

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Biracial and Multiracial people are one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States. Individuals with a mixed identity have the ability to choose endless racial/ethnic designations that best exemplify their racial/ethnic social identity. However, people who are racially/ethnically mixed may receive criticism if their proclaimed identity does not coincide with the societal perceptions of their racial/ethnic identity. People who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and have White ancestry can be perceived as White by society. Therefore, Biracial and Multiracial people have the ability to pass as White if they have White ancestry and appear White. This study explored racially/ethnically mixed peoples' perceptions of passing as White. Qualitative surveys were conducted to find if Biracial and Multiracial people thought they could pass as White.

When Biracial and Multiracial people have the ability to pass as White, they are associated with the White group. Association with the White group equates to being afforded advantages and benefits. Thus, White privilege may be afforded to racially/ethnically mixed people who pass as White. Qualitative interviews were used to explore if Biracial and Multiracial people identified with having White privilege. The research also examined the connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege. Findings suggest racially/ethnically people who can pass

as White identified with having White privilege. Moreover, participants and a research team evaluation identified factors that contribute to passing as White. The findings presented in this study are significant as it explores the intersection between Biracial and Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The information presented in this study implies that the phenomenon of passing is an important concept toward social justice and racial equity.

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Brown on the Inside: Multiracial Individuals and White Privilege

by  
Shannon D. Quihuiz

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Shannon D. Quihuiz, Author

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## Brown on the Inside: Multiracial Individuals and White Privilege

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was 12:50 p.m. on Wednesday. The bell rang to signify the end of lunch and, for the first time this year, Mrs. Anderson's third-grade students were all lined up and eager to begin instruction. Why were the students so excited and ready to learn on this particular day? Today was no ordinary Wednesday, when afternoon instruction usually focused on arithmetic and grammar. Today was special. Today was Cultural Appreciation Day. For the next two hours, students would share their culture with the rest of the class. Some students brought food to share, while other students brought in pictures, music, artifacts, and other objects.

Grace was sitting at table four waiting patiently for her turn. Grace was eight years old and the newest member of Mrs. Anderson's classroom. After the winter break, Grace transferred from a school in another county. She was a quiet student and has not yet established a close network of friends. Grace was excited to share her culture with her new classmates.

Grace's favorite person in the world, her Grandma, helped her make sweet empanadas to give her classmates a taste of their Mexican culture. Grandma and Grace mixed the dough with their hands and while Grandma rolled out the dough patties, Grace placed spoonfuls of the pineapple and pumpkin filling. Grandma folded the empanadas and Grace pierced four little holes on the top of each little pastry with a fork. Together, Grace and her Grandma sprinkled the pastries with sugar and placed them in the oven to

bake. While they waited for the oven timer to ring, Grandma told Grace stories about their family.

Soon, it was time for the children at table four to share. Shannon described her Irish culture, handed out shamrock stickers to her classmates, explained how her family celebrated St. Patrick's Day, and told the tale of the leprechaun. Matthew shared his love of baseball and showed off his Dodgers gear, told stories of attending baseball games and how his family always ate Dodger dogs and cheered for rookie Eric Karros. Finally, it was Grace's turn. She passed around the sweet empanadas, told the class about her Mexican heritage, and explained how her family made these desserts every Christmas.

Over the course of two hours, all of Mrs. Anderson's students had shared their culture and stories. When the 3:00 p.m. bell announced the 20-minute recess period, the children exited the classroom for the freedom of the outdoors.

Grace was walking to the edge of the grass to pick some flowers when three of her classmates approached her. Leah asked Grace, "Can you speak Spanish?" Grace thought, "I have never been asked this question before." Puzzled by the question, Grace shook her head no. "See," Leah said to her friends, "I told you she wasn't Mexican!" Grace, a quiet and timid child, took offense and responded, "Yes I am." Leah rebutted. "No you are not. You can't speak Spanish and you are not Brown. You are White, like us." Grace was dumbfounded. She just stood there, not knowing what to say or do. The three other girls ran off, giggling. How could she be White, Grace wondered, if Grandma talked about being Mexican? Grace thought, "Well, my mom is White but my dad is Brown." Grace did have light skin like the rest of the kids at school and only knew a

couple of words in Spanish; maybe she wasn't Mexican. Grace asked herself, "Am I White?"

### **Background of the Study**

The concept of questioning one's racial/ethnic identity is not an uncommon phenomenon. Throughout a lifetime, people's identifications and understanding of their racial/ethnic identity may change with the dynamic interplay among self-perception, societal perception, socio/political contexts, and education. The study of racial identity development describes the constant evolution and complexity of racial identity and group membership (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Racial identity development theory refers to:

the belief systems that evolve in response to the racial group categorization given meaning by the larger society. In societies like the U.S., where racial-group membership is an important determinant of social status, it is assumed that the development of a racial identity will occur, to some degree, in everyone. (Lawrence & Tatum, 1999, p. 47)

Numerous foundational theories exist to describe the experiences of racial identity formation for people with single, monoracial identities (e.g., Black/African American, White, Latino, Asian American, and Native American). Many of these theories examine the shared commonality and association between the self-perception of identity and the group/collective identity (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). While these theories are integral to self-discovery and racial/ethnic identity resolution, the monoracial theories may not meet the needs of people of who identify with more than one race or ethnicity.

The emergence of people who identify with more than once race or ethnicity has led to changes in the way populations are reported in the United States. It has only been

within the past decade that the Census permitted individuals to self-identify with more than one race (Jones & Smith, 2001). According to Jones and Smith (2001), the 2000 Census referred to Multiracial individuals “as the *Two or more races* population, or as the population that reported *more than one race*” (p. 1, emphasis in the original). According to the 2000 Census, 6.8 million people, or 2.4% of the U.S. population, identified with more than one race (Jones & Smith, 2001). Of that 6.8 million, 42% were individuals under the age of 18 (Jones & Smith, 2001). The percentage of the population who will identify with more than one race or ethnicity (i.e., Biracial and Multiracial) will continue to increase and become more complex in the future (Renn & Shang, 2008). To address the evolving composition of the population, Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed-heritage identity development theories and models emerged to describe the experiences of individuals who identify with more than one race or ethnicity.

In general, for individuals who are racially/ethnically mixed, racial identity development describes how people personally identify their racial/ethnic identity, how their proclaimed identity correlates with societal perception of identity, and factors that influence their racial/ethnic identity assertion (Davis, 2009; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). People who identify with more than one race or ethnicity have the opportunity to self-disclose their race and ethnicity, however, how they personally identify and what society labels them may not be congruent. This conflict, described as the discrepancy between choice of identity and assigned identity (Wijeyesinghe, 2001), is not uncommon among people with a mixed racial/ethnic identity who see themselves one way and have society label



them another way. Thus, a dichotomy exists between personal identification and societal perception of identity.

People who are racially/ethnically mixed and have White ancestry may be labeled as White by society. To be considered White by members of society who categorize by appearance, Multiracial people must display physical features that are in alignment with the general perception of the features of those in the White group.

Characteristics such as skin color and tone, hair color and texture, eye color and shape, size and shape of facial features, and body structure are used by the general public and society to make assumptions about people's racial ancestry, racial group membership, and racial identity. (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 140)

People who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and have the ability to fit into the White group are described as being able to "pass as White." Thus, racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White access White group membership. For Multiracial people to pass as White, there must be a level of acceptance of their racial/ethnic identity as White from society (Kroeger, 2004). Passing as White may also involve a level of misrepresentation and concealment of true Multiracial identity (Bradshaw, 1992), but access to White group membership remains dependent on societal designation. This means that Multiracial people can pass as White if society believes them to be part of the White group. Therefore, people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and have the ability to pass as White will be viewed as part of the White group.

Perceptions and assumptions are ingrained in our nature as humans and effect how we treat each other. Privilege describes social rewards and benefits afforded to people because of an association to group membership (Johnson, 2006). White privilege is defined as unearned entitlement and advantages exclusively received for being White

(McIntosh, 2002). The concept of White privilege has evolved to encompass White identified people, people who pass as White, and people who are misperceived as White (Wise, 2008). Thus, Multiracial people who can pass as White will be perceived as part of the White group by society and will be afforded access to social rewards and benefits based solely on the color of their skin.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Even though the correlation between Multiracial identity and passing as White has been made, there remains the need for an exploration involving the relationship between Multiracial people who pass as White and White privilege. Much of the literature describes the experiences of Multiracial people who appear White and the limitations on their choice of identity when society deems them White (Bradshaw, 1992; King, 2008; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). The relation between passing as White and racial identity development has been addressed in literature, but analysis has not extended to include the concept of White privilege. Because societal acceptance determines access to group membership, Multiracial people who can pass as White have access to and can benefit from White privilege. Studies on Multiracial people who pass as White and their perceptions of White privilege are needed to explore the extent to which White privilege influences access to social rewards and benefits in the lives of those who pass as White, even though they may not consider themselves to be White or part of the White group.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore racially/ethnically mixed peoples' perceptions of passing as White. Qualitative inquiry was used to collect and analyze the

stories of Multiracial individuals. In addition to the participants' perspectives of racially/ethnically mixed identity and passing as White, the concept of White privilege was explored to determine the relationship between people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and acquisition of social rewards and benefits of White privilege.

The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. Do Multiracial/ethnic people identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstance, pass as White?
2. Do Multiracial/ethnic people, who can and do pass as White, identify with having White privilege?
3. Is there a connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege?

### **Significance of the Study**

Being White matters in the United States. Association with the White group equates to being valued, viewed as “normal,” and afforded access to social rewards and benefits (Johnson, 2006). An outcome of this study was to see if participants who identified with more than one race or ethnicity also identified with being able to pass as White. If participants understood they could pass as White they may recognize being associated with White group membership. This recognition may raise awareness regarding societal perceptions in the designation of racial/ethnic identity and how racial/ethnic identity influences access to privileges and benefits. Dalton (2002) describes this access as the recognition of privilege that society confers upon those who pass as White because of their White appearance. Thus, the relationship between socially perceived White identity and White privilege may expose notions that contribute to race relations, and concepts of racism and White supremacy.

There is considerable literature focusing on White privilege, (e.g., Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 2002; Rothenberg, 2002; Wise, 2008). A growing collection of published research has explored Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed-heritage identity development (e.g., Poston, 1990; Renn, 2004; Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Much of the research and literature discusses White privilege and Multiracial identity as separate concepts, even though acknowledgement has been made about the need to explore their connection (Renn, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). To address the paucity of research exploring White privilege as it relates to Multiracial individuals who pass as White, this study attempts to expand the literature. This study extends the work that has been done regarding White privilege and Multiracial identity development. Findings of this study and the conclusions developed from it may serve as a resource for members of the higher education community (i.e., student affairs personnel and faculty) in regard to the concept of “passing.” The notion of passing is not a newly developed phenomenon, but it has implications on social identities and the correlation between intrapersonal proclaimed identity and interpersonal perceived identity.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of racially/ethnically mixed people who have the ability to pass as White, qualitative research was conducted at a four-year public land grant university located in the northwestern region of the United States. Two decisive factors were established to recruit a specific participant population. Specifically, this researcher gathered data from people who identified with more than one race or ethnicity and believed, to some degree or under certain circumstances, they had

the ability to pass as White. Participants engaged in a qualitative survey designed to address a series of questions that explored the dichotomy between the self-proclaimed identity and the socially perceived identity, and passing as White. This researcher and the four-person research team (i.e., two graduate students and two professional staff members) reviewed submitted materials individually and subjectively to determine, in their judgment, if each participant could pass as White.

Those participants who met the two criterion were invited to engage in a one-on-one qualitative interview with the primary researcher. A series of questions were asked addressing identity, experiences about passing as White, and perceptions of White privilege. Once the stories of their experiences of passing as White in relation to White privilege were documented, this researcher identified themes and categories that emerged from the data. These findings were presented to the participants who then had the opportunity to provide their feedback and ideas about the accuracy of the findings. The findings of this study were not intended to be a generalization of the experiences of racially/ethnically mixed people who have the ability to pass as White. The objective of this research was to gain understanding of a previously unexplored relationship between the ability of Multiracial individuals to pass as White and White privilege.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section provides definitions for several key terms used in this study. Definitions were drawn from existing literature and theory. For the purpose of this study, terms were defined as follows:

***Dominant and Subordinate Group Dynamics.*** Dominant and subordinate group dynamics refer to the dichotomies within social identities (e.g., race, dominant group-White and subordinate group-people of color/non-White or biological sex, dominant group-male and subordinate group-female). Subordinate has been used interchangeably with minority and dominant has been used interchangeably with majority (Marger, 2006). Dominant and subordinate group dynamics do not always pertain to numbers or majority rule, but do reference the allocation of power and resources. Therefore, dominant groups have greater access to power and resources and often make the rules to define what is “normal,” “right,” and “truth” (“Social Justice,” 2010). Subordinate groups have less access to power and resources and often are seen as “less than,” “inferior,” and “deficient” (“Social Justice,” 2010). Dominant groups define and identify subordinate groups. This means that subordinate groups are identified and perceived as different. For the purpose of this study, the terms dominant group (i.e., White) and subordinate group (i.e., people of color or non-White) were used.

***Ethnicity.*** A social, political, and historical construct that divides people into groups based on cultural characteristics (e.g., values, religion, behaviors, language, shared history, and ancestral geographical base) (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997).

***Multiracial.*** The term Multiracial describes a group of people who share more than one racial/ethnic identity. The Multiracial group is dynamic and no single experience can be used to portray the group’s complexity. Other cognate terms have been used to describe this group of people including (but not limited to) multiethnic, mixed identity, mixed heritage, Biracial, mixed, hybrid, half-breed, Mestizo, Mulatto, and Hapa.

There has been debate within the literature pertaining to the inclusivity of terminology describing people with more than one race or ethnicity; however, most published research continues to use the terms “Biracial” and “Multiracial.” For the purpose of this study and to be comparable to other published research, this researcher used the term “Multiracial” to identify people who self-proclaim more than one race or ethnicity. The terms Multiracial/ethnic, people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity, and racially/ethnically mixed people were used synonymously and interchangeably throughout the research.

***Pass as White.*** The ability to pass involves being accepted and received as something (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). The concept of passing has implications of a dual existence between the intrapersonal (i.e., self proclaimed identity) and interpersonal (i.e., socially perceived identity) (Ginsberg, 1996). Therefore, to successfully pass as something (e.g., pass as White), society must determine the ability to do so. The societal designation is central in passing. For Multiracial people, “passing as White” means the ability to fit in with the White group. Determined by this researcher and research team, the most important factor when considering the ability to pass as White was skin color. Other factors (e.g., socialization, upbringing, cultural awareness, education, childhood experiences, language, accents, and name) were considered, but overwhelmingly physical appearance, specifically skin color, was the most influential factor. For the purpose of this study, to pass as White means to have a light complexion and to have the ability to access and be associated with White group membership.

***Race.*** Race is a social, political, and historical construct that categorizes people hierarchically into distinctive groups based on certain characteristics (e.g., physical characteristics) (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997).

***White privilege.*** White privilege refers to unearned entitlement and advantages afforded to people based solely on their skin color (i.e., White appearance) (McIntosh, 2002). White privilege has two distinguishing factors: unearned entitlement and conferred dominance (McIntosh, 2002). Unearned entitlement refers to the benefit of access to resources and social rewards (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997). Conferred dominance refers to the power one group (i.e., dominant group) has over another group (i.e., subordinate group) (McIntosh, 2002) and involves the power to shape the norms and values of society (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997).

### **Summary**

Awareness regarding passing as White and White privilege among people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity should be explored. The research examined the relationship between Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The research explored the following questions:

1. Do Multiracial/ethnic people identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstance, pass as White?
2. Do Multiracial/ethnic people, who can and do pass as White, identify with having White privilege?
3. Is there a connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege?



In answering these questions, the study provided a new perspective examining both the personal and socially perceived identity of passing as White for Multiracial people and the individual's self-perception of White privilege.

This thesis is organized in five chapters. In Chapter 2, the literature review, background knowledge and a review of the literature regarding Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege is presented. Information in the chapter also expands the context in regard to the definition of terms (e.g., race and ethnicity). In Chapter 3, the research methodology offers an examination of the qualitative structure used in this study. Information in this chapter outlines the methods used in recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing data. In Chapter 4, the findings, analysis, and discussion are presented. Information gathered from the participants, especially the themes and categories that emerged from the data collection, are offered and the analysis and discussion of the study results presented. In Chapter 5, conclusions and recommendations are offered that synthesize the data and outline suggestions for future research and practice.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing body of knowledge and literature related to Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. This study aimed to explore the interrelationship among these three concepts. To thoroughly examine Multiracial identity, this researcher found it necessary to identify and discuss the literature as it relates to race and ethnicity in hopes of clarifying the terminology used in this study.

Following a discussion of literature on race and ethnicity, the researcher explored the concept of passing as White. Some racially/ethnically mixed people have the ability to pass as White because of physical appearance, especially skin color. Physical appearance is an influential factor in choice and self-disclosure of identity. The way people look provides access to and association with group membership. Thus, physical appearance can facilitate congruence within particular racial/ethnic groups or incongruence within these groups (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This means that racially/ethnically mixed people who pass as White can be rejected and denied access to their non-White communities (King, 2008; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) while being given access and association with the White group. Sections of this chapter are intended to provide an understanding of the relationship between Multiracial identity and passing as White.

People who fit in and are associated with White group membership are afforded access to White privilege. Because value and preferred treatment are based on Whiteness, people with light skin and pass as White and who may be misperceived as White will be valued and treated as part of the White group (Wise, 2008). Thus, people who pass as

White will have access to White privilege (i.e., benefits and social rewards). This section in the literature expands on the research conducted on White privilege in relation to Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White. In brief, the review of the literature presents information on (a) Multiracial identity, (b) passing as White, and (c) White privilege. Because there is a paucity of research on the topic of White privilege as it relates to racially/ethnically mixed people who pass as White, the researcher sought to explore these topics.

### **Multiracial Identity**

Renn and Shang (2008) predict complexity within the racial/ethnic demographics in the United States as an increasing number of people self-identify with more than one race or ethnicity. It was through this choice to self-identify that the labels of Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed gained acceptance to identify racially/ethnically mixed people. Most of the literature and research use the term Multiracial versus multiethnic. Much of the literature stipulates that racial categories subsume ethnic groups. For this reason, the first part of this section will explore race and ethnicity. The second part of this section will examine the Biracial and Multiracial identity development theories and models. These identity development theories and models demonstrate the complexity of identity formation for people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity.

### **Race and Ethnicity**

Race is a multidimensional phenomenon that is not easily defined (Rattansi, 2007). The term is used to describe the classification or division of people into distinct groups based on certain real or perceived hereditary characteristics (Wijeyesinghe, 2001;

Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997). Race is often linked to biological, historical, political, social, and ideological constructs (Davis, 2009; Omi & Winant, 1994). In addition, some people interchange and intertwine race with ethnicity. According to Marger (2006) race is often applied to encompass many specific ethnic groups. “For example, to speak of ‘blacks’ in the United States in the aggregate is to assume a homogeneity that does not exist.

Overlooked is the ethnic variety among U.S. blacks” (Marger, 2006, p. 23). Omi and Winant (1994) constructs ethnicity as one of the paradigms within racial theory.

Wijeyesinghe (2001) describes ethnicity and ethnic groups as subcategories of race and racial groups. In addition, the characteristics of race have broadened to include cultural dynamics and ethnic classification (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997). Because the expanded nature of the definitions, constructs, and uses of the term, race is not only linked to physical appearance, but also to cultural, behavioral, and ethnic elements (Rattansi, 2007). “In popular usage, it has been used to describe a wide variety of human categories, including people of a particular skin color (the Caucasian ‘race’), religion (the Jewish ‘race’), nationality (the British ‘race’), and even the entire human species (the human ‘race’)” (Marger, 2006, pp. 16-17). Based on these linkages, biological, historical, political, social, and ideological constructs can be associated with race and ethnicity.

Historical and political frameworks describe race and ethnicity within distinct time periods and political agendas. Within particular historical periods, norms are set regarding race and ethnic identity (Omi & Winant, 1997). Marger (2006) describes the environment as the key influence in shaping social behavior. This means that society is informed on which ways they can identify and group people within racial/ethnic

categories. Therefore, political consciousness attaches the importance of categorizing racial/ethnic groups. Omi and Winant (1997) describe the historical framework as the recognition of “legitimate” groups, where different groups are afforded social mobility based on their racial/ethnic identity, while other groups are not afforded this access. Therefore, as long as people continue believing racial and ethnic differences are meaningful, people will continue to act on those beliefs (Marger, 2006).

Race and ethnicity arose as biological constructs within specific time periods and political agendas. The biological construct argues human variation is dependent on biology (Rattansi, 2007). This distinction means physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair texture and color, eye orientation, lip fullness, and cheekbone orientation) and ancestral heritage are used to classify people into separate and distinct racial/ethnic groups. These groups are then graded within a hierarchical format to rationalize “superior” dominant status and “inferior” subordinate status. In the 21st century, the White group is the “superior,” dominant racial designation (Davis, 2009). This designation means that members of this group have the power to define and normalize the physical characteristics, culture, and behaviors of their racial/ethnic identity and make all other racial/ethnic identities different, abnormal, or odd.

An example of race as a biological notion, was during the time when the Southern states adopted the “one drop” rule. The implication of this rule was that any degree of Black/African ancestry equated to inferior, second-class citizens (Rattansi, 2007) even when they were visibly White. This attribution of the “one drop” rule “consigned an individual to the wrong side of the white/black divide, determining (disadvantaging)

where s/he could live, what kind of work was available, and whether marriage or even relationships could take place with a white partner” (Rattansi, 2007, p. 7). Conversely, the “one-drop” rule did not apply to White, European/American ancestry. This means that having White, European/American ancestry did not equate to elevated, superior racial status (Rattansi, 2007) and that people with White ancestry, but appeared to be a person of color, would be labeled as their non-White identity. The hierarchical formation of normal and other is also applicable to ethnicity. An example of ethnicity as a biological notion was during the time when the Nazi agenda was to eliminate people who fit outside the Aryan, superior race and make Germany “*judenrein*,” or “clean of Jews” (Rattansi, 2007, emphasis added in original). “In the absence of clear *biological* evidence, a *cultural* practice, commitment to Judaism, functioned as a *racial* marker” (Rattansi, 2007, p. 6, emphasis added in original). Thus, the Nazis exterminated Jews based on the assumption that Jewish culture and behaviors were inferior.

The biological notion of race and ethnicity has been disproven; according to Davis (2009), the American Anthropological Association claims there are not distinct races but only one human race. Expanding upon the claim that there is a single human race, the American Anthropological Association (as cited in Davis, 2009) postulated “one trait does not predict the presence of others. . . . Since all phenotypes are inherited independently, they cannot be bound together to be indicators of distinct groups of people known as racial categories” (Davis, 2009, p. 16). However, racial taxonomy is still employed to rank racial/ethnic identities according to a greater than/less than system.

Ultimately, race and ethnicity function together as factors that lead to an assignment of value and worth.

Race and ethnicity have thus been designated social and ideological constructs. The derived terms “social construct,” “socially constructed,” or “social construction” originated from the ideology of social constructivism. Audi (1999) defines social constructivism as “knowledge in some area is the product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups” (p. 855). In other words, social constructivism describes the way people shape, interpret, and construct the world and its social institutions (Audi, 1999). Social constructivism is the idea that society is produced and receives meaning and value by human beings (Marshall, 1998). Essed (2002) expanded on the notion proposed of race being a social construct, positing that race is an ideological construction, and so race can never exist outside the framework of group interest. According to Marger (2006) “people attach significance to the concept of race and consider it a real and important division of humanity” (p. 21). Based on these premises, social and ideological frameworks recognize it is through the process of social interaction that value and attitudes are created and placed upon race and ethnicity.

### **Identity Development**

The earliest reference to mixed race identity was found in Park’s (1928) theory of the “marginal man.” According to Park, the marginal man is caught within two distinct worlds while remaining an outsider to both. The marginal man’s position within two different cultures causes constant crisis and turmoil (Park, 1928). The theory of the

marginal man emphasizes the complexity for people with a mixed race identity. Since the marginal man was first presented, many more documented experiences have emerged to depict the racially/ethnically mixed identity. Specifically, in the last decade of the 21st century, instances of Biracial and Multiracial identity development theories and models increased in the literature and research (e.g., Poston, 1990; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

No single racial identity label or category can describe the collective Multiracial experience (Shih & Sanchez, 2005) because there is such a variety within the population. Multiracial identity is complex, dynamic, and perpetually evolving. The monoracial identities (i.e., Black/African American, Asian American, Native/American Indian/Indigenous, White, and Latino/Chicano, among other racial identity labels) cannot capture the complexity and variety within Multiracial identities. Formally, monoracial identities examined one's experience as the monoracial identity (e.g., Black/African American or White) and paid less attention to that identity as a choice during the identity development process (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Although there is much complexity within monoracial identities and the concept of choice is pertinent in the way monoracial people choose to identify, Multiracial models and theories examine and focus on how people choose certain identities and their reasoning influencing their choice. Ultimately, the Multiracial identity label challenges traditional beliefs about race and racial categories (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Poston (1990) expanded prior monoracial stage identity development models by articulating the Multiracial experience. According to Poston (1990), individuals have a



variety of choices in how they identify their racial heritages. When Multiracial people choose to identify with a monoracial identity, this choice can cause internal conflict and guilt because the single racial heritage may not fully encompass their racial and ethnic ancestry (Poston, 1990). With knowledge and acceptance of their various racial and ethnic ancestry, individuals can come to recognize and appreciate all their racial heritages (Poston, 1990). Root (1990) proposed a four-step resolution model specifically observing societal influences. Her model involves (a) acceptance of the identity society assigns, (b) identification with both racial groups, (c) identification with a single racial group independent of societal pressure, and (d) identification as a new racial group (e.g., Biracial or Multiracial) (Root, 1990). This four-step resolution model emphasizes the conflict with personal choice of racial/ethnic identity and societal assumption of racial/ethnic identity and individuals who resolve their identity disputes will eventually choose to identify their racial and ethnic ancestry without societal influence or pressure (Root, 1990).

Choice is a factor within Multiracial identity development. Multiracial identity development theories and models examine how people with more than one race or ethnicity come to choose certain racial/ethnic identities, the factors that lead to their selection(s), and the meanings which influence their choices (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Multiracial individuals, in particular, are in a position to choose between many different identity options. Some multiracial individuals choose to identify with just one of the component races. . . . other multiracial individuals choose to identify with none of their component races and instead choose a new category: multiracial. Still others choose to be more specific. . . . they identify themselves by their specific component races. (Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 570)

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) depicted the typology of racial identity options (i.e., singular, border, protean, and transcendent) to describe the choice available to Biracial and Multiracial people. The singular identity describes Biracial and Multiracial people choosing one of their racial/ethnic ancestry, while the border identity represents the creation of a Biracial and Multiracial identity versus selecting only one of their singular identities (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The protean identity incorporates all singular and border identities and alters depending on the context and the transcendent identity describes refusal of all racial/ethnic identity labels because they describe themselves as human (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Even though Multiracial individuals choose how to define their racial identity, there is much controversy surrounding this choice (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007).

Tension is associated as the prospect of self-identification because people struggle with making the choice to identify or not identify with their various racial/ethnic identities (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Although individuals may be able to reconcile this tension, conflict exists between self-identification and peer, societal, and external perceptions of self-identification (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Wijeyesinghe (2001) describes the discrepancy between self-identity and outsider's perceptions of self-identity as the relationship between "ascribed racial group membership" and "chosen racial group membership."

*Ascribed racial group membership* is the racial group or groups that are applied to an individual by other people and social institutions based on factors such as physical appearance, racial ancestry, and the social construction of race at a given point in time. This ascribed racial group may or may not be consistent with the racial group that the individual actually identifies with, defined in this chapter as

*chosen racial group membership* (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 130, emphasis in original)

Inconsistencies occur when the “ascribed racial group membership” and “chosen racial group membership” are not in alignment with one another (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). People who are racially/ethnically mixed can endure conflict between how they personally identify and how society defines them (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Multiracial people may encounter questions about the way they choose to identify, as well as whether they belong in the group(s) they selected (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Because of these types of questions about belonging, Multiracial individuals may feel the need to justify their choices. Wijeyesinghe (2001) expanded on the factors that may influence the choice of racial identity and suggested eight factors that affect one’s choice of racial identity: racial ancestry, early experiences and socialization, cultural attachment, physical appearance, social and historical context, political awareness and orientation, other social identities, and spirituality.

Choice of racial identity is highly dependent upon physical appearance. Physical appearances are used by society to fit people into racial categories (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). In analyzing the literature regarding Multiracial people, Renn (2004) found three consistent themes that had an impact on racial identification: physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and peer culture. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) discussed the ways in which society perceives a person’s racial/ethnic identity can strongly influence his or her identity. In addition, Renn (2004) found a person’s appearance strongly influenced his or her identity. Therefore, assumptions made by peers about racial identification can cause restriction of choice (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Biracial people have dual minority status (Johnson, 1992; Shih & Sanchez, 2005) which means that they may not be perceived as White enough to gain all the privileges associated with being White (e.g., immunity from racial discrimination) but not quite “minority enough” to be viewed as a full member of a racial minority group and thus, deserving of minority fellowships. (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009, p. 133)

Physical appearance can either support choice and create acceptance of racial/ethnic identification or create barriers for choice, which leads to speculation and questions about racial/ethnic identification (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Ecology models emerged to describe contextual forces (i.e., ecological, social, cultural, and psychological) that consistently influence racial identity (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Renn used an ecological approach to observe five patterns within Biracial and Multiracial identity development. Renn (2004) proposed students hold (a) a monoracial identity, (b) multiple monoracial identities and shift depending on situation, (c) a Multiracial identity, (d) an extra racial identity by opting out of identifying with U.S. racial categories, and (e) situational racial identity according to context. Her study emphasizes situation identification depending on self-understanding of racial/ethnic identity, context, and the construction/deconstruction of racial labels. Moreover, the patterns in Renn’s (2004) study are constructed beyond the limitations of a resolution stage model. A resolution stage model refers to entering one stage, doing work and exploration to resolve a conflict, and then progression to the next stage until the end is reached. This is different from patterns or statuses as “there are no predictable stages of identity development because the process is not linear and there is no single optimal endpoint” (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 19). Therefore, Multiracial

identity development theories and models describe the fluidity of the Biracial and Multiracial identity.

### **Passing as White**

The concept of passing is not a newly developed phenomenon; it has been portrayed throughout historical and social contexts. The term “passing” has been used to describe performing as something or being perceived as something. Passing involves social identities, meaning people can pass for race/ethnicity, gender, social class, or sexual orientation, to name a few examples. Although passing is discussed in literature, little research exists that explored the topic of passing and its relationship to specific social identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual/affectation orientation). For this reason, this research aims to advance the understanding of what it means to pass as White for people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity. This section will examine the concept of passing through its elements and construction.

### **Elements of Passing**

Passing is commonly regarded as being able to be accepted for or perceived as something. Passing can involve being accepted for or perceived as something other than what one claims to be or being accepted for or perceived as how one claims to be. For example, some Multiracial people pass as White and do not claim their non-White identities. Inversely, other Multiracial people pass as White but identify with their non-White identities. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the concept of “passing (for)” as “to be accepted as equivalent to; to be taken for; to be accepted, received, or held in repute as” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 294). According to Simpson and Weiner (1989)

passing often implies being something else. Passing involves a dual existence between individual (i.e., the self/core identity) and the societal (i.e., the perceived/performed identity) (Ginsberg, 1996). For a person to pass for something else, society must assume and perceive the person to be that which he or she pass for. For individuals with mixed racial/ethnic identities, societal perceptions are influential factors in the way they can and do choose to identify. Physical appearance is an important factor in whether someone can pass. In King's (2008) study, Scarlet describes her physical appearance as the main factor that society references in determining her racial/ethnic identity:

I identify more strongly as a person of color than I do as a White person and so it's frustrating because I don't feel comfortable going to students of color spaces because I'm not perceived as a student of color. I'm starting to be a lot more vocal about my intersecting identities and feeling uncomfortable in places where [there are] students of color. (King, 2008, p. 36)

Ultimately, a person's ability to pass is highly dependent on societal acceptance. In addition to societal and peer acceptance of identity, passing may also involve personal deception. Deception involves misrepresentation, which may equate to lying or the omission of facts. For example, David Matthews (as cited in Kroeger, 2004) deliberately withheld information to present himself as White:

As a teenager, Matthews felt he had only two choices: The more difficult one would have been to tell the truth, just to come right out and explain his background to "these people who I feel a kinship with" and risk losing their friendship. . . . His solution was to take the first route and omit the information that would have complicated his life. He passed. (Kroeger, 2004, p. 21)

Matthews's life can be described as a performance between how he identifies and sees himself as and what society would label him knowing his racial/ethnic ancestry. When society does not have knowledge of the entire picture and makes assumptions, this can be

viewed by them as deception. When deception is involved, there is a sense of risk to the individual; he or she may be caught or found out. For this reason, Ginsberg (1996) found that to successfully pass as something, the person who passes or is using deception must go somewhere else, where his or her identity is unknown and cannot be revealed. Even if some variation in deception is involved with passing, societal perceptions are the single most integral influence on whether or not someone can pass for something.

During instances when passing involves being associated with the dominant group (e.g., White or heterosexual) the act of passing has been described as maintaining the dominant groups. People who can pass for the dominant group navigate through the system with ease (Kroeger, 2004) and perpetuate the dominant systems of oppression. People who can pass can either choose to maintain the systems in place by accepting their passing identity, or they can decide to challenge their passing identity and thus question the systems of oppression. Kroeger (2004) defined passing as occurring

when people effectively present themselves as other than who they understand themselves to be. . . . Passing means that other people actually see or experience the identity that the passer is projecting, whether the passer is telegraphing that identity by intention or by chance. (Kroeger, 2004, pp. 7-8)

Kroeger's (2004) definition of passing identifies the dichotomy between the individual's identification and the societal assumption. Individual identification involves "[w]ho they understand themselves to be" (Kroeger, 2004, p. 8, emphasis in original), which is the self-disclosure of racial/ethnic identity. Conversely, the societal assumption involves "[w]ho others see them as" (Kroeger, 2004, p. 8, emphasis in original), which is the way in which society determines the racial/ethnic identity(ies) of other people. Passing is highly dependent on both the individual self-disclosure identity, the societal perceived

identity, and how close those two concepts align. Because the purpose of the study was to understand the concept of passing, this researcher used the aspects of both the intrapersonal perceived identity and interpersonal perceived identity.

### **Construction of Passing as White**

Passing was originally constructed and discussed in the literature as a part of the Black to White binary. Passing meant Black passing for White, whereas reverse passing meant White passing for Black (Kroeger, 2004). Therefore, passing describes the action of an Black/African American person who could be viewed and seen as a White person. Passing was said to occur when “a Negro becomes a White man, that is, moves from the lower to the higher caste. . . . this can be accomplished only by the deception of the White people . . . [and] by a conspiracy of silence on the part of other Negroes” (as cited in Kawash, 1996, p. 62). This depiction of the concept of passing as White was employed during slavery when Black/African American captives escaped and transitioned to a White person to avoid enslavement, whipping, persecution, and injustice. Postings and reward flyers often referred to such situations:

100 DOLLARS REWARD. Will be given for the apprehension of my negro Edmund Kenney. He has straight hair, and complexion so nearly white that it is believed a stranger would suppose there was no African blood in him. He was with my boy Dick a short time since in Norfolk, and offered for sale . . . , but escaped under the pretence of being a white man.—Richmond *Whig*, 6 January 1836. (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 1, emphasis in original)

Ultimately, Edmund Kenney’s passing for White was for means of survival. The phenomenon of passing is dependent on societal influences and will continually change and broaden its meaning and group membership as our perceptions of who is White and who is Black changes. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Jim Crow “separate



but equal” segregation laws (i.e., *Plessy v. Ferguson*), which stated, under Louisiana law, any person with one-eighth “Negro” ancestry could be legally defined as “Negro.” Even though, as in the case of Plessy, ancestry was not physically visible and he could pass as White (i.e., purchase a White car train ticket and sit in the White car), Plessy was deemed non-White once he disclosed his Black/African American ancestry (Ginsberg, 1996).

In an example of the impact of self-identification on the concept of passing, in 1982, Susie Guillory Phipps sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vitale Records to change her racial classification on her birth certificate (Omi & Winant, 1994). Phipps considered herself White until she reviewed her birth certificate that ascribed her as Black. “Phipps was designated ‘black’ in her birth certificate in accordance with a 1970 state law which declared anyone with at least 1/32nd ‘Negro blood’ to be black” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 53). Because of the complexity of antiquated legislation, self-perceptions, personal preferences, and societal labels, the concept of passing will continue to evolve and change depending on the historical, political, and social contexts.

As the racial/ethnic demographic in the United States diversifies beyond the traditional construction of passing (i.e., the Black-White binary), there is a need to evaluate the meaning and group membership of passing. Moraga (1996) sought to emphasize the ambiguities for individuals who do not fit within the paradigms of Black and White. “We light-skinned breeds are like chameleons, those *lagartijas* with the capacity to change the color of their skins. We change not for lack of conviction, but lack of definitive shade and shape” (Moraga, 1996, p. 232, emphasis in original). Thus, racial and ethnic group membership and the concept of passing cannot be defined narrowly

within certain racial/ethnic identity binaries. Bonilla-Silva (2004) posits that the racial stratification system is undergoing a profound transformation that will result in a more inclusive meaning and group membership of passing: a three-tiered racial stratification system. According to the three-tier system (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), “Whites” are at the top, “honorary Whites” are in the middle, and the “collective black” or “non-Whites” are at the bottom. Within this construction, Bonilla-Silva (2004) claims the “honorary Whites” are becoming White and will be able to fit in with the White group with limited to access to rewards and benefits.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2004) the White group includes “Whites, New Whites (Russians, Albanians, etc.), Assimilated white Latinos, Some multiracials, Assimilated (urban) Native Americans, and A few Asian-origin people” (p. 933) and the honorary White group includes “Light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, Most multiracials, and Filipino Americans” (p. 933). Even though the “passing as White” group may broaden to include more racial and ethnic identities, these additions to the White and honorary White groups were intentionally made to perpetuate privilege and oppression.

Moraga (1996) describes how physical appearance, specifically skin color, determines the group membership in which people are associated:

In the “choice” resides the curse, the “maldición.” There is no denying that this *güera*-face has often secured my safe passage through the minefields of Amerikan racism. *If my thoughts could color my flesh, how dark I would turn.* But people can’t read your mind, they read your color, they read your womanhood, they read the women you’re with. They read your walk and talk. And then the privileges

begin to wane and the choices become more limited, more evident. (p. 236, emphasis in original)

Moraga (1996) describes the power of the dominant group because it ultimately decides who receives privileges and upward social mobility. The power of the White group is to define every other group (Garner, 2007). Therefore, the honorary White group was developed as a means by the White group to maintain and perpetuate White supremacy and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). This extension means that the honorary Whites would have elevated social mobility, greater acquisition of privileges, and would experience less oppression than members of the collective Black group (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

According to Bonilla-Silva (2004), the stratification system will undergo a transformation that will be highly dependent on color gradations. “Colourism” will dictate group membership and acquisition of privileges (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Thus, social mobility will increase when people appear White or near-White (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). The concept of passing as White is dynamic and complex; it is dependent on both White group membership and Whiteness. Because there is no agreed upon meaning for White group membership and Whiteness (Garner, 2007), the concept of passing as White will continue to morph and change to meet the needs of the dominant group to create and sustain dominance and privilege.

### **White Privilege**

White privilege describes the unearned advantages and benefits afforded to people with membership in the White group. References in literature and research relative to membership in the White group encompasses those people identified beyond White identified (i.e., pass as White and misperceived as White) (Wise, 2008). To address and

better understand the concept of White privilege from both within and beyond White groups, this section explores the characteristics of privilege and becoming aware of White privilege.

### **Characteristics of Privilege**

Privilege is difficult to reveal and is unexplored by most people. This difficulty is encountered because people are able to depict and describe difference and disadvantage, but examining and understanding privilege or unearned advantage is not a common practice. Those identified as different have been described as the unknown, the other, and the outsider (Johnson, 2006). When people do not know or understand something, perceived difference can lead to fear, discomfort, vulnerability, and risk (Johnson, 2006). Inversely, privilege is rarely named or discussed as something to fear and does not lead to feelings of discomfort, vulnerability, and risk for the dominant group. Privilege is described as the norm or normal, the status quo, and the standard of comparison for the dominant culture (Johnson, 2006). As McIntosh (2002) noted:

I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status . . . but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. (p. 97)

It becomes, in essence, a self-fulfilling prophecy: because privilege and advantage are difficult to delineate, they are ignored, invisible, and taught to be unrecognizable.

Being privileged equates to being perceived as normal and worthwhile. It affords access to benefits, advantages, and social rewards. Privilege, based on group membership, exists when one group has something that is denied to other groups (Rosette, 2006). Privilege has been defined within two constructs: unearned entitlement

and conferred dominance (McIntosh, 2002). Unearned entitlements are things of value restricted to certain people by virtue of their group membership (McIntosh, 2002). Unearned entitlements are privileges only available and restricted to particular social groups, but should be afforded to all people (McIntosh, 2002). They can be described as affording the unearned entitlements to all people or the dominant group giving up their unearned entitlement. In either case people would not be elevated from each other because of unearned entitlements. People with unearned entitlements are reluctant to make those benefits and rewards available to all people because, if they were to give up their unearned entitlements, they would lose their elevated position and the gap between themselves and the people below them.

Johnson (2006) found unearned advantages give dominant groups a competitive edge that leads to credibility and competence. “To give up that advantage would double or even triple the amount of competition” (Johnson, 2006, p. 23). Conferred dominance works in the same way to support and sustain dominant group dynamics. Conferred dominance gives one group power over another group (McIntosh, 2002). This hierarchy means that people within the dominant and privileged group occupy the positions of power (Johnson, 2006). The dominant group need not have more members or numerical majority; it has control of the institutional power. Thus, members of the dominant group have the power to define “normal” and “other,” and to influence social institutions to reflect such assignment. Johnson (2006) describes dominance as the most impactful aspect of privilege because it leads to the unequal distribution of resources and rewards.

Privilege manifests itself in specific and intentional ways to maintain dominant and subordinate group dynamics. Johnson (2006) describes one of the ways privilege is maintained is through an identified position. This means that privilege is identified as the norm and status quo (Johnson, 2006). For example, assumptions are made that dominant privileged groups represent the society as a whole (Johnson, 2006). By representing the society as a whole, the social institutions (e.g., mass media, education, and history) display and support the dominant group as the norm and standard of comparison.

Johnson (2006) uses the phrase “path of least resistance” to emphasize privilege as an identified position. Because people have the ability to choose among options, when they weigh the possibilities and select a path that is of least resistance, their choice is considered a social norm (Johnson, 2006). People readily communicate, through deeds if not words, whether their path is in alignment with social norms. The amount of resistance a person encounters when he or she selects a particular path will make clear the paths that have not been selected (Johnson, 2006). For this reason, privilege is also focused or centered on the dominant groups. According to Johnson (2006), attention is focused on “who they are, what they do and say, and how they do it” (p. 100). Wise (2008) describes this focus as the “White lens” through which all subject matter is to be viewed.

Privilege is also maintained through the techniques of silence, denial, and blame. These methods are used to perpetuate the elevated dominant group and position over other groups. Silence signifies inaction and passive acceptance (Johnson, 2006); the systems of privilege and oppression are self-sustaining, in part because no one recognizes or challenges their existence. Johnson (2006) stated that his, “silence on this issue sends

the message to other whites that there *is* no issue” (p. 120, emphasis in original). This sentiment coincides with the denial technique as it maintains privilege does not exist and therefore is not considered a factor. Denial also operates by discrediting or minimizing people’s experiences (Johnson, 2006). In other words, people’s realities or lived experiences, which are not considered the norm, are challenged. Over time, these challenges lead to the belief of equal opportunity and that ability, talent, and hard work leads to success and access to privileges and advantages.

In truth, everyone does not have the same opportunities and cannot elevate their positions with hard work and dedication. “You can either conclude that the ethos is a myth, that things aren’t as equal as you’ve been told—which requires a rare willingness to rethink everything you’ve been taught—or you can decide that there must be something *wrong* with the people at the bottom” (Wise, 2008, p. 64, emphasis in original). Ultimately, this system exists to perpetuate difference and oppression. Blame is also used to minimize the existence of privilege. Individuals who claim to be oppressed are blamed for their position; they are told hard work and dedication can lead to an ideal status. The elevated position and situation to which the oppressed aspire cannot be obtained because the system dictates the hierarchy and where people can be positioned along the superior-to-inferior continuum. “If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own” (McIntosh, 2002, p. 99). Silence, denial, and blame are tactics used to maintain dominant and subordinate group dynamics and afford privileges, benefits, and social rewards to the dominant group.

The system of privilege sustains itself by institutional and systemic practices. Conditions are continually created for dominant groups to be depicted as normal and be afforded benefits and access to social rewards while subordinate groups are deprived of equality and justice (Jensen, 2005). This ideology perpetuates the idea that certain individuals—not certain social institutions—are discriminatory. The distinction can be appreciated when people find and pick out others who are blatantly prejudiced and discriminatory. For example, in White caucus groups, White people may attempt to identify and name the racist(s) in the group. Once the racist(s) are determined, people can feel at ease because they are more knowledgeable and ultimately “better” than the racist(s); the people who identified the racist(s) are, at least in their perceptions of themselves, more fair and unbiased. This delineation denies the pervasive institutional, systemic, and organizational aspects (e.g., laws, policies, and practices) that perpetuate oppressive systems because the focus is on personal agenda, behavior, and intention.

People who describe privilege from an individualistic perspective do not feel part of the problem (Johnson, 2006). If people do not seek to acknowledge and understand their part within systems of privilege and oppression, the subordination of other people will continue (Wise, 2008). As Wise (2008) explained, “You can’t solve a problem, after all, if you refuse to acknowledge that it exists” (p. 63). To help solve the problem of racism and racial bias, then, it is important to associate privilege with individualistic, institutional, systemic, and organizational contexts.

When benefits and rewards are provided to some people and denied to other people because of group membership or association, privilege is at work. Privilege is



difficult to identify, define, and describe because it is constructed within normalcy.

McIntosh (2002) described White privilege as an “invisible weightless knapsack.” “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, 2002, p. 97). Therefore, making privilege visible is key in becoming aware of the ways it impacts group dynamics.

### **Becoming Aware of White Privilege**

Whiteness and White privilege is all around us, yet it is difficult to conceptualize.

McIntosh (2002) commented that she had not always noticed she was being afforded

White privilege. One of the privileges about being White is never having to think about it

(Wise, 2002). However, being White matters. Being White is depicted as being normal; it provides the individual with preferential treatment, benefits, and social rewards.

Whiteness and White privilege must be revealed; people must be made aware of them.

Becoming aware and acknowledging of Whiteness and White privilege occur for a

variety of reasons; arguably, the most common reasons emerge from a development of

White identity and exposure to prejudice, discrimination, and oppression.

The formation of White identity begins with the acknowledgment of the

individual’s existence as a racial being and having a race. Because many White people do

not see themselves as having a racial identity (Helms, 2008), racial identity remains

invisible and unexamined. As Applebaum (2008) explains, unmasking and unveiling is

the beginning of a shift in understanding from ignorance to awareness. Manglitz (2003)

used the concept of consciousness to describe becoming aware of one’s racial identity.

Helms (2008) proposed the existence of the White identity development model within six racial-identity statuses: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy.

According to Helms (2008), each status within the White identity development model serves as a dynamic interplay relative to other positions. A person can revert to previous statuses depending on the context. The ability to revert to a previous status means White people can quickly lose awareness of their White identity. The contact status involves obliviousness to racial status; individuals at this level of the White identity development model will not challenge the dominant White racial group (Helms, 2008). Disintegration involves confusion when White people are forced to choose between their White group or humanism (Helms, 2008). This status describes when White people are becoming aware of and learning more about prejudice, discrimination, and oppression.

The reintegration status of Helms's (2008) White identity development model is represented by White people resolving prior conflicts by elevating the White group and expressing intolerance for other groups. This status has been described as the level at which most White people decide to exist (Helms, 2008). Pseudoindependence is marked by prior elevation of the White group having been scaled down (Helms, 2008); at this level, White people have begun to depict Whiteness for what it is and not view it as a superior race. In both the immersion/emersion and autonomy statuses, White people try to redefine their Whiteness and understand racism and White supremacy to ultimately feel secure about themselves (Helms, 2008). Throughout the continuum of these six

statuses, becoming aware of a White racial identity can lead to awareness of White privilege.

Whiteness and White privilege can also be unveiled through discovery of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. Case (2007) found that White privilege awareness correlated with greater awareness of racism and prejudice. When Jensen (2005) examined Whiteness, he revealed the historical truths about the United States (i.e., White America) and the nation's foundation (i.e., genocide, colonization, and slavery); knowledge that led him to explore the ways in which his life was privileged and what he could do individually and systemically to create a more equitable society. Manglitz (2003) found that "addressing the issue of White privilege and racism directly can induce an awareness of Whites' own complicity in perpetuating racism along with direct attempts to counter it" (p. 129). Based on the findings of these researchers (Case, 2007; Jensen, 2005; Manglitz, 2003), learning about the past injustices and current contexts can expose White people to reflect on White privilege afforded to them and the ways in which Whiteness is embedded within social institutions and the ways we treat other people.

### **Summary**

This literature review examined Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. These concepts guide the framework of the study through the exploration of racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White and whether they identify with having White privilege. Although the literature allowed for a broad overview of each topic, there is a paucity of researching discussing White privilege as it relates to people

who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and can pass as White. To address this gap in the literature, the present study seeks answers to questions regarding the intersectionality among these concepts.

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research explored racially/ethnically mixed people, passing as White, and White privilege. A qualitative study was conducted at a four-year public land grant university located in the northwestern region of the United States. Participants had institutional statuses (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) and agreed to engage in a qualitative survey and one-on-one interview. This chapter includes a reintroduction of the purpose of the study and research questions to describe and justify the research design. Specifically, this chapter offers an outline of the methodological framework used in the study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight and perspective on racially/ethnically mixed peoples' understanding of their ability to pass as White. The secondary purpose of this study was to explore the interconnection between people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity who can pass as White and White privilege. Three research questions were developed to gather information about Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. Do Multiracial/ethnic people identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstance, pass as White?
2. Do Multiracial/ethnic people, who can and do pass as White, identify with having White privilege?
3. Is there a connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege?

Participants engaged in this study explored their Multiracial/ethnic identity and passing as White. Data gathered in response to these research questions helped inform the relationship between racially/ethnically mixed people who pass as White and White privilege.

### **Research Design**

The ultimate goal of the research was to gain an understanding of whether racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White identify with having White privilege. Because of the paucity of research pertaining to White privilege as it relates to Multiracial/ethnic people, this study can contribute to the overall understanding of racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White and how their identity may relate to acquisition of benefits and social rewards. To explore these complex concepts, the research was conducted using qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry was the optimal approach for this study because the method is flexible and emergent (Creswell, 2009). The flexibility of the method allowed this researcher to adjust the research design as needed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences.

Qualitative inquiry also recognized the researcher as the key instrument (Creswell, 2009), which allowed the analytical lens of the researcher to collect and organize the data (Litchman, 2010). Additionally, qualitative inquiry attempted to capture the voice of the participants, which allowed them to tell their own stories through their words and voice (Litchman, 2010). By choosing qualitative inquiry, the research process was focused on learning from the participants about their experiences instead of the researcher imposing her meaning on the study (Creswell, 2009). In an area with limited

research, a qualitative inquiry approach enabled the researcher to explore the interrelationship among Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege.

### **Participants and Recruitment**

Participants for this study composed of students, faculty, and staff from a four-year public land grant university located in the northwestern region of the United States. To contribute to the study, participants had to meet two criteria. First, participants had to identify with more than one race or ethnicity. Second, participants had to believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, that they had the ability to pass as White. These two decisive factors were necessary to acquire the correlation among Multiracial/ethnic identity, passing as White, and White privilege. Individuals who did not fit within these criteria were excluded from participation in the study.

Because of the unique qualifying characteristics of this study, the research drew a small population of the Multiracial/ethnic community. The researcher could not determine the participant population (i.e., people who identified with more than one race or ethnicity and are able to pass as White) without each person's self-disclosure. For this reason, the researcher used a purposive sample. A purposive sample allowed the researcher to select participants who were good and willing communicators.

This is sometimes described as seeking individuals who will be rich sources of information. In other words, qualitative researchers make subjective judgments regarding the individuals to select based on the likelihood that they would be able to provide the needed information. (Patten, 2009, p. 149)

### **Two-Phased Approach**

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a qualitative survey. Phase one was limited to a maximum of 100 participants to avoid exceeding the

proposed number of participants who enrolled for phase two. Phase one also involved an evaluation conducted by the research team examining the qualitative surveys submitted by the participants in phase one, which led to a possible invitation to participate in a one-on-one interview (i.e., phase two). Phase two of the study was limited to ten participants. To secure the target size of a maximum of 100 participants for phase one and ten participants for phase two, snowball sampling was used to locate other potential participants. Snowball sampling involves asking individuals to identify additional people with the characteristics of the study population (Litchman, 2010). “This technique is based on trust. If the initial participants trust the researcher, they may also identify other potential participants to convince them to trust the researcher” (Patten, 2009, p. 51). To prevent the researcher from contacting individuals who were not previously identified, the researcher asked enrolled participants to share recruitment materials with other individuals who they thought might be interested in the study. In this way, interested people could contact the researcher directly to learn more about the study and become a participant.

This researcher used a recruitment e-mail message and flyer to solicit participants (see appendices A and B for full content). Recruitment materials were sent to individuals via e-mail listservs and public postings. This researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board to contact various department leadership and administrative support to publish the recruitment materials. Individuals interested in participating in the study were instructed to contact the researcher. This researcher replied to inquiries and provided people with the informed consent form and qualitative survey (see appendices



C, D, and E for full content). Once the participants were identified, the opportunity to engage and take part in the study was offered to them (see appendix C for full content).

### **Data Collection**

This study aimed to explore people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity, passing as White, and White privilege. To obtain this information, each phase of the study sought to explore the connection among these concepts. Phase one involved the qualitative survey (i.e., the participant intake form). Participants were requested to complete the participant intake form, which included questions to allow participants to share their racial/ethnic identity, thoughts regarding passing as White, and perceptions of societal/peer labels of their racial/ethnic identity. The data collected during this phase provided information regarding Multiracial identity and passing as White. Phase two, conducted after evaluation of the intake forms submitted by participants in phase one, involved an interview.

The interview allowed the researcher to examine people who identified with more than one race or ethnicity, reported having the ability to pass as White, and their thoughts on having White privilege. This phase of the study was optional, which meant that not all participants from phase one were contacted for an interview during phase two. This method was used to ensure participants met the two criteria to obtain information about benefits and social rewards as they relate to Multiracial identity. To obtain diversified opinions of participants' ability to pass as White, this researcher used the investigator triangulation procedure (i.e., evaluation by the research team during phase one). Investigator triangulation involves two or more evaluators investigating some aspect of

the study (Russ-Eft & Presskill, 2009). The research team and their knowledge about the concepts of Multiracial/ethnic identity and White privilege are described later in this chapter. For this study, investigator triangulation was used to obtain multiple perspectives to determine if participants can pass as White.

The research team examined the participants' information to express their opinions on whether the participants have the ability to pass as White (see Appendix F for the evaluation form). The survey completed during phase one collected demographic information, qualitative answers to supplemental questions, and a photograph from the participants. These materials were supplied to the research team to determine whether or not the participant could pass as White. Evaluation of the photographs were based on overall physical appearance (e.g., hue of skin, hair color and texture, eye orientation, lip fullness, and cheekbone orientation). Evaluation of the demographic and supplemental questions were based on name, identity and self-disclosure, language, nationality, socialization, childhood experiences and family upbringing, education, and description of their culture. Each research team member determined for himself or herself what the evaluation entailed based on his or her perceptions and preconceived notions of what constitutes as White group membership and passing as White. The research team then documented their results on the evaluation form. Once all information was collected, the primary researcher determined whether the participant would be invited for an interview.

During phase two of the study, participants were invited to engage in an interview. The purpose of the interview was to gain information about what the participants thought about certain topics and to explore whether there was a shared

experience for Multiracial individuals who can pass as White. The intent was “to set up a situation in which the individual being interviewed will reveal to you his or her feelings, intentions, meanings, subcontexts, or thoughts on a topic, situation, or idea” (Litchman, 2010, p. 140). To gain each participant’s perspective through his or her voice, this researcher used a guided semistructured interview (see Appendix G for the list of interview questions used).

The guided semistructured interview allows for general topics to be explored with the flexibility to change the direction or language to provoke responses from the participants (Litchman, 2010). “Although the general structure is the same for all individuals being interviewed, the interviewer can vary the questions as the situation demands” (Litchman, 2010, p. 141). The guided semistructured format allows for the interview session to be more like a conversation in which the participant has the opportunity to tell his or her story and allows for follow-up questions when a new or particularly fruitful line of discussion emerges (Litchman, 2010).

Participant interviews were set for a maximum duration of two hours. The researcher used the same structure to begin each interview, which consisted of providing information about the study and reviewing how the information would be analyzed and presented. This researcher obtained permission to use a recording device. If the participant declined to be recorded on tape, the alternative method of handwritten notes was used. To help the participant feel comfortable, the interview began with relationship-building small talk to allow rapport to develop. The “grand tour” question was used to start the interview and get the participants talking about the topic of the research

(Litchman, 2010). Thus, participants were able to tell their story about their experiences as racially/ethnically mixed and their ability to pass as White.

The following topics were addressed during the interview: demographic information, self-disclosure of identity, identity development and construction, societal perceptions, White privilege, benefits of White privilege, burdens of White privilege, and education. The guided semistructured interview permitted additional topics and questions to be explored. Once the interview was complete, the researcher informed the participants about how data analysis would proceed and thanked them for contributing to the study.

Qualitative data are in the form of words (Litchman, 2010). This researcher used the process of transcribing and thematic analysis to organize and draw meaning from the information collected during the interview. Transcribing involved listening to the recorded interviews and documenting the words in a computer word processing file. The purpose of transcribing interviews was to put the words into a useful format (Litchman, 2010). According to Litchman (2010), “transcribing is not just a straightforward and simple task, but involves judgment questions about the level of detail to include” (p. 193). For this reason, this researcher performed the transcribing herself to provide consistency and to document the level of detail and rigor.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of the data analysis process for qualitative research is to take large amounts of information and organize it to create meaningful concepts (Litchman, 2010). The researcher used the three C’s process (i.e., coding, categorizing, and concepts) (Litchman, 2010) to engage in the creation of meaningful data. The data analysis process

began with an initial review of each transcript in its entirety. Codes were then inserted to organize groups of information. In qualitative research, “codes” is a term used to describe words or phrases created by the researcher to identify sections of data (Litchman, 2010). Once all the codes were inserted, this researcher examined them to determine redundancies and rename codes, as needed. From this point onward, this researcher created a list of categories. A category is the identifier for the codes that had a connection with each other (Litchman, 2010). In essence, this researcher transitioned from a long list of codes to several lists of categories to identify recurring themes. This researcher then determined the importance of the categories and combined and removed them as needed.

The goal is to recognize the important concepts that emerged in the data (Litchman, 2010). The final step in the data analysis was to identify the key concepts or themes. In qualitative research, concepts are the central issues or themes that were identified through the process of coding and categorizing the data (Litchman, 2010). Concepts also reflect meaning the researcher associated with the data (Litchman, 2010). This researcher then used the themes (i.e., concepts) to respond to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and re-presented in this chapter.

### **Human Participants Protection and Confidentiality**

This study was approved through the Institutional Review Board at the four-year public land grant university located in the northwestern region of the United States. This means that the research protocol, recruitment methods and documents, qualitative survey, evaluation process, and interview methods and questions were submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board to ensure the study would not harm the participants. To

ensure ethical considerations, participants were provided adequate knowledge of the intent and purpose of the research.

The informed consent form (see Appendix D) was provided to offer participants information on the general purpose of the research, the data collection and analysis process, what the potential benefits and risks were, and what would be done with the information they provided (Patten, 2009). Participants were provided a detailed explanation of this process. Specifically, the informed consent form described what would occur during each phase of the study. Participants were advised that phase one of the study involved processing and analyzing their information provided through the participant's intake form (see Appendix E). The informed consent form also disclosed information about how phase one of the study involved an evaluation by the research team. Participants were asked to read and sign the informed consent form during Phase one of the study to permit the research team to process his or her information. The informed consent form described phase two as and a possible invitation for an interview. "The primary value is that participants must be *protected from both physical and psychological harm*" (Patten, 2009, p. 25, emphasis in original). The participants were provided the opportunity to leave the process at any point during the research.

Confidentiality was maintained for the participants. Research team members completed the Institutional Review Board compliance training to ensure correct protocol was followed and to keep participants' identity and submissions confidential. Additionally, all participant intake packets, including demographic and supplemental questions, photograph, and consent form, as well as recorded audio tapes and handwritten

notes from interviews were kept in a locked and secure file cabinet in this researcher's residence. All transcribed interviews were placed in a password-protected, coded computer file. A copy of the file was made on an external hard drive and placed within the locked and secure file cabinet.

The materials were kept in their original format, except for the audio recordings. The audio recordings were erased once the writing process was complete. Each document was recorded with the participant's first name, date, and numerical code. For the transcribed interviews, documents were recorded with the participant's first name, Int, and numerical code. "Int" was the researchers abbreviation for interview. To allow the research team to make decisions on whether the participants had the ability to pass as White, the research team was provided the participant's full name so they could use this information as a factor in their consideration. Therefore, participants were not given an alias until data collection was complete.

The Principle Investigator will securely store all study-related documents, including hard copy and electronic data, for three years after completion of the study. After that period if time, the materials will be archived. This researcher will also retain and securely store a copy of the data. This researcher's copy of the data contains no personal information and all individual identifiers were removed to maintain confidentiality. This cleansing of data is a safeguard against unintentional disclosure of individually identifiable information.

This researcher obtained permission to possibly use the participants' information in the future for journal publications and conference presentations. To maintain

confidentiality for the participants, only the general concepts from the interviews will be used. Participants' personal information and photograph will not be published.

### **Perspective of the Researcher**

The researcher is an important component of the qualitative research process. The role of the researcher was to construct the study through his or her perspective. To fulfill her role in the process, the researcher collected the data, gathered the information, analyzed the data, and made interpretations of the data (Litchman, 2010). By performing these actions, the researcher serves as the filter through which meaning is constructed from the words and it is through her lens that ideas are created (Litchman, 2010). "All information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears and is influenced by his or her experiences, knowledge, skill, and background" (Litchman, 2010, p. 16). For this reason, the study cannot be unbiased or objective as this researcher influenced both the research and the results (Litchman, 2010).

This study was of personal, academic, and professional interest for this researcher. Personally, this researcher identified as a 26-year-old racially/ethnically mixed female who had the ability to pass as White. Because the researcher identified with the participants, she had a personal investment in understanding the experiences of people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and can pass as White. This researcher believed being White matters in the United States. Whiteness equates to being valued, viewed as normal, and the ability to yield the benefit of White privilege. This set of beliefs led this researcher to explore her White appearance and what it means relative to the treatment of other people. These reasons fueled this researcher to investigate the



interconnection among people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity, passing as White, and White privilege.

Most of this researcher's other social identities align within dominant group dynamics. This means that she fits within a privileged state and has access to benefits and social rewards. Specifically, the researcher is a U.S. citizen, college-educated and pursuing a master's degree, gender identity and expression is feminine and fits in the gender binary system, heterosexual, temporarily able bodied, size and athleticism fits society's depiction of normal and acceptable, raised middle class, and raised Catholic. Even though these social identities are not directly related to the study's focus on racial/ethnic identity, they are important factors with dominant and subordinate group membership.

Fitting within the dominant group membership equates to a privileged status. Privilege operates in intentional ways to maintain its dominant position and keep a hierarchy so that people are treated differently based on associated group membership. This researcher understands the importance of the intersectionality among social identities, but decided for the purpose of this research to focus solely on racial/ethnic identity.

As this researcher began to explore this research topic, she became aware of the dearth of published research and general literature regarding the interrelationship among Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege. Because of this gap in the knowledge base, this researcher is academically and professionally invested in the research topic. This researcher believes these findings can contribute to the body of

knowledge regarding Multiracial/ethnic identity and White privilege. The study also explored the general concept of passing, which this researcher believes will be a worthwhile topic for educators.

### **Perspective of the Research Team**

The research team consisted of four people: two graduate students and two professional staff. Each member of the research team identified the biases he or she held pertaining to this study, which were informed by his or her social identities, worldview experiences, and socialization. The research team was also able to identify that many of their biases were not known and not yet identified. This means that they could not fully depict all the biases they may have pertaining to the research topic. To ensure the research team members' biases are documented, this researcher will briefly describe each research team member and his or her knowledge and experience pertaining to racially/ethnically mixed identity and White privilege.

The first student research team member identified as a 45-year-old Multiracial female with an ethnic identity of Trinidadian. She was Canadian, pursuing a master's degree, heterosexual, temporarily able, middle class, and Catholic. She was, at the time of this research, developing a thesis on mixed racial identity and a specialization focused on social justice. Given her scholarly pursuits, she believed she was very knowledgeable in the concepts of Multiracial identity and White privilege.

The second student research team member identified as a 25-year-old White female. She identified as an American, pursuing a master's degree, heterosexual, temporarily able-bodied, middle class, and agnostic. She was familiar with the concept of

individuals who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and with the Multiracial identity development models. At the outset of this research, she expressed having no extensive knowledge about the experiences of Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed people, but was aware of some of the identity issues these individuals may face. Additionally, identifying as White had led her to explore her Whiteness. She was knowledgeable about the concept of White privilege and was aware of her own White privilege. She attempted to remain cognizant of this privilege in her everyday life and worked actively to educate other people about White privilege.

The first professional staff research team member identified as a 43-year-old White male. He was American, had earned a Ph.D., was heterosexual, upper middle class, and Christian. His position within the university involved exploration of social justice and identity development topics. Within the past five to six years, he had become more interested in understanding the factors of identity for Biracial and Multiracial people. He understood that how students present, their sense of self, and how the world treats them can be very different and may not fully relate to a specific racial identity. For these reasons, he believed there could be a sense of loss for a specific community. Pertaining to White privilege, he was a White man and had been on a journey to better understand his own unearned advantages and privilege. He continued to explore the privileges he has received and takes seriously the associated responsibilities. He was also cognizant of the systemic privileges and was exploring and attempting to address policies, procedures, and practices that perpetuate unintended bias.

The second professional staff research team member identifies as a 36-year-old Indian, Asian American woman. She had earned a Ph.D., was heterosexual, temporarily able-bodied, upper middle class, and Hindu/Sikh. From a personal interaction point of view, she knew many people who identify with more than one race/ethnicity. She acknowledges that she has more to learn and likely makes assumptions without personal awareness of those assumptions. She also acknowledged that her experience with Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed people do not represent the collect experience of this group and people who identify with more than one race. This member of the research team had done research on Asian American identity development and sought to underscore the importance of Multiracial identity as a necessary part of that construct. In regards to White privilege, she does not identify as White. For this reason, she has not experienced White privilege but is familiar with the construct of White privilege.

### **Limitations**

This study's focus was to gain an understanding of the relationship among Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The study emphasized the participants' racial/ethnic identity as the principle social identity. Thus, the research examined only one aspect of the participants' identity. This study provided participants the opportunity to disclose and discuss their other, more personally salient social identities (e.g., gender identity/expression, sexual orientation/affection, education, wealth, and poverty, to name a few), but their other social identities were not considered to the same extent in the research analysis. This study also focused on Multiracial people who can pass as White at a four-year public land grant university located in the

northwestern region of the United States. The study did not attempt to recruit or evaluate people from other monoracial/ethnic identities that believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, they had the ability to pass as White.

Participants were selected based on their personal, this researcher's, and research teams' perspectives as to the participants' ability to pass as White. This means the concept of passing as White was designed through personal bias. Each participant, this researcher, and research team member decided for himself or herself what White group membership entailed and what factors led to passing as White. The decision on whether a participant could pass as White (and thereby be invited to participate in the study) was based on personal bias and preconceived notions. This approach was meant to replicate real-world attitudes towards judgment and perceptions of Whiteness and White group membership.

This study examined three distinct concepts: the experiences of people who identify with more than one race and ethnicity, the ability to pass as White, and White privilege. The study did not attempt to evaluate and access the participants' status, level, or stage of their racial identity developmental process. The study also focused on White privilege as participants understood and comprehended the concept. Therefore, participants' knowledge and awareness of White privilege was not assessed. Johnson (2006) describes privilege as being difficult to expose because people cannot recognize the characteristics of privilege and, therefore, cannot relate to the benefits and social rewards afforded to them. Because of this difficulty, there were challenges in gaining

information from the participants about the ways in which they saw White privilege influence and exert an impact on their lives and the lives of other people.

Thematic analysis was conducted by this researcher. This means that the data was filtered through this researchers' perspective, lens, and world views. This researcher identified three main themes. This researcher examined and filtered the data through these three approaches, which precluded other analysis and findings. An anonymous review of the findings or a comparative analysis would diversify the findings beyond the researchers' perspective.

This study was conducted within a specific time frame of a masters' program thesis. A year was allotted to propose, conduct, analyze, and present research findings. For this reason, depth in participant recruitment and interviews following the data analysis were constrained. Due to time restrictions, this researcher did not use member checking for the transcribed interviews, which would provide opportunity to clarify and assume accuracy in the data. Other methods of member checking (e.g., second interview following the data analysis) could not be performed due to time restrictions. This was partially due to the calendar winter holiday when research analysis concluded. The guided semistructured interview format presented limitations because established questions were used, but each conversation's direction was dependent on the participant. As a result, the data was extensive, allowing the researcher to depict the complexity and fluidity within the stories of Multiracial people.

This study was limited to racially/ethnically mixed people who have the ability to pass as White who were attending or working at a four-year public land grant university

located in the northwestern region of the United States. For this reason, the results and findings cannot be generalized beyond this population. Generalization refers to the concept in scientific research when random samples from populations are used to generalize back to that population (Litchman, 2010). The purpose of this study was not to generalize the population of racially/ethnically mixed people, but to describe, understand and interpret (Litchman, 2010) their experiences and understanding of passing as White.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided background information regarding the research methodology used for this study. Qualitative research was used to explore the experiences of Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. Qualitative inquiry emphasized participant-oriented methods to explore the interrelation among Multiracial/ethnic people who pass as White and their identification with having White privilege. The research design incorporated purposive and snowball sampling, qualitative survey and interview techniques to collect fruitful data, and intentional coding to draw meaningful concepts for analysis. Further insight into the findings and analysis of the study is offered in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

This study explored racially/ethnically mixed peoples' perceptions of passing as White and whether this belief is related to having White privilege. This chapter begins with a description of the participants in the study, followed by the research findings and analysis. The chapter is organized according to the themes and categories identified during the analysis of the data.

To gain information related to the research questions, data was collected through demographic and supplemental questions (i.e., the participant intake form and one-on-one interviews). Participants' interview transcriptions were coded to derive the central themes and categories. The researcher found the following major themes emerged from the participant interviews: (a) White privilege, (b) navigating social circles, and (c) burden. Each theme is discussed in detail, with excerpts from the participant interviews included. It is from these findings and analysis that this researcher made connections to the original research questions and offers concluding remarks and recommendations in Chapter 5.

### **Participants**

Participants selected for the study identified with more than one race or ethnicity and believed, to some degree or under certain circumstances, they had the ability to pass as White. This study collected the unique life stories of racially/ethnically mixed people. The purpose of this study was to reveal and understand their perspectives regarding the concepts of passing as White and White privilege.

Reasons for participation in the study varied among the participants. Some of the participants sought the opportunity to discuss their mixed racial/ethnic identity beyond a



classroom or diversity training framework. Other participants believed the study was unique and fascinating because it sought to explore the phenomenon of passing as White and they wanted to be part of that discovery. For most participants, the concept of monoracial boundaries and the perpetual misidentification of their racial/ethnic identity by society led them to engage in the study as they saw an opportunity to discuss their racial/ethnic mixed heritage and the impact it has had on their lives.

The recruitment process identified 16 participants. Ten participants engaged in phase one and all ten participants were selected to be part of the in-depth phase two study. Collectively, participants were between the ages of 18 through 46 and represented various gender identities/expressions, sexual/affection orientations, levels of ability/disability, socioeconomic status, and institutional status. A general overview of participant demographics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Gender identity/ expression	Age	Sexual/ affection orientation	Ability/ disability	Socioeconomic status	Institutional status
Anne	Female	18	Heterosexual	None	Middle class	Student, 1st-year BA candidate
Chris	Male	40	Heterosexual	Able bodied	Declined to identify	Student, MA candidate
Daniel	Male	22	Pansexual/gay	Temporarily able bodied	Lower middle class	Staff

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Pseudonym	Gender identity/ expression	Age	Sexual/ affection orientation	Ability/ disability	Socioeconomic status	Institutional status
Emma	Female	21	Declined to Identify	Declined to identify	Middle class	Student, 3rd-year BA candidate
Greg	Male	34	Heterosexual	Declined to identify	Poor	Student, 4th-year BA candidate
Jill	Masculine female	39	Heterosexual	Temporarily able	Middle class	Staff
Kayla	Female	19	Heterosexual	None	Lower middle class	Student, 1st-year BA candidate
Laura	Female	43	Heterosexual	Declined to identify	Middle class	Faculty
Lynn	Female	39	Heterosexual	Able	Lower class	Student, MA candidate
Theresa	Female	46	Heterosexual	Temporarily able bodied	Middle upper class	Student, 4th-year BA candidate

The study focused on the participants' racial/ethnic identity. Specifically, participants were asked to disclose their racial/ethnic mixed identity and personal insight and perception of their ability to pass as White. This researcher and research team also provided an opinion, based on their personal assumptions and preconceived notions, of whether the participant could pass as White. Table 2 offers a general overview of the participants' racial/ethnic identity and the perception of passing as White by the participants and research team. Brief summaries are also offered to describe the context of each participant's racial/ethnic identity and ability to pass as White.

Table 2

*Participant Racial/Ethnic Identity and Passing as White*

Pseudonym	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Self Identification (Participant) Pass as White	Societal Identification (Research Team) Pass as White
Anne	White and Spanish	Yes – Light skin color and red hair	Photograph – 5 Yes, 0 No Responses – 3 Yes, 2 No
Chris	Minority of One African American/Black and Caucasian/White	Yes – Has a complexion that looks like a tan	Photograph – 1 Yes, 4 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Daniel	Latino American	Yes – Identifies being raised with emphasis on the White culture	Photograph – 0 Yes, 5 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Emma	Mixed Blood Native American, Irish/English and Anishinabek (Ojibway)	Yes – Light skin, light brown hair color, and light eye color	Photograph – 3 Yes, 2 No Responses – 5 Yes, 0 No
Greg	White/Caucasian and Chok Taw American Indian	Yes – White appearance and skin is not Brown unless tan	Photograph – 5 Yes, 0 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Jill	Caucasian/White, African American/Black, and Native American	Yes – Light skinned and blue eyes	Photograph – 5 Yes, 0 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Kayla	White and Italian	Yes – Light skinned and no form of an accent	Photograph – 3 Yes, 2 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Laura	White/Mixed Caucasian (Scotland and Ireland) and Latino (Mexican)	Yes – Fair complexion, English language, and White socialization	Photograph – 1 Yes, 4 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Lynn	Caucasian/ Ethnic Roma American Indian and Arapaho	Yes – Light skin color and eye color	Photograph – 5 Yes, 0 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No
Theresa	European & White Swan Band of the Yankton Dakota & Chickasaw	Yes – Phenotype and raised in the White dominant society	Photograph – 5 Yes, 0 No Responses – 4 Yes, 1 No

**Anne**

Anne explained she had always thought she was White, just like everyone else. She reported that, until recently, she had not understood why her mother had repeatedly instructed her to check the “other” box on her paperwork for school. Anne described her ancestry as Spaniard and White because her family’s lineage originated in Spain.

Anne believed she could pass as White and be viewed as any other American. Her physical appearance is White; she has a very light skin color and red hair. According to Anne, people from Spain often display these physical features and these people are often represented as being White versus Spanish. Upon review of her intake form, the research team found Anne could pass as White. The research team noted her White appearance and lighter skin color as the main factors contributing to her ability to pass as White.

According to Anne, the only time she was asked questions about her racial/ethnic identity beyond her White appearance was when people heard her last name. Most people report not understanding why she had a Mexican last name when she looked White. For this reason, Anne explained she often found herself clarifying her racial/ethnic identity.

**Chris**

Chris identified his racial/ethnic identity as a minority of one in which he represented the best of both worlds. Chris’s ancestry was both White/Caucasian and Black/African American. He described his childhood and young adult experiences as unique from those experiences of fully White or fully Black people. When he was a child, he thought of himself as mostly White because he lived with the White side of his family.

However, in the first grade, he became aware that he was different because his peers called him “chocolate boy.”

Chris believed he had the ability to pass as White. Even though his skin was darker, as though he had a perpetual tan, he could fit into the White group. He described instances when he was with White people and they made racial slurs, telling Black jokes and Mexican jokes, as though he was part of their White group. The research team thought Chris would have difficulty, based on his appearance, with membership in the White group. Even though his skin was tan and could be associated with the White group, his hairstyle and facial hair made him less identifiable with the White group.

Most people were surprised, according to Chris, to learn he had White and Black ancestry. He was most often mistaken as solely White, Middle Eastern, and Jewish. Even when Chris informed people of his true identity, people continued to discount and identify him differently than what he claimed.

### **Daniel**

Identifying as Multiracial had been a recent development for Daniel. As a child, he identified his racial/ethnic social identity as Latino, even though he had both Latino and Caucasian ancestry. His family always stressed he was Latino, although they neither spoke the Spanish language nor practiced the culture.

Daniel believed he could pass as White because he was raised with an emphasis on the White dominant culture. His upbringing and education did not expand beyond the White culture and only recently had his mother begun to celebrate Latino cultural traditions (e.g., el Día de los Muertos). However, these celebrations within the Latino

culture did not alter Daniel's perception of his ability to pass as White. Although the research team identified Daniel's upbringing within the White culture could lead him to be accepted as White, his physical appearance would not. The research team designated he could not pass as White because his skin color is too dark to fit within the White group norms.

Most people label Daniel by his sexual/affection orientation before they examine and made assumptions about his other social identities (e.g., his racial/ethnic identity). Specifically regarding his racial/ethnic identity, most people labeled Daniel as Latino. Daniel believed society deemed him as Latino because of his non-White complexion. Daniel does not personally identify as Latino, so there was disconnection between the way society labeled him and the way he personally identified.

### **Emma**

Emma claimed to have known from an early age that she was Native American and White. While growing up, both of her parents emphasized her Native ancestry, which led Emma to have a strong Native American identity connection. It was not until Emma became older that she started to question her validity as a Native American person. Emma depicted herself as less legitimately Native American because of her White appearance. For this reason, Emma had continued to explore her mixed-heritage identity.

The way Emma looked fitted the White group. Emma reported believing she had the ability to pass as White because her light skin, light brown hair, and light eye color aligned with European ancestry. In review of her submission, the research team had mixed opinions about Emma's ability to pass as White. Two members of the research

team who themselves identified as White found Emma could pass as White based on her light skin and facial features, while the other research team members found her facial features did not align with European ancestry.

According to Emma, people constantly designated her racial/ethnic identity as White. When she revealed her Native American ancestry, people questioned her identification and frequently told her she did not look Native American. Emma reported the belief that most people create their assumptions of the Native American/Indigenous population by stereotypes. For this reason, Emma believed she would rarely be accepted as Native American and her racial/ethnic identity would continue to be challenged and questioned.

### **Greg**

Greg's racial/ethnic identity changed when his mother began to explore Native American philosophy. Greg's ancestry included both White Caucasian and Choctaw American Indian heritages. As a child, he identified as White, Italian, and German. Once his mother learned about Native Americans and his immediate family became aware of their Native American ancestry, Greg identified as Choctaw American Indian.

Greg believed he had the ability to pass as White. His appearance was that of a White person; he had a light complexion and facial structures that fitted the White group. He also believed his mannerisms fitted the norms within the White group. These were the reasons he reported being seen as any other White person. The research team thought Greg could pass as White mainly because of his skin color. They also distinguished his facial features as fitting the membership in the White group.

According to Greg, most of the time people assumed he was White. When Greg revealed his racial/ethnic identity and Choctaw American Indian ancestry, people did not believe him and discounted his proclaimed identity. He described his experience as a “wannabe” to both parties; members of the White group thought he was attempting to compensate for his Whiteness and those in the Native American group believed he was lying. Greg’s skin tone was an influential factor in societal perceptions and viewers’ disregard for his Native American identity.

### **Jill**

As a child, Jill identified her race/ethnicity as White. She knew she had Black ancestry on her father’s side, but because she did not have contact with him and was raised by the White side of her family, she did not identify with that aspect of her race/ethnicity. As Jill grew older, she came to realize she did not fit into the White group. This realization led her to claim a Biracial/Multiracial identity. Jill reported continuing to have anxiety in claiming her racial/ethnic identity because she believed the way she looked did not coincide with what she claimed as her identity.

Jill could pass as White. She had a light complexion and blue eyes. She described the ultimate test of her ability to pass was from her grandparents. When they became aware that Jill’s mom was having a child with a Black/African American man, they insisted she get an abortion. At birth, Jill was very light-skinned baby and her presentation led to her maternal grandparents accepting her into the family. Following the path charted by Jill’s grandparents, Jill was designated by the research team as being able



to pass as White. The research team described Jill's appearance as European/Caucasian because of her light skin, light blue eyes, and facial structure.

According to Jill, most people identified her as a White female. People rarely assumed anything beyond her White appearance. The exception was when she participated in diversity trainings and people attempted to assign her to one of the monoracial/ethnic categories (e.g., Native American or Latina). Jill reported feeling a discrepancy between how people labeled her as White and the way she identified as Biracial/Multiracial, but all she could do was oppose their label and others' assumptions.

### **Kayla**

Kayla identified her racial/ethnic identity as Italian and White. Because both of her parents had Italian ancestry, she was raised to follow Italian and White American cultures. More recently, she had come to identify solely as White, even though this single label does not fully encompass her racial/ethnic identity.

Kayla reported believing she could pass as White. She had light skin, which made her able to pass as White. She also thought she is depicted as a White American because she did not carry any inflection in her voice, meaning she did not have an accent. The research team was inconclusive on whether or not Kayla could pass as White. Most of the research team found Kayla's responses fit her in with the White group, but her photograph did not. Even though Kayla had light skin, some of the research team members found her dark hair and certain facial features (i.e., nose and lip fullness) did not fit the White group.

According to Kayla, most people mistook her for White or Hispanic. Kayla believed she had the ability to fit different races depending on her skin tone (i.e., whether she had a suntan) and who was identifying her. When Kayla had a suntan, society labeled her as Mexican. When she had no suntan and was lighter, she was deemed White. Rarely did people accurately identify her Italian ancestry.

### **Laura**

As a child, Laura identified as either White or Latina based on how society perceived her. According to Laura, her mother had always told her she was White, but would use her Hispanic family name on school forms and official paperwork to help Laura get into better public schools. When Laura became aware of her full identity, she began to claim mixed heritage if the opportunity was available to do so. Otherwise, she reported checking various boxes (i.e., White, Hispanic, and Latina), depending on the situation and context.

Laura believed she had the ability to pass as White. She knew her light complexion, socialization in White culture, and lack of fluency beyond the English language were factors contributing to her ability to pass as White. Laura described her ability to pass as White as a choice because she could simply omit or proclaim her Latina identity as she wished. Laura reported thinking her ability to pass depended on how other people read her racial/ethnic identity. She could choose to fit their expectations and be treated a certain way or challenge their preconceived notions with the possibility of mistreatment. The research team found Laura could navigate the White group because she was raised to assimilate in White spaces. However, the research team was unable to

reach consensus on assigning her part of the White group based on her photograph.

According to opinions expressed by members of the research team, even though Laura had light skin, her eye shape, nose, and hair color, and facial structure would lead to an assumption of Latina or Native American heritage.

According to Laura, society identified her racial/ethnic identity in a variety of ways. Laura was subject to labeling in the extremes, deemed either all White or all Latina. When Laura was designated a Latina, people expected her to be bilingual. When she did not meet that criterion, she was deemed “not Latina enough” and designated her a mix or White.

### **Lynn**

As Lynn grew older, she began to identify as an Arapaho. She began to reconnect with her tribal family and, when she was in college, she took courses to learn more about her tribe. Lynn could pass as White. She had very light skin and light eye color. These characteristics were most noticeable when Lynn and her sisters were together in social situations; they each had a different skin shade and were often designated as having various racial/ethnic identities from each other. Out of all her sisters, Lynn was the only one who was always deemed the White one.

Upon review of Lynn’s intake information, the research team found Lynn had the ability to pass as White. Based on her skin tone, eye color, hair texture, and face shape, particularly her cheekbones and nose, the research team believed she could fit within the White group membership. Society depicted Lynn’s racial/ethnic identity as White. Even

though Lynn identified as Native American, she was aware of how her physical appearance affected her ability/inability to access this identity.

### **Theresa**

When she was a child, Theresa identified her racial/ethnic identity as White. This identification was based on her mother, who was of European descent, having raised her. Theresa became aware of her biological father's Native American identity when she met her paternal grandparents. After Theresa realized her paternal grandparents were Native Americans, she began to identify with both aspects of her racial/ethnic identity. When her mother subsequently married a White man, Theresa was forced by her mother to tell people her stepfather was her biological father. For many years, Theresa had to deny the existence of her true biological father and her Native American identity. As Theresa grew older, she was able to acknowledge her Native American identity and explore her mixed racial/ethnic identity. Theresa identified her ancestry specifically as the White Swan Band of the Yankton Dakota and Chickasaw Tribe and European.

Theresa reported the belief that she had the ability to pass as White. Theresa thought her phenotype (i.e., her light skin, blue eyes, and brown/blond hair) was the primary factor in her ability to pass as White. She also described her lack of knowledge and understanding about her Native American culture added to her ability to pass as White. The research team assigned Theresa as having the ability to pass as White, crediting her complexion for allowing her to access the White group membership.

Theresa personally identified as Multiracial and mixed but was rarely depicted as such by society. Most people labeled her White because of her physical appearance. Even

when she informed people of her racial/ethnic identity, people continued to assume that she was a middle-class White woman. Also, because Theresa was raised in the dominant White culture, she was able to fit most of the expectations and norms people have of White people.

### **Categorizing the Data**

After this researcher had obtained information from the participants and confirmed they met the two criteria (i.e., identified with more than one race or ethnicity and believed, to some degree or under certain circumstances, they had the ability to pass as White), participants were invited to take part in a one-on-one interview. Interviews were guided and semistructured to allow for flexibility within the conversation so that participants' stories could flow using their own direction and words. The intention of the interviews was to explore the concepts of racially/ethnically mixed people who have the ability to pass as White in relation to identifying with having White privilege. After the interviews were conducted and the data was coded and analyzed, this researcher found three main themes and several categories supporting the themes. A brief overview of the findings is presented in Table 3. Themes and categories are described and discussed in detail in the section that follows Table 3.

Table 3

*Themes and Categories*

Theme	Categories
1. White privilege	Identifying with White privilege  Choice
2. Navigating social circles	Disclosure/nondisclosure of Multiracial/ethnic identity  Acceptance  Color gradation  Authenticity
3. Burden	Guilt  Education

**Theme 1: White Privilege**

White privilege emerged from the data as a predominant theme. White privilege is the unearned advantages and benefits afforded to White people based on the color of their skin (McIntosh, 2002). Most participants were able to define and generally understood the concept of White privilege:

“I define White privilege as any inherent right or privilege that you automatically get because you are light-skinned.” (Lynn)

“I was introduced to Peggy McIntosh and it was kind of, one of those things where we were, like, ‘Aha!’” (Jill)

Other participants, who were identified by their demographic information to be some of the younger participants, were unfamiliar with the concept of White privilege:

“I haven’t heard of the term, I had to Google it. But I now know it is the privilege you get because you’re White.” (Anne)

Regardless of whether the participants were familiar with and/or knowledgeable about the concept of White privilege, the stories they shared alluded to experiences and examples about White privilege.

**Identifying with White privilege.** Identifying with White privilege surfaced as a category within the theme of White privilege. The first step toward identifying White privilege was to identify being part of the White group. White privilege was afforded to White group membership and being part of and associated with the White group meant access to White privilege. Therefore, Multiracial people who passed as White were perceived to be part of and associated with the dominant White group. Several participants’ comments were a reflection of the idea of being associated with the White group:

“A lot of people think I’m White. When they hear my last name they think, ‘Where did you get a name like that?’” (Anne)

“[In reference to people labeling his racial/ethnic identity] Looking at the color of your skin and having people make the assumption that, ‘Oh, they are White.’” (Daniel)

“I was raised as a White girl and no one really saw me as Latina, and probably don’t still to this day.” (Laura)

The expansion of the White group to include people who pass as White has been noted in the literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Wise, 2008). Because the definition of White has expanded beyond those who are exclusively White, White privilege is afforded to people who identify as White and/or pass as White (Wise, 2008). When participants were asked the question, “Tell me about your experiences with White

privilege,” many identified examples and offered experiences of White privilege in their lives. However, some participants spoke to the difficulties in identifying White privilege in their lives:

“I’ve only had a couple situations in which I literally saw that my skin color had protected me. I know my skin color. But I don’t need a bunch of those instances to know that it does [in reference to access to White privilege].” (Greg)

“Well, let me just start by saying it’s hard to determine because I am a White person. It’s hard to determine which of the things I’ve achieved in my life have been because of me being able to pass as White.” (Jill)

White privilege is often difficult to articulate and examine because it is often misconstrued as the norm, the standard of comparison, and the status quo (Johnson, 2006). However, as the conversations progressed, participants were able to identify the ways in which they benefitted from White privilege. Some participants were able to identify nonspecific ways in which White privilege impacted their lives:

“I suppose the White privilege is simply being left alone, by appearing White. I’m just one of the other masses.” (Chris)

“[In reference to passing as White and fitting in the dominant White group] You are seen as one of the good ones.” (Laura)

“[In reference to being part of the White group] You realize, look at all these things that I can do and without concern.” (Theresa)

The comments offered by Chris, Laura, and Theresa highlighted one of the benefits of White privilege was being viewed as normal. When White privilege was depicted as normal, it was difficult to recognize and unveil. Emma and Greg discussed how being White matters in affording them access to benefits and advantages:

“I would say that in our society there’s still definite advantages given to people that are primarily European heritage. People who are White have the ability to go farther in society. If you wanted to make it in society, you had to be more White. That’s a fact.” (Emma)



“I know for a fact that I haven’t had anyone deny me something because I am White. That’s the difference to being White because I’ve never experienced anything that was a detriment to me because of my color. Other people of other colors say that they do on a regular basis.” (Greg)

Jensen (2005) describes how being White in a White supremacist and racist society impacts being depicted as normal, receiving preferred treatment, and being afforded benefits and access to social rewards. For Jill, not experiencing discrimination was correlated to the benefits of White privilege:

“My level of discrimination is not even anything compared to people of color. You look at them and know that they’re a person of color and that my experiences is minute compared to the time that they would be presented with something like this.” (Jill)

Jill understood that people of color are not treated the same as people in the White group. Some of the participants discussed the specific ways in which White privilege had an impact on their lives. Anne, Daniel, and Laura associated a benefit of White privilege was not being questioned:

“I don’t get the questioning. They don’t question if I speak English and stuff.” (Anne)

“I guess not having to be questioned about what you are is one of the fundamental largest privileges a White person has.” (Daniel)

“When people are reading me as White, you don’t get stopped, or questioned, or questioned as to whether you belong in whatever social setting or educational setting or any of those things and nobody is looking out for you. Just greater access to a lot of things and assumption of civility and assumption of good intentions.” (Laura)

Since Anne, Daniel, and Laura could fit in the White group, they were viewed as normal. McIntosh (2002) describes this benefit as conferred dominance because White is constructed as the norm. Being White meant being left unexamined and unquestioned. This is why Anne, Daniel, and Laura identified not being questioned as a benefit of

White privilege. Chris and Greg pointed out being treated differently as a benefit of

White privilege:

“No one treats me poorly because I look White. If I am treated poorly, it’s not because I look White. It’s because of something else I’ve done, something I’ve said to offend someone or something like that. Whereas, I’m aware, for Blacks, that there can be prejudice and animosity just for being Black.” (Chris)

“I’m free of worrying that somebody is going to do me harm or wrong because of the color of my skin. And that harm or wrong will come as a surprise because that’s not something I have to constantly worry about.” (Greg)

Both Chris and Greg knew that being a person of color led to mistreatment and harm. They were also able to identify association with the White group led to favored treatment. Lynn also was able to depict a variety of circumstances in which White privilege afforded her favored treatment and feeling at ease:

“Like not getting followed around a grocery store, having people worry about you stealing something, or walking into a bank and having to wait longer than the person next to you. Lots of examples. Just carrying around all the things you take for granted, not being stared at, not having people cross the street to get away from you. Lots of things like that.” (Lynn)

Identification with White privilege was portrayed throughout the participant interviews. Specifically, participants identified being associated with the White group and described the ways in which White privilege existed in their lives. Even though varying levels awareness about White privilege existed among the participants, to some degree, their ability to pass as White afforded them access to the White group, and its benefits and social rewards.

**Choice.** Multiracial people who pass as White have the ability to choose to disclose their identity or remain silent about their identity. Participants were able to choose when to associate with their White identity (i.e., not engage in disclosing their

racial/ethnic identity) and when to associate with their non-White identity (i.e., engage in disclosing their racial/ethnic identity). Passing afforded them the privilege of choice when identifying with their subordinate identification (i.e., their non-White identities). This privilege of choice meant they could determine when to confront being perceived as White in challenging White supremacy and/or racism. Jill described the choices as turning it on and turning it off:

“I’m Multiracial, whether or not I was claiming it at that particular time or not. Then realizing that there are so many people out there who can’t just walk through the world not caring or thinking about this. On a daily basis, I can choose not to think about it. I can choose not to do anything about it. I can turn it on and off when I feel like it. For someone who passes as White, I have the luxury of being able to turn it off whenever I want to.” (Jill)

Jill described her ability to be viewed as a White person. She could operate in society as a member of the dominant White group that afforded her White privilege with access to resources and social rewards. With this ability she could choose moments when to challenge that perception. Jill’s choice to challenge and intervene is emphasized within the concept of the “path of least resistance.” The path of least resistance describes choices that align with the social norm and status quo (Johnson, 2006). When people deviate from normal thoughts and behaviors, they are described as resisting the system (Johnson, 2006). These were the moments Jill described as turning it on. Multiracial people who can pass as White made choices when to confront and engage.

Some participants described experiences when they would choose not to identify with their subordinate identity in order to be afforded White privilege:

“I don’t want to sound bad but when I am applying for a job, I think about which box to select. I used to work for American Eagle and I would say about 95% of the women who work there are White. So I marked the White box on my

application. I kind of pick and choose when I identify with it, which is horrible.”  
(Kayla)

“If I knew that I could get a job that paid me much more if they thought I was White, I think I would probably do it because I have a family to care for.” (Chris)

For Kayla and Chris, being viewed as and associated with the White group meant acquisition of social rewards and benefits. If they were to choose to identify as Multiracial and expose their subordinate identities, they could have lost access to these social rewards and benefits. At stake was a job for Kayla and increased financial earnings for Chris. Kayla and Chris remained silent to maintain association with the White group. Johnson (2006) describes silence as a way to perpetuate and maintain systems of privilege and oppression. Silence signifies that people are in tacit agreement with what the systems in place; they are not challenging the norm (Johnson, 2006).

Choice was perhaps the greatest privilege afforded to Multiracial people who can pass as White. Multiracial people who can pass as White were seen as and associated with the dominant White group and accessed benefits and social rewards. When participants chose to engage (i.e., disclose their racial/ethnic identity), there was a potential risk of losing White privilege. When participants chose not to engage (i.e., not disclose their racial/ethnic identity), there was less of a potential risk of losing White privilege. The potential risk of losing White privilege is linked and associated with White group membership. When participants were no longer seen as and depicted with White group membership, there were not afforded White privilege. Participants ultimately could choose if and when to upset and challenge being associated with the White group and being afforded benefits and social rewards from White privilege.

## **Theme 2: Navigating Social Circles**

Navigating social circles was the second theme to emerge from the data.

Navigating social circles refers to fitting in and navigating through various racial/ethnic identity(ies) and group membership(s). Literature includes references to the concept of navigating social circles within the identity development theories and models regarding choice of Multiracial identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) and disclosure/nondisclosure of Multiracial identity (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). The ability to fit in with different dominant and subordinate groups (i.e., White people and/or people of color) was dependent on the situation and context. Laura and Emma articulated their ability to navigate several different racial/ethnic social circles:

“Definitely, when you meet with somebody or start to interact with somebody, you notice signs of how they are reading you. Some were instantly reading me as White. Some were instantly reading me as Latina. And some were instantly reading me as a mix. And that would inform different opinions on how they would treat you.” (Laura)

“[In reference to being associated with the White group] I can move within these circles but I am not always comfortable within these circles. I have the mobility but I don’t necessarily agree with the system or the situation. This is something I am opposed to because it is in conflict to what I believe to be true, according to my cultural understanding.” (Emma)

Laura found her ability to navigate different racial/ethnic social circles was dependent upon how society perceived her. She received different access and treatment based on how her racial/ethnic identity was read. Wijeyesinghe (2001) describes this as the “ascribed group membership” because society identifies and dictates treatment and access to navigate social circles. Emma described her frustration with being able to navigate several social circles, mainly being able to fit in with the White group, based on

her appearance. Jill had the perspective that if Multiracial people have the ability to pass as White, they would not be questioned and would be viewed as normal:

“I think if I were to just walk through the world with people I don’t know, they’d have no clue. No clue that I am not White.” (Jill)

One of the most prevalent perspectives among the participants was the notion of navigating social circles. Each participant alluded to fitting into different social circles at some point.

**Disclosure/nondisclosure of Multiracial/ethnic identity.** Within the theme of navigating social circles, the category of disclosure/nondisclosure of Multiracial identity emerged. Disclosure of Multiracial/ethnic identity involved revealing or sharing racial/ethnic ancestry whereas nondisclosure involved not revealing or sharing. Disclosure of racial/ethnic identity is described as being met with disapproval if the racial/ethnic identity is a devalued one (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009), whereas nondisclosure of the devalued identity allows access to the dominant social circles. The devalued identity relates to the subordinate identity. In a society defined by White supremacy, non-White are perceived and depicted as less than by the dominant culture.

One of the major components of passing as White is being associated with and part of the White group. As described in theme the navigating social circles, participants were able to describe experiences in identifying with the White group. Similar to this, many participants reported they were provided access to the White group by default when they did not disclose or chose not to disclose their Multiracial identity:

“When I first came to work there [referring to working at one of the cultural centers], she asked, ‘Who is this White girl, what’s she doing here?’ And hearing

that hurt me because I realized, ‘*Wow, I am perceived as White.*’” (Emma, emphasis added)

“During orientation, I was going by the booths and we stopped at the MECHA group and they asked me if I was an ally. They were of Hispanic origin and saw me as White.” (Kayla)

“I don’t remember exactly what I said but I went up to them [people at the Native American cultural center] and they said to me, ‘Oh, hi. Are you here to find out about the Native American Longhouse? What do you know about Indians and what do you want to learn?’ And I was just floored at how it was framed to me—‘*Oh, so obviously you are White and are here to learn about us.*’” (Theresa, emphasis added)

Emma, Kayla, and Theresa’s experiences showed how they were associated with the White group by default. For some participants, disclosing their Multiracial identity did not lead to clarity or to being associated with their “true” identity. The “true” identity can be linked to the Multiracial identity development theories and models that describe final position or status as awareness and appreciation of one’s identity and the ability to claim one’s identity free of societal pressures (Renn, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Participants alluded to the fact the difficulty in disclosing their Multiracial identity to any of the groups with which they identify:

“It’s hard to build trust within communities of color when you don’t look like a person of color. And it’s hard to gain respect from a White community once you reveal that you’re Multiracial.” (Jill)

Chris recounted a similar experience when disclosing his identity to different people within dominant and subordinate group memberships. When he disclosed his Multiracial identity to the White group it did not lead to them perceiving him as a mixed person. Instead, they discounted his experiences and did not believe what Chris claimed as his identity:

“But, usually they discount it [referencing the White group]. I will say, ‘Hey, I’m mixed, you know.’ Then they look at me and just continue with their conversation. I’m one of them is their mentality, I believe. So, they think I’m White, regardless of what I say.” (Chris)

Discounting the experiences of racially/ethnically mixed people who have various racial/ethnic identities that are non-White was common. Johnson (2006) describes denial as a technique used by privilege to discredit and minimize the experiences of people in order to sustain dominant and subordinate group dynamics. This dismissal could occur because Multiracial people who can pass as White were viewed as less of a threat to the White group. Because they looked White, they could be trusted. Multiracial people who pass have the ability to morph into the dominant group and stay there, as long as they did not rock the boat. Rocking the boat can be characterized as disclosing their true Multiracial identity, knowing too much information and advocating for subordinate identities, and challenging the White group. Many White identified and passing as White people rock the boat and challenge the dominant systems that maintain privilege and oppression. Greg found constraints could be placed on Multiracial people who pass when they disclosed their identity and attempted to rock the boat. Greg’s intention in disclosing was also questioned and portrayed negatively:

“And then on the other hand, there’s the White culture, where I feel like I’m walking around with a mask on. They treat me as a White person. But, when I start talking about my beliefs [In reference to his Native American philosophy], then I’m the odd ball out and they don’t like me anymore. So, once I out myself, I’m not popular anymore. Now I’m a fake or I want to be part of the Indian culture so I have educated myself well enough to appear that I am Native American, but really it’s just a façade. I’m trying to look cooler than my White peers by expressing this interest.” (Greg)



As Greg described, rocking the boat can lead to a potential risk of loss of access with the White group and discredit and discount his lived experiences. Several of the participants referenced instances when disclosure of Multiracial identity resulted in loss of friendships and jobs. Ultimately, they were no longer viewed as nonthreatening, safe, and trustworthy once they disclosed their racially/ethnically mixed identity. Sanchez and Bonam (2009) notes that once people disclose their full identity, they shift into a state of vulnerability because they do not know how the people who received the news are going to act. Even though the participants could still pass as White, they were stigmatized and deemed as “other:”

“Individuals who were very sheltered all their life found out I was Multiracial and I was part Black. They basically just stopped hanging out with me.” (Jill)

“I’ve been fired from a job after they found out I was half Black. I had been there for a couple of months and a bunch of what people refer to as good old boys were standing around on break smoking and having a soda. We were talking about family members and one of the fellows was talking about his father and I brought up my father as I was quite proud of him being the first Black police officer hired in his county. As soon as I said that, one of the fellows said ‘Oh excuse me,’ and he walked off. I saw him later speaking with the supervisor. The next was, ‘We’re going to have to let you go, Chris.’ The only conclusion that I could draw since I was doing my job and I was up for employee of the month was because I was half Black.” (Chris)

Jill and Chris described how disclosure of their non-White identities led to being mistreated and not associated with the White group. Although there was a risk of loss of White group membership and White privilege, it was highly conditional on context and situation. Therefore, disclosure of Multiracial/ethnic identity led to a *potential* risk of loss of White group membership and White privilege (emphasis added). This is because participants could be in a new/different context and situation or with new/different people

and be associated with the White group and afforded White privilege. The ease with which the participants reported navigating social circles was determined, to some degree, by their disclosure/nondisclosure of Multiracial identity. Although Multiracial individuals may be able to fit into multiple racial/ethnic social circles, other factors (e.g., physical characteristics) play a role in whether Multiracial people were able to navigate various racial/ethnic identities.

**Color gradation.** Another category identified within the theme of navigating social circles was color gradation. Color gradation referred to the skin tone of the participant along the Black-to-White continuum. Physical characteristics, specifically the color of one's skin, permitted access to and association with dominant and subordinate groups. Physical appearance was depicted as either fostering or hindering access and association to group membership and navigating social circles. King (2008) found physical appearance, particularly skin color, is a highly influential factor in being able to identify with certain groups. Ultimately, skin color informs the navigation of social circles and the treatment of people (King, 2008). Participants knew their skin tone was an important factor because it provided access or did not provide access to various racial/ethnic group memberships:

“I’m probably the Whitest-skinned kid in the family. My sister is very dark-skinned and she definitely got the darker pigmented skin. And then my older sister as well is quite a bit darker than I am. Had I been the only child, I would have been able to pass all the time as a kid. It’s way easier to be White when you are a kid versus a half-breed or a person of color or Native [American].” (Lynn)

“Different treatment is based on skin color. My dad is darker from the rest of us. They assume he doesn’t speak English. And he speaks perfect English. It is funny because he will go to a Mexican restaurant and people will go up to him and start talking to

him in Spanish. He will be like, ‘Umm, I don’t really know what you are saying.’” (Anne)

“I have a brother and he is older than me and he is much more lighter than me. He was treated different than me growing up.” (Kayla)

“I would question my parents when they would say something about lighter skin. I remember one time my mom said something about me being White.” (Emma)

Color gradation was one factor that highly influenced society when considering and permitting the ability to navigate social circles. Wijeyesinghe (2001) found that society uses physical appearances to fit people into racial categories. Even though Multiracial people who can pass as White were limited in their ability to navigate to dominant and subordinate identities based on disclosure/nondisclosure and color gradation, for the most part, they had access and social mobility based on their White appearing racial/ethnic identity, which was denied to people of color.

**Acceptance.** For Multiracial people who pass as White, the ability to navigate social circles is dependent on acceptance into that racial identity group. Acceptance was identified as a category within navigating social circles because many participants alluded to this concept. Acceptance involved being able to fit in and seen as part of certain group memberships. Several participants expressed their desire to fit in. Acceptance was closely related to color gradation as many times skin color permitted access to different racial/ethnic group memberships. The participants expressed beliefs that their ability to fit in was based on what they looked like, specifically what skin color they had. Theresa described their ability to access and fit in with the White group by default because they could pass as White:

“I fit in with the mainstream. And people thought of me as White and accepted me as White and no one said anything because I look White and played that role. That is what I learned to survive. You don’t rock the boat when you are growing up. You do not want to be different. I didn’t want to be different but, at the same time, I wanted to be different.” (Theresa)

Theresa passed as White, therefore she could fit in with and receive acceptance from the White group. Theresa discussed wanting to be different and fit in with her Native American identities. Participants also spoke about acceptance or non-acceptance with their non-White identities. Chris indicated acceptance within his Black identity was only during moments when he disclosed his mixed identity:

“[In reference to being accepted] I’ve noticed it on the White side because I look White, or at least mostly. On the other side, I’ve encountered from a number of Black peoples’ acceptance only when they discover that I’m mixed. So they assume I’m a White person and I’m receiving animosity and dirty looks. Then usually, this is common, one person in a group of Black people will say, ‘Wait are you mixed?’ And I’ll say, ‘Yes.’ Then it’s like, ‘Oh, okay.’ And then suddenly I’m accepted because I’m part Black, not just because I’m a person but because I’m part Black.” (Chris)

Chris found that informing the Black community of his Black identity led to a higher level of acceptance. Emma and Theresa identified their inability to participate in certain activities or groups because they passed as White. They noted they could not fit in to that social circle because of the way they looked:

“It actually took me a little while to go to the Native American Cultural Center because I was a intimidated, because I was worried, ‘*Will they see if I’m Native enough, will I belong here?*’ I was afraid. ‘*Will they accept me because especially with the skin tone difference?*’” (Emma, emphasis added)

“An example of this is a colleague invited me to join a group of women of color and we were going to talk about issues involving women of color. When I saw her e-mail and I started to cry. I wrote back and said, ‘When people look at me, do they see a woman of color? Will I be someone who can stand up and say I am a woman of color?’” (Theresa)

Emma and Theresa felt like they would not be accepted by their non-White identities because they could pass as White. Emma and Theresa also discussed the pain they had with their inability to be seen as anything beyond the White racial/ethnic label. Jill shared these experiences of wanting to fit in. She also felt she needed to justify why she was identifying her racial/ethnic identity as Multiracial because she passed as White:

“I have always felt that I need to justify my presence or I need to justify why I’m in diversity situations or why I was at a people of color racial identity training. For the first 20 minutes of that specific person of color racial identity training, I felt uncomfortable because the facilitator was being very straightforward and mentioned the fact that there were individuals in the training who were questioning the presence of other individuals. I am almost positive that I was one of those questionable individuals. So I always feel like I have to justify myself, so I do, especially in diversity situations, I do share that I am Multiracial.” (Jill)

Jill pointed out the importance of justifying her identity in order for people to accept her in communities of color. Justification of the racial/ethnic social identity transitioned to the concept of authenticity below. Emma described she needed validation to identify with her Native American identity:

“There was a point where it was called into question the validity of who I was. I was seen as something other. [In reference to being perceived as White] And I think that set up some feelings of, ‘*Do I belong or do I not?*’. In a lot of my thinking, I would see myself as, ‘*I’m not Native enough.*’ And before going to a powwow, this would be a concern. ‘*Will people see me as this White person who doesn’t belong there?*’” (Emma, emphasis added)

Emma experienced self-doubt in claiming her Native American identity and looked for validation from other people in order to feel accepted by her Native American community. Some participants experienced continual rejection with their subordinate identities even though their peers knew of their true mixed identity:

“I on several occasions got beat up by a bunch of Indian kids who knew full well that my mother was Indian and was involved in the ceremony and was considered

an elder or respected person. But because I was White, they didn't like me. They would not accept me because I looked White.” (Greg)

“We [referring to her sisters and herself] were bullied by full-blooded Native students because we were half-breed[s] and not of a tribe of that area. So that whole half-breed label was something that I had no idea about until I was in junior school/middle school and that was very, very difficult. 'Cause you are either White or Indian at that point.” (Lynn)

Greg and Lynn discussed how the Native American community have heightened ideas on “being Native enough.” For the most part, acceptance within different racial/ethnic social circles was dependent on the way the participant looked and how he or she was perceived by society. Therefore, navigating various social circles can occur but that ability to navigate may not lead to acceptance in a particular group membership.

**Authenticity.** Closely interconnected to the category of acceptance, the concept of authenticity emerged from the data. What makes an identity authentic? Many people reported being informed they were “not Black enough” or “not Native enough” to be part of their group membership. As Jill and Emma mentioned above, they felt as though they had to justify and validate their racial/ethnic identity. In these cases, there was believed to be lack of authenticity on the part of the individuals whose appearance did not match the societal racial/ethnic designation. Authenticity involves being true to oneself and knowing one’s own social identities and character. Root (2010) found many Multiracial people question their authenticity with their racial/ethnic identification. As Daniel grew older, he changed how he identified to seem more authentic:

“I identify as Multiracial at this point. It is kind of a new thing for me but it best exemplifies being a Latino American but being raised very Caucasian. The Latino side of things wasn’t really explored other than my mom telling me I was Latino. The words and the actions didn’t really connect all the time. A lot of the time, she

would say we are Latino with Latino heritage, but we never did a whole lot there.” (Daniel)

Daniel felt he could not authentically claim his Latino identity, which led him to identify as Multiracial. Some participants reported feeling the need to prove who they were when identifying with their subordinate identity. In particular, they did not want to seem inauthentic for claiming and identifying with that part of their identity. Greg experienced denial from both aspects of his identity (i.e., the White group and Native American group) when claiming his Native American identity:

“Most of my peers, they obviously, initially view me as being a White person. If I want to talk about my German heritage, I usually get lots of good responses. If I start going in the Native American culture, I immediately am going to get that look of, ‘*Okay you're just trying to impress us of your knowledge of some other culture,*’ but really, that’s amongst the Whites. They’re dismissive. The actual Native Americans have treated me with, ‘*You're just trying to attach yourself to something that’s not yours.*’” (Greg, emphasis added)

Both the White group and Native American group questioned Greg’s authenticity for claiming that specific identity. He passed as White and therefore could not identify with the Native identity because his peers depicted it as inauthentic. Theresa mentioned using traditional clothing and jewelry as a way to seem more authentic in relation to her Native American identity:

“[When speaking about her grandfather] He always told me when you want to wear and dress in our clothes and wear a ribbon shirt or you are wearing your earring, then you believe who you are. And know who you are and that is what you are portraying. You are our family and just hold onto that. So wearing my earrings and my necklaces make me feel more real.” (Theresa)

Theresa’s need to feel more real contributed to how authenticity was rooted within the racial/ethnic identity. There were various perceptions on what was seen as an authentic racial/ethnic identity and what was not viewed as an authentic racial/ethnic

identity. Participants who identified with a Native American identity also indicated there was a degree of authenticity in regard to tribal affiliation. “Blood quantum” or “quantum fraction” refers to the degree or fraction of Native American/Indian ancestry a person has (Wilson, 1992). In maintaining an Indian identity, federal recognition is an important aspect within the issue of mixed blood or required “quantum fraction” (Wilson, 1992). Participants who were part of the Native American community experienced the question of authenticity in relation to “blood quantum” and reservation status.

“[In reference to the Native American community] There is an attitude that is pervasive amongst those who live on a reservation as being more authentic.” (Theresa)

“In the United States, you have to prove that you’re of American Indian descent, otherwise, it’s against the law to collect certain ritualistic things like animal parts. Usually under an endangered species thing, but sometimes it’s just they don’t want people going out and making money off it and stuff like that. What I’m trying to get at here is that, we have this religion, if you will, this basic philosophy that our government says you can only practice if you prove you have a certain blood in you. I mean, they just don’t do that with anybody else.” (Greg)

Tribal affiliation (i.e., reservation status and blood quantum) influenced being viewed as authentic or not authentic. For Theresa and Greg, the idea of legitimacy within the Native American community added a new factor that hindered their access in identifying with their Native American identity. Lynn pointed out legitimacy was important in claiming an identity in relation to hiring practices. In particular, she reported that to claim an identity for hiring purposes, it must be authentic:

“My biggest problem with people who identify as mixed is using that identity to get positions based on Affirmative Action. I feel really passionately that if you check the box, you need to be able to prove that is who you are. You must be authentic to your, the part of you that’s a person of color [referencing authenticity toward her Native American identity]. It means that you make a commitment to educate yourself about that part of you. In my situation, I had to reconnect [to]



family. I learned about the social issues that we're facing, not only my tribe, but Native people in this country in general. It was very important for me to learn the history." (Lynn)

Participants' knowledge, exploration, and understanding of their non-White identity/ies were seen as authentic in claiming that identity. Lynn's perspective added a dynamic as to the importance of being true to oneself and learning the history of one's racial/ethnic ancestry. Another aspect of being connected to making honest claims, Jill identified intention being a factor in relation to authenticity:

*"Another thing that comes up when you are filling out forms [I think], 'Is someone going to think I'm trying to gain some sort of privilege? Additional privilege by indicating this on this form? I already get White privilege. Is somebody going to think I'm going to actually get scholarships or get ahead or be hired because I am now putting Multiracial and Biracial on my application?' And so that is also going through my head every time I'm presented with one of these forms. So it's kinda like, 'What do you put down? Why are you even putting something down? What is the motive of the individuals who are asking that? Why do they need to know this information?'" (Jill, emphasis added)*

The questions of authentic factors for people who are racially/ethnically mixed involved knowledge of identity and the intention in claiming that identity. For Native Americans the legitimacy within blood quantum or reservation status was apparent as a factor for authenticity. When examining the concept of authenticity and participants' accounts, the question that became unsettled was, "Can people be authentic if they claim an identity beyond what society designates for them based on societies perceptions?" Within this study, "If people pass as White and society views them as part of the White group, is it authentic to claim a racial/ethnic identity beyond White, especially when there is access to White privilege involved?" Among the participants' responses, direct answers to these questions were not found, but participants' responses scratched the surface on

some facts that kept participants from identifying with certain aspects within their identity. Authenticity within racial/ethnic designation was important as it connected with self-perception of identity and societal acceptance of identity.

### **Theme 3: Burden**

The concept of burden emerged as a theme throughout this study as participants described difficulty in connecting with all facets of their identity. Burden involved the feeling of being weighed down or having a load to bear. Even though some participants felt weighed down and burdened, other participants felt energized as they depicted burden as a duty and responsibility. Lynn and Greg described their difficulty in identifying with the Native American aspect of their identity because they looked, and were perceived as White:

“In a way, I feel like I have to work harder. I’m glad I do and it is that part of me that needs to prove that I’m dedicated. If you’re going to claim it and you’re going to own it, you have to be willing to give back.” (Lynn)

“My thinking is that our burden as White people is to constantly be aware of the history we have, that our ancestors took. And we need to, if we are good people, we need to constantly see that done away with. And look after our brothers and sisters of color, if you will, wherever you might find them and make sure they’re not being discriminated against.” (Greg)

Both Lynn and Greg pointed out the need to dedicate more energy to exploration of their identity development, but ultimately were energized and felt as it was part of their responsibility to do so. Emma discussed a sense of loss when passing as White because society viewed her as the single, monoracial White identity versus her entire identity:

“It definitely feels like it’s taking something away from you when people assume that’s all you are or don’t recognize the other facets of your identity. I have to question who I am and what I am more than most people.” (Emma)

Jensen (2005) describes White people's burden as understanding the problem and doing something about it. For people with racially/ethnically mixed identity and the ability to pass as White, there may be opportunities to engage in more conversations clarifying or justifying their identity, which could be represented as a burden for them.

**Guilt.** The concept of guilt emerged as a category within the theme of burden. Guilt refers to the idea of being responsible for something (Jensen, 2005). Participants identified guilt with being able to pass as White. Laura described how she felt guilt because of varying to skin tones and color shades:

“Somebody that passes carries a guilt load because I could know somebody just a shade darker than I, [who] can speak the language and carries that inflection into their English is going to be questioned, is going to be tokenized. So when you are the one passing, you know that you are taking the privilege that is being given to you. It makes me hyperaware that the next person in the room is going to be subjected to more scrutiny than I am.” (Laura)

Laura felt guilty that she could pass and that other people with darker skin complexions could not feel at ease. Lynn talked about how the guilt of skin tone was within her family dynamics:

“When I was younger there was quite a bit of guilt around that [referring to passing as White], especially in terms of my sisters dealing with overt racism all the time.” (Lynn)

Lynn's sisters were darker than her and she felt guilty for their mistreatment and constantly dealing with racism. The sense of guilt for having a lighter skin tone was a shared feeling for many of the participants. Laura and Lynn spoke about how they felt responsible for the different treatment other people and their relatives received because of darker complexions. The concept of guilt was also connected to authenticity. For Daniel, the feeling of guilt when he identified with his subordinate identity was never-ending:

“Most of the forms are still monoracial, so I will check Latino typically. But I do have hesitation with that because while, yes, it is part of my heritage, part of me feels guilty because I don’t feel Latino half the time. I know especially when everyone talks about diversity, jobs, checking a box is a good step up. But again, there are days when, personally, I may not qualify for that because I don’t practice. My first instinct is the guilt.” (Daniel)

Daniel discussed how guilt manifested toward not feeling authentic with aspects of his identity. Jensen (2005) identifies the concept of guilt as irrational and counterproductive. Jensen (2005) found guilt can lead to complacency and, because of complacency, people do not feel accountable for the world in which they live. If people stay within the guilt concept, it is not beneficial for them or for the people suffering from oppression. When the participants were able to transition their guilt into action, it led to the category of education.

**Education.** The concept of education emerged from the data within the theme of burden. Many participants reported the belief that it was their personal responsibility to educate people (i.e., friends, family, classmates, and random people they did not know) in areas of race, ethnicity, racism and White supremacy, and White privilege:

“I feel a responsibility to create a world I want to live in and I get bitter about that. It is my responsibility to defend where things are and how things should be. I think that goes back to being a minority, though, no matter which one part you are, you already put on the defensive and have to rationalize and justify.” (Daniel)

“I do that by being as vocal as I can. Obviously my being White does not automatically grant me an audience or influence that I matter. But I do believe that I have a responsibility to be as vocal about problems that I see. I do think that my being White possibly gets me audiences that I would not get otherwise to engage those audiences with this information that they might not otherwise come by or know about.” (Greg)

Participants felt a person sense of responsibility and felt energized by that feeling as it could create change. Both Daniel and Greg discussed their responsibility to educate.

Lynn identified the opportunity to navigate social circles while educating:

“I think that folks who are Multiracial sometimes feel like they can’t speak for either population or pieces of who they are. I don’t have a problem with that and I sometimes get a little tired of always having to be the one who’s got a foot in each world. Who is responsible for being the bridge between the two populations and educating? I think a lot of folks who are bi- or Multiracial probably get put into that position quite a bit in the classroom, especially when it is a situation where people are learning about issues of race and racism and privilege.” (Lynn)

For Lynn, the responsibility to educate on the multiple aspects of her identity could be burdensome, but she also referenced having opportunities to educate in areas of both oppression and privilege. Most participants referenced their individual burden, however the degree to which they felt responsible for educating varied among the participants. Chris discussed his feeling of education not mattering with random people he did not know:

“Out in public, I don’t know that person, so I don’t care. And if that’s the way they’re going to think about it, my stopping and saying something to them, it’s going to be confrontational and I don’t mind, really, in a public setting like that, with strangers. It’s not going to change their mind. It might actually make things worse.” (Chris)

Chris continued his explanation about the burden of feeling the need to education by pointing out he would feel more responsible toward people if they were friends of his or in a class:

“If I’m in a class, like a class I took where some people weren’t quoting a book but used the term Negroes. I thought, *‘Alright, I’m just going to wait. Give it another class or two to see and if this continues then, I’ll have to say something.’* And so, in my case, when I encounter someone who exhibits ignorance, unless it’s just a passing public thing, there is a point in me making any comment. Any

education is better than nothing, than perpetuated ignorance, which is what they are wallowing in.” (Chris, emphasis added)

As Chris felt some education was better than no education with people he was somewhat invested in, Kayla shared the same belief that the responsibility to educate was something she did with people with whom she believed she would eventually have a connection:

“If it is somebody I am going to be close friends with or that I am just meeting and we are going to be personal with each other, then I would probably tell them. [In reference to informing them about mixed identities]” (Kayla)

The concept of when to educate arose in relation to the concept of choice. Participants were able to select if they educated or not. Therefore, although participants may feel burdened, they could choose whether or not to make it their personal responsibility. Jill and Theresa discussed their thoughts about educating in relation to burden and privilege, as there was a balance between both. Jill also identified her ability to choose when to educate and when to not educate:

“I realized that there’s a learning opportunity and there’s different ways to approach people so that they can actually get more out of the encounter. I am not going to say that I do that all the time because I have to choose my battles. I also get tired and then there are just some instances where I just don’t really want to go there. Not in every situation do I challenge that.” (Jill)

Jill discussed the responsibility to educate other people as something optional. She could choose when to engage and when to not engage. For Theresa, the burden of educating was expressed in relation to loss of access and privilege:

“If I stand up and make a comment about a joke or anything to do with racism or something, then I will see a change. *‘Oh, I better watch what I say in front of her.’* For me, I have realized it will always be about education and explaining, even when White people shut me out and [do] not listen.” (Theresa, emphasis added)

Scholars describe the possible risk of loss of access to the White dominant group as being a “race traitor” (“Race Traitor,” 1993). A “race traitor” describes someone who speaks out and against his or her White group membership (“Race Traitor,” 1993). Race traitors among the White group understand how Whiteness perpetuates injustice and are committed to deconstructing White group dominance and power (“Race Traitor,” 1993). Once someone has been deemed a race traitor, his or her effectiveness in educating and being listened to by the White dominant group has the potential to be minimized or limited. It is possible the White dominant group would no longer listen to or associate a race traitor with the White group. Therefore, race traitors have a potential risk of loss of White group membership and White privilege. Theresa remarked that the potential loss of access would not deter her from her continual dedication to educate.

Although education was depicted as a burden, it was also seen as an opportunity. Racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White have a potential risk of loss of White group membership and White privilege by educating and taking responsibility, however, it is highly contingent upon context and situation. What this means is participants can be re-afforded White group membership and White privilege if the context were to change or be a new situation. Therefore, even though attempting to educate may be a burden, failure to do so can coincide with privilege; it is a privilege to be able to decide when to educate and when to not educate.

### **Summary**

Through the qualitative survey and interview process, participants were able to share their various stories and experiences regarding their mixed racial/ethnic identity,

their ability to pass as White, and their association with White privilege. From the data collection, the themes that emerged from the study were (a) White privilege, (b) navigating social circles, and (c) burden. The categories found within each theme support that people who were racially/ethnically mixed could pass as White, depending on societal designation and physical appearance. The findings also supported people who pass as White, to some degree, were aware of and identify with having White privilege. Chapter 5 addresses the themes and categories in relation to the original research questions. Also included in Chapter 5 are this researcher's recommendations for future research and practice.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Exploring the experiences of racially/ethnically mixed people with White ancestry has led to a dynamic understanding of the relationship of passing as White and White privilege. This relationship is important because it reveals the complexity of accessing and being part of various dominant and subordinate group memberships and the factors that support and inhibit that access. To assess the findings in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter 1, a brief overview of the study, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the implications, and suggested recommendations for future research are presented in this chapter.

### **Summary of the Study**

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of passing as White and White privilege among racially/ethnically mixed people at a four-year public land grant university located in the northwestern region of the United States. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. Do Multiracial/ethnic people identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstance, pass as White?
2. Do Multiracial/ethnic people, who can and do pass as White, identify with having White privilege?
3. Is there a connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege?

This researcher used qualitative inquiry to gain a broad understating of the experiences of people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity. Participants were identified by purposive and snowball sampling. Through qualitative surveys, this researcher engaged in investigating the concept of passing as White. A research team evaluation was used as

an additional dynamic to understanding the concept of passing as White. One-on-one interviews were then conducted with 10 participants to explore the interrelationship among Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The collected data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify the major themes. The themes that emerged from the data were (a) White privilege, (b) navigating social circles, and (c) burden. Several categories within those themes became apparent. Findings supported the initial research questions posed in Chapter 1.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study revealed the intersectionality among the concepts of Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege. The participants shared their unique stories and experiences involving these topics, which led to the findings and analysis of the data. The following section provides an explanation of the findings based on the original research questions.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was, “Do Multiracial/ethnic people identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstances, pass as White?” Participants identified with being able to pass as White, although there were considerable distinctions among their abilities to do so. Most participants identified with a monoracial identity when they were children and did not have a conception of a Biracial, Multiracial, or mixed identity designation. Of the monoracial identities selected during adolescence, most participants identified with a White identity. This identification was based on the children having

been raised by members of the White side of their family or they were unaware they had another racial/ethnic identity.

Some participants who were socialized into White culture became aware of their racial/ethnic mixed identity when peer or society assignment created awareness. This awareness was the result, then, of their family, friends, classmates, or strangers having told them they were something different than only White. The other participants, who were not informed of their racial/ethnic identity until a later discovery, depicted themselves as any other child and “normal.” This assumption of commonality suggests that their racial/ethnic identity was unexplored. It also suggests they were depicted as having a White identity because any other racial designation would not be depicted as “normal.” Once participants were made aware of their mixed racial/ethnic identity, most participants began to explore their identity. Some participants continued to identify with a White identity. Some participants stopped identifying with their White identity and identified instead as their non-White identity. Still, participants seemed to ignore the Biracial, Multiracial, or mixed aspect of their racial/ethnic identity until later years of their racial/ethnic identity exploration.

Most participants became aware of and began to explore their Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed identity once the peer or societal perception of their identity was questioned or challenged. This means that the participants’ initial designation of their racial/ethnic identity conflicted with the societal perceptions of their identity. Participants found the most influential factor to this incongruence was physical appearance. Overwhelmingly, lighter complexion or skin color contributed to passing as White.

Participants also mentioned eye color and hair texture and color as important factors in physical appearance and ability to pass as White.

The participants described their ability to pass as White or having a White appearance inhibited their ability to identify with non-White identities. Other factors emerged that led participants to identify with having the ability to pass as White. The second most common factor in participant's ability to pass as White was socialization of White culture. Participants who were raised by family members with White ancestry, had an upbringing focused on White culture, and/or received education that was set within a predominately White institution, were found to have a greater ability to pass as White. Other factors relative to ability to pass as White that emerged sporadically in participants' responses were name, language, knowledge or celebration of subordinate culture, and nationality.

Generally, participants who identified with more than one race or ethnicity in this study identified as being able to pass as White. Many of them wanted to be depicted as Biracial, Multiracial, and of mixed identity, but understood certain characteristics, specifically physical appearance and skin tone, prevented them from being depicted as such without question or confrontation. The participants' awareness and confidence of their proclaimed racial/ethnic identity was determined, in large part, on how they engaged in conflicting the societal perceptions of their racial/ethnic identity. Thus, participants had the ability to proclaim their racial/ethnic identity without influence from societal designation.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was, “Do Multiracial/ethnic people, who can and do pass as White, identify with having White privilege?” Drawing upon the findings, many of the participants identified with having White privilege. The participants that were able to pass as White could fit in and be associated with the White group. Because of this dominant group membership, racially/ethnically mixed people who can pass as White were afforded access to benefits and social rewards.

Even though most participants were aware of the privileges associated with being perceived as White, they had difficulty naming the ways in which they personally were privileged. Many of the participants discussed benefits and social rewards in generalities. Most participants were able to identify their association with the White group led them to be depicted and viewed as “normal.” Participants articulated the benefits of normalcy as not being questioned, being left alone, and belonging to the White group membership. In addition, some participants were able to identify the benefits of receiving preferential treatment and not being harmed through their passing as White.

Overall, participants who identified with more than one race or ethnicity and could pass as White acknowledged and identified with being able to access the White group and being afforded White privilege. Although privilege may be a difficult concept to explore, participants were able to identify with the ways in which they received advantages. Many of the participants did not want the privileges afforded to them and felt burdened by being able to pass as White. Other participants reported the belief that having access to the White group could lead to the opportunity to deliver education,

through which they could advocate for racial justice. Although White privilege awareness and development varied among all the participants, participants identified being on a continual journey of self-exploration to understanding their passing as White in relation to White privilege.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 was, “Is there a connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege?” The correlation between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege was difficult to ascertain through participant responses. To examine the interrelationship, this researcher examined the findings of the study as a whole. Based on the findings, some categories in the research could be construed to have a correlation among Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege. The first connection was made between the categories identifying with White privilege and color gradation. Identifying with White privilege was a category within the first theme, White privilege. Color gradation was a category within the second theme, navigating social circles. The second association was the category of choice, which was also within the theme of White privilege. These two examples emphasize the connection between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege.

Color gradation refers to physical appearance, specifically complexion or skin color. This category related to identifying with White privilege because participants believed that their skin color allowed them access and gave them the ability to navigate into and within the White group, thus affording them access to White privilege.

Participants described experiences when their skin tone was slightly darker (e.g., tan skin color during the summer) and they would not be seen as White and would encounter questions about their racial/ethnic identity. Therefore, the correlation between Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White and White privilege is highly dependent upon physical appearance, specifically skin tone.

Likewise, the category of choice expressed the relationship between Multiracial/ethnic people that can pass as White and White privilege. Throughout the findings, choice was depicted as having the ability to disclose or not disclose one's racial/ethnic identity. This finding was positioned within the theme of White privilege because people who could pass as White were often associated with White group membership by default. This association equated to White privilege and access to benefits and social rewards. When racially/ethnically mixed people who could pass as White chose to disclose their racial/ethnic identity, there was a potential risk of losing access to White group membership and thus a potential risk of losing the benefits and social rewards of White privilege. However, unless participants continually challenged their White label and advocated for their subordinate identity, they would not be depicted as anything but their White group membership. Participants could receive White group membership and White privilege if they changed context and situation. In general, it was difficult to determine the extent to which the correlation between Multiracial/ethnic people who could pass as White and for whom White privilege existed, but from some of the themes and categories that emerged from their comments, interdependence could be inferred.

### **Implications**

This study explored the concepts of passing as White and White privilege in relation to people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity. To address the paucity of literature and research regarding Multiracial identity, passing as White, and White privilege, this study sought to gain an understanding of these phenomena. This study yielded meaningful research, theoretical, practitioner, and pedagogical implications for institutions of higher education.

In regards to research, the prevalence of Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed identity continues to increase. This implies the population of individuals passing as White will likely increase and diversify. For this reason, it will be important to educators to continue to explore these topics as people will continue to identify as passing for White and be afforded White privilege.

There are also theoretical implications as this study provided a general understanding of people with more than one race/ethnicity who could pass as White and whether they identified with having White privilege. Racial identity development theories and models exist to describe the racial/ethnic identity formation for people (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). The White group has been described in literature as encompassing people who identify as White, pass as White, and are misperceived as White (Wise, 2008). Given the particularly unique participant population, this study revealed and explored the intersectionality among racially/ethnically mixed identity and their identification with passing as White. It will be important to integrate the concept of



passing in Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed heritage identity theories and models in allow the space for people to explore the concepts and factors within a passing identity.

With this awareness, educators and administrators can explore this identity in relation to policies, procedures, and support services on campus. Thus, practitioners can integrate the concept of passing to higher education. First, racial/ethnic identity development diversity workshops or trainings should expand to incorporate the concept of passing within racially/ethnically mixed identity. This attention to support for diversity leads to more awareness of the development of a racial/ethnic existence beyond monoracial identities. Also, monoracial support services (e.g., cultural centers) could be trained and developed to acquire a better understanding of racially/ethnically mixed identification and passing to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes regarding accepted and authentic group membership. This awareness may lead to the elimination of social disenfranchisement of being “not Black enough” or “not Native enough.” Through these measures, a possibility exists to question and challenge racial/ethnic hierarchical continuums and reevaluate how those institutional practices can be remedied.

This study revealed the concept of passing through racial/ethnic identity, which has pedagogical implications. Using the findings discussed in Chapter 4, awareness and acknowledgment was developed regarding the factors that contributed to passing as White. Factors that influence passing were identified and discussed through a racial/ethnic identity. These factors, although applicable to racial/ethnic identity, can be applied toward the general concept of passing to help educators become aware of this phenomenon. Educators will need to be knowledgeable about the concept of passing as

they will need to evaluate how they are personally teaching people to pass and not pass. What are the words, actions, and behaviors educators are teaching (consciously and unconsciously) about passing as something, specifically within this research, passing as White. Also, educators will want to know about the phenomenon of passing as the population continues to diversify.

The concept of passing exists for various social identities (e.g., sexual/affection orientation, class and socioeconomic status, gender, and ability/disability) (Ginsberg, 1996). Because of the ubiquity of passing, general awareness of passing, the factors that contribute to passing, and how passing effects those who pass, can reveal the steps necessary to support people through this journey and self-discovery. Ultimately, if the concept of passing is left unexamined, people who pass will continue to maintain and perpetuate dominant and subordinate group dynamics with or without consciousness of their actions. For this reason, educators should take the initiative to become knowledgeable about the concept of passing. Such knowledge may lead to an evaluation of the norms and routines we engage in that support privilege and oppression toward the amelioration of passive existence.

White privilege exists to sustain dominant and subordinate group dynamics and afford benefits and social rewards to people who are White. This study explored the concept of identifying with White privilege through passing as White identity. The findings indicated that participants who passed as White had access to and did benefit from White privilege. Given this correlation between those who pass as White and the benefits of White privilege, it is worth thoroughly understanding the concept of White

privilege and who has access to White privilege; people are treated differently based on such designations. This study found the people associated with the White group were afforded benefits of White privilege. Thus, this study supports the notion that White group membership and White privilege must continually be examined to conceptualize and eliminate the differential treatment of people. If educators were consciously aware of which groups are afforded White privilege because of assumed group membership, people could be made aware of those associations and challenge the system that supports injustice and inequity.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study examined people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and their ability to pass as White. The concept of passing was not explored beyond a racial/ethnic identity. Because the focus of the study was the ability to pass as White, other social identities in relation to passing were not explored. The concept of White privilege was explored through participants' personal knowledge and identification with the concept. Based on the construction and limited scope of this research, there remains a need for additional research in Biracial, Multiracial, and mixed identity, passing, and White privilege to explore the following areas:

1. What is the relationship between passing for something and not passing for something? What factors do people contribute to passing for something and not passing for something? Is there a variance in these factors among people who identify with being able to pass for something and people who do not believe they can pass for something? An example would be to examine

socioeconomic passing and the relationship between passing for wealthy and not passing for wealthy.

2. If Multiracial/ethnic people can pass as White and identify with having White privilege, what are the connections among their other social identities in this construction?
3. Multiracial/ethnic people who can pass as White were caught between the individual identification of identity and societal perceived identity. What is the relationship between the personal designation of identity and the assigned or perceived societal identity?
4. Are there monoracial/ethnic identities that have the ability to pass as White (e.g., Native American or Asian American racial/ethnic identities)? Do these people recognize and acknowledge their ability to be perceived as White and associated with White group membership?
5. What are the factors that contribute to other passing phenomena (e.g., gender, class and socioeconomic status, sexual/affection orientation, and ability/disability)? Do the factors of passing across various social identities relate to each other? How are they different?
6. What is the relationship between passing and Native American identity? How does authenticity (e.g., blood quantum and reservation status) relate to their concept of passing or not passing?
7. If people pass as White and society view them as part of the White group, is it authentic to claim a racial/ethnic identity beyond White, especially when there

is access to White privilege involved? (As identified in the category of authenticity).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This researcher sought to explore this topic based on the paucity in the literature and research regarding Multiracial/ethnic identity, passing as White, and White privilege. It is her hope the study offers insight and perspective into how perceptions of passing as White and White privilege develop among racially/ethnically mixed people and that the information presented will encourage continued research in these areas. This researcher used an evaluation performed by a research team to bring a new dynamic regarding passing as White. This study has implications for educators because the racial/ethnic demographic will only continue to diversify. This expanded diversification means that the number of people who will be identified and perceived as something other than what they are will continue to grow. For this reason, it is important to continue to examine the concept of passing. Also, based on the literature and the findings, as the White group membership expands, more people are afforded access to benefits and advantages of White privilege. Therefore, research must continue to expose the manifestations of privilege to strive toward justice for all.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Recruitment E-Mail

Date

Dear OSU Community Member,

Hi there. My name is Shannon Quihuiz and I am a graduate student in the Department of Education pursuing a Masters in the College Student Services Administration program.

I am conducting research and looking for individuals who identify

- With more than one race or ethnicity, and
- Believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, you have the ability to “pass” as White.

Do you identify with more than one race or ethnicity?

Do you feel you identify a certain way but are  
labeled differently by society?

Do you constantly have to justify or clarify your identity  
to the people around you?

I am looking for people who want to share their stories with me. Participation includes completion of an intake form, questionnaire, and photograph submission with the opportunity to be re-contacted for an interview.

If you would like to participate in this study or would like more information, please contact me for more information. Thank you for your time and have a wonderful day.

Sincerely,

Shannon Quihuiz  
Graduate Student, College Student Services Administration  
Oregon State University  
(714) 273-1086  
shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu

Principle Investigator: Janet Nishihara  
Director of EOP  
339 Waldo Hall  
janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu  
(541) 737-3928

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

# BROWN ON THE INSIDE

## Multiracial Individuals and White Privilege

Do you identify with more than one race or ethnicity?

Do you feel you identify a certain way but are  
labeled differently by society?

Do you constantly have to justify or clarify your identity  
to the people around you?

Do you believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, you have the  
ability to “pass” as White?

Hi there. My name is Shannon Quihuiz and I am a graduate student in the Department of Education pursuing a Masters in the CSSA program.

I am conducting research and looking for individuals who identify

- With more than one race or ethnicity, and
- Believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, you have the ability to “pass” as White.

I am looking for people who want to share their stories with me. Participation includes completion of an intake form, questionnaire, and photograph submission with the opportunity to be re-contacted for an interview.

If you would like to participate in this study or  
would like more information, please contact  
Shannon Quihuiz at [shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu](mailto:shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu)  
or (714) 273-1086

Principle Investigator: Janet Nishihara  
Director of EOP  
339 Waldo Hall  
[janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu](mailto:janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu)  
(541) 737-3928

### **Appendix C: Standard Response to E-Mail Inquiries**

Dear (name of person),

Thank you for expressing interest in the research study on Multiracial individuals and White privilege. The purpose of this study is to examine if Multiracial individuals identify with being able to, to some degree or under certain circumstance, “pass” as White. This study attempts to discover if there is a connection between Multiracial identity development and White privilege. As the purpose of the study is to learn more about Multiracial individual’s perspectives regarding “passing” as White, societal assumptions and influences and White privilege.

I have attached several documents that should be completed if you would like to participate in this study. I will give you time to review and submit the documents. If you are no longer interested in being a participant in this study, please let me know.

- Informed Consent Form: discusses the study protocol,
- Participant Intake Form: (1) demographic questions, (2) supplemental questions, and (3) photograph submission

If you have any questions regarding the study or attached documents, feel free to contact me through email or by phone with your questions.

Thank you and take care,

Shannon Quihuiz  
Graduate Student, College Student Services Administration  
Oregon State University  
(714) 273-1086  
shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu

Principle Investigator: Janet Nishihara  
Director of EOP  
339 Waldo Hall  
janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu  
(541) 737-3928

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form



### Educational Opportunities Program

Oregon State University, 337 Waldo Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-6405  
T 541-737-3628 | F 541-737-3998 | <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/eop>

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM - 4794

**Project Title:** Brown on the Inside: Multiracial Individuals and White Privilege  
**Principal Investigator:** Janet Nishihara  
**Student Researcher:** Shannon Quihuiz  
**Other Research Staff:** Mamta Accapadi, Eric Hansen, Lauren Plaza, and Tara Riker  
**Version Date:** November 10, 2010

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#### 1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the research team questions about anything that is not clear.

#### 2. WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to interview people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity and believe they have the ability to “pass” as White, to some degree or under certain circumstances. This study attempts to find the relationship between these two concepts.

This study is being conducted by a student researcher for the completion of her thesis.

Up to ten participants will be invited to take part in this study.

#### 3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you identify with more than one race or ethnicity. You also believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, you have the ability to “pass” as White. You must determine for yourself what is to be

included based on your perceptions and preconceived notions of what constitutes as “passing” as White.

#### **4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

This study will have two phases. Phase one involves your participation. You will be asked to complete and submit a participant intake form. The participant intake form includes demographic and supplemental questions, a photograph submission, and a signed consent form. The researcher will use this information for analysis during the first phase.

Phase two involves an interview. During phase two the research team will evaluate and review your submitted information. The research team will then select a diverse pool of participants that have various experiences. Because of this, not all participants from the first phase will be re-contacted for the second phase. Once the research team has determined the participant pool, you may be re-contacted for an interview.

The study activities include questionnaires, photographs, an evaluation, and interviews.

**Photographs:** A photograph of you is required for this study. You can either submit a photograph or have the student researcher take your photograph. You should not enroll in this study if you do not wish to have your photograph submitted to the research team.

**Interview:** You may be re-contacted to participate in an interview. If you decide to accept the invitation, you will be asked to conduct an interview with the student researcher. During the interview you will be asked questions and be given the opportunity to tell your story. After the interview is complete, you will be asked if you would like to do a follow up interview. The follow up interview will occur after the information has been processed. If you give permission, the interviews will be audio recorded.

The student researcher will listen to the audio recording, write out the conversation and information from your interview will be processed.

If you agree to the follow up interview, you will meet with the student researcher for a second time. During this interview you will be asked to validate the findings.

**Audio Recordings:** You will make a choice to be audio recorded during the interviews. If you do not wish to be recorded, the student researcher will take notes during the interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.  
*Initials*



\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio recorded.  
*Initials*

**Study duration:** The first phase of the study, which involves the participant intake form, will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. The second phases of the study, which involves the interview, will be no longer than two hours. You will be re-contacted to participate in the interview. After the study is complete you will have the option to participate in the follow up interview. This interview will take 30 minutes.

**Storage and Future use of data or samples:** The student researcher will label your information. Each label will have your name and a number identification code. Your information will be in a secure and locked file cabinet in the student researcher's home. All materials will be kept in their original format, except for the audio recordings. The audio recordings will be deleted once the writing is complete.

All study related documents, including hard copy and electronic data, will be securely stored by the P.I. for three years post study termination. Upon that time the materials will be archived. The student researcher will also retain and securely store a copy of the data. This copy of the data will contain no personal information and all individual identifiers will be removed to maintain confidentiality. This is a safeguard against unintentional disclosure of individually identifiable information.

The research team will not use your personal information beyond this study. It is possible however the research team may use this study for future conference proposals and/or journal articles. Through these avenues, your personal information and photograph will never be made public. The research team will also provide you a false name to keep your identity confidential and private.

**Study Results:** The study results will be shared with you during the follow up interview. You can also attend the student researcher's thesis presentation.

## **5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the being in the study include:

All reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, inconveniences, and harms do not exceed everyday opinions made about the way you look. Assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices are connected to the way you look.

You will provide personal information to the research team. Therefore, anonymity cannot be ensured because of the submission of personal information and photograph. The research team will however keep your information confidential and private. A possible risk might be accidental disclosure of information that could identify you.

However, this risk has been greatly reduced by training of the research team and keeping all your records confidential. You will be given a false name to protect your identity. The research team will also remove your personal information to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

**email:** The security and confidentiality of information sent by email cannot be guaranteed. Information sent by email can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses.

## **6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, you may have the opportunity to share your story and learn more about your lived experiences.

## **7. WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

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

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

The student researcher will have access to the audio recordings. The student researcher will use the audio recordings to write out what was said. The information will be typed to a computer word processing file. The audio recordings will be kept in a secure and locked file cabinet in the student researcher's home. The student researcher will delete the audio recordings once the writing is complete.

To help ensure confidentiality, we will use your name and a number identification code to collect the data. Once data collection is complete, you will be given a false name. The research team will remove your personal information to maintain confidentiality and privacy. All research materials will be kept in a secure and locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. All computer word processing files will be kept in a password protection coded file.

All study related documents, including hard copy and electronic data, will be securely stored by the P.I. for three years post study termination. Upon that time the materials will be archived. The student researcher will also retain and securely store a copy of the data. This copy of the data will contain no personal information and all individual identifiers

will be removed to maintain confidentiality. This is a safeguard against unintentional disclosure of individually identifiable information.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

## **9. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

## **10. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Shannon Quihuiz at [shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu](mailto:shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu).

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu)

You may also contact the Principle Investigator: Janet Nishihara at [janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu](mailto:janet.nishihara@oregonstate.edu)

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

**11. WHAT DOES MY SIGNATURE ON THIS CONSENT FORM MEAN?**

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

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent)

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

**Appendix E: Participants' Intake Form**

## Contact Information (For Researcher's Use Only)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Contact Availability? (Circle One)      Email      Telephone

## Demographic Questions:

Racial Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender Identity/Expression: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ability/Disability: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual/Affection Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship/Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Spirituality/Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Military/Veteran Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Education Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Socioeconomic Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Political Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Photograph Submission Enclosed: (Circle One)

YES

NO

A photograph of you is required for this study. You can either submit a photograph or have the student researcher take a photograph. You should not enroll in this study if you do not wish to have your photograph submitted to the research team.

Supplemental Questions: (Please submit answers to supplemental questions on a separate sheet of paper.)

1. How did you identify your race/ethnicity when you were a child?
2. Has the way you identified racially/ethnically changed since you were a child? If so, what caused these changes?
3. What language do you speak? What language or languages were you socialized with when you were a child? Have people told you, you speak with an accent? Please explain.
4. How would you describe your family lineage? Can you trace your family tree? Please explain.
5. Please describe your culture. What are some of your family traditions that you have maintained since a young age? What are some family traditions that are important to you but you currently do not practice?
6. Briefly explain your childhood education. This may include, but is not limited to: type of school attended, student demographic, teacher demographic, curriculum highlights and extra curricular activities participated in.
7. How do you think society labels your identity? (Imagine you walked into a room for 30 seconds and then disappeared. What are the characteristics/things other people will identify you by?)
8. Do you believe there is a disconnection between the way you personally identify racially/ethnically and the way society labels you as? Please explain.
9. Do you believe, to some degree or under certain circumstances, you have the ability to “pass” as White? Please explain.
10. What factors did you consider when determining your ability, to some degree or under certain circumstance, to “pass” as White?
11. The term White privilege describes the normalization, advantage, and privilege available to people with light skin and who appear to be White. What are the ideas, themes, and examples you think about or associate with the concept of White Privilege?

12. Why are you interested in this study?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself that hasn't been mentioned?

Return all materials including (1) photographic submission, (2) participant intake form, including (a) completed demographic questions and (b) supplemental questions, and (3) consent form to the student researcher, Shannon Quihuiz at [shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu](mailto:shannon.quihuiz@oregonstate.edu) or 714-273-1086

### Appendix F: Research Team's Evaluation Form

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Numerical Identification Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Research Team Evaluations:

	Criteria	Evaluator Initials		Evaluator Initials		Evaluator Initials	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you believe the participant has the ability to "pass" as White, based on your perceptions and preconceived notions of what White is?	Photograph Submission						
	Participant Intake Form Demographic & Supplemental Questions						
	Comments Section						

Characteristics to consider for Photograph Submission: hue of skin, hair color and texture, eye orientation, lip fullness, cheekbone orientation, among others

Characteristics to consider for Demographic & Supplemental Questions: name, identity and self-disclosure, language and accent, nationality, childhood experiences and family upbringing, education, description of their culture, among others

Professional Research Team Evaluations:



Based on the above findings  
and reviewing the participant's  
application, Do you believe the  
participant has the ability to  
"pass" as White?

Evaluator Initials		Comments Section
Yes		
No		
Evaluator Initials		Comments Section
Yes		
No		

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### Appendix G: Interview Questions

Participant Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Recording Start Time:\_\_\_\_\_ Recording Stop Time:\_\_\_\_\_

Numerical Identification Code:\_\_\_\_\_

**Part I Preliminary Research Information (provide to the participant)**

1. Why the researcher is there,
2. The purpose of the study,
3. Why the participant has been selected,
4. What process their information will undergo,
5. How the researcher will analyze and use their information,
6. How long the interview will take, and
7. Permission to use a recording device.

**Part I Demographic Information**

1. General Information
2. If student:
  - a. What is your year of study?
  - b. What is your major?
  - c. What are you involved in on campus?
3. If faculty or staff:
  - a. What department are you affiliated with?
  - b. What does your job entail?
  - c. What are you involved in on campus?

**Part II Small Talk and Grand Tour**

1. Tell me about what it is like to be a Multiracial individual?

**Part II Identity**

1. How do you identify ethnically or racially?
2. How did you come to identify yourself that way?
3. Which other aspects of your identity are important to you/close to your core?
4. How important is your ethnical or racial identity to you?
5. How does society perceive your identity? (Examples)
6. Why do you believe society perceives your identity in such a way?
7. In which ways, if you choose to, do you combat those perceptions? (Examples)
8. Other thoughts related to your identity?

- Part III      What factors led to their perceptions of White privilege?
1. How do you define White privilege?
  2. What are some examples you associate with White privilege?
  3. Do you identify with having White privilege?
  4. Have you taken any classes, seminars, etc. to explore White privilege?
  5. What do you most contribute as the source of your knowledge of White privilege?
  6. What are the types of conversations you have around White privilege? What creates those conversations? (Examples)
- Part IV      Do Multiracial individuals believe they benefit from White privilege?  
How Multiracial individuals believe they benefit from White privilege?
1. What are the benefits of White privilege?
  2. Do you have distinctions between privilege, unearned assets, and unearned privilege?
  3. Tell me about your experiences with White privilege.
  4. What are the benefits associated with White privilege? (Examples)
  5. Do you believe you benefit from White privilege? Why or Why not? (Examples)
  6. Do you believe society thinks you benefit from White privilege? Why or Why not? (Examples)
- Part V      Do Multiracial individuals feel a burden with containing White privilege?
1. How does the difference, if there is one, between your identity and society's depiction of your identity make you feel? Explain.
- Part VI      General Closing Question
1. Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about?
  2. Would you like to participate in the follow up interview?