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The Social Construction of Racial and Ethnic Identity Among Women of Color from Mixed Ancestry: Psychological Freedoms and Sociological Constraints

Laura Quiros

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG
WOMEN OF COLOR FROM MIXED ANCESTRY: PSYCHOLOGICAL FREEDOMS
AND SOCIOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS

by

LAURA QUIROS

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Laura Quiros

6/5/09   Mimi Abramovitz, DSW
Date   Chair of Examining Committee

6/5/09   Michael Fabricant, Ph.D
Date   Executive Officer

Darrell Wheeler, Ph.D., M.P.A.

Bernadette Hadden, Ph.D.
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG

WOMEN OF COLOR FROM MIXED ANCESTRY: PSYCHOLOGICAL FREEDOMS

AND SOCIOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS

by

Laura Quiros

Adviser: Professor Mimi Abramovitz

In the context of the 21st century, when an increasing number of people cannot be classified by an archaic system based on race, an awareness of the complexities of ethnic and racial identity is more important than ever. This study assists in the development of a critical understanding of the complexity of racial and ethnic identity by exploring the construction of racial and ethnic identity among women of color from mixed ancestry. These women are the offspring of parents from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, their identities—both internally and externally constructed—belie traditional racial and ethnic categories. This population faces unique struggles, as identified in the empirical literature and supported by the data analysis. Women of color from mixed heritages: have been assigned monolithic labels based primarily on their physical appearance; may feel pressured to adopt a single and predetermined ethnic or racial label; and are often researched as one ethnic or racial group. Furthermore, scholars agree that institutional racism has been a constricting force in the construction of identity and identification for ethnic groups of color in the United States. This study is important

because women of color are not always comfortable with the ascribed identity, particularly when it is based on faulty characterizations and when their ethnicity is overlooked. Additionally, this study brings insight to the psychological and social impact of socially constructed identifications.

This study regards race and ethnicity as social constructions, defined by human beings and given meaning in the context of family, community, and society. As such, women of color from mixed ancestry find themselves in the middle of the psychological freedoms and sociological constraints of identity construction within the dominant society. As a result, they develop management techniques for integrating components of self and for managing the freedoms and constraints in social constructions of race and ethnicity.

This is a subject of pivotal importance to multiple fields of inquiry as well as one having significant educational, clinical, and programmatic implications. Among the implications for social work practice and pedagogy are the need for critical reflection, increased awareness, and cultural diversity.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Research

Within the United States, the construction of identification for women of color

from mixed ancestry is a complex and fluid process. These women are the offspring of

parents from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, their identities—both

internally and externally constructed—belie traditional racial and ethnic categories. The

resulting complexity stems from their multifaceted heritage, from their exposure to

diverse values, roles, norms, behaviors, and languages and from living in a White

dominated society that makes race the dominant marker of identity and where White is

associated with power and privilege and color carries stigma. The combination of these

realities complicates the women's identity development (and the development of racial

and ethnic consciousness) in ways not faced by mono-racial or mono-ethnic individuals.

Women of color from mixed heritage face unique struggles. On the one hand,

United States society typically assigns monolithic identifications to individuals and

groups primarily based on their race, which is based on physical characteristics such as

skin color, hair texture, and body shape. In contrast, ethnicity, which refers to shared

religion, language, food, geographic origin and ancestry or other social characteristics, is

less detectable and more likely to be ignored, overlooked, misread or silenced.

Undeniably, women of color of mixed ancestry are pressed to adopt a single and

predetermined racial or ethnic label, (Root, 1992, 1998, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994;

Wallace, 2001; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002, 2001).

Racial and ethnic identifications can intersect or diverge, however, when it comes

to labeling women of color of mixed heritage, race trumps ethnic identity. In effect,

women are constrained by the social constructions designed by those in power. For example, a woman with dark skin and curly hair may self-identify ethnically as Jamaican and racially as Black, but because of her physical features most people see her simply as African American. In another example, a woman with similar physical features may self-identify ethnically as Puerto Rican and racially as mixed race, yet wider social would label her African American based on her physical features. This attribution becomes problematic not only because it is inaccurate, but also because in American society, Blackness is associated with deeply held beliefs of stigma and inferiority while in contrast, Whiteness represents power and privilege (Aspen Institute, 2004).Although legally sanctioned forms of racism no longer exist, its historical legacy and the resultant racial inequities remain embedded in the nation's political, economic and socio-cultural institutions. This "structural racism" (Aspen, 2004) disturbs the construction of identity for women of color from mixed ancestry because they must contend with the negative meanings associated with the notion of race. They regularly run into demonizing stereotypes and other mischaracterizations based on racial and/or ethnic traits that continue to permeate the entire social order and act to justify both social exclusion and the unequal treatment of women of color. In the final analysis, this study regards race and ethnicity as social constructions, defined by human beings and given meaning in the context of family, community, and society (Root, 1992, 1998, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Wallace, 2001; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002, 2001).

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research explores the social construction of identity among women of color with mixed heritages. This chapter presents the literature on the theories used to study identity formation as they bear on the formation of racial and ethnic identity and racial and ethnic identification. After reviewing and critiquing traditional psychological theories of identify formation, it turns to the ecological approach and multidimensional models of racial and ethnic development that help to operationalize the concept of social construction. Even here, while theories of racial and ethnic identity formation for women of color exist, few discuss the experience of women of color with mixed ancestry. Therefore, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the theory of social construction in relation to the study of the racial and ethnic identity and identification of women of color from mixed ancestry. In the end this research applies the ecological approach and existing multidimensional theories of racial and ethnic identity formation to the experience of women of color from mixed ancestry.

Traditional Psychological Theories

The study of identity formation in the United States is commonly attributed to the developmental psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1963). The foundational work on identity has roots in traditional psychology where identity is understood as a more general sense of self. Erikson defined identity formation as (1968), "a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his/her communal culture" (p. 22). Inherent in this definition is the acknowledgement that the process of identity formation involves both the

individual and his or her membership in a cultural group and in society. Yet, this framework focuses exclusively on developmental issues and rarely acknowledges the many life changes and experiences that shape one's identity and identification (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Erikson (1963) studied identity development through eight developmental stages beginning at birth and continuing through adulthood. Each stage consists of a process of exploration and commitment to important parts of identity with the critical developmental task faced during adolescence. Central to the Eriksonian model is the resolution of a psychosocial crisis during the adolescent stage of development. According to this theory, the resolution of crisis during the adolescent stage has positive psychological outcomes and is key to a sound ego in adulthood**.**

Erikson's (1963) theory of identity development may serve as a reference point, but the limitations in this theory are particularly relevant to women of color from mixed ancestry. To begin with, the positive resolutions at each stage of development favor male socialization and virtually ignore women's development. Studies in support of Erikson's theory are criticized because of his over reliance on White, male and middle-class samples. Gilligan (1982) has written extensively on Erikson's (1963) theory of life-span development as a male-oriented model that focuses on issues of separation and individuation as opposed to relationship and care that Gilligan (1982) believes are central to women's development (Kroger, 2002).Moreover, traditional psychological theorists such as Erikson view identity as a static process, one that can be mapped and empirically measured in linear terms. Yet, racial and cultural identity is a unique and dynamic process whereby individuals are likely to re-examine their ethnicity and their race throughout their lifetime (Phinney, 1990). Root's (1990) extensive work with multiracial

individuals serves as an example of the limitations of the traditional psychological frameworks. Qualitative studies with multiracial individuals revealed the fluidity of identity among this population depending upon their immediate surroundings, their unique history and daily experiences. Social change such as the manifestation of racism and changing environments further affects the construction of personal identification. "Any individual who witnesses the evolution of social change may also witness change in his or her own self-view" (Root, 1992, p. 33).

Despite the limitations in his work, the literature states that Erikson did have an awareness of the role of culture in identity. McGoldrick (1982) notes that Erikson's description of the final stage of human development included the process of coming to terms with cultural identity: "for only an identity safely anchored in the 'patrimony' of a cultural identity can produce a workable psychological equilibrium" (p. 412). However, this theoretical model of identity development is limiting and inadequate to describe racial and ethnic identity development. For individuals of mixed heritage, the construction of a personal identity falls outside of the traditional identity discourses and roadmaps. As stated by Root (1998), "identity development, validation, and transformation are contextually informed by people in situations within which they interpret their interpersonal transactions through political, gendered, and class positions within the region's history of race relations" (p. 240).

Traditional Theories of Racial Identity

The conception and construction of race on the macro level has implications for racial identification on the micro level. The traditional theories from developmental and counseling psychology on racial identity (such as William Cross' *Nigrescence models*)

refer to racial identity as a collective identity in combination with the individual's perception of the commonalities he or she shares with a particular group based on a common heritage (Helms, 1990). Black racial identity is conceptualized in the psychology literature as the process of accepting and affirming Black identity in an American context (Vandiver, 2001). Therefore, the achievement of such identity is in accordance with one's ascribed group membership.

William E. Cross Jr. (1971) formulated the original *Nigrescence* theory of racial identity development during the Civil Rights movement. This social movement contributed to the creation of a collective identity among Black Americans. Nigrescence is the French term for *turning Black*, reflecting the model's description as the psychological process of an American individual moving from a place of Black self-hatred to Black self-acceptance (Vandiver, 2001). The Cross (1971) model on Black racial identity development is cited as one of the first models of ethnic identity and has played a major role in the conceptualization of African Americans' racial identity (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). The literature and subsequent research supports that Cross' (1991) nigrescence model is straightforward, easy to understand, and, as a result, has face validity (Vandiver, 2001). Yet, similar to traditional theorists, Cross (1971) used a conventional linear theory to study racial identity development and assumed racial identity was a universal process among African Americans. Helms (1990) explains that this model assumes that one's Black racial identity develops regardless of one's ethnicity. "One's ostensible 'Africanness'" Helms (1990) adds, "is also assumed to account for one's psychosocial development regardless of ethnicity" (p. 4). Cross revised the original theory in 1991 in an effort to include a multiple identity cluster at each stage of identity

development (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). This model was further expanded in 2000. The revised models allow for the diversity of internalized identities beyond race. However, this latter model still falls short of addressing the unique experiences and voices of racially identified ethnicities of color.

Traditional Theories of Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a component of the more general definition of identity formation as described by Erikson (1968). The definitions of ethnicity vary throughout the literature (Phinney, 1990). Broadly defined within the psychological literature, ethnicity is most often used synonymously with culture. Transmitted over generations by family and reinforced by the surrounding community, ethnicity can influence how a person acts, behaves, and what he or she believes. Researchers cite psychologist Jean Phinney's conceptualization of ethnic identity as the most widely used definition (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). Phinney (1990) defines ethnic identity as a dynamic and multidimensional construct that refers to one's sense of self as a member of an ethnic group. She includes self-identification, subjective feelings of ethnic belonging, and positive and negative feelings towards one's ethnic grouping in this definition (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Phinney, 1990).

The psychological literature often merges race and ethnicity into a single category. For example, Phinney (1996) describes ethnicity as "broad groupings of Americans on the basis of both race and culture of origin" (Phinney, 1996, p. 919). However, race and ethnicity are fundamentally distinct because race varies among ethnic groups. In addition, the differences in race among ethnic groups impact group

membership. One may identify with an ethnic group but may not be wholly accepted or recognized as a member due to their perceived race (Wallace, 2001).

In reviewed articles on ethnic identity formation published in English since 1972 (books, chapters dissertations or unpublished works were excluded from the review), Phinney (1990) found seventy empirical articles that focused on ethnic identity in adolescents or adults. Although the articles varied in terms of the meaning, the measurement, and the study of ethnic identity, they all focused just on ethnic identity among "minority" or non-dominant group members. European ethnic identity was included in this group. The majority of these studies focused on ethnic identity development among White ethnic groups, specifically Jewish Americans, then Black Americans, with less research on Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians.

Findings from Phinney's (1990) extensive review of literature revealed several gaps and limitations in the existing research on racial and ethnic identity. For one, the research on the heterogeneity within the Black population is generally neglected in the study of ethnic identity (Phinney, personal communication, March 16, 2006). Second, definitions of ethnic identity vary widely throughout the research such that a universal definition does not appear to exist indicating confusion or disagreement about this topic. Third, approximately half of the studies in Phinney's (1990) reviewed research did not assess ethnic *self-identification*. In some studies the researchers knew the ethnicity of the participants, while in other studies the researcher identified the participants as members of a group. None of the studies with Black participants asked for a self-identification. Furthermore, Phinney's (1990) research indicates that participants in these studies reported that a single label inaccurately described one's ethnic identity and was

particularly problematic for individuals from multiethnic and multiracial backgrounds. Finally, Phinney (1990) suggests that ethnic self-identification is an important aspect of ethnic identity—one that would be best assessed with open-ended questions. For example, Wallace's (2001) study of mixed-heritage high school and college students from diverse backgrounds captures the complexity of racial and ethnic identification by allowing participants to self-identify. In Wallace's (2001) study, racial and ethnic identification was collected by a survey featuring racial categories with multiple ethnic subcategories as well as open-ended spaces for providing specific information about ethnic heritage (Wallace, 2001). If students were unable to locate their racial and/or ethnic identities in the predetermined boxes, they also had the option to self-identify, removing the pressure to adopt a single and predetermined racial and ethnic label and giving them the agency to express their multiple heritages.

The psychological literature on ethnic identity also fails to address the existing intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in identity formation. A few researchers, such as Chae (2001/2002), Frankenberg (1993) and Phinney (1990), report significant differences between male and female identity development among racial and ethnic groups (Chae, 2001/2002; Phinney, 1990), but on the whole the discussion is very limited. As Frable (1997) adds, however, that gender identity research tends to exclude mixed-heritage individuals. Chae's (2001/2002) general review of literature integrating gender, ethnicity, and identity formation offers a more holistic view of identity formation. Chae's (2001/2002) literature review highlights the effects of gender socialization and gender role expectations on male and female ethnic identity formation. According to this compiled research, women are more likely to develop strong ties to ethnic heritage and

tradition compared to males. Yet, as noted by Chae (2001/2002), the socialization process for males and females is different according to the ethnic groups. The socialization practices of specific ethnic groups were not included in this literature review because of the limited studies that focus on socialization and identity. Finally, Chae's (2001/2002) reviewed research found that, regardless of gender, the context of the environment influences identity development among ethnic minorities.

The traditional psychological literature also highlights the complex relationship between ethnic identity and psychological adjustment. Developmental ethnic identity models explore the extent to which an individual has "achieved" a secure sense of ethnic identity throughout their life in a process of exploration and commitment to various stages of development (Phinney, 1990; Marcia, 1980). Studies derived from developmental models support the prediction that higher self-esteem is found in individuals with achieved ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). Although psychologists such as Phinney do not set standards for the level of ethnic involvement that is needed for a person to achieve ethnic identity, they seem to assume that individual reach a universal resting place where identity is fixed and stable. While Phinney (1990) states that each ethnic group has its own distinct history, tradition, and values, she addresses that such variations further complicate the difficulty in both assessing and measuring ethnic identity.

Critique of Traditional Psychological Theories

To summarize, the traditional psychological models of identity formation are problematic for understanding identity construction among women of color from mixed

ancestry in three distinct ways: identity is viewed as a linear process, the Western

emphasis on achievement of a singular racial or ethnic identity, and the limited research

on the absence of gender as an additional sociocultural construct impacting the process of

identity development.

First, identity is a fluid process. As discussed, identity can change over a lifetime

in a way that is not reflective of a stage process (Root, 1990). Yet within the traditional

psychological identity models, fluidity in terms of identity is viewed as pathology rather

than a sign of vitality (Wallace, 2004). Second, women of color from mixed heritage are

faced with a multiplicity of identities and may seek simultaneous group membership from

more than one reference group. According to Wallace (2004), this notion of achieved

identity is an example of traditional Western achievement-oriented ethnic and racial

models where an individual is labeled "at-risk" or considered to be "unhealthy" by failing

to identify with, and settle on, a single socially constructed identification. Traditional

models of identity formation contribute to women's pressure to adopt a single and

predetermined racial or ethnic label and add to the mischaracterizations that women of

color from mixed ancestry regularly run into because they do not fit into the conventional

racial and/or ethnic categories. Finally, the traditional psychological theories neglect the

intersectionality of gender and racial and ethnic identity among this population. Women

of color live racially structured lives that impact identity formation in ways not faced by

males of color or their White peers (Frankenberg, 1993). These three critiques support the

move toward the theory of social construction in relation to the study of women of color

from mixed ancestry.

The Social Construction of Identity

The psychological theories that comprise the majority of the studies on ethnic and racial identity formation alone fail to capture the holistic process of racial and ethnic identification of women of color from mixed heritages. Social constructionism may provide a better theoretical fit for several reasons, as this theory is better able to capture the complexity and inherent tensions involved in the construction of identity for this population. Within this study social constructionism, specifically the social construction of race and ethnicity, is analyzed as both a positive and negative force in identity construction. Deconstructing the theory as it relates to identity formation allows the reader to understand the meaning of both the psychological freedoms and sociological constraints faced by women of color from mixed ancestry.

Psychological Freedoms

Social Constructionism highlights the fluidity and dynamism of identity formation within specific social contexts. For women of color from mixed ancestry, identification takes place in the context of society through interpersonal relationships while constantly undergoing reconstruction and redefinition. This means that the racial and ethnic categories people use to identify themselves and others are continually created, inhabited and transformed throughout a person's life course depending on their history and daily experiences. In other words, identity and identification is a social and interactional process. More so, at different times and in different contexts, certain aspects of identity are more relevant than others (Dein, 2006). For example, in a pilot study Root (2000) asked participants what aspects of identity are important to them in the contexts of home, work, school, with friends, in the community, and in a community in which no one

knows them. Root (2000) found that the salient aspects of identity changed depending on the contextual environment. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) refer to this type of identity as a "protean identity," meaning that individuals exercise fluidity in their identity depending on the context of a particular interaction. Landale and Oropesa (2002), note that ethnic and racial identities for Latinos are also subject to change when individuals relocate. "In particular, migrants often encounter different definitions of their racial identities in origin and destination locales" (Landale & Oropesa, 2002, p.234). Furthermore, social constructionism considers the non-singular nature of identity construction by acknowledging the multiplicity of identifications that women may adopt beyond the conventional racial and ethnic categories. In other words, social constructionism creates the space for the opportunity for a fluid personal identification as individuals are able to choose one identity in lieu of another as needed or as desired.

Sociological Constraints

At the same time, racial and ethnic identifications are constructed by those in power. Historically, racial categories have been limited to White, Black, Hispanic and Asian. For example, Americans of Caribbean ancestry are often ascribed a single identity—Black—which conflates race and ethnicity (Nagel, 1994). Black is typically used as a "catch-all" designation for people of color when, in fact, Black people do not always share group membership with others of similar skin color. As Hadden (2002) suggests in her research on HIV prevention with Black immigrants, "HIV prevention strategies need to be cognizant of the fact that Blacks are not a homogenous population with a single culture and ignore historic and contemporary differences within the group" (p.78). In Root's (1992) book, *Racially Mixed People in America*, Michael Thornton

notes of the diversity within people from African ancestry, "African heritage equals being Black because we as a society say it is so, although Blacks are realistically a number of diverse people—Jamaican, Ethiopian, Nigerian, and so on" (p. 323).

Similarly, women from Puerto Rican and Dominican ancestry with racially mixed backgrounds are often ascribed a single identity of Hispanic, Latina or even "Spanish," thereby reducing them to a single ethnic category and silencing their complexities. Yet heterogeneity is also found within the Latino culture. Although Latinos may share some cultural similarities, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, and Cubans, for example, have unique characteristics and histories that set them apart from one another. Gracia (2007) suggests that the use of ethnic labels leads people to assume that ethnic groups are homogeneous, forgetting obvious differences among the members of the groups and sometimes of subgroups within the groups. Stephan and Stephan (1989) found that when individuals were given the choice to select more than one ethnic identity, multiple ethnic identities clearly emerged among Hispanics in New Mexico and among a sample of various mixed heritage individuals in Hawaii. The ways in which Latinos choose to identify differ across cultural groups depending on the context of their environment, their skin color and their experiences with discrimination (Landale & Oropesa, 2002). As stated by Campbell and Rogalin (2006), some Latinos may choose to emphasize their ethnic and national origin, whereas others choose the pan-ethnic category of Latino or Hispanic as an identifying label. This perceived identification and limited choice of labels presents a struggle for women whose personal identities are multifaceted and therefore fall outside, on the border, or in the margins of the socially constructed dominant and mainstream labels (Anzaldua, 1999).

Social constructionism recognizes external forces that constrict identity formation (Burr, 2003). Sociocultural conditions such as racism and sexism and the limited menu of racial and cultural categories presented in dominant society restricts women's choice in deciding which labels and practices to adopt and further impacts their welfare and struggle to claim a personal identity. This cohort of women has grown up amidst variegated worlds, and as a result their personal racial and cultural identity is typically very different from what outsiders perceive it to be. In fact, a mixed method study by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) of fourteen Biracial participants, ranging in age from 18 to 22, revealed that more than half of the participants who identified themselves as Biracial (as opposed to exclusively Black or White) experienced a chasm between their self-understanding of their identity and society's perception of their identity. As the researchers explain, these individuals self-identify as Biracial, but the "social world fails to validate their chosen category of self-understanding" (p.44). The outsider tends to take the complexity of such identification for granted and assigns labels to these women based on their physical appearance (skin color, hair texture, body shape, etc.) and the dominant White, middle-class culture's stereotypic manifestations of identification.

Consequently, social constructionists question the extent to which women can freely construct their personal racial and cultural identity within the context of their multifarious environments within American society (Nagel, 1994). Debate remains as to how much personal agency women are afforded to critically reflect and exercise some choice in their personal construction of identity.

Social constructionists locate the creation of identity within the social realm by taking into account the perceptions of the identifier as well as the psychology of the

person being identified within the social realm. It is within this analysis that social

constructionism creates both the space for a fluid and flexible personal identification

while restricting and constraining the lives of people of color of mixed heritage.

Identity Through a Social Construction Lens

The ecological approach to identity formation and specific multidimensional

models of identity development reviewed next are examples of identity models that locate

identity formation in the realm of social constructionism and offer a paradigm of identity

formation that includes both individual and sociological complexities. The social

constructionism frameworks acknowledge diverse and subjective definitions of

identification and reject any core features or proprieties that individuals from similar

cultural backgrounds may be expected to possess within society (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387).

Through this lens, the diversity among racial and cultural groups is recognized and

universality among individuals and groups is not assumed (Reynolds & Pope, 1991).

The ecological approach to identity development and the multidimensional

models of identity development that follow—Root's Model of Identity Resolution, the

Multidimensional Identity Model, and King and DaCosta's Faces of Race—focus on the

context of the environment and assume that identities can change throughout an

individual's life cycle. That is, they are not fixed. Indeed, writes Root (1990),

"multidimensional models of identity will not be perplexed that phenotype, genotype, and

ethnicity do not necessarily coincide with or predict identity" (p. 6). Rockquemore and

Brunsma (2002), for example, report that individuals from mixed racial backgrounds

often adopt identity types that vary with their unique history and social contexts. They

note that racial identity for individuals from mixed racial ancestry is "malleable, rooted in

both macro and micro social processes, and that it has structurally and culturally defined parameters" (p. 115). In addition, Rockquemore (2002) and Root et al. (1998) include the role of the external identifier, adding that mixed-race individuals often perceive themselves differently from how others define them, that is they may assume or accept a public or an ascribed identity, that differs from a private identity.

Ecological Approach

The ecological approach to identity development considers the economic, social, familial and political environments in which individuals appear to seek a sense of self, sometimes repeatedly, at different times throughout their lifetime (Rockquemore & Delgado, 2009). These environments are fraught with discrimination, marginality and ambiguity, all of which constrain the process of identity development and racial and ethnic identification (Root, 1990). At the same time, this approach also allows for flexibility in self-identification. As stated by Rockquemore and Delgado (2009), "it is only the ecological approach that allows for contextual shifting of identities, multiple simultaneous identities, and no racial identity" (p.23). Essentially, the ecological approach recognizes the sociological constraints and psychological freedoms inherent in social constructionism.

Root's (1990, 1996) model of racial identity development uses the ecological approach as a framework for understanding identity construction among Biracial individuals. This model considers the environments in which individuals interact as factors in their identity resolutions. Furthermore, Root's (1990, 1996) approach acknowledges the various way individuals may choose to identify throughout their lifetime depending on the context of the environment.

Root's Model of Identity Resolution

Root's (1990) model of identity resolution challenges traditional linear models and offers a new framework for identity development. This model was developed for people with different types of "other" status. According to Root (1990), the question of self-definition produces internal conflicts within multiracial individuals. Root (1990) further states that, "the strongest recurring conflict at critical periods of development will be the tension between racial components within one self" (p. 198). Multiracial and *multiethnic* backgrounds are likely to experience a similar tension, as they too are ascribed "other" status and are faced with a multitude of heritages.

Root (1990) explains that in the early stages of identity development, individuals are likely to compartmentalize their different components of self, alternate between aspects of their heritages, and give attention to different parts of self during different times. According to Root (1990), the alternating of heritages indicates both the presence of a conflict and an absence of strategies for integrating components of self. The resolution of this conflict is indicated by the acceptance of both sides of one's heritage and therefore, the need to compartmentalize various aspects of the self diminish.

According to Root (1990), the first resolution for the Biracial individual is accepting the identity assigned by others such as society, community, family or peers. Root (1990) explains that this passive acceptance of an identity may be positive in that the individual feels a sense of belonging to the group that society assigns them to. For example, for the Biracial individual who is assigned an identity of Black and accepts this identity, the resolution is positive. Root (1990) purports that those who strongly identify with their extended family are more likely to adopt the ethnic identity that society assigns

to the family unit. However, Root (1990), recognizing the impact of the sociocultural context in the construction of identity, notes that this resolution may be the most difficult because perceived identity is situational. Individuals are perceived differently and assigned different identities in different social environments and in different parts of the country. In these instances, individuals may be forced to work towards a more active resolution process by educating others with whom they interact with on their chosen identity.

The second identity resolution within this model is accepting both racial and/or ethnic groups the person has inherited. Root (1990) describes this resolution as the most idealistic of Biracial status. For example, when asked about their ethnic background an individual may respond by saying, "I'm part Dominican and part Black," or "I'm mixed." Root (1990) explains that this resolution is positive when the individual feels comfort with, and privilege in, both groups of their heritage. As Root (1990) explains, this individual should be aware of and develop coping strategies, such as being indifferent to outside opinions, for dealing with the social resistance that may accompany their comfort with belonging to both groups because this identity may not be recognized or validated by the outside world.

A third option is the active acceptance of a single racial and/or ethnic group. This individual has made the choice to identify with a particular ethnic or racial group regardless of the family's identity, the identity assigned by society, or the identity that most likely corresponds to their physical features. However, choosing to identify with one racial group does not have to indicate a denial of the other aspects of a persons' identity. For example, a woman who identifies as Jamaican is not in denial of her identity

as a Black woman. Root (1990) explains that this is a positive resolution in that the individual does not deny the other part of their heritage. Root (1990) notes that difficulty in this resolution may arise if there is an incongruous match between the individual's self-perception and how others perceive the individual. These situations are dealt with by an awareness and acceptance on the part of the individual that such difficulties and tensions may arrive, and the use of coping skills to most effectively deal with the reality of such incongruity.

A final identity resolution is the identification as a new racial and/or ethnic group. For this individual, identification as a new group may be the result of the struggle with marginal status created by not feeling a sense of belonging to any racial or ethnic group. As Root (1990) explains, the generation of a new group alleviates the feeling of marginality that a multiethnic or multiracial person may be struggling with. However, tensions are more likely to surface as society's classification system does not soundly recognize persons of mixed race. Therefore, the socially available discourses for racial and ethnic identification are limiting. In this case, individuals would need to inform people of the inaccuracy of the assigned racial group.

This model acknowledges the freedoms and challenges of identification among mixed racial heritage individuals (Root, 1990, 1998). Root's theory is aligned with the social constructionist view that identity for the mixed person is neither static nor linear and is further impacted by various social contexts. Furthermore, these strategies are not mutually exclusive and individuals may move among them at different times in their lives in an effort to resolve the tensions that may result from a difference between their personal and ascribed identifications. Root (1990) emphasizes three main themes present

throughout all of the resolutions. First is the acceptance of the person's dual heritage. Second, the individual has the right to declare how they wish to be identified, and third, the individual develops strategies for coping with tensions and resistance that may result from the resolution of their identity. Perhaps most important is acknowledging that any incongruity that exists between the individual's self perception and society's perception is the result of others' insensitivity and ignorance, not an individual deficiency.

Multidimensional Identity Model

Expanding on Root's (1990) theoretical framework, Reynolds and Pope (1991) created the Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM). The MIM outlines, "four possible options for identity resolution that occur within a dynamic process of self-growth and exploration" (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 178). These four options are created in a matrix based on an individual's passive or active acceptance of one's oppression or of multiple oppressions. In the first two quadrants, individuals may choose to identify with one aspect of their identity. The difference lies in whether this is a passive acceptance or a conscious choice of self-identification. Within these options lies the discussion of personal agency—how much choice do individuals have in the self-identification process? The third option for identity resolution is for an individual to embrace all aspects of their identity but in a segmented fashion. Reynolds and Pope (1991) explain that this individual lives in separate and often unconnected worlds as a result of the lack of integration of their heritages. The final option is identification with the many aspects of the self and therefore, identity as a new group. For example, rather than the sole identification of Puerto Rican, a Puerto Rican woman may embrace all of her intersections of her identities and thus identify as a Puerto Rican woman of color.

As an example, Jones and McEwen (2000) use the MIM as a theoretical base for their exploration of self-perceived identities and the multiple dimensions of identity among female college students. Results from their qualitative, exploratory study yielded an even more complex model of multiple dimensions of identity development. Their conceptual model for multiple dimensions of identity is designed to "capture the essence of the core category as well as the identity stories of the participants" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). Jones and McEwen (2000) present a diagram of their model with the "core" at the center of the model. Results from Jones and McEwen's (2000) study indicate that a core sense of self is at the center of an individual's multiple dimensions of identity. Participants described the core as their "inner identity" or "inside self," whereas their "outside" identity was defined as identity that was ascribed by others. Further results of this study indicate that "outside identities" were found to be less meaningful than the complexities of their "inside identities" (Jones & McEwen, 2001). Within this model the researchers acknowledge the range of contextual influences such as family background and sociocultural experiences such as sexism and racism that influence identity development and the individual differences in the important and salient aspects of identity. This research presents further evidence of the social construction and fluidity and complicating intersecting nature of racial and ethnic identification.

Faces of Race

King and DaCosta (1996) provide a typology of the four "faces of race," or the four levels in which race is socially constructed among individuals (Wallace, 2001; King & DaCosta, 1996). This model takes a more macro approach by acknowledging the possibilities, limits and struggles associated with the personal construction of racial

identification within the context of U.S. society. Race, in this first face, is described as something that one does. The literature explains that "doing race" happens both within individuals and between individuals. In other words, women can be self-reflective about how they choose to identify, but they are restricted by the current socially and politically defined racial and ethnic discourses. As discussed, social constructionists would agree that the label that one chooses to define oneself is limited by society's narrow and limited categories.

The second face of race as a social construct is the external presentation and perception of the racial self. This face of race involves the presentation of the racial self in interaction with others. On this level, race is created both within the individuals as well as among the interactions with others. This second face of race explains the inherent limitations of racial and ethnic identification for women of color from mixed ancestry. When one's personal cultural identification is not recognized, validated or legitimized by others, one may never feel fully "authenticated" (King & DaCosta, 1996). Because the culturally mixed person's presentation does not appear to fit into the dominant discourses, these individuals are often asked the question "What are you?" Racial categorization and labels are constructed though these interactions between individuals. These labels are differently constructed in time and place.

Thirdly, race is created both by individuals and by the group. In this third face, race is "done" collectively. In other words, one's racial identity is created among the complex interaction of group members. For example, Puerto Ricans living in New York have created a collective definition of what it means to be a "Nuyorican."

Finally, race as a social construct is both relational and hierarchical. Racial categories are relational in that they are mutually exclusive; people can belong to only one group. Yet, these groups are situated hierarchically and derive meaning in relation to each other. Due to America's history of racial classification and structural racism, Whites sit at the top of this hierarchy.

The aforementioned theories provide a framework for understanding identity construction among individuals with multiple dimensions of identity. Each paradigm recognizes the duality of social constructionism as it relates to racial and ethnic identification. For example, in Roots' (1990) framework, within each identity "resolution" the individual is faced with the challenge of having to authenticate their self identification in a society where their "choice," of identity is most likely to be challenged. These typologies help to illustrate the struggles, complexities, and freedoms involved with constructing a personal identity within contemporary social contexts in the United States. According to Root (1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000); Wallace (2001, 2004); King and DaCosta (1996); Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), and others, social constructionist paradigms as well as new, more flexible models of racial identity formation address the limitations found in traditional psychological theory. However, most of the research on this topic is limited to research with adolescents. Furthermore, few studies address the complexity of *both* multiracial and multiethnic identity.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity

Studying the lived experiences of multiracial and multiethnic individuals requires

understanding the systems of racial and ethnic classifications and conceptualizations

throughout United States history.

Conceptualization and Classification of Race and Ethnicity

Historic Overview of Racial and Ethnic Classification

Historically, the constructions of racial and ethnic classifications were guided by

the subordination of people of color for economic and political reasons. Omi and Winant

(1994) explain that racial policies were enacted with the goal of repression and exclusion.

The Naturalization law of 1790 was the first attempt to define American citizenship,

available only to free "white" immigrants. The effort to include all racial groups within

the United States' parameters for citizenship has been a drawn out and contested process.

For example, it was not until the passage of the McCarren-Walter Act of 1952 that

Japanese became naturalized citizens (Omi & Winant, 1994).

In 19th century America, assigning racial identifications to groups who were

deemed as non-white kept individuals of color politically and economically weak and

increased low-wage labor (Glenn, 1985). Ethnic groups were collapsed into a single

category and for much of the 19th century, "White," "Negro" and "Indian" were the only

racial categories recognized by the state and federal government (Omi & Winant, 1994).

As Glenn (1985) adds, the domination and exploitation of colonized minorities during

this time in American history was even more intense for racial and ethnic immigrant women because of the interlocking oppressions of race and gender.

Previously undefined ethnic groups, such as Chinese and Mexicans, were classified within the existing racial ecology for exploitive and exclusionary purposes. Yet as will be discussed, over time increases in immigration and subsequent demands for recognition and equality by particular groups forced states to reevaluate the racial order and reconsider how to define and categorize ethnic groups. The section continues with an overview of the one-drop rule that was the American system for racial classification by late nineteenth century and in turn, determined racial identity for non-Whites. That is, race was the dominant marker of identity where White was associated with power and privilege and color carried stigma. As such, this section of the chapter continues with a discussion of the conceptualization of race and ethnicity throughout United States history. Evolving theories on race and ethnicity, changes in the United States ethnoracial population and political movements on the part of individuals of multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds contributed to the alterations in racial and ethnic classification, as seen in the United States census and in more recent paradigms of racial classification. Perhaps most relevant to this study is the documented historical instability regarding the shifting classifications and conceptualizations of racial and ethnic groups through United States history, which demonstrates how race and ethnicity are socially constructed and deeply rooted in the economic, political, and social history of this country. This section concludes with the discussion of the definition of race and ethnicity as social constructions.

Racial Classification: The One-Drop Rule

The one-drop rule as the American system of racial classification was most prevalent during the Jim Crow era in American history, covering much of the twentieth century (Hollinger, 2003). This principle derived from a long held belief that each race had its own blood type, and therefore individuals were marked by some physical trait that revealed African ancestry (Wright, 1994). As Glenn (1998) explains, "in the Jim Crow South whiteness was constructed in opposition to blackness; white status and identity was defined by whites, literally, as the absence of blackness" (p.32). The one-drop rule mandated that any person with any Black ancestry identify monolithically as Black, a move designed for economic, political, and social reasons among which was to increase the slave population, prevent interracial marriage and keep the White race "pure" (Wright, 1994; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). Consequently, individuals were constrained to identify exclusively as Black even if their African ancestry was much less than fifty percent (Sweet, 2005).

The one-drop rule was a purely American concept that was not true in other countries. As Sweet (2005) explains, "this differs from the Caribbean, where you are 'White' if you look preponderantly European" (p.75). As stated by Hollinger (2003), "the stigma carried by blackness is unique, and is affixed and perpetuated resolutely by the American practice of treating blackness as a monolithic identity that an individual either has it or does not have it on the basis of the principle that any African ancestry at all determines that one is simply black" (p.1368). In the American history of racial classification, individuals and groups of color were legally and culturally racialized and ascribed a Black identity that constrained their choice of identification and carried with it

stigma and disadvantage because Blacks were historically defined as genetically inferior to Whites.

Racial Conceptualization: Genetic Meaning

Since the end of slavery, principles of scientific racism, eugenics, social Darwinism and the one-drop rule of government construction by ancestry and physical attributes supported the uncritical acceptance of the biological concept of race (Snipp, 2003). That is, Americans who were classified as Black were deemed as genetically, culturally, and intellectually inferior to White Americans. Included in the conceptualization of race as a difference in the genetic make-up of Blacks and Whites were the assumptions that phenotypic features as dark skin, kinky hair, and certain facial features were ugly and less desirable than the Eurocentric ideal that defined American culture. As stated by Omi and Winant (1994), "white skin was the norm while other skin colors were exotic mutations which had to be explained" (p.15). An added assumption included in the social Darwinist thinking about race was that racial intermixing was considered a sin that would lead to the creation of "biological throwbacks" (Omi & Winant, 1994). Interracial mixing between Whites and Blacks, also known as miscegenation, was a criminal offense that gained strength during the Jim Crow era in American history (Hollinger, 2003). As a result, children born to Black and White couples were considered bastards and were assigned a non-White status, also known as the principle of hypodescent (Hollinger, 2003). As emphasized by Hollinger (2003), for the most part the miscegenation laws treated Latinos as White. Yet, the mistreatment of all Latinos and other ethnoracial minorities still took place throughout American history.

"Latinos were usually regarded as legally white even when being stigmatized and mistreated" (Hollinger, 2003 p.1375).

The one-drop rule combined with miscegenation and the prevailing views on race that those identified as Black were genetically inferior to Whites had social, political, and economic implications. Differential treatment between Whites and non-Whites was justified by the unequivocal acceptance of race as a biologic concept. Racism was explained as organic due to the presumed genetic differences between Blacks and Whites and anti-Black racism assisted in ascribing racial identity to those deemed as non-White by the government. Furthermore, as explained by Hollinger (2003) "the combination of hypodescent with the denial to blacks residing in many states with large black populations of any opportunity for legal marriage to whites ensured that the color line would long remain to a very large extent a property line. Hence the dynamics of race formation and the dynamics of class formation were, in this most crucial of all America cases, largely the same" (p.1379). Racial classifications, begun as a tool for colonial and economic exploitation, developed into an ideology of white superiority that was woven into the fabric of society (Glenn, 1998; Kaufman, 2003).

Racial Conceptualization: The Ethnicity Paradigm

The scientific backing that the biologist and deficiency theories received were challenged and revoked by contradictory evidence and faulty generalizations in the 1920's and 1930's (Singleton & Musick, 1986). Among the critiques of the biologic concept of race was the greater genetic variance found within racial groups than between them (Machery & Faucher, 2005; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez & Peck, 2007). Falsifying the argument even further was the finding that race could not account for genetic variation

(Shih, Bonam, Sanchez & Peck, 2007). As explained by Omi and Winant (1994), the

ethnicity paradigm arose during the 1920s and 1930s as a direct challenge to the previous

views on race.

The concepts of cultural pluralism and assimilation were two major currents of

the ethnicity paradigm that helped to reconceptualize and reclassify the concept of race in

America. Cultural pluralism was understood as the dynamic by which immigrant groups,

referring primarily to White Europeans, maintained their ethnic identity while

participating in the majority culture, whereas assimilationism meant the abandonment of

ethnic group identity in an effort to adopt the dominant culture's language, values, and

practices (Omi & Winant, 1994). Cultural pluralists and assimilationists both defined race

as a social category and as just one of the many components of a person's ethnicity. That

is, race was not seen as a unique identity, one that had played a part in how the United

States was structured and socially, politically, and economically organized. During this

time, ethnicity was the framework for which race was understood in America.

Although the prevailing views on race as a biological concept were challenged by

the ethnicity paradigm, this framework presented many challenges for understanding the

unique experiences and extreme racialization of persons and groups of color in the United

States (Omi & Winant, 1994). Although, by definition, cultural pluralism honored the

diversity of immigrant groups, the ethnicity paradigm undermined the centrality of race

in American history. By locating race within one's ethnicity, the historical and distinctive

experiences of slavery, colonization, racial inequality, and exclusion among people of

color in the United States were denied (Rothenberg, 1992). Furthermore, assimilation into

the dominant White culture was unattainable for racial minorities whose physical

differences made incorporation into the White majority impossible and whose racial identity was still largely determined by the one-drop rule (Omi & Winant, 1992). In other words, those with darker skin have long "assimilated" less readily than those with lighter skin, for reasons both political and social. Finally, miscegenation laws were still prevalent throughout the country. As explained by Hollinger (2003) "very few of the early twentieth-century discussants of the melting pot even mentioned blacks, for whom mixing with whites was 'miscegenation'" (p.1366).

Another major limitation of the ethnicity paradigm was that Blacks were viewed as one ethnic group among others. "With rare exceptions, ethnicity theory isn't very interested in ethnicity among Blacks. The ethnicity approach views Blacks as one ethnic group among others. It does not consider national origin, religion, language, or cultural differences among Blacks, as it does among Whites, as sources of ethnicities" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.22). This issue of assumed homogeneity has also been foisted upon other racial and ethnic groups such as Native Americans, Latin Americans, and Asian Americans.

Reclassification: Movements and Changes in Ethnoracial Population

In response to the inadequacies of the ethnicity paradigm, legal changes brought about by the civil rights movement and increases in immigration in the 1970s, the reclassification and reconceptualization of racial and ethnic groups recurred. To begin with, demanding group rights and recognition, many Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans also rejected ethnic identity in favor of a more radical racial identity (Omi & Winant, 1994). Challenging cultural pluralism and assimilation, Black Americans worked to redefine Black identity in the United States by placing race front

and center as a social, economic, and political organizing principle. For example, the

"Black is beautiful" cultural movement of the 1960's created positive images of Black

people's skin-deep features and continued to challenge the "scientific" racist logic of the

biologically based concept of race (McLaren & Dantley, 1990). The identifying racial

labels of "Black" and eventually, "African American," replaced "Negro" and "colored"

as some argued that the term "Negro" was a relic of slavery (Franklin & Moss, 2005;

Rothenberg, 1992).

Second, although socially ingrained in the fabric of this country, the one-drop rule

and the ban on miscegenation were deemed unconstitutional in 1967. Finally, changes in

the United States racial and ethnic population further challenged the American system of

classification and conceptualization of race and ethnic in the United States. As explained

by Hollinger (2003), increased immigration from Asia and Latin America during the

1970s altered the ethnoracial makeup of the United States by producing new kinds of

racial and ethnic mixtures. Immigrants from Mexico constituted the largest groups of

immigrants from Latin America in the 1970s. As Hollinger explains (2003), Latino

immigrants challenged the American system of racial classification because the color

category was blurred. The racial classification of Latino immigrants varied based on

context and ethnic group. While Mexicans were considered legally White they were often

regarded socially and culturally as non-White. The ambiguity in Latino racial identity

was similar among Puerto Ricans and immigrants from Cuba and the Dominican

Republic. As stated by Hollinger (2003):

> The federal government was eventually obliged to recognize that some Latinos
> were on the black side of the black-white color line. Puerto Ricans and
> immigrants from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, for example, grew up in
> societies that did not mark the black-white color line sharply, with the result that

in the words adopted by the Census Bureau in 1970, 'Hispanics can be of any race' (p.1377).

The shifting racial perspectives and classifications of Latinos exposed the state's struggle with "racializing" a particular ethnic group, as was revealed by the Census.

Reclassification: The Census

The changing ethnoracial composition of the United States population and the demand for recognition among racial minorities assisted in altering the way official documents, most notably the United States Census, recorded and measured race (Snipp, 2003). "The census, as the primary arm of our public racial categorization system, is not simply a counting of the U.S. population," explained Shih and Sanchez (2009), rather, "it is a highly political apparatus reflective of social and cultural discourse regarding race in the United States" (p.30). The Census as a reflection of the prevailing racial system is most evident in the case of Latinos, where changes in their ethnic categorization included changing the 1970 category of "Persons of both Spanish Surname and Spanish mother Tongue," to the "Hispanic" category in 1980.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Directive No. 15 in 1977, which established the official classification standard for record keeping, collection and presentation of data on race and ethnicity in federal program administrative reporting and statistical activities (U.S. Census Bureau). In 2000, multiple check-offs appeared on all government forms, including the Census, that ask for racial and ethnic identification. Most data collections replaced the single-race "check one only" box form with "check one or more" race format. The 2000 Census data reported that 2.4 percent of the general population identified with two or more races (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). The change in public policy launched by Directive No. 15 dismantled "the mythical notion

that race is fixed rather than fluid, or that any governmental agency's perception of racial

identity takes priority over an individual's right to self identify" (Ramona Douglass,

2000). Yet, categories remain exclusivist—as Glenn (1998) notes, categories are never

free floating.

While perfunctory compliance attempted to capture the evolving complexity of

racial and ethnic identity in America with the check-off system (Snipp, 2003), it also set

off a major debate between bureaucratic needs and the right to ethnic and racial self-

identification (Waters, 2000). On the one hand, the diverse categorization provides and

gathers information for administrative and public policy purposes. At the same time,

Americans feel that the government categories deny them the right to racial and ethnic

self-identification. Others see a need for a multiracial category (Waters, 2000). Among

the advocates for a multiracial initiative include grassroots organizations such as Project

RACE and the Association of Multiethnic Americans (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Others, including leading civil rights organizations and leaders such as the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Jesse Jackson and Kweisi

Mfume, oppose the multiracial category (Swan, 2003; Waters, 2000). These

organizations and leaders believe that monoracial categories are necessary to preserve

Black identification and guard against discrimination (Swan, 2003). Such advocates also

believe that adding a multiracial category to forms such as the U.S. Census would

negatively impact civil rights-regulated programs such as housing, employment, and

education (Wright, 1994). Essentially, individual yearnings for self-identification may be

at the expense of group needs. Thus far, the dilemma between legislative needs and racial

and ethnic self-categorization has been dealt with on government forms by allowing for

the diversity of ancestry and ethnicity, but assuming that "races" do not intersect and are thus rigid and mutually exclusive (Waters, 2000).

Modern Versions of Conceptualization and Classification

The concept and classification of race has changed throughout the history of the United States (Omi & Winant, 1994). Although ruled unconstitutional in 1967, many scholars believe that the one-drop rule is still prevalent today in popular culture (Daniel, 2002; Hollinger, 2003; Waters, 2000), because individuals with African phenotypic features are still considered Black, or at the very least, non-White. Similarly, while contemporary racial theories support the notion that racism is merely an illusion that can be eliminated in the hopes of a utopian, "color-blind" society, the United States has been and remains a "color-conscious" society (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The literature describes a paradigm of racial and ethnic classification popularized in the past decade by Historian David Hollinger (2003). Ethnoracial classification refers to the classification of individuals and groups in the United States by themselves, each other or by state authority based on descent (Hollinger, 2006). This classification, which is based on descent, includes both race and ethnicity (Hollinger, 2006). As stated by Hollinger (2006):

> The term ethnoracial, which has rapidly gained currently during the last decade, helps keep our eyes open to the shifting conditions of history. The term proclaims a refusal to classify communities of descent into binary subcategories that have proven harder and harder to vindicate empirically (p.155).

Social Construction of Race

The historical instability and the resulting shifting categorizations and conceptualizations of racial and ethnic groups demonstrate that the concepts of race and

ethnicity are social constructions given meaning in the social world. Social

constructionists propose that, "the concept of race is a pseudo-biological concept that has

been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others"

(Machery & Faucher, 2005, p.1208). As stated by Carter (2007), "race is defined as a

social construction in which people in the United States are identified by their skin color,

language, and physical features, and are grouped and ranked into distinct racial groups"

(p.18). There is no biological basis for race, yet people continue to be assigned labels and

systematically categorized based on perceived social commonalities and physical

characteristics shared by a group because race plays a central role in structuring and

representing the social world (Omi & Winant, 1994). Social constructionists note that

racial categories have no biological basis yet in United States society race defines

people's experiences and opportunities (Shih, Sanchez, Bonam & Peck, 2007). A

person's race is still most often decided by one's phenotypic features and typically, skin

color becomes the basis for which society judges a person along a continuum from light

to dark where Whiteness continues to be the dominant and desired social group (Ore,

2003).

In an effort to challenge contemporary perspectives on race, Omi and Winant

(1994) devised the theory of racial formation. This framework for understanding race as a

social construct places race front and center as a key factor is the social structure of

societies that typically include a "racial order." This racial order, which views White as

the preferred and dominant color, is organized and enforced by social, political, and

micro and macro economic social structures, shaped by relationships, and played out

within individuals and collective institutions in society (Omi & Winant, 1994). As a

result, there are social implications and psychological meanings attached to the way that

individuals of color think about their racial group membership and construct their

personal identification (Carter, 2007). For example, Latinas with dark skin are less likely

to assume a Black identity because they understand the way that Black people are

stigmatized in the U.S. (Landale & Oropesa, 2002). As stated by Omi and Winant (1994),

"everyone knows what race is, though everyone has a different opinion as to how many

racial groups there are, what they are called, and who belongs to what specific category"

(p. 3).

Social Construction of Ethnicity

In this study, ethnicity is also defined as a social construct. According to the

constructionist view, ethnicity is subject to both internal and external perception.

Meaning that, ethnic identification is similarly constructed by individuals through

socialization within particular social contexts. Ethnic groups are passed on through

generations and defined by the individuals themselves and others based on a common

language, culture, ancestry, geographic origin, and sometimes religion (Wallace, 2001).

As stated by Ore (2003), "ethnicity denotes a group of people *who perceive themselves*

and *are perceived by others* as sharing cultural traditions such as language, religion,

family customs, and food preferences" (p.9). Constructionist scholars agree that, like

race, ethnicity is a social construct that is subject to social, political, and economic

manipulation (Spickard & Burroughs, 2000). Nagel (1994) suggests that understanding

ethnicity as a social construction does not preclude the historical basis of ethnic groups.

Instead, it only adds to the inherent complexity of ethnicity and ethnic identification.

In sum, the theory of social construction guides this research. By viewing race and ethnicity as social constructions, identities are understood to be malleable and subject to shift within different contexts. That is, viewing race and ethnicity as social constructions creates the space for the opportunity for fluid personal identification and the personal flexibility to be able to use one identity or another as needed. Furthermore, viewing the concepts of race and ethnicity as social constructions diminishes the meaning and impact of racial and ethnic stereotypes (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). As Dean (2006) states, "in the social constructionist approach race and ethnicity are socially produced, heterogeneous and dynamic processes of being and becoming" (p.72). As the same time, the social constructions of race and ethnicity have constrained the lives of people of color by the historic racial classifications where those in power were in the position to socially construct "others" for social, economic, and political purposes.

Contextual Factors and the Construction of Racial and Ethnic Identity

Consistent with the theory of social construction that views racial and ethnic identity as constructed within and influenced by social contexts (Dean 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994; Shih & Sanchez, 2009), this study includes contextual factors that impact the construction of racial and ethnic identity of women of color with a mixed heritage— an understudied topic (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The literature that considers the structural influences on the construction of identity focuses on a multiracial population; this study extends that analysis to include multiracial and multiethnic populations. The structural influences that will be discussed are: family messages, societal stereotypes and characterizations based on physical appearance. These structural influences were selected

because for one, identity emerges through socialization experiences in different social contexts beginning with the family. As stated by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), "an individual's pre-adult and adult social networks may include a vast number of potentially significant others such as family members, neighbors, and peers who influence the daily interactional work of shaping and defining a person's identity" (p.58). That is, identity is negotiated through interactions in different settings beginning with the family and extending to the community and society. Second, within the social contexts of the family and dominant society, messages are relayed and individuals are stereotyped and categorized based on individual factors, most often physical appearance. As Hall (2006) notes, individuals are perceived and classified based on cultural representations of physical attributes that are given different meanings in different contexts.

Family Messages

The home environment is where the development of identity begins. In their work with Black American adults, Demo and Hughes (1990) emphasize the significance of the family context as the most influential socialization setting in terms of the formation of a child's values, sense of self and belief system. As such, the family, as the first social network, plays a powerful role in the beginning emergence of racial and ethnic consciousness for women of color from mixed racial and ethnic ancestry. Messages communicated within families—in the form of parent-child interactions, modeling, and role-playing—become the starting point for the construction of identity. It is within these family socialization settings that messages regarding norms, morals, values, and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next. More specifically, the following sections

of this chapter begin at home with the messages individuals receive regarding family

character, appearance, and connection within the family.

Family Character

The messages transmitted in the home environment regarding the family character

as multiracial and multiethnic units are unique because for much of American history

unions between people of different races and cultures were prohibited. The multiracial

and multiethnic mothers and fathers transgressed racial and ethnic boundaries to be

together, as prior to 1967 marriages between mixed races were illegal (Rockquemore &

Brunsma, 2002). Wallace's (2001) study on identity development among fifteen mixed

heritage students discusses the unique realities of interracial and interethnic families

living in the United States. For one, participants in Wallace's (2001) study reported to be

aware of the struggles their parents faced in terms of negotiating their distinct racial and

ethnic backgrounds and courtships in United States society. The multiracial and

multiethnic adolescents in Wallace's (2001) study referred to their parents as "trailblazers

on the frontiers of race and ethnicity" (p.41). Ending the ban on mixed marriage helped to

legitimize this population yet experiences with racism endured. A Biracial participant in

Wallace's (2001) study shared the messages he received regarding his parents'

experiences with racism resulting from their interracial marriage.

> I remember my parents used to talk about how hard it was to be an interracial couple. They used to talk about that…The people they dealt with…they didn't have any problems. People they knew understood and were very comfortable with it. But…they said on a societal level it was very different. People would ridicule them, but they didn't talk to me about it a lot 'cause they didn't want me to be upset, or for me to not understand, so they wouldn't speak about that much (p.42).

Families of color from mixed ancestry live between and amongst different worlds in the

home and within the context of the dominant White society where being of color and

ethnic brings with it a level of complexity not experienced by mono-racial and mono-

ethnic individuals. The above vignette illustrates one way that children develop a sense of

their interracial identity which is through the messages they receive regarding their

family's racial "distinctness" (Wallace, 2001).

Second, the ways in which these parents negotiate their interracial and interethnic

differences within the context of their family further influences identity construction.

Messages are transmitted through differences in contrasting cultural values, often

manifested in parenting styles, and different levels of acculturation that each parent

brings to the home environment (Wallace, 2001). For example, Wallace's (2001) study

discusses the impact of parents' orientation toward their own ethnic identity on children's

understanding of their ethnic group membership. Results of the study indicate that for

parents who are racialized minorities or whose families immigrated to the United States

in the past three generations, ethnic identity was relevant, whereas, for multiethnic

European American parents, ethnic identity was viewed as optional and played more of a

symbolic role (Wallace's 2001). "Growing up in an interracial, interethnic family

structure and having recently mixed heritage provide an important context that shapes

their ethnoracial identity" (Wallace, 2001, p.154). Similarly, in their work with

adolescents with one Latino parent and one Anglo American parent Northrup and Bean

(2007) discuss the challenges Bicultural Latino and Anglo American families may

encounter negotiating the balance between the diverse cultural values of Anglo

Americans and Latinos. The authors cite such differences as the level of family

responsibility and the differences in importance placed on family relationships as examples of contrasting cultural values (Northrup & Bean, 2007).

Racial and ethnic identity is further influenced by the messages children receive around the pressure mixed heritage children may encounter to adopt only one ethnic or racial background which is often influenced by the messages of disapproval and rejection they receive from family members about the interracial and interethnic character of their family. In their work with Bicultural Latino and Anglo American families, Northrup and Bean (2007) discuss the impact of the level of acceptance children of mixed ancestry receive from racially and ethnically different family members. Similarly, participants in Wallace's (2001) study shared stories of the "subtle hostility" and in some cases, permanent estrangement from relatives because of the interracial character of the family. As stated by one multiethnic woman in Wallace's (2001) study:

> My grandfather and grandmother…that was a mixed marriage-Italian and German. And my grandmother's family disowned her for marrying my grandfather (p.43).

These foundational messages regarding the unique family character of interracial and interethnic families within the United States adds a level of complexity to the construction of identity and self-identification.

Appearance

Familial messages regarding appearance further influence the construction of racial and ethnic identity. Studies by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) on Biracial families indicate that the subtle and explicit messages that are communicated to children, beginning at birth, about their racial identity greatly affect the children's self-understanding of their racial identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Perhaps most

salient are messages communicated to children with regard to appearance, specifically

skin tone, hair texture and facial features (Russell, Wilson & Hall, 1992). For example,

the correlation between worth and skin color begins in the home environment as children

learn about their appearance through social interactions with family members. Patricia

Collins (2000) cites Marita Golden, the author of *Don't Play in The Sun: One Woman's*

Journey Through The Color Complex, relaying her experience as a young child whose

mother told her not to play in the sun because "you gonna have to get a light husband

anyway, for the sake of your children" (1983, p.24, in Black Feminist Thought, p.91).

Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson and Ronald Hall also address the issue of skin color within

African American families in the book *The Color Complex* (1992). As stated by the

authors, "while most African American family members do not dwell obsessively on

differences in color rarely is the subject neutral or unmentioned" (p.95). Similarly,

Northrup and Bean (2007) suggest that appearance, specifically skin color, influences the

identity formation process of youth with one Latino parent and one Anglo American

parent. According to Northrup and Bean (2007), the construction of identity for a youth

whose Latino parent is White will be very different from the identity process of one

whose Latino parent is of African descent.

Familial messages regarding appearance are also conveyed through the physical

dissimilarities among family members. In multiracial and multiethnic families, physical

similarities are not common. The diversity within the family unit is literally represented

in the appearance of the children from these unions. As a result, physical dissimilarities in

skin color, hair texture, and facial features complicate, both socially and psychologically,

the construction of identity for the children of these families. Results from Wallace's

study (2001) indicate that physical dissimilarities impact both outsiders' perceptions of

mixed heritage families as well as the relationships within the families. Individuals

receive racialized messages of superiority and inferiority regarding differences in skin

color, hair texture, and other physical features in their families, all of which impact their

sense of belonging and connection to their racial and ethnic roots. The following two

vignettes from Wallace's (2001) study illustrate the messages children receive regarding

physical dissimilarities within families:

> I'd be walking down the street with my grandmother…I remember hearing…from
> people…just because of the way I look…my skin color…"This is your kid?"
> (p.51).

> My mom…and my little sister Robin have a really special relationship. They're
> Probably the closet…I think, because Robin looks like her…so I think that is
> influencing my mom a little bit (p.52).

The literature suggests that the familial messages individuals receive regarding their

appearance play a crucial role in the early formation of identity for the interracial and

interethnic youth.

Connection

The final category of messages discussed within the family context is messages

about connection to ancestry. For one, feeling connected to one's racial and ethnic roots

is influenced by the ways in which parents pass on, or do not pass on, aspects of

belonging and heritage, such as language, food, and values. Children may be more likely

to cultivate an early connection to their ethnic identity when aspects of culture are

transmitted in the home environment. For example, a multiethnic adolescent and

participant in Wallace's (2001) study reported that family, food, music, and the holiday

celebration are "important markers of her Irishness" (p.59). Campbell and Rogalin (2006)

found that speaking Spanish at home is an indicator of connection to the Latino community and influential in the choice of racial and ethnic identification an individual adopts. As stated by Campbell and Rogalin (2006) "those who speak Spanish at home are significantly more likely to choose Latino as their sole racial identity on a combined ethnic origins questions than those who do not" (p.1042). Similarly, Landale and Oropesa's (2002) research on Puerto Rican women in the U.S. and Puerto Rico suggests that language shapes and reflects an individual's identity.

Second, early connection to ethnic and racial identity is further influenced by behaviors and biases of family members and by experiences of divorce and separation (Wallace, 2001; Northrup & Bean, 2007). For example, if immediate or extended family members are more accepting of one side, the adolescent may be more likely, or pulled, to identify exclusively with that ethnic or racial heritage (Northup & Bean, 2007). Studies of Biracial children indicate that children tend to identify more with one race than the other. For example, research by Poussaint (1984) found that the Biracial African American students in his sample adopted the identity of their African American parent. The students reported that they were embarrassed by their White parents, who made them feel less "authentically Black" (Cauce, et. al., 1992, p.213).

Children growing up in a single parent household may be forced to negotiate one side of their heritage alone, or choose to reject one side of their heritage because of family turmoil such as divorce or remarriage (Wallace, 2001). Decisions regarding identity construction in turn affect the individual relationships that children form with their mothers and fathers (Cauce, et. al, 1992). For example, allegiance to one parent may

cause feelings of rejection in the other parent and may alter the nature of the child and parent relationship.

Finally, the geographical and generational distance from similar racial and ethnic communities impact the home environment and one's early connection to racial and ethnic heritages (Wallace, 2001). Growing up in racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods where the message is diversity is normative may provide a sense of comfort and safety for mixed heritage children. In contrast, racially or ethnically homogenous neighborhoods may limit the availability of identification options for mixed heritage youth and add to feelings of marginalization. Rockquemore (1999) found that Biracial individuals were more likely to choose an exclusively Black identity the more time they spent interacting in predominantly Black social networks. In another example, a Taiwanese and European-American female in a study by Pearl Gaskins (1999) shared how her experience as a child of divorce and growing up in a racially homogenous neighborhood impacted her early understanding of her racial and ethnic identity.

> My parents were divorced when I was three. My father had custody of me, and my mother and her family became estranged from me. I grew up on Long Island. It was a pretty white suburban type of experience. When I was younger I was very Caucasian looking. I identified as more white than Asian because that was my experience then that was who my friends were, that was what they considered me. They didn't really acknowledge that I was part Asian. So people felt comfortable making racial jokes and offensive remarks in front of me. I internalized the shame about being mixed. I wished that I were white (p.190).

In general, mixed heritage families of color have the unique challenge of fostering a positive interracial racial and interethnic identity in their children and at the same time helping to them understand the realities of racism as they leave the home environment and interact with peers in social settings (Stevenson & Davis, 2004). Yet, even if an

integrated sense of racial and ethnic consciousness is achieved at home, the child is not

immune to hostile experiences in the larger society. The child may find that a divergence

exists between the family's affirmation of their mixed heritage and society's racism and

devaluation of their complexity often communicated in early interactions with peers and

individuals in the community and in larger society. For example, as explained by a 23-

year-old African American and European American study participant in Williams' (1996)

ethnographic study on the construction of identity among African/European-American

Biracial men and women and Asian/European-American Biracial men and women:

> I never thought of my race as a dilemma until when I was 5 or so. This
> White kid on my block called me a nigger out of the blue. Just out of the
> blue! For some strange reason, I knew this was a bad word and that it had
> something to do with the fact that my mom was different, but I didn't
> really comprehend the full picture. These are the kinds of incidents when
> you look back, it gets you damn angry you wanna go start a riot or
> something, like you've been betrayed by a society that has lied to you all
> these years. See you gotta develop an awareness about these things. Once I
> lifted my blinders and realized that we got a lot of racial cleaning to do,
> then I was able to make sense of all the racist remarks and fights and all.
> As a child, you don't know what hit you. Kids are mean, yeah, but they
> also act out of the racism they learn (p.200).

Patricia Collins (2000) references a popular children's rhyme sung in Black

communities that relays the message of skin color advantage.

> Now, if you're White you're all right,
> If you're brown, stick around,
> But if you're Black, Git back! Git back! Git back!

Bradshaw (1992) explains that self-esteem provides a buffer against racism as

well as wrongly ascribed identifications, and further highlights the importance of open

communication within the family context. In-depth interviews with nine Biracial people

in New York City found that those more likely to choose a Biracial identity came from

families where racial issues were more openly discussed (Kerwin et al, 1993).

The majority of the work on multiracial and multiethnic families focuses on the difficulties and struggles that these families face, rather than highlighting the strengths and resilience involved in defining their racial and ethnic selves in a color-coded society where race and ethnicity take on different meanings in different contexts. A more detailed look at the dominant culture and mischaracterizations that individuals of color from mixed ancestry have to contend with draws attention to the resiliency involved in self-identification.

Societal Stereotypes

The challenges that individuals from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds face are negotiated in the context of wider society as they move in and out of different social contexts and actively construct their personal identities. Yet within social contexts, "structural racism" (Aspen, 2004) disturbs the construction of identity for women of color from mixed ancestry because they must contend with the negative meanings associated with the notion of race. They regularly run into structural forces such as demonizing stereotypes and other mischaracterizations based on racial and/or ethnic traits that continue to permeate the entire social order and act to justify both social exclusion and the unequal treatment of women of color. Women of color from mixed ancestry are assigned an identification founded on the dominant White culture's assumption of who these women are. These assumptions are, for one, often accepted without question and two, particularly problematic because they have often been built up from false teachings and gross mischaracterizations based on social constructions of race and ethnicity grounded in the biological claim that people of color are naturally inferior (Rothenberg, 1990).

Historically, the media has played a powerful, legitimizing, and controlling role in the formation of stereotypes that in turn impact individual and collective identities for women of color. The negative images presented in the media and the language and labels used to describe and characterize women of color perpetuate myths and depreciate (Pinderhughes, 1989). Gracia (2007) suggests that even thinking in ethnic terms may further perpetuate stereotypes, faulty generalizations and a silencing of one's unique and multiple identities. For example, terms such as "Latina" do not accurately represent the reality of the persons they purport to describe and tend to paint the erroneous and narrow picture of all Hispanics or Latinos as the same. Demonizing stereotypes re-appear in each racial and ethnic group, they just change slightly to fit the mold. The stereotypes used to describe Black, Latin, Asian, and Biracial women are discussed as additional structural forces influencing the construction of identity.

Black Women: Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire

Three main images in the media that are ascribed to Black women are the Mammy or "Aunt Jemima," the Jezebel, and the Sapphire images (Pilgrim, 2002). These stereotypes, which evolved during slavery, continue to conjure up negative images of Black women. Traditionally, the Mammy or "Aunt Jemima" figure represents the submissive domestic worker. Her image is one of a nurturing full-figured, dark, African American woman wearing an apron, with a do-rag on her head and is smiling. Her uniform, affect, and large figure depict her as an unthreatening, hardworking, and docile servant (Yarbough & Bennett, 2002).

Quite different from the desexualized Mammy image, the Jezebel or bad-Black-girl stereotype is depicted as the hypersexual Black women. This figure is typically

shown as a thin, fair-skinned woman who takes advantage of men through sex. She is

seductive, alluring, and lewd, and is portrayed today in popular culture in such movies as

Monster's Ball (2001) as well as televised rap and hip-hop music videos (Pilgrim, 2002).

Lastly, the Sapphire image is portrayed as a dark brown woman with her hands on

her hips signifying that she is headstrong and opinionated. Popularized by Ernestine

Ward in the television series *Amos and Andy*, this image is one of the emasculating and

aggressive Black woman. "The myths of Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire have their roots

in negative anti-woman mythology. Moreover, at any time, each of these images is used

to characterize African American women in a monolithic way. Consequently, many

people find it difficult to appreciate the diversity of African American women and instead

impose identities based on negative stereotypes" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2002).

Latinas: Sexy Temptress or Domestic Worker

Latin women are also subjected to generalized representations based on historical

racist and sexist beliefs. Latin women, in general, are most often depicted as sexy

temptresses, docile housewives, domestic workers, sex objects or virgins (Franco, 2008).

The Latina is seen in mainstream media as playing the role of the nurse or maid or the

sexy Latina. She is portrayed as a curvaceous woman with full hips who speaks with

broken English. More specifically, Chicana women are constructed as "erotic and exotic"

and Puerto Rican and Cuban women as "tropical bombshells…sexy, sexed, and

interested" (see Mullings, 1994).

Asian Americans: Dragon Lady or Geisha Girl

Asian-American women have been depicted in images as the Dragon Lady, or the

China Doll, which is also known as the Geisha girl. Similar to the stereotypes applied to

Black and Latin women, these images collapse both gender and sexuality (Espiritu, 1997). The Geisha Girl or China Doll is portrayed as servile, docile, and submissive, whereas the Dragon Lady is the castrating and aggressive woman.

Mixed Heritage: Tragic Mulatto

Among mixed heritage individuals, Wallace (2001) calls attention to the hybrid degeneracy theory that is often applied to mixed heritage individuals. As explained by Wallace (2001), this theory portrays mixed heritage individuals as inferior or inherently tormented because of their Black and White biological make-up. Perhaps the most popular image used by popular literature and the media to describe this theory is the "tragic mulatto/a." As shown in popular literature, the tragic mulatto/a is an individual from a mixed Black and White lineage. This image is one of a frizzy-haired, lost person who does not fit in the "natural" racial order. Barack Obama makes reference to his identity as a mixed heritage individual in his book, *Dreams of My Father*. "Privately, they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose—the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds."

Gendered Stereotypes

To this day, racial, ethnic, and gendered stereotypes and labels are used to enforce hierarchies of privilege and inferiority, with Whiteness being the dominant and desired social group (Ore, 2003). The classic stereotypes that have been applied to all women of color serve to alienate women from mainstream society and perpetuate racial, patriarchal and class domination (Espiritu, 1997). Espiritu (1997) writes about the "gendering of ethnicity," which she defines as the process by which White society assigns gendered characteristics to "others." Gendering of ethnicity reduces women of color to one-

dimensional caricatures and demonizes their differences as illustrated in the stereotypes applied to women of color. Essed (1991) coined the term *gendered racism* (as cited in Shorter-Gooden, 2004) to describe the experiences of oppression that are most relevant to the identities of Black women.

Negative and stereotypical cultural messages linked to Blackness in the media, as well as sexual harassment, being made to feel invisible, and having to listen to racial slurs are a part of the lived experiences for women of color. Furthermore, the majority of the personal experiences of racism encountered by Black women are forms of gendered racism illustrating the juxtaposition of racism and sexism in the lives of Black women (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Characterizations and Physical Appearance

Linked to the societal stereotypes are characterizations based on physical appearance such as skin color, hair texture, and body image. Dominant society typically assigns identifications to individuals and groups primarily based on their race, which is derived from these physical characteristics. This section of the chapter discusses two different types of characterizations based on physical appearance. One, individuals of color from mixed ancestry are racialized because of their black features. Two, individuals from mixed heritage are constantly queried about their identity because of their ambiguous physical features. Both are constraining forces in self-identification.

Racialization

Omi and Winant (1994) describe racialization as, "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (p.64). Similar to Omi and Winant's (1994) description of racialization, Lewis (2003) makes the

distinction between what she terms racial identification, understood as self-definition, and racial ascription, that is, external racial categorization. External racial categorization has its historic roots in assigning people identities with the goal of creating oppressive racial categories (Lewis, 2003). As explained by Lewis (2003), identity is imposed on non-racialized individuals for human categorization purposes, as was evidenced by the one-drop rule of racial classification.

The social process of racialization is an example of how in United States society, race trumps ethnicity in terms of identification. As shared by a Jamaican woman in an unpublished qualitative study by Quiros (2005), "Jamaican, African American or not, you are still Black and when it comes down to it they do not see the distinction; they see the skin and that's it." The Black woman in United States society is given messages that imply, "I know what you are" because a woman who "looks" Black is most likely to be labeled as Black, or African American, *regardless of her ethnic self-identification.*

Findings from Brunsma and Rockquemore's (2001) study of Biracial college students show the correlation between skin color and racial identification. Results of this study conclude, "skin color influences others' interpretations of appearance and ultimately influences the choice of identity" (p. 238). The majority of the respondents (65.5%) who perceive their skin color as dark stated that they "appear Black" and are assumed by others to be Black, whereas 64.7% of the respondents who have light skin said they "appear White" and could pass as White. Among the respondents who stated they "appear ambiguous" and are not assumed to be Black, 82.2% have light to medium skin. This research by Brunsma and Rockquemore (2001) suggests that skin color is most often the initial predictor of external identification. Typically, the darker one's skin, the

more likely the individual would be identified exclusively as Black, but the way "Black"

is described in the literature is not representative of one's personal and complex

experience. As stated by Brunsma and Rockquemore (2002), "Black has been considered

to describe a common set of social experiences; however, it is not currently accurate in

depicting monolithic assemblage of similar situations and circumstances" (p.102).

Additional results of this study by Brunsma and Rockquemore (2002) purport that

reviews of others and the racialized assumptions others make about Biracial individuals

significantly affect self-understanding of race (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001).

What Are You?

If an external label is not imposed, individuals of color from mixed ancestry are

constantly queried about their identity because of their racially and ethnically ambiguous

features. Such questions as "What are you?" become part of their daily reality. This

question implies an awareness of unfamiliarity as a result of variances in appearance, as

well as the assumption of the multiracial person's outsider status (Bradshaw, 1992; King

& DaCosta, 1996). Pearl Fuyo Gaskins (1999) captures the voices of mixed-race youth in

her book, *What are you?* This book is a result of a qualitative study of eighty mixed-race

young people. *What are you?* uses poems and essays from forty-five mixed-race youth to

illustrate the unique and profound experience of being racially and ethnically mixed. As

Gaskins explains (1999), despite their diverse backgrounds of White and Asian, Black

and White, and Hispanic and Black, the youth all shared the similar experiences of not

fitting neatly within the lines of America's racial divide. As Gaskins (1999) states, "they

cross borders, they straddle lines and they challenge boundaries" (p.10). Physically, these

individuals fall somewhere in between Black and White. They might have brown skin but

straight hair, or light skin and kinky hair, or they might look white but speak Spanish.

Gaskins (1999) explains that the ambiguity in appearance causes confusion and

discomfort among others in dominant society because the racial and ethnic box is blurred.

Perhaps most powerful is the description of the racially and ethnically mixed person as an

"inkblot" where the observer projects what they need to onto the racially or ethnically

mixed person in order to alleviate the uncertainty and discomfort (Gaskins, 1999). As

stated by Root (Gaskins, 1999), who is racially mixed herself, "people see us and they

project what they need onto us to make themselves feel comfortable "(p.20). This

projection is often a monoracial or monoethnic identity that helps to alleviate the

observer's discomfort while reducing the complexity of identity for the racially and

ethnically mixed person. Furthermore, the projected identities are constructed differently

in time and place and are guided by stereotypes of mixed heritage individuals (Wallace,

2001). As a Biracial participant in Wallaces' (2001) study stated:

> Sometimes I get the impression that it's some kind of exotic thing and they are
> just curious, you know "What are you?" "What are your parents?" "Where are
> your parents from?" Like they don't know the answer and they're just trying to
> figure it out…I think it's the exotic thing. I have definitely got comments like "Oh
> what an interesting mix." Or "what a nice color."

The "What are you?" question is an example of the importance that race is given

in United States society because people have been socially conditioned to notice one's

race, albeit socially constructed, first (Gaskins, 1999). As a Biracial and Native American

woman from Gaskins (1999) study shared, answering the "What are you question?" is a

common experience for her.

> I was eating diner in the dorm at a table full of people, and all of a sudden, one of
> the guys I knew came up. He saw me and asked "what are you?" That totally
> caught me off guard, and I was embarrassed. I just wasn't expecting it in front of
> all those people. It made me feel so different from everyone else. I get asked what

I am a lot. I usually just answer that I am mixed. But then that isn't enough of an answer for most people; they want to know the details. So I say, "I'm black, white, and Indian," and people want to know more. "Which parent is what?" Then I have the difficulty of explaining that both of my parents a re mixed. So now I don't feel like explaining, I just say "Native American." Most of the time people are very happy with hearing that response (p.23).

As stated by another participant in Gaskins (1999) study when speaking of her

mixed Navajo and Anglo-Irish heritage, "it's not something that you have to aspire to be

or try to prove. It just is. You don't have to separate yourself into 'I'm half Navajo and

I'm half white. There is no separation. It's something that you are and you were brought"

(p.70). As illustrated, individuals of color from mixed racial and ethnic ancestry are

characterized and sorted into categories based on the social constructions of race and

ethnicity.

Power of Social Constructions

This chapter began with a detailed discussion of the structural influences of the

family, societal stereotypes, and characterizations based on the social constructions of

race and ethnicity on multiracial and multiethnic populations. Within the home

environment individuals of color from mixed ancestry receive varied messages related to

their identity as mixed heritage children. After leaving the confines of their home and the

neighborhoods they grew up in, they are confronted with societal stereotypes and

characterizations based on their physical appearances and the messages related to

appearance are even more relevant to women of color. In a social context where

Whiteness is valued and perceived as the norm, appearance alone makes it that much

more difficult for women than men to transcend the limitations of color imposed by

society (Root, 1990). As Patricia Collins (2000) notes, women's valuations of their self-

worth often depend on their physical attractiveness (Collins, 2000). Supporting research

by Bowles (1993) found that women had a more difficult time accepting their Black

features than men (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). In addition, women are the

recipients of subtle and overt racist messages more often than men when it entails the

discussion of worth based on appearance (Boyd-Franklin, 1991).

Extending the experience of mixed heritage individuals of color, this section of

the chapter discusses the power of social constructions on their welfare, interpersonal

relationships, and careers. This study is unique in that the majority of the literature on

racial and ethnic identity focuses on the adolescent stage of development, whereas this

study focuses on adult women. As a result, identity construction is studied throughout

different contexts in different stages. Finally, this section of the chapter culminates with a

discussion of the impact of the social construction of race and ethnicity on the internal

construction of identity.

Impact on Welfare

The impact of the social construction of race and ethnicity on the welfare of

individuals of color from mixed ancestry is illustrated in varied forms of bias from

family, friends, peers, and society at large. For one, all people of color experience bias

and societal discrimination on a near daily basis. Second, individuals of color of mixed

heritage experience bias and rejection from monoracial and monoethnic friends, family

and peers precisely because of their multiracial and multiethnic ancestry. Finally, as

individuals from multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds, their voices are often silenced

by a society that essentailizes identity and reduces identification to monolithic labels.

Individuals of color from mixed ancestry are pressured to conflate their complexities by adopting a single and predetermined racial or ethnic label.

Bias and Societal Discrimination

Bias and societal discrimination are social realities that remain embedded in the nation's political, economic, and socio-cultural institutions and are evident in the disparaging ways that people of color are treated and characterized. Within the stereotypes and characterizations are messages about the value of White power and privilege. Most often individuals of color experience societal discrimination based on physical appearance where "color" carries stigma. Despite shifting definitions of race and culture the stigma of being of color, as it relates to behavior and appearance, is ever present in people's psyches, in social institutions and is linked to unequal treatment of people of color. Kaufman (2003) speaks to the "walls of racism" that are a constant for people of color. As Kaufman (2003) states:

> For many people of color, those walls are ever present: in the lack of representation and misrepresentation of people from their own racial groups in the media every day; in the ways people are harassed by the police and treated by the judicial system; in the subtle but persistent ways that people of color are treated with suspicion in mostly white situations; and in the maddening fact that people of color can't know if they didn't get a job because they weren't the best applicant or because they weren't the right color (p.121).

The value attached to whiteness is also represented in the images of what it means to be beautiful. Individuals of color, particularly women, experience societal discrimination when they do not look white. In United States culture, White society has set the precedent for how women should behave and look and the norm from which research on the "universal woman" is based is the White woman (Graham, 1992). The physical characteristics of slender figures with straight-hair and fair skin define the

standards of beauty and elevate Whiteness over "colorness." When mainstream references to "women" are made, the reference is almost always to a White woman (Darder, 2002); except when the images presented are negative. The association of White with "right" is universal among racial and ethnic groups of color (Russell, Wilson & Hall, 1992), and as a result, the bias attributed to persons with racial and ethnic features impacts the welfare of people of color. For example, in an unpublished study (as cited in Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992) conducted at DePaul University, psychologist Midge Wilson and two of her students found that Blacks and Whites share negative attitudes about Black women with dark skin (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). In her study, Wilson asked eighty evenly divided Black and White males and females to characterize their impressions of the photographs of twelve Black women. Results revealed that the dark-skinned women participants were primarily rated as less successful, less happy in love, less popular, less physically attractive, less physically, and emotionally health, and less intelligent compared to their lighter-skinned counterparts (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). This literature by Russell, Wilson and Hall (1992) also notes that skin color bias has lead to a desire among some women of color to look Whiter.

The literature discusses other distinct racial features such as hair texture, language, dress, and customs that distinguish individuals from the dominant group and impact the welfare and construction of identity for women of color (Phinney, 1990). For example, the literature points to the unique experiences of Black women and their personal and public struggle with "good" hair and lighter skin. "The great hair obsession is driven by the painful need of many African Americans to conform to the dominant norms of American society. And beauty, fashion, and hairstyles are the most popular and

perverse expressions of those values" (Hutchinson, 1998, Conclusion section). In *Hair Matters*, Ingrid Banks (2000) discusses the messages that Black females receive that their hair in its natural style is undesirable, therefore having to endure the pain of getting their hair straightened. "The dominant interpretation of African American male and female hair straightening has been that it expressed identification with the White hair aesthetic" (Banks, 2000, p. 10). As Kaufman (2003) explains, in American society, Whiteness is the general basis for beauty, making it hard for women of color to embrace their own beauty and "love themselves and love each other" (p.138).

On a more encouraging note, a recent *Newsweek* article discusses the positive affirmation that Black women have received from First Lady Michelle Obama. As stated in the article, "Michelle is not only African American, but brown, real brown" (p.32). Michelle's physical appearance, specifically her skin color and athletic build, expands the scope of beauty for the Black woman in the 21st century and may have a profound effect on the self-esteem of many women of color (Samuels, 2008).

Bias and Rejection

Individuals of color from mixed heritage are caught between the socially constructed racial and ethnic worlds of Black, White, Asian and Latino. For one, mixed heritage individuals experience bias and rejection from family members because of the interracial and interethnic character of their families. Second, experiences of rejection are noted within racial and ethnic peer groups because the multiracial and multiethnic individual challenges the norms of classification. Wallace (2001) uses the term "culturally suspect" to describe the experience of mixed individuals in the context of racial and ethnic peer groups. As Wallace (2001) explains, the majority of participants in

her study felt tension from their peers in specific racial and ethnic groups because of their

mixed identities. The multiracial and multiethnic participants in Wallace's (2001) study

shared that their loyalty to a group and legitimacy within the group is questioned by their

peers because of their dissimilar physical appearance and interactional styles (Wallace,

2001). Gaskins (1999), whose mother is Japanese American and father European

American, shared her own experiences as a child with her constant struggle of feeling

neither "white enough" or "nonwhite enough." Similarly, a Latina American participant

in Wallace's (2001) study expressed her struggles with marginalization within the Latina

community:

> Well, there's a …definite Latina faction…and I very much want to identify with
> them. And I normally do identify with the Latino culture. But this group has
> pushed me somehow on the outside and part of it, I'm feeling, is my mixed
> heritage… sometimes I have the feeling that I don't have the full experience of
> being full Latina (p.103).

The struggle with feeling marginalized and the effort to gain legitimacy among peers

within specific racial and ethnic groups is an experience unique to multiracial and

multiethnic individuals.

Racialized issues of superiority and inferiority based on physical appearance as

well as experiences of rejection by family, peers, and racial or ethnic groups because of

mixed racial and ethnic identity are external forces that impact the welfare of individuals

of color from mixed ancestry. As Gaskins (1999) states, "multiracial people find

prejudice on both sides of the fence—from people of color as well as from whites"

(p.140). For the multiracial and multiethnic individual, the social realities of structural

racism and living on the margins of different racial and ethnic groups call into question

one's authenticity and elicit feelings of marginality, inferiority, and needing to prove

oneself (Gaskins, 1999; Wallace, 2001). Pellegrini (2005), a Mexican and Italian American states, "I have grown tired of trying to conform with what others see me as and/or wish I were. I no longer want to pass. I conclude that I should not have to fractionalize and segregate the diversity in me for the sake of anyone" (p.532).

Silence

The voices of individuals of color from mixed ancestry are silenced. For one, in dominant society race trumps ethnicity, meaning individuals are racialized and ascribed an identity that is more often than not monolithic and based solely on physical features. Second, rooted in the faulty classifications are the historic stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups. The reality is that individuals of color from multiracial and multiethnic ancestry may seek simultaneous group membership from more than one reference group (Wallace, 2001). As stated by Williams (1999), "in placing people in either/or categories, their experiences are forced into simplistic paradigms that fail to capture their complexities" (p.34).

Contributing to the suppression of complexity is the felt pressure to "check one box" and adopt monolithic external identifications for the sake of others (Pellegrini, 2005). Words and phrases used by participants in Gaskins (1999) study to describe the feelings associated with the coercion and pressure they have experienced to adopt a single and predetermined label include: "conflicted" "uneasy" and "I've never fit into any category." Little is known about the psychological processes at work when a person checks a box reporting to be a member of a particular racial or ethnic group (Snipp, 2003). This decision of what box to check on application forms for jobs, scholarships, loans, mortgages, enrollment forms for schoolchildren, and certainly on the United States

Census, is an example of an externally imposed barrier that becomes an internal struggle impacting the welfare of individuals of color from mixed ancestry. For example, a Haitian-American woman friend of mine shared with me that in filling out mortgage forms for her new home she felt reluctant to identify as African American because she identifies as Black and Caribbean. However, that box did not exist. On one level she felt she would be denying her Haitian heritage if she chose to settle on being labeled as African American, and while she had the option to skip the question, there was another strong part of her that felt she had to answer the question to show that people of color were buying homes. This example illustrates how the tension of freedom and constraint of identification is felt.

Traditional models of identity formation contribute to the understanding of identity as a monolithic essence with universal meanings, whereas social constructionism considers the non-singular nature of identity construction by acknowledging the multiple identifications beyond the conventional racial and ethnic categories. Yet as Glenn (1998) notes, racial and ethnic categories are never free-floating and the agency to express multiple heritages is still silenced by the overpowering social constructions of race and ethnicity.

Social Impact

The social construction of racial and ethnic identification influences the personal and social decisions that individuals make. Race, for example, is noted in the literature as a significant predictor of the choice in a partner (Thornton, 1996). But beyond that, how does the social construction of race and ethnicity impact personal decisions regarding career choices and interpersonal relationships with friends and co-workers? What

influence does external identification have on the socialization process with peers and in work environments for mixed-heritage individuals? Do societal beliefs about race and ethnicity channel women to different careers? Once in a career, how does being a woman of color form a multiracial and ethnic background affect their work and relationships with co-workers? In a study on gender and the career choice process, Correll (2001) purports that cultural perceptions of gender impact the early career choices for both men and women. Similarly, racial and ethnic stereotypes contain expectations for competence that may or may not impact one's career choice and level of functioning at work.

Yet, the research on the social impact of racial and ethnic identity is limited. Thornton (1996) argues that much research on racial and ethnic identification is limited to 1) early age experiences and 2) a fixation on racial/ethnic identity that ignores the impact of race and ethnicity on the various roles that individuals play. As questioned by Thornton (1996), "Where in our range of roles do we place mixed identity?" (p.118) Lewis (2003) discusses what she terms the "everydayness of race"—the awareness of how race and racial identification is constructed in everyday life. Although dealing with an externally imposed racial or ethnic identification that may or may not match with one's own self-identification is universal, the divergence of one's external ascription from one's internal self-identification is a part of daily life for women of color, impacting one's sense of racial and ethnic identity. For example, a colleague of mine who identifies as Caribbean-Black shared that in her career in academia she is keenly aware that her actions and behavior may, unfortunately, be used to speak for or against the whole Black race. When asked how her life decisions have been affected by her internal and external identification she stated, "the fact that there are so few people of color on the faculty in

schools of higher education has been a motivating force for me to pursue and complete

my PhD." However, not every woman in this study may be conscious of her internal self-

identification and the impact on her life decisions.

As Lewis (2006) found in her study focusing on everyday race making within

three school communities, some adults and children may only think about their identities

in moments of interaction with the social environment and in moments of divergence.

Research on this topic remains scarce. In fact, psychologist and expert in ethnic identity

formation theory, J. Phinney (personal conversation, January 6, 2007), indicated that she

did not have any information on racial and ethnic identity and the implications for life

decisions.

Impact on Internal Identity Construction

Socially constructed racial and ethnic characterizations and the meanings attached

to the characterizations may produce internal tensions within multiracial and multiethnic

individuals. As discussed in the previous section, individuals of color are racialized and

characterized based on their physical appearance. Racialization and characterizations are

problematic because for one, race is the dominant marker of identity where White is

associated with power and privilege and color carries stigma, second, ethnicity is ignored

and finally, the assigned categorization may be very different from the individual's

internal identification.

Research by Nakashima (1992) suggests that as multiracial individuals move

through their identity development one of the earliest conflicts they may encounter is a

divergence between their own internal identification and the external identification that is

imposed on them from the outside. Shih and Sanchez (2005) also purport that multiracial

and multiethnic individuals often encounter inconsistencies between how they define themselves and how they are defined by society. Yet, women of color, in general, must contend with the external identification by others on a daily basis through social interactions in different contexts. It is these social interactions that may bring meaning to, or cause women to question and/or qualify, their internal racial or ethnic identity. Research by Bradshaw (1992), suggests that identity conflicts arise when external attributions of racial and ethnic identification are incongruous with the internal experiences of racial and ethnic self-identification.

This experience of ascribed identification may be even more intense for foreign-born Blacks, or subsequent generations who maintain an ethnic identity. Johnson (2000) refers to Black immigrants as experiencing a "double invisibility." Similar to the native-born Black population, Black immigrants suffer from one kind of invisibility on a national level when their ethnic identity is ignored and the focus is on the color of their skin. An added dimension of invisibility comes into play as Black immigrants often find that they are lumped with Blacks born in the United States in an, "artificial, monolithic minority designated Negro, Colored, Black, or African American kind of second invisibility" (p. 57). For example, Hine-St. Hilaire (2006) cites the efforts second generation West Indian immigrants go through to assert their ethnic identities. Jones (1997) found that the women in her study who had come to the U.S. from different countries felt that upon arrival to this country they faced "the color thing." According to Jones' study, it was only when they arrived in the U.S. that race took on meaning, whereas, for women born in the U.S. who had strong cultural ties, race was never discussed as a meaningful identity dimension. In his work involving ethnic identity and

acculturation—"a process involving two or more groups, with consequences for both; in effect however, the contact experiences have much greater impact on the nondominant group and its members" (p. 616)—Berry (2001) found that those individuals with distinct physical features different from the receiving society may experience prejudice and discrimination and thus be hesitant to pursue assimilation because of the fear of rejection. Landale and Oropesa (2002) support this finding in their work with mainland and island Puerto Ricans. According to these authors, dark-skinned Puerto Ricans are often identified as Black, yet they are hesitant to assume a Black identity because of the way Black people are stigmatized in the United States.

Carmen Braun Williams (1999) speaks to her personal struggle with ascribed racial identity in her essay *Claiming a Biracial Identity: Resisting Social Constructions of Race and Gender*. As stated by Williams (1999), "I have been queried about my racial identity or erroneously, my nationality. People, mostly White, have wondered why I do not choose to 'pass' as White. Other people, mostly Black, have demanded to know why I say I am Biracial instead of just 'admitting' I am Black. People have given me advice on how I should talk, think, act and feel about myself racially. Repeatedly people have tried to define my existence for me" (p.33). As Williams (1999) suggests, although race can contribute to ethnicity, it is neither accurate nor necessary to assume that one's ethnicity is based on his or her perceived race, particularly within multiracial populations. Bell hooks (1990) further discusses the process involved in moving from society's definition to a self-definition and labels this process "claiming the I." Using hooks' words, "claiming the I," in a color-coded society that does not honor the multiple realities is a challenging process. "To define a self that fails to conform to the rigid categories of

racial and cultural identity is daunting, given the virtual absence of outside affirmation"
(Williams, 1999, p.33).

In Conclusion

Women of color from mixed racial and ethnic ancestry attempt to construct their
personal identity in the face of the American history of ethnoracial classification,
demonizing stereotypes and faulty characterizations in a society where race trumps
ethnicity and contributes to the silencing of their unique identities. As Freire (1970/1993)
suggests, marginal status is created by the dominant society and structures and rules that
order it. Crenshaw (1994) states that being a woman of color is not inherently oppressive;
the issue is being a woman of color in a sexist and racist society that privileges a
particular race and gender.

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the construction of racial and
ethnic identity takes place within social contexts in American society and is influenced
by structural forces. Weeding through social ascriptions that vary according to context
and gaining the confidence to embrace multiple parts of oneself within American society
is a process that is unique to women of color from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds.
W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1953) famously spoke of the notion of double consciousness
experienced by African Americans more than a century ago. In the *Souls of Black Folk*
DuBois (1903/1953) wrote that the African American "ever feels his two-ness…two
souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (p. 5). As affirmed by Ladson-Billings
(2003), this notion of double conscious is relevant to all people outside of the dominant
culture. Women of color from mixed ancestry are among this group. As Hall (1992)

purports, Americans of mixed ethnic and racial heritage must live in two worlds, and some may wrestle with more than two.

The ecological approach to identity formation and specific multidimensional models of identity development previously discussed, are examples of the theory of social constructionism and offer a paradigm of identity formation that includes both individual and sociological complexities. Providing opportunities for women of color from mixed ancestry to share their stories, and define their labels and identifications through qualitative inquiry adds to the literature and addresses the need for critical reflection, increased awareness, and cultural diversity throughout academia curricula. By uncovering the ways in which racial and ethnic identity for women of color from mixed ancestry is influenced by and constructed within specific social contexts in American society, this study aims to incorporate a more nuanced and critical understanding of the complexity of identity and the impact of identification.

Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry

This study will present qualitative data from thirty-one interviews of self-identified women of color from mixed ancestry, documenting their racial and ethnic identity construction within the contexts of various environments. The research questions how specific social contexts of family, community, and American society influence racial and ethnic identity. Qualitative study in the tradition of grounded theory is the research methodology used to explore this topic. Qualitative research lends itself to engaging women around both the constructions and meanings associated with their racial and ethnic identification. As stated by Janesick (1994), "qualitative techniques have been

employed because of, among other things, the suitability of the technique and the question" (p. 211). This method of research aims for a rich description of the lived experiences of informants. Within this group of women there are complicated stories to tell and to study them any other way would rob these stories of their complexity. Ontologically, the nature of reality is socially constructed within specific contexts and through interactions. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to explore the complexity of identity within social contexts while paying careful attention to detail and nuance in an effort to communicate the women's reality in their own terms (Patton, 2002).

Introduction to Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2006) suggests that the research problem should dictate the method used to collect and analyze data. In this study, data was collected through in-depth, intensive interviewing to research the problem of the social construction of racial and ethnic identity among a mixed heritage population of women within the context of American society. As such, the diversity and complexity of the human experience insists on a process-oriented and creative approach to research that allows for a flexible research design. More specifically, researching the lived realities of women of color calls for a methodological approach that honors diversity and elevates the voices of women of color rather than an approach that reinstates hegemonic ideologies and essentialist categories. Therefore, qualitative study in the tradition of grounded theory is the best approach to assist the researcher in exploring and understanding the personal construction of racial and ethnic identification.

Grounded theory methods emerged in the 1960's from Glaser and Strauss's (1965, 1967) fieldwork with hospital staff and their experiences with terminally ill hospital patients. Glaser and Strauss (1967) formulated systematic methodological strategies from their fieldwork that lead to the development of mid-level theories grounded in the data collected from their informants (Charmaz, 2006). These strategies were adopted by social scientists for studying other areas of interest where the focus was on generating theory from the concurrent process of data collection and analysis. Assisting in the theoretical development, Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987) identify specific analytic tools that assist the research in data collection and analysis and are the defining components of this approach. These tools include: advancing theory during each step of data collection and analysis, using the constant comparative methods to compare data throughout the research process, constructing analytic codes and categories from the data, engaging in memo-writing, sampling with the goal of constructing theory, and conducting the literature review following the development of an independent analysis (Charmaz, 2006). These tools and their implementation as it relates to this study, will be further defined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodology in the tradition of grounded theory was used to explore the construction of racial and ethnic identity among women of color of mixed heritage. The research question is: How is the personal construction of identity for women of color from mixed ancestry influenced by structural factors within specific social contexts in American society? By connecting with women through qualitative inquiry to uncover the ways in which their racial and ethnic identities are shaped by structural factors within social contexts in American society, this study aims to incorporate a more nuanced and critical understanding of the complexity of ethnoracial identity. This chapter begins with a discussion of the themes of qualitative inquiry and grounded theory as the most appropriate methodology and theoretical orientation for this study.

Advantages of Qualitative Research

To begin with, qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry whereby the research takes place in real-world settings. In qualitative research, the aim of the research is not prediction or control, but rather discovery and exploration of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). As a "discovery-oriented" approach, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the study setting or place constraints on the potential outcomes of the study (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) states, "what makes this naturalistic inquiry is that real-world participants direct the change, not the researcher, as in the laboratory" (p.42).

Second, qualitative research is a flexible research design where data sampling schemes, collection instruments, and hypotheses cannot be completely specified in

advance. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher remains open to and tolerant of new information that may enter the research process and alter the initial research design. Furthermore, in qualitative inquiry the size of the sample selected is consistent with the purpose of study (Bernstein, 1991). Therefore, each case is purposely selected with the general selection criteria being the identification of information-rich cases. Sample size in qualitative inquiry depends on the purpose of the study, contrary to quantitative inquiry where the method is random sampling with a requirement of a greater number of cases for the purposes of generalizability. "In qualitative inquiry, the selection of the respondents must be made accordingly. The first principle is that 'less is more.' It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them" (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). As such, qualitative research methodology allows for a deeper exploration of individual variation. In this study, the exploration of individual variation is crucial because women of color from mixed ancestry represent a diverse group whose experiences cannot be generalized beyond the individual.

An additional advantage to qualitative inquiry is that methodologically, knowledge of the participants' reality is gained and learned through data collection methods such as: in-depth interviews, field observations, and documents (Patton, 2002). In contrast, in quantitative studies the choice of methodology is research in the form of statistical information used to verify generalized predictions. Qualitative data collection methods such as in-depth interviews insist that the participants' own voices and stories are the focus of the inquiry. As stated by Patton (2002), "qualitative data describe…they capture and communicate someone else's experience of the world in his or her own

words" (p. 47). Open-ended questions asked during the interviews give way to in-depth responses about informants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences and provide the data to be analyzed.

In terms of the analytic process, qualitative inquiry involves inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). That is, patterns emerge from the participants' stories, without prior assumptions or a logically deduced hypothesis. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p.306). As such, qualitative research methodology allows for and honors multiple perspectives. Strauss & Corbin (2008) purport that "qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of the participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (p.12).

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument central to the collection and analysis of data (Patton, 2002). The researcher's prior knowledge of the research problem, his or her personal and professional experiences with the phenomenon, and the ways in which the researcher engages the informants all play a role in the research process. Consequently, Patton (2002) speaks to the concept of researcher reflexivity as crucial component of the researchers' process and one that influences the collection and analysis of data. Patton (2002) defines reflexivity as an ongoing examination of the researchers' self-knowledge and self-understanding. "Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voices of those one interviews and those whom one reports on" (Patton, 2002, p. 65). Strauss and Corbin (2008) purport that

reflexivity, which includes continual self-reflection throughout the research process, is a valuable tool used to question one's perspective, source of knowledge and how that knowledge may impact the research process. From reflexivity comes a deeper level of self-knowledge and self-awareness that directly impacts data collection and analysis.

Finally, the relationship between the researcher and the researched affects data collection, as it is this intimate relationship that will allow the researcher to enter the world of the informants and help unveil the material that needs to be explored. The qualitative researcher "goes into the field" and uses himself or herself to engage the informants, developing a closeness and trust for deeper inquiry (Patton, 2002). This means that the researcher must open oneself up to inquiry and discovery, contrary to quantitative research where the researcher remains objectively separate from the data and the focus is on confirming pre-existing knowledge. As such, an authentic immersion in the lives of the informants is always a central theme in qualitative inquiry. This immersion includes a critical consciousness of the diversity of experiences and meanings that each informant brings to the study. Beyond this immersion, the researcher must create a safe space for the informants to tell their stories. The ability of the researcher to communicate an understanding to informants while being nonjudgmental—what Patton (2002) calls "empathetic neutrality"—helps to foster this safe space. Women of color from mixed ancestry represent a community whose complexity has been diminished by the dominant discourse. Elevating their voices and constructing a narrative that is an alternative to the dominant discourse is a crucial task for the researcher.

Janesick (1994) uses the metaphor of dance for qualitative research design, with the researcher as the artist. This metaphor is illustrative of the creativity, energy, and

immersion necessary for qualitative inquiry. Similar to dance, qualitative research tells a story in all its uniqueness, complexity, emotionality, and context. "The qualitative researcher is like the dancer, in seeking to describe, explain, and make understandable the familiar in a contextual, personal, and passionate way" (Janesick, 1994, p.218).

Although qualitative research is best suited for this study, there are inherent limitations to qualitative studies, beginning with resources and time. Qualitative studies require smaller samples that do not yield quantitative results that can be used for statistical analysis (Phinney, 1992). Furthermore, some researchers argue that it is often difficult to draw meaningful generalizations because of the large degree of variance among small sample sizes (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). Qualitative research is often criticized for the nature of the analysis, which stands in direct contrast to the formulas and rules of statistical analysis (Patton, 2002).

Theoretical Orientation: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is noted as the most comprehensive qualitative research methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory stands in contrast to positivistic quantitative research where testable hypothesis are deduced from exiting theories and the focus is on validation and justification. In contrast, inductive analysis is the hallmark of grounded theory methods where creation and discovery is the focus. Furthermore, in positivist research, data collection is followed by analysis in a linear fashion, as opposed to grounded theory methods that uses systematic yet flexible guidelines to collect and analyze data concurrently with the aim of thematic and theoretical development.

Throughout the research process grounded theorists use analytic tools and strategies, as previously identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987) to manage raw data and assist with thematic and theoretical development. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to analytic tools as "thinking strategies" that are used strategically and purposely to stimulate the analytic process and help the researcher conceptualize the data. The analytic tools specific to this study—coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling—are outlined below.

Coding

Data analysis involves coding. Codes are tags or labels that the researcher attaches to the data that are then used to classify and assign meaning to data. Coding involves searching for the right language to best describe the raw data. Within the cyclical process of back and forth data collection and analysis, gaps in the research are identified and themes emerge through the process of coding and categorizing raw data. As stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008):

> Coding involves interacting with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (p.66).

As Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain, the coding process utilizes the art of questioning. Questioning helps to stimulate the analytic process and helps the researcher think outside of the box in order to extract the essence or meaning of the data. In this context, thinking outside of the box means that the researcher must be continually be engaged in reflexivity which means being aware of his or her preconceived notions and how such assumptions may infect the analytic process. Simultaneously, the researcher learns to think abstractly

and conceptually, and uses one's mind and intuition to help guide the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In grounded theory methods, open coding is the first step to identifying core concepts that are closely related to the phenomenon. As stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), "open coding requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them" (p.160). Within this process of open coding, the questions that researchers may ask of the data are open-ended, more general and less refined. It is only after carefully scrutinizing the data that the researcher is ready to attach interpretive codes to the material. During this process the researcher may attach labels comprised of the participants' words. These codes are called "*in vivo* codes." As stated by Charmaz (2006), "*In vivo* codes help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (p.55). As the research and analysis progresses, axial coding helps achieve data reduction by building connections within categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this process, the concepts that are generated during open coding relate to each another and the result is a broader category that encompasses previous concepts.

Throughout the coding process the grounded theory researcher makes constant comparisons between and among the data. Making comparisons is a tool used to help the researcher classify and better understand the data, and forces the researcher to think more abstractly about differences and similarities within the dimensions of the phenomenon under study. Bowen (2006) confirms that within grounded theory, the production of theory rests on the continual interplay between data collection and analysis throughout

the research process. It is from this dialogical relationship that raw data is scrutinized, concepts are constructed from initial coding, categories are developed and refined and in some cases, mid-level theories are framed around the data.

Memo-Writing

Another analytic tool used in grounded theory methods, and specifically in this study, is memo-writing. Memos are preliminary analytic notes that help to document the researcher's journey through data collection and analysis. Memos assist in capturing and developing the rich diversity of the phenomenon and further assist in the layout and thematic development of core categories and subcategories. As Strauss (1987) notes, memos become increasingly more elaborate in the later stages of data analysis, yet all memo types document the researcher's experience with the phenomenon under study.

As stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008) "memos are the running logs of analytic thinking" (p.108). The researcher using grounded theory methods writes memos throughout the research process as a way to record emerging themes, as well as thoughts and insights that surface during data collection and analysis. As Charmaz (2006) explains, "memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue" (p.72). Strauss (1987) notes that memos are an essential part of the internal dialogue the researcher is continuously engaged in. As previously discussed, the researcher must remain aware of what he or she brings to the study and any preconceived notions and biases that the may enter data collection and analytic. Writing memos are a way to remain aware while evaluating the research process.

Theoretical Sampling

In grounded theory methods, the flexible guidelines for data collection and analysis encourage constant development and refinement of the sample selection and the interview guide. Another strategy researchers use to assist in such development and refinement is theoretical sampling. As Charmaz (2006) explains, "initial sampling in grounded theory is where you start, whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go" (p.100). Theoretical sampling is specific for theoretical and conceptual development of the inquiry and is used to modify interview guides, select new participants or add new sources of data as a study progresses.

As Disko (2008) explains, grounded theory sampling is both purposive and iterative. It is purposeful in that the best possible informants are selected to illuminate the topic and develop theory. It is also iterative, in that the initial sample selection is expanded as new information is collected and analyzed. As stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), "theoretical sampling is based on the premise that data collection and analysis go hand in hand" (p.145). In other words, the concepts derived from the analysis guide the data collection. This type of sampling involves a level of unknown where the researcher must "let go" as he or she lets the research guide the data collection.

In sum, adopting grounded theory methods from the beginning of the research process provides the qualitative researcher with the analytic tools to deeply explore and better understand the phenomenon under study. The following section illustrates the description and selection of sample for this study.

Description and Selection of Sample

This research involved the collection of data through in-depth interviews with thirty-one self-identified women of color between the ages of 30 and 40 years old. The focus was on women's understandings and descriptions of their own identities, rather than labels imposed from outside. Women of color with mixed heritage can fit into several categories, typically presented in the literature as "women of color," "bicultural," "multiethnic," "mixed," "multiracial," or "minority." Although the women may choose to identify as such, efforts were made not to assign labels but instead to remain open to all possible racial and ethnic descriptors. The researcher was careful not to impose or essentialize identities, as a primary goal was the avoidance of ascribed identity.

The unit of analysis for this study was women who identify as women of color and share a perspective of being more than one race or ethnicity. The intensive interviews conducted for gathering data focused on self-definitions of racial and ethnic identity as well as different experiences that impacted women's personal construction of a mixed racial and ethnic identity within specific social contexts. The focus of analysis was on women's construction of their racial and ethnic identity as influenced by structural forces within specific contexts. That is, the diverse and comparable ways women of color from mixed ancestry construct a unique personal identity within specific social contexts within American society.

Criteria for Sample Selection

The original criteria for the sample selection were self-identified women of color from a mixed ethnic background, between the ages of 30 and 40, with a bachelor's degree, who were born in the United States. Therefore, women of color were initially

defined as women who have at least one parent from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, Latin America, South America, or Native American heritage. Since the original assumption was to explore the conflict between racial and ethnic identity, women with White parents were not going to be included. The recruitment flyer stated that the researcher was looking for women of color of non-European descent. The qualifications were listed as follows:

You must be a woman of color from a mixed ethnic background;
Have at least one parent from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, Latin America, or Native American heritage;
Between the ages of 30 and 40;
With a bachelor's degree and born in the United States

The intentional-ambiguity of the language used in the flyer allowed for a diversity of respondents, as women from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds interpreted the flyer differently. The first woman to respond to the flyer was a woman who identified, generally, as a "Multiracial Black woman." Although her mother is racially White, she stated that she "definitely identifies more racially, as Black." The initial criteria stated that women were to be of non-European descent, however, fieldwork shifted the data collection. After three women from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds with one parent from European descent responded to the flyer, the initial study criteria was re-evaluated and expanded to where it could include women who had one parent from European ancestry and one parent of color. Ultimately, twelve women who had one European parent responded to the flyer and were interviewed. In addition, four women who were interviewed for this study were born outside of the United States.

In the tradition of grounded theory methods, data collection and data analysis occurred concurrently. This dialogical relationship aided in the explication of new

concepts and categories. All twelve women with one White parent identified as women of color, making them eligible to participate. Comparatively speaking, these women had similar struggles to those who did not have a White parent. As I studied the initial data, the research shifted to a more general discussion of the complexity of identity and self-understanding among women of color from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds and elaborating on these categories meant that I was engaging in theoretical sampling.

The ways in which the language on the flyer was framed had implications for who was attracted to the study. Confining the recruitment through the use of rigid language would have diminished the sample, thereby limiting the process of discovery. In this study, the ambiguous and neutral language in the flyer allowed for a diversity of respondents. In the tradition of grounded theory methods, the cyclical elaboration of sampling continued during data collection and analysis as new information was obtained.

Recruitment

In order to obtain the best possible informants, the recruitment strategy consisted of postings, email blasts, and personal outreach. The initial recruitment began by posting flyers in common areas in New York City universities, including graduate schools. Women enrolled in higher education in diverse city universities would be likely to meet the study criteria. In addition, the recruitment flyer was sent to the office of the New York City chapter of the National Association of Social Workers New York City office, the Puerto Rican Family Institute and posted on the Women of Color Policy Network website. Contact was also made with the facilitators of the RACE project at the Liberty Science Center. The researcher spent a morning with the facilitators explaining this study, and left flyers with the staff to distribute.

The initial recruitment strategy expanded when women who had been interviewed generated additional informants by sending out an electronic copy of the flyer to their network of friends and family. Otherwise known as Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), this sampling method is often used when the target population is comprised of hard-to-reach groups (Heckathon, 1997). For example, one woman who participated in the study sent out the following message to friends and colleagues:

> My sister friend, Laura Quiros is conducting her doctoral dissertation on women of color from mixed ethnic backgrounds. Her research will explore how racial and ethnic identity influence important life decisions. Our sisters who have one foot in different cultures and racial groups often struggle with their racial and ethnic identity, often because of the framework or rather box that society puts them in. Laura's research will help shed some light on their issues.

The majority of the women responded to the flyer via email. Many sent detailed responses that included their racial and ethnic ancestry. From these emails the researcher determined the diversity of the respondents. These responses represented the beginning of their story. For example, as shared by one woman in an email response to the flyer, "I'm 33 yrs., 07/31/74, born here in NYC but my mom is from Barbados, my dad from Bermuda (passed in 91—massive heart attack, it's ok), my stepfather is from Barbados. I had three brothers, now two, ranging from 40 (3rd child), 46 (I think), and 52 (first born)."

Women were invited to participate if they were interested in the study and if they felt they met the criteria indicated on the flyer. A screening form was used to screen women who responded to the recruitment flyer to confirm that they were in fact eligible to participate in the study. The screening form was comprised of questions that were asked of the women who responded to the recruitment flyer via telephone. If the potential participant responded via e-mail then she was thanked, and asked to provide a phone

number and a good time to call, explaining that it is best to discuss the study over the

phone. After introductions, the potential participant was asked the following questions to

confirm that she met the study criteria:

1. Do you identify as a woman of color?
2. Do you have at least one parent from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, South America, or Native American heritage? If so, where are they from?
3. Do you identify as having a mixed background?
4. Do you have a bachelor's degree?
5. How old are you?
6. Were you born in the United States?
7. I am planning on conducting the interview in English. Are you comfortable with that?

If participants met the study criteria and they were still interested in participating in the

study, then they were given further information regarding the consent process, the

purpose of the study, the types of questions the researcher wanted to ask, the option of

tape recording the interview and how the researcher intended to use the results of the

study. If the informant agreed to proceed, then a time and place to meet to sign the

consent form and conduct the interview was agreed upon. The informed consent

highlighted both the voluntary nature of the interview as well as the ways in which

confidentiality was maintained. These steps included the immediate transcription of the

interview tapes or noted with all identifying information removed and immediate

destruction of original tapes and notes. The interviewees were assured anonymity by

confounding individual identity though false identities. The participants were reminded

that they could drop out at any time, or decline to answer any particular question asked

by the interviewer, though no one opted to do so.

Data Collection

The principal method for data gathering was through in-depth, intensive interviewing. According to Charmaz (2006), advantages of intensive interviews include, but are not limited to: going beneath the surface of the described experience, stopping to explore a statement or topic, requesting more detail or explanation, restating the participant's point to check for accuracy, shifting the immediate topic, validating the participant's perspective, respecting the participant and expressing appreciation for participating.

In this study, a deeper understanding of the complexity of racial and ethnic identification was sought through a hybrid interview guide consisting of both the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview approach, as opposed to questionnaires with predetermined response categories (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, fieldwork strategies such as personal engagement, and direct and personal contact with the women, allowed the interviewer to explore in greater depth the women's construction of identity and self-identification. This approach to data collection works well with grounded theory methods. As stated by Charmaz (2006) "both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches" (p.28).

In qualitative research it is the interview guide that drives the inquiry. Taking the women back through their experiences could not be done with the standardized open-ended interview approach alone because it limited the process of discovery. More specifically, asking questions in a standardized order disrupted the flow of the women's stories and the standardized wording limited their responses. The combined approach ensured that the same key questions were asked of each woman, yet flexibility in the format and wording allowed for a more genuine account of

the construction of their racial and ethnic identification. For example, some women felt more

comfortable using the term "culture" instead of "ethnicity" when discussing their heritage.

Development of Interview Guide

The development of the initial interview guide was based on the researcher's prior

history with this topic as well as the reviewed literature. Consistent with grounded theory

methods is the understanding that the researcher does not begin the study with a blank

slate (Patton, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). The researcher's perspective and prior assumptions

help shape the conceptual framework of the inquiry and give the researcher ideas on what

kinds of questions to ask. The authors use the term "sensitizing concepts" to describe a

general set of concepts, or background ideas, that help to organize the study and serve as

a foundation for the collection and analysis of research data (Blumer, 1954; Charmaz

2006; Bowen 2006). In general, sensitizing concepts give the researcher a loose

framework to begin exploring and questioning the topic at hand (Charmaz, 2006). As

stated by Charmaz (2006), "grounded theorists' background assumptions and disciplinary

perspectives alert them to look for certain possibilities and processes in their data" (p.16).

Charmaz (2006) refers to such concepts as "points of departure" that assist in the

formation and the development of interview questions, as well as serve as a guide in the

analysis of data. Yet, such concepts are preliminary in that these concepts can be

disregarded if they prove to be irrelevant. Furthermore, researchers caution that the

overuse of the concepts can become a distraction from emerging themes and suppress the

emergence of grounded theory from fieldwork (Blumer, 1954; Charmaz, 2006; Patton

2002). Within the tradition of grounded theory methods it is the lived experiences of the

participants that inform the story.

The reviewed literature, my own history as a woman of mixed heritage and my prior knowledge of the development of racial and ethnic identity among women from mixed ancestry served as a guide for the initial development of the interview guide. Loosely operationalized concepts such as racial and ethnic identity, internal identity, external identity, and influences on identity provided a starting point for data collection and analysis (Bowen, 2006). The initial guide was separated into five sections, though these sections were eventually collapsed. The answers to the questions that I had intended to ask emerged as women told the stories of the personal construction of their identity. Taking notes during the interview and constant memo-writing allowed me to return to key points and follow up on certain statements. The interview guide was refined and questions were trimmed as the interviews progressed in order to gather specific data for thematic and theoretical development.

Researcher Preparation and Conduct of Interviews

My personal background and professional interests led me to want to understand how women of color from mixed ancestry construct their unique identities within the context of American society. Understanding how reality is constructed for informants meant personally, authentically, and critically engaging in the material being studied. To begin with, engaging the women in this study by sharing my own personal experiences as a woman of color from mixed ancestry facilitated the process of data collection. However, I regularly struggled with knowing when, what and how much to share. In preparation for the interviews, I spent time reflecting on my personal construction of racial and ethnic identity, asking myself why I was engaged in this work and figuring out what it was I wanted to know. I piloted the interview guide on myself as well as with a

few close friends who met the study criteria. Yet, in the beginning stages of the research process, maintaining the balance between owning my perspective while honoring and elevating the perspectives and voices of the women whom I interviewed was a crucial and at times a difficult task, especially when my experiences and ideologies differed from the informants. As Fine (2003) and colleagues explain, "a call for the inclusion of subjective experiences of the researcher into what has traditionally been conceived of as subject matter bears different implications for differently situated researchers" (p.170). Initially, I abstained from sharing my background with the women until the end of the interview. However, by the end of the fourth interview my strategy had changed because of the fervor with which the women were asking me the specifics of my background. These queries typically occurred at the end of the interview, once the tape recorder was off. I shared with the women how my history as a woman of color who has struggled to integrate and accept my dual heritage had informed this inquiry and increased my desire to delve more deeply into the lives of women to extend my knowledge of the construction of identity. Once the women realized that I could relate to their experience as a "mixed" person, they shared more, often returning to previous questions with greater detail. In the fifth interview I edited my approach. I shared my identity in the beginning of the interview rather than waiting until the end. Fortunately, qualitative inquiry allows for flexibility in the research design. It was my hope that this decision to share my background would remove some of the mystery surrounding me and deepen my connection to the women I was interviewing, while communicating an understanding of their lived experiences as a person from a multiracial and multiethnic background.

The informal conversation in the beginning of the interview while the tape-recorder remained off helped to establish a rapport with the women. Our informal conversations lead to the interview guide. Although the tape recorder formalized the interview process, engaging in active listening, and remaining socially engaged by making eye contact and paying attention to non-verbal cues helped elicit responses to questions. I found it helpful to occasionally summarize the women's remarks as a check on understanding. Attention was also paid to the wording of each question, as the way in which questions are worded in an interview impacts the response. Patton (2002) notes that ideal questions are those that are open-ended, neutral, and clear. Creating a safe space where women felt comfortable to tell their stories was a priority. As stated by Fontana & Frey (1994), "to learn about people we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us" (p.374).

Content of Interviews

The interview guide consisted of well-planned, open-ended questions with probes. This guide primarily served as a reminder to ask all relevant questions, as it was easy to get distracted by the participants' stories and miss opportunities to probe further for detail and clarity. Despite the preparation and planning, interviewing was an unpredictable process because the women guided the interview. There were many moments that required me to depart from the interview guide. Charmaz (2006) notes that there are times in an interview when participants retell painful stories that they might have never imagined telling. For example, in this study a woman described her experiences as a child being bused to a different school in an outer borough for the sake of segregation. She described her experiences as the only Caribbean-American child, and what it felt like to

be teased by the African American children because of her accent and the ribbons her mother put in her hair. At one point during our conversation, she started to tear. She had prefaced her story by stating that "it's so painful, so if I start crying don't feel bad." In this instance, my role as the interviewer was to assess her safety and comfort level, rather than to obtain more information to advance my study. Listening to her story and validating her pain helped to bring this participant back to the conversation.

In another example, I interviewed a woman after a long day at work where she felt her supervisor had treated her unfairly because of her ethnic background. She was distraught and wanted to spend the beginning part of the interview processing the experience with me. Again, just listening, paying careful attention to when to probe and validating her experience, increased the level of comfort and safety in the interview, allowing the participant the freedom to share. Once she was done processing the experience, she was able to move on to the interview questions.

Throughout the interviews, topics were explored at the interviewer's discretion based on the women's telling of their stories. Flexibility in language allowed for a deeper exploration of what concepts such as race, ethnicity, and culture meant to the women. It was crucial to learn what these concepts meant to the woman rather than make assumptions based on the literature or my prior knowledge. For example, analyzing the beginning interviews within a day or two after I transcribed them alerted me to the fact that I neglected to ask informants how they define race and ethnicity. This question was added to my interview guide. The women's subjective definitions of race and ethnicity added depth to the data and afforded me the opportunity to use the informants' language to communicate meaning.

The intensive interview approach used to gather data offered the flexibility to probe when appropriate and to pose new questions that were not originally anticipated in the original design of the instrument. I kept a running list of questions that worked and tried to maintain a balance between taking notes and just listening. At the end of the interview women often shared that they felt understood. As stated by one woman in the study, "our discussion felt cathartic, discussing issues that I have harbored deep inside that will always be a part of me. I am so used to internalizing these issues that our discussion made me rethink how important it is to let out story out." At the end of the interview I let the women know that if they have further thoughts to share or if there was anything else they felt I should know about the identification they could email or call me. Many women wrote me emails days, weeks or months later with additional thoughts and stories that they had forgotten to share or that were prompted by the interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the first interview. The first step in my analysis was to listen to each recorded interview from beginning to end in order to more fully immerse myself in the woman's story. The transcriptions of the interviews were done, by hand, within a day or two of the interview. I transcribed each interview by hand to stay engaged and immersed in the research process. One advantage of transcribing the data myself was that I remained intimately connected to the informants' stories because of the recurrence of listening to them. Although this process has a clear advantage, I had to remain aware of my preconceived notions and biases. This involved listening the different parts of each interview several times to ensure that I was transcribing the words of the participants as

opposed to paraphrasing the material with the assumption that I understood what the participant was saying. There were natural breaks in the interviews, denoting a change in topic, which I used to pause the tape to digest the material.

Transcribing the data within a day or two of the interview was a priority. Following each transcription I went back and read through the material. It was during this initial stage of data analysis that I vicariously entered the life of each woman. Analyzing the data while collecting the data, informed the next stage of questions in the interview. As previously mentioned, analyzing the beginning interviews soon after I transcribed them alerted me to the fact that I neglected to ask informants how they define race and ethnicity. The following two tables (Table 1 and Table 2) present the definitions of ethnicity and race defined by the women in this study. These definitions were taken directly from the transcribed interviews. Although there are some similarities in the way that the women define such terms, women's personal definitions of the below terms are differentially defined and not monolithically set. These definitions must be articulated if one is going to look at the issue of racial and ethnic identity critically.

Table 1

Definitions of Ethnicity

Participant	Definition
Yesenia	Where my parents are from.
Joelle	Ethnicity has to do with culture in the ethnographic sense and usually tied to some type of geography, some type of geographical place that you are from.
Susan	A combination of how you identify and where you trace your background and your belief system. A complete picture of where you are from.
Mary	Culture, tradition, mores, morals and sometimes it's your country of origin.

Table 2

Definitions of Race

Participant	Definition
Catherine	Race is defined differently in different places.
Jen	Race is a social construct. It is a blanket term that people try to make into a box or category. I actually believe it is more fluid.
Erica	Race is a performance with made-up scripts and people just say anything they want to say. People change depending on their audience. It's malleable, inventive and much less significant. You begin to define what race means based on how you live your life.
April	It's obviously identifiable, but also a creation.

As stated by Charmaz (2006), "studying your data prompts you to learn nuances of your research participants' language and meaning. Subsequently, you learn to define the directions where your data can take you" (p.34). As discussed, sensitizing concepts were initially utilized to raise supplemental questions to deepen the inquiry and as an analytic frame to sort through and organize each story. During the course of the analysis, these sensitizing concepts became an integral part of a core category.

Then next set was open coding, which meant intensely examining each section of the interview and finding the right words to articulate what I think the raw data are about. Open coding was utilized to advance the research and assist in the beginning stages of analysis. Again, initial coding involved combing through the interviews line by line and then section by section, naming segments of data that best helped to illustrate and classify the content of women's stories. These codes were short phrases that came directly from the data. Initial codes in this study included: racial identification, ethnic identification, family and identification, society and identification, skin color and identification, perception of identification, conflicts and coping with conflicts, relationships and identification, and career and identification. These initial codes can be described as themes and concepts that emerged from the data. As new data was gathered the interviews were coded and compared to ensure consistency. Throughout the data collection and analytic process, I returned to the codes several times to ensure that I was not trying to fit the data into preconceived categories or coding too generally. Studying the emerging data required constant reflection and awareness. Following initial coding, a more focused process of applying selective phrases to create categories helped reduce data. Axial coding assisted in building connections within categories comprised of

concepts. For example, within the category of the sources of social construction, I created

subcategories of a) the family b) dominant society d) mischaracterizations e) stereotypes,

all of which influenced the construction of identity for these women. Memo writing early

on in the research kept me connected to my process as a self-reflective researcher and

helped to further develop and analyze the content of the stories, and elaborate on the

concepts and categories that I created from the raw data. My initial memos came from

pausing the tapes that I was transcribing to jot down reminder notes and ideas and that

were stimulated by the interview as well as to think and reflect on the material I had

collected. I used the margins of the transcriptions to make comments regarding my

impressions and document questions that surfaced during data analysis. In addition, I

created separate memo sheets that I dated and organized by the concepts that I had

created. Memos written during the latter stages of my research included notes on

comparisons between the women's struggles they experienced while constructing their

personal identity. I separated the women by their parentage to make comparisons among

the data. Memos provided me with a record of my process.

In the tradition of qualitative inquiry and grounded theory, themes and concepts

were derived inductively from the women's stories. Themes that captured the essence of

racial and ethnic identity construction inductively emerged from the data and analytic

concepts, categories, and subcategories were created from open and axial coding. These

categories were constructed through constantly comparing the emerging categories.

Furthermore, consistent with grounded theory methods, the literature review continued

throughout data collection and analysis. As women spoke about negotiating their reality

within certain contexts and Latinas shared their struggles with the concept of race, the

researcher continually sought out literature specific to these topics. Based on the information that I was collecting and simultaneously analyzing, the research was pushed beyond its initial boundaries forcing me to expand my knowledge of specific dimensions of identity.

In Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the research methodology and theoretical underpinnings used to research the social construction of racial and ethnic identity and identification among women of color from mixed ancestry. I discussed the advantages of qualitative research as well as the rigor involved in grounded theory and the analytic tools that assisted with conceptualization of the data. In addition, I discussed the development of the intensive interview guide that was used to collect data, my preparation, and the conduct and content of the interviews.

In the analysis section of this chapter, I detailed and illustrated the emergence of themes, concepts, and categories that evolved through the concurrent process of data collection and data analysis. In addition, I provided the reader with a glossary of frequently used terms in the women's own language. The following chapters report on the findings of this study. The analytic chapters begin with thumbnail sketches of the thirty-one women who participated in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WOMEN

Short sketches abstracted from the taped and transcribed interviews are presented

to introduce the women. These brief biographies are organized by the order in which they

were interviewed for the study and serve as a reference point for the reader. These

portraits help to contextualize the stories abstracted from the data analysis presented in

the following chapters. Included in the biographies are the women's self-identifying

labels, their parents' racial and ethnic identity and birthplace, physical descriptors, their

current residency, and their employment. Some of the women chose not to discuss their

fathers' ancestry. The women's socio-economic status ranges from lower to middle-class.

Names were assigned to the women that will be referred to throughout the data analysis

to deepen the connection to their narratives on the construction of their racial and ethnic

identity.

Thumbnail Sketches

Allison identifies as "Multiracial and Black," depending on the situation. Her mother is
White and was born in Michigan. She thinks her father, who is African American, was
born in Mississippi. Allison was born and raised by her mother in Michigan. Physically,
Allison has dark curly hair and describes her skin color as "medium tone." She currently
resides in New York City and works as a Librarian.

April identifies by stating her parents' nationalities and her racial makeup, which is
Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Biracial. Both of her parents are from New York City. Her
mother is Biracial and Puerto Rican and her father is African American and Caribbean.
April was born and raised by her mother in New York City. Physically, she has dark
wavy hair and describes her skin color as "somewhere in the middle." April currently
resides in New York City and is a film director and photographer.

Cory identifies as either "Latina" or by stating her nationalities, which are Dominican and
Ecuadorian. She was born and raised in the Washington Heights section of New York
City. Cory grew up with both of her biological parents and five siblings. Physically, she

describes herself as having "Latina" features and "pretty light skin." She currently resides in New York City and works in the public education sector. Cory is bilingual in English and Spanish.

Beth identifies as West African. Her mother was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone and her father was born in Nigeria. Beth grew up in Jamaica and moved to New York City in her 20's. Physically, Beth has long braids and describes her skin color as "Black." Beth currently resides in New York City and is a photographer.

Tara identifies as Black American. Her mother was born in Barbados and her father was born in Bermuda. She was born in California, moved back to Barbados when she was in grade school and then relocated to Queens, New York when she was in elementary school. Physically, Tara has dark short hair and describes her skin color as "golden." Tara currently resides in New York City and is in the engineering field.

Anna identifies as "Mexican American" but prefers to be called "Chicana." She was born in Denver, Colorado. Her mother is from Denver and her father is from Mexico. Physically, she has straight brown hair and describes her skin color as "very light." She currently resides in New York City and is working on her PhD in environmental toxicology. Anna is not fluent in Spanish.

Lucia identifies as "Latina and as Puerto Rican." She was born and raised in the Bronx section of New York City. Her mother was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico and her father was born in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Physically, she has brown wavy hair and describes her skin color as "tan and beige." She currently resides in the Bronx and works in the corporate sector and is pursuing a Master's degree in business. Lucia is Trilingual in English, Spanish and French.

Jesse identifies as Native American, Irish and African American. Her mother is Native American and Irish and was born in New York and her father is African American and was born in South Carolina. Jesse was born and raised in New York City by her mother and grandmother. Physically, Jesse has dark curly hair and describes her skin color as "brown." Jesse currently resides in New York City and is a lawyer.

Kim identifies as "Biracial." Her mother was born in Michigan and is German and her father was born in Florida and is Black. Kim was born in Texas and raised in Montclair, New Jersey with her mother and her younger sister. Physically, she describes her skin color as a "yummy caramel color," and has dark curly hair. Kim currently resides in New Jersey and works in public relations.

Mary identifies as a woman of color of African descent. Her parents are from Haiti. Mary was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was a teenager. Physically, Mary has dreadlocks and states that she is seen as a "Black woman." Mary currently resides in New York City and is a Professor. Mary is bilingual in English and French.

Joelle identifies as Caribbean American. Her mother was born in Jamaica and her father was born in Brooklyn. Joelle was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York with her mother, father, brother and sister. Physically, Joelle describes her skin color as "brown-skinned" and her features as "African." Joelle currently resides in Brooklyn and is a Professor of English.

Gia identifies as "African American." Her mother is from the rural areas of Germany and her father is from the rural areas of Georgia. She grew up with her mother, father and younger sister in the mid-west. Physically, Gia describes her skin color as "lighter than chocolate" and her features as "exotic." Gia currently resides in New Jersey and works in the field of education.

Eva identifies as "Black and White." Her mother is White and is from Minnesota and her father is Black and is also from Minnesota. Eva was born and raised in Northern California with her mother. Physically, Eva states that she is perceived as Black because if her skin color and hair texture. Eva currently resides in New Jersey and works in marketing.

Yesenia identifies as "Dominican and Hispanic." She was born and raised in the Washington Heights section of New York City. Both of her parents are from the Dominican Republic. She grew up with both of her biological parents, brother and sister. Physically, she has straight brown hair and describes her skin color as "fair." She is in graduate school for social work and currently resides in New York City. Yesenia is bilingual in English and Spanish.

Susan identifies by stating, "My parents are from the Dominican Republic." She was born and raised in the Washington Heights section of New York City. Physically, she is has wavy hair and describes her skin color as "tan." She grew up with both of her biological parents, brother and sister. She is a social worker and currently resides in New York City. Susan is bilingual in English and Spanish.

Maribel identifies as "Puerto Rican." Her mother and father are from Puerto Rico. She was born and raised in the Bronx section of New York City. Physically, she has dark curly hair and describes herself as "short with brown skin." She grew up with both of her biological parents, brother and sister. She currently resides in the Bronx and is a photographer. Maribel is bilingual in English and Spanish.

Samara identifies as "Black and of Caribbean ancestry." Her mother was born in Barbados and her father was born in Pennsylvania. Her father is Irish and Polish. She was born and raised by her mother in Verona, New Jersey. Physically, Samara describes her hair as "wavy and frizzy" and her skin color as "light." Samara currently resides in Montclair, New Jersey and works in corporate America.

Rachel identifies as "American Hispanic," or "Cuban and Ecuadorian" depending on the situation. Her mother is from Cuba and her father is from Ecuador. She was born and raised in New York City and grew up with her biological parents and her sister and

brother. Physically, she has straight brown hair and describes her skin color as "White."
She currently resides in NYC, although is in the process of relocating to France. She is in
the social service field. Rachel is trilingual in English, Spanish and French.

Victoria identifies as "Italian and Puerto Rican." Her mother is Puerto Rican and her dad
is Italian. Physically, she describes her appearance as "Italian," with curly hair and her
skin color as "fair." She grew up in Brooklyn with her mother and brother. Victoria
currently resides in Staten Island and works in the financial field.

Nadia identifies as "African American." Her mother was born in North Carolina and was
African American and her dad was born in Puerto Rico. Nadia was born and raised in
Brooklyn New York. Physically, she processes her dark hair and describes her skin color
as "Black." Nadia currently resides in Brooklyn, New York and works in the non-profit
sector.

Raquel identifies as Black and Jamaican. Her mother was born in Kingston, Jamaica.
Raquel was born in Jamaica and moved to the United States when she was two years old.
Physically, Raquel has dark curly hair and describes her skin color as "light." Raquel
currently resides in Philadelphia and is pursuing a PhD is architecture.

Jo identifies as "Latina." Her mother is Puerto Rican. Physically, she has curly hair and
describes her appearance as "petite and fair skinned." She was born in Connecticut and
grew up with her mother. She currently resides in Connecticut and is returning to school
to pursue a Masters in Education. Jo is bilingual in English and Spanish.

Elanie identifies as "Black, Hispanic and Native American." Her mother was born in
Queens, New York and is Black and Native American and her father was born in Puerto
Rico. Elanie grew up in Queens, New York with her mother, father and brother.
Physically, she has dark curly hair and identifies her skin color as "medium brown."
Elanie currently resides in New York City and is an artist.

Dina identifies as being "mixed race." Her mother is Peruvian, Italian and Russian and
her father is White and Native American. Dina was born in Oregon and grew up with her
mother and brother in New York City. Physically, she has straight brown hair and
describes herself as having a "curvy, Latin body." Dina currently resides in New York
City and works in the publishing industry.

Michelle identifies as "Irish and Chinese." Her mother is Chinese and her father is Irish.
She grew up on the north shore of Long Island with her mother and father. Physically,
Michelle has states she has "unique" features, dark hair and describes her skin as White.
Michelle currently resides in New York City and works in the publishing industry.

Elan identifies as Black and as first-generation African American. Her adopted mother
was born in Idaho and her birth mother was born in Gonzalez, Louisiana. Elan's adoptive
father was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and her birth father was born in Ghana, West
Africa. Elan was born in San Diego, California. Physically, Elan has long braids and

describes her skin color as "Black." Elan currently resides in Harlem, New York and is a professor and consultant. Elan is bilingual in French and English.

Carla identifies as "Black or African American" and considers herself "mixed." Her mother is a mix of Italian, German, Dutch and French and her father is African American. Carla grew up with her mother. Physically, Carla states that she looks "Black." She describes her skin color as "very brown" and her features as Italian. Carla grew up with her mother in a "majority White neighborhood." Carla currently resides in New York City and works in the publishing field.

Teresa identifies as "Black, Italian and Cherokee." Her mother was born in Niagara Falls and is Italian and her father was born in Alabama and is a mix of African American and Cherokee. Teresa grew up with her mother, who she identifies as "dark Italian." She was born in Boston and grew up in New York City. Physically, she describes her skin color as "tan" and has wavy hair. Teresa works in social services. Teresa currently resides in New York City.

Jen identifies as Black, Jamaican and Multiracial. Her mother and father were both born in Jamaica. Jen was born and raised by her mother in Long Island, New York. Physically, she has brown curly hair and describes her skin color as "dark brown." Jen currently resides in New York City and is a Pediatrician.

Cindy identifies as "half Mexican and half Polish." Her father was born in Chicago and is of Mexican descent and her mother was born in Germany. Physically, she has dark hair and a "shapely bottom." She describes her skin as "White." Respondent was born and raised in Chicago with her mother and sister. Cindy moved to New York in following graduate school and currently lives in New York City.

Kate identifies as "Biracial." Physically, she has curly hair and describes her skin color as "olive." She was born in Puerto Rico and moved to New York City when she was in grade school. Her mother is Dominican and her father is Puerto Rican. She grew up with her mother and did not have any contact with her father. She is a social worker and currently resides in New York City. Kate is bilingual in English and Spanish.

The following chapters help to tell the stories of the above women's construction of identity and identification within the context of American society in all of its' intricacy and dynamism. In this study the definitions of racial identity (personal, chosen, racial self understandings) and racial identification (how others view them) are adopted from the most recent work of Rockquemore and colleagues (2009) and extended to include multiethnic people (Shih & Sanchez, 2009).

This study involved two levels of analysis. First, the women were analyzed as a group to explore the construction of identity within specific social contexts. The second level of analysis involved organizing the women in three separate groups based on ancestry to compare the similarities and differences of being racially and ethnically mixed women of color within the United States.

The analytic chapters that follow will present the core categories and other major categories and themes that were constructed from the interplay of data collection and data analysis with the aim of incorporating a more nuanced and critical understanding of the complexity of identity construction within the context of American society.

CHAPTER SIX: SOURCES OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Contextual Factors and the Construction of Racial and Ethnic Identity

The social construction theories on identity suggest that multiracial and multiethnic individuals construct identity through their interactions within social contexts such as the family, community and society (Root, 1992; Root, 2000; Wallace, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Shifts within the family, community and society create shifts within the personal construction of identity. Therefore, racial and ethnic identity is understood to be a malleable, flexible, and fluid process that changes throughout a person's life course depending on their history and daily experiences (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

This study explored the collective experiences of women of color with mixed heritage beginning as children and continuing through adulthood. Women who participated in this study shared the subtle and overt messages they received, and continue to receive, both at home and from their communities and society about what it means to be a woman of color from a multiracial and multiethnic background in America. Consistent with social construction theories on identity, the messages that the women received from their daily interactions with mothers, fathers, aunts, godmothers, siblings, grandparents, peers, and society at large all played a role in the construction of their identity. Some messages were crushing and painful, while others were uplifting and supportive. Without exception, the home messages laid the foundation for their journey towards their self-understanding and personal construction of their racial and ethnic

identity. The following sections of this chapter present data illustrating the messages and lessons that resonate for the women as they reflected on their childhood and adulthood and their emerging sense of racial and ethnic consciousness. Categories and themes derived from the data analysis of the narratives capture the social and interactional process of racial and ethnic construction for these women.

Family Messages

Echoing the literature, the data indicate that the home environment is the primary context where the construction of identity begins (Demo & Hughes, 1990). This section of the chapter discusses the early lessons and messages that the women received as children regarding race, ethnicity, and connection within their mixed heritage families.

The impact of the family context on the construction of identity was not answered in one specific question but peppered throughout the interviews. In response to questions the women were asked about how they define their racial and ethnic identity, the ways in which they first became aware of their racial and ethnic identification, and racial and ethnic dissimilarity among family members, the women were prompted to share stories of their past and the ways in which messages and lessons regarding race and ethnicity were transmitted within the family. Within the family setting, three categories regarding the messages that women received emerged from the data analysis. These categories of messages include family character, appearance, and connection, all of which influenced racial and ethnic identity construction.

Family Character: Mixed Identities and Negotiations

As discussed in the literature (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Wallace, 2001), the ways

in which the parents of mixed heritage children negotiated their identity and their

interracial and interethnic differences, independently and as a family, set the stage for

their children's identity construction. The negotiation of identity for the parents of these

women took place in the context of United States history where interracial marriage was

not legally sanctioned until 1967. As Michelle, whose mother is Chinese and father is

Irish, stated during her interview, "my parents were such pioneers when they got

married." Carla, whose mother is Italian, German, Dutch, and French and father is

African American, echoed this statement during her interview: "Nowadays, you see

mixed families all of the time, but it wasn't as common where we were in the 1970s."

These families crossed over traditional racial and ethnic boundaries to be together during

a time in American history when miscegenation was only recently legally sanctioned. As

a result, experiences of discrimination and bias were common for the Puerto Rican,

African American, Jamaican, and Biracial parents of the women in this study. Elanie,

whose mother is Native American and African American and Father is a native born

Puerto Rican, painfully described the influence that her fathers' struggles as a Puerto

Rican man in the United States had on her identity, psychologically.

> My father, he influenced who I am, he was wrongfully kicked out of the Navy, he
> was "the man," he is Puerto Rican, and his story, he had this man issue that inner-
> city youth grow up with your parents pushing you down. It's not their intention to
> make us feel like that, but you get in that mindset that whatever you do is not
> going to be good enough because people will put you down. You get buried, you
> grow up and you are like should I try this, or should I not? I struggled with that.

As a result of Elanie's father's experiences of racism and discrimination growing

up as a Puerto Rican man, the message of "not being good enough" was correlated to his

Puerto Rican ethnicity. Elanie's perspective of her father's experience highlights the

social character of ethnic classifications. In her story, identifying as Puerto Rican

signified struggle. As discussed throughout the literature, the subtle and explicit messages

that are communicated to children from their families about personal identity and the

identification within their mixed family character, began the process of children's self-

understanding of their racial and ethnic identity and consequently, their overall sense of

self (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

In another example, Jen, who identifies as Black, Jamaican, and Multiracial,

reported on her perception of her parents' varied identifications. Jen's parents are both

Jamaican immigrants yet their experiences and their choice of identifications differ.

> My father, he would identify as a Black man if he were pressed to answer that question, even though his father was Southeast Asian Indian. My mother was always wanting to identify as other, like she never classified herself or put herself in a box even though the rest of the world may see her as a White lady because she looks White. She never really wanted to identify as such she just wanted to be other, she never to acknowledged race or color.

As a child from a multiracial background Jen was aware of the different ways her

parent's negotiated their identity. While Jen's father "chose" to identify with his Black

race, Jen's mother made the decision to opt out of racially identifying. Jen explained

during her interview that her father is a dark-skinned man with a strong Jamaican accent

who is most often externally identified as Black until spoken to. In contrast, Jen's mother,

as a fair-skinned woman, has more flexibility in her choice of identification. She too has

a Jamaican accent but is most often identified as White based on her skin color. As an

adult woman who inherited her fathers' complexion, Jen has come to the resolution to

embrace her blended identity and as a result, includes all of her ancestry in her self-

identification. Yet, she continues to struggle with the externally ascribed and faulty

classification of an African-American woman based on her physical features.

For the women in this study, learning to embrace the complexity of their identities

in the context of their family proved to be a difficult task. In a society that historically

relied on single identifying labels, being "mixed" was complicated. April received the

message from her parents that her identity as a Biracial woman brought with it a sense of

confusion and that she should privilege one racial identity over the other.

> I know for my mother she was Biracial and that was a huge identity crisis for her.
> How she dealt with it was that she chose a Black man because, as she said, "I
> wanted you to come out Black, I did not want there to be any confusion as to what
> you were." I have confusion anyway.

April continued:

> I definitely think that both of my parents have this idea of being split but deciding
> to fit into something.

Internalizing the racial system, the desire "to fit into something" was a need the women

described feeling during their formative years. For many of the women, the message to

embrace their multiracial *and* multiethnic backgrounds was not transmitted in the home

environment. Reasons for this include traditional beliefs in the Western achievement-

oriented ethnic and racial models where an individual was labeled "at-risk" or considered

to be "unhealthy" by failing to identify with, and settle on, a single socially constructed

identification (Wallace, 2004), experiences of discrimination and the different ways that

parents of multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds "choose" to negotiate their identities.

Women also shared their experiences as children and adolescents whose parents

immigrated to the United States from a different country. Messages of assimilation into

the dominant American culture were directly communicated to both Gia and Mary. Gia,

whose mother is White and father is Black, described her experience with the irrelevancy

of her German ethnic identity resulting from her mothers' desire to shed her German

ethnicity in an effort to become more "American":

> I would say that I don't have a lot of pride for that culture because my mom left Europe and came here and transplanted herself and I think she was one of the immigrants that during the 1970's it was about blending in, melting pot, that whole melting pot idea and we lived in the mid-west which was just plain stupid, close minded and homogenous, so I think that she was trying to be American as much as she could, so I never really felt like a German girl or anything like that.

As a woman who presently identifies and is identified as African American, Gia also

shamefully explained the messages she received from her father about race:

> My dad has always had very strong views about black people and really has a lot of racial hatred toward black men so therefore it has manifested as always pursuing white women, I think my dad thinks that I am a little too Black, I don't fall into that biracial thing.

> Whereas Gia was born in the United States and is of European and African

American ancestry, Mary, a dark-skinned woman with long dreadlocks, came to this

country from Haiti when she was a teenager. Mary who presently identifies as a woman

of color from African descent, discussed her early experiences with the message she

received to abandon her ethnic Haitian identity in an effort to become more American,

despite the fact that she is considered and treated as a racialized minority.

> When my parents immigrated here there was a strong assimilation to American culture because at one point, I actually lost my language. My first language is French and Haitian Creole, so when we came to the U.S. we were so assimilated with learning English that was all I did, so I started to lose all of that and really I did for a little and really identified as being a Black American for assimilation purposes (Mary).

The literature suggests that for parents who are racialized minorities or whose families

immigrated to the United States in the past three generations, ethnic identity was relevant,

whereas, for multiethnic European American parents, ethnic identity was viewed as

optional and played more of a symbolic role (Wallace, 2001). These two examples stand in contrast to the literature and are evidence of individual variation, complexity, and fluidity of identity for multiracial and multiethnic children.

Resulting from the budding number of mixed racial and ethnic individuals and subsequent challenges to the traditional and rigid forms of classification, the women in this study have more "freedom" than their parents did to self-identify. Yet, the foundational messages from the home environment add a level of complexity to the women's identity development (and the development of racial and ethnic consciousness) not faced by mono-ethnic and mono-racial individuals. Additionally, as social constructionism recognizes, sociocultural conditions such as racism and sexism and the limited menu of racial and cultural categories presented in dominant society restrict women's choice in deciding which labels and practices to adopt.

Appearance: Racial Identity and Colors Within Our Families

A second major theme that resonated throughout the interviews is the link between appearance and racial and ethnic identity and identification. This discussion is two-fold. First, regardless of ancestry, women reported that physical dissimilarity within their families, specifically differences in skin color, was the first place that prompted self-questioning of their racial and ethnic identity, their sense of belonging within the family and was their first awareness of White skin color advantage within this country. Second, women reported that their identifications were, and continue to be, based on social constructions of race and ethnicity that results in stereotyping and faulty classifications. This section of the chapter presents data on early interactions involving the messages women received about the physical differences within families as related to identity

construction and identification. The final section of the chapter, on messages that women received from dominant society, will discuss the link between appearance and racial and ethnic identification.

Physically similar appearances communicate identity and membership to certain groups. In other words, when individuals look like their mothers, fathers, sisters or brothers there is an automatic sense of kinship. Yet, for multiracial and multiethnic families, physical similarities are not common. The diversity within the family unit is literally represented in the appearance of the children from these unions. As a result, physical dissimilarities in skin color, hair texture, and facial features complicate the identity development for children of these families because belonging and connection are questioned (Wallace, 2001).

Data from this study suggest that skin color differences among family members prompted self-questioning, bewilderment, and feelings of marginalization among women who looked physically dissimilar from their family members. As a child, Jesse found it hard to understand the color gradations within her immediate family. Jesse's mother is Native American and Irish and her father in African American.

> I remember saying or just realizing there was some kind of difference. "I'm brown skin, my sister's brown skin, my daddy's brown skin, but my mommy and my grandma, they are off-White."

Dissimilarities in skin color among Jesse's immediate family members were internalized as a feeling of being different.

In another example, Elan clearly recalled the defining moment of her racial consciousness, as she vividly retold the story of her encounter with skin color difference between her and her mother:

I identified with my mother early on and she was White and had blond hair and we had those early exercises in grade school where you had to draw a picture of your self-image and I didn't have a self-image. I literally did not look in the mirror and see anything in particular, I looked at other people, and so I drew a picture of someone who looked like my mother. I figured mothers and daughters look alike so literally I was looking at her and drawing a picture of her and figured I would probably get something that approximated me. I was corrected and told that I was not White that I was Black and that was probably my first lens to understand that there is actually a crucial difference between who my mother was and who I am. I think for the most part my mother was fairly clear with me about being Black and that it was not an option for me to be White. Based on actually a kind of criminal logic. She said that people would follow me around in stores waiting for me to steal something not because I was half White but because I was half Black so I might as well get to understand that, get used to it, and make friends with Black people and move on.

As Elan clarified, this difference in skin color represented a fundamental distinction between her mother's experience in the world as a woman with White skin and her experience as a woman with dark skin. It was through such early interactions that women were forced to find connection to their families outside of appearance while they simultaneously learned the meaning of color in United States society.

Other women had similar stories of having racially dissimilar mothers. .Although Raquel and her mother had similar physical features, their differences in skin color created a chasm in their external identifications.

My mom, she is White, she has blond hair and green eyes. I look a lot like her, but people would never see that because I am a different color (Raquel).

Carla recalled a defining moment in her racial conscious when her grandmother made an effort to normalize her color difference within her family and society:

I didn't have anybody at home that looked like me. My mom, she always had all these books on Black history and Black culture, we are big readers in my family and it was just kind of natural that we are big readers, but it wasn't like my mom put books in my hand, I didn't have a lot of pride in who I was. My grandmother always gave me cards for all the holidays, and every card I got had a little brown girl on it, and the little brown girl had something modeled about her features but I didn't think much of it. Then one day, cause we lived above a card shop, and I

was in the card shop and I saw one of the cards that my grandmother sent to me, but the card had a little White girl on it, and that moment I was standing there looking at that card with the little White girl on it and I was trying to figure out why that card had a White girl on it and I realized that every card my grandmother had ever sent me, she had painted brown, because she wanted me to have a card with a little girl that looked like me.

The messages regarding physical dissimilarities among family members were not confined to the home environment. Women discussed how color differences between siblings prompted questions from strangers. Anna, who identifies as Mexican American and describes her skin color as "very light," irritably shared the comments she received from strangers regarding the difference in skin color between her and her sister.

People would say that must be your fake sister, and I'm like, no that's my sister. She's short and thicker, I'm taller and very light, she is very very dark. My father is very dark and my mother is very fair. She is of Spanish descent so she has light skin. You say the word sun and she burns.

Susan's experience speaks to the color gradations within the Dominican community that cause confusion to outsiders. Susan's parents are both from the Dominican Republic yet her family ranges from very fair to what she describes as "tan."

My family is from mainly my color to very fair skinned and light hair. Sometimes people are like "how are you family?" because we look so different. You have to almost discover it on your own that it's okay to come in different colors.

The women in this study reported that the physical dissimilarities found among siblings were also loaded with messages of skin color advantage, with White being perceived as more desirable. Elanie reported that she remembers noticing how her mother's brother "received the worst treatment because he was the darkest." Women from Latin ancestry with dark skin were given nicknames such as "Negrita" and "La India" in reference to their skin tones. Lucia, who identifies as Puerto Rican, spoke about her experience growing up as the "darker" one in her family:

> It's really weird because growing up you see like the color divide in the family, so my younger brother thought that I was "Negrita," or people in my family would call me "La India."

Maribel showed her pain when she recited her childhood nicknames and recalled memories of her mothers' rejection of her curly hair. She vividly described missing out on playtime to endure her mothers' employment of chemicals and hard tooth combs in an effort to look Whiter:

> I always felt like the brown one, my sister is light skinned and we are really close. My father is my complexion, my brother is my complexion, my sister is light skinned they would call her "Leche" and she has a Spanish nose and I came out like this so my mom will call me "La India." I wondered why do you have to buy these chemicals and endure this and my mom would give me Tylenol after she would wash my hair and then she would start combing my hair, and my brother and sister would be playing outside and they said that they could hear my screaming.

Yesenia, a light skinned Dominican, recalled the accolades she received as a child in contrast to her darker skinned sister:

> My sister always got "oh you are darker than the other two." I always got the "oh you are so fair." It was always, "you're Dominican, you are so fair." My building was pretty much Cuban and they were all very fair skinned, they would always tell my mom, "your daughter is so pretty, look at her, how White she is." My mom was like, "yeah, Susan is a little darker."

These findings suggest that regardless of ancestry, appearance played a crucial role in the early formation of racial and ethnic identity as well as how women were identified and treated within their families of origin. Consistent with the literature (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001), women perceived their skin color and interpreted their appearance through the eyes of others.

Connection: Saliency of Ethnicity

The data suggest that women's connection to racial and ethnic identity differed in that women's connection to their racial identity was interpreted through their appearance

and interactions with others in their families of origin and in dominant society, as will be

discussed in the following section. In comparison, those who felt connection to their

ethnic identity and for whom ethnic identity was relevant, reported that this connection

internally evolved as it was nurtured in the home environment. A third theme that

emerged from data analysis was women's connection to their ethnic identity. For one,

influencing the women's connection to their ethnicity were the messages they received

regarding the importance and value of their nationalities. For example, women recalled

distinct messages that their mother, father or grandparents passed on regarding the

cultivation of ethnicity in the home. Joelle proudly discussed her connection to her

Caribbean roots:

> To me the ethnicity is more significant then the race because I do identify with being Caribbean American. If pushed I will say Jamaican American because I grew up with both parents but my mother's influence has been stronger maybe because she was a stay at home mom, and then my father his parents are also Caribbean so he grew up in a very Caribbeanized household and my household was very Caribbean. So, I do identify strongly with that and I do participate in Caribbean related activities in my community whenever possible.

> The messages related to ethnicity and culture were rooted in a sense of tradition.

That is, women were taught their native language, taught to cook ethnic-specific meals,

and took family trips to visit relatives in their parents' country of origin. Samara, Tara,

Susan and Jesse shared how they found connection to their varied cultures.

> I do not consider myself to be American Black, I consider myself to be of Caribbean ancestry, even though I was born here. My mother used to send me there in the summers and I would spend summers with my grandmother (Samara).

> My mom has instilled this traditional West Indian culture as far as food, values, respect your elders, no sucking of the teeth (Tara).

> My parents made it a part of us, we went there (Dominican Republic) every year, every Christmas we were there so, the music, the food, the language, were all a part of us (Susan).

> My mom and grandmother have been really good at acknowledging the things
> I've come from. I try to take it a step further and see what traditions there are like.
> I would love to go to the reservation and get a little more in-depth because I do
> feel like that's a piece of me that the government is trying to take away (Jesse).

These women were taught the message that their culture was valuable and

important. They grew up with a strong sense of ethnicity, in that certain aspects of their

culture were deliberately shared and passed on, and as a result, these women had a less

difficult time finding connection to their ethnic identity.

In contrast, others who were given less direction and for whom certain traditions

and aspects of culture were not passed on reported that they felt on the border of many

cultures and have struggled with finding connection to their ethnicity. As discussed in the

literature, for women from Latin ancestry, not speaking Spanish proved to be a barrier to

feeling a part of their Latin roots (Campbell & Rogalin, 2006). Elanie embarrassingly

shared her struggle as a Black, Hispanic, and Native American woman who was never

taught to speak Spanish by her first generation Puerto Rican father:

> I don't speak Spanish so that brings up a lot; Spanish people don't really connect
> with me because I do not speak the language.

Second, early connection to ethnic identity is also influenced by behaviors and

biases of family members and by experiences of divorce and separation (Wallace, 2001;

Northrup & Bean, 2007). As discussed in the literature and in illustrated by the data in

this study, racial and ethnic identity is influenced by the messages children receive

around the pressure to adopt only one ethnic or racial background. Additional themes of

confusion, loss, and inadequacy emerged from the stories of women who were estranged

from one parent and from those who experienced rejection and hostility from relatives

because of the interracial and interethnic character of their family. While privileging one

race or ethnicity over the other was a message in some of the families, for others the

absence of a parent relayed a message of indifference. As Dina hesitantly recalled:

> My father left when I was very young, so I don't really know his family, but my
> mother says he is part White and part Native American. There are so many things
> going on I have never connected to any one of them so I just say "mixed race" not
> really one more so than the other. I don't feel like I belong in any one culture, I
> guess maybe even I would feel better if I were brought into my Italian heritage,
> my Russian heritage, my Peruvian heritage and kind of was given more
> information but because they wanted to downplay it so much that I just feel like, I
> was severely depressed about it.

Dina's family dynamics resulted in her feeling estranged from her roots and "depressed."

For Dina, the message was one of apathy. Her racial and ethnic identity was ambiguous

and lacked meaning and as a result, she felt paralyzed and lost in her multiple heritages.

Cindy's story is similar, though she willfully pursued her Mexican roots.

> Our mother didn't have any contact with my father so that probably influenced
> my identity, too. I reached out to my dad's Latin side of my family a lot and I
> ended up going to a predominately Black public school. We were raised with
> Polish tradition but it was always important for me to know about the rest of my
> family and that's what I did, as soon as I got my license I got back to the hood and
> hung out with them every moment that I could.
>
> The themes of confusion and loss also applied to other women in the study.

Growing up, Michelle, Samara, and Carla were faced with situations where their

interracial and interethnic backgrounds were viewed as undesirable from immediate and

extended family members.

> My parents didn't give me a strong grounding in my identity so I had to figure it
> out for myself. My dad is racist towards Asian people so it's such a weird thing;
> they were such pioneers when they got married. When your own dad hates half of
> what you are it's a little bit confusing. (Michelle)

Samara and Carla shared similar experiences:

> I tried to get to know my father's family but they are very prejudiced. So after a
> time I just backed off because I don't feel that I deserved to hear anybody say I
> am less of a person just because I am not full 100% like they are (Samara).

My mother has always supported me. I am illegitimate; my aunt wouldn't play with me at family functions (Carla).

The vivid memories expressed through the re-telling of stories in this section of the chapter document the women's perceptions of their home environment as it relates to the beginning construction of their racial and ethnic identity. The categories that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis within the family context include the character of their family as multiracial and multiethnic families within the United States, the impact of the social construction of physical appearance and physical dissimilarities within families, and the connection to ethnic identity through the transmission of values and traditions. In addition, themes of loss and confusion were prevalent in women who experienced abandonment and rejection from family members, as well as for those who were left to sort through their complexities on their own. These accounts support the understanding of identity as a complex and social process beginning at home. As discussed, the family does not exist in isolation. The following section of this chapter presents data illustrating the messages the women received in the communities they grew up in.

The Community

Two consistent structural influences reported by the women were the neighborhoods they grew up in and educational institutions. Embedded within their narratives were countless examples of how the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhoods they grew up in and their early interactions with peers in educational institutions influenced the construction of their racial and ethnic identity and identification. As discussed in the literature, within these environments occurred the first

sources of socialization outside of the home setting (Wallace, 2001). The messages that women received regarding their racial and ethnic identity were derived from the physical appearances of the people in the neighborhoods as well as from the interactions within the communities. Categorizing other people based on physical appearance is a reflexive response, one that the women took part in and were subjected to.

Neighborhoods: Where We Grew Up

While it is ideal to grow up in a neighborhood where diversity is normative, few of the women in this study experienced the advantage of growing up in a neighborhood where people looked like them. For these few women, their neighborhood was portrayed as a safe haven.

> I didn't really feel aware of what Hispanic was, of being Hispanic or Latina growing up cause I was always surrounded by people who were just like me so I didn't realize there was a real distinction, you just didn't have that awareness yet (Cory).

> When I was growing up I was in a very mixed community, which felt comfortable for me (Allison).

> Growing up, I was on a very mixed block, you had African Americans you had the Latinas and the Irish and the Italian it was a really nice mix (Lucia).

A more common experience discussed in this study was growing up in a neighborhood where diversity was not normative and looking different from the majority was ridiculed. Leaving the confines of the home environment meant being confronted with callous messages from neighbors and peers in the community. For the majority of women in this study, their dark skin tones, curly hair, and colorful clothing were accentuated and ascribed negative meanings in these environments. As children of multiracial and ethnic ancestry they endured the challenges of integrating into dominant White society. As Jen, a Black, Jamaican, and Multiracial woman, clearly explained:

You are coming out of your home, which is an environment where race is not supposed to be an issue or is not an issue or does not play a role, and you are walking into an environment outside where race is everything. That is the first thing that people notice about you as soon as they look at you, the skin color, the fact that you are different. I was automatically classified as Black because I was not White.

Michelle's Chinese and Irish ancestry was highlighted in her racially and religiously homogenous community:

I grew up in a very White, Jewish neighborhood; I was raised believing that I knew I was different; I looked different.

Gia shared these feelings of difference as she recalled her strains and traumas growing up in the Midwest as a child from a multiracial family:

Growing up in the 70s in Ohio in a very homogenous town that was close-minded and racist, I was shamed by the kids I went to school with who were racist children of racist parents. There was a lot of shame about my mom being White and my dad being Black. People were always trying to get me to be the way they wanted me to me, or find out what I was or had some assumptions, I used to get made fun of every day.

The same woman who suffered through the arduous task of her mother's grooming in an effort to straighten her hair, Maribel, reflected on the ridicule she tolerated as a child because of her brown skin tone:

In my building this older woman, my parents always said she never meant any harm by it, but one day she would say "hi" to me and she would say "hola fea" (hello ugly). As a kid you just swallow it because you feel fea, they are calling you fea and your parents are walking with you and they are not saying a word. Every time I would see her I would say, "oh no, I have to endure her saying this." And I was brought up to be respectful so I don't talk back, so it's all of this, you are fighting with all these things. Your parents are enduring it and you have to shut up because you have to be quiet and submissive and you are supposed to be raised this way.

For the women in this study, finding the beauty in their racial and ethnic diversity became increasingly difficult as they entered the school environment.

Peers: Experiences in School

The impact of physical appearance on racial and ethnic identification continued as the women shared stories of the evolution of their identity. The following passages illustrate the pain and struggle experienced by those women who were physically dissimilar from their peers. This data documents the early school interactions as the women in the study noted these experiences as crucial in how they began to understand and feel the challenges of being both ethnically mixed and "of color" in America. While the majority of the women referenced skin color as the main source of disdain, two women from Caribbean ancestry painfully recalled negative incidences resulting from ethnic markers of difference that were observed through the clothing they wore, their hair texture, and accent. It is though these examples that the social constructions of race and ethnicity and the accompanying mischaracterizations and stereotypes are most evident. With tears in her eyes, Joelle clearly articulated the traumas she tolerated as a child of Caribbean ancestry.

> I was bused out to a White school in Bensonhurst for the sake of segregation, or integration, whatever the hell they wanted to call it, and I was the only Caribbean-American. All of the rest of the students that were Black were African American and I got teased because of my accent, I got teased because my mother put ribbons in my hair, and those were ribbons that came from England and only Caribbean people had those ribbons because they had relatives in England that sent them over. Then of course the White kids did not accept me because I was Black, and then you had the Black kids who did not accept me because I was West Indian, so then like no matter what I had to go through that painful experience and it wasn't like, I couldn't deny, I couldn't say well I'm White or I'm African American, because there were obvious things about me that made me different.

Tara's hair texture and accent revealed her West Indian roots, causing similar mockery from her peers.

> When I was in elementary school I was an outcast. I came from the Island and I had jheri curls and when I went to school with the girls here they had the permed hair and the long hair or they had it straightened. I did not have any of that stuff. Kids also would tease me because of my accent. Eventually I changed my accent and became more Americanized. I did not want to be ridiculed.

Tara chose to manage such ridicule through assimilation, whereas Joelle shared later in her interview that, "because of that I strongly identify with my culture because I figured, I got teased for it, so why not, if I gone through all of that pain."

Samara, also of Caribbean ancestry, discussed how she internalized the ethnic slurs and her physical dissimilarities to mean that she was deficient in beauty.

> I was probably only in second or third grade and I remember this White boy said to me, "nigger don't sit at my table," and I remember that. I always felt like I was ugly growing up. I guess I really didn't realize who I was until I really got to meet other people and then I really got to know who I was and that I'm not ugly.

Eva, April, and Jen shared stories of having darker skin tones then their peers in school and the messages they received because of it. These powerful examples illustrate how children first learn the associations between "Black and ugly," "Black and different," and "Black and stupid." As discussed in the literature, such erroneous characterizations and harmful stereotypes based on impressionistic evidence further perpetuate the White female aesthetic within American society (Collins, 2000).

> When you are 7 and you get on the bus some kid near you yells " nigger, get off the bus"—I didn't even know what it meant but at that moment but I clearly realized that I was on the other side of some line that I didn't know about (Eva).

> My mother put me in this school, where like if it was public school and you wanted to be in the best classes that meant you were around White people at that time and so it was a very confusing path because then I was obviously going to be different so I think I was always hyper aware but not really knowing how to mange it (April).

Echoing the literature, the negative meaning and value given to persons with racial and ethnic features has long lead to a desire among some women of color to look Whiter

(Collins, 2000). Similar to Tara, Jen shared her struggle with accepting her Black

features.

> In school I tried to hide the fact that I was Black, which is so ridiculous I
> definitely identified more, I sought out my mother's Jewish side to try to identify
> with that so I could try to fit in (Jen).

This data illustrates the power of physical appearance on the construction of

identity and identification beginning in the family and extending into the community. As

the data suggest, appearances evoked racial categorization and classification. As women

interacted with peers in their communities and school settings labels such as Black,

Hispanic and in one case White were placed on them. Consistent with the literature

(Anzalda, 1999; Campbell & Rogalin, 2006), women shared that these conventional

racial and ethnic labels limited their choice of identity, diminished their complexity and

enhanced their struggle to claim a personal identity that included more than just their

monolithic and socially perceived label. As Beth recalled during the interview:

> It is hard to process I just never thought of it before in relation to me. It was like a
> slap in the face. "You mean my choices are actually limited, I thought the only
> person who could limit my choices was me!"

Rachel's ancestry is Cuban and Ecuadorian, yet as a child she reflected on her early

identification as Mexican.

> There were times when I was really young and saying "I'm Mexican" because I
> thought all Hispanics were Mexican. I did not understand that there were different
> cultures and countries.

These vignettes are further evidence of the structural influences on the

construction of identity and identification. Within these stories, identity is understood as

an ongoing and interactional process that takes places within different contexts as women

negotiate their identity. As described through these poignant examples, appearance is a

crucial factor in early identity construction and racial and ethnic identification. The women derived meaning and valuations of their self-worth from interactions with family and peers in different contexts based on appearances, albeit social constructions. These early experiences within their families, neighborhoods, and educational institutions laid the foundation for the construction of their identity. This data supports the social construction theories on identity where identity construction is viewed as a fluid process that develops within social contexts as social constructions of race and ethnicity permeate society.

The final section of this chapter extends this discussion by providing rich details of the external identifications, mischaracterizations, and stereotypes that women had to contend with as emerging adults in dominant society, and further reveals the daily struggles and resiliency of identity construction within a society that forces classifications and monolithic notions of the self.

Society

The link between appearance and racial identity construction remains constant as women, regardless of their ethnoracial background, described countless experiences throughout their adulthood where they were stereotyped, mischaracterized, and incorrectly labeled based on their phenotype and other markers of difference. As children, adolescents and as adults, "appearance provides the first, albeit socially constructed, information about an individual to others in the context of face-to-face interaction" (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

During the interviews for this study, the women were asked directly about the external identifications they have to contend with as adults. Women shared stories about

their experiences with being stereotyped and racialized because of their skin color or

questioned because of their ambiguous physical appearance. Embedded within these

ascribed identities and faulty characterizations were messages from society about the

value placed on the White aesthetic. Throughout all of these stories their resiliency is

evident.

Our Complexities: On Being Mixed

As discussed throughout the literature, women of color, in general, must contend

with demonizing stereotypes and mischaracterizations based on their physical appearance

and social constructions of race. In one example, Elanie, who comes from a Puerto Rican,

Native American and African American background, shared how she has to contend with

the stereotypes ascribed to women from "mixed" ancestry.

> There is that whole concept of "you are mixed up!" Because of the different
> things and then they decide I am also not smart or I am also light headed, and this
> that and the other thing and I am not!

Maribel commented in an agitated way on the classic stereotypes attributed to "Latinas."

> I think they see me as stupid because I have brown skin and have an accent. The
> assumption is they need to keep me informed because I may have difficulty with
> vocabulary cause some words I know in English and some words I know in
> Spanish so I may pause and I think in pictures versus in language, so I must be
> stupid.

In addition to being confronted with stereotypes based on their racial and/or

ethnic identities, all of the women in this study were recipients of mischaracterizations

based on physical appearances. Some women reported that their language, accent, and

their names also contributed to stereotyping and faulty classifications. For example, Beth,

who identifies as West African, furiously shared her daily occurrences with the confusion

she causes strangers because society's assumptions of her Black appearance do not match

with her accent.

> So EVERY time I open my mouth I always stop people, I open my mouth and
> there is a sudden readjust and reorganize, "where do we put you now?" "What do
> we do now?" Because of my accent and because of how I look, especially if I'm
> dressed like how I'm dressed now in jeans and my sneakers, and I have braids. I
> cause confusion and I know that that confusion can only be there because of the
> assumption that is made about me before I open my mouth because I am Black
> and a woman and I have braids. It has to be that because for me that proves that
> there has to be on some level some discrimination, some erroneous judgments
> being made.

For Elan and Maribel their names are strong racial and ethnic socializes that contribute to

both stereotypes and faulty characterizations.

> A lot of people see your last name and make judgments from your name. My
> name is a strong socializer (Elan).

> For me I cannot escape the fact that I am Puerto Rican. They gave me this crazy
> name; my name is at the end of the Puerto Rican national Anthem (Maribel).

> Consistent with the literature, women in this study were confronted with

stereotypes based on their racial and/or ethnic identities, racialized because of their Black

or White physical features, notably skin color, and/or constantly queried about their

identity because of their ambiguous physical features (Omi & Winant, 1994; Gaskins,

1999). Jen is quite aware of how the complexity within her identity as a Multiracial and

Jamaican woman is diminished because she is racialized and as a result her ethnicity is

overlooked and ultimately her complexities are silenced.

> Black is still being equated with being Black American, which certainly is not
> how I identify myself. I do not come from those southern roots, that is not my
> culture and the Black immigrant experience or the first generation American
> experience is a much different experience for a Black American.

Teresa, who identifies as Black, Italian, and Cherokee, embraces her complexity and

clearly commented on how she feels about her externally ascribed White identity.

> I have always wanted people to know that I am mixed and not assume that I am White and I am not sure why that irritated me so much, but it always did.

In other examples, Kim, Joelle, and Yesenia discussed their experiences with Black racially ascribed identities. For Kim, her German ethnicity is overlooked by her Biracial physical appearance.

> German is such a strong part but as far as putting myself out there to the world I am not German American I am Black and White. I identify that way probably as a result of society labeling that. I really have fought the labeling myself one or the other because I know that society will probably pigeonhole me because of my skin color and that's not who I am.

Although Joelle identifies as Caribbean American, she is racialized and socially ascribed an African American identity based on her physical appearance and society's social construction of race.

> When people see me they are going to see an African American woman, and even though I don't even identify with being African American, that's what people are going to say when they see me. Every now and then I will have someone that says, "oh you look exotic," or "I can tell you are mixed race," whatever the hell that means. Jamaica has this motto "out of the many—one people," and I know that my background is multiple ethnicities, even if people don't.

Yesenia identifies as Dominican, yet she is ascribed a White identity based on her physical appearance.

> I took a cab today and the cab driver said, "Oh, I thought you were White." I took a cab at 125th street. And I'm like, well actually my parents are Dominican so I consider myself Dominican. And he was like "you are not Dominican, you are American, cause you were born here." And I was like, yes I was born here but I always say I am Dominican, whenever someone asks where I am from I say, "I'm Dominican." I'm not sure what it is but people think all Hispanic people are dark brown and they can't be anything else.

> Lucia and Victoria were among the women who reported being constantly queried about their identity. Lucia does not fit the stereotypical mold of a "Puerto Rican" and as a result she is often questioned about her identity or falsely classified.

They can't define me. Until I tell them, they don't know what the hell I am. They will think I am Middle Eastern, they think I am Venezuelan, they will think I am Italian, they will think I am everything, and then when I say I am Puerto Rican they're like "What, get out, but you don't seem like one." And I'm like "Guess what? You are wrong." You are wrong because I am and that's that.

The physical attributes from Victoria's Italian and Puerto Rican ancestry cause confusion among strangers, as she explained.

I look Italian, I have the Roman nose, light green eyes, fair complexion, and sometimes people would identify me as Jewish or Russian. They would be surprised when I tell them I am Puerto Rican. Luckily I have hair that can do either or, so one day it might be curly and one day straight. I have had some people say, "you look Puerto Rican," but that's the 1 percent, maybe if I dressed differently, wore bigger hoops, had a tan.

In American society, appearance communicates identity and identification. As discussed throughout the literature, women of color from mixed ancestry straddle the borders of the socially defined racial and ethnic categories and as a result, are confronted with stereotypes, faulty ascriptions, and forced classifications from dominant society based on the social constructions of race and ethnicity. These experiences contribute to an increased awareness of their race and ethnicity in American society that vary based on their racial and ethnic make-up, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

In Conclusion

This chapter documents the women's journey through the various social contexts of their family, community and society where they were continually confronted with messages about race and ethnicity. These findings support the theory of social construction in that identification is experienced as a social and interactional process. The messages that the women received in these contexts laid the foundation for their understanding of what it means to be a multiethnic and multiracial woman of color in the United States, regardless of their specific ethnoracial ancestry.

In addition to the influencing factors that were presented in the data, social class is another variable that, due to the limitations of this study, was not addressed. This next chapter begins the second level of data analysis. The thirty-one women were separated into three categories based on parentage to provide a more detailed account and comparative analysis of the impact of social constructions of race and ethnicity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POWER OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

This chapter presents data illustrating how the social constructions of race and ethnicity have shaped women's personal construction of racial and ethnic identity and identification. Beginning with the emergence of women's sense of racial and ethnic identity, followed by the impact of social constructions on women's welfare, and culminating with the different ways that women responded to social constructions, this chapter illustrates the power of the social constructions of race and ethnicity on women's identity development.

The data is organized in three different categories based on the women's ancestry. These groups are only based on the women's parentage and ancestry, *not* on the women's self-identification. As discussed throughout the literature, identities are fluid and malleable, meaning that women alter the language used to describe themselves based on the contexts of their environments.

The first grouping consists of nine women (29%) whose parent(s) are from a Spanish-speaking country. These women have family from two different Spanish-speaking countries or from different parts of the same country. This group of women has been studied in the literature under the ethnic label of "Latina" or "Hispanic," generally referring to their ethnic identity.

The second grouping consists of the twelve women (39%) who have one parent with European ancestry and one parent of color. For example, the ancestral make-up of these women includes the following: Peruvian-Italian-Russian; African American-Italian;

African American-German; Mexican-Polish; Italian-Cherokee. These women come from a multiethnic and multiracial background. This group of women is referred to as "Biracial" in the literature, generally referring to their multiracial background.

The third grouping consists of ten women (32%) whose ancestry is African (from Africa) and/or Caribbean. These women represent the heterogeneity within the Black community because of their multiethnic background. The ancestral make-up of these women include: African American and Puerto Rican; Caribbean Black American; Black and of Caribbean ancestry; Black and Jamaican; Black, Hispanic and Native American; Woman of Color; West African; African American from Africa; Black, Jamaican and Multiracial.

The categories and themes that emerged from the data analysis were created to compare experiences between and among women from the three different backgrounds. These categories best illustrate the power of the social constructions of race and ethnicity on women's identity and identification. These categories are: women's sense of racial and ethnic identity, the impact of the social constructions of race and ethnicity on women's welfare, and women's responses (resolution) to the social constructions. A glossary of terms is provided at the beginning of each section to help the reader better understand the meaning of the constructed categories and themes, yet each theme was uniquely defined for the three groups women. Following the glossary is a table illustrating the effects of social constructions for each subset of women. The boxes that are checked off in each table refer only to what informants disclosed during data collection. Unless otherwise explained, the absence of a checked box does not carry any particular meaning. Vignettes that best illustrate the categories and themes of the effects

of the social constructions of race and ethnicity on identity for this diverse population of women were derived from data collection and analysis. Each identity comes with its own set of circumstances and meanings.

Sense of Racial and Ethnic Identity

Women's understanding of their racial and ethnic identity began in the home environment and extended to their communities and society. Awareness of their racial and ethnic identity emerged through interactions with others in social contexts. Women took notice of how they were perceived by others and reported that external perceptions were largely based on appearance and language. Awareness of their racial and ethnic identities emerged gradually throughout their childhood, adolescence and tapered off during adulthood, as the older they got, the less they took notice of how they were perceived by others. For some of the women, their awareness of the social constructions of race and ethnicity resulted in ambiguity about their racial and ethnic identity. Many of the women were faced with questions from others such as "What are you?" Not knowing where they fit in the racial order, or not being grounded in their cultural heritage, resulted in internal ambivalence. The following section documents each group's sense of racial and ethnic identity.

Table 3

Glossary of Terms
Sense of Racial and Ethnic Identity

Theme	Definition
Awareness of Racial Identity	Being conscious of one's perceived and socially construed race and racial identification.
Awareness of Ethnic Identity	Being conscious of one's perceived and socially constructed ethnicity and ethnic identification.
Ambiguity About Racial Identity	Currently face, or have faced, internal ambivalence when asked about racial identification.
Ambiguity About Ethnic Identity	Currently face, or have faced, internal ambivalence when asked about ethnic identification.

Latinas

Table 4

Latinas and Power of Social Constructions
Sense of Racial and Ethnic Identity
(N=9)

	Cory	Anna	Lucia	Yesenia	Susan	Maribel	Rachel	Jo	Kate
Sense of REI									
Awareness of RI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Awareness of EI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ambiguity RI	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Ambiguity EI		X							

Awareness of Racial Identity

All nine women from Latin ancestry reported that they are aware of their racial identity in their daily interactions based on how they are perceived by others in different environments. An internal awareness also occurs when they are asked to check off boxes or fill out a form that asks for their racial identity. For eight of the nine women, racial identity was reported to be a confusing and nebulous concept, situated on the border of the socially defined racial categories of Black and White. As discussed in the literature, Latinos challenged the American system of racial classification because the color category was blurred (Hollinger, 2003) Therefore, for these eight women, awareness of their racial identity meant being aware that as Latinas, they did not fit into the socially

defined racial categories, internally or externally. For some of these women, racial and

ethnic identity merged, while others discussed the distinction between a White Latina and

a Black Latina. The data suggest that for these eight women, racial identity remains an

elusive and confusing topic of discussion. For Yesenia, her identification as Hispanic is

void of race. Yet, as she explained during the interview she is ascribed a White racial

identity because she has "fair skin."

> I never identify myself by a color, I identify myself as a Hispanic. When I say I
> am Dominican that's when the color issue comes up but I never say that I am
> White. I don't know why this is difficult. Growing up and hearing "oh you are so
> fair skinned," and comparing myself to my sister or my cousins, I guess that's
> why I would check off White. I think when I say Hispanic, I would put that into
> colored woman, just the term Hispanic even though again, my skin is fair, I don't
> consider myself White, it is so weird to say that. I don't consider myself White, I
> am just the pale one.

> Similarly, Susan, Kate, and Anna openly discussed their confusion about racial

identity and the meaning of race in different contexts. All of the women are from

different Latin backgrounds and all face the same ambivalence over their racial identity.

> That I find tricky because sometimes you will just see Black or White. I do not
> think I am either. I mean, I think I have influence from both so I find that
> confusing. There is a lot of confusion, not so much confusion but it depends who
> you ask because every country has their own feelings about what race and
> ethnicity means. It's not a clear-cut area. I have always said I am tan. Growing up
> I was like "why isn't there tan on the census?" I am not Black or White, why not
> tan? That was my word I used as a little kid and it continued as I got older
> (Susan).

> If DNA tests were done on all Latinas to determine racial makeup the vast
> majority of us would be considered mixed race (Kate).

At the end of the interview, Anna thoughtfully reflected out loud on the questions that

were asked.

> The race question really stuck with me. It is essentially because there is no racial
> term to identify Latinos. If your skin is White, then they—government
> applications, etc—call you Hispanic of White heritage, if your skin is Black...well

then your Black with Hispanic heritage. There is no, "Latino with Hispanic heritage" or something of that nature. Further, I do not identify as White or Anglo. I don't consider myself White and I know Mexican isn't a racial group. I am *brown* (Anna).

For Jo, racial awareness is most present when she is asked to complete forms.

I am aware of my race whenever I have to fill out a government form. I always check off Latino or Hispanic descent. I am not Black, it's not who I am. Yes there is African and Taino in me but that was years ago. I don't have African American features, I am a Puerto Rican woman.

Awareness of Ethnic Identity

As demonstrated in the above vignettes, awareness of a racial identity occurred in situations where the women were racialized or forced to choose a racial identity. These women reported to be ascribed a racial identity that was often in conflict with their personal identity. Awareness of their ethnic identity as "Latinas" also occurred through interactions with others in their family, community, and dominant society. Women reported that awareness of their ethnic identity began in the home environment where they learned to speak Spanish, cook ethnic meals and traveled to visit relatives in their parents' countries of origins. Beginning in her childhood, Yesenia's Dominican heritage was featured prominently in her life.:

My parents made it a part of us, we went there (Dominican Republic) every year, every Christmas we were there so, the music, the food, the language, were a part of us.

Yet as the women got older, the sense of being "Latina" changed from a normative experience to being different from the majority.

If I think about it more I would say it depends on who I am around. For example, I work a couple of days at a hospital, so sometimes I have to speak Spanish and the language reminds me of where I am from. At a place like Columbia where I worked a couple of years, the majority were Jewish or anything other than Black or Hispanic so I thought about it more. It depends on your setting (Susan).

I remember being called out for my ethnicity. I was walking with my girlfriends who were Irish, we were coming back from lunch and there was this group of Italians girls who spotted us, but they saw me and they were like "oh look it's the Puerto Rican Day Parade." And then my girl friend who is Irish was like "well, I'm not Puerto Rican," and I'm like thinking to myself she doesn't mean to insult me and she is trying to find herself but it kind of hurt too because I was like "wow am I dirty? I am in AP classes just as much as you!" (Lucia).

Cory's progression of her ethnic awareness evolved from not being aware of her ethnicity, to adopting a White racial identity, to her present identification as a Latina Dominican Ecuadorian:

I didn't really feel aware of what Hispanic was, of being Hispanic or Latina growing up because I was always surrounded by people who were just like me. Then I remember in elementary school, learning more about history and civil rights and it was always Black and White and thinking wow, I'm glad I'm White because we didn't have to go through all of this. I had no concept back then so in a very simplistic way I remember having those thoughts but I can't say that at that time I was like, oh I'm a White person. It's just that when you are just given two categories, my skin looks light—I must not be Black. It wasn't until I went to a boarding school and it was predominately Caucasian, and I obviously knew before then that I was Latina Dominican Ecuadorian, but it was kind of a culture shock. It was a big wake-up call that, oh I am not White these guys are White, I was never White or will be White. I think high school was when I was developing that sense of awareness of what it meant to be Dominican Ecuadorian Latina and from New York and all that because I had a real contrast for the first time in my life.

Ambiguity About Racial Identity

As the data indicates, the majority of women from Latin ancestry, eight out of the nine, expressed ambiguity about racial identity in the context of American society. Physically, these women feel in between the color spectrum and as a result their racial identity remained a nebulous issue, with the exception of one woman. As a White Latina, Rachel did not question her racial identity—she identifies as White based on her skin color.

Ambiguity About Ethnic Identity

As Table 3 indicates, Anna was the only woman from Latin ancestry who expressed ambiguity about her ethnic identity. Anna is not fluent in Spanish and was born in the United States and therefore, questioned her sense of belonging to her Mexican ancestry. She described her lack of fluency and the fact that she "only holds an American passport" as "having a soft spot," making her vulnerable to outsiders questioning her authenticity as a Mexican woman. Echoing the literature, for individuals from Latin ancestry speaking Spanish facilitates a sense of connection and belonging to a "Hispanic" ethnic identity (Campbell & Rogalin, 2006).

European and of Color

Table 5

European and of Color and Power of Social Constructions
Sense of Racial and Ethnic Identity
(N=12)

	Allison	Kim	Gia	Eva	Teresa	Carla	Victoria	Cindy	Samara	Dina	Jesse	Michelle
Sense of REI												
Awareness of RI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Awareness of EI		X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Ambiguity RI		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Ambiguity EI					X		X			X	X	X

Awareness of Racial Identity

Racial identity for this group of women ranged from Black to White to somewhere in between. Similar to the women from Latin ancestry, all twelve women from European and of-color ancestry reported to be aware of their racial identity through interactions with others within the contexts of their environment. For some women this was a daily awareness, whereas for others it varied depending on their social networks as well as interactions within these networks. Allison, who identifies as a Multiracial and Black woman, reported on her "everyday" racial awareness:

> On some level I think about it everyday. Just in my interactions with others I'm aware of it on some level, even if it's on a subconscious level, who I am speaking to, what their background is, what the dynamics of the relationship are. When I

move around the community I am aware. Harlem, or Washington Heights, and all
segments of that academic part of the community, which is largely White, and the
more Black or African American part of Harlem, and then some of the more
Latino parts of upper Manhattan.

Similarly, Kim and Gia described their daily awareness of their Black racial identity,

which, as they shared, is very much attached to experiences of bias and discrimination.

Like Allison, Kim, and Gia's brown skin tones and curly hair textures, contribute to their

racialization and subsequent consciousness of the social construction of race in American

society where White is associated with power and privilege and color carries stigma.

> Everyday. That's hard for people to understand, both Black and White. You are
> faced with nuances everywhere you go. Comments that people make. Because I
> am not talking with a certain vernacular, or a certain tone to my voice you just
> naturally assume that I am one way or the other. There are simple things like what
> happened when I was camping with my sister last weekend. I'm walking back
> from the bathrooms and I pass this White women, and she was walking around
> the trail and I'm like "good morning," and she purses her lips and frowns her
> brow a little bit and just nods her head quickly. I get back to my camp site and I
> see my sister and I tell her an interesting thing happened, and I told her the
> situation and I told her that you as a White person, you are probably going to
> assume that she is having a bad day or doesn't like people or doesn't want to be
> bothered, for me, when those simple situations happen I never know if it's
> because of my skin color. You are faced with that kind of typical stuff. Everyday,
> you never know if the attitude is someone having a bad day or that they don't like
> the way your skin looks (Kim).

> I would say walking around day to day it's not something I think about constantly
> but it does come up. For example, yesterday we were out having a piece of pizza
> and I wasn't thinking about anything to do with my race whatsoever, and me and
> my son and daughter were sitting outside eating a piece of pizza and my son
> started asking about the billboards right along the Bloomfield Ave. intersection,
> and he says "mom, I noticed in this area you don't see Black people on the
> billboards, in our area there are Black people on the billboards." Then we started
> to get into a conversation of what type of billboards, because he was noticing they
> are all alcohol and cigarette ones around me, and then we started talking about
> race and stuff. For me I think that's an example of what's it's like. I don't really
> engage it as much but it comes up (Gia).

As illustrated by the above vignettes, appearance is related to the level of racial

awareness among this group of women.

Awareness of Ethnic Identity

Eight women in this subset shared that they are aware of their ethnic identity. For this group of women awareness of ethnic identity differed from awareness of their racial identity. Awareness of ethnic identity was reported to be more of a subconscious, internal and optional awareness. In contrast, racial identity was ascribed and primarily based on appearance. Similarly, Wallace (2001) found that for multiethnic European American individuals' ethnic identity is viewed as optional and played more of a symbolic role. For some of the women ethnic identity was learned and nurtured as children in the home environment, whereas others made a conscious choice to find connection to their ethnicity as adults. Awareness of ethnic identity for this group of women is understood to be a positive awareness, one that they have chosen to embrace. Kim, whose mother is German and father is Black, connects to her German ancestry even though she is ascribed a Black racial identity.

> I am very German. I am very German in a lot of ways. In the foods that I eat and enjoy and I use a lot of German Slang. There is this whole other part of me, that's very European, very German, which is more important to me then the White part but I don't think about it that much it's just part of me.

Teresa, whose mother is Italian and father is African American and Cherokee, is increasingly aware of her Italian roots in an effort to pass on traditions to her son.

> As I have gotten older I have identified more with the Italian culture. The food, the family relationships, I have gotten much closer with my mother having become a mother, so in that sense and helping my son find his identity I have embraced the Italian culture more.

In another example, Carla, whose is also a mix of Italian and African American, shared that her awareness of her ethnic roots manifests everyday through her cooking.

> I am aware of it because it is in my cooking I make very good baked rigatoni and my sauce is to die for, it is part of who I am.

Similarly, Samara takes pride in her Caribbean ancestry.

> I think it is part of everyday life. The way I cook, I don't cook American food. I cook how my mother taught me to cook. I met a guy recently and he said to me "you're more Caribbean than you are American." He's like "everything about you, the way you cook, the way you clean, the way you talk."

Ambiguity About Racial Identity

Eight women from multiracial backgrounds reported that at some point in their lives, they questioned their Black, White or Biracial racial identity. As multiracial women many were confronted with feelings of inadequacy because they fell somewhere in the middle of a Black and White, albeit social constructions, identity. While some women of European and of color ancestry orchestrated the freedom to identify with their ethnic heritages, they were equally constrained by the social constructions of race. As discussed in the literature, individuals of color from mixed heritage are caught between the socially constructed racial and ethnic worlds of Black, White, Asian, and Latino. For example, Kim, Teresa, and Carla shared similar stories of ambiguity about their racial identity in various social contexts. Each woman was influenced by the social constructions of race within American society. Kim's struggle was similar to what Gaskins (1999) described in her study with not being "Black enough":

> I didn't like to be in large crowds of Black people because I was afraid that they would see through me even though my skin was Black. The first time that I was around a gym full of Black people it was at college and we were going to a Step Show sponsored by one of the Black fraternities but it never occurred to me that I had never been in a room with 1500 Black people in my entire life. And I walked in there and I was seized with panic and I literally stood in a corner with my back up against the wall scared to go out in the crowd because I was like, I am not completely Black. I was terrified. Almost now to say it I am ashamed, you know how can you feel this way that this group of people? But that was a very defining moment for me.

Teresa's ambiguity about her multiracial ancestry was a result of society's pressure to

adopt one racial label:

> It was an additional level of confusion to process, trying to figure out who I was
> and how was I going to relate to the world and how was this world relating to me,
> some people seem so clear and ok and some seem so confused and dissatisfied
> that I am not one thing.

Carla's experience represented the struggle to identify as Black because of the meanings

attached to the Black racial identity:

> When I was a teenager I read this article in *Ebony* magazine and in the story there
> is this young man and he is mixed but he looks like he is White. He is talking
> about growing up and identifying Black and it really struck me, when this young
> man, even though he looks like he is White, why he is identifying as a Black
> person? I just found it so weird. I am a junior in high school and I am looking at it
> and I am thinking why is he identifying as a Black person when he could be
> White when it would be so much easier to just be White? And as I am reading it I
> am thinking you know what, I read the article I let it go and when I came back I
> thought "it's not his thinking that is messed up, it is my thinking that is messed
> up." It just really changed the way that I look at things.

Ambiguity About Ethnic Identity

Teresa, Victoria, Dina, Jesse, and Michelle reported having a difficult time

finding connection to their ethnic identity.

Similar to Anna, Victoria felt that her inability to speak Spanish diminished her

sense of belonging to her Puerto Rican ancestry: "It's hard because I don't know the

language, either language, Spanish or Italian."

Michelle shared a similar story in that she was never taught her mother's native

Chinese language:

> My mom was partners with my grandparents. They owned a Chinese laundry
> close by to where I grew up so I would go to the laundry every day after school,
> and I would hear Chinese spoken but I don't know how to speak it I just didn't
> pick it up. At home it was very American, we have some Chinese artifacts but my
> mom has never been to China and we ate very American.

Jesse spoke about institutional roadblocks as obstacles in her ability to embrace

and find connection to her Native American ancestry:

> I think the main one for me especially with a Native American ancestry it was like "oh no you are not Native American you don't..." It's like they are trying to take away a piece of me. You don't qualify because you don't fit into this criteria that we set up based on our rules and regulations, you don't qualify. And that's what I feel is like a roadblock, it's like you are trying to strip me of my identity.

The lack of ethnic cultivation in the home environment and the overpowering

social constructions of race in the dominant society clearly contributed to the women's

ambiguity about their ethnic identity.

Black and Ethnic

Table 6

Black and Ethnic and Power of Social Constructions
Sense of Racial and Ethnic Identity
(N=10)

	Beth	Tara	Mary	Joelle	Nadia	Raquel	Elanie	Elan	Jen	April
Sense of REI										
Awareness of RI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Awareness of EI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Ambiguity RI						X				X
Ambiguity EI										X

Awareness of Racial Identity

Similar to the women from Latin ancestry and the women from European and of-color backgrounds, all ten women in this subset reported to be aware of their racial identity through their interactions with others in the context of American society. These women were identified by their perceived Black race based on their physical appearances and exclusively classified as Black or African American. As discussed in the literature, the Black population suffers from invisibility on a national level when their ethnic identity is ignored and the focus is on the color of their skin (Johnson, 2000).

In one example, Beth painfully described her repeated incidents with racialization. As a dark-skin woman with a British inflected accent who was born in West Africa and grew

up in Jamacia, Beth's awareness of her ascribed racial identification may be even more

intense because, as she attested to, Black immigrants often find that they are lumped with

Blacks born in the United States in a kind of second invisibility (Johnson, 2000).

> Living in America has made me much more aware of race then I was at all in my life. I think culturally here there is a preoccupation with race that is so intense. Because one, you hear it on the television everyday. Everybody is being described or separated out as White, Black, Mexican, Latin American….you always hear it is the one thing that hit me immediately when I moved here whenever anybody describes someone the first description is the person's race, it's just the culture of America it's how people speak about each other according to race first, then we get to character. And so I feel like I am very hypersensitive to it and I notice it in every regard, so they will hear that I have an accent and they'll go "oh where are you from you're not African American?" And I'm like, "why is that the only alternative?" I'm in a country where I see myself as very oppressed, as seen in the media, and so that makes me very aware of my race.

> Similar to the women from European and of-color ancestry, awareness of racial

identity correlated with experiences of racial distinctness, discrimination, and bias. Joelle

and Jen, who are both first generation Jamaican Americans, discussed their acute

awareness of their Black racial identities and the intimate connection to antiblack racism.

> It is a fight to have to not internalize racism. Race is one of those things that I am always aware of whether it is at the forefront, or it's way in my subconscious but I think that I am always aware of race I am never not aware, like when I go into a auditorium I will look to see first in general how many people of color are there and then specifically how many Black people are there, so I think it is something I am always aware of and always counting like how many people of color in my working environment and who is Black and who is Asian and just seeing, so I think it is always something that I am aware of (Joelle).

> I would say it is something that comes up at least once a day. If it doesn't have to do with my job it has to do with being a new mother and as I wheel my child around am always waiting for someone to ask me what my race is thinking that I am the nanny. That is something that I think about everyday (Jen).

Awareness of Ethnic Identity

All ten women reported to be aware of their ethnic identity. These women

reported that ethnic identity was significant to their sense of self yet was more likely to be

overlooked, misread or silenced.

> Ethnicity is for me more of culture, tradition and mores and morals, and
> sometimes for me it's sometimes your country of origin identifies your ethnicity
> because I very much identify as being a Haitian woman more so than being
> African American. I became more and more conscious of my ethnic background,
> the leaders of the Haitian revolution, and all the contributions that Africans have
> given to the world (Mary).

As Joelle shared, she is more aware of her racial identity because race is the

primary marker of identity in American society. Yet, her ethnic identity is more

significant to her:

> To me the ethnicity is more significant then the race because I do identify with
> being Caribbean American if pushed I will say Jamaican American because I
> grew up with both parents. I am more aware of it when I am in Caribbean places
> where I can enact that Caribbean identity because on a day-to-day basis in work
> relations, I think I am more aware of my race than my ethnicity.

Raquel explained that for her ethnicity also trumps race in terms of her personal

identification, yet she too feels confined by the social constructions of race. As the

women reported, awareness of ethnic identity is indicated by cultural practices and

experienced in daily life from the people the women interact with to the food that they

eat.

> I think that's the thing that I live most daily that a lot of things that are common
> sense to Americans I think are not true about the whole world. It could be
> anything from I don't eat cheese and milk so I will find myself reporting on a trip
> that I made and saying "well it's not everywhere in the world that everything on
> the menu is smothered with cheese." (Raquel)

Ambiguity About Racial Identity

Raquel and April expressed ambiguity about their racial identity in the context of American society. Raquel, a woman with light-skin and curly hair, described her struggle with her racial identity in the United States as compared to her experiences with color in Jamaica:

> I think probably the hardest is trying to talk to African Americans about how I identify differently in Jamaica versus here and to explain that it doesn't have anything to do with loyalty a lack of loyalty or anything like that. It's just the fact that I am aware of the fact that I am not identified as Black in Jamaica and that the reason why I am identified as Black in the U.S., although I don't reject it, I embrace that identity but at the same time I am aware that it has to do with racial discrimination in the U.S.

April's multiracial and multiethnic background left her constantly feeling like a "fraud."

> Its just so complicated its always feeling like an a fraud or am I identifying with too much with Whiteness... it's a constant, its just as constant as my obsession with food just as my obsession with my career, this internal drive, there are just things that are infused in it and it is highlighted when I am in a situation and I feel like, the fraud thing is big.

April's struggle with her racial identity as a multiracial and multiethnic woman is similar to the challenges experienced by the women from European and of-color backgrounds.

Ambiguity About Ethnic Identity

April also expressed ambiguity about her Puerto Rican and Caribbean ethnic identities because her multiethnic and multiracial background leaves her feeling as she states, "somewhere in the middle."

> I don't feel like I fit into either side, I always feel kind of lost, when I'm around, in terms of food, and in terms of most of the family members that I'm close with is through my mom's side, but which people would assume is not Black but most are Black Puerto Rican or Black Cuban so its Afro-Latino kind of thing and which I feel very comfortable but yet when I'm with my uncle on my dad's side, I can totally be there. I just always feel a little bit like an outsider, but culturally I would say I am more connected to my mom's culture.

As illustrated by this vignette, the more complex the identity, the more one feels isolated in their multiple heritages. In effect, the constraints in the social constructions of race and ethnicity bring with it a forced sense of belonging.

Summary of Findings

As discussed, the meanings of racial and ethnic identity, as well as the ways that women are identified in American society, differ according to women's racial and ethnic background and their ascribed racial and ethnic identity. Despite differences in definition, awareness of racial identity was unanimous among the three subsets. All thirty-one women felt a keen sense of awareness of their racial identity or, in the case of the women from Latin ancestry, awareness of the lack of a racial identity in American society. As conferred throughout the literature, racial identity is a social identity that is socially constructed and determined by physical appearance as well as language and names, and is given meaning in different contexts. With the exception of some of the women from Latin ancestry whose appearance is such that they are identified as "Latina" or "Hispanic," racial identification trumps ethnicity and diminishes the complexity of identity. This finding was particularly relevant to Black women from ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, a Black ascribed racial identity has historically been associated with negative attributes, which the women reported to be conscious of and in some cases internalize.

The majority of the women, 87%, reported to be aware of their ethnic identity. Awareness of ethnic identity was reported in women who felt connection to their parents' country of origin. Narratives from each group describe the ways in which women were aware of their ethnic identity through family history, language, food, and interactions

with others in different social contexts. However, for the women from Latin ancestry awareness of their ethnic identities was equated with being different from the majority. These women were ascribed monolithic ethnic labels of "Hispanic" or "Latina" that were embedded with stereotypes and mischaracterizations.

Impact of Social Constructions on Women's Welfare

The impact of the social construction of race and ethnicity on the welfare of individuals of color from mixed ancestry is illustrated in experiences of bias and discrimination, feelings of rejection from different racial and ethnic groups and the ultimate silencing of their complexities by feeling pressure to adopt a single and predetermined racial or ethnic label.

Table 7

Glossary of Terms
Impact of Social Constructions on Women's Welfare

Theme	Definition
Bias	Experiencing unfair treatment because of the social constructions of race and ethnicity and the stereotypes attached to racial and ethnic labels.
Rejection From a Racial Group	Experienced a negative response from a racial group.
Rejection From an Ethnic Group	Experienced a negative response from an ethnic group.
Silencing	Unique and multiple identities have been silenced by society's social constructions.

Latinas

Table 8

Latinas and Power of Social Constructions
Impact of Social Constructions on Women's Welfare
(N=9)

	Cory	Anna	Lucia	Yesenia	Susan	Maribel	Rachel	Jo	Kate
Impact									
Bias		X	X			X			
Rejection From RG									
Rejection From EG							X	X	
Silencing		X	X		X	X	X		

Bias

Three women from Latin ancestry reported to have experienced bias at some point in their lives because of their physical appearances and the stereotypes of what it means to be "Latina" in the United States. As discussed in the literature, White society has set the precedent for how women should look and behave and the norm from which the universal woman is based is the White woman (Graham, 1992). Lucia's experience of rejection at her job in Public Relations early on in her career illustrates this struggle:

> I think maybe I did not fit their look in that building the only thing I saw were like 5'7", 5'8" chicks that were slim and blond, if you were a brunette you were super pale that was something I caught really quick in my overview and if I have hips, I have always fought my hips ever since I was young, when I had the *Sassy* magazine and you're just like, "my ass won't fit in those shorts."

Anna, a Chicana woman from Denver, recalled her experience of bias because of her ethnic looks:

> I remember in high school being followed in stores in Denver because I looked the part that they thought was ethnic.

In another example, Lucia heatedly discussed her feelings of isolation in her career as she struggled to change the misperception of Latin women as domestic workers:

> No matter what title I was at, and I was always the only Latina in like a group of managerial or assistant managerial position, you know, I wasn't the cleaning girl even though I was treated as one.

Maribel also reported that she has changed her teaching style because of the stereotypes associated with Latin women as docile:

> What I realized is that I am brown skinned, I am Latina and the students are going to try to fool around and try to run with the class. So I changed. In the beginning I was nice, now I am nice at the end. It's this thing, "oh look, the little brown Puerto Rican." You may not verbalize it but that's what you are thinking because it's been programmed.

Rejection from Racial Group

The women from Latin ancestry did not report to have experienced rejection from a racial group.

Rejection from Ethnic Group

Jo and Rachel experienced rejection from their ethnic group. Jo, a Puerto Rican woman who describes her appearance as "petite and fair skinned," shared that rejection from her Latin peers was based on her socioeconomic class. As she explained:

> I went to college and all of a sudden there were all these really cool Puerto Rican and Dominican women. They were first generation college students and I really thought, "mom, why did you make me go to this high school in the Italian section of New Haven?" I felt like I couldn't compete like I wasn't a real Latina I felt like I was lacking. I was a suburban, I didn't grow up in a Puerto Rican or Black neighborhood, I grew up in the Italian section. People joke you are a Bourgeois Latino, and I'm like "no I am not!" I say, "You have never have seen me dance.

Yo hablo espanol y bailar salsa, la comida espanol …yo soy Latina." I almost felt jealous like I didn't grow up with enough Latinos and I felt like I better really improve my Spanish and I struggled with that, like I wasn't Latina enough (Jo).

For Rachel, her White skin and Irish features were met with rejection from her "Spanish"

peers:

In high school experiencing the same thing, like "you can't possibly speak Spanish because of the way you look." Finding myself in situations where it was automatically assumed that I don't speak Spanish that I won't be able to relate or connect with you on that level. For me that just seemed strange since in my household and everything about me I considered so Spanish.

Silencing

Five of the women from Latin ancestry admitted that their multiethnic identities

have been silenced by society's social constructions of race and ethnicity and by the

accompanying stereotypes of what it means to be "Latina" in the United States. As Anna

declared, "they put you in a box to try to understand you!" The women reported that

outsiders primarily identified them by the monolithic and ethnic label of "Hispanic" or

"Latina." Technically they all were "Latinas," yet for some of these women, ethnic

identity represents more than simply "Latina" or "Hispanic," as their awareness extends

to their specific nationalities and heritages. As discussed in the literature, the Latino

culture is heterogeneous in that Latinos may share some cultural similarities but Puerto

Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans and Dominicans, for example, have unique characteristics that

set them apart from one another (Gracia, 2007). Susan, who identifies by stating "my

parents are from the Dominican Republic," explained:

I find that when I say Hispanic or Latina it doesn't say much but telling exactly where my parents are from gives them a little more insight about me.

Rachel, a Cuban and Ecuadorian Latina, shared a similar experience:

I was labeled my freshman year as the White girl, and so it was very interesting, being labeled one way, my father was called Juan Valdez, and being automatically considered a Mexican just because of the way my father looked, and not understanding, any layers of difference. And experiencing the same thing through high school, like "you can't possibly speak Spanish because of the way you look." Finding myself in situations where it was automatically assumed that I don't speak Spanish, that I won't be able to relate or connect with you on that level. For me that just seemed strange.

Consistent with the literature (Gracia, 2007), the use of ethnic labels such as "Latina" and "Hispanic" foster the thinking that ethnic groups are homogeneous and further promote faulty stereotypes. Lucia's experience as a Puerto Rican woman in dominant society supports this finding:

People will see me and be like "she's pretty, she's a pretty Latina, she probably knows about JLo and how to dance really well." I also find when you are in a predominantly White area, they will look at you and be like "oh you're the little Latina girl." And you're like "no, I'm a woman and I'm Latina and I could tell you what you need to know." It's also because people are expecting that commonness about oneself that I learned French. I was like, I'm going to surprise you.

European and of Color

Table 9

European and of Color and Power of Social Constructions
Impact of Social Constructions on Women's Welfare
(N=12)

	Allison	Kim	Gia	Eva	Teresa	Carla	Victoria	Cindy	Samara	Dina	Jesse	Michelle
Impact												
Bias	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Rejection from RG			B	B	B/W					W		
Rejection from EG							X	X		X		
Silencing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Bias

Incidents of bias were found to be almost uniform among women from European and of-color backgrounds. For this group of women, experiences of bias were multifaceted. For one, racialized issues of superiority and inferiority were attributed to their physical features as women of color and the stereotypes attached to ascribed Black and multiracial labels. As Jesse stated, "I am dehumanized because I am Black in the only 'home'—USA—that I'll ever know." Kim, a heavyset Biracial woman with caramel color skin and curly hair, discussed her experiences of antiblack racism based on her physical appearance:

> I noticed that there are situations where people, none White if you will, get followed in stores and that has happened to me. If I am walking around in an all-Black community it is a non-issue—I don't get looks and I don't get stares. Then there are parts of White communities, places that I'll go, even in Montclair, and its like "what is she doing here?" That's because they are looking at my skin.

The stereotype of women of color as intellectually inferior was inflicted on Gia by her guidance counselor:

> My White guidance counselor in high school told me I wasn't supposed to apply to Penn, he told me, "you should apply to Rutgers because you will get into Rutgers I don't know if you will get into Penn." I walked in there when I got my acceptance! I felt like I had to laugh. I think that race is something that came out really big growing up Biracial.

> A second type of bias resulted from the women's Black and White identities. As Eva shared:

> So here I am in Black American culture and they would say things like "oh you are part White so you are going to end up smarter," or "make sure you put a hat on because you don't want to get darker than you already are." I remember when I was a kid I would say "oh, I embrace both sides of my culture, I have the White side and I like going to school." That's ridiculous! But that's sort of how you are brainwashed. I suffer from my own racism.

> The women discussed the awkward and often painful stories of being "too dark" or "too light" and the repercussions of a socially constructed racial identification. Allison's struggle as a multiracial woman illustrates the chiasm of being on the border of Black and White socially constructed racial divide where prejudice is experienced on both sides:

> I experienced discrimination because of being too light or too dark. As a kid in a very general way, I was picked on for being too light by Black girls or being too dark by White girls.

Rejection from Racial Group

As indicated in Table 9, four women reported that they have experienced rejection from a racial group at one point in their lives. Table 9 indicates which racial group the

women reported to experience rejection from. Feelings and incidents of rejection were

noted as a result of being economically, culturally and physically different from the

historical and socially constructed Black and White racial categories. Gia attributed the

rejection she experienced from the Black community to her family's socio-economic

status because being "authentically Black" was associated with a lower socio-economic

class. Gia's story is similar to how Jo endured rejection from her Puerto Rican peers

based on class:

> The Whiteness in my Blackness was never questioned until I think I was around more Black people then it would be grades of color and shade and things like "did you ever grow up playing Double Dutch?" Different cultural questions, and then when they found out I was raised upper middle class there would be the comparisons like "oh you are White. You are like a Black girl but you're White."

Eva spoke about the "backlash" from the Black community because of her intonation,

which is a socially constructed cultural indicator of what it means to be "authentically

Black" or "authentically White" in American society:

> There was some backlash against me because how I spoke. People in the Black community would ask me, "who are you?" "What are you doing here?" "Do you want to be White, or do you think you are White?"

Teresa reported that based on her physical appearance, specifically her Italian features,

she experienced rejection from the Black community:

> I will never forget, a good friend of mine and I were talking and saying something about being Black and she said, "well Teresa you are not really Black," so in those instances, her perspective of me, she didn't quite accept me as really Black.

Teresa also shared the rejection she refused to tolerate from the White community:

> I actually went through quite a period where I was very angry at the White race and kind of handled it that way and said, "well you guys won't look at me like I am one of you, so forget you then."

Rejection from Ethnic Group

Victoria, Cindy, and Dina reported to have felt rejection from their Latin ethnic peers at one some point in their lives. All three women come from a Latin background and all three women were never taught the Spanish language. As discussed in the literature and illustrated in the above vignettes, language is a strong connector to ethnic identity and ethnic group membership.

> People really get angry, I have had people come up to me and start speaking Italian and they say what are you, Italian? And I say I am part Italian and then they get angry and say "why don't you know Italian?" and the same in Spanish, "what's wrong with you why, don't you know the language?" The language is such a big part. People get angry at me (Dina).

> Not being enough Latino enough because I wasn't raised speaking Spanish, didn't live in the hood, or whatever it was (Cindy).

Silencing

All twelve women from this subset shared stories about how their multiracial and multiethnic identities have been silenced by society's social constructions of race and by the accompanying stereotypes of what it means to be "Biracial" or "Other" in the United States. As Jesse said, she only desires to be "whole." Kim explained that her complexity as a Biracial woman with both German and African American ancestry has been silenced because she is assigned a monolithic Black identification based her physical appearance, specifically her skin color:

> I really have fought labeling myself one or the other because I know that society will probably pigeonhole me because of my skin color and that's not who I am. I can't say that I am a Black woman because I am not. I have this whole other family that to me I would be denying if I said was a Black woman one phrase that I had heard from someone was "why don't you say you are a Black woman who happens to have a White mother?"

For Gia, her complexity has been silenced by society's need to "put her in a hole."

> There would always be the need for them to identify me and put me in a hole, like for their needs. For me, I have always felt Black but I never felt like I had to be in a hole but everyone always had to put me in a hole. I think that they really need to look at those boxes altogether and I think there is some psychological warfare on some level with even those boxes.

Victoria's fair skin has resulted in outsiders labeling her as White, despite the fact that she identities as Italian and Puerto Rican.

> That always bothered me, when you go to Puerto Rico they are like "who is this White chick?" I'm like wow; my mother was born here (Victoria).

> The pressure to "pick one box," is another way that complexity of identity is silenced. The notion of having to check one box is presented as if dividing up people into neat racial and ethnic categories was a natural way to categorize people. Yet, as discussed in the literature, little is known about the psychological process at work when a person checks a box reporting to be a member of a particular racial or ethnic group (Snipp, 2003).

> Cindy clearly expressed her frustrations as a Mexican and Polish woman growing up in Chicago:

> It was very frustrating growing up in a highly segregated city. I don't think people intentionally meant to be rude or not inclusive but just begin forced to pick a box growing up it sometimes is quite, I just wasn't cool with it. You just wanted to be able to express yourself or just be known for what you want to be versus having to choose one or the other, being categorized.

The designated category of "Other" on forms and applications further illustrates the confusion that accompanies mixed race identities. The "Other" category is assigned to individuals who do not neatly in the Black and White racial categories and highlights feelings of a foreign status.

> When you are in a predominately White environment and you are not White, you are just "other." (Eva)

Black and Ethnic

Table 10

Black and Ethnic and Power of Social Constructions
Impact of Social Constructions on Women's Welfare
(N=10)

	Beth	Tara	Mary	Joelle	Nadia	Raquel	Elanie	Elan	Jen	April
Impact										
Bias	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rejection From RG	B	B		B		B	B	BR	B/W	B/W
Rejection From EG					X		X			X
Silencing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Bias

All ten of the informants reported that they have experienced bias at some point in their lives because of their ascribed Black racial identification. The women reported that incidents of bias and antiblack racism were the result of their Black physical features. As discussed in the literature, in American society Blackness is associated with deeply held beliefs of stigma and inferiority (Aspen Institute, 2004).

> I noticed that when I shop, or of I'm looking for a job or if I am talking to someone for the first time, I feel there are certain qualifications that I have to make perhaps because I am Black and perhaps because I am a Black woman (Beth).

> Once I walked into a clothing store and was really treated shabbily and I wasn't going to say anything and then when I walked out of the room I came back and said, "It was really inappropriate how I was treated. You don't even know how much money I have." Sometimes I do my best shopping on impulse. You don't

know how much money I could have dropped in this store and just talked to them about making an assumption based on how I look (Mary).

I feel like there are some teachers who don't want to deal with race or don't know how to deal with race and so when I say the thing that people aren't talking about it more readily identifies me as a Black person who should be dismissed. It's hard for me to say that I feel like people look at me and then there is a race component to what's going on I feel like it's more out of the ways that I interact with people (Raquel).

Rejection from Racial Group

As illustrated in Table 10, eight of the ten women reported to have experienced

rejection from a racial group at some point in their lives. The experiences of rejection

varied among these women. Similar to the women of European and of-color ancestry,

feelings and experiences of rejection were noted as a result of being culturally and

physically different from the historical and socially constructed Black racial category.

Elanie, who is a mix of Black, Puerto Rican and Native American, shared her struggle

with rejection from her African American peers because of her multiethnic appearance:

It is quite difficult for African Americans—when you do not look African American you get ostracized in a certain way. The people who tried to most bring me down and try to tell me something negative about myself were Black women, dark-skinned women, but I don't know if they were trying to equal the playing field.

As noted in the literature, feelings of rejection from racial groups may be more

intense for foreign-born Blacks, or subsequent generations who maintain an ethnic

identity. These women are racialized by society at large while being ostracized by the

Black American community because of differences in culture. As a first generation West

Indian woman, Tara had a similar experience with rejection from her Black American

peers:

> I was an outcast. I came from the Island and I had jheri curls and when I went to school with the girls here they had the permed hair and the long hair or they had it straightened. I did not have any of that stuff.

Jen, a first generation Multiracial and Jamaican woman, poignantly explained her struggle with rejection from the both the Black and White communities:

> A lot of times these immigrant families especially the more educated ones are living among in better neighborhoods, which happen to be the White neighborhoods and attending better schools and then having to deal with White people assuming that they do not know anything because they are Black. Then not being able to be connected even on a race level to their Black American brothers and sisters because the two communities do not understand each other either.

> In a different example, Elan was rejected from a Biracial student group because she chooses to personally identity as a Black woman, even though her mother is White:

> When I was in college somewhere in the middle of college, they started a students of mixed heritage group and I remember being invited to join and I went, and I dropped out right afterwards because they argued with me in the very first meeting and I said, "this is supposed to be support and you are arguing with me." And it was because I did not adequately give my mother proper space in terms of racial identification. And I said my mother told me don't bother. But they really didn't like that. They were really big on this egalitarian understanding equal access to both races so I thought that was kind of a load of crap because underneath it was a desire to switch hats in different moments that were strategically useful which I thought was a privilege that was linked to birth right that was therefore unfair because other people did not have access to it based on their genetic makeup which is a totally politically bogus notion to rally around so I thought that was bullshit and I said okay forget it. So I kind of broke with that group.

Elan's story is another example of the socially constructed and fixed notions of racial categories that adds to the complexity of identity for individuals from multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds.

Rejection from Ethnic Group

Three of the women in this subset reported to have experienced rejection from an ethnic group at some point in their lives. Experiences of rejection were reported to be the result of differences in physical appearances and in not being able to speak Spanish. Nadia's experience with rejection from her Puerto Rican peers was a result of her dark skin tone:

> I was at a pool party and there was family there, and there was a little girl there, she had to be maybe 10 at the oldest and she wanted to know why I was dark skinned and why I wasn't light skinned if I was Latina. It was very uncomfortable because at that moment I didn't feel Latina, I was like okay I am African American here based solely on my skin color.

Elanie shared her experience of rejection from the Latin community because she does not speak Spanish:

> I also don't speak Spanish so that brings up a lot; Spanish people don't really connect with me because I don't speak the language.

Silencing

All ten women shared stories about how their multiethnic identities have been silenced by society's social constructions of race and by the accompanying stereotypes of what it means to be Black in the United States. Echoing the literature, these women report experiences where Black or African American is used as a "catch-all" designation for people of color when, in fact, Black people do not always share group memberships with others of similar skin color.

> I would just identify myself as Black based on the color of my skin. But because of what I know, as far as my family history and my links to the American Black/White issue, and what I have taught myself by making a conscious effort on a regular basis—don't judge a book by its cover, treat people as you would have them treat you, little moralistic things like that—I guess the best way would be to

consider myself a woman of color, because I know I am more than just what people see on the outside (Tara).

My racial identity is my phenotype, you know when people see me they are going to see African American woman, and even though I don't even identify with being African American, that's what people are going to say when they see me (Joelle).

I always try to put my identities altogether, even though people are like, you are more Black, you are more this, and then I say, what if I took your arm off? Would you miss your arm? My mother and my father are very important people and I love them both (Elanie).

I think Americans can be a little basic. They really tend to collapse things in ways that are not productive or helpful or even true. It seems like all of that, my culture and values, was silenced when they came here because race took precedence (Eva).

Beth explained her irritation with the pressure she feels to identify her race on

forms:

I've always resisted having to answer the question, because its, I figured it doesn't have anything to do with anything I am applying for when I'm sending out applications, if anyone is looking at me they can tell, I've never understood why they need to answer in the big picture other than a descriptive detail of what I look like. So I'm really never committed to, "oh I'm Black."

Similarly, April notes how "checking a box" is another example of how the complexity

of identity is silenced as women are pressured to fractionalize and segregate their

diversity:

I always check African American and Latino and my mom would be like "you should check everything because that is what you are." I always check multi boxes. But I don't do a multiracial box. For some reason I feel like that is an easy out, I don't know why, I just don't really do that one.

Summary of Findings

As the data indicate, the experience of bias and racialized issues of superiority and

inferiority resonated with all three groups. In total, 74% of the women reported

experiencing bias at some point in their lives. The experiences they shared regarding incidents of bias and discrimination were highly correlated with socially perceived appearances and stereotypes based on social constructions of race and ethnicity. The differences within each group are illustrated in Tables 8, 9 and 10.

The data indicate that the women with the darkest skin tone and most ethnic features experienced the most bias, specifically antiblack racism, and were more likely to be ascribed a singular Black identity. In contrast, those who are fairer skinned and viewed by society as "White" reported that they had fewer experiences with discrimination than darker skinned women. This finding is evidence of one, the deeply held beliefs of stigma and inferiority associated with Blackness in American society and two, the darker the woman the more likely she was ascribed a singular Black racial identity illustrating the power of skin color in racial identification.

It is important to note that, although the majority of the women in this study reported that they do not identify with the White culture, those with fairer skin did benefit from White privilege in that they experienced less prejudice and experiences with discrimination. Yet, for many of the women "White privilege" did not feel like privilege as the external perception of White connected them to a culture that they do not feel a part of. Society might grant certain advantages for looking White, but internally this label and association presented a conflict. Furthermore, women from all three ethnoracial groups experienced the pressure to adopt a single and predetermined racial or ethnic label. Noted in this analysis as "silencing," the women reported that their ethnicities were more likely to be ignored, overlooked, misread or silenced. This finding illustrates that women of color from multiracial and multiethnic ancestry seek simultaneous group

membership from more than one reference group yet remained constrained by the racial ecology. Social construction theories on identity consider the non-singular nature of identity construction by acknowledging the multiplicity of identifications that women may adopt beyond the conventional racial and ethnic categories while noting the limitations and challenges of self identification in United States society.

The final sections of the chapter extend the discussion by presenting data on the social impacts and management of multiple identities.

<div align="center">Social Impacts</div>

The social construction of racial and ethnic identification influences the personal and social decisions that individuals make. Race, for example, is noted in the literature as a significant predictor of the choice in a partner (Thornton, 1996). But beyond that, how does the social construction of race and ethnicity impact personal decisions regarding career choices and interpersonal relationships with friends and co-workers? What influence does racialization have on the socialization process with peers and in work environments for mixed-heritage individuals? Do societal beliefs about race and ethnicity channel women to different careers? Once in a career, how does being a woman of color form a multiracial and ethnic background affect their work and relationships with co-workers? In a study on gender and the career choice process, Correll (2001) purports that cultural perceptions of gender impact the early career choices for both men and women. Similarly, racial and ethnic stereotypes contain expectations for competence that may or may not impact one's career choice and level of functioning at work. Still, the research on the social impact of racial and ethnic identity is limited. This section of the chapter

presents data on the social impact of racial and ethnic identity as reported by the women in this study.

Table 11

Glossary of Terms
Social Impacts

Theme	Definition
Relationships	Impact on choice of and relationship with friendships and partnerships.
Career	Impact on choice of career and functioning within career.

Latinas

Table 12

Latinas and Effects of Social Constructions
Social Impacts
(N=9)

	Cory	Anna	Lucia	Yesenia	Susan	Maribel	Rachel	Jo	Kate
Impact									
Relationships	X	X	X				X		X
Career	X		X	X		X	X		

The majority of the women from Latin ancestry reported that their multiracial and

multiethnic ancestry has impacted their relationships and career. As Lucia explained in an

email she sent me a week after the interview took place:

> I left our conversation thinking about how my ethnicity/race and color has
> affected me and in short, it made me conscious of everything I do and am because
> I am always trying to prove that I am more than what people will perceive. It
> affected me choosing the men I dated, the man I married, how I dress, the music I
> listen to, the movies I watched, my relationship with my family, friends,
> coworkers and strangers and it has made me driven to do the best I can in all my
> endeavors great and small.

Relationships

Cory, Anna, Lucia, Rachel, and Kate shared stories of the impact of identity on

their relationships, both in terms of friendships and their partner choice.

> I definitely knew that I always wanted to be with somebody who could relate to
> my culture and my background and so ideally I would be with somebody who was
> Hispanic and that was my only real sort of criteria. As far as friendships towards
> the end of high school and college I was making a conscious decision of wanting
> to have my circle of friends of people of color cause I want to be calm and
> comfortable and I think I pretty much stuck to that. I am not as closed off to other
> people I meet if I happen to hit it off with them wherever they are from, but
> friends now are primarily Black and Latino and I have some friends that are
> White but I never feel that same kind of connection with them (Cory).

As Cory discussed in her interview, she was "sick of being an ambassador" and desired to

surround herself with people who understood her.

Lucia and Anna expressed the unease they experience around "White people."

> Now it's made me very conscious of how to be around White people in general.
> Even in grad school now I have to represent who I am and there is a girl in my
> class who is also Boricua but she identifies with the White Latinas (Lucia).

> I am not attracted to White men and I don't know if its just in my head where I'm
> like, we really don't have anything in common or if it's literally because I am
> thinking the worst, I don't want anything to do with that (Anna).

Kate shared that her racial and ethnic identity as a Biracial woman from Puerto Rican

ancestry impacts her relationships:

> It affects everything, who I date and my friendships. At the end of the day, I can
> count my White friends on one hand. I just feel like, its all effected by my culture.
> At the end of the day, it's just easier. There becomes this feeling of what is easy
> and what fits and that's people of color (Kate).

Career

Five of the women from Latin ancestry reported that their identity influenced their

career. The impact of identity on career was noted in terms of career choice as well as

how women functioned in their careers. While some women made a conscious decision

to pursue careers where they were immersed in their culture, others did not. Cory's

identity as a Latina woman of color effected her career choice by motivating her to

pursue a career in education where she could be in a position to "give back" to the

communities where she came from.

> I got very interested in public education, and there were a lot of interesting
> exciting things going on and I see that directly attached to where I came from and
> how I grew up and my own kind of self awareness as a person of color in all
> different kinds of education systems so I feel like those parts of my identity feed
> right into it. Its definitely something that I carry around with me, how I grew up
> and where my parents are from my family and all of that is definitely a factor, in
> choices of friends, partners and where I work.

Rachel, who works with "poverty issues" and is required to speak Spanish, shared how

her identity has been critical in both her career choice and in how she functions in her

role as a Director.

> It has been critical, in the area that I am involved in. I work with poverty issues
> and I have had to speak Spanish and that has helped tremendously. Most of our
> staff speaks Spanish and I use it all the time.

Cory and Rachel shared similar intimate connections to their careers as Latinas. These are two examples of women who were driven to pursue careers with a social justice component where they were working with others who share similar historical experiences and cultural practices and in effect, deepening their connection to their ethnicity.

In a different example, Maribel, a professional photographer, finds herself in situations where she is confronted with Puerto Rican stereotypes. Maribel indignantly described her struggles as a Latina photographer:

> In my career because I know I have to try twice as hard or even harder. I shot at Shea Stadium and the first day I went here I just told myself, I am just going to talk to people and let them know I am new. I went in and introduced myself. I was the only female in the and the only person of color. I said my name was Maribel and in between innings the guy at the end of the row would say "Hey Maria!" repeatedly.

European and of Color

Table 13

European and of Color Effects of Social Constructions
Social Impacts
(N=12)

	Allison	Kim	Gia	Eva	Teresa	Carla	Victoria	Cindy	Samara	Dina	Jesse	Michelle
Impact												
Relationships	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Career	X		X				X	X	X	X	X	

Relationships

Eleven of the women reported that their identity has impacted their relationships,

both in terms of friendships and their partner choice. As Allison explained:

> I think it has always been important to me that I have a diverse group of friends
> and in that can be on any level race, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity etc. In
> terms of dating, I pretty much dated people of every race and ended up marrying a
> White man from the UK, and that is significant because I really don't think it was
> very likely that I would have married a White American man, because I think that
> most White American people have such a skewed idea about just because racial
> issues in this country that even with the most liberal White American there was
> always going to be a point at which we reached a deal breaker where it was, ok
> but you just don't get this (Allison).

Eva, who identifies as Black and White, discussed the influence her Black racial identity

has had on her friendships:

> I just had this thought, maybe I missed out on friendships with some White
> people. I never had any Asian friends and I never knew why, but maybe because
> Asians in this country identify with White culture more, I might have missed out
> because I was identifying so long with the Black community and that's where I
> felt comfortable.

Teresa, Carla, and Cindy expressed similar views regarding the influence of

identity on their relationships. As illustrated by these vignettes, race is a factor in who

women feel most connected to and comfortable with.

> I have always been more comfortable with people of color and even though I may
> have formed surface relationships, just culturally I have been uncomfortable with
> people of Caucasian background so I have not pursued closer friendships with
> people, so in my case it has had some influence on who I have dated and who I
> have become friends with (Teresa).

> As far as my girlfriends go I can have a White girlfriend and I can think that she is
> just my friend and then as it turns out she becomes my "White" friend (Carla).

Cindy, who identifies as half Mexican and half Polish, found acceptance among the

Black community:

> The people who I felt most comfortable around and I am not sure if it was because
> of their history as a people, was the African American community, it's who my
> best friends ended up being in grammar school. It wasn't for any other reason
> then who I felt comfortable around or who I received love from.

Career

Six of the women from this subset reported that their racial and ethnic identity

impacted their choice of career as well as how they function in their careers. In one

example, Allison choose a career where her diversity was represented:

> As far as my career, I'd say that it influenced that too because I was a sociology
> major in undergrad. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with it but I worked in
> the libraries all throughout undergrad and I ended going to library school because
> those were the kind of mentors that I had a few of whom happened to be
> multiracial so I felt like libraries were always more liberal and that was important
> to me and I also felt like when I stopped straightening my hair it was kind of a
> really big deal like in the early 90's to have natural hair and librarians seemed like
> they could be in an academic environment and still be fairly casual and have
> natural or kinky hair and be very afro centric or whatever centric and it just felt
> like a really comfortable environment where everybody was accepted.

In a different example, Samara's identity affected her work life. Samara, whose decision to enter the corporate world of work had nothing to do with her Caribbean ancestry, reported that her "light" complexion was an advantage as far as promotional opportunities. At the same time, her mixed racial appearance caused questioning among her colleagues as to where her loyalty would lie:

> The difference is, I would say somebody with a darker complexion will come in and be labeled and be overlooked for a promotion. When I come in the door, I think they are waiting to see, "is she going to hang around with the White people, is she going to hang around with the Black people?" They watch and wait to see who I identify with because they don't know, so they sit there and watch cause I noticed that as I go through that I have people talking to me from both sides. Eventually I merge to one side and the people who were talking to me in the beginning no longer talk to me. It happens like that. I usually merge towards the Black side because they start to want to do lunch with me and talk to me and I have more things in common. Then the White people who used to talk to me stop talking to me.

Black and Ethnic

Table 14

Black and Ethnic and Effects of Social Constructions
Social Impacts
(N=10)

	Beth	Tara	Mary	Joelle	Nadia	Raquel	Elanie	Elan	Jen	April
Impact										
Relationships	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Career	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Relationships

All ten of the women reported that their identity impacted their friendships and

partnerships. As Tara explained:

> I try to go out there and see if I can click with maybe White females or White
> Americans but it just doesn't rock, I just feel the tension automatically.

Beth, who identifies as West African, shared the impact culture has had on her

relationships:

> I can't say that race has affected my friendships; culturally yes that certainly has
> played a part in my friendships. Most of my friends are foreigners or people who
> are more worldly. There are few Americans, because it's exhausting to keep
> qualifying.

In another example Raquel, a Black and Jamaican woman, discussed her experience with

men:

> I've pretty much dated all Black men, both from the U.S. and outside of the U.S.
> and I think lately I feel it would be easier to be in a relationship with someone
> from the Caribbean at least. Because I think that one of the things that I struggle

with is an Americentric viewpoint that irritates me and the explanation that I have
to give starts to feel exhausting.

Beth and Raquel used the word "exhaustion" to describe the feeling of having to explain

their experiences as women of color from mixed ancestry to others. As the other women

in this study reported, relationships with individuals who are similar in race and culture

bring an ease and level of understanding that is both familiar and comfortable. For Elan,

racial identity has concurrently impacted her personal and professional life:

> I think in terms of career I have noticed an interesting pattern that the majority of
> my social relationships are with people of color and dominantly Black people and
> my career relationships are often dominantly with White people, so there is this
> weird split that becomes more and more stark as I grow older that was never the
> case when I was younger. I had a very mixed life when I was young and now
> there are these separate worlds.

Elan's account of her personal and professional relationships support the social

constructionist view that at different times and in different contexts, certain aspects of

identity are more relevant than others.

Career

Eight of the ten women reported that their identity impacted their career in terms

of career choice as well as how they functioned in their careers as women of color.

Within these examples are experiences of bias and discrimination, as well as the pressure

to achieve. Beth shared how she struggled with the pressure to conform to the social

constructions of race in this country as well as the impact her ascribed racial identity has

had on her career as an artist:

> I came here to perform and to be an artist, and I never sought out to be a "Black"
> artist, it's not how I was raised. After 8 years of being here already it was the first
> time I was performing with specifically with an "African American" group, made
> me think about African American issues. It opened up a conversation in my head
> that maybe I should have all along but didn't quite reach that. I wept during that
> process because it made me realize that yes, no matter what I do, no matter how

much I try to break stereotypes, no matter how educated I may be, I will never change anybody's mind really about what they expect of an African American woman which is to be ghetto and look for the cheap stuff try to get everything for free. It was very painful to realize that and so ever since I did that show I think the blinkers fell off or other blinkers came on, and now I see it everywhere and now I feel like I am experiencing myself as an African American woman for a change.

Mary described how her Black race and Haitian ethnicity impacts her functioning at

work. As a result of the lack of diversity within her field she feels she has to "represent"

for communities of color:

Because of the environment that I work in, there are so few faculty of color that I feel like an obligation to be present at certain things so that we are represented. Nobody is asking me but I feel that obligation and then just kind of speaking up and saying something, when it just doesn't stand, when people are making assumptions about Black people or Latino people and there is nobody else to speak up or say something and for a college that's student body is so ethnically diverse and for the faculty to be not diverse is really appalling.

Joelle and Elan, also in academia, articulated similar experiences.

I am working in a college right now, the student body is pretty integrated the faculty is still pretty White washed so again; there is always that awareness. I went to a meeting today for the teacher academy students and these are students that are going to be aspiring teachers, and of course I am counting the people of color around the table, and there was an Asian-American guy, and myself and we are making decisions for students who are mostly of color. (Joelle)

I think that it more so about people's experience with me in a professional environment. They begin to start flipping their definition of race into a definition of professional aptitude. So you become White by virtue of your competence. And I think a basic error that they often do not recognize is in their speech so they will say, "well I don't think of you as White." Which means they are using race as some kind of analogy for ability. (Elan)

In a final example, Jen used the term "survivors guilt" to illustrate her feelings as a doctor

of color in a field where she feels marginalized and isolated as a woman of color.

It influenced my career in that I feel as a Black person in my field I get that, my friend calls it a *survivors guilt*, which is when you go to work and you are the one who is up there, climbing up there to the top and you look below you and you see the custodian the janitor the maids, who are all Black and Jamaican or from your similar background and you feel like you need to represent for all of them.

Summary of Findings

According to the data, racial and ethnic identity and the social constructions of race and ethnicity impact both relationships and careers. The data suggest that the majority of the women in this study felt more comfortable in relationships with people of color, and with those who came from a diverse and similar racial and ethnic background. The impact of identity on career was noted in terms of career choice as well as how women functioned in their careers. Increased incidents of bias and discrimination in the workplace were found among the women from Black and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, women in well-paid and prestigious public and private service jobs reported feelings of marginalization, isolation, and guilt. Regardless of their ethnoracial background, the women in this study shared the experience of racial or ethnic distinctness in their place of work. This is an understudied topic in the literature on racial and ethnic identity.

The final section in this chapter brings the women back together to discuss their responses to the social constructions of race and ethnicity in terms of their present internal identity and how they manage their multiple identities. The previous section documented the women's responses to social constructions in terms of their relationship choices and careers. The following section discusses how women from all ethnoracial backgrounds manage and respond to the social constructions of race and ethnicity.

Management of Multiple Identities

At some point in their lives, all of the women in this study have experienced internal conflicts and tensions regarding the negotiation of their multiple heritages. The tension experienced around self-definition is not uncommon for multiracial and multiethnic identities (Root, 1990; Rockquemore & Delgado, 2009). As a result, individuals from multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds develop strategies for integrating components of self and for managing the freedoms and constraints in social constructions of race and ethnicity. As discussed in the literature, identity conflicts arise when external attributions of racial and ethnic identification are incongruous with the internal experiences of racial and ethnic self-identification (Root, 1990; Bradshaw, 1992). Tensions also manifest when one desires to orchestrate their agency through self-identification while being constrained by the social constructions and the prevailing racial systems of categorization.

As adults, the women in this study have, both passively and actively, managed such tensions in varied ways. As Jo stated, "the goal is to getting to that place of comfort with yourself." Management techniques described by women in this study include: accepting the socially constructed racial and ethnic labels, shifting identities and self-identifications, and resisting the dominant racial and ethnic practices of a socially ascribed monolithic identity.

Accepting

One management technique reported by the women in this study is to accept society's singular ethnic and racial labels when faced with questions of identity. Jesse, who comes from Native American, Irish, and African American ancestry, explained

during her interview that she follows society's exclusive identity rules out of

convenience:

> I just find that a lot of times on forms or anything instead of checking all three or other or bicultural or Biracial, I just do African American, simply because it is easier and for awhile it was the only alternative so it was like "choose one."

Anna, who shared in her interview that she "really" identities as Chicana, echoed Jesse's

statement:

> They put you in a box to try to understand you. To explain that to people and to make it easier to people I don't really care about, I'm like, I'm Mexican American.

Dina also conformed to the singular ethnic label of "Latina," despite the fact that her

mother is Peruvian, Italian, and Russian and her father is White and Native American.

> I guess I just sometimes say the easiest thing, I say I am Latin. I really think I am selling myself short because I am not one thing more than the other and it shouldn't have to be just this or just that and growing up I was very angry about it and I really felt short changed.

In another example, Kim reported:

> I just say Biracial and then most folks ask me what that is and I say one parent is Black and one parent is German American. I guess I do say German American, German is such a strong part but as far as putting myself out there to the world I am not German American I am Black and White. I identify probably as a result of society labeling that.

As illustrated by these vignettes, this response to the social constructions of racial

and ethnic identity is understood as a passive acceptance of the identity assigned to the

individual by others such as society, community, family or peers. As Roots (1990) notes,

this acceptance is positive if the individual feels connected to the ascribed identity.

Shifting

A second, and most common, management technique is the contextual shifting of

identities. Wallace's (2001) study on mixed heritage adolescents refers to this

management technique as the ability to "shift gears" as the individual travels across and within social contexts. Women in this study reported that their identity and self-identification is situational, meaning identity and self-identification is flexible, dynamic and influenced by social, cultural, and institutional forces and social contexts, as opposed to developmental stages. The data suggest that the women adapted their self-identifying racial or ethnic labels as well as their behaviors, to their environments. Kim explained, "I can tell my behavior when I am with my Black friends as opposed to my White friends or a mixed group." Similar to Kim, Jen's self-identification as a Multiracial and Jamaican woman changes depending on her audience and the level of intimacy in the relationship:

> I think that in more intimate conversations with people I've been more apt to describe all of me. But for just general conversation, I would stick to my African American identity. I don't know I think it really depends on who I am talking to and who I really feel, like "she actually really cares about what I am saying or what I have to say."

Samara shared how her self-identification shifts depending on her environment:

> I consider myself to be Black and of Caribbean ancestry but when I go to parties I say I am from Barbados.

Nadia reported the contextual shifting of her identities as a woman from African American and Puerto Rican ancestry:

> I think my identity has changed. Growing up in middle school, I was more Hispanic and African American, then in high school I was completely African American, then I switched back again in college to Hispanic and African American and now I am just African American. I think it had a lot to do with my peers and who I gravitated to.

As a Multiracial woman Allison described her active decision to shift her identities and behaviors based on advantage:

> Sometimes I try to come across as more Black or more Multiracial or pretend to be very racially ambiguous because I don't know what identity would have the most advantage.

Whereas the changes in identity and self-identification for the women from European and of color backgrounds and Black and ethnic backgrounds centered around race and ethnicity, shifts in identity for the women from Latin ancestry focused on nationality. As Cory reported: "Depending on the situation I will go by my nationalities, and say Dominican and Ecuadorian." Rachel echoed her statement:

> When I am in New York, I would say I am a Hispanic person or I am Cuban and Ecuadorian depending on the situation.

These women use the social construction of race and ethnicity to their advantage by participating in the flexibility and fluidity that the framework allows for.

Resisting

A third management technique described by the women is resisting the dominant view and embracing their multiple simultaneous identities. With this strategy women spoke about being indifferent to outside perceptions. Reflecting on her evolution Elanie declared, "now, I don't worry about what people think."

 Elan shared a similar view:

> If you are too vexed about it then I think you begin to initiate really tiring conversations with people that are repetitive and in a way, you wind up stimulating a kind of "get over it" response at a certain point which is sad but at the same time it is kind of true because maybe it should have been limited to a particular phase or period and you should have come to a resolution and moved on.

Tara clearly voiced her response:

> Those people who do know me would know my identities and those who don't, I just don't bother going into detail. Sometimes I play the mystery. "Yeah I'm going to let you think about it, serves you right for assuming one thing without asking!" It does not faze me much.

As an adult woman who embraces her multiracial and multiethnic ancestry, Cindy

reeducates people:

> Back then it was more like "identify me correctly," I am not one or the other. Now I do as well but more so as a point of information and I always see it as an opportunity to educate people like we have been blessed to be this message of diversity, let me educate you on the messages that immigrants here to have a better life isn't what the whole culture looks like. When you go there you fully understand you have your white Mexicans you have your dark-skinned Mexicans and some that favor more the Spaniards and some that favor more the Aztec Indians, and you get it a lot more. I now see it as an opportunity to educate people on the differences.

These women have an uncompromising sense of identity as they deal with and respond to

the social constructions of identity with resistance.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL

WORK PRACTICE

This study explored the construction of racial and ethnic identification among

women of color from mixed ancestry. These women are the offspring of parents from

multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, their identities—both internally and

externally constructed—belie traditional racial and ethnic categories. This population

faces unique struggles, as identified in the empirical literature and supported by the data

analysis.

This study regards race and ethnicity as social constructions, defined by human

beings and given meaning in the context of family, community, and society. As such, the

women in this study found themselves in the middle of the sociological constraints and

psychological freedoms of identity construction within the dominant United States

society. While each subset of women faced unique struggles, all were assigned

monolithic identifications that were primarily based on their perceived race. Within these

identifications lurked antiblack and antiethnic racism. The data from this study indicate

that ethnicity was more likely to be ignored, overlooked, misread or silenced. Even when

ethnicity was noticed, as it was for the women from Latin ancestry, nationalities were

conflated producing ethnic labels that assumed homogeneity among ethnic groups.

Indeed, the women of all ethnoracial backgrounds in this study were continually

confronted with stereotypes and other mischaracterizations that were based on racial

and/or ethnic traits. Appearance was a mainstay of identification and a factor that evoked

feelings ranging from rejection to acceptance among and between the different racial and

ethnic groups. Women in this study reported that ascribed identities based on appearance

were often in conflict with their internal self-identity and as a result, they developed

varied management techniques to respond to social constructions and their multifaceted

identities in a society that historically has been structured to oppress those who straddle

the borders of a colored identity. Yet, within these confining realities women strived to

construct a personal identification that embraced their multiple racial and ethnic

identities. As one woman desperately stated, "I yearn to accept my beauty without

oppressing another's." This same woman, Elanie, further expressed her complexity in an

illustration that she wished to be included in her interview. She explained her illustration

as:

> The transformation of being more than one race or ethnicity. The black and white
> image is like a coloring book for people of all shades to fill in the color of their
> skin and the rainbow of their growth.

The below illustration pictorially describes the psychological freedoms, represented by

the butterflies, and the sociological constraints, indicated by the way in which the woman

is holding her head and the distraught expression her face, included in identity

development for women of color with mixed heritage.

Illustration: Freedoms and Constraints
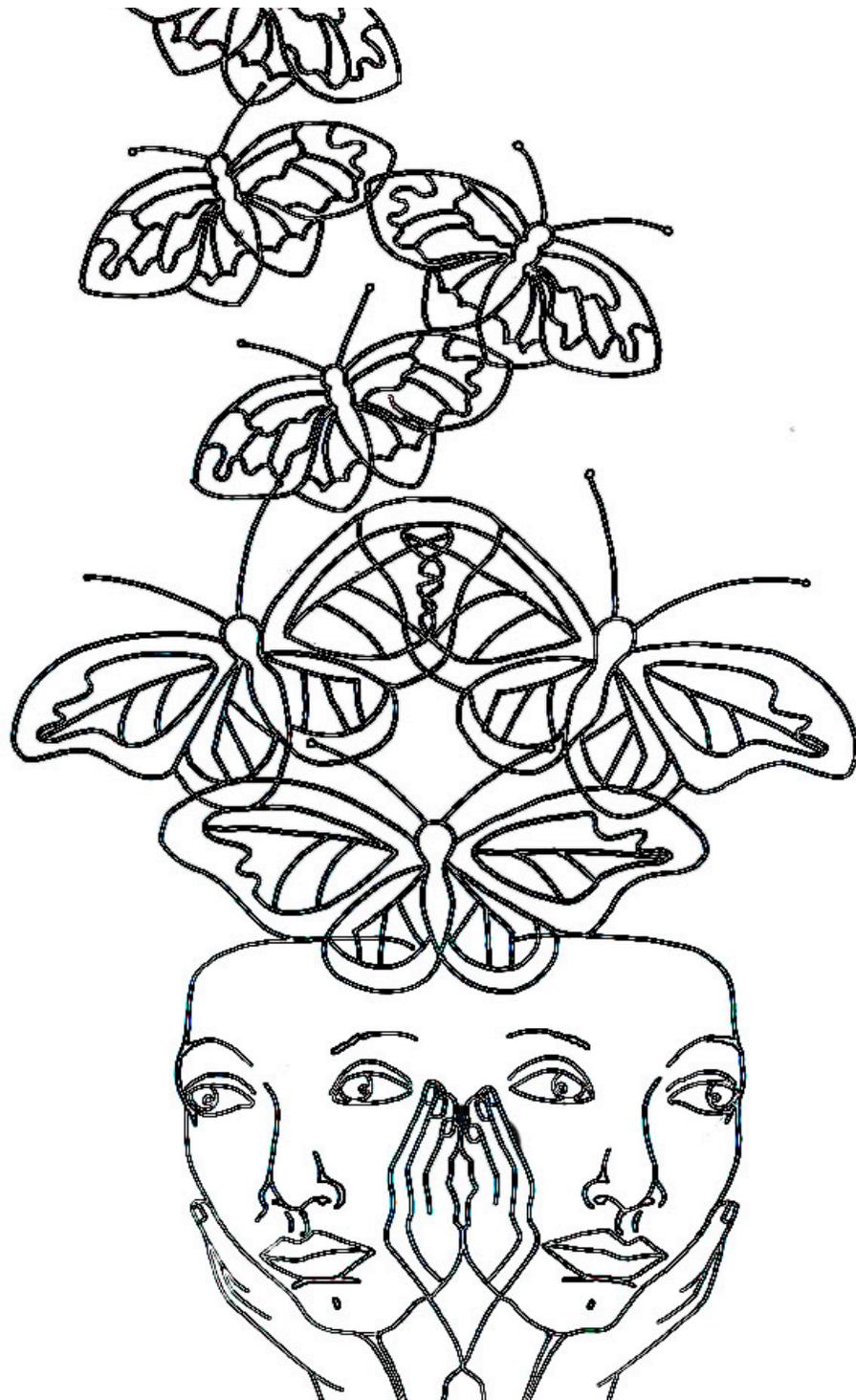
The results of this research extend the existing ecological approach to racial identity development to include women from *multiethnic* backgrounds in addition to multiracial backgrounds. The ecological approach to racial identity development considers the economic, social, familial, and political environments by which individuals appear to seek a sense of self in, sometimes repeatedly, at different times throughout their lifetime (Rockquemore & Delgado, 2009). These environments are fraught with discrimination, marginality, and ambiguity, all of which affect the process of identity construction among women of color from multiracial *and multiethnic* ancestry. Simultaneously, this approach allows for flexibility in the varied ways individuals "chose" to manage social constructions and self-identify. As such, an additional enhancement to the existing ecological paradigms is the conceptualization of social constructionism as both a positive and negative force in the construction of identification among a multiracial and multiethnic population.

Implications

The complexity of racial and ethnic identity is a real world concern that raises

questions practitioners, administrations, researchers, and educators may all experience in

their own realities. This is a subject of pivotal importance to multiple fields of inquiry as

well as one having significant practice, research, programmatic, and pedagological

implications. Among the implications for the field of social work are the need for critical

reflection, increased awareness, and cultural diversity, as well as positioning

multicultural practice as a purposeful intellectual activity throughout human service

organizations and schools of social work.

Implications for Practice

This study assists in the development of a more nuanced and critical

understanding of the complexity of racial and ethnic identity and identification among

women with multiple dimensions of identity. This research encourages social workers to

increasingly engage in a theoretical analysis and discussion of the social and

psychological impacts of the social constructions of race and ethnicity.

As the majority of the clients in urban settings are of color, social work

practitioners must be educated on the centrality of race and ethnicity throughout United

States history and contemporary classifications and categorizations of women of color.

Among the questions to be ever mindful of is the following: how do present

conceptualizations and categorizations of race and ethnicity contribute to the further

oppression and traumatizing of women of color? Instead of robotically labeling clients

and assuming one's identification based on their physical appearance and the

presumption that we are privileged "experts," collaborating with clients by asking how

they identify and what their identifications means to them is essential to authentic social work practice. As Hartman (1992) states, "in research and practice we must abandon the role of expert, we must abandon the notion that we are objective observers and our clients are passive subjects to be described and defined" (p.21).

Second the understanding that clients do not exist outside of, or separate from, their personal history is essential to social work practice. Similarly, racial and ethnic identity and identification does not take place outside the web of reality. This research empowers social workers to move beyond rigid monolithic labels, embrace complexity, and holistically consider history and the context in which women live. On a direct practice level, it is vital to include the context of clients' lived experiences when gathering information in an assessment and throughout the therapeutic relationship. Critical assessment teaches us to deconstruct such images and messages and question how such social forces affect the identity development for women and families of color from different ethnicities.

Indeed, researchers must also remain aware of the ways in which race and ethnicity are constructed and, more concretely, the labels and categorizations used when naming and describing the studied population. For if they don't, researchers contribute to the traumatizing oversimplification of identity for this population.

Implications for Pedagogy

This study also helps address the pedagogical needs for cultural diversity and critical reflection in academic curricula. It is the responsibility of social work educators to solicit feedback from students and challenge contemporary and monolithic categorizations while surfacing the complexity of identity within the classroom. This can

be achieved by providing a safe space to deconstruct how race and ethnicity are

constructed and the implications of such constructions. Journeys into the lives of women

of color from mixed heritage through such tools as qualitative inquiry provide an

alternative perspective for critically evaluating one's ideologies and tendency to

oversimplify racial and ethnic identity. The literature on critical pedagogy has served as a

guide to this work.

Critical Pedagogy

Central to this research is the influence of complex factors on identity

development. This study makes a significant contribution to social work pedagogy by

demonstrating the possibilities of critical pedagogy. Defined by Saleebey and Scanlon

(2005) as a radical approach to education, critical pedagogy "examines the role of power

in the production of knowledge and holds that the purpose of education is the

emancipation of oppressed groups" (p. 2). According to these authors, critical pedagogy

has gained increased attention from progressive educators, particularly among those

interested in race, class, and gender issues (Saleebey & Scanlon, 2005). Derived from the

work of Paulo Freire (1970), this study incorporates the complex domain of critical

pedagogy as a model for researching and teaching the social construction of race and

ethnicity. Viewing racial and ethnic identification through a critical lens incorporates the

impact of the socio-cultural, political, environmental, and economic contexts in which

women of color live. By taking a critical approach to racial and ethnic identification, the

socially constructed boundaries placed on identity expand to include more than

appearance when assuming one's identification.

In addition, critical pedagological approaches may push students to examine existing theories and incorporate a fresh lens while engaging in a dialogue that critically assesses racial and ethnic categorization and the impact on women with multiple dimensions of identity. For example, viewing identity formation through an ecological lens lifts the socially constructed boundaries placed on identity, allowing for the freedom of self-identification beyond the conventional categories. Social work students are then pushed to examine existing theories and engage in a dialogue that critically assesses racial and ethnic categorization and the impact on individuals with multiple dimensions of identity. Drawing from Freire's notion of the critical educator, this research increases awareness among social workers of the complex world with its diverse cultural settings and wide range of clients' backgrounds. It brings insight to diverse traditions, epistemologies, and worldviews, all of which will aid social workers in efforts to empower clients—a central, if not always realized, tenet of social work practice. Future studies involve delving deeper into the realm of the meaning and impact of the social constructions of race and ethnicity in everyday reality and the ways that women of color manage their identities within the context of the United States.

APPENDIX A

STUDY QUESTIONAIRRE

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to discuss your racial and ethnic identification. I am conducting this study to better understand the dynamics of racial and ethnic identification and the impact on central life decisions. This interview guide will attempt to capture how your own racial and ethnic identification may differ from how others may identify you and any impact these identifications may have on life choices that you have made.

This questionnaire is voluntary and no one will be interviewed without her full and informed consent. All information will remain confidential.

If at any time you feel you need a break, just let me know. I also want to remind you that you may change your mind at any time about participating in the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

I. Demographic Information

I would like to start with some background information related to this study

1. Where were you born?

2. Where was your mother born?

3. Where was your father born?

4. Where were your siblings born?

Definition:

What is your understanding of the concept of race?

What is your understanding of the concept of ethnicity?

II. Internal Self-Identification

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about how you, personally, identify.

How do you define race or your racial identity?
How do you define ethnicity or your ethnic identification?

5.　How do you identify today?
Probe: **How is your racial identity different from your ethnic identity?**
Probe: How do you distinguish between your racial and ethnic identity?
Probe: How do you identify racially today?
Probe:　How do you identify ethnically today?

Are both of these identities significant to you?

6. Of these identities (racial and ethnic), do you find that you identify more with your racial or ethnic identity?
Probe: If you identify with both, would you say that you have one primary identity, in other words, the identity you feel most connect to and most often refer to yourself as?

7. Can you tell me more about how that came to be?

8. Have you always had the same primary identity or has your primary identity changed over time and/or place?
Probes: If it has always been this way, what happens to the other identity? How did you deal with the other identity? If it has changed over time, can you tell me how and why this developed?

Topic: Racial Self-Identification
I would like to ask you some questions about your racial identification

9A. In what ways are you aware of your race?

If participants mention skin color the research will ask:
How do you describe their skin color? Would you describe your color as light, medium or dark? What does light, medium, or dark skinned mean to you?

9B. If participants have not mentioned skin color the researcher will ask:
How does your skin color factor into your racial identity?
How would you describe your skin color? Would you describe your skin color as light, medium or dark?
Probe: What does light, medium or dark skinned mean to you?

10. Can you recall when you first became aware of your racial identification?
Probe: Can you tell me more about the experiences that made you aware of your race?

11. How often do you think about your racial identity?
Probe: Is it (your racial identity) something you think about every day, once in while or hardly ever?

12. Do you or have you ever, experienced racial bias or discrimination based on your appearance? What aspect(s) of your appearance?

13A. If yes, how do you think that this affected your primary identity?

13B. If no, why do you think that is?

Topic: Ethnic Self-Identification
Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your ethnic identification.

14. In what ways are you aware of your ethnicity?
Probe: Can you recall when your first became aware of your ethnic identification?
Probe: Can you tell me more about this?

15. How often do you think about your ethnic background?
Probe: Is it (your ethnic identity) something you think about every day, once in a while or hardly ever?

16. Do you ever experience ethnic bias or discrimination based on your ethnic background?

17A. If yes how do you think that affected your primary identity?
17B. If not, why do you think that is?

III. External Identification

Now, I would like to switch the focus and ask you some questions about how you think others see you.

21. How do you think other people see you racially?
Probe: What qualities of yours do you think contribute to this?
Probe: How does your appearance contribute to this identification?

If participant has not mentioned skin color the researcher will ask:
Probe: How would other people describe your skin color?

22. How do you think other people see you ethnically?
Probe: What qualities of yours do you think contribute to this?

IV. The Questions of Potential Conflict OR Tension

Now I would like to ask you about what is it liked to be of mixed heritage.

A. Familial
23. In what ways is your **racial** identification the same as your parents and siblings?
Probe: do you identify the same way as your parents and siblings?

24. In what ways is your **racial** identification different from your parents and siblings?
Probe: Can you discuss any tension that may exist, or may have existed, around racial identification within your family? What kinds of tensions were there?

25. In what ways is your **ethnic** identification the same as your parents and siblings?
Probe: Do your parents and siblings ethnically identify the same way you do?

26. In what ways is your **ethnic** identification different from your parents and siblings?
Probe: Can you discuss any tension that may exist, or may have existed, around racial identification within your family? What kinds of tensions were there?

B. Societal
27. How would you describe how others outside of your family, such as friends, merchants, even strangers, see you?
Probe: What labels or words would they use to describe you?
Probe: Would you say that there is a difference between how you see yourself and how others outside of your family see you?

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER

If there is a difference, ask Question #27-29
If there is NO difference, GO TO Question #30

Now, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about how you feel about this difference.

28. What is this like for you to have others perceive you differently than you perceive yourself?
Probe: Does this create any conflicts for you?
Probe: Can you tell me some more about this? Why is this a conflict for you?

29. In what ways does this conflict affect you?
Probe: How much does the conflict become a part of your daily life? Your family, with friends, on the job, internally?
.

30. How do you manage or cope with this conflict?

31. You mentioned that there is **not** a conflict between how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you? Can you tell me more about why there is no conflict? How do you explain the lack of conflict?

Ask the following to ALL participants

32. How important is it to you whether or not others see you the same way that you identify racially?

33. How important is it to you whether or not others see you the same way that you identify ethnically?

IV. Impact of External Identification on Life Decisions

I would like to ask you how you see yourself and how others see you affect the decisions you make about y our life (work, career choices, family relationships, social life, love life, leisure activities values, worldviews, race relations, other?)

34. How has your primary self-identification affected these or other life decisions?

35. How have the perceptions of your race and ethnicity by others affected these or other life decisions?

We also talked about conflicts that exist between how you see yourself and how others see you.

36A. You spoke about such conflicts. I am wondering how these conflicts affected your decisions about work, career choices, family relationships, social life, love life, leisure activities, values, worldviews, race relations, other?
Or
36B. You indicated that you did not experienced such conflicts. I am wondering how the absence of these conflicts affect decisions you make about your life (work, career choices, family relationships, social life, love life, leisure activities, values, worldviews, race relations, other?)

Thank you. Before we end, is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

WOMEN OF COLOR FROM MIXED ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

My name is Laura Quiros, and I am a doctoral student at the City University of New York, Hunter College School of Social Work. I am interested in interviewing women of color of non-European descent for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to explore how racial and ethnic identity influence important life decisions, such as career choices and interpersonal relationships.

To qualify for this study you must…

…be a woman of color from a mixed ethnic background;

have at least one parent from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, Latin America, or Native American heritage;

between the ages of 30 and 40;

with a bachelor's degree and born in the United States

If you want more information about this study or are interested in participating, please contact me at:

(Phone) 917-434-9392 or (E-mail) quiroslaura@aol.com

THANK YOU!

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Autobiographical Statement

My personal biography influenced the desire to investigate women from mixed heritages. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), "every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research art" (p. 30).

I am a mixed heritage woman evolved from an interracial and interethnic union. My father is a first generation Puerto Rican-Venezuelan, and my mother a second generation Jewish-American. My father identifies as a Latino man of color, my mother a White Jewish woman. Ethnically, I am a Latin Jewish woman and racially I identify as a woman of color. However, based on my appearance, I was ascribed an identity that stripped me of my complexities. I grew up in a wealthy Westchester suburb surrounded by the White middle- and upper-class where the pressure to perform, achieve, and assimilate was overwhelming. The educators of my past ignored my complexity as well as the context in which I grew up, all of which contributed to my identity development and changing racial and ethnic identification. I was bombarded with messages that "White is right," so I spent my formative years doing everything in my power to look White. This denigration engendered a certain degree of diminished self-worth. I spent years straightening and ironing my hair and dieting excessively. My identity as a confused misfit as well as growing up in a tumultuous home environment where the focus was on surviving not thriving left me vulnerable to negative outside influences and labels that I internalized. It was only when I went away to college and found a mentor and met people whom had similar life histories and fears that I felt validated and accepted. This was the beginning of my journey towards an integrated racial and ethnic identity and a

critical consciousness. Simply stated, my history informs my knowledge of racial and

ethnic identity as a dynamic, complex, painful and empowering process.