having some exposure to diversity on campus meant that these multiracial individuals were caught between two or more worlds. These individuals had to negotiate an identity that felt comfortable and gave them a sense of belonging.

Sunrae who is phenotypically White, felt marginalized by the Native American community on campus. Sunrae describes this as “racism but in reverse” and would prefer not to be recognized as mixed. Sunrae also stated that she does not want to be perceived as part of the White dominant culture as she feels that her phenotype enables her to gain unearned privileges:

Yes, [laugh]. All the time! It is funny, but racism but in reverse is really strange -- I do not know if the people on the other end even come close to understanding just because I can pass as the dominant culture it does not really mean that I would really want to. I would even be proud of doing that. I mean, I know I can. Even then it is uncomfortable. I feel like I am cheating, you know.

Sunrae acknowledges her multiracial identity however; she would like to have her Native American ancestry acknowledged by everyone else. Sunrae feels a sense of horizontal hostility from other Native American people because of her White phenotype. Ironically, Sunrae grew up experiencing White privilege and acceptance however she is confused today because the Native American group of which she desires to be part sees her as an outsider because of her physical appearance.

Lane who is also phenotypically White felt marginalized and uncomfortable because of her White physical appearance while visiting the Native American cultural center on campus. Lane also felt that she did not know how to speak up or advocate for

herself when confronted with issues about her legitimacy as an authentic Native

American:

I think that yes, the first time I came to the cultural center, I came in all excited. Before we walked in and I can't remember exactly what the woman said to me but it was something like oh, are you here to find out about Native American students and would you like to know about Native American culture and are you here to you know...so not recognizing that I native and I didn't feel like I was welcome...I was looking around I noticed everyone with darker skin it really just sort of hit me no one knows who am...I didn't know how to advocate for myself or speak up so I kind of left and I never went back. For the four years I was here before, I just didn't feel comfortable.

Lane also felt that her phenotype was the factor determining whether she was accepted by other Native Americans on campus. Lane also desired a feeling of belonging and acceptance from this group. Lane's case represents a situation where her Native American family was in her life sporadically while growing up. As a result of this, she had a deeper understanding of Native American culture and traditions compared to Sunrae. Despite this exposure to her Native American family, Lane was expected to fully assimilate to her mother's White values and traditions. This put Lane in an awkward position while growing up because she was influenced by her mother to hide a culture that she somewhat desired to embrace. As she moved into adulthood, Lane felt compelled to reach out to her Native American roots however she felt excluded from this group because of her phenotype.

Casey felt marginalized at work because of her phenotype is non-White. Casey felt that she was treated different to her co-workers who were predominantly White. She reported that during meetings at work her suggestions were often overlooked and ignored. Casey believed that she would have been treated differently in the workplace if she was not a person of color or multiracial:



Oh yes, I am experiencing that right now in this job. Everything I do is constantly questioned about everything that I try to do. But yet, when someone else gives an idea, nobody goes against what she has to say. Is that typical? I feel like a minority, but I hate like having to feel this way. Though when I hear it from others (her co-workers), like if that person (Casey) was White, you think you would be treated differently. I think it is very apparent, especially if you work in the student government that has been run by predominately White people for the past twenty thirty years.

Casey came from a very sheltered environment where all of her family is multiracial and all of her friends are people of color or identify as multiracial. Casey had never been on a predominantly White campus and is now feeling a sense of disconnection between herself, other students and her superiors at work.

Ellen who is half Mexican and is phenotypically White identifies as White. However Ellen sometimes feels offended and marginalized when her White friends make jokes about Mexicans:

But you cannot really tell who is who, not even your friends or even like people, will make jokes, and I will always say something about it because you never know who is part of that race. I do not necessarily look like a Mexican, but I can and like that is offensive to me. And they are just like joking about it. So yeah that is definitely happened.

Ellen felt that her phenotype has shielded her from discrimination and has not yet publically identified as biracial as she is in fear of being ostracized from her friends. Ellen is now beginning to feel a sense of disconnection because of her undisclosed racial identity as she would like to identify as biracial to her friends.

Sunrae, Lane, Casey, and Ellen all felt marginalized because of their physical appearance, stating that they were treated differently by others on the college campus. Each one of these individuals has experienced horizontal hostility from the groups that they desire to be accepted by.

### **Friendship Networks and Acceptance**

The majority of the participants reported that their friendship networks tended to be individuals who were ethnically monoracial. Some participants reported that they specifically sought out multiracial individuals like themselves because it made them feel a sense of belonging. The remaining participants reported that they looked primarily for friends who were White Euro-American.

Ellen's closest friends are White. Ellen's friends have always been White however, she now has friends that are biracial on the campus, and her boyfriend is Hawaiian:

All my life, ever since I can remember, the majority of my friends are Caucasian, they are Caucasian here too. My boyfriend is Hawaiian though. I have lots of friends that are like biracial here on campus but my really close friends are Caucasian.

Ellen is a traditionally aged student who is just becoming aware of her multiracial identity. Ellen has spent her formative years identifying as White. After being on a predominantly White campus for over one year, Ellen is now realizing that although she identifies as White, she may not be perceived as White by others because of this, she is beginning to reach out to members of other racial groups to feel more accepted.

In contrast, Patrick does not have many White friends. Patrick reported having a lot of friends who identify as Black and as people of color. His closest friends are Hawaiian:

So I have four best friends all of them identify as Hawaiian but that would be it as far as my closest friends. I have friends who identify as Black basically as just people of color. I also have friends who identify as people of color but very minimally as compared to those who identify White.

Patrick stated that he grew up in a predominantly White environment. Patrick has left his family and friends behind who encouraged his White identity. Now that Patrick has spent at least one year on a predominantly White campus, he has come to realize that he

looks less like the dominant group. Patrick is now somewhat excluded from the dominant group and stated that he no longer identified with this group. Patrick has chosen to spend more time with people of color who he feels are more accepting of his multiracial identity.

Sunrae described her closest friends as being from various racial mixtures.

Sunrae described her friends as multiracial and she reported being most comfortable spending time with these individuals:

I would have to say that my closest friends are multiracial. There is one at a cultural center -- she has Irish, as well as an Oregon Native. There is another student is not at the cultural center - she is Swedish and Ojibwa. So she is mixed. There is are a couple that I have met through classes... a couple of them call themselves White, but when you start talking to them...they know they have Native in there, I think I am more comfortable with multiracial people. And we do get into these discussions about how idiotic it is that before Europeans came. Nobody worried about blood quantum or not...if you're full native.

Sunrae described her closest friends as multiracial, White and Native American. Sunrae has chosen friends who look similar to herself and have similar backgrounds and values. These factors suggest that Sunrae is trying to feel less marginalized and gain a sense of belonging to the group of Native American people on campus.

All of these participants appear to be at different phases with respect to their identity development and this may be reflected in their choices of close friends. Ellen has just started to acknowledge her "Hispanic" identity and is now seeking out biracial friends. Patrick, who is more comfortable with his biracial identity, has only sought out people of color to become friends. Sunrae has identified as mixed for a very long time. Sunrae has transitioned through various levels of her identity to where she is comfortable identifying as mixed, and has identified her closest friends as mixed.

### **Participation in Ethnically-Based Programs and Associations**

A secondary research question was whether the students' identities played a role in determining whether they took part in any ethnically-based programs and/or associations. Nine participants joined or took part in at least one ethnically-based program and/or an association on the campus. One participant who did not join any programs or associations did feel that a designated space for multiracial student support was needed.

Patrick has participated in many ethnically based programs on the campus and has also suggested that a group or a club would be useful for multiracial students to form a network in order to find others who identify as they do. Patrick also suggested that staff should be trained about multiracial student issues and concludes by suggesting that having a "base" is important for multiracial students:

I have put on programs that are ethnically based and I've helped advance information around those scenes. I put on a cultural fashion show and I have participated in planning Dia des los Muertos and I have spent time at the Cesar Chavez cultural center... I think that having a very hands-on group or club would probably be the first step that would make sense for people to have a network of others that identify as they do. Just having that network would really do a lot so if you came to hard times you have the people to rely on. Or maybe having staff that have been trained in the actual information. Just having that base there for us is important.

Patrick's involvement in ethnically based programs helped him to cross new borders in his identity development. Patrick is still searching for more programs that relate to his multiracial identity. Patrick stated that having a designated space to network and meet people will enable multiracial people on campus to feel a greater sense of belonging and mattering.

Lane has become a participant of three ethnically based programs and/or associations. Lane has indicated that the programs and/or associations that she has

joined help her to refine her identity and gives her a better sense of belonging by accepting Lane's multiracial identity and by sharing common experiences of feeling marginalized. Lane suggested that she would like to have a place that caters to people who are mixed. Lane suggests the need for a "racial liaison representative" so that she could have someone to talk with for mentorship and guidance. Lane also suggested that that she would like to have a poly-cultural space for people who are mixed or if their racial identity is different from their parents:

I am part of AISES which is the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. My grandfather was an original Elder on the board so I kind of feel I need to jump in there because my sisters and cousins are part of that too. Oh and OSU fusion. OSU fusion because it's about the mixed and multi-and poly, it's a great way to share -- I love that, it's fantastic! The cross-cultural mentoring program I thought that would be a good way to build skills cross-culturally and how to be a mentor. I will be working with college students so I think that would really help me too sometimes I wish I had a mentor too... I definitely have the perception of feeling welcome and OSU fusion. I definitely felt that way with the cross-cultural mentorship program...I thought that that was important for me to be able to go someplace to share...A multiracial liaison representative -- that would be a great idea because it would be somebody that I can talk to. If anything happens I have somebody to share that incident with. A poly-cultural center for people who are mixed.

Ellen has not joined any ethnically based programs and/or associations on the campus. Ellen was unsure about whether multiracial people like her feel marginalized on campus. Ellen acknowledges her Mexican heritage but continues to identify as White. Ellen sees a need for a multicultural center, classes, and discussions where everyone could learn about multiracial people:

If there was a multicultural center, it would be cool or more maybe like a class or classes or even like discussions where everyone on campus could be invited so other people could learn about it. Like I do not know, just like how multiracial people feel on campus. Discussion groups...that would be really cool. To get together with other people just like to talk about things...but I think that would be really cool, discussion groups.

Ellen was the only participant who did not join an ethnically based program and/or association on campus and yet she still recommended the need for a multicultural space. Each participant stated that a designated space was a priority for those who identify as multiracial to gather, make friends, and to find support. Ellen, Patrick and Lane suggested that there should also be a full-time faculty member to mentor, and support the needs of those who identify as multiracial.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented findings related to the ways in which multiracial students racially identify themselves prior to enrollment and after at least one year at a predominantly White, large, research university. This chapter also examined whether the participants joined ethnically-based programs and/or associations in order to aid in their retention and success. From the data presented in this chapter, the researcher was able to make a number of suggestive conclusions. The first one is that older non-traditional students seemed to have a clearer perception of their racial identity before and after enrolling in the institution. Younger traditionally-aged students were either exploring their identity or had recently changed their racial identity from a monoracial group to a mixed identity. The younger students were still in a transitional phase looking to make meanings of their new identity. Parents and familial ties played a major role regarding the participants' initial identity; most participants except for one, identified with the dominant culture while growing up. Many participants acknowledged their non-dominant racial identity only when they were with their extended family. Most participants who identified as White did not feel marginalized before they enrolled in the university however, once they identified as multiracial, they

felt marginalized by their peers and the general community. Most participants had mostly White friends prior to enrolling at the university; after at least one year, they had multiracial friends. All participants except for one have joined an ethnically-based program and/or association. All participants stated that multiracial students require programs and a designated space of their own to feel welcome and to have a sense of belonging. Most participants stated that there is a need for a professional staff representative to support multiracial students. Participants also stated that more awareness about multiracial students is necessary and they would like to have more classes and workshops that would educate the general student population about multiracial identity.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This concluding chapter will build on understanding the identity of multiracial students in universities and whether they chose to seek support through ethnically based programs and associations which may better inform university administrators with regards to determining services to be provided for this group. The researcher will provide (a) a discussion of the findings, (b) limitations and recommendations for further research and, (c) general conclusions.

Multiracial students are faced with their own unique challenges when arriving on a predominantly White, large, public research university for the first time and having to maneuver through their college transition, can be arduous (Shang, 2009). Adding to what may be a confusing adjustment; multiracial students may experience new feelings of identity development and perhaps new identity choices (Schlossberg, 1989). Understanding multiracial student identity transitions is very complex as multiracial students cannot be categorized into a single group that is suggestive of the current five recognized racial groups in the United States. Most Americans have a difficult time codifying and classifying multiracial men and women; this confusion often makes multiracial Americans feel like outsiders (King, 2008).

On predominantly White university campuses, it is crucial for the success of multiracial students to feel a sense of belonging and welcomed (Schlossberg, 1989). Most college campuses in the United States have support systems in place for the five recognized racial groups such as cultural centers and clubs (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Multiracial students who seek out support for both academic and social reasons at



existing campus cultural centers and clubs often report not being received in a positive manner from monoracial groups (Jones & Jones, 2010).

This qualitative study explored the identity choices of 10 multiracial students prior to their admittance into a predominantly White, large, public research university and their identity choices after at least one year at the institution. The study also examined identity development of multiracial students, the various factors as to why participants chose to identify as they did, how their identity changed certain aspects in their lives, and to what extent they desired to feel a sense of belonging. This study also explored whether multiracial students sought support through ethnically-based programs and associations.

The sample size of 10 participants was relatively small. The methodology was designed to provide some insight into the participants' experiences and not to suggest any generalizations or conclusions. Although the sample size is small, the study is informative in terms of providing a voice for participants for student affairs practitioners and university administrators so that they may have a better understanding of the unique multiracial identity experiences of this group.

This study was conducted to examine the identity transitions and success of students who identify as multiracial. This study explored three research questions: (a) What are the identity experiences of students who identify as multiracial at a predominantly White institution? (b) How do these experiences differ after one year after one year of being on campus from who they identified as prior to admittance to a predominantly White, large, public research university? (c) What campus resources

including programs and associations do multiracial students access to gain support and aid in their college experience?

### **General Conclusions**

The participants in this study were very willing to talk about their experiences. Several participants indicated that they were very pleased to have had the opportunity to talk about their personal experiences with someone of a similar mixed racial background. Many participants stated that they felt their experiences and opinions did not matter to the general monoracial population on the campus.

In addition to the themes that were presented in chapter four, the researcher was able to identify four prevalent findings regarding the participants' identities: first, all participants identified in one of the recognized monoracial groups prior to enrollment because of familial and peer pressure, second, after at least one year, and all participants (except for one) identified with at least two racial groups subsequent to enrollment, third, all individuals subsequently felt marginalized by members of the monoracial groups on the college campus, and fourth, the older-than-average participants tended to have a more sophisticated understanding of their complex multiracial identity that may have been due to the increased social awareness of people of color throughout their lives, where they may have lived, and who may have been part of their friendship networks compared to the traditionally-aged college students. As a secondary purpose, the researcher hoped to explore in greater depth the ways in which identity was a factor in choosing to become a part of any ethnically-based programs or associations on campus. During the interviews, the participants also shared their opinions and perspectives with regards to programs and resources that they felt were needed to aid

with their retention and success. The participants also suggested what changes they felt would be helpful and relevant for the multiracial population to make them feel welcome and have a sense of belonging and significance: all participants stated categorically, that they would benefit from having ethnically-based programs and/or associations specifically for students who identify as multiracial to help them transition and become more successful in college. These programs and/or associations would aid in their sense of belonging or mattering for the participants who identify as multiracial once they began to feel a sense of double rejection from the group that they originally identified and other monoracial groups. All participants (except for one) have joined at least one ethnically-based program and/or association since arriving on a predominantly White, large, research institution.

### **Anticipated Findings**

Many of the findings and themes of this study were similar to the existing literature about multiracial students. Most participants stated that their racial identity was situational and dependent on whom they were with at the time. According to Schlossberg (1989), multiracial students may live bicultural lives just to fit in with their college peers and according to Renn (2008), they may also seek out support to aid in their transition. Rockquomore and Brunnsma (2008) also note that at the protean level of their mixed “race” identity model, individuals change their consciousness as they move from group to group and through various contexts of their lives. In an earlier study, Root (1996) refers to this concept as border crossing where individuals use multiple perspectives or are purposefully situational in their identity in order to better manage the current situation that they are in to their benefit.

Another anticipated finding was that all of the participants were at various levels in their identity development based on their age and physical appearance. Some of the traditionally-aged participants were not as comfortable with their multiracial identity as they had just begun the process of identifying with more than one “race.” Many of the younger participants (under 25 years of age) started identifying as multiracial only after leaving their home and families. According to Wijeyesinghe’s (2001) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity, cultural attachment influences the choice of multiracial individuals. These individuals tend to cling to the cultural traditions in which they have been involved and exposed to in their childhood. It was clear throughout the interviews of the traditionally-aged participants that they were influenced by their past experiences and that Wijeyesinghe’s (2001) physical appearance factor was more a salient determining factor of their multiracial identity. However, the older-than-average participants seemed to be much more comfortable identifying as multiracial. According to Root (1996) and Renn (2008), multiracial individuals were comfortable using their multiple identities or border crossed to fit the situation. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008), note that younger individuals see themselves as exclusively in one racial group based on their physical appearance which is a strong determinant regarding multiracial identity. These models all suggest that age, physical appearance, and experiences while growing up are strong predictors of identification, new experiences related to their identity, and whether they seek out ethnically based programs and /or associations at a predominantly White, large, research institution.

All participants felt that there was a need for a separate space that was designated for multiracial students regardless of their racial mixture. All participants

stated that this space would be an ideal place to meet other multiracial students. A designated physical location would help multiracial students feel a sense of belonging and welcomed, and it would be a place that they could feel safe being themselves in contrast to the existing monoracial cultural centers where they reported feeling uncomfortable. Some participants reported feeling horizontal hostility in the existing monoracial cultural centers. All participants in this study indicated that they would like to see more multiracial awareness through classes, workshops, and programs offered on campus. Some participants indicated that they would like to have a dedicated faculty member located at a designated space for multiracial students to advocate and mentor them. These suggested changes for improvements at the university were all in agreement with previous research conducted by (Brown, 2009; Jones & Jones; 2010; Renn 2008; Roper & McAloney, 2010). These similarities suggest that multiracial students in higher education require unique programs and association in order to feel connected and be successful.

### **Unanticipated Findings**

There were several findings that were unanticipated while analyzing the data for this research. The first unanticipated finding was that the individuals who responded earliest to the recruitment letter (Appendix A) were all older than average students. This suggests to the researcher that the older multiracial individuals were fairly comfortable expressing their opinions regarding their mixed identity because they had more life experience and a better sense of their identity. All participants were extremely eager to tell their story about their identity transitions during the interviews. All participants stated that they did not have a regular outlet to discuss their feelings about their identity

development and what it meant for them to be a multiracial student at a predominantly White, large, public research university.

One of the traditionally-aged participants, who initially indicated that she was multiracial on the eligibility survey (Appendix B), acknowledged her Mexican heritage during the one-on-one interview but did not claim a multiracial identity and maintained that she identified as White only. This suggests to the researcher that this participant may be in an initial phase of transitioning from a monoracial identity to a multiracial identity. Her identity is also influenced strongly by her physical appearance, which is phenotypically White. According to Renn's Five Patterns of Identity (2008) this student holds a monoracial identity where the individual chooses one heritage background with which to identify. It is important to note that this student was one of the younger participants in the study.

Another unanticipated finding was that once the participants identified as multiracial, they tended to feel some degree of marginalization from the five recognized monoracial groups. Almost all of the participants who identified as White prior to enrollment, after being on the campus for at least one year, acknowledged their mixed racial identity. Once they accepted a multiracial identity and no longer saw themselves as White, the participants stated that they experienced a new feeling of marginalization from the dominant group. Schlossberg (1989), stated that individuals are always concerned about transitioning into new roles or having new experiences and the "larger the difference the former role and the new role, the more marginal the person may feel" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 7).

### **Implications for Practice**

This study explored the transitional experiences of students who identify as multiracial and whether they sought out ethnically based programs and associations to aid with their transition into college. The results of this study have implications for administrators, faculty and staff in higher education. This study might also provide information that could aid in the development of programs and potentially improve the quality of services and resources provided for the growing number of multiracial students.

The participant pool of 10 was small; however the information presented in this research is suggestive of the unique transitions and needs that other multiracial students may experience at a predominantly White institution. Practitioners in higher education should be encouraged to seek an understanding of this growing student population and incorporate and/or develop new programs to assist multiracial students if they are to equally compete with students from monoracial groups who already have programs in place to promote success, retention, and ultimately graduation. This may be somewhat challenging as the current higher educational system is still struggling to meet the needs of monoracial groups (Roper & McAloney, 2010). Practitioners must not assume that the needs of multiracial students are the same as those who identify as non-White. Multiracial students have their own unique challenges and strengths that must be understood in order to alleviate social barriers (Brown, 2011). Practitioners must also look to the future and find ways to include this diverse group before they are left behind by their peers both academically and socially. Student Affairs leaders must encourage administrators, faculty, and staff to broaden their knowledge regarding multiracial students identity development and transitional issues through examining existing

literature, attending conferences, and becoming more involved with multiracial students. This knowledge will aid in the challenges for practitioners and help to develop more comprehensive programs that will be inclusive of all multiracial students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations to this study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process was long and tedious. The researcher had little control regarding the turn-around sequence and so the approval process took much longer than the researcher had anticipated. Though the researcher submitted the informed consent document and the protocol document to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval in June of 2010, the study was not approved until mid-October of 2010. This study was also limited by the small number of participants who participated in a relatively short 60-minute interview. Because of time constraints, the researcher was not able to spend time recruiting a more diverse pool of participants. A more diverse sample may have given the researcher more variability in the participant experiences. A more diverse group of students would include participants who were of other racial mixtures. The current sample contained individuals who all have one White parent. The sample was made up of a disproportionate number of older than average students. It is important to note that the students who responded to the initial recruitment e-mail were those who were very motivated to talk about their experiences and who had also begun the process of transitioning from a monoracial identity to a multiracial identity. The researcher found that most of the students who replied immediately to the initial recruitment letter (Appendix A), were female, older-than-average students and who were very comfortable talking about their mixed “race” identity.



The study did not examine the socio-economic, socio-cultural background or roles of significant others such as teachers, mentors, coaches, and/or religious leaders of each participant because the interview schedule was limited to 10 questions. The researcher believes that had the socio-economic or socio-cultural background of each participant been examined, a more detailed picture would have emerged about the multiple dimensions related to multiracial identity development. It is important to note that the intent of the researcher was not to generalize, but to gather participants' stories.

Current research about this topic is somewhat limited. The researcher was able to find information about monoracial groups through various journal articles, books, and electronic data bases however most of the existing literature about multiracial groups focused on students who identified as Black/African American and White (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987; Sands & Schuh, 2004; Smith & Tutwiler, 2005) and rarely included other racial mixtures in their research. Some research that focused on multiracial students (Wong & Buckner, 2008; Brown, 2009; Jones & Jones, 2010) was very superficial and based on small samples.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In order for college campuses to become more culturally sensitive regarding multiracial students, assessment and further research is necessary. It is important that higher education administrators use the existing research findings to inform and improve institutional policies. Policy information regarding multiracial students in higher education is limited despite the increasing importance of multiracial issues. A continuation of similar research included in this study concerning identity development

is essential, as it is evident from the findings presented that there are numerous multiracial groups that require the attention of administrators.

Further research would benefit from longitudinal studies based on a larger sample size that would examine identity transition starting prior to enrollment and how students transition during their college years. A concerted effort should be made to recruit traditionally-aged male participants and people with different multiracial mixtures. These studies would also examine whether individuals change their identity (border crossing) in order to fit into one of the five monoracial categories and the impact that border crossing has on identity. Researchers should ultimately begin with ascertaining how many multiracial students are on college campuses as the numbers regarding this population are still somewhat ambiguous and are under-reported.

Because multiracial student mixtures are diverse, researchers should then delve into the best practices of how to support students who have these unique identifications. Part of these best practices would be to measure the attitudes of the administrators and those who would play an integral part in disseminating new programs and much-needed interventions. Once there is enough research about social, “racial,” and historical contexts to substantiate the best practices, it is recommended that the administrators collaborate with multiracial student leaders to better evaluate the needs and to recommend new programs and services for this growing multiracial student population.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

A more inclusive college environment where multiracial students have a sense of community will not only promote feelings of mattering and belonging but may ultimately support better scholastic achievements for this group. This will also enable

members of monoracial groups to have a richer understanding of another layer of racial diversity. Monoracial groups are typically engaged in their own social issues and tend to overlook multiracial students who do not generally have the resources available to them on college campuses to address their concerns. Greater recognition of multiracial students is becoming more evident; it is important that campus officials recognize and become more sensitive to issues of identity and promote engagement and dialogue with the community. Racial identity is fluid and becoming more complex in the United States through the dilution of ethnic barriers, interracial marriages, immigration, and international adoption. Multiracial students, with the help of college administrators, must work together to create a more tolerant and inclusive learning environment. This is particularly important because society is evolving and becoming more diverse.

In order to address and create a more inclusive environment for multiracial students, administrators must integrate cultural and social issues into their long term planning and strategies and acknowledge the fluidity of “race” and social issues. Multiracial social programs and policies need to encompass the individuals’ multiple racial identities and also focus on the positive aspects of identifying as multiracial. It is at this juncture, when dialogue has commenced new programs are initiated, that acceptance will proceed and the future of multiracial students will be more inclusive with unparalleled acceptance.

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## APPENDICES

**Attachment A-Recruitment Materials**

To: Students who self identify as biracial multiracial or mixed race

Subject: Participate in Research

Name of Study: College Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Programs and Associations

Dear Student:

My name is Lauren Plaza and I am a graduate student in the College of Education. I plan to study the connections of students who self identify as bi racial, multiracial or of any mixed racial background and their involvement particularly in student associations and organizations. The results of this study will be used to write a Master of Science thesis in partial completion of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in College Student Services Administration at Oregon State University. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The study would ask that you participate in an individual one-on-one audio taped interview during the next few weeks of the Fall 2010 term.

Qualifications to participate in this study include:

- Must be at least 18 years of age.
- Must be either of junior or senior class standing
- Must identify as , biracial or mixed
- Must be involved in a cultural program or association during your tenure at Oregon State University.

If you meet the qualifications for participating in this study, and wish to do so, please email me at [lauren.plaza@oregonstate.edu](mailto:lauren.plaza@oregonstate.edu). I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration of this request!

Sincerely,

Lauren Plaza  
Graduate Student Researcher  
College of Education

Jessica White  
Principal Researcher  
College of Education

## Appendix B: Eligibility Survey

For the purpose of this study, multiracial, bi-racial and or mixed “race” students are defined as students whose parents are not of the same “race” or are of mixed “races”.

1. Do you identify as a biracial, multiracial, or a mixed “race” student? Circle one:  
Yes/No

2. Do you identify with one “race” only? ( ) Two “races” ( ) More than 3 “races” ( )

3. Which best describes your racial/ethnic identity? (Please check all that apply)

- *American Indian or Alaskan Native*: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.
- *Asian or Pacific Islander*: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands and Samoa.
- *Black, not of Hispanic Origin*: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- *Hispanic*: A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of “race”.
- *White, not of Hispanic Origin*: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East.
- If none of the above choices apply to you, please use your own description:

---

- Decline to respond

4. Have you participated in any ethnically based clubs and/or associations at Oregon State University?

Circle one: Yes/No

5. Which clubs and/or associations have you participated in at Oregon State University?

6. Have you participated in culturally based programs at Oregon State University?

Circle one: Yes/No

7. Do these clubs and/or associations help to support you both academically and socially?

Circle one: Yes/No

8. Why did you select these clubs and/or associations listed in question 3?

#### Demographic Information

1. What is gender do you identify as? Male/Female/Other (please identify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your year of study?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your major?
5. Have you or are you participating in an academic support service (EOP, TRIO, Upward Bound, CAMP, etc.)?

If you would like to be part of this study, please provide your contact information.

1. Name
2. Phone number
3. E-mail

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

The following interview questions have been organized as they relate to each research question of this study. The interview will begin with questions that solicit basic background knowledge of the participant and create in order to get an idea of how the participants perceived themselves. Interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured format and the researcher will remain flexible and open to addressing issues and topics as they arise with unscripted questions. This will allow for topics of relevance and personal significance to the participant to be explored further.

### Part 1-Identity Development

1. How did you self identify your “race” while growing up?
2. How do you self identify your “race” now?

### Part 2- Friendships and Identity Development

1. Do you recall your friends ever asking you “what race are you?”
2. Was your answer situational? Probe: Did you ever lean towards a specific “race” depending on who asked you the question and did your answer influence which student programs and associations you participated in?

### Part 3- Pre Admission Decisions

1. Tell me why you decided to come to Oregon State University? Probe: Prior to applying was the racial makeup of the campus something you were curious about?

### Part 4: Campus Life and Identity Development

1. Tell me about your closest friends at Oregon State University. Probe: how would you classify your friends’ “race” identity?
2. Have your closest friends ever make racist jokes which were directed at people that identified as you identify? Probe: if yes, how did you deal with these jokes?
3. What are some of the social issues you see on campus with people who are from groups?
4. Have you ever felt marginalized because of your physical appearance or because of how you identify as compared to how others identify you? Probe: what strategies do you have for dealing with feeling marginalized?

### Part 5-Participation in Programs and Associations on Campus

1. What programs and /or student associations have you chosen to participate in at Oregon State University?
2. Why did you choose to take part in these programs and associations? Probe: Which ones make you feel welcome and why or did the perception of feeling welcome have anything to do with your decision?
3. Do you think that students who are multiracial require any particular programs or student associations at Oregon State University?
4. As a student who identifies as you do, what programs or associations could Oregon State University provide for you in order to facilitate your success and retention?

## Appendix D-Informed Consent Document



ADULT EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP  
 Oregon State University, 402 Education Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331  
 Tel 541-737-4661 | Fax 541-737-8971 | soewebite@lists.orst.edu/

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **Student Involvement in Special Interest Student Organizations**  
 Principle Investigator: **Jessica White, Adult Higher Education Faculty**  
 Co-Investigators(s): **Lauren Plaza, Graduate Student in College Student Services Administration**

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

You are invited to participate in a research study that will focus on the connections of students who self identify as multiracial or of any mixed racial background and their involvement particularly in student associations and organizations. The results of this study will be used to write a Master thesis in partial completion of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in College Student Services Administration at Oregon State University.

We are studying this topic because we want to understand the way in which multiracial students identify themselves after they have been immersed in a predominantly White Euro American campus for at least two years and whether they seek support through various groups within ethnic and cultural associations in the existing cultural associations which are intended to serve traditionally identified or monoracial groups at Oregon State University.

Student involvement has been shown to be a vital part of student retention and by participating in this study you will be helping us to understand how to improve the experiences for students who have similar interests and involvement on college campuses.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?**

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in this study. Please read this form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, including the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that are not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study.

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being invited to take part in this study because you have indicated that you are a student at Oregon State University, are at least 18 years of age and you have self identified yourself as multiracial, biracial or "mixed". Furthermore, you have been attending Oregon State University for two academic years or more and are willing to share your experiences.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?**

This study asks that you participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher to discuss your experiences on the topic previously discussed.

Oregon State University • IRB Study #.4684 Approval Date: 10/12/2010 Expiration Date: 10/11/2011



ADULT EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP  
 Oregon State University, 402 Education Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331  
 Tel 541-737-4661 | Fax 541-737-8971 | soeweb@lists.orst.edu/

If you agree to participate in this study, your estimated time commitment is no more than one hour over the course of the Fall 2010 quarter. The one-on-one interview will be scheduled during the first few weeks of the quarter and the focus group shortly after, within the middle to late weeks of the quarter.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

There are minimal risks involved in this study. You will be able to decline to answer any question without justification, and the researcher will avoid asking you to speak about deeply personal topics that you do not wish to address.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY?**

We do not know if you will benefit from this study. However, we hope that the information that we gain will help to benefit students in the future data from the project will aid student affairs professionals/advisors in understanding how to best serve students who's experiences are similar to your own. We also hope that you enjoy talking about and reflecting upon your experiences.

#### **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will not be paid for or compensated in any way for being in this study.

#### **WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during the research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law and university policy. You will be assigned an identification code that will be used on all data forms in order to secure your privacy. If the results of this project are published, your identity will not be made public.

#### **AUDIO RECORDING**

This study requires that you are audio recorded in the interview. This recording will be transcribed by a professional, confidential, transcription service. This will allow the researcher to revisit, review, and analyze information discussed during the course of the interview. Only the researcher and the transcription service will have access to the recording and transcriptions. Furthermore, all recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research study or after a period of no more than five years from the completion of this study. As a participant you will have the opportunity to opt-out of being recorded.

- I agree to be audio recorded
- I decline to be audio recorded





ADULT EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP  
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### **DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have before volunteering. If you decide not to take part in this study, your decision will have no effect on the quality of care and services you receive.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in this study. You may elect to pass or decline to answer any question posed during the interview or focus group. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports in a manner that doesn't personally identify you.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have questions about this research project, please contact: Jessica White at 541.737.8576 or [jessica.white@oregonstate.edu](mailto:jessica.white@oregonstate.edu) or Lauren Plaza at (541) 250-9016 or [lauren.plaza@oregonstate.edu](mailto:lauren.plaza@oregonstate.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541)737-4933 or [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participants Name (printed):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Date)