In this paper I focus on the process of formulating an ethnic identity in the United States for individuals of mixed-ethnicity. My main question explores the complexities an individual with parents of separate and distinct ethnic heritages faces when constructing an ethnic identity in our society. American society is reaching a new reality where influences of not only mixed “race”, but of an individual’s multiple ethnic heritages can be recognized and discussed. Still, American culture has little patience with changing identities between contexts or with an ambiguous identity. Through the combination of research, interviews, and my own life experiences, I explore the many complex influences and conditions which shape an individual's mixed ethnic identity over time. My main informants are individuals whose parents acknowledged an evident and specific ethnic heritage distinct from one another. My informants are a combination of their cultural and biological heritage, leaving them with more flexibility how to construct their own ethnic
identity, which may then change through time, based on their unique life experiences.

As I traced the formulation of ethnic identity, for individuals of mixed-ethnicity, I found that it is not only shaped by how they see themselves, but also by how others perceive them. Ethnic identity begins with the individual’s family heritage, cultural background, language, and personality and is then transformed by political, economic, educational, and other diverse influences of society, which unfortunately also includes prejudice, discrimination, and embellished stereotypes.
Mixed Ethnic Identity in the United States

by

Courtney C. Lonergan

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*This list doesn't include all of my informants, as I did not record all conversations with all informants. Informants who did not feel comfortable being taped were not taped.


Informant #3: A.C. #1 on 9/26/98; A.C. #2 on 12/7/98; A.C. #3 on 2/2/99.

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Informant #12: J.M. #1 on 10/2/97; J.M. #2 on 2/5/98; J.M. #3 on 5/6/98.

Informant #15: L.B. #1 on 2/30/98; L.B. #2 on 6/16/98; L.B. #3 on 2/21/99.

Informant #16: M.M. #1 on 1/22/98; M.M. #2 on 1/28/98.

Informant #20: M.J. #1 on 10/31/98; M.J. #2 on 2/4/99.

Informant #21: N.G. #1 on 3/12/98; N.G. #3 on 6/2/98.

Informant #23: J.O. #1 on 1/19/98; J.O. #2 on 4/26/98.

Informant #24: P.D. #1 on 1/30/99.

Informant #28: R.S. #1 on 5/12/98; R.S. #2 on 11/18/98; R.S. #3 on 1/14/99; R.S. #4 on 3/12/99.

Informant #30: R.T. #1 on 11/4/98; R.T. #2 on 2/16/99; R.T. #3 on 4/12/99.
In this chapter I introduce the focus of study and the methods I used for my research. In this type of paper I think it is important for the author to explore her own background has shaped her views concerning race and ethnicity in the United States.

**Focus of Study:**

After much background research, reading, and interviews with about 100 Oregon State University students, I decided to focus on interviews and conversations with thirty-six students who identify with a mixed-ethnic or multiracial heritage and identity. My informants were raised in families whose parents identified with separate ethnic or "racial" groups and were then introduced to the traditions and cultural characteristics of each. Through my interviews and research I trace the stages of my informants' constructions of their ethnic identities by focusing on their personal experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds (see Appendices 1, 2, and 3). I relate their stories, experiences, and explanations with each other along with taking into account current influences of our society and other outside influences here in the United States.
States. I held private and group discussions, formally and informally, with many friends, family, and acquaintances of my informants. I then re-examined my personal research in light of popular debates, opinions, theoretical discussions, and other research and issues concerning multi-ethnic and "pure" ethnic identities in our society.

I began my research by conducting formal interviews with each of my informants. In these interviews I used my questionnaires, and attempted to get to know my informants so they would feel comfortable discussing how they have shaped their multi-ethnic identity. After the preliminary formal interview, I then moved to informal interviews and discussions with their friends and family members. I would then hold follow-up formal interviews with my main informant to discuss their friends and families perspectives and how their opinions affected my informant's personal identity. When my informants and their friends and family were comfortable I would tape record our conversations, however some of my informants did not feel comfortable being taped. In these circumstances I would rely on extensive note taking. Since my research and questioning did uncover some very personal ideas and emotions, I use pseudonyms for my informant's names to protect their identity.

The statistics on my informants are quite interesting, of my thirty-six main informants, 20 are male and 16 are female. The average time spent living in Corvallis is 3.47 years, with fifteen years being the longest
stay and one year being the shortest amount of time an informant has been in Corvallis. My informants are from all over the United States: ten informants from California, five from Oregon, four from Texas, three from Alaska, three from Washington, two from Hawaii, two from Arizona, and then others from Idaho, Louisiana, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, and two students who are originally from Nigeria and Ecuador. The average age of my informants is 23, with the oldest being 33 and the youngest being 19.

It is very exciting to be writing and studying about mixed ethnicity and discussing the stages of shaping an ethnic identity in our society, especially at this point in time. Even though mixed ethnicity has been a part of our society and American culture from the beginning, it is currently a popular topic of discussion. Because mixed ethnicity is a topic of widespread debate and discussion, society in general is influenced by current discussions found in popular news publications and media events. Academic discussions, up until recently, have steered away from debates concerning mixed "race" and other surrounding issues. So, in many cases, the best sources of information for researching and studying mixed ethnic identities in our society is from mixed ethnic individuals themselves. Individuals with multi ethnic backgrounds have been encouraged to recount their experiences in academic discussions and even within the popular media. I feel that it is important to include resources and other background information from
academia and also from the public in order to capture a well-rounded perception of the diverse experiences and complex influences upon individuals of mixed ethnicity in our society, today and in the future.

Not only is my research affected by its popularity, but it is also affected, at the same time, by the experiences and environment my informants are confronting here at Oregon State University. My informants, many for the first time, have reached a time in their lives where they are questioning society's ethnic and "racial" categories. They are now able to focus on shaping their own personal mixed ethnic identities. Many of my informants feel that they are in a marginalized position in our society, yet as they discover more about themselves and surrounding society they feel more confident in their mixed ethnic identities.

My informants were well aware from childhood that they were unique individuals as their combined heritage allowed them to cross ethnic and racial barriers. Their mixed-ethnic heritage and associated identity set them apart from the majority of their friends who felt they had a "pure" ethnic heritage and identity. However, my informants are still involved in the processes of shaping their unique mixed ethnic identity in our society and continue to help my research by sharing their perspectives, complex influences, and personal feelings surrounding their life experiences.
In this discussion I will touch on the many complexities that surround the issues of mixed ethnicity in our society. I will identify different influences and criteria that group individuals into separate ethnic categories as well as discussing the categories themselves. I will also locate patterns associated with the different attitudes and perspectives my informants hold towards their ethnicity and discuss separate stages they experience with their ethnic identity over time.

**Positioning the Author:**

When I first started thinking about this topic, I asked myself, how I arrived at the positions I hold now socially, culturally, politically, and economically? As I took a step back and looked at life experiences that shaped and reflect my values and beliefs I found that my ethnic/racial positioning is related to and influences many aspects of how I define my position as a unique individual in our society. I am confident in what I stand for and represent to my friends, family, and acquaintances and I am grateful that I have diverse and substantial relationships across many racial and ethnic barriers in our society. But then I wonder; why isn't everyone at the same comfort level with individuals of separate ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds? How have I arrived at crossing these stigmatized barriers of our society unlike other members of white dominant society? Essentially, I feel that the diverse values and
interactions my parents not only presented, but also practiced throughout my life shape my open perspectives and attitudes on life and relationships.

My parents didn’t need to preach the inherent equality of all individuals in our society, it was a given in our family relationships and interactions. Our diverse relations with separate ethnic groups seemed normal to my brother and me, in fact we didn’t even notice racial differences, it was just normal that people looked different from one another. Some people are big, some small, some tall, some short, some have browner skin, and some have peachier skin. We grew up in Anchorage, Alaska which is a very diverse town of about 280,000 people. My family lived in a middle class neighborhood containing people of middle-lower and middle-upper financial statuses. However, many of our family friends and playmates lived in lower class neighborhoods. It would take forever to list all the interactions and relationships from my childhood that helped in forming who I am today. (In fact, I had never even reflected on how my ideas surrounding race and ethnicity were formed so early on in my life.) As I look back on my family life and experiences that previously seemed so normal and ordinary, I realize that they are actually quite different from other individuals’ that I have encountered in our society. My parents had so many ethnically diverse friends that it seemed normal to me that everyone looked, spoke, and
acted differently. These attitudes were then, and are now, reflected in the friendships and lives of my brother and me.

My mother was, and is to this day, the only non-Native adopted into an Aleut tribe (Tlingit Indians, Saxman Tribe, Raven Clan) in Alaska. I was raised since the day I was born with the son of the Chief, as our families were very close. My brother's best friend throughout elementary and junior high was Somnuck, they were inseparable, my brother, Brady, was an honorary member of Somnuck's family, as Somnuck was in ours. Somnuck and Brady were like twins, they did everything together, the only difference that I distinctly recognized between the two was that Somnuck was a head shorter than my brother, besides that they were exactly the same and equally annoying. Somnuck's family emigrated from Laos four years after he was born, his parents didn't speak any English, and they lived in a very small house with Somnuck's six brothers and sisters. However, these racial and economic differences didn't make Somnuck seem any different from us. Actually, we just assumed that everyone was different, each family was unique and we all had own diverse family traditions and practices.

I distinctly remember the day my mom let me buy a Cabbage-Patch Kid. She refused to buy me one so I had to do extra chores and save up my allowance. I was seven; she took me to a huge toy store that had isles and isles of Cabbage-Patch Kids. I was so excited! I had no idea
which one I wanted, I was concerned about names I didn't want a common name like Sarah or Amy, but my mom told me I could always change the name of the doll later when I got home. I have not even really thought about it before, but the doll that I picked out was a little African-American girl, I named her Billie Jean. I have so many memories with this doll; I took her everywhere. When I started thinking about this paper I called my mom and asked her what she thought, if anything, about why I picked out a black doll over a white one. She said that she wasn't surprised at all, we had many ethnically diverse toys, and that my brother's favorite doll was also black. I had totally forgotten about Pumpkin, she was one of those dolls whose eyes opened and shut when you laid her down and then sat her up. She was the only doll my brother had and he took her everywhere.

My family spent time yearly in Mexico throughout my childhood. We visited barrios, rich cities, poor cities and even Mexico City. My parents wanted my brother and me to be open to different cultures, traditions, languages and different lifestyles. We would travel alone with only our family, or with good family friends who were native Mexicans. At many times we were the only white people in a village, or in large cities, the only white people as far as your eyes could see. This wasn't uncomfortable or even really discussed by our family, as we were excited
to be around people who were different from ourselves so we could experience their culture, traditions, and ways of doing things.

I remember witnessing blatant racism for the first time when I was in Mexico. It occurred in Mazatlan, Mexico which has recently, over the past ten years, become a huge American tourist attraction. Before the booming tourist industry began, there was one bus system that traveled throughout the entire city. As American tourists arrived, Mazatlan introduced a new, cleaner, and more modern system, which traveled primarily to the beach and other tourist parts of town. The old bus system, with the older busses with holes in the floor, also traveled to the same places. My family would always use the bus system and we would always just get on whichever bus arrived first, no matter which bus it was. Most tourists, however, used the new bus system while the locals only rode on the older bus system. One day my little brother and I traveled to town with our parents' good friends. My brother was five and I was nine. As we were attempting to board the first bus that arrived, a white, male, American (thinking that my brother and I were alone) grabbed my arm. He said, "Little girl you don't want to get on that bus with all the dirty Mexicans, you might get a disease." I didn't understand what he meant, I was always on those busses and the people weren't dirty, they were clean. My dad's friend grabbed my other hand and said, "Come on Courtney, let's just get on the bus." When the man saw who I
was with he recoiled as if I were dirty, like I was going to give him a disease.

This man had pushed his viewpoints on a young child, and then had rejected that child with the same racism and discrimination that he held towards people who were not like him. On top of that, his ignorance and prejudice towards a group of people whose country he had chosen to visit was completely unfounded. This man had really scared me, and I was even more affected by his words when I saw and heard my parents’ reaction to the incident. My parents discussed racism, prejudice, discrimination, and ignorance. They explained how I should not only be scared of people like this man, but feel sorry for them because of their own ignorance. My parents did not preach for me to be completely fearful of racist and bigoted people, but to be very wary and cautious to not let myself be in a potentially harmful situation.

As the years went on, at home, when traveling, and in Mexico I often found myself in situations where I confronted racism and discrimination from many whites, which was not only directed at the minority or “non-white” individuals I was with, but was also directed at me. Sometimes I encounter prejudice and biased opinions from whites when I am by myself, simply because of who they had seen me interacting with previously. In some situations it is quite scary, especially when I am being questioned and refused service by white
males. However, I am always affected and will do what I can to change the situation or question the motivations of the racist individual.

My parents have always pushed me to recognize and combat racism in its many forms in our society. The childhood books that my parents read to my brother and me discussed the inherent equality of all people, while also recognizing and rejoicing in our many differences and unique qualities, traditions, and cultures. “Free to be you and Free to be me” was my favorite book as I was growing up. My brother and I would force my parents to read it to us over and over, even though we both had it memorized.

However, until I left for college, University of Idaho, I didn’t realize how unique my diverse background actually was, and how upsetting the opinions of my new friends and acquaintances would be. At school, I discovered that most of my friends grew up around people that were similar to themselves, economically, socially, culturally, and racially. Most of the people I met were from Idaho, and their parents and older siblings had all attended University of Idaho. Traditions and the continuation of them were very important; change and new ideas weren’t encouraged. I was forced to realize that I had crossed many social barriers surrounding race and ethnicity that many people will never bridge in their lifetimes. I did not share the same fear, distrust, and social distance that my white friends held towards members of minority
cultures in our society. It was hard to hear all the stereotypes and racist remarks, especially when my friends didn’t recognize them as being racist, they explained “It’s simply the truth, Courtney. I don’t know how it is in Alaska, but this is the way things are around here.” When it came to social interactions and parties, I met and hung out with many white and minority individuals; due to my friendly, outgoing personality. My new white friends continued to ask me, “Why are you friends with so many minority individuals?” First off, I found it interesting that I needed to justify my friendships, but my question was “Why is it uncommon to have friends of different racial and ethnic backgrounds than your own?”

When I graduated from college and moved here to Corvallis, I was very aware that my racial and ethnic position in society differs from most people that I encounter. I have experienced racial discrimination and stereotypes surrounding interracial relationships that I have been a part of from members of white dominant society and from members of minority cultures. There are many stigmas and stereotypes surrounding interactions between people who are not similar racially or ethnically in our society. Because I was aware of my positioning, I was also much more observant of my insider/outside perspective. Members of white dominant society monitor language that they use around me to make sure they don’t “say the wrong thing” or “sound racist.” So in many ways, I am seen as different in these relationships because I have minority friends. Conversely, my friends who are from separate ethnic
and racial backgrounds treat me as though I am an insider, where I "know where they are coming from" and "understand racism of white dominant society." They feel they can discuss stereotypes and racist discrimination without judgement and biases on my part, unlike other members of white dominant society that they have encountered.

I am still in the process of determining who I am and what I stand for as I am living through my college experiences. I feel that I know what I stand for, but I am also interested in how others perceive me. I am often quite shocked when I discover some stereotypes that people of my own race have about me because my close friends are of different racial groupings. For example, an Asian-American classmate of mine asked me if I was planning on "getting plastered" and if I was going to the Peacock (a popular dance/night club). I actually was going to go to that bar that night, but I wondered why he thought that I would be going, since he had never seen me there before. I asked one of my European-American friends, "I am a graduate student, he doesn't even know me, why does he assume that I party and drink excessively?" She informed me, "Well, in class you are always discussing your black and Hawaiian friends and how you do everything with them. What do you think we assume you guys do when you are together, sit around and read poetry?" So, because of the racial background of my friends, people have assumed that we drink and party, when in actuality sitting around talking and listening to music would be a lot more accurate. I have also surprised
friends of minority cultures by my actions. A male African-American acquaintance of mine was surprised when I didn’t mind meeting him at his apartment by myself to study. He thought that a "white girl" would feel threatened in that situation. So, even though he knew me as an individual, he was still surprised that stereotypes common of individuals in white dominant society did not influence my decisions.

My position in society is reflected in my interests in anthropology and my emphasis on mixed-ethnic identity and minority cultures here in the United States. I have been told by some of my informants that I am easy to talk to, not only because of my personality, but because I am a woman. However, ultimately, I must recognize my position in this society as a white female and the privileges associated with this ethnic heritage. I understand that I will never be able to completely understand the unique experiences my informants and friends have had and have still to experience and deal with on a daily basis in our society. When recounting life experiences and related emotions of my informants; I present them as my informants presented them to me without including any outside value judgements or various opinions on their perspectives. I find it very important to not qualify or question an informant’s viewpoint, as each individual’s experience is valid. This discussion and examination of mixed ethnic identity is a very personal and emotional topic for my informants, and for myself. My informants have been willing
to share their personal experiences in order to help me better study and understand the process of shaping a mixed-ethnic identity in the United States.

Naomi Zack (1995) explains that separation between racial groups in our society is maintained through social borders and barriers between established racial and ethnic groups. Social borders are perpetuated through minimal personal contact and insignificant communication (Zack, 1998; Augustin, 1988). As I studied these social and cultural barriers, I discovered that people who feel uncomfortable or distanced from members of another race or ethnic group do not make meaningful eye contact with each other. The person of the minority culture can sense this apprehensive or wary behavior, especially if the person feeling uncomfortable is a member of white dominant society. I was able to cross this barrier, by being able to make substantial eye contact and by establishing meaningful conversations that could then develop into friendships. By being comfortable with myself and my feelings towards members of ethnic groups different than myself, I was then open to more friendships and relationships. Feelings of apprehension, fear, or uncertainty on how to approach a person different than yourself reflects the confusion and possibly biased and racist stereotypes that are held in your mind (Francis, 1976). First impressions and perceptions are lasting, and if a person is made to feel uncomfortable because of their race, they are not likely to forget. Because I know that all people are
equal and I refuse to judge or stereotype an individual on trivial knowledge, I am then open to new people and experiences.

As I have described in the past paragraphs, I have been interested in the topic of mixed-ethnic identity for some time. I have always questioned social and racial separations of people by our larger society and as a child always wondered why people were judged and grouped according to their particular social class, ethnicity, and race in our society in general. Throughout my life experiences I have been able to cross over ethnic and social barriers and wondered why it was easy for me to do so, but not for other members of general society. By looking at my own life and how I came to construct my own ethnic identity, I decided that I wanted to study the complex identities of individuals of mixed ethnicity in our society, whereby being born into a family of at least two distinct ethnic heritages they have the ultimate ability to cross ethnic, cultural, and racial barriers formed by our society.
Chapter 2: Race and Ethnicity in the United States

In this chapter I discuss the importance race and ethnicity have in shaping a mixed ethnic identity in the United States. I set the stage to begin discussing the complexities of mixed ethnic and "racial" identities in our society. I present different popular theoretical and related discussions that concern multi ethnic identities and their formulation. I then move on to discuss white privilege and how it affects the construction of multi ethnic or minority identities in our society.

Race and Ethnicity:

Outside of college communities, most individuals in the United States grow up in neighborhoods that consist mostly of members of the same ethnic or racial backgrounds and similar economic class (Hall, 1997; Rogers, 1994). They may have interactions with members of other racial and class backgrounds, but most substantial relationships are with individuals of their same background. Members of white dominant society, especially those in the upper class, can live their whole lives without establishing substantial relationships with members of minority cultures (Haizlip, 1995). Minority cultures in our society are over-represented in lower class neighborhoods and are therefore further distanced from influential members of dominant white society
Likewise, many of my informants of minority cultures in our society have expressed that they have had limited interactions with members of white dominant society on personal and family levels. In political, economic, and educational realms they interact with members of white dominant society, although these contacts rarely result in meaningful relationships. Minimal personal contact and insignificant amounts of substantial, meaningful relationships across separate ethnic groups in our society add to the miscommunication and help perpetuate differences, stereotypes and biases between groups of people (Bammer, 1995).

These characteristics of our society affect individuals and families claiming mixed-ethnicity even more drastically, as these differences, biases, and privileges can be witnessed not only between groups of people but within individuals of the family. Problems with constructing a mixed-ethnic identity prove to be most difficult when the individual has one parent of white dominant society and the other of minority heritage here in the United States (Haizlip, 1994). They grow up witnessing one parent easily assimilating with the institutions of white dominant society, when the other has to struggle against discrimination and stereotypes. They are constantly reminded throughout their childhood of the social and cultural barriers between separate ethnic and racial groups in our society.
However, individuals of mixed ethnicity have the capability, through their cultural and biological heritage, to cross these social barriers surrounding race and ethnicity that many people will never bridge in their lifetimes. They do not share the same ignorance, cynicism, and apprehension that many individuals hold towards members of separate ethnic cultures and racial groups in our society, as they are in themselves a combination of two or more distinct ethnic heritages (Parham, 1989). Yet, they face complex obstacles unique to individuals of mixed-ethnicity in our society, where they have to construct their own ethnic identity in contrast to predetermined racial and ethnic categories established by our society. As a result of this unique identity they, in turn, have to deal with feelings of isolation and marginality, as they are not considered "true" members of a particular ethnic or racial group.

When discussing the uniqueness of multi-ethnic identities and the blending of separate and distinct cultures and backgrounds, the discussions surrounding hybridity and hegemony can be very insightful. Hybridity, when related to multi-ethnic identities, represents the equal influence separate ethnic backgrounds have upon the individual and how their mixed ethnic identity is a blended combination of aspects and perceptions gained equally from both ethnic heritages. The concept of hegemony directs our attention to the power struggle between the two separate ethnic backgrounds and shows that one aspect of the
individual's ethnicity has more influence and prestige or impact over the individual. Hegemony concerns power and related class structures, where one aspect overpowers or dominates another aspect.

Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) discuss "hybrid" cultures that are thought to be an equal combination of two cultural backgrounds, and report that the relationship is truly hegemonic. They explain how, "Hybrid products are the result of a long history of confrontations between unequal cultures and forces, in which the stronger culture struggles to control, remake, or eliminate the subordinate partner" (Lavie et al., 1996). These authors, as well as many other cultural anthropologists, would argue that hybridity does not truly exist on a social or cultural level. However, most multicultural discussions that have attempted to study and discuss multi ethnic or mixed ethnic identities in our society assume that an individual's mixed ethnic identity is hybrid, with each part of their ethnicity contributing equally towards the formulation of the "true" self. Using this approach mixed ethnic identities can be explored and understood by discovering how the individual combines their two distinct heritages into one balanced whole.

Through my informants' experiences, however, I have found that the process of formulating a multi ethnic identity in our society is not necessarily hybrid, but in actuality is influenced by hegemonic forces. My informants are constantly changing and altering their ethnic identities as their life experiences, perceptions, and situations change.
My informants feel that one part of their heritage has more influence in certain situations or parts of their lives, where the other has little or no influence. This is what allows individuals to "pass" as a monocultural member of a particular ethnicity or culture. Society with its political and social constructions and labels concerning race and ethnicity, presents discrimination and racism which suppresses minority groups and cultures. Our society also practices differential treatment which allows different opportunities based on a culture's ability (or perceived ability) to assimilate with white dominant society. When an individual attempts to formulate a mixed ethnic identity in our society they are forced to confront biased and unequal treatment towards their separate ethnic backgrounds taken by societies institutions and practices.

Another theory, which can be related to the experiences of multi ethnic individuals in our society, is the phenomenon of diaspora. Diaspora refers to the dual loyalty or combined relationship that migrants and refugees have to their original home and their current place of residence (Lavie et al., 1996). Diaspora theory requires researchers to develop new means of analysis to recognize cultural, national, ethnic, and racial boundaries in order to completely understand the dual loyalties and marginal positions these people experience. Multi ethnic identities can also be studied and better understood using this perspective. My informants’ mixed ethnic identities represent the combination of two distinct ethnic heritages,
where they feel marginalized between the two, not able to describe their identity with one or the other. By recognizing this perspective, the United States will no longer be able to disregard the political and social influences that greatly affect multi ethnic individuals. Power relationships need to be recognized; not only those which exist in society in general, but also those that exist within our means for analyzing cultures and diverse ethnicities. For example, many contemporary analyses of mixed ethnicity and other "race" relationships constantly emphasize the importance of differences and the borders of ethnic communities, rather than focusing on the centers and similarities, found between "separate" groups (Brewer, 1997; Tizard, 1995a; 1995b). In these circumstances, multi ethnic identities have been discussed and debated by looking at the borders, or distinctive qualities of each ethnicity. However, mixed ethnic identities can also be considered by looking at similarities, the centers or common ground, found between "distinct" ethnic groups which in actuality may not be that "different."

Many of my informants can identify with this viewpoint. They find that the common cultural characteristics, values, and beliefs found between their ethnic heritages are the aspects of their identity that truly explains their personal outlook and uniqueness.

Here in the United States there is pressure for individuals to "know who they are." A positive, defined, and confident sense of a personal identity is considered a necessary assertion for success and happiness.
However, American society, at the same time, has made “race”, or rather the phenotypic characteristics associated with particular human groups, the main determinant for deciding a human identity (Herring, 1998; Root, 1996). Racial and ethnic distinctions made and emphasized by our society shape individual perspectives and unique identities. While we may see identities as being characterized by an individual’s view of themselves, these individual identities are shaped by how an individual perceives others viewing them. A person’s identity is not something over which they have full control, as people also see themselves though the eyes of others. For these reasons, an individual can determine various important aspects of their identity based on surrounding company and influences (Saenz, 1997; Smedley, 1998). American society helps to shape and reinforce personal identity using spuriously established ethnic and “racial” categorizations (Harris, 1995). As Brian Courtney, a mixed ethnic individual who wrote an article for Newsweek (1995) explains, “America is obsessed with labeling persons according to racial and ethnic distinctions regardless of individual perceptions or identities.” This impacts personal perceptions of identity as individuals are forced to realize social barriers and biases, which categorize humans into distinct ethnic and “racial” groups. Individuals must use their “race” and ethnic heritage in the formulation of their unique identity as society prioritizes these characteristics as defining and grouping individuals into distinct groups.
However, America is also reaching a new consciousness where issues of mixed-ethnicity and related identity constructions can be recognized and discussed. As a result of civil rights movements, not only have inter-ethnic and interracial interactions increased (Daniel, 1992), but there has also been a move towards more receptive, understanding, and open-minded attitudes towards mixed racial identity. Interracial marriages have increased dramatically (Njeri, 1993; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995) in the past twenty years and many of these couples have questioned the attitudes and institutional policies that have encouraged mono-cultural identities (see Appendix 4). American preoccupations with categories that separate humans into distinct ethnic and racial groups still exist, although we have reached a point in time where these categorizations can be questioned and discussed.

Formulating a mixed ethnic identity in our society is an ongoing process, which changes and shifts with each unique life experience and meaningful social interaction of the individual. An individual may alter their ethnic identity several times throughout their lifetime, each time coming to a closer feeling of their “true” identity. Mixed ethnic identities are influenced by many diverse environments that vary throughout an individual's life ranging from their surrounding social networks, cultural heritage, economic influences and kinship traditions, to significant political issues of the time (Ropp, 1997; Twine, 1991).
General perspectives and related terminology is being altered as ideas of multicultural identities are being discussed and debated. Mixed ethnic identity is a combined consciousness that is not easily reconciled with existing social constructions of racial identity development theory in our society (White, 1997; Sickles, 1972). The current discussion relies on dualistic terminology which revolves around “either/or” categories instead of moving towards a new perspective for multi-ethnic individuals which incorporates the ideas of “partly” and “both/and.” The terms “race” and “ethnicity” are also at the foundation of this discussion. The confusion about their specific meaning represents the confusion of our society in dealing with multi-ethnic populations and individuals. Discussions attempt to uncover what “racial” group individuals of mixed-heritage identify with. However, individuals do not identify with racial characteristics, they identify with cultural characteristics of their families, neighborhoods, and other ties found within their social interactions. When dealing with issues of identity for individuals of mixed-heritage, the discussion really concerns which ethnic group or groups the individual associates with.

**Mixed Ethnicity in the United States:**

Mixed-ethnicity is at the foundation of what is truly “American” in our society, a country that focuses on the ideals and hopes of a mixture
of diverse people from different countries and ethnic heritages. However, it is this same society which insists on grouping and categorizing groups of people along very strict measures. It is said that if you have one-drop of "non-white blood" you are automatically no longer considered white (Dublin, 1997). In fact, the Supreme Court in 1986 overruled a Louisiana woman's decision to identify as white in our society because she has 1/32 of "black blood" in her family history (Norment, 1995). She is considered "legally black" by our society even though she, her family, and her community accept and identify her as being white. Her freedom to shape and assert her own ethnic identity was completely denied by our highest judicial system. American society is very concerned with upholding its established ethnic and racial groups, through whatever means necessary, and until recent developments, the US Census would not allow for any ambiguity or personal choice within racial and ethnic identities (Reddy, 1994; Forbes, 1990; Martyn, 1987).

Another stunning action towards complete racial and ethnic segregation was taken against a young interracial couple and their newborn in Thomasville, Georgia in March of 1996 (Shipler, 1997). The couple's child died shortly after birth and was buried in the local cemetery. Two weeks later the Barnett's Creek Baptist Church called the young couple and requested that they move their child to another location as no "half-breeds" were welcome to be buried in their all-white cemetery. As the couple protested this outrageous proposition and
gained support in their plight, the church removed its request and apologized for any additional grief they might have caused the family. As I examine these actions I must question why ethnic and racial distinctions are still so prominent and continue to have the strength to persist in our society as we move on to the 21st century. Since general social distinctions across ethnic and racial groups have existed and still persist today, they unavoidably affect individuals on a personal level. Individuals of minority heritage must recognize racial and social distinctions in order to prepare themselves for their everyday lives and interactions.

While individual perceptions and identities are influenced by many different social, political, and economic distinctions made and emphasized by our society, my research at this particular historical juncture showed that ethnic and racial characteristics have the largest impact in constructing an identity. So, mixed ethnic individuals in particular, can determine various important aspects of their identity based on specific surrounding company and current societal influences. Individuals are forced to use their race and ethnic heritage in the formulation of their personal identity as general society prioritizes these characteristics as defining and grouping individuals into distinct groups.

An individual’s *ethnicity* cannot be simply defined as an individual’s racial or biological heritage, as an ethnic heritage or identity combines many different aspects of the individual’s personal experiences.
and societal interactions. Thernstrom (1980) defines fourteen attributes of ethnicity which all may or may not be influential in an individual's construction of their own ethnic identity (see Appendix 5). The two that I find most interesting and relative to shaping a mixed ethnic identity in our society are; an internal sense of distinctiveness and an external sense of distinctiveness. As I discussed in the paragraph above, individuals of mixed-ethnicity shape their ethnic identity not only according to how they see themselves, but are also very influenced by how outsiders may group or categorize them racially, culturally, or ethnically. Individuals do not have the choice of overlooking one perspective and accepting another, they search to find a middle ground where they can come to combine and relate not only how they see themselves in contrast to others and other ethnic groups, but then also how these outsiders see or accept their mixed-heritage.

White Privilege:

Dominant society's institutions and power resources have a large impact on these self-reflections and perceptions of minority and mixed race individuals in our society. Many individuals of minority heritage define their ethnic identity differently from, or even in contrast to, practices and influences of white dominant society (Dyson, 1994; Hartigan, 1998). They are very aware of the barriers and obstacles they
are faced with because of their ethnic and racial distinctiveness, yet they are also very proud and thankful for their separate ethnic and cultural heritage. As one informant of Native Alaskan and European American ethnic decent described, he would not want to be a member of any other race or ethnic groups, but he does wish that society was not as biased in favor of white dominant society. He is constantly reminded that he is a minority in this society, and that he does not have the many societal, political, and economic privileges like most members of white dominant society, even though his own father is white.

Another informant of European American heritage and ethnicity explains that if she could pick any racial or ethnic group, she would want to be anything but white. She can't stand being classified as a member of "white dominant society." She has had to deal with many confrontations throughout her life where minority individuals have accused her of being racist and biased just because of the color of her skin. She recognizes white privileges in our society and takes action to not take advantage of institutionalized racism through her social interactions and her life in general.

Peggy Mcintosh discusses these "white privileges" in much detail, and even put together a list of privileges (Mcintosh, 1989). Mcintosh explains, "I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious." (Mcintosh, 1989 :10) Whites
are taught to see that everyone has the same opportunities, regardless of their race or ethnicity, when in actuality members of white society have many advantages which aren’t even recognized as placing white individuals at a higher vantage point with increased opportunities in comparison to minority individuals.

Individuals who are raised with one parent of minority heritage and the other a member of white dominant society, witness these white privileges and white biases throughout their childhood. As one informant describes, when he went to the grocery store with his mother, who is white, she could pay with a check or credit card and never be questioned or asked for ID. However his father, who is African-American, was always questioned, often had to show two forms of ID, and was generally hassled by service workers. Throughout my informant’s childhood, it seemed as though his father was being always questioned, hassled, or even ignored, when his mother never had problems justifying herself to service workers and other institutions of society. Then as my informant aged, he recognized that he was approached in much the same manner as his father, and not his mother. These are examples of white privilege that white individuals do not even have to be conscious of. Individuals of minority heritage, on the other hand, are faced with character judgements, biased assumptions, and stereotypes on a daily basis. White dominant society controls access to power and related resources in our society, where a white individual does not need to look
outside of their community and culture in order to succeed. Therefore, they assume that everyone has the same "basic rights" and ability to succeed in our society as they do. As McIntosh explains, "whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us". (1989: 12) Whites do not realize that they are already, because of their ethnicity, at an advantage. If whites would take action to recognize these privileges, steps could be made to diminish institutionalized racism and other forms of discrimination in our society.

I found it interesting after talking with my informants of mixed ethnic heritage, how much their white parent stressed the biases and inequalities of our society, along with discussing white privileges. One of my informants' parents explained to them that; even though they have equal amounts of white and black heritage, they will be judged as black by our society and therefore will have to fight for the privileges that most whites automatically enjoy. Other white parents also stress the importance of their child identifying with their minority heritage, as this is how they will be perceived by general society. When I was presenting these perspectives to a fellow white student, married to a white man here at Oregon State University, she professed that it was awful that these parents tell their child which ethnicity to identify with. She explained how she doesn’t tell her children that they have to identify as being
white; she lets them choose their ethnicity. What she didn’t understand
is that this could be considered yet another white privilege, where
members of white dominant society don’t have to even discuss the factor
of ethnic identity with their white children, as their ethnic heritage is the
norm.

On a daily basis individuals of mixed or minority heritage come
into contact with institutions, beliefs, and structures of white dominant
society, whether it is through their job, the media, financial institutions,
educational materials, political agendas, consumer marketing, or even
within law enforcement. Through personal interactions within these
systems they discover that they cannot identify with white dominant
society, as these same institutions perpetuate stereotypes and subjugate
minority individuals. Naomi Zack (1995) discusses how most people
choose a racial or ethnic identity after they have learned how others
identify and, in turn, treat them. Practices and institutions of white
dominant society present biased perceptions and stereotypes of minority
cultures, which can be found in the media and other general
publications. For example, minority individuals are disproportionately
represented in crime and other illegal activities. A group of my friends
watching a news broadcast discussing a robbery investigation
determined that whenever the kids thought to be involved were non-
white the media suggested that it was “gang related.” When the suspects
were white, nothing about gangs was mentioned.
Non-white individuals do not only have to deal with these portrayals of negative stereotypes; they also have limited access to power resources controlled by white dominant society (Winters, 1998). Therefore, as many minority individuals do not have the same access to educational services, upward political and economic mobility, and related opportunities, they then cannot identify personally with the culture or race that does have control and unlimited access. Minority individuals and individuals of mixed-ethnic heritage are continuously forced to face and combat societal systems set up against them.

In the same way, many whites identify being “white” as not being part of an ethnic minority group in our society. Riggins (1997) describes this phenomenon as the “self” versus the “other.” Individuals associate the “self” with people they come into contact with on a personal level, have similar class and social experiences, similar cultural heritage, and/or another aspect of their lives in common. Different ethnic and racial groups are separated in our society economically and socially. This leads to the identification of the “self” in contrast to the “other” along ethnic and racial lines, which can be illustrated in ethnically segregated neighborhoods, churches, and communities. The “self” is separated from the “other” through social distance, stereotypes, and biased judgements of cultural practices and heritage (Riggins, 1997). Individuals tend to identify with the “self”, their specific ethnic group,
and see themselves as distinct from the "other," different ethnic communities present in our society.
Chapter 3: Patterns of Ethnic Identity

In this chapter I discuss the different patterns I found between my informants in the formulation of their multi ethnic identity. I discuss the environments that influence the patterns and then I discuss the patterns themselves. In one pattern the individual chooses to identify with only half of their ethnic heritage. In many of these circumstances the individual is able to "pass" as being a "pure" member of that ethnic or racial group. I then move on to discuss the many complex influences that either allow or hinder an individual from passing as part of their ethnic identity. I then discuss yet another pattern where individuals choose to identify with both ethnic heritages either by combining or adapting one or the other depending on the context.

Shaping a Mixed Ethnic Identity:

Formulating an ethnic identity when an individual is of mixed racial and cultural heritage in our society is even more complex and confusing, especially when the individual has ties to dominant white culture and a stigmatized minority group. Biologists, geneticists, and anthropologists agree that there is no pure race and that everyone is of some type of mixed-ethnicity (Phinney, 1996). In our society, however, individuals are perceived as having mixed-heritage when their parents
recognize separate ethnic identities and teach their cultural and ethnic
traditions to their children. These individuals then have greater degrees
of ethnic diversity and may be able to cross ethnic and social barriers,
which will allow them to identify with several or separate ethnic groups
and communities (Romano, 1998; Johnson, 1994). Nevertheless, in our
society individuals of mixed-ethnicity are obligated to "choose" their
race/ethnicity, as in the census, to establish their racial and ethnic
identification to the rest of the community (Zach, 1995). This can lead to
confusion and ambiguity regarding ethnic identities, as an individual is
not sure which ethnicity to identify with.

One of my informants, of European-American and African-
American heritage, is in this predicament of asserting a definite ethnic
identity. Interestingly enough, my informant feels as though he identifies
ethnically as Hawaiian. He doesn't have any Hawaiian heritage,
although his best friend is Hawaiian and my informant feels as though
he "looks" Hawaiian by his skin color and build. He has mastered his
Hawaiian friends' accents and mannerisms and stays consistent with
this identity whenever his Hawaiian friends are present, regardless of any
other ethnic groups that may also be represented in the group.

Because of his mixed heritage, my informant feels as though he
can't be completely black and he can't be completely white so he chooses
a neutral identity. As he explains, "I am Hawaiian, I just had to go
through a more confusing journey to realize my identity. People are actually surprised when they discover that neither of my parents are Hawaiian, that my mother is white and that my father is black." In this example, a person does not have to be biologically tied to an ethnic or racial identity. As long as the individual is socially accepted by the ethnic group, gathering, community, or organization, they can then identify personally with the established culture and practices. However, as in this example, skin tone is also an important factor in being able to cross racial and ethnic barriers, along with being able to "pass" for another ethnic or racial group.

In our society racial groups are classified by focusing on the phenotypic characteristics of skin color, hair form, and other facial distinctions; where variations in skin tones are overlooked. In our society, cultural differences are translated into racial distinctions. The color of your skin decides what group you are categorized with, in general, and the individual is usually placed with the minority heritage or the most stigmatized group by society (Morganthau, 1995; Oder, 1995). Yet, it was my informant’s medium skin tone and large body build that allowed him to pass as Hawaiian in the first place. Had he a darker skin complexion and a more slight build than other individuals, outsiders and close acquaintances, may not have accepted him as a Hawaiian. He "looks" Hawaiian, has made himself familiar with
Hawaiian culture, language, beliefs, and traditions and has therefore been able to “pass” as Hawaiian.

Even though my informant has the ability to choose his unique ethnic identity, the process of choosing is very confusing and in certain circumstances can leave him unsure as to which ethnicity to identify with. My informant finds himself altering his mannerisms, language content, dialect, and slang depending on the ethnic background of the individual with whom he is conversing. He is aware and proud of his ability to “fit in” with whatever group of people he hangs out with, but his friends both white and black view his changing identity negatively. This inconsistency or shifting perception is looked upon negatively by society in general and by the established ethnic communities that my informant finds himself identifying with (Phinney, 1996). His friends of European American heritage along with his friends of African American heritage discuss my informant’s inconsistency in formulating an ethnic identity. “He doesn’t even know who he is or what he stands for. He is fake like a chameleon. When he is around a group of white guys he acts white, and when he’s around a group of black guys he acts black. How can you respect that?” “Yeah, but whenever there are any Hawaiians around he is definitely Hawaiian. What a messed up guy.” However, my informant’s Hawaiian friends have no problems with his identification with Hawaiian culture and ethnicity. They don’t mind that he doesn’t have any Hawaiian heritage; they are flattered that he wants to know so much and
appreciates their culture and practices. However, his Hawaiian friends also recognize that their culture is accepting of anyone who wants to learn more about Hawaiian culture, regardless of their skin color or biological heritage.

**Choosing One Ethnicity:**

Dominant American culture has little patience or tolerance for changing individual identities, or associated ambiguous categories of individual characteristics and personality traits. Individuals are expected to be consistent in assertions of who they are and what they stand for. As illustrated with the perspectives of my informant's friends, these principles are often viewed as more worthy of respect than developing a repertoire of ethnic identities.

Another informant of African American heritage and ethnic identity echoes dominant culture's preference for "pure," unchanging ethnic identities. He states that he would never want to be a part of, or add to, this inconsistency and confusion regarding mixed-ethnicity and the formulation of an ethnic identity. He expands on this by explaining that he has never wanted to be a part of an interracial relationship or never wants to have a mixed-ethnic marriage for the sake of his children and their ethnic identities. When he was growing up, each day before he would face the world he saw his parents. "I knew who I was, where I
came from and what I stand for. I was an African American son and proud of it. I represented the ideals and goals of my parents each time I left the house." By letting himself be persuaded to think that there are "pure" races or ethnic groups to identify with, he is limiting his views and perceptions surrounding multi ethnic unions. When he explains how he represented the ideals and goals of his parents, he overlooks the fact that individuals with parents of "separate" ethnic backgrounds can do the same. However, he wants this feeling of certainty and security in his children's ethnic and racial identities and believes that it will reflect who they are in the future. He explains, "If I were to see a white mother and a black father I would be confused, I would be part of both ethnicities, but I also wouldn't be a definite member of either group." He says that it would be unfair to confuse his children. He wants them to grow up with the same confidence of a defined ethnic identity, as he did.

Lynn Norment (1995) discusses the importance of choosing one "definite" ethnic identity in a mixed-parentage upbringing. She explains that it is important for an individual of mixed ethnic heritage to identify with the ethnic group or community that general society categorizes them as being a part of. They can recognize their diverse ethnic heritage, but it is very important for them to realize their minority or stigmatized heritage in this society because those are the stereotypes and discrimination that they will come to face throughout their lives. If parents do not allow their children to recognize their minority heritage,
they are only confusing and disguising the reality that they will be forced
to deal with later in their lives.

Asserting a definite ethnic identity early in life increases self-
confidence and feelings of belonging within social institutions and
networks (Norment, 1995). As one of my informants of African American
and European American heritage explains, "My mother always told me, 'I
am white, your father is black. You are an equal part of both in our
home, but in the world you are black. In life you will be judged and
treated as a black man, you need to accept that.'" Social, political, and
economic biases along with discriminatory practices of our society force
an individual to realize and understand their ethnic heritage and specific
identity. They will need to understand that a part of their heritage may
be more stigmatized and will lead to unequal treatment and perhaps
lessened opportunities in our society. As another mother explains,
"Accept the blessing of having the advantage of two cultures, but
understand that you are black. In this world if you have one spot of
black blood, you are black, so get over it" (Norment, 1995). This is a
straightforward perspective that states the realities individuals of mixed-
racial heritage are faced with in our society. Some individuals that
identify with a single ethnic group view this approach as being harsh to
the individual of mixed-ethnic heritage. Why should they have to
choose?
But not choosing leads to confusion and stress for the individual as they want to have a consistent identity without complications or hard feelings from friends and family, like my first informant of European American and African American heritage who identifies as Hawaiian. Even though he identifies as Hawaiian, he still feels pressure from his white and black friends to “face up to who he really is.” He feels that he doesn’t have as much self confidence as his friends and other acquaintances and that his friends hold him in lower respect because he is not who they think he should be. Instead of viewing his capability to assimilate his mannerisms and dialects according to his surroundings and environment as a highly adaptable skill and talent, his friends see it as a flaw he will overcome once he recognizes “who he is.” However, his family is very supportive in how he has shaped his ethnic identity, and as he grows and changes, he realizes that perhaps his current friends aren’t the best friends or judges of character that they seem to be.

The Intricacies of Passing:

Depending on the particular circumstance, as with my informant of European American and African American heritage who identifies as Hawaiian, individuals are able to “pass” for a cultural or ethnic heritage different than their actual biological heritage. “Passing” is an interesting concept when applied to individuals of mixed-ethnicity in our society.
While skin tone may allow an individual to "pass" as a "pure" member of an established ethnic group, it may also hinder an individual from identifying with their personal multi-ethnic heritage and background (Haizlip, 1995).

Formulating a multi-ethnic identity is a very complex process, which cannot be reduced to biological or social categories and groups. As with the informants I recently discussed, the ability to "pass" as a member of the group or groups the individual actually identifies with, makes life a lot easier on the individual within both their personal and social interactions. However, when the individual is perceived or categorized as being part of an ethnic or racial group that they don't identify with or partly identify with, it makes their life much more complicated. In these circumstances, the shaping of their ethnic identity is an ongoing process which is affected or altered with daily interactions, acquaintances, politics, environment, social networks, and economic opportunities.

One of my informants of Native American and European American heritage explains how she is questioned, criticized, and simply unable to identify with her unique multi-ethnic identity as her skin tone does not allow her to "pass" as a Native American in our society. Her father is Native American and her mother is European American, she was raised on a reservation and identifies completely with her Native American heritage and culture. However, her extremely light skin tone along with
her blonde hair and blue eyes limits her from being accepted as a Native American not only by society in general, but also by other Native Americans, not of her own tribe.

Here at Oregon State University, she is faced with the most problems concerning acceptance of her ethnic identity. Native American students and other non-Native American students do not accept my informant as being a "true" Native American, or even as having "part" Native American heritage. A Mexican American classmate of my informant explains, "She is not Native American, she is as white as any other white person. She is claiming to be Native American for attention or financial aid or something like that, but I don't believe for one second that she identifies as Native American." In this example, an individual's skin tone and other phenotypic characteristics has not allowed my informant to "pass" as a "pure" member of part of her ethnic heritage. However, this also uncovers another issue, that she is able to "pass" completely as white or European American, even though this may not be her personal choice. Because she can "pass" as "white" in our society, many individuals argue that she cannot, therefore, be able to understand or identify with minorities or minority cultures here in the United States. She does not face the same discrimination, stereotypes, and institutionalized racism that minority individuals with darker complexions face on a daily basis. As another informant of Native American and African American heritage explains, "She will never be able
to understand what people of color have to go through on a daily basis in our society. She looks white, so she is treated as though she is white. Just like men cannot completely understand what it is like to be a woman, white people cannot completely understand what it is like to be a minority in our society."

Many of my informants, those who are multi-ethnic along with those who identify with a single ethnic group, argue this same point. They explain that no matter how much a white person is “aware” of discrimination, racism, and stereotypes in our society they can never understand what it is like for a minority individual in our society to constantly combat racism on both personal and institutional levels, since they have never had to face it themselves. White individuals are privileged in our society and although these privileges can be recognized, the feelings of subjugation and oppression felt by minority individuals in our society cannot be replicated. However, my informant explains her predicament, “How can I identify with white society when I was raised on the reservation and have seen all the atrocities that white people have done to my people? People do not know how I feel on the inside, who I truly am, and this is why I don’t need to explain my identity, I will allow people to stereotype me as a white person, but on the inside, I am Native American.”

Because her ethnic identity is not accepted by society in general, she must internalize her ethnic identity and be faced with the
stereotypical judgements based on the tone of her skin and other
phenotypic characteristics. "Racial" or ethnic identities are imposed on
individuals by society and its institutions (Marable, 1995). The process
of labeling oversimplifies how ethnic identities are experienced, since an
ethnic identity is truly the result of complex interactions between the
individual and social institutions of our society. This is a problem that
individuals with mixed ethnic heritage are faced with in our society, as
society and its institutions will place them within the ethnic or racial
group that they "look" like they belong to, regardless of their individual
multi-ethnic identity.

Choosing Multiple Ethnicities:

As individuals of mixed ethnicity are familiar with at least two
separate ethnic and cultural heritages they have the ability to either
blend their ethnic heritages or "pass" for one or the other. Another
option which has not been as widely discussed in popular literature is
the advantage and capacity that individuals have to switch and alter
their ethnic identity throughout their lifetimes and even within specific
situations and environments. As with my informants, they can alter
their ethnic identity, language terms, dialect, body language and actions
to adjust to the group or individual they are dealing with.
An informant who is Mexican American and European American identifies as "American." She chooses the term "American" to encompass both of her identities, not choosing one over the other. She recognizes her Mexican American heritage, but has never identified with Mexican culture or traditions. Her European American mother and Mexican American father raised her in a small town; where my informant and her sister were the only minorities in their entire school system. All of her friends were white, everyone she came into contact with was white, and she didn't see herself as being any different from anyone else.

"American" to my informant is the common cultures and values that all ethnic groups share as Americans. However, it wasn't until she went off to college where she felt herself being set apart from all her friends, and for the first time she felt like she wasn't a "true American" but a "Mexican American." She found that in these circumstances people were using her as a "token" for her race, because they wanted her perspectives, values, or ideas as a "Mexican American" instead of her own individual viewpoints. For example, in class, teachers will call on her and ask her, "What do your people think about this issue?" or "How does this affect your people?" My informant cannot believe that people assume that she can actually represent viewpoints of an entire culture and group of individuals. She constantly has to deal with stereotypes and related biases because of the color of her skin. Other teachers, students, and acquaintances compliment her on how well she speaks English, and
attempt to speak to her in Spanish. However, other Mexican American students that she comes into contact with do not accept her mannerisms and dialect. In fact, she has caught on that they say derogatory comments to her in Spanish once they discover that she only speaks English. Mentally and emotionally my informant has been able to identify as white, but physically and socially she "passes" as Mexican American, regardless of her personal choice and multi-ethnic identity.

So, as my informant's interactions, environments, and perspectives alter, so must her multi-ethnic identity. She was able to identify as an "American" with the idea that all native-born share some basic cultural similarities (Smedley, 1998) but now is in the process of reevaluating her identity. She is still an "American" but she realizes that in many circumstances and interactions she is viewed, judged, and categorized as a Mexican American. She explains how important it is for her to realize how prominent her Mexican American heritage is to herself, especially since this part of her identity will force her to confront stereotypes, discrimination, and institutionalized racism found in our society. Before, as she explains, "I was sheltered, I was color-blind. Now I realize how others see me. I am still the same person, I identify as 'American' but I need to prepare myself for the way others view me and will treat me in this world."

An informant of African American and Mexican American heritage explains how he never had a choice when shaping his ethnic identity: "I
look black, so people treat me as a black man, if I were to identify with my Mexican American heritage it would be a joke because I don’t look Mexican.” My informant was raised by his Mexican American mother, African American father, and his mother’s adoptive parents, who are white. His parents and grandparents have a huge influence on how my informant sees himself today. However, he cannot “pass” or be accepted as anything other than black in our society due to his dark skin tone. Although he cannot “pass” for different parts of his ethnic heritage, he still incorporates characteristics from each culture into his “black” identity. He doesn’t believe that he has a multi-ethnic identity, as he sees himself as a black man in our society, however he does feel that his perspectives are very multi-ethnic. Depending on his surrounding company, or purpose, my informant can draw on multiple dialects, mannerisms, body language, and other assorted cultural attributes in order to communicate effectively. He is a communication major and sees his multicultural background as one of his greatest assets. However, he also correlates his own success and failure, good decisions and bad, to separate aspects of his background. “I am black, so I identify personally as black. When I was young, my black part of my identity got tied up in bad stuff. I got into bad stuff like drugs and gangs, but what is different for me is that I have something to pull me out of that whole system.” He goes on to explain how he can be successful in college and in life because he is familiar with white and Mexican American culture. White dominant
society controls access to power and resources here in the United States and he knows that in order to survive in this white dominated world that he needs to know how to assimilate and blend with white culture. By switching to a Standard English dialect along with altering his tone, mannerisms, and communication style, he can achieve the goals he has set for himself and be successful.

When it comes to his own self-perception and identity, my informant has bought into ethnic and racial stereotypes held by white dominant society, and then plays them off against each other. When he evaluates good and bad choices he has made in his life, he attributes the good decisions to his white ethnicity and the bad decisions to his black ethnicity. However, as he explains more about his life and experiences it becomes evident that it is not only ethnic stereotypes held by our society which influences his own personal identity, but also his personal experiences with his family members.

As he was growing up, my informant had positive white role models, his grandparents, who were constantly pushing him and encouraging him to succeed. He did not have any black role models in his family when he was growing up, and whenever he would do something wrong it was attributed to his father, "You must get that from your father." Since my informant’s father (whom he didn’t meet until he was sixteen) was black, he not only attributed his mistakes to his “father’s” heritage, but to black culture in general. He saw his mother as
a neutral influence, and that in turn reflects his perception of his Mexican American heritage as being a positive or "normative" influence.

My informant identifies many privileges with his multi-ethnic perspectives and background, and compares his multicultural attributes and successes with friends of his who are mono-cultural. He explains how his good friends who can only identify with black culture have a harder time in school and in life in general due to communication barriers and their own mono-cultural identities. He states, "They don't know how to talk, they think they can get by talking with their black slang, but they don't realize that white people don't take them seriously—and never will if they continue to talk like that." Even though, many of my informant's friends and other black individuals in his social network view him as "selling out." As one friend explains, "He isn't being true to himself, his family or his people. He can't 'act' white because he is black."

Black citizens are American, however individuals do not have to embrace their national "American" identity at the expense of their ethnic identity. As Dyson explains, "The two are not mutually exclusive. We (blacks) simply have to overcome the limitations imposed upon race to make sure that privileges are not viciously or arbitrarily assigned to racial difference. To erase race is to erase ourselves and to obscure how race continues to shape American perceptions and lives" (1993, p229). Throughout history, the United States has continually subjugated and
oppressed minorities and people of color politically, economically, and socially. In order to combat this oppression, minority cultures have been forced to generate pride in their culture, heritage, and unique backgrounds. Therefore when multiracial people attempt to "pass" as something other than their minority heritage or take pride in their mixed heritage, they are often viewed as exalting their "white" or high-status ancestry and attempting to deny their minority origins (Forbes, 1990). However, when multi-ethnic individuals associate or attempt to "claim" part of their white or unstigmatized ethnicity, they are doing so to be able to succeed in a white world. My informants do not lose their unique identity; they simply alter their interactions and speech patterns to be able to assimilate to white culture to be successful in the workplace. When they return home to their communities and neighborhoods they then return to their ethnic identities, where they do not have to conform to white culture and society. Multi-ethnic individuals are often found in this predicament of having judgements passed when they seem to be "choosing" one ethnicity or ethnic identity over another. Generally, in our society, multi-ethnic individuals are encouraged to identify with their minority or stigmatized heritage, that way they are not seen as attempting to "pass" or "sell out" as another culture which is not their own, or isn't how general society categorizes them. As Thorton explains, when multi-heritage individuals identify with their majority heritage it is seen as undermining struggles for self-determinism and when
individuals identify with their minority heritage they at least maintain an alliance with their oppressed minority culture (1992). Yet, ethnic identities are shaped and constructed as a result of complex interactions between the individual and their surroundings, it is not a simple distinction or preference between ethnic backgrounds or cultural heritages.
Chapter 4: Added Complexities

In this section I discuss the additional influences and complexities individuals of mixed ethnicity face related to their specific family background and experiences. I then discuss the capabilities multi ethnic individuals have in changing their identities through time.

Family Dynamics:

In order to discuss the unique identities individuals of multi-ethnic parentage have in our society, it is important to recognize the different sources and factors that influence the construction of an ethnic identification. A child’s ethnic identity may take different routes throughout the course of their life based on the combined influences of their parents, community and other surrounding influences. An individual’s personal attributes, parents’ characteristics and many structural factors of the surrounding society influence how an individual will identify themselves along with how others will categorize him or her (Parrillo, 1997).

Structural factors include the status of the different ethnic groups by white dominant society, whether one of the ethnic groups is considered part of white culture, the size of the minority group or groups, and the ethnic diversity of the area. These factors influence how
individuals see themselves in relation to others of society and affects how they define their ethnicity (Parrillo, 1997). For example, if an individual is living in an area with few minorities they may not want to identify with their minority heritage or may not even have the community resources to help maintain this minority ethnicity. Conversely, if they live in an ethnically heterogeneous neighborhood they are likely to be presented with more ethnic and racial tolerance. This allows them to determine their own ethnic identity with less pressure to conform to rigid ethnic identities, where they don’t have to choose between their mother’s and their father’s ethnic identities. More diverse communities tend to be more accepting of multi-ethnic identities and the child will have fewer experiences of marginality, as there will be more people having similar experiences, in turn, influencing how they formulate their ethnic identity (Takaki, 1993).

An established ethnic identity, particularly for an individual of mixed-ethnic parentage, controls how they live their lives, interact with people from other groups, and view society as a whole. Many times, multi-ethnic individuals will feel confused and conflicted with their ethnicity. This is very important to realize as an ethnic identity has strong emotional significance, making an individual part of a group and an accepted member. When an individual feels marginalized, this feeling of not having a place in the world can affect their self-esteem and other aspects of their personal lives. Our society demands that these
individuals either pick one ethnic group, or forces them into a specific category based on the color of their skin. When individuals are required to recognize part of their identity and deny another aspect of their identity, negative emotions and reactions may result.

One of my informants of mixed European American and African American heritage has faced many problems and complex personal issues when trying to construct her ethnic identity. My informant, Theresa* (names have been changed), and her sister were raised by their single African-American father in a small black neighborhood which was surrounded by a much larger white community. Theresa has a light complexion and can pass in some situations as Hispanic or white. However, she strongly identifies as an African American or black in our society and is very offended when outsiders assume that she is "mixed" or has another ethnic identity outside of her Black American heritage. Here at Oregon State University, her closest friends and acquaintances are other black students and professors. She steers away from white dominant society and personal encounters with white individuals as much as she possibly can, although this proves quite difficult, as she has to interact with whites and white dominant society on a daily basis. Theresa's mother, of European American heritage, was committed to a mental institution when she was five and when her older sister was seven. As she looks back and reflects on her life experiences she cannot recall a positive white female role model in her life, in fact she has had
problems relating and communicating with white females. As I interviewed my informant's sister, she explained how she feels that the reason my informant has problems establishing substantial or even positive relationships with white females is due to the insecurities she feels with her own white mother. When Theresa was two years old her mother kidnapped her older sister and left Theresa and her father behind. No one will ever know why her mother took one daughter and left Theresa behind, but as Theresa's sister explains, "I 'look' white and Theresa 'looks' black, or maybe it was just easier for her to take me since I was older, I don't know, but I think Theresa thinks our mother left her because of her darker skin."

On many separate levels Theresa's resentment and anger towards her mother keep her from identifying with white culture. Her feelings towards her mother have transformed into a loss of trust, minimal respect, and increased hostility towards white society in general, and white females more specifically. Another female informant of Mexican American and European American descent explains her similar perceptions, "White women are corrupt. They are sympathetic, seem nice, and then they just stab you in the back. The only white woman who has been trustworthy in my whole life is my own mother." Even though this informant had a positive white female role model in her life, she holds the same hostility and anger towards white women as my first informant.
Theresa's sister, who was accepted by her white mother and who "passes" as white to friends, family and society in general has no problems with white society or white women. However, she does understand and sympathize with her sister's viewpoint, "She has just been hurt too deeply to trust any white people outside of our family. I wish there was something I could do to help her--- (maybe) introduce her to some white women that would go against her own stereotypes."

Theresa's sister has friends from a mixture of racial and ethnic backgrounds, but only dates white men. Theresa only converses with personally or dates black men. She explains how she does feel that she is in competition with white women to be friends with and date many of the eligible black male athletes on campus. This competition then adds to her hostility towards white women. Theresa does not like people to know that her mother is white. She always discusses the power and respect of a strong black mother, and the walls of her room are covered with pictures and drawings of black women holding their children.

Theresa had no white role models in her childhood. Her personal issue with her mother complicates her life on many levels. She knows her heritage, and she resents the fact that her "white" mother rejected her. Her means for combating this hurt and isolation are to reject white society or any white individual before he or she, too, will hurt her. However, she also realizes that in order to survive and be successful she has no choice but to interact with white dominant society. She is caught
in the middle, with no role model, no one who understands her background, viewpoints, and personal identity.

My informant’s identity is still changing and growing; while her sister is trying to encourage her to get more counseling, Theresa explains, “This is something I need to take care of myself. I don’t enjoy holding onto all this anger, but I have been this way my whole life, it is what I’m used to. I am my own person, I don’t need anyone else to tell me how to think.” Theresa’s father also recognizes that she has some complex issues, but is proud of her for being who she is. “My daughter is one of the strongest people I know. I admire her.”

My informants’ perspectives illustrate very well the influence that parents’ ethnic identities and specific family backgrounds have in helping a child formulate their ethnic identity. If parents address the development of their child’s ethnic identity and promote the acceptance of multiple identities, along with including the hardships and judgements they will face from others in society, asserting a “multi-ethnic” identity will be less traumatic. Within the family is where people can take the first step towards accepting “multi-ethnic” identities, and then further steps can be taken in educational, economic, political, and social aspects of our society.
Changing Ethnic Identities through Time:

Multi ethnic identities are constantly changing and shifting throughout an individual’s lifetime, as they themselves grow and change with the times and surrounding environment. Not only do their identities shift with different periods of their life, they can also vary from time to time depending on separate contexts. Through my research and interviews with informants and friends, I found that the assertion and realization of ethnic identities often changes as individuals leave their home and family surroundings and travel to new distant places and formulate new social interactions; like leaving for college. Often times attending college is the first time an individual will form substantial long-lasting relationships with individuals that identify with an unfamiliar or separate ethnic heritage (Phinney, 1996, Martyn, 1987).

One informant, of African-American and Apache heritage, explains how he was raised in large black family, neighborhood, school, and surrounding community. Although, he came into contact with whites on a daily basis, nothing lasted past surface relationships. It wasn’t a conscious choice; he simply interacted and surrounded himself, as did all of his friends, with people who he could identify with on an ethnic basis. His father is African-American and his mother is an Apache. An African-American family adopted my informant’s mother when she was
born, yet her family helped her to maintain and learn about her cultural and ethnic heritage. My informant has always identified himself on a social and personal level as black or African American. It is within his family where he celebrates and recognizes his Apache heritage. He feels that it is really no one's business what his exact cultural heritage is, and will not talk about his mixed-ethnic identity unless he is specifically asked.

His family, through the combination of cultural traditions of both of his ethnic heritages, stresses the importance of family unity and togetherness. So it was just natural for my informant to follow the role of his parents and other family members, who always had separated their fun, friends, and other activities as much as they could from white culture and society. However, when he arrived at OSU to play football, he had no alternative but to interact with members of white dominant society on a personal and professional basis. His coach was white, many team members were white, his neighbors were white, his teachers, and almost every person he came into contact with were white. Through his interactions with these different individuals he realized for the first time how his own distinct ethnic identity set him apart and distanced him from members of white dominant society. He never questioned his own identity, but was introduced to individuals with different identities and recognized their separate backgrounds and experiences. As time went on he was able to cross ethnic and racial barriers and now has many very
good friends of separate ethnic backgrounds with whom he can “identify with” on many levels. This acceptance of separate identities was allowed through decreased social distance (Riggins, 1997).

Ultimately, however, he never stopped identifying with being African American no matter how many friends and relationships he had with people who were not African American. He is now more comfortable discussing his mixed-ethnic heritage and has interests in contributing to the Native American clubs on campus. The only problem that he has had is from African American friends who think that he is “selling out” or not proud of his African American heritage because he has so many white and non-African American friends. He replies by letting them know that they can think what they want, but he is not putting aside his identity or heritage because he has friends of different ethnic backgrounds. His fluidity between different ethnic groups and confidence to not be affected by peer pressure shows that he is also confident in his own unique ethnic identity. My informant identifies with both of his ethnic heritages, yet he understands that American society sees him and judges him as African American, so this is the identity he must claim and defend to the general public.

Another informant, an Asian American and European American male from a small town in Oregon, had never confronted the idea of an identity or heritage separate from that of white society and culture. His Chinese American mother and white father raised him, and although
they recognized and celebrated his Chinese heritage, he always identified himself and his parents as “white.” All of his friends and their families were white, and race and ethnic issues were not discussed, they just didn’t have any friends that were minorities. He didn’t see himself as being racist or as an individual of mixed-ethnicity, he had just never came into contact with members outside of his ethnic heritage, so he didn’t know that they have a distinct identity and cultural heritage from his own. When he first arrived at Oregon State University and made friends from different countries and ethnic/racial backgrounds he realized that he identified himself as ethnically separate from his new friends. He identifies as being “white” which he feels represents the culture and ideals of white dominant society, encompassing a multitude of ethnic backgrounds. He was surprised that his friends identified more with each other, as being non-whites, than they did with him and his other white friends. This informant, through interactions outside of his family and hometown networks, was forced to realize negative characteristics and stereotypes associated with whites in our society. He felt that he had to prove to others that he wasn’t racist or close-minded towards other cultures or practices, and he wanted to do this as an individual of mixed Asian and European heritage. Now, in contrast to how he felt at home, he feels that he is grouped or categorized negatively as a “racist white guy.” Through this realization he is attempting to
redefine his personal ethnic identity taking into account stereotypes that he will have to uncover and confront.

Theresa, my informant of African American and European American heritage, explains that if she is in the company of mostly white individuals she will interact with a more formal dialect and body language. However, if she is in the company of primarily black individuals she uses a more relaxed dialect, where she can just interact without thinking about the "proper" way to speak and act. When she first arrived at Oregon State University she was friends with primarily other white students and was able to pass as a member of white society through her interactions, language use, and dress. Her light skin tone was also a reason she was able to "pass" as a member of white society. People would assume that if she had any ethnic heritage it was probably Mexican or Hispanic. She would accept this classification openly, as she would have rather been categorized as white and part of a less stigmatized minority group in our society than as an African American.

All of her friends were white; all of her interactions were with white people. However as time went on, my informant decided she wanted to explore more of her black ethnicity. Since she was raised in black culture by her black father, she easily changed her associations, the way she dressed, and her language use so she could assimilate with the other black students on campus. She made the change quite easily, she was able to keep her white friends but then black students on campus also
accepted her as black. Today, my informant does not claim any white heritage; she identifies completely as a black American. She does not like to talk about the time when she identified as white and was able to “pass” as a member of white dominant society. She is very militant in her ideals and beliefs about black culture, some of her black friends find this funny as just two years before she was able to pass mask her black heritage and associate completely as white. Now instead of having friends of many ethnic backgrounds, her close friends are all black individuals. She feels that she can no longer identify or be close friends with members of white society as they will never be able to understand her place in society as a subjugated minority. However, she is not comfortable discussing her mixed ethnic heritage with either black or white individuals. She explains that her specific ethnic heritage is not important any more, because she has now reached the point in her life where she has defined her ethnic identity. She attempted to construct her identity first by focusing strictly on her white heritage, and then she shaped her identity by drawing from a combination of both ethnicities. Now, she no longer acknowledges an ambiguous status, but identifies totally as a black American.

Parham (1989) identified three stages of movement for formulating a racial or ethnic identity in our society being; stagnation, linear progression, and recycling. In the stagnant stage the individual is not aware of related identity issues, and relies on a previously constructed
"racial" or ethnic identity. In the linear progression stage the individual changes and alters their ethnic identity according to their environment and surrounding influences. In the recycling stage the individual then combines their new knowledge and understanding with their previously constructed identity.

Williams (1999) proposes another possibility for multi-ethnic individuals, simultaneity. She goes on to explain that within a multiracial identity an individual can be in several "stages" at the same time with different parts of his or her ethnic identity. The circumstances and changes my informant discussed above can be related to these theoretical models to better understand mixed-ethnic identity and its complexities. As my informant described, she was often at different stages of development and understanding with her two separate ethnic identities at the same time. While she was in the linear progression stage with her white ethnicity (being completely immersed in white culture and interactions) her black ethnic identification was in the stagnation stage. She then attempted to recycle her black heritage and traditions to combine them with her linear progression of her white ethnicity. As she progressed with her knowledge and understanding of her own black ethnicity, her white ethnic identity has reached the stagnate stage. When my informant's perspectives are applied to this theoretical ideology, it is evident that simultaneity is an important concept. Her separate, yet combined ethnic identities were at different
stages at the same time, where her changing focus on characteristics of her ethnic identity cannot easily be described or understood using any one racial theoretical model. Constructing a mixed ethnic identity is a very complex process which is very difficult to reconcile with existing social constructions of race and racial development theory (Thomas, 1999). Mixed ethnicity in itself describes an experience that does not fit dualistic constructions used by our society in general.
Chapter 5: Language

Language is a very important topic for my informants when they discuss their mixed ethnic identity. Their language use and particular dialect help define their identity and prove to others their ethnic heritage. In this chapter I discuss the influences of language and terminology on the identities of multi ethnic individuals including ethnonyms, or what groups call themselves and what they call other groups.

Language and Mixed Ethnicity:

Language also allows them to cross ethnic barriers and have the ability to "pass" as a definite and complete member of either one of their separate ethnic heritages. As in my informants' experiences, individuals of mixed ethnicity find that even if their skin tone made their membership in a specific ethnic group questionable to members of that group, they could prove their membership through their language use, terminology, and mannerisms.

Separate ethnic groups have different communication styles that vary according to body language, terminology, intonation patterns, vocal pitch, sarcasm levels, etc. These communication styles also vary depending on the members participating in the group interaction or communication. As individuals of mixed ethnicity are able to master
these distinct communication styles, they are accepted into the associated group and, in turn, are able to identify as a member of that specific ethnic group. Mastering these differences is a very complex process, which outsiders, or individuals that only have access to one ethnic heritage or ethnic group may not ever grasp or completely understand in their lifetimes. Sometimes language is the strongest tie an individual of mixed ethnicity has to a part of their ethnic heritage (Verma, 1996).

One of my informants, a female of Hawaiian and European American descent identifies with both of her ethnic heritages. However, here at college, she sees her language and mannerisms as the only part of her outward demeanor that associates her with the Hawaiian part of her heritage. As one of her white friends describes, “She looks like a normal white girl, and then as soon as she opens her mouth you realize that she has a different culture and dialect than white society. She looks like an American, but she is really Hawaiian.” This is an example of racialized hegemony, where whites are invisibly “normal” and racialized populations are visibly marginal. The terms “white,” “normal,” and “American” are, in this context, inter-changeable all serving to define white dominant society as the standard.

My informant was raised in Hawaii by her white mother and Samoan father, completely immersed in Hawaiian culture and traditions. Her half-brothers and the rest of her extended family with whom she was
raised are full Samoan, so she is more comfortable with the peoples and cultures of the Pacific Islands than with white dominant society. She has no problems at all assimilating with white society here at OSU and easily maintains her Hawaiian ethnicity while living in a predominantly white world. She also recognizes her Hawaiian dialect and mannerisms as a way of maintaining her Hawaiian ethnicity and distinguishing herself from “white folks” on the mainland.

Without this language connection, minority ethnic identities would be much harder to preserve, and separate, from the practices and values of white dominant society. When language is lost, so is part of the culture and heritage. An informant of Mexican American and European American heritage explains that she learned about her Mexican heritage and culture through language and interactions with her grandparents, parents, and relatives in her home and neighborhood as she was growing up. She was raised in a poor Mexican American barrio in south Los Angeles. Her mother is a Mexican American and her father is a white American, although her mother and her mother’s family raised her without any help from her father. My informant remembers that throughout her childhood, she had the lightest skin when compared to all the other kids in her neighborhood. So throughout her school years, in sports and friendships, she relied on her language and knowledge of Mexican culture to allow her to fit in and feel like a “true” member of her neighborhood and community. She would always speak Spanish in her
home, playground, stores and community; English was reserved for the classroom. Now, since she has been attending Oregon State University she feels that she has lost a part of her ethnic identity, a part of who she really is. She feels this loss because she has not been able to communicate in Spanish on a regular basis and because her strong family ties and interactions have suffered due to increased distance.

Through the language and stories of her grandmother, my informant learned about her Mexican heritage, and how her language and identity would influence her daily interactions, relationships, and communications with white dominant society. My informant used to have a Spanish accent when she spoke English and explained how members of white society looked down upon her, or treated her like she wasn’t very intelligent. When she was young, she never associated herself as a member of white dominant society; she was a Mexican American. But now, as she has been completely submersed in white society and culture here at OSU, she feels distanced and cut off from her Mexican heritage. Now her English bears no traces of Spanish, and she is treated like a member of white dominant society. “It is just easier to assimilate with white society than to attempt to maintain my separate ethnic heritage”, she explains. She has visited the Hispanic cultural center but does not have the time to be involved in their various activities, clubs, and associations. She is a full time student with a ROTC scholarship and has a part time job. Between classes, homework,
and her ROTC involvement she barely has enough energy for her job. She has absolutely no time to spare in extra activities because all of her time spent outside of class goes towards making enough money to continue to attend OSU. She has not been able to maintain her language, culture, and ethnic identity and as a result she feels that she has lost a part of who she is. If she ever walks by a group of people speaking Spanish on campus, she automatically feels pangs of homesickness and is reminded of how much she misses Mexican culture.

Through their language and dialect, individuals of mixed-ethnicity can not only prove their ethnicity to others, but use it to help them maintain their diverse ethnic heritage in a society that attempts to overlook their distinct cultural influences when it is easy to do so. My informant feels that because she has a lighter skin tone, blue eyes, and doesn’t look or speak like the stereotypical “Mexicana,” people of white dominant society would much rather overlook her non-white background than confront their own stereotypes and personal biases towards people of her culture and heritage. She plans to move back home when she is done with school to be with her family and to renew her ties with her Mexican ethnicity, language, and culture.

By studying how important language, dialect, and different communication styles are to individuals of mixed-ethnicity, it is easy to understand how these language barriers between separate ethnic and racial groups in our society are very influential in maintaining social
distance between these ethnic groups. Various communication styles found between separate ethnic groups in our society are not trivial differences, but very prominent barriers, which, when not recognized, can lead to further separation and miscommunication between different groups of people. Different communication styles are most easily recognized when one culture controls access to power and associated resources. In this case, individuals of other cultures must conform to the group in power's language use and communication styles. These differences can be exemplified in university systems where white dominant society sets the guidelines for personal interactions, rules, language use, and proper terminology. However much universities attempt to diversify and become completely multicultural, there needs to be the understanding that white dominant society is still in control of the institution's interactions and processes. The university must recognize that even if the differences are not realized, or even wanted, that institutionalized racism does exist. Here at Oregon State University and in the Corvallis area there are many examples of miscommunication and misunderstanding between different ethnic groups which occurred as a result of separate communication styles. These problems with communication can prove quite drastic, as miscommunication between minority students and their white professors hinders the students' learning processes and may even lead to lower grades and dismissal from the institution.
An informant of Native American and African American heritage explains how he and his teacher never quite see eye to eye. "She tells me the assignment I need to do, and how long it should be. . . to get it in as soon as I can. Then when I turn it in just a week later she says that it is too late and that I also wouldn't have got any credit because it needed to be typed." As in this circumstance, many white professors have assumed that their students all have the same educational background, and that they completely understand what is expected of them without much added explanation. However, as is the case with many of my informants who identify with minority cultures in our society, students have different educational backgrounds and culturally influenced learning styles and approaches towards work that are often incompatible with dominant white societal assumptions about proper teaching and grading styles (Fish, 1995).

Communication style differences between separate ethnic groups leads to miscommunication on many separate levels in our society. Here at Oregon State University, two of my informants who identify as African American were outside a party discussing when they were going to leave. The local police, who were white, drove up, and my informants continued their discussion. The police jumped out of their car, yelled "freeze", handcuffed one of my informants and threw him in the back of their car. The officers reported on their radio two black males fighting and arguing, and asked for back up. My informants were not arguing, they are best
friends, they were simply talking very loudly trying to figure out each other's opinions. The policemen realized their mistake and released him and later apologized for the incident. On one level, there was miscommunication between these two ethnic groups as the white police officers assumed that raised voices correlate with anger, when in actuality my informants were laughing and having a good time. On another level, the police were racially motivated by jumping and handcuffing a black man without any reason or explanation. So as language use and mannerisms differ between separate ethnic groups, racist stereotypes perpetuate this miscommunication, which in turn can lead to the maintenance of these communication barriers.

An informant of African American and European American heritage, who identifies as black recounted,

"My friends and I went to a (white) sorority party and we saw a gang of good-looking girls there. We tried to talk to them, told them that they look good and that they should come over to our house later and hang out. The next morning the police and the father of one of the white girls we were talking to showed up at our house accusing us of threatening and sexually harassing the girl at the party."

What followed was a heated discussion that left everyone angry, and fortunately no legal action was taken. The girls who my informants had met at the party didn't understand that the guys liked them and were trying to be their friends; instead they were scared and assumed that my informant and his friends were threatening them. Different communication styles marked by variations in emphasis and terminology
led to separate interpretations of the same interaction and continued to sustain the communication barriers found between these two separate ethnic groups.

Context and body language are very important components in understanding the meaning behind language use as they influence perceptions and connotations. Any word or term that is taken out of context can be understood with a totally different interpretation. If one was to simply list my informant's actions without including their language, perceptions, emotions, and viewpoints there would be no basis to discuss mixed ethnic identity in our society. It would also be too difficult to explain the monumental effects of spoken words, in how word choice in conversations can bring about many unforeseen emotions in one group of people, and then be viewed as nothing out of the ordinary by another group of people. Often times specific terms, words, and their meanings are particular to a specific ethnic group, and cannot always be defined or recognized by the dominant culture or other outside groups.

It is important to recognize that language use in our society represents the complex relationships between people with separate ethnic backgrounds. Stereotypes and generalizations continue to exist between different ethnic groups based on social distance, ignorance of cultural practices, and value judgements (Riggins, 1997). Different "racial" and ethnic groups have to confront different standards towards
their specific language use, due to these stereotypes. For example, when individuals of non-white heritage successfully master a language or dialect that is seen as "different" from their perceived ethnic or "racial" group, specifically Standard English, they are seen as "acting" or betraying their friends and relatives. However, when a white individual masters a couple "colloquial" words or phrases from a language or dialect spoken by non-whites in our society, Spanish terms or AAVE for example, it is seen as witty, or "natural" (Hill, 1998).

**Ethnonyms:**

Different ethnic or "racial" terms are appropriate for different groups of people in different situations. Terms vary on if they are used in reference to the Self (in-group) or if they are in reference to the Other (out-group). Yet terms also vary by who is present during the conversation. If everyone present is considered part of the in-group then terms used to define ethnic or "racial" distinctions are often times different than terms used if individuals representing the out-group are present (Riggins, 1997). Separate terms are also appropriate when comparing written language and spoken language. Written language almost demands more formal terminology for example; European American, Native American, Asian American, African American, Hispanic American are accepted in writing etc., where as terms like "whites",...
“blacks”, “Indians” and more specific or national terms like “Mexicans”, “Chinese”, and “Filipino” are more accepted in spoken language. Language or terminology choice also varies according to who or which group of people the language is directed to, whether they are an in-group, considered part of the Self or an out-group, regarded as the Other. Statements also vary in relation to the specific context. There can be many problems with this, as in our country when people of South American heritage are labeled as “Mexicans.” Ordinarily, people try to use “politically correct” terms that are accepted at that time, however this often varies from the terms used in everyday language with their friends.

For example, an informant of Hawaiian and African American heritage refers to herself as “tan” and will ask, “Where are all the brown people?” She uses these generalized terms to refer to all ethnic minorities of darker complexions in the United States. However, she would only use these terms with her friends and close acquaintances (in-group) and would not consider it acceptable if “others”, (out-group) especially individuals of European American heritage also used these terms. An informant of African American and European American heritage is not bothered when he is classified as African-American or “black”, but he does have a problem with being called African. His reasoning for this is that he has never been to Africa and has no ties to that continent. He was born in America and he is an American. He
believes that if people are going to need to distinguish his ethnicity further, then they should use African American or European American, since there isn’t an easy term combining both. However, because our society categorizes him as African American due to his darker complexion, he also identifies himself, on a social level, as African American. On a personal level, he considers himself a person of “mixed ethnicity”, but wouldn’t identify himself with the term “mixed ethnicity” because it doesn’t specify what ethnicities he is a mixture of, it is too large of a categorization.

My informants of mixed ethnicity have had to deal with slander, stereotypes, and racist language from individuals who represent both parts of their multi ethnic identity. Such language, especially when spoken by close friends and family members, makes my informants feel isolated and marginalized, as their mixed ethnic heritage is stigmatized by individuals representing parts of their personal identity. Different names that my informants have been called are, light skinned, red, oreo, mulatto, etc., and even though many of these terms have been used endearingly, they are still not favored by my informants. For example, when my informant who has black and white heritage hangs out with all of her girlfriends, who are African American, they call each other “dog,” except for my informant who they call their “light-skinned dog.” She is bothered by this distinction, especially since it makes her feel like she isn’t a “true” member of the group. She, like many of my other
informatics, finds that when her friends are giving her a hard time or trying to make fun they will call her “white girl,” “whitey,” or “red.” Being called “white girl” is the ultimate cut down, especially when they tell her that her mannerisms or tone of voice “seems white.” In this circumstance “white girl” or “whitey” are terms which represent the translation of situational forces into a sense of structural power (Essed, 1997). In other words, my informant’s friends enjoy the safety of group protection, and my informant, because she is of mixed-ethnicity, experiences the unsafe condition of her heritage and is then subjected to language that reflects this position (Essed, 1997). Racial slurs and distinctions are further means towards marginalizing and isolating my informants, and however harmful they may seem, they affect my informants on a personal level.
Chapter 6: Current Events and Debates Surrounding Mixed Ethnicity

There are many ideologies, theories, and perspectives surrounding interracial marriages in our society today. Some question whether interracial relationships and the identities of their children are really a phenomenon that needs discussion. Is it really an issue here in the United States? And if it is, what racial or ethnic groups do these children of mixed-racial heritage want to identify with? Do they have a choice as to which ethnic or racial group they identify with? Discussions surrounding interracial and interethnic relationships can be found in many current events and political conversations, ranging from debates concerning civil rights legislation, the Census Bureau, and adoption, to discussions on educational opportunities and community acceptance. These factors influence interethnic relationships and their families along with shaping how children of these marriages identify themselves racially and ethnically in the United States today.

The perspectives and issues surrounding the assertion of a mixed-ethnic or mixed-race identity today can be found in the debates and discussions surrounding the “multiracial” option being disputed for the 2000 Census. Questions revolve around whether there should be an “other” category at all, or if there should be a new category introduced; “multiracial.” Census Bureau arguments discuss the reasons behind
having a multiracial category, questioning if there is even the need for such a classification. Mixed race groups are fighting for their right to not be an "other" anymore, but to have their ethnic identity justified and recognized.

Mixed-race marriages have increased from 150,000 in 1960 to over one million in 1990. Based on these statistics, the number of racially mixed children in 1990 would be over 2 million (Perlmann, 1997). These statistics represent only those marriages that were registered as "interracial" and do not include any children that were born out of wedlock, so the actual numbers are, in reality, much larger. However, even if we were to rely on these inadequate and now outdated statistics, people of mixed-race heritage are very much a part of our society, and their issues regarding asserting a unique identity in our society are valid and need to be recognized.

The present system used on the United States Census concerning the identification with a specific racial category originated in the 1970's with the purpose of mandating civil rights laws which monitor voting rights, and equal access to minorities in housing, education, and employment. Multiethnic and multiracial organizations are lobbying for the addition of the group "multiracial" on the next Census. Individuals of mixed ethnic heritage argue for a combined term that doesn't draw lines between "separate" ethnic influences. As an informant of Native American and African American heritage explains, "I have never
distinguished differences between my heritages. I am a product of both, my entire life perspective and experiences are equally affected by my outlook and identity which is shaped simultaneously by my African and Native American heritage."

However, many minority leaders and organizations are against this distinction as they see the "multiracial" designation hurting minority representations in civil rights laws and other related legislation by diminishing the number of people who are counted as members of their minority group (Shipler, 1997). By reducing numbers in already established minority groups, our government has another reason to cut funding, decrease affirmative action movements, and minimize other civil rights legislation. Many black leaders are also extremely concerned about this consideration, and address it specifically, because if many blacks designate themselves as "multiracial", as many are, and not as black then many African American programs and organizations will lose power. Without this power they will lose helpful programs that are still necessary for affirmative action and upward mobility for black communities. Jesse Jackson considers the proposal for a "multiracial" distinction as "a diversion designed to undermine affirmative action" (Townsel, 1996).

Why do we still need and use racial distinctions in our society today and into the 21st century? Race is a socially constructed ideology formulated in our society without any basis in biological fact.
Anthropologists assert that all human populations, in all times and places, were always mixed populations, that there were never any pure races (Brues, 1976). Race is primarily a sociopolitical construct. The sorting of people into separate racial groups in this era has generally been done by powerful groups in order to subjugate outsiders and maintain power (Spickard, 1989). The boundaries surrounding racial labeling begins with geography, culture, and family ties. It then runs through economics and politics until it reaches biology. However, racial distinctions and their associated attributes are concerned with culture and social structures, not biology. Yet, racial categories are still recognized by our society as being valid.

Many anthropologists and other activists discussing the 2000 Census argue that continuing to force people to choose a racial grouping is perpetuating stereotypes and doesn't allow people to move forward and view each other as equals without any racial distinctions. As Cose (1997) explains, racial distinctions become an excuse for prejudice. The meanings and attributes we relate to race and the separate classifications continue the problems. "Racial labels are not objective configurations, but are political in nature" (Thornton, 1992). Racial labels explain how society establishes privileges and divides resources, and has nothing to do with personality or individual identities. Yet, racial distinctions are still a very large part of our society as white dominant society controls access to power and resources.
Minority individuals of color, and this includes individuals who are of mixed-race or mixed-ethnicity, have to fight oppression, discrimination, and racism in order to overcome barriers found in educational, political, economical, and social institutions of our society because of their phenotypic characteristics. So, on the census, asking individuals to assert their race, and not necessarily their ethnicity, does hold some substantive value that can be applied to civil rights laws in our society. Since people are discriminated against in our society based on looks, their racial phenotype and skin color, the Census should monitor equal opportunities and oppression based on racial distinctions that exist in our society. Pure biological racial groupings do not exist although social definitions within our society subjugate separate ethnic groups on the basis of their skin tone and other phenotypic characteristics.

However, as we move to the issue of introducing a “multiracial” distinction, the discussion becomes more complex. We are now simply not addressing racial groups, but questioning what racial groups people identify with. Supporters argue that individuals with parents from different racial groups should not have to choose a specific race or the category “other.” They should be able to choose a distinction that better defines who they are and what they identify with, as being an individual of two distinct racial heritages. As Clarance Page exclaimed (5/1/97), “If
people cannot call themselves what they want. . . . they cannot call themselves truly free."

The terms *race* and *ethnicity* are again at the center of this discussion where confusion about their meaning continues to perpetuate the problem of determining an identification term for individuals of mixed ethnicity. The entire Census argument revolves around what *racial* group individuals of mixed-heritage identify with. As I mentioned earlier, individuals do not *identify* with racial characteristics; they *identify* with cultural and ethnic characteristics of their families, communities, and social interactions. When dealing with issues of identity for individuals of mixed-heritage, the discussion really concerns which ethnic group, or groups, the individual identifies with. Children of *interethnic* marriages, the term I will use now as it implies the cultural characteristics the individual identifies with, are marginalized between two separate ethnic identities and communities. These separate foundations, traditions, and cultures then shape and guide the child on their journey towards constructing their own unique ethnic identity and place in the world.

*Racial intermarriage*, as labeled by the census and other organizations representing both minority cultures and white dominant culture, needs to be recognized and discussed as a form of *ethnic intermarriage*, as it is simply intermarriage along specific ethnic lines that our society chooses to call race lines (Perlmann, 1997). If the Census Bureau could view "multiracial" identity as a "multiethnic" identity, then
the discussion surrounding children of interethnic marriages would never have been an issue. This is because the Census Bureau has been counting the children of ethnic intermarriages for over a century where individuals have been able to choose two if not more distinctions for the country of origin and heritage of their parents (Coleman, 1997). If individuals have been able to designate several ethnic heritages, the Census Bureau should have no problem tabulating and calculating a Census that allows individuals to assert their multiple “racial” heritages, as defined in our society.

This inability to see ethnic and racial intermarriages as the same phenomenon is an underlying problem within our society and its institutions. It illustrates the distinctions made and assumptions surrounding race and racial groupings in our society, where people are judged as different by their skin color or phenotypic traits rather than by their ethnic heritage, culture, or individual personality. This emphasis on needing to assert an individual’s distinct racial group is then compounded when the individual is from an interethnic union. When these conflicting perspectives concerning the 2000 Census discuss an individual’s right to identify with more than one race, they are touching on a much larger debate. Individuals of mixed-ethnicity who struggle to assert an ethnic and racial identity, in spite of their marginal status, in our society are influenced by not only their parents and families, but also by their surrounding community, schools, media, and other political,
social and economic institutions of our society. It is not an easy or simple identification like checking a box or a couple of boxes on a form. An ethnic identity not only helps individuals define themselves to the surrounding society but also represents their own perceptions and viewpoints.

Mixed-ethnic individuals who are striving to be recognized as part of their own distinct racial and cultural group have additional hurdles which other minority groups have already overcome in their ongoing quest for recognition and equal opportunity. This can be illustrated in the methods used in the Census Bureau's calculations that project the future racial compositions of the "American" people in the year 2050. This phenomenon has been called the "Browning of America" by the media and relates to the prediction that America will be more than 50% non-white, by the year 2050 (Eddings, 1997). The Bureau backs this estimate by tabulating the increasing birth rates of minority groups over the birth rates of white dominant society along with immigration and other related factors. These findings propose that white society will no longer be the majority in "American" society (Shipler, 1997).

After examining the Census Bureau's basic assumptions and methods used for this forecast, however, a much more complicated issue is uncovered. The tabulation of their statistics reflects much of our society's treatment towards and means for dealing with individuals from mixed marriages or "multi-ethnic" backgrounds. The projections for the
future racial compositions of the "American" people completely overlooks the many multi ethnic peoples and interethnic marriages found in our society today. These people were not taken into account in the assertion that the population would be over 50% non-white in the year 2050. The census focuses only on racial population terms defined as "white", "African American", "Asian American", "Hispanic", and "Native American" or "Alaskan Native" in determining future racial representations.

Nonetheless, this ignorance or overlooking of multi-ethnic individuals is not where my major problem with the Census Bureau's results is found. When determining future racial compositions, the study assumes that there will be no further intermixing of people across ethnic and racial lines (Perlmann, 1997). The study is based on "whites" marrying "whites", "Hispanics" marrying "Hispanics", "Native Americans" marrying "Native Americans", "African Americans" marrying "African Americans" and "Asian Americans" marrying "Asian Americans." The Census Bureau does not even recognize interethnic marriages as a possibility. The fact is that interethnic relationships are increasing, and if this increase is not taken into account for future ethnic and racial compositions of the United States, outcomes will be under-representative of actual future populations. Taking this unsubstantiated bias into account, the "Browning of America" is already a much larger reality than anyone may realize.
This example of the Census Bureau's oversight or disregard for multi-ethnic populations in our society is representative of the challenges and struggles individuals must face in order to assert an "multi-ethnic" identity in our society. Interethnic unions and relationships are found throughout United States history, from colonial times to present day, encompassing many distinct ethnic and racial groups. Interethnic unions are not a new phenomenon; they have just been continually overlooked by the mono-ethnic culture of the United States where individuals are forced into one ethnic or racial category. Their struggle isn't merely for equal opportunity, but for recognition of their unique heritage. The complexities surrounding this issue reflect the experiences of multi-ethnic individuals in our society. The avoidance of these issues, in turn, reinforces the problems our society has in dealing with minority and multi-ethnic identities and surrounding issues.

Yet another argument states that the simple answer "multi-ethnic" is a false answer as it groups many diverse people with different ethnic identities under one term, where the term is the only thing they have in common (Root, 1992). This is representative of the mono-ethnic culture of the United States, where everyone fits into one distinct category or group. Regardless of the fact that the individuals that fall under the term "multi-ethnic" may have nothing in common, they are all seen as representing a distinct ethnic or racial category. This term also doesn't take into account the separate heritage and backgrounds of the people it
groups together. An individual of Asian American and white heritage has unique experiences compared to an individual of Native American and African American heritage. To group these two individuals under the same term to assert that they have the same "multi-ethnic" identity is ridiculous. The "multi-ethnic" category is not taking a positive step for identifying unique ethnic characteristics and influences on an individual in our society; it is not much different than the term "other." What we need to do is to recognize individuals' distinct heritages and ethnic identities, and how individuals who have multi-ethnic backgrounds have unique experiences here in the United States. These individuals should be recognized and accepted with their combined ethnic identities. The Census Bureau decided that instead of introducing a "multiracial" category which would be handled in the same fashion as the previously used term, "other," they would allow individuals to check more than one racial/ethnic category (Wright, 1998). If these results are then tabulated correctly, they should not minimize or undermine affirmative action efforts or other issues surrounding minority organizations and established legislation.

Multiethnic marriages have been a popular topic in current discussions, as illustrated in the many arguments surrounding the proposed "multiracial" category on the 2000 census. The many different perspectives debated explore the hardships of asserting an ethnic identity for individuals of mixed-ethnic parentage in our society.
Ultimately, instead of characterizing people as "multiethnic" or "multiracial" we need to recognize individuals as identifying with separate and distinct ethnic groups, and support them for doing so. Through this realization we can move away from a racially designated society, towards a society that recognizes many differences which make all of us unique and not easily placed into racially distinct categories or groups. Our world is full of colors; we can no longer define our society in "white" and "black."
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In my research I uncovered two major perspectives or viewpoints for dealing with the issues of mixed ethnic identities in our society. The first addresses the importance of recognizing two separate and distinct ethnic identities and their contrasting influences, while the other perspective attempts to combine both ethnic identities into a completely multicultural experience. The first perspective argues that it is important for an individual of mixed heritage to realize and identify with their minority or stigmatized heritage in this society because they will come to face stereotypes and discrimination throughout their lives. Confusion surrounding this reality will only confuse the individual and reduce self-confidence.

The second perspective argues for a combined or mixed-ethnic identity with no lines drawn between "separate" ethnic influences. This way the individual doesn't have to choose between their ethnic heritages, and will not feel as though they are not a "real" or "pure" member of an established ethnic or "racial" group. Both of these discussions attempt to reduce ethnic identity into defined categories with assigned terms but, in actuality, individuals of mixed-ethnicity are constantly shaping, switching, and combining their separate and distinct experiences into their personal identity. Mixed ethnic identity is much more complicated than these straightforward perspectives. Individuals of mixed ethnicity
are not limited to their "biological" ethnic heritage, or even their parents' heritages; they are free to choose what they like.

Mixed ethnic identity is centered in the person, not in societal constructions. It is up to the individual to shape and build their ethnic identity, there is no "correct" identification for mixed ethnic individuals. Mixed ethnic identity is a combined consciousness that is very difficult to reconcile with existing social constructions of race and racial identity development theory (Williams, 1999). Combined ethnic identity is an experience that does not fit dualistic constructs that shape our cultural beliefs about race. It is a struggle to find words and ideas that can describe the experience of shaping an ethnic identity, words that do not compartmentalize or divide. As Williams explains, our cultural beliefs about racial and ethnic issues are mired in the dualistic constructs of, good and bad, right and wrong, us and them, and black and white.

Mixed ethnic identity, even though it is not a new phenomenon, cannot be studied and explained completely using the dualistic terminology of racial identity theories and perspectives of our society. Our society's base in monocultural identities attempts to overlook the complexities found within multi-cultural identities and backgrounds. General society also contrasts and explains groups by looking at the borders found between groups and their distinct differences. Rather
than using this perspective, multicultural identities can be recognized and discussed by focusing on the centers of groups, not the borders, to celebrate similarities, differences, and other unique influences. By moving away from dualistic terms such as either/or good/bad, multiethnic identities can be more completely understood by using encompassing terms like partly and both/and. Instead of limiting and minimizing the multi-ethnic experience, a new more open-minded perspective can move towards a better understanding of the processes and influences that shape a mixed ethnic identity.

Daniel (1992), discusses a new way of thinking which is best expressed by using the principle found in a new mathematical theory called, “fuzzy logic.” This principle or theory argues that many concepts or phenomena cannot be categorized using binary thinking or dualistic constructions. “Fuzzy logic” emphasizes particular context relationships and wholes where there may be several explanations, influences, or answers. This perspective allows mixed ethnic identities to be centered in the person and not in societal constructions. Individual and cultural influences can be discussed and debated as unique phenomena that shape the formulation of multi-ethnic identities. This perspective also gives individuals the right to define their own experiences, their own personal perspectives and meaning, and to shape their own unique identity. Multi-ethnic individuals can claim a unique “I” which challenges many people’s defined beliefs about race. By taking the
courage to claim their own experience despite much resistance and judgement by society in general, mixed ethnic individuals can combat feelings of marginality and uncertainty by beginning to formulate their personal ethnic identity (Williams, 1999).

Many times mixed ethnic identities are overlooked, or individuals are simply encouraged to alter their perspectives or multi-cultural identity. On several occasions throughout their lifetimes, my informants were encouraged to believe alternative monocultural explanations and ideologies towards explaining their unique experiences. In these circumstances my informants' explanations were minimized and qualified with separate “accepted” monocultural explanations, which left them without useful perspectives or even means for processing their lives, heritage, and specific environments. In these situations, our society and its institutions have placed multi-ethnic individuals in a marginalized position within our society, where they have no distinct place or group with which to identify. This then leads to further confusion and complex emotions as the individual feels they are “different” or “wrong” for identifying with more than one predefined cultural group or category.

Each of my informants recalls this experience and other feelings of marginality during their childhood and lives in general. Overcoming this perspective is a complicated task that involves redefining biased social constructions and racial ideologies presented and supported by our
society. While everyone shapes their own personal identity, they do so within established hegemonic structures of our society. Sometimes these structures include the hegemony of one ethnic group over another, but at other times my informants are influenced by the hegemony of the idea of "pure" ethnic groups over mixed ethnicity.

Individuals find themselves overlooking their multi ethnic heritage by attempting to identify with the monocultural categories presented and accepted by our society. When individuals are not encouraged in their quest for asserting a multi ethnic identity, it is often easier for them to identify with how others categorize them. This leaves the individual constantly questioning their personal identity, and wondering why they are letting society judge and categorize them. Mixed ethnicity is an identity that allows individuals to cross many racial and cultural barriers posed by our society. However, this fluidity and constantly changing perspective is not encouraged by our societal values which expect an individual to have a definite understanding of "who they are" and "what they stand for."

As my informants questioned the defined labels presented by our society, they wondered how racial labels could continue to be emphasized and recognized still today. Ethnicity and ethnic distinctions are often grouped and judged according to racial categories, groups, and labels. Individuals are often judged, grouped, and stereotyped according to their perceived racial background. Their perceived racial heritage also
shapes the many forms of institutionalized racism and discrimination they may or may not encounter throughout their lives. Racial distinctions and their emphasis in our society, are not based in biology, but are social, economic, and political in nature. As Spickard (1989) explains, “The sorting of people into this race or that (race) in the modern era has generally been done by powerful groups for the purposes of maintaining and extending their own power.” The people in power, or people who are defining racial distinctions, can then relate cultural attributes, values, morals, and personal characteristics to the racial categories in order to justify the racial labels. By justifying the inferiority of one culture to another, the culture in power then justifies their rule and perhaps unjust, oppressive and racist judgements and actions used to subjugate different groups of people.

Many individuals never question racial categories, groups, and labels that are constantly supported and perpetuated by our society and its institutions. Multi ethnic individuals along with their friends and families are taking positive steps towards redefining racial labels and categories used by our society. Instead of accepting society’s predefined assumptions and value judgements of racial categories, new arguments have questioned the basis for the racial categories in the first place. By evaluating racial categories’ highly political and social development, their meaning and importance has been greatly diminished in the eyes of my informants.
Racial categories are superficially defined, as individuals do not identify with their racial characteristics, but identify with their ethnic and cultural background. Ethnicity is a large factor in how individuals define and identify themselves personally, and in contrast to society in general. However, race cannot be completely overlooked as it has had great influences on how our society is structured in the past and still today. Ethnic identity encompasses the many different distinctions, viewpoints, judgements, and stereotypes which are inflicted upon the individual due to their unique racial and cultural backgrounds. An ethnic identity combines cultural background and personal heritage with general society’s judgements and categories which, within our society, tend to be defined with racial labels and characteristics.

Racial labels and distinctions allow negative stereotypes about moral qualities of individuals to be created and perpetuated. By doing so, dominant society can easier ignore the individual distinctiveness of those they are oppressing and not feel guilty about their racist and discriminatory practices (Eschbach, 1995). However, when oppressed groups of people find a common ethnic and cultural heritage and can work together towards fighting stereotypes and institutionalized racism; race can be used as a positive tool, a source of belonging, and can help establish positive self-esteem. When individuals of mixed ethnicity are placed in the middle ground where they do not have a specific ethnic or
cultural group to identify with or any racial label to relate with, self-esteem dwindles and individuals often feel lost and isolated.

Even though mixed ethnic identities must be viewed first and foremost as unique and personal to the specific individual and their life experiences, some similarities or patterns can be found within the perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints of my informants. First, support from family, specifically parents and other older influential relatives, helps mixed ethnic individuals formulate their identity. If parents address issues and support children in their uncertainties the child will feel less stress and have a more positive self-esteem as they will not feel isolated and alone. My informants who were encouraged by their parents to formulate their unique personality and identity are more confident and self-assured in their personal identity and with their place in society. My informants who did not receive support or had minimal positive role models often tried to overlook part of their ethnicity or ignore the complexities found within their multi-ethnic background. These individuals have since had the courage to recognize and identify with their multi-ethnic heritage, but it has often been more complicated and is done on their own without much family support.

Individuals of mixed ethnicity have a much easier time shaping their personal identity when they have positive role models from each of their ethnic heritages. If they are lacking a positive role model in part of
their ethnic heritage, they are then not able to identify with the positive traits and culture of that heritage. Also, if there are negative models representing part of their ethnic heritage, it is very unlikely that they will be able to relate to or identify with that part of their heritage at all.

Another influence which affects multi ethnic individuals' self-reflection and personal identity is acceptance of their multi ethnic heritage by close friends and peers. My informants have found this influence to be more important as they have moved away from home and have become less dependent on their parents financially and emotionally. My informants do not openly discuss their mixed heritage with acquaintances and the general public. They save their personal discussions concerning their life views and perspectives for close friends and are then greatly influenced by their friends' perceptions, comments, and viewpoints. For example, an informant of African American and European American heritage does not recognize his European American heritage as defining "who he is." His friends who identify as African American, or black, explain, "He is just like us, and identifies with us as black men. He might have some white blood and a little lighter skin, but he is the same as us." Another informant of Native American and European American heritage recognizes both her heritages as influencing her ethnic identity. Many of her friends also have mixed ethnic backgrounds and also celebrate their multi ethnic identities.
Other patterns located within the complexities of my informants' multi ethnic identities have to do with the political or social standing of their different ethnic backgrounds and the effects these relationships have upon the individuals' perspectives and lives. The first similarity can be found in the perceptions and viewpoints of those who have one parent of minority heritage and the other a member of white dominant society. In this blending of ethnic backgrounds, the child views many biases found within "American" culture. My informants who are part white and another minority group found within our society are very aware of institutionalized racism, white privileges, and other biases and stereotypes found within white dominant society. Throughout their lives they have witnessed the political nature of their ethnic heritage, where the white part of their heritage is their "ticket to success" and their minority part of their heritage leads to judgements, stereotypes, and other biased assumptions to be made about their character and lifestyle. They have to deal with the issues of dominant white society, the subjugation of minority individuals, and then combine these issues within their own personal formulation of their mixed ethnic identity.

I also uncovered similarities between my informants who have African American, or black, heritage as part of their ethnic background. With this background, they have very little choice in formulating their ethnic identities due to the political and social stigma associated with black culture and ethnicity in our society. My informants, because they
“look” black are treated, judged, stereotyped and discriminated against, just as an individual who identifies with only black culture would be. These people report that if they try to identify as “multi ethnic” or “multi racial” that others assume that they are doing so to attain a higher status in society, and to downplay their African American heritage. Just as my informants who have white heritage recognize the biases and oppressiveness of white dominant society, my informants with black heritage witness the resistance of our society towards accepting a multi ethnic or “multi racial” identity.

Classifications based on ethnic categories have always been a part of our social, economic, political, and historical interactions, and they are still emphasized today. Americans attempt to place individuals into neat categories, reflected in how most applications ask the individual to check their race or ethnicity. Multi-ethnic and mixed-race individuals have been forced throughout history to choose one ethnicity over another, or it has simply been chosen for them. This contrasts with the fact that there are no pure races and every human has mixed heritage (Zack, 1995). In spite of the fact that no pure races exist, our society is obsessed with drawing lines between races and determining specific ethnic heritage for minority individuals. Our society places such a large emphasis on ethnic identity that individuals are well served by acknowledging their multiple heritages and understanding the influences ethnic background has on their perceptions and interactions.
Different societal factors influence an individual's assertion of their ethnic identity. However, an individual's identification with a distinct or even several ethnic groups then influences how others perceive that individual. It is a continuous cycle that controls perceptions of accepted ideologies and values, and then also presents and continues stereotypes and institutionalized discrimination in our society. Ethnic identity gives individuals a feeling of belonging and a place in society with other individuals who share similar cultural and social perspectives.

Anthropologists were very influential in asserting racial categories and their imposed moral characteristics. Early anthropologists assumed that pure races did exist at one time, and then went about grouping and defining these "different" groups of people based on phenotypic and genotypic traits. Racial distinctions and characteristics were considered biological. However, when all of the traits were compared and contrasted it became evident that there were so many commonalities between groups that many anthropologists concluded "pure" races do not exist. As Templeton explains, "Due to extensive genetic interchange through population movements and gene flow from over hundreds of thousands of years ago there is only one evolutionary lineage of humans with no subspecies or races under either traditional or phylogenetic definitions" (1998). If anthropologists can convey this understanding of race in our
society, new moves can be made towards addressing racial categories and racism here in the United States.

However, at this point in time, many of my informants are still greatly affected by the "biological" classification of race upon their personal multi-ethnic identity. Many of them feel that they must either choose between their two biological/cultural heritages of their parents or choose to identify with one culture of one parent. When formulating their personal identity, multi-ethnic individuals can often become persuaded by a common racial worldview; the idea that biology has some intrinsic connection to culture. As mixed ethnic individuals attempt to recognize the cultures that they "inherited" from their parents they need to recognize that their parents' cultures and lifestyles are unique, having no basis in biology or associated racial features (Harrison, 1998). An individual's identity is subject to not only their cultural background and childhood, but also influenced by current political issues, economics, and social structures. Cultures themselves are constantly changing over time, without any changes in associated racial features or biology. Cultures are not easily defined as separate cultural characteristics are deemed more important or are emphasized by different individuals or family groups. A common cultural background is a basis for comparison between individual identities, although an individual's cultural background does not determine their unique ethnic identity.
Individuals are not limited to the cultures and traditions of their parents and other relatives just because of a biological connection. As with my informant of African American and European American heritage who identifies as Hawaiian, as long as the individual is socially accepted within the established “group” and is familiar with the culture, traditions, values, and beliefs they can then identify on a personal level. As individuals are free to choose their personal multi-ethnic identity, they still have to deal with the constraints, biases, discrimination, and institutional racism that our society continues to tolerate. Just as society in general can overlook the complex problems of institutionalized racism and discrimination, society also continues to overlook the complex issues surrounding mixed ethnic identities. Many multicultural discussions assume that “cultures” and “races” neatly coincide and can be discussed as one in the same. However, race and culture are separate entities that may or may not coincide. Just because two individuals share the same culture does not mean that they have similar racial characteristics, also, just as if two individuals are viewed as being in a similar “race” this does not mean they have the same culture, traditions, heritage, or upbringing.

Our society in general assumes that individuals with similar racial traits have similar cultures. This is where individuals of mixed ethnicity pose a problem. Individuals of mixed ethnicity may identify with part of their own ethnic heritage or another ethnic heritage. Many of my
informants of mixed ethnic heritage explain how they find themselves identifying with other mixed ethnic individuals, organizations, and groups. They feel that if United States society hadn’t placed their identity in such a marginalized position, that they never would have identified with other multi-ethnic individuals. As one of my informants explains, “I identify with your other informants. I completely understand the complexities in their lives and the hardships they face because their identities and personalities are questioned, debated, and even overlooked.” However, my informant also goes on to explain that this is where the similarities between multi-ethnic people stops. “I am African American and European American. I really have nothing in common with a person of Mexican American and Chinese American ancestry.” Mixed ethnic individuals’ experiences in society are different, as their cultures, background, family, heritage, and experiences are distinct and unique. However, what it really comes down to is the individual’s personal experiences, personal viewpoints, and perspectives. Identities, and particularly multiethnic identities, are very personal and cannot be tied or associated with entire groups of people. Each of my informants, even those with the “same” ethnic heritages, have all shaped their identities uniquely. Even multi-ethnic individuals within the same family have arrived at different definitions and constructions of their unique ethnic identities. Ethnic identities are personal, private, and at sometimes very emotional, so as it is not easy for an individual to shape
and construct a mixed identity in our society, it is also very complicated for them to talk about and put into words.

Ultimately, shaping a mixed ethnic identity in the United States is a very complex process which draws on many diverse influences and surrounding environments of the individual. The individual is not only influenced by their own world view and life experiences, but also by many outside forces of society. This identity is then subject to change and alterations as the individual has new experiences and expanded viewpoints. Mixed ethnicity is an increasing reality in our society today where issues surrounding mixed ethnic identities can no longer be overlooked. By addressing the complexities mixed ethnic individuals face in our society we can then move towards a better understanding of our society and its institutions in general.
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APPENDICES
QUESTIONNAIRE #1

What is your full name?

Does it have any special significance?

When were you born?

Where are you from?

Are you a student? (major, year)

Do you work? (where)

What are your hobbies, things you enjoy to do?

Where are your parents from?

What are your parents' professions?

What is your ethnicity?

What cultural groups do you identify with?

How did you arrive at that answer?

Are there times when you feel more a part of one ethnicity than another? explain.

What is an "American?"

What image do you think of when you hear "American?"

Is that an important part of your identity?

What makes you feel this way?

How are you different from the stereotypical "American"?

How do you think your life has differed from the white member of dominant society in the United States?

How do you feel the United States has treated people of mixed ethnicity
in the past?

How does the United States and its members approach your separate cultural heritages today, how do you feel about this?

Do you feel that you have been the victim of stereotyping? In what ways? slang, body language, etc.

What are some judgements that people who do not know you have assumed based on your ethnicity or color of your skin?

Do you feel that you pre-judge people of other ethnicities?

Do you feel like you are in a marginal state, as not sure as to what culture to identify with? Have you ever experienced culture shock?

How did you learn about your roots and culture?

How far back can you trace your roots?

What are some of your favorite family traditions? ex. teasing cousins dance
Appendix 2

QUESTIONNAIRE #2

What do you think of when you hear the word mixed-ethnicity?

What are common stereotypes of people of mixed ethnicity?

What is your opinion on racially mixed marriages and relationships?

How accepted are they by our society?

Do people of mixed ethnicity have a special place in our society like other minority groups?

Is it important for mixed ethnicity to be recognized?

What is your hometown?

How long have you been attending OSU?

How do you feel about OSU and diversity?

Does OSU have any problems concerning multiculturalism and race that need to be addressed?

Do you ever feel uncomfortable at OSU because of your ethnicity or color of your skin?

At certain places, around other students, workers, or professors?
QUESTIONNAIRE #3:

My goal is to interview students at OSU to determine and study individual and diverse ethnic identities. Through the interviewing process I hope to identify common and contrasting themes to then establish the focus and main point of my study/paper. I hope to achieve this through open-ended questions that will allow the informant to guide me through important topics and issues.

Questions:

How do you define your ethnicity?

What groups of people do you identify with?

Does this differ from the groups of people you identify with at home?

How do you think “others” categorize you?
   *at home?
   *at OSU?

Can you identify any stereotypes people who don’t know you may associate you with?

Can you explain important influences on how you came to determine your identity?
   *ethnicity?
   *socio-economic influences?
   *dominant society and values?
Appendix 4

Married Interracial Couples

- Interracial Couples
- Black/White
- Black Husband/White Wife
- White Husband/Black Wife
- White/Other Race
- Black/Other Race
- All Other Couples

Appendix 5

ATTRIBUTES OF ETHNICITY

1. Common geographic origin
2. Migratory status
3. Race
4. Language or dialect
5. Religious faith or faiths
6. Ties that transcend kinship, neighborhood, and community boundaries
7. Shared traditions, values, and symbols
8. Literature, folklore, and music
9. Food preferences
10. Settlement and employment patterns
11. Special interests in regard to politics in the homeland and in the U.S.
12. Institutions that specifically serve and maintain the group
13. An internal sense of distinctiveness
14. An external sense of distinctiveness
