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BEYOND BIRACIAL:
THE COMPLEXITY OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION FOR
WOMEN WITH ONE BLACK AND ONE WHITE PARENT

by

Roxanne Jamin Kymaani

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2014

Dissertation Committee

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

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BEYOND BIRACIAL: THE COMPLEXITY OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION FOR
WOMEN WITH ONE BLACK AND ONE WHITE PARENT

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Dedication

If I were really asked to define myself,

I wouldn't start with race;

I wouldn't start with blackness;

I wouldn't start with gender;

I wouldn't start with feminism.

I would start with stripping down to what fundamentally informs my life,

which is that I'm a seeker on the path.

- bell hooks

This dissertation is dedicated to all who question the dominant discourse...
and are ready to begin a new and emergent dialogue around identity construction.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank all those who have contributed, assisted, and participated in this research. This dissertation has been made possible by a series of people that have contributed their time, support, and guidance, all in different ways, but all critically important. To the five women who selflessly shared their stories of triumph, tragedy, and complex identities in our dialogical space, I thank you for your courage and willingness to share your authentic self. You embraced the opportunity to question the dominant discourse, and in doing so, expanded the literature and deepened my personal growth. Your voice is now part of a collective.

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Barbara, my mother. Thank you for loving me unconditionally, being my biggest cheerleader, and an example of the authentic, strong, and insanely intellectual woman that I aspire to be. Without your encouragement, I would have been unable to work through the ups and downs of this journey. You have supported every idea, read every line, and provided me with unwavering, enthusiastic encouragement. Everything that I have achieved is the result of your loving presence in my life.

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Abstract

In the United States, the post-Civil Rights Movement era changed forever the social perceptions about race and the self-perceptions of people who are born with mixed racial origin. Choosing to identify as mixed race in America inevitably leads to a racial cross-examination linked to America's continued struggle with its racial heritage and the enduring legacy of a dominant discourse.

This dissertation focuses on the lived experience of women with one Black and one White parent. While subject to labels such as Black and White, Black, mulatto, biracial, mixed, or other, the central question is what do these women wish to call themselves. At the core of this qualitative study is the exploration of whether a dialogic approach can help create the conditions for the construction of a new language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled Black and White, mixed race, and/or biracial. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from human development, psychology, and leadership, this dialogic approach provides women with one Black and one White parent an open opportunity to describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity. In addition to the dialogues, interview protocols are used to examine the intersection of individual histories with the collective emergent meaning of racial identity. As such, this dissertation explores some of the difficulties, dilemmas, and challenges in naming identity for one's self in the face of a prevailing dominant discourse. Through the creation of a collective space, the findings suggest that dialogic conditions allow for new voices to emerge to describe and give meaning to the complexity of identity for mixed race individuals, as well as point to the potential discovery of language for shared meaning.

This dissertation contributes to the development of a critical understanding of the complexity of identity construction, bringing insight to the notion of a liminal space to explore what became termed a “Collective Only Experience.” The implications of this research include evidence that a dialogic approach may be one methodology for women with one Black and one White parent to gain greater leadership efficacy in describing their lived experience, move beyond current identity constructions, and collectively name their identity for themselves.

PROLOGUE

The Beginning of My Lived Experience

As a mixed race/biracial¹ female raised in a predominantly White middle class neighborhood by my single mother, I often struggled with understanding my identity. My mother is White and my father is Black. I am identified as the “light skinned” girl, with brown eyes and curly hair. My earliest memory of knowing I was different was at the age of 10, on the playground of my elementary school where a White boy called me a “slave” and told me to “go back to Africa”... I remember feeling hurt, embarrassed, and confused. Questions I was asked frequently, “What nationality are you?” (I have found that most people who ask this question do not understand the difference between ethnicity and nationality), or the abrupt “What are you? Where are you from?” immediately branded me as different and thus, somehow not the norm. I now view these questions not as simple requests for information, but an attempt to gain a position of power through exclusion and marginalization based on what the majority perceives me to “be”.

Over the years, and depending on the context and environment, my answer to those questions would shift from *Black and White*, *Black*, *mulatto*, *biracial*, *mixed*, or *other*. But these labels did little to reveal the complexities of my mixed race experience. Even in childhood, I never really felt connected to the racial description of any of these labels, although I did have another term to describe myself: *different*. In my childhood I knew I was different and I often felt alone, as if no one else understood or experienced

¹ For the purposes of this dissertation, the terms “biracial”, “mixed”, or “mixed race” will refer to individuals who have one Black parent and one White parent, and will be used interchangeably. It is important to note that these terms are part of the dominant discourse used to define and categorize these individuals.

what it was like to be racially mixed. I am neither Black nor White, African nor American, but somehow I knew I was simultaneously all of these. Raised by a single White mother, I was not confident about my cultural heritage or ethnic identity. That fact made me different from most other people, certainly the other people who were part of my world at the time.

During my undergraduate studies, I declared being a U.S. history major and ethnic studies minor, focusing on Black history and race relations, at least in part, to understand the struggle with trying to combine two identities that this society has, for many generations, said cannot (or, to be more precise, should not) be combined. I attended a few meetings of the Black Student Union, participated in conferences that focused on people of color, and, eventually, helped to organize the first Women of Color conference within the University of California system, which included a biracial student caucus. It was during this time that I began to identify as *other* – *the binary mindset of Black, White, mixed* - as a way to self-authorize how I distinguished myself, and to reframe the context of how society categorized me.

I became more curious about my “status” and how I embodied both identities of Black and White. I wondered about others who were like me and how they self-identified. During my doctoral studies, I began researching the general human development concepts of Erik Erikson and Robert Kegan, as well as other adult development models that focused more specifically on biracial development. I began to connect to this concept of being between two stages, two spaces, sort of “in flux.” During this time I was introduced to the concept of liminality (Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1995),

hybridity theory, and the notion of Third Space² (Bhabha, 1994; Green, Elson, & van Linge, 2012).

Conversations with friends and colleagues about this liminal/hybrid/Third Space/space-between began to make more sense as I sought to deconstruct - or perhaps reconstruct - my identity, especially through the use of dialogue for reflecting upon past and present experiences. One conversation in particular had a lasting impact on how I approached the new interrelated concepts and constructs I had encountered. A few months into the conceptual development of my dissertation, I had a conversation with a female friend and colleague who is also identified by others as biracial/mixed. I told her about my idea of living in a “between space” with regard to my multiple identities and the experience of trying to define and create an identity from this Third Space. She shared her very similar story of growing up in Ohio, where she also felt like she did not belong, not knowing how to answer questions about her identity, and her experience of feeling alone.

Our conversation shifted from our childhood memories of being the *only* mixed race person in our classes, and the feelings of needing to constantly choose our identity in order to appease other people’s understanding of our racial identity. We began to feel deeply connected to one another and our similar stories, and the links to our lived experience within the actual and situated every day “in between” worlds in which we both had lived in. We discussed what it might be like to collectively explore the in-between with others who shared that experience.

² In the next chapter, I will go into more detail about the meaning and use of these concepts. What is important for now is that they began to give a language to my experience, and perhaps that of others like me.

This conversation with my friend allowed me to see the connection to other people's "only experience", which started to transform how I was viewing the lived experience of being me. I began to develop a theory of the *collective only experience*, a term I originally developed as a placeholder to describe my lived experience as one among others. For me, the *collective only experience* began with the childhood experience of growing up feeling like I was the only one who could understand my identity construction; this in-between space of being neither Black or White, AND the hybrid of Black and White, but different, and without the language to describe it. Then, later, into adulthood, I discovered other individuals who also identified with this in-between space. This shared recognition of being neither/nor, can be a collective experience of growing up as the "only", and creating a collective of "onlys". I began to identify it as something between the individual and collective experience, the collective being in which the experience of others participates in the social construction of one's individual identity.

As I ventured into this new learning, I realized the nature of the words "collective" and "only" together appeared to be contradictory. What this might represent is the notion that there is yet to be a language to describe this experience or this hybrid identity. This term served as placeholder for what I thought would emerge at the end of this dissertation: a new language to describe this experience and a new term for this hybrid identity.

My lived experience as a light-skinned woman living in a monoracially categorized country has instilled in me a passion to learn more about the lived experiences of others who share this hybrid space. In an attempt to make sense and

meaning of my “in-between-ness”, I continue to explore my own beliefs and expanding perceptions of living within and between two worlds, and the choice to let go of my old assumption about being the only person who has experienced this space.

I started researching biracial identity development models and found that most studies were centered in the field of adolescent psychology and only examine people at an individual level. It became clear that my dissertation research focus on this cultural phenomenon needed to be more than just a study of how individual women identified within externally designed categories. Through my intention to define and describe identity and have greater efficacy of voice in the process, my hope is that collectively, the participants of this study will join me in moving beyond a tired constructivist discourse toward a new, hybrid understanding of our collective identity. It is an opportunity to explore the collective lived experiences of this in-between space, using a dialogical lens to reveal both subtle and explicit characteristics about the space. In particular, it challenges the notion that the dominant discourse is held to fixed concepts of identity and provides an opportunity for a new paradigm of understanding. New possibilities for examining open spaces collectively, and reconsidering identity can be revealed, not as pre-determined and categorized by birth, but as socially constructed and collectively defined.

The story is old. Our testimonies are new. - Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe

CHAPTER ONE

Overview of the Study

Within the United States, the construction of identity for women of color from mixed ancestry is a complex and fluid process. In cities and towns across America, more people are self-identifying as mixed race, biracial, and/or multiracial (United States Census, 2010), and yet at times these terms are particularly difficult to describe, understand, or navigate (Norris, 2013). Choosing to identify as mixed race in America inevitably leads to a racial cross-examination of sorts that represents America's continuing struggle with race. For example, women with one Black and one White parent may live between cultures or identities that are identified as *Black and White*, *Black*, *mulatto*, *biracial*, *mixed*, or *other*. These are labels with historical significance that share the trait of being created by the dominant majority where "White" is associated with power and privilege and "color" carries a historical stigma and negative connotation. Consequently, their internally and externally constructed identities contradict the traditional racial and ethnic categories. The combination of this lived reality complicates the collective identity construction and cultural consciousness for women with one Black and one White parent in ways that are not faced by monoracial individuals.

Unlike monoracial identities, biracial identities continue to challenge our understanding of race. From its historical beginnings, the United States has always been a diverse nation of people from different ethnic and cultural origins. However, the dominant society has not embraced the notion of equality in diversity, and therefore the racial system has focused on the White-non White dichotomy (Brunsma & Rockquemore,

2001; Root, 1992; Wright, 2010). Thus, people from different racial groups have entered into romantic relationships, leading to biracial children. The most prominent example of this is the sexual union of African Americans and Caucasians during the era of slavery. The children of those unions were classified in a dichotomous fashion using the one-drop rule, which defined individuals who had one drop of Black blood (i.e., any percentage of Black ancestry) as solely Black (Dineen-Wimberly & Spickard, 2010; Makalani, 2001; Root, 1992). Until 1967, many states had laws against miscegenation (marriage or sexual relations between a man and a woman of different races).

In 1967 the case of “Loving v. Virginia” was presented to the United States Supreme Court. In June 1958, Mildred Jeter, a “Negro” woman, and Richard Loving, a White man, were married in the District of Columbia, which was legal. Shortly thereafter, the Lovings returned to their hometown of Caroline County, VA, and established their marital residence. In October 1958, the Caroline County grand jury issued an indictment charging the Lovings with violating Virginia's ban on interracial marriages. On January 6, 1959, the Lovings pleaded guilty to the charge, and were sentenced to one year in jail. The trial judge agreed to suspend the sentence for a period of 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave Virginia and never return together for 25 years. The United States Supreme Court reviewed the constitutional question of whether a law adopted by the State of Virginia to prevent marriages between persons solely on the basis of racial classifications violated the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteen Amendment. On June 6, 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court declared for the first time in the United States that interracial marriages were legal. This meant that people were free to marry across racial boundaries and travel and live wherever they wished, without legal

consequences (U.S. Supreme Court, 1967). Although this case did produce equal rights under the law, it did not create a new category or identity for the children of interracial unions.

The first term used to categorize the offspring of a “pure African negro” and a “pure White” was *mulatto*. The root meaning of *mulatto* in Spanish is “hybrid,” but it also included the children of unions between Whites and so-called “mixed negroes”(Goodman, Moses, & Jones, 2012). Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass both had slave mothers and White fathers, and were referred to as *mulattoes* (Goodman, Moses, & Jones, 2012; Malcomson, 2000). This *mulatto* term dates back to the 1500s, yet first appeared on the U.S. Census in 1850 as an alternative to “White”, “slave”, and “other” categories. The “other” category was used for “Free Coloreds”, mixed race, Chinese, Turkish or other Middle Eastern people. Census records noted *Mulatto* status with the letters “MU” next to a person’s name to identify them. By the late 19th century, *Mulatto* was considered offensive and derogatory due to its association with slavery, colonialism and racial oppression. The terms then shifted to *negro*, *colored*, or *Black* (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007).

Because the one-drop rule stated that one drop of Black blood made a person Black, many biracial individuals were categorized as Black (Malcomson, 2000). This practice illustrates the logic in the concept of *hypo descent*, which is “a social system that maintains the fiction of monoracial identification of individuals by assigning a racially mixed person to the racial group in their heritage that has the least social status” (Root, 1992, p. 182). Even in the Civil Rights era, children of one Black and one White parent were categorized as Black: W.E.B. Du Bois, civil rights activist and author; Malcolm X,

Muslim minister and human rights activist; and Lani Guinier, the first African-American woman tenured professor at Harvard Law School; all mixed race, yet self-identified as African American or Black. Categorically, their use of African American or Black as their identity shows the delay between the changes in laws on marriage and the language being used to describe people of mixed race identities. Culturally, this lag in a mixed race category did not even show up on the U.S. Census until 2000, almost 40 years after the interracial unions and their offspring were determined legal.

An example of the dissonance between legal discourse and social discourse of naming mixed race identity is exemplified by Barack Obama being referred to as the first African American President of the United States; an identity label that he also claims (Bratter, 2010; Winborne, 2009). Barack Obama's story illustrates the complexity of mixed race individuals: the societal norm to define oneself in one way or another, the importance of public perception, the political meaning of appearing to favor one designation over another, the role of the self that is presented and held back, and the dominant discourses³ in which such racial signifiers are embedded.

How mixed racial identity is understood and discussed extends beyond Mr. Obama. The 2000 Census questionnaire allowed respondents the option to self-identify with more than one racial designation. Before 2000, census categories for race only include the following designation: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or

³ A discourse is a particular way of speaking about a subject, and contains certain meanings, words, opinions and attitudes that are understood by particular groups of people or by a particular culture (Green, Z., Elson, O., & van Linge, A., 2012). Dominant discourse refers to the power to determine which discourse or language is used to define reality; the ability to ascribe what rests within the boundary of this reality (what is marginal); the quality of representing normative consciousness, and thereby concealed from critique (Green et al, 2012). With its power to allocate time and to assigning trained journalists to assert certain ideological beliefs, broadcast media has a strong influence on the discourse that becomes recognized as mainstream, reinforcing what the program directors decide are the dominant opinions and attitudes but which may influence that dominance through repetition of language and terms used.

African American (historically these categories were previously titled Negro or Colored), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Some other race. Only one box could be chosen on the form. Ethnic categories included Hispanic or Latino. In 2010, the second time the option of choosing multiple racial categories was available on the U.S. Census forms, individuals who reported a background of mixed race grew by 32% to 9 million between. The number of people who identified as both White and Black jumped 134 percent to 1.8 million. Almost 50 percent more children were identified as multiracial on this census. Comparatively, the single-race population increased 9.2% (U.S. Census, 2010). The 2010 census was the second one to allow multiple categories to be chosen, being the first to provide a glimpse of trends in multi-race reporting.

While the census forms do not account for the lived experience of mixed race people (Norris, 2013), mainstream news organizations, such as CNN, National Geographic, the Huffington Post, and television shows, such as CNN Black in America, and Anderson Cooper 360, are documenting the various stories across the world of mixed race couples and their lived experiences. These trends in popular culture and research suggest there is a biracial/multiracial movement for a new conversation around mixed race identity. Although the discourse around mixed race identity is emerging, the language that we currently use to engage in these conversations is steeped in the antiquated and binary understanding of race.

Problem Statement

In an ever-increasing globalized and culturally diverse world, it seems impossible to define one's self through pre-conceived categories of cultural, racial or ethnic boundaries - categories that are defined by the dominant discourse. While previously

accepted by scholars as the best solution for biracial individuals' ethnic/cultural inclusion, the current language used by observers to distinguish these categories is often not inclusive of the lived realities of those being observed. The dominant discourse that has categorically defined our identities and our lived experience ironically limits the possibility of the emergence of a new language. Both language and American social structure use an "either/or" or a "both/and" approach to racial categories, which emphasizes the exclusion of hybrid individuals within the ranks of White society.

Those in power create a dominant discourse, and it becomes the accepted way of looking at or speaking about a particular subject, since it is repeated often. Sampson (2008) argues that the dominant culture uses its power to maintain a monolithic tradition in which the dominant voice is the primary social constructor. Those who have power are the constructors; those with no power are the constructed – also referenced as the "other". Sampson writes, "The other is a figure constructed to be serviceable to the historically dominant White male group. In order to provide this service, the other cannot be permitted to have a voice, a position, a being of its own, but must remain mute or speak only in the ways permitted by the dominant discourse" (2008, p. 18). The concept of dialogic partnerships, as articulated by Sampson, implies and encourages a shift by some of those in dominance to create a new discourse that will include the voice of "the other." The complexity of this construction is that the ideas expressed by the dominant party and the constructed "other" are both embodied in the mixed race person. For observers to better understand the challenge, it is important to acknowledge the significance of both the internal and external processes.

When dominant discourses change, the people in power are likely to resist the threat of allowing new discourses to take over their position and the self-perception of their status. A dialogic shift has the potential to make a contribution toward equality of social power and reveal a richer understanding of the construction of identity. This new space – the space where new conceptions of identity are negotiated – can be articulated as a collective, bringing to light the push against and out of historical legacies of racism, discrimination, and the dominant discourse, and letting come, potentially, a new language to describe this phenomenon as developed by the very people living it.

There is no absolutely perfect terminology to describe and define an identity for women with one Black and one White parent. It is possibly explained by the fact that the language to describe it has yet to emerge. The lived experiences of these women are rarely congruent with distinct and exclusive categories. Instead the women are situated at the boundaries of multiple identities of a neither/ nor rather than an either/or (Bolatagici, 2004; Gilbert, 2005). Some women with this heritage may exist in-between the two known externally named identities. Their mixed race may be visible in their eyes, hair, skin tone, however, their in-between lived experiences are not externally visible, conceptualized by observers, discussed in their daily interactions, nor recorded in their narrative.

Gilbert (2005) writes, “Because mixed race is a social construction, it seems sufficient to argue that in all circumstances it should be left to the individuals to self-identify for reasons of self-empowerment” (p. 59). However, the current language used to define and categorize the identity of individuals with one Black and one White parent relies on an antiquated construction. Vygotsky (1962) describes the development of

thought and consciousness through words asserting that “[words are] a microcosm of human consciousness” (p. 153). As such, an emergent language mirrors the emergent consciousness

It may no longer be sufficient to be defined or labeled as Black and White/biracial/other. For individuals identified as such, notions of fluid identities and hyphenated categories push against the current fixed structures of identity formation and development (Carter, 1995). The research remains inconsistent and limited in its ability to capture the fluid and emergent processes that represent the multiracial experience and identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This rigidity has led to a certain level of anxiety and tension when trying to fit people of mixed race into the labels and categories as defined by the dominant discourse (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007; Smith & Leavy, 2008). It is time to move away from research on multiracial identity as seen through development models and categories, towards a more emergent space that recognizes the fullness of the lived experience as. The study of the peoples’ lived experience and their perspective can be told in their own words, rather than in pre-ordained categories.

Purpose of the Study

It is time to ask women with one Black and one White parent what they would like to call themselves, and for people with mixed heritage to collectively develop the language to do so. For these individuals to be “the subject who decides” what constitutes the identity choices available for the often mysterious and complex naming of their identity is an act of leadership (Carroll & Levey, 2010, p. 212). It is the individual’s language that manifests a collective voice, but it is through the collaboration with others

that the collective voice distinguishes itself from simple self-reflection (Felicetti, Gastil, Hartz-Karp, & Carson, 2012). The use of dialogue where people of similar backgrounds collaborate to create a common meaning is one such process that allows these women to be their own authors of a shared meaning. The naming of one's lived experience is a form of phenomenology. What was once Black or White became Black and White, and now a hybrid of what these two identities represent. This hybrid is a space between the identities, a liminal space that has yet to be named. Liminality has several meanings. One that is described by Brown (2007) involves a 'blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries; the breakdown of historically fixed categories; the exposure of ambiguities; the fluid and hybridity of identities; play and absurdity; and uncertainty" (p. 5). One way that the liminal space can be named is to project it out, not as a tension between two polarities, but located as two rays or vectors from Black and White to create a third space.

Homi Bhabha (1994) developed the concept of Third Space as the location where culture has no fixed identity, purity, or unity, and where initial notions of race and nationality have been replaced by a hybrid existence. Bhabha (1994) argued that the border region between two domains is often a region of overlap or hybridity and can become a Third space that contains attributes of each of the two bordering spaces. By evolving in the "in-between", one can learn to negotiate and translate between them, without the imposition of the dominant discourse. Bhabha sees these individual experiences as a part of a larger process toward historical change, noting, "it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated" (p. 2). Third space is aligned with identity politics, which

is defined as “a politics based on the particular life experiences of people who seek to be in control of their own identities and subjectivities and who claim that socially dominant groups have denied them this opportunity” (Sampson, 1993, p. 1219). By creating a third space, something that is simultaneously neither Black nor White AND the hybrid of Black and White has the potential to emerge (Green, Elson & Van Linge, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the collective on the formation of collective identity as distinct from the individual’s process of identity construction. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from the human development, psychology, and leadership literature, this study used a dialogic framework to explore in depth the lived experiences of women who have one Black and one White parent, to compose a narrative about how they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as articulating how their individual histories intersect within this new discourse. More specifically, a participant reflection questionnaire, two group dialogues and personal interviews were employed. Research and theory suggest that the use of the experience of a collective dialogue is an opportunity for a potential emancipation from the dominant discourse (Bohm, 2004; Issacs, 1999). Through the use of dialogue, this research study attempted to go beyond the familiar ways of how we have viewed and researched biracial identity. Further, it was a way to work with the actual experiences of mixed race people that offer a representation of the lived reality of individual women and their “onlyness,” simultaneously with their concurrent recognition of the collective experience for the women who chose to participate.

The way we are placed in life and how we make sense of space are continuously and inseparably linked to our lived experience of the actual and relational every-day life-

worlds. What appears to be absent is a methodology for this exploration. An exploration of the collective consciousness might allow for:

1. The creation the potential space for something new to emerge (Bohm, 2004).
2. Examination of the seeming duality or polarity that informs mixed race identity that is expressed when individuals are in dialogue within what is called third space (Bhabha, 1994).
3. Exploration of how the embodiment of a hybrid identity is more than an either/or, or a both/and experience (Green, Elson & Van Linge, 2012).

This dissertation study explored some of the difficulties, dilemmas, and challenges in naming identity for one's self, while attempting to create a collective space for a new voice that reveals, describes, and seek understanding about the complexities of mixed race individuals whose lives are often defined and constrained by the dominant discourse. What emerged during this process was a new language for understanding biracial identity from the voices of the observed, and new insights about these women collectively see themselves. This emergent voice spoke in collective terms representing a shared identity (Felicetti, Gastil, Hartz-Karp, & Carson, 2012).

Based on the evolving nature of this study, the final results were considered emergent. From a leadership perspective, leadership emerges in the interaction between people as the act of recognizing and being recognized. People's images of themselves are social constructions, and the development of a leadership self (and thereby leadership) is associated to the interaction between how individuals see themselves, and how these self-images influence people's acts as leaders (Carroll & Levy, 2010). The concept of

leadership in this dissertation is the ability to dialogue about the construction of one's self by reflecting on identity in different contexts and coupling this to the acts of leadership.

From a third space lens, the potential implications of this research may allow for greater leadership efficacy for women with one Black and one White parent to describe their lived experience and collectively name their identity. How people name and claim who they are may be a first step in a kind of leadership, especially when they have experienced a lifetime of having others define their reality. It changes the discourse, which may in and of itself be an act of leadership.

Research Questions

There was one overarching question for this dissertation study: *How can a dialogic approach create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White?*

Under this question were four supporting questions:

1. What is the relationship between social constructions of identity and the lived experience?
2. In what ways does negotiating an in-between hybrid space influence one's identity formation?
3. What is the shared meaning attributed to the lived experience of being a woman with one Black and one White parent?
4. What is the impact of a collective dialogue on the construction and naming of a shared identity?

A fully functional multiracial society cannot be achieved without a sense of history and open, honest dialogue. – Cornel West

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This section will present the literature on theories and concepts used to study identity formation and social construction of identity. The expansion and complexities of women with one Black and one White parent necessitates a review and a re-examination of the foundational identity theories, contemporary identity development models, social constructs, and the current language for how we describe identity.

Initially I began my research on the subject of identity by examining human development models (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Kegan, 1982, 1994). This seemed like a good place to start since these concepts were what sparked my academic interest in the topic of identity construction. I then researched traditional racial identity development models that offered a linear understanding of identity formation from adolescence to adulthood (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1978, 1989, 1998; Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1984, 1990, 1994, 1995). Further, I discovered other identity development models that focused on biracial identity development (Poston, 1990; Stonequist, 1937). Through this research I found that there was more to be said about the social construction of identity that looked beyond stage theories of adolescent development.

I found that the concept of liminality is able to serve as the umbrella for how this section of the literature review is organized and explored. Conroy (2004), wrote: “Liminality may offer the possibility of deliberately displacing our understandings, beliefs and ideals outside the realm of others, or indeed our own, socio-psychological

containment in order to view them afresh” (p. 7). Through this space I will explore the following concepts: (a) liminality and liminal space; (b) hybridity and Third Space; (c) historical construction of mixed race; (d) general notion of social construction; (e) defining identity; (f) predominant human development models; and (g) predominant racial identity development models. I discovered connections of identity development to the social construction of race (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Root, 1992;), identity (Erikson, 1968; Tatum, 1997), liminality (Turner, 1967, 1974, 1982; van Gennep, 1960), hybridity and Third Space (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996), that allowed me see the difficulties, dilemmas, and challenges in naming identity for one’s self. Additional relevant literature to consider for this study will include an overview of intersectionality, Black feminist epistemology, and social movement theory. I have chosen these ten bodies of literature because collectively, they hold pieces of the theoretical orientation of this discourse.

Liminality and Liminal Space

Liminality is derived from the term, limen, meaning “threshold.” In his book, *Les Rites de Passage (The Rites of Passage)*, Arnold van Gennep (1909) first introduced the word liminal in the field of anthropology by describing coming-of-age rituals and marriage as rites of passage that followed a three-part structure: (a) separation (b) liminal period and (c) re-assimilation. Victor Turner (1974) further developed the concept of “liminality”, describing “liminal personae... [that] are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned” (195, p. 95). The limen, of liminality refers to a threshold or passageway, a state of being between two different existential planes. It is attributed to people who transition, or pass through a state of societal ambiguity

because they “elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate [them] in cultural space” (p. 95) and eventually return back to society, changed and more knowledgeable. Eliade (1959) defined this threshold that separates these two places as “the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds communicate” (1959, p. 24).

Turner viewed society as the structure between classes of people, which allowed for the observation of the liminal periods in a person’s life as an inter-structural situation, being in or on the margin of hierarchy (1995, p. 95). People in the liminal period who are marginalized at the boundaries of a normative structure, or “threshold people”, who will often join with other people who are in similar conditions forming a community. The “sense of community” fosters a powerful developmental period of “intense comradeship and egalitarianism [where] secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized” (Turner, 1995, p. 95). This is connected to David Bohm’s concept dialogue in that the individuals come together into a different kind of participatory consciousness that allows for a “sharing of common content” (Bohm, 1996, p. 30)

Victor Turner’s concept of liminal space was a space of transformation between phases of separation and reincorporation (Turner, 1967). It represented a period of ambiguity, a marginal and transitional state. Turner noted that those who pass through a liminal phase are initiated back into their society, changed and more knowledgeable. Arnold van Gennep used liminal space to describe rituals of transition. For van Gennep, liminal or threshold refers to a space between the world of status that the person is leaving and the world of status into which the person is being inducted (van Gennep, 1960). In post-colonial studies, Homi Bhabha referenced liminality as a category strongly

related to the concept of cultural hybridity. For Bhabha (1994), liminal space was an interstitial passage between fixed identifications representing a possibility for a cultural hybridity that invites difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. The concept of liminality as an “in-between” space and/or state offers a significant degree of clarity in describing some of the most interesting and highly specific social and cultural phenomena because it highlights the complicated nature of identity construction. Liminal spaces are ambiguous and ambivalent.

Liminality and Liminal Space in This Research Context

The etymology of liminality and the original scholars suggests movement from one phase of being to another, not simply a space between, but a non-static movement. For the purposes of this research study, I view liminality as expressed by Conroy (2004), in that it is:

A metaphor which points to a space that is neither inside or outside but lies at the threshold of our social, political, cultural and educational spaces... Liminality may offer the possibility of deliberately displacing our understandings, beliefs and ideal outside the realm of others, or indeed our own, socio-psychological containment in order to view them afresh. (p. 7)

Liminality as a social construct allows for the complexities and contradictions of identity construction and the potential naming of identity to emerge and explain the lived realities of individuals. Understanding of liminality is essential to the present study because the identity construction process and language emergence have the potential to produce liminal spaces. The state of being in liminality gives space and consciousness for reflective suspension, moments when action is held in abeyance, allowing for the emergence of new self-knowledge. Liminality, as described by Brown (2007) involves a ‘blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries; the breakdown of historically fixed

categories; the exposure of ambiguities; the fluid and hybridity of identities; play and absurdity; and uncertainty” (p. 5). This inner/outer, personal/social dynamic plays out in the formation, narration, and interpretation of people’s lived experiences is a part of the ongoing formation of their identity. It is the space between, the state of being neither-this-nor-that, betwixt and between, neither me nor not me.

Liminality creates the construct for disrupting one’s internal sense of self and external place within the social system. It then allows for the emergence of a new identity formation narrative, one that is collectively shaped, reframed, and renegotiated, yet holds meaning based on the individual narrative. The liminal space creates a frame where individuals can experiment with familiar categories of identity and culture, while isolating their chosen elements and recombining them in unprecedented combinations (Turner, 1967, 1974, 1982) in order to form a new sense of self. Drake describes how “moving into, through and out of the in-between space between the old story and the new one exposes the building blocks of a culture and its norms, values and axioms in way that are not available through an everyday experience” (2009, p. 67). What may emerge from this liminal space, both the conversation and the new way of thinking about biracial identity, goes beyond the notion of both/and, and creates a neither/nor, the hybrid identity.

Liminality, as an anthropological and sociological construct, is able to capture some of the complexities and contradictions of identity formation and construction. Within a research construct, liminality can be used as way to understand identity formation in the following ways: (a) the concept of liminality as a context for understanding identity construction as “in-between”; (b) a liminal space where externally

familiar structures of identity are suspended, dissolved or surrendered; (c) a collective refusal to judge everything by a pre-given model or paradigm; and (d) the liminal space where biracial individuals live, the third space.

Liminality allows for the materialization of the conditions for a third space, wherein a new discourse can emerge, offering a new language for describing, defining, understanding and knowing identity. If an individual is living between two cultures, and finds it difficult to fully identify with either, then the notion of a constructed third space may be useful. This third space provides the opportunity to explore mixed race visibility, identity and agency.

Hybridity and Third Space

The concept of first space suggests a space that is privileged or dominant in social interaction, whereas second space is that which is marginalized (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996). Homi Bhabha (1994) developed the concept of third space as the location where culture has no fixed identity, purity, or unity, and where initial notions of race and nationality have been replaced by a hybrid existence. By evolving in the third space, the in-between, one can learn to negotiate and translate between them, without the imposition or opposition of the dominant discourse. Bhabha sees these individual experiences as a part of a larger process toward historical change, noting, “it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated” (p. 2). Third space is aligned with identity politics, defined as “a politics based on the particular life experiences of people who seek to be in control of

their own identities and subjectivities and who claim that socially dominant groups have denied them this opportunity” (Sampson, 1993, p. 1219).

These events or “spaces” may create the opportunity for participants to examine how to negotiate a shared third space where different cultures and ideologies come into contact and conflict, and allow a new language to emerge. What is critical to this dissertation is the sense that these spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative, space of knowledge, discourses, and identity formation. From a cultural perspective, the most common way to deal with hybridity is to hyphenate the race or add an “and” in between (e.g. Japanese-American or Black and White). Bolatagici (2004) argues that this does little to reveal or deal with the complexities that come with mixed race identity. It simplifies and reduces the individual to the binary sum of their racial parts, representing a both/and juncture. Bhabha argues that we must undo thinking from a simplistic binary opposition, placing emphasis on the opposition between First and Third World nations, between colonizer and colonized, men and women, Black and White (1994). In his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha offered the following statement:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1994, p. 2)

What is really happening here is that that unconscious part of us that knows who we are, knows what we are about, from a historical and current context is coming into consciousness. What we are trying to do collectively is bring that forward, and it is our

responsibility to do that. This gives rise to something already in existence and yet unrecognizable. Bhabha argues that the third space affords us to do just that, and allows us to look at the history of which we have come, to look at other aspects of who we are from an emergent perspective, and to begin to name it, through the emergence a the third space.

By extension, Bhabha's notion of third space is logically consistent with the experience of between two races, the hybrid space of being both Black and White. The influences on collective and individual identity in the post-colonial world can be understood through the post-colonial theory of hybridity. Cultural hybridity is a term first introduced by Bhabha describes the embodiment of a pluralistic identity that encompasses the characteristics or attributes of more than one culture or race. It refers to the difficulties in reconstructing a sense of self and country following colonial occupation. The inability to completely recover the past and the difficulties of separating from the culture of the former colonizer, create an identity which is an amalgamation of both the traditional and westernized processes of cultural fragmentation and multiculturalism. Hybridity allows for the exploration of a cultural identity that does not fit into the existing notions of what the racial designations as that of simply Blackness or Whiteness. Hybridity theory posits that people in any given community draw on multiple resources or experiences to make sense of the world. The examination of being "in-between" several different sources of knowledge and discourse can be both productive and constraining in terms of one's literate, social, and cultural practices—and, ultimately, one's identity formation and sense of self. Rather than portraying these differences as destructive, hybridity offers a new emergence of identity, a coexistence of "giving up the

desire for a pure origin, hybridity retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures, but without assuming hierarchy. It is not just a new identity but a new form of identity” (Sakamoto, 1996, p. 115 as cited in Bolatagici, 2004).

Bhabha located hybridity within a third space as being “a present time and a specific space... which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read anew” (1991, p. 55). This means the words, symbols, and rituals are not static, and can be given new meaning. It is a site of translation and negotiation, and “by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (Bhabha, 1991, p. 39). Sakamoto (1996) expanded upon this notion of third space by expressing that “a borderline culture of hybridity is a powerful and creative ‘Third Space’ through which ‘newness enters the world’, subverting the authority of the dominant discourse” (p. 116, as cited in Bolatagici, 2004).

Third Space can also be considered as being closely relevant to a liminal space, in that it embraces race as “betwixt and between” space. The narratives from this space can serve as embodied experiences of hybridity, challenging the postcolonial hybridity theories predominant in the literature that disregard the actual lived experiences of hybrid or mixed race people. By allowing a Third Space to emerge in the context of identity formation as well as conversation, we allow the creation of various consciousnesses that are individualized by the lived experience of the perceivers in a collective context. Such consciousnesses may be the unimagined, progressive aspect of globalization, but they are not something one arrives at serendipitously. Developing a third space consciousness

requires a critical evaluation of the disconnectedness between cultures at the spaces where they coexist. It is about the connection within a new hybrid space that emerges from the collective space; a space to compose and negotiate new ways of speaking -- about and to their cultures, histories, and experiences -- and articulating their spatially situated selves within the collective, a third space that embraces complexity and rejects simplicity and reduction.

What we can derive from Bhabha's writing on hybridity as third space is akin to the struggle around being identified as mixed race by the dominant discourse at any moment, yet the internal experience is something different, not yet named or labeled, and in need of translation. Third Space is a way of describing and reflecting possibility for identity to emerge anew. It is a liminal space full of new ways of viewing cultural meaning, blurring the lines of existing boundaries and calling into question the dominant discourse of culture and identity. The concepts of hybridity and third space have considerable implications for reconstructing identity of biracial individuals.

Brief History of Race

Though many definitions of race exist, there appears to be no established agreement on any scientific definition. The term "race" describes the classification or division of people into distinct groups based on certain real or perceived hereditary characteristics (Dikötter, 2008). Biological race refers to the existence of natural, physical divisions among humans that are hereditary, reflected in morphology at birth. Race is how society socially categorizes the hereditary traits of different groups of people, thus creating socially defined differences and designations based on biologically visible traits,

such as skin color, hair, and physical differences (Dikötter, 2008; Helms, 1994).

Declaration of race is often socially imposed and hierarchical.

This classification system was developed in Europe and North America in the 18th century. The popular tendency was to attribute a general inferiority or superiority to a particular race, based on biological differences. The tendency became prevalent because the scientific theories during that time were considered to be based on science and therefore accurate. Natural, physical divisions among humans, such as body height, hair texture, eye color, body shape, and skin tone were considered hereditary, reflected in morphology, and crudely defined by terms like Black, White, and Asian (or Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid) (Goodman, Moses & Jones, 2012) Social Darwinism supported this notion and kept it in place as a way to maintain a social hierarchy (Malcomson, 2000). In a social context, race does not have acknowledged customs or globally learned behavior as does identity with ethnicity. There is data to suggest that there is greater within group than between group differences genetically, indicating that race is a scientifically mythic structure (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2009; Malcomson, 2000).

The “one drop” rule was heavily used in the American South to determine that any degree of Black/African ancestry equated those individuals as inferior, second-class citizens even if they might be visibly White (Malcomson, 2000). This attribution of the “one drop” rule “consigned an individual to the wrong side of the White/Black divide, determining (disadvantaging) where s/he could live, what kind of work was available, and whether marriage or even relationships could take place with a White partner” (Rattansi, 2007, p. 7).

Ethnicity, often used interchangeably with race, is a socially constructed concept that divides the overall population into subgroups based on aspects such as physical appearance, historical nationality, ancestry, tribal group or the cultural behaviors, experiences, language, and customs with which an individual identifies or chooses (Wijeyesinghe, 2012; Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997). One's biological racial group can be comprised of many ethnicities (Helms, 1994). The concept of "culture" refers to the identity or value orientation that represents a society (or country) that also contains subsidiary cultures, including values, traditions, histories, customs, et cetera. Culture is now considered the more appropriate discourse to note differences among diverse individuals. However, this still assumes categories are necessary and appropriately defined by the dominant majority.

General Notion of Social Construction

Social construction theory was originated as an attempt to explain and come to terms with the nature of reality; what we "know" to be real and essential as a product of the culture and period in which we live. It includes the ways we think about and use categories to structure our experience and analysis of the world. The notion of social construction is considered to be any phenomenon invented or constructed by individuals in a particular society or culture. It exists because the people agree to behave or act as if it exists, thereby following rules, most often unwritten or assumed that support the social construct. For instance, race, class and gender are human creations and do not exist independently of our ideas about them or our responses to them. They do not really mean anything, but that does not make them any less real (Haslanger, 2012; Newman, 2007).

They only have a meaning because society gives them a meaning, based on what we believe to be “real”.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967, 1991) theorize social construction as a symbolic interaction or something that forms over time as people interact together, their actions and speech eventually becoming habitualized and repeated into common knowledge and discourse. Further, Pinker writes, “some categories really are social constructions: they exist only because people tacitly agree to act as if they exist...but that does not mean that all conceptual categories are socially constructed” (2002, p. 202). Social constructions require human practice in order to retain and sustain an existence, but its basic effect is that they are universally agreed upon and therefore shape and assume the illusion of reality (Searle, 1995). Through their active participation in the social world (by knowing, recognizing and claiming), individuals construct their knowledge about the world, which shapes and forms their identity.

Race as a Social Construction

Scholars have written extensively on race as a social construct, and the great majority of anthropologists agree that *race* is a socially constructed concept, and that race has no biological or natural basis; the “race” related physical variations found in humans have no real significance except for the social/cultural importance put on them by people (Haslanger, 2012; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1992; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007; Smith & Leavy, 2008).

Weber (1998) argues that in order for us to develop an understanding of race (and class, gender, and sexuality) as a socially constructed identifier, we must take into consideration that identifiers depend on four points: they depend on context, they tend to

make us think in opposites or either/or terms, they reflect social rankings and power dynamics, and they have both psychological and structural meanings. Contextually speaking, race has existed throughout most of history (particularly in western models of thinking) as one of the ways to differentiate and categorize individuals. Thus their meanings are constantly changing as a result of economic, political or ideological events, and are considered fluid. American society has a tendency to identify and categorize people based on an “either/or” or terminology – White or Black, rich or poor, man or women, which could potentially lead to an assumption that one is better than the other. This type of thinking reinforces the view that these identifiers are permanent and biologically imperative (Newman, 2007). Further, the status of one group is always defined in terms of its relationship with other groups, based on systems of dominance, power, wealth, and access. Finally, the social construction of race has meaning based on the individuals’ lived experiences in the personal, familial, community and institutional contexts in which they live.

Centuries of racial mixing have also made it problematic to “unequivocally differentiate one so-called racial group from another” (Helms, 1994, p. 295). “Race as a social construction” draws attention to how the social, legal, and political categories traditionally used to define “race” exhibit significant inter-society, within-society, and historical variability, so that these social categories are at best a crude approximation of actually existing human biological variation. However, race is still a cultural term used by most Americans to describe what a person's ancestry is. It is “malleable, rooted in both macro and micro social processes, and that it has structurally and culturally defined

parameters” (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002, p. 115). Unfortunately this brings with it many misconceptions and erroneous biological connotations.

Racial formation is another term for the social construction of race. Omi and Winant (2010), define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). By stating that racial formation is a “sociohistorical process” the authors argue that when the concept of race was formed, its meaning in society was based on many critical events that have happened in history over time. What ties people together in a particular racial group is not a set of shared physical characteristics – since characteristics are not racially specific – but the shared experience of being identified by others as members of that group (Newman, 2002; Piper, 1992).

A Socially Constructed Mixed Race

Race as a social construction becomes even further complicated when discussing multiracial individuals. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) introduced the term “double consciousness” into the study of African American psychology. He defined double consciousness as the way in which African Americans view themselves, individually and as a group, through the eyes of the society they live in. Du Bois described this process as “always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (1903, p. 299). This produces what Du Bois calls a “twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (p. 299).

Despite writing this idea for a 19th and early 20th century world, it can be argued that it may be appropriate to consider the notion of double consciousness as a useful

concept in developing knowledge around the experience of biracial people in contemporary times. Individuals still face many obstacles in a monoracially-oriented society. More specifically, the collective and individual experience of biracial people as viewed through a lens of double consciousness may represent the juxtaposition of developing identity in the paradox of Black/White race relations. Brown (1990) argued that this kind of “dual reality” constitutes the essence of the social and psychological dilemma confronting biracial people.

Attention and controversy follow the discussion in how multiracial individuals are defining/identifying themselves. Much of the research on biracial and multiracial identity has focused on the conceptualization of biracial identity development through the use of racial labels, descriptors, or categories as a way to make sense of it (Bhabha, 1994). Categories make the world appear understandable and safe, so the dominant majority persists in trying to categorize these individuals. However, biracial individuals don’t “fit” into any preexisting racial categories; they belong to both White and Black groups, while simultaneously not fully belonging to either. Thus they cannot be easily classified in either a monoracial majority or monoracial minority group, thereby facing rejection from both majority and minority groups (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007; Smith & Leavy, 2008). The so-called descriptors, mulatto, biracial, mixed, multiracial, or other, are built on old-fashioned ideas of scientifically distinct races that can be mixed together, like paint or ingredients for a recipe (Renn, 2000). Furthermore, these labels embrace a dominant binary mindset, and the social world no longer lends itself to binary thinking when issues of race and ethnicity come into play (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

The forced choice social construct of biracial/multiracial categories is limiting in

nature for people who are trying to reconstruct or deconstruct their identity, ethnicity and culture. Their ambiguity of racial identity means that biracial people are outside existing definitions in most circumstances. Furthermore, given the complexities of identity, and the societal need to name and categorize individuals into fixed groups, the academic literature does not identify a discourse or any empirical data to reveal collective racial identity formation. However, research does exist that includes individual racial identity research (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; 2010).

Defining Identity

Identity is something of a paradox. Beverly Tatum (1997) stated,

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves. (p.18)

While Tatum's comment was speaking about monoracial Blacks, it is still relevant to individuals with more than one race associated to them. Our current use of the term identity is not well captured by standard dictionary definitions, particularly due to its social construction of the construct on an individual level. The dictionary definition relies on an outdated meaning of the word that is still used frequently in conversation, but is never the less still limited by our present understanding of identity. In reviewing the literature on identity, one can find a multitude of definitions and clarifications that range in complexity and difference (Erikson, 1968; Fearon, 1999; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009; Tatum, 1997). However, what is in fact

agreed upon is the concept of questioning one's identity and naming it is a common and complex phenomenon.

Our current sense of identity has developed within the last fifty years, mostly through studies of identity formation by U.S. psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson. Erikson defined identity formation as "a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his/her communal culture" (1968, p. 22). Erikson further acknowledged the complexity of identity, and stated,

We deal with a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture... In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness." (p. 22)

Erikson studied identity development through eight stages beginning in childhood and spanning through one's lifetime. He argued that people's identification and understanding of their identity may change and transform based on the dynamic interplay among self-perception, societal perception, socio/political contexts, and education. Identity is generally described as developing through largely internal processes (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1994), with relatively little attention paid to the influence of external forces in constraining or co-constructing identity. Multiple dimensions of identity depict a core sense of self and sense of belonging that is deeply embedded in a social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Social Identity

Social identity theories offer an additional way to explore the other dimensions of identity construction, such as one's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, religion, et cetera (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982). Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). The theory posits that a person has not one "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on basis of his/her personal, family or national "level of self" (Turner, 1982). The theory was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination, while attempting to identify the *minimal* conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favor of the ingroup to which they belonged and against another outgroup. It is an individual-based perception of what defines the "us" associated with any *internalized group membership*. This can be distinguished from the belief that personal identity, which refers to self-knowledge, derives from the individual's unique attributes.

Assigned Identity

For the individual, choosing to identify as Black, White, Black and White, mixed race or biracial has significant implications for how one is received and experienced by the dominant majority. This choice also may have an impact of individual life chances and opportunities, both on the individual level and the community level. The concept of double consciousness as described above echoes this "othered" experience of mixed race identity. These individuals are assigned an identity based on categories determined by the dominant society that they may not desire or accept. Julie Lythcott-Haims (1994) noted,

“The multiracial person suffers in silence.... Although society has told multiracial people to choose, in actuality, society makes the choice for them” (p.240, cited in Literte, 2007). Couple this situation with an attempt to reconcile their own description of identity within two racial worlds, a biracial person’s navigation of internal racial multiplicity and duality, and external push against mainstream society, can lead to the creation of an identity that goes beyond traditional oppositions and categories. Those who seek to construct their identity outside of the mainstream paradigm will have no choice but to create themselves as unique and different, pushing past the “both/and” to a “neither/nor” – in essence, a hybrid third space.

Predominant Human Development Models

Throughout the twentieth century, different researchers have developed and conceptualized models for understanding identity development. These models were based upon Erikson’s (1959, 1968, 1980) psychosocial research on identity formation and identity crisis, identity formation studies by Marcia (1980), and the cognitive work of Piaget (1952). While all identity models emphasize the psychosocial development process of self, others also take into consideration the cognitive complexity of the self-definition process (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Helms; 1990). The traditional cognitive and psychosocial models are stage models, meaning that development occurs linearly in a step-by-step progression through sequential, hierarchically organized levels of development. More contemporary models consider racial and ethnic identity as a process that occurs over one’s entire lifetime.

Erik Erikson's Eight Stages

Greatly influenced by Sigmund Freud, Erikson (1963) studied identity development beginning at birth and continuing through adulthood. Erikson saw identity as “both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (1959, p. 109). Whereas Freud emphasized the conflict between the id and the superego, Erikson’s eight stage life span development model emphasized the role of culture and society, and how conflicts that can take place within the ego itself and impact development.

Each stage consists of a process of exploration and learning that focused on critical developments tasks that one faces during adolescence. Development is dependent on critical tasks at each stage and that identity develops either during adolescence and/or in any crisis that may occur after adolescence. The stages are: a) Trust vs. Mistrust (birth-1 year old); b) Autonomy vs. Shame or Doubt (1-2 years old); c) Initiative vs. Guilt (2-6 years old); d) Industry vs. Inferiority (6-12 years old); e) Identity vs. Identity Diffusion (12-18 years old); f) Intimacy vs. Isolation (18-40 years old); g) Generativity vs. Self-Absorption (40-65 years old); and h) Integrity vs. Despair or Disgust (65-death). During all of these psychosocial stages Erikson asserted that the individual develops on three levels simultaneously: biological, social and psychological (representing the organism, membership of society and individualism respectively).

Erikson (1959) believed that the individual could not be understood apart from his or her social context, in that, “individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change” (p. 114). This premise is seen throughout Erikson’s developmental stages, particularly in the fifth psychosocial stage (identity versus role

confusion), which occurs during adolescence. Erikson emphasized the adolescent period, arguing that this was a crucial stage for developing a person's identity, yet continued growth and development throughout one's life was still very much possible.

Central to the Eriksonian model is the "identity crisis", which introduced the notion that during development, there is a period or of psychological distress, often occurring in adolescence but sometimes in adulthood, when a person pursues a clearer sense of self and an acceptable role in society (Beckett & Taylor, 2010; Erikson, 1959). An identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. The resolution of this "crisis" has positive psychological outcomes and is necessary for a sound ego and healthy sense of self into adulthood. Failure to resolve this crisis may mean ongoing struggles that persist throughout life.

Erikson's identity development model certainly served as the foundation for understanding identity formation, however his theory is limiting in nature for mixed race individuals, particularly for women. Since the early 1980s, many scholars have critiqued Erikson's theory (Kroger, 2002; Phinney, 1990; Root, 1992). To begin, his notion of positive resolutions at each developmental stage favor male development and socialization while almost completely ignore the female perspective. His over reliance on samples of White middle class males has been the target of criticism. Additionally, as with most traditional psychological theories, his model views identity as a static, linear process that can be empirically measured and supported as such. However, racial and cultural identity represent a more dynamic process where individuals will likely re-examine and shift their identity consciousness multiple times throughout a lifetime (Phinney, 1990).

More recent qualitative studies of multiracial participants have revealed the fluidity of their identity, depending upon the immediate environment, history and daily experience of the individual. Root (1992) posited that social changes, changing environments, and interactions with racism and micro aggressions tend to have a shifting impact on one's social construction of identity. "Any individual who witnesses the evolution of social change may also witness change in his or her own self-view" (Root, 1992, p. 33).

Robert Kegan's Six Stages

Building on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, Kegan's (1982) theory of adult development examines and describes the way humans grow and change over their adult lives. In his seminal book, *The Evolving Self*, Kegan describes his constructive-developmental theory as concerned with both the *construction* of an individual's understanding of reality and with the development of that construction to more complex levels over time.

Kegan's model was built on six "equilibrium" stages (mental complexities or "orders of mind") through which people develop. The stages include a) the incorporative stage; b) the impulsive stage; c) the imperial stage; d) the interpersonal stage; e) the institutional stage; and f) the inter-individual stage. The object of each stage is the subject of the preceding stage, and it offers a new "transformation" of meaning making, something Kegan considered to be different than simply learning new information or skills. Each stage of development is constantly renegotiated.

The subject/object relationship can be described as what we *have* in our perceptions, versus what *has us*. What can be seen as *object* represents the *content* of

one's knowing, while what one is *subject to* provides a clue about the underlying *structure* of one's knowing. Kegan writes, "We *have* object; we *are* subject" (p. 32). New information may add to the things a person knows, but transformation changes the way they know those things. This transformation is about changing the very *form* of the meaning-making system – including its complexity and uncertainty. For Kegan (1994), transformative learning is possible when someone is able to step back and reflect on something, which then changes "not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the way he knows—not just what he knows, but the way he knows" (p. 17).

The subject/object relationship is fundamental to understanding Kegan's stage theory because of his notion of "evolutionary truce", which establishes a balance between subject and object. "Distinguishing between how something appears and how something is just what one cannot do when one is subject to the perceptions" (Kegan, 1982, p.29).

Predominant Racial Identity Development Models

Racial identity refers to how an individual identifies himself or herself within a racial group or categorization. Maslow (1943, 1954, 1968) was an early scholar who emphasized the importance of a sense of collective belonging as a factor in cultivating psychological health and wellbeing. The construction of race on the macro level has implications for racial and cultural identifications on the micro level. Western academic scholars and psychologists study racial and cultural identity development because research shows that racial and cultural identity promote a sense of self and belonging. Various racial identity development models have been created and revised over the years in an effort to explain the phenomenon of racial identity development (Cross, 1978; Erikson, 1968; Helms, 1994; Kegan; 1982; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002; Root, 1992).

Traditional theories reference racial identity as a collective identity integrated with the individual's perception of what they share with a particular group's common heritage (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Helms, 1990). Several foundational theories exist to describe the experiences of racial identity formation for people with single, monoracial identities such as Black/African American, White, Latino, Asian American, and Native American. Phinney (1990) argued that individuals are likely to re-examine their ethnicity and race. Many of these theories examine the shared commonality and association between the self-perception of identity and the group/collective identity (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). To date, most multiracial identity models in psychology capture a largely internal developmental process (Collins, 2000; Kich, 1992; Williams, 1994). However, earlier theorists suggest that individuals learn to manage their socially stigmatized identities in social interactions (Goffman, 1963).

Scholars who embrace stage theories of development assume that development occurs linearly as people progress through sequentially and hierarchically organized levels of development that locate the individual in a stage or within a predetermined category (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Each subsequent stage is more complex and advanced than the prior one. However, individuals who move on to a subsequent stage may, at times, revisit the thinking and sense making of an earlier stage (Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982).

White Identity Development

Janet Helms (1984, 1990, 1994, 1995) developed what some scholars consider to be the most elaborate and sophisticated White racial identity model. Her theory is based

on the premise that race is constructed in a sociopolitical and cultural framework rather than a biological reality. She considered racism to be a central and intimate part of being a White American (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Initially developed as a hierarchical stage model, Helms defines her model through six specific racial statuses, or “ego status”. Each status is a complex expression of one’s racial identity (Daniels, 2001). Helms defined two phases which the statuses belong to: (a) abandonment of racism and (b) defining nonracist White identity. The six statuses are: *contact*, *disintegration*, *reintegration*, *pseudoindependence*, *immersion/emersion*, and *autonomy*. While the statuses are fluid, the challenges of a lower status must be resolved prior to progressing to the next one (Helms, 1995). However, an individual may revert back to a lower status if necessary (Sciarra & Gushue, 2003). In a revision of the model, Helms (1995) included Information Processing Strategies (IPSs), which White people use to reflect certain attitudes and behaviors as a way to avoid or alleviate any anxiety or discomfort when dealing with race-related issues.

Helms’ model is the most widely cited, researched and applied of all the White racial identity development models. However, some scholars are critical of this model, arguing that it does not accurately describe or reflect White identity development (Pack-Brown, 1999; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Rowe et al. (1994) described four reasons why they believed Helms’ model and other identity development models were flawed. First, they claim that her model is inaccurately based on minority development models (discussed in the next section) due to the fact that Whites maintain the dominant position. Second, the authors argue that the model places too much emphasis on the development of White attitudes toward minorities, and not on their own racial group

membership. Third, Rowe et al. criticized the fact that the model is conceptually inaccurate and the stages imply developmental progression from less to more healthy stages with no empirical evidence to support this conclusion. Finally, the authors criticized Helms' for exclusively basing her model on Whites' interaction with Blacks, subsequently limiting the applicability to other minority groups.

It is important to note that Helms' did respond to the critique, by refuting the developmental stage concept, and replacing it with the term *status*. Helms' (1995) argued that her writings and research were misrepresented, and that she does emphasize White identity and minority identity development in various contexts. However, this model does appear to focus more on a development of sensitivity to other racial groups rather than the task of developing a positive White identity.

Minority Identity Development

Cross' Nigrescence model. During the Civil Rights movement, William Cross (1971, 1991, 1995) formulated the psychosocial Nigrescence theory of racial identity development. This movement was a key contributor to the creation and sustenance of a Black collective identity. Cross' model is considered to be one of the first models of ethnic identity development and the most influential. The original model delineates a five stage process, a "resocialization experience" (1995, p. 97), in which a Black individual moves from a White/non-Afrocentric (unawareness of race) frame of reference, to a positive Afrocentric frame of reference (exclusively pro-Black), to a multi-cultural identity (acceptance and commitment to many cultures (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2003). The original stages were: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

Further research provides evidence that Cross' conventional linear model is easy to understand and straightforward (Vandiver, 2001). However, some scholars have argued that his model is too simplistic and problematic due to his assumption that Blacks are first unaware of their race and the race of others, and that racial identity was a universal process among African Americans (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001).

In 1991, Cross revised this theory and replaced the idea of being pro-White with the concept of race salience, "the degree to which race is an important and integral part of a person's approach to life" (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 210). Salience can have a positive (pro-Black) or negative (anti-Black) valence. Additionally, Cross separated the immersion-emersion stage into two additional two stages: anti-White alone, and anti-Black alone, creating three possible options: anti-White, pro-Black, anti-White/pro-Black. The last change was the collapsing of the fourth and fifth stages into Internalization.

Minority development model. Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979, 1989, 1998) introduced a five-stage Minority Development model, later renaming it the Racial/Cultural Identity Development model. Their model argues that as a result of oppression, people experience a natural internal struggle in order to develop an understanding of themselves (sense of self) and the dominant group. The stages are: *conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness*. At each of these stages, an individual is characterized as having four corresponding beliefs and attitudes. These consist of an attitude about the self (based on the salient identity characteristic), other individuals with the same characteristic, individuals from the dominant culture, and individuals of other marginalized groups.

While the model is presented as a stage theory, the authors believed that the process is best conceptualized as a continual, fluid process.

Unlike Cross' model, the Atkinson et al. (1989) model is meant to be applied to all people of color, regardless of racial or ethnic background (Sue & Sue, 2003). Neither model accounts for biracial identity formation, assuming that at some point, the individual will choose one set of cultural values over another at different stages. They may reject their minority identity, and then reject the majority identity as well. These models do not allow for multiple identities to be integrated (Poston, 1990). Models such as these are then used to view biracial individuals, who are assumed to be at a less advanced status due to their biracial classification (Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001). Therefore, while these minority identity development models were conceptualized for application to all minorities, they do not align with the unique process of biracial identity formation.

Biracial identity development model. The monoracial theories discussed above are integral to self-discovery and racial/ethnic identity resolution for single race individuals; however, they may not meet the needs of people who identify with more than one race or ethnicity. Several significant criticisms towards these theories and models are: 1) they are developed for monoracial individuals, rather than biracial or multiracial persons; 2) they inaccurately assume that biracial or multiracial individuals are accepted by their parent culture(s); and 3) the linear character is incorrect in describing the complexity of the identity development of these individuals (Poston, 1990; Root, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2003). The exploration of biracial identity formation requires an understanding of the historically racist attitudes toward racial mixing, marginality of

belonging/not belonging, and the process for integrating multiple identities into a hybrid identity space. To address the limitations of the monoracial models, research into mixed race identity formation has led to the creation of multiple identity development models as a way to understand this phenomenon (Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunisma, 2002; Root, 1990, 1992).

Stonequist's three phases. In 1928, Park coined the term “marginal man” to describe a person who lives in two cultural worlds and who inevitably experiences a divided self, not fully accommodated to either; a perfect description for biracial individuals. Stonequist (1937), a student of Park's, elaborated on his ideas, but viewed it as a person's inability to form dual ethnic identification due to the bicultural membership (Sue & Sue, 2003). In his classical work, *The Marginal Man*, Stonequist alluded to the unwillingness of White society to distinguish between what he refers to as “mixed bloods” and “full bloods” (Blacks).

Park wrote in the Introduction to Stonequist's book,

The marginal man...is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures....his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and, either wholly or in part, fuse. (1937)

Park argued that individuals in this position were more intelligent and ambitious, because they are “mixed bloods” (mulattoes) citing W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington as examples of this. Referring to Black males, Stonequist argued:

This fact is of fundamental significance in comprehending the general characteristics of the ‘mixed blood’. He is not the dejected, spiritless outcast; neither is he the inhibited conformist. He is more likely to be restless and race conscious, aggressive and radical, ambitious and creative. The lower status to which he is assigned naturally creates discontented and rebellious feelings. From an earlier spontaneous identification with the White man, he has, under the rebuffs of a categorical race prejudice, turned about and identified with the Negro

race. In the process of so doing he suffers a profound inner conflict. After all, does not the blood of the White man flow through his veins? Does he not share the higher culture in common with the White American? Is he not legally and morally an American citizen? And yet, he finds himself condemned to a lower caste in the American system! So the mulatto is likely to think of himself. Living in two such social worlds, between which there is antagonism and prejudice, he experiences in himself the same conflict. (1937, p. 24-25)

Stonequist developed the Marginal Person Model, the first model of biracial identity development. He posited that biracial individuals are not able to develop full identities because both races marginalize them, calling it identity purgatory.

Stonequist's model has three phases:

1. First Phase: The biracial individuals (half-castes) are not aware of their differences from the dominant class.
2. Second Phase: A crisis or event occurs and through some rejection by Whites, the biracial individual becomes aware that they belong to an "inferior group" and becomes marginal. Stonequist believed this to be a painful event that is characterized by psychological maladjustment.
3. Third Phase: The biracial individual attempts to escape from the marginality by becoming absorbed into the White majority and attempting to pass as White. The individual could also try to integrate into the Black group, but this would mean overcoming the negative feelings towards Blacks as well as Blacks' distrust and hostility toward the biracial individual. Others may choose not to ever assimilate and remain marginalized, which creates feelings of isolation and condemnation by both racial groups (adapted from Stonequist, 1937).

It is unfortunate that Stonequist's model was not supported by any behavioral or

empirical evidence. It also was focused solely on the plight of the Black male, not inclusive of both genders. Additionally, it placed identity problems solely on the individual and not related to external factors, such as prejudice within cultures and the individual internalization of these biased beliefs (Poston, 1990). Despite this lack of support, Stonequist's model was thought to be the predominant postulation until the late 1980s. It became the framework for other theories to conceptualize biracial identity formation as an uncertain, ambiguous, and problematic. This was assumed to lead to problems such as low self-esteem, isolation, substance abuse, and identity confusion (Herring, 1995; Poston 1990).

Poston's five stages. In order to address the shortcomings of previous identity development models, Poston (1990) developed a stage model that reflected the construct that encompasses one's racial identities, including racial attitudes, self-identification, and racial preferences (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993). The five stages are: *personal identity; choice of group categorization; enmeshment/denial; appreciation; and integration.*

Poston's model is considered to cover a lifespan of development, emphasizing a healthy progression of the identity formation process of biracial individuals. While this model is considered useful and relevant, Carter (1995) argued that it is limited in nature because it confuses ethnicity with culture and race, consequently overlooking important sociopolitical realities. Further, Poston's research was largely based on biracial individuals who were participating in support groups, and without any empirical evidence to support the outcome. Despite the model's ability to address specific experiences of positive biracial identity formation, it suffers from the same challenges and biases

presented in past literature (Brussa, 2007).

Critique of the Identity Development Models

There are several limitations in the research of identity development. First, scholars are trained in specific paradigms and epistemology, and to date there has been minimal conversation or collaboration across disciplines or methodological approaches in order to create an interdisciplinary perspective in understanding identity formation. The majority of the models are developed within a psychological framework for understanding adolescent growth, and to support therapeutic work with individuals (Bracey et al, 2004; Renn, 2000; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1992; Udry et. al, 2003), however, none of them use a leadership or dialogical perspective in understanding the negotiation or construction of identity. The research has also not viewed or named the in-between space as an actual identity. The result of this perpetuates repetition, disconnection, and a lack of new theories that extend beyond one's academic discipline in order to offer new explanations for the experiential reality of a mixed race individual's lived experiences and identity choices.

Secondly, the majority of these development models have primarily focused on Black or White identity development (Daniels, 2001; Poston, 1990; Root, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Rowe, Bennett & Atkinson, 1994). Few academic scholars and theorists have conducted research for the purposes of understanding biracial identity development. A recent review of literature on the development of persons identified as biracial/Black and White, concluded that most research to-date has focused on exploring this development through linear stage development models made for Blacks or Whites, and that it is sufficient to

continue to identify these groups through modifications of these models (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore, 2003; Rockquemore, Brunσμα, & Delgado, 2009; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The oversimplified dichotomous categories that assume a stage development of identity does not allow for the exploration of another identity space that is emerging, which is beyond a biracial/mixed race category.

Thirdly, the fixed factors in the individual identity development models inevitably become limitations of their methodology, and perpetuate the same racial categorization that tend to limit identity development for mixed race individuals. Leavy (2009) argues that traditional qualitative methods may no longer suit the study of identity development as our understanding of hybrid identity construction increases. In order to move the conversation forward, research that draws on the hybrid theories of Third Space and how multiracial people navigate this space must be explored.

Finally, the primarily social-psychological perspective developed by the scholars aforementioned, lacks an accompanying dialogue and collective discussion about the ideologies and discourses that structure those lived experiences. Freire (1970) would argue that dialogue is the means by which people have liberation. It is the means by which the oppressed have the opportunity to define themselves in the presence of the oppressor. It is about working from the differences between the other that allows one to really begin to experience liberation in the definition of self. Through the use of dialogue, a collective voice of complicated intersectionality of living “in the space between” two worlds, the third space, where knowledge of each world collide and intersect (Bhabha, 1994; Bolatagici, 2004), can emerge.

The Status of Mixed Race Identity Now

Over the past three decades, the scholarly work on mixed race or multiracial people has predominantly focused on processes of racial identity formation and development. The founding of *The Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* is an indicator that multiracialism is a young and budding area of scholarly investigation, suggesting that critical multiracial studies have become an important and recognizable interdisciplinary field of study. This is an important turning point, and one that shows that when the terms of future discussion are being established, change is upon us.

A significant body of research has provided the understanding that racial identities of biracial and multiracial people are complex, and built on a multifaceted matrix of experience. Based on this research, we now know is that these identities are negotiated through social interaction (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002), racialized through experience (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002; Rockquemore and Arend, 2002), embedded in racialized social encounters (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002; Jaret and Reitzes, 1999); and deeply connected to intersectionality (Gillem, 2000; Phillips, 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002). This research suggests that lived experience of mixed race people is very complex. The challenge is that over the past few years, research has overlooked the connection between these collective lived experiences as something unique to understanding its impact on identity construction.

Outside of academic research and in the arena of social media, people have created and joined social groups, blogs, and websites dedicated to a concept or cause, which has created a plethora of information at one's finger tips with the potential to help to gain a personalized understanding of how individuals identified as Black and

White/mixed/biracial/other understand themselves. This has created opportunities and space for new ways of conceptualizing race and discrediting the racial binary models.

Intersectionality

The multiplicity of identity has been researched further through the concept of intersectionality by several prominent African American feminist authors (Crenshaw, 1996; Hill Collins, 1995, 1998; hooks, 1989). Coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, the term intersectionality or the matrix of domination, underscores the multidimensionality of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). The concept emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s from critical race studies, and is the idea that the crossing of socially constructed categories of oppression and privilege such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, interdependently form interlocking patterns that produce distinct sets of perspectives and consequences among individuals (Andersen, 1996; Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; King, 1998; McCall, 2005). Andersen wrote, "The interlocking patterns in turn serve as a basis for developing multiple systems of domination that affect access to power and privileges, influence social relationships, construct meanings, and shape everyday people's lives" (1996, p. xii). The social location that is formed by this intersection of social constructions of oppression and privilege is crucial in understanding the complexity of an individual's lived experiences, including their actions, choices, and outcomes (Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris & Hamilton, 2009).

The central beliefs of intersectionality are: "(a) no social group is homogenous, (b) people must be located in terms of social structures that capture the power relations implied by those structures, and (c) there are unique, non-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group" (Stewart & McDermott, 2004, pp. 531 – 532). From its

inception, intersectionality has had a long-standing interest in the intersection of race and gender, primarily since it rejects the ‘single-axis framework’ often embraced by both feminist and anti-racist scholars. Instead it offers a new analysis on “the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s life experiences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Leslie McCall emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, calling it “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall, 2005, p.1771). This important theoretical contribution has become the standard multidisciplinary approach for analyzing individuals’ experiences of both identity and oppression.

Identity development models have traditionally offered separate treatments of racial identities (Cross, 1991, 2001; Phinney, 1990) and for example, sexual identities (Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989 as cited in Stirratt, Meyer, Ouellette, & Gara, 2007). There are important differences in these identity development models. However, they postulate that individuals must undergo a process of identity acquisition that includes attaching greater positive valence to a particular identity and successfully integrating the identity into one’s self-concept. This assumes that greater positive valence and integration of racial identities leads to more desirable outcomes, which are then associated with better psychological adjustment. However, identity multiplicity and intersectionality suggest that individuals who identify with both sexual and racial/ethnic minority groups will experience a unique combination of stressors and adaptations correlated to the concurrent development and articulation of both identities. Identity multiplicity and intersectionality are particularly relevant in research with individuals who may encounter multiple forms of oppression along the lines of gender,

race/ethnicity, and sexuality (Stirratt, Meyer, Ouellette, & Gara, 2007). Due to the simultaneous experience of all these identities resulting in different meanings and experiences than what could be captured by consideration of race alone, researchers should also consider gender, sexuality, and other identities that may be the focus of oppression or discrimination.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Given the fact elite White males developed and control western structures of knowledge validation, their interests take over the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship, referred to as Eurocentric, positivist knowledge. Based on these ideas, knowledge is defined and espoused by the following four positivist points: 1) True and correct knowledge only comes when the observer separates his or her self from what is being studied and an objective stance is present to guard against bias; 2) Personal emotions must be set aside; 3) Social science is value-free so no personal ethics or values can enter into the research; and 4) Knowledge advances through accumulation and adversarial debate (Collins, 2000). As a result, women's perspectives, specifically Black women's perspectives and experiences have been consistently distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge.

Collins argues that Black women are uniquely juxtaposed at the focal point of two powerful and prevalent systems of oppression: race and gender. Referring to this position as "intersectionality", it creates the possibility of seeing and understanding more spaces of overlapping interests. This social position is influential in the discussion around race and gender, as well as being influential in how we understand knowledge. Black

feminist thought pushes back on the White male interpretation of the world.

Collins offers us four characteristics of alternative epistemologies as ways of knowing and validating knowledge that challenges the dominant discourse and White male status quo. The first point suggests that alternative epistemologies are built on lived experiences rather than objectified position. Subjects are turned into the objects of study, connecting to personal experience. The second dimension is the use of dialogue rather than adversarial debate. The use of dialogue assumes at least two participants and implies the emergence of knowledge through the conversation that takes place. The third characteristic is built around the ethics of caring. Collins argues that knowledge does not require the researcher to be separate from one's own thoughts and feelings, rather, "Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of the argument" (2000, p. 263). The fourth point is focused on personal accountability. This approach believes that all knowledge is based on beliefs, which are things assumed to be true. These four alternative epistemologies, or ways of knowing, are not separable from our lived experience, nor are they abstract entities that sit apart from an individual's political values and personal beliefs.

The notion of the lived experience from Collins' perspective allows for the intersectionality of various social positions to be explored: race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and so on. Recognizing the tensions between these characteristics can be explored as unique matrices of intersecting interests. Collins believes that understanding the connectivity of these issues allows for the creation of safe spaces, "social spaces where [B]lack women can speak freely" (p. 100). She identifies three

primary safe spaces for Black women; one of them being the relationship between the women.

The importance of these safe spaces is that they provide an opportunity for self-definition, which Collins believes is the first step toward empowerment, and movement away from being defined by and for the use of others. The safe spaces are also exclusionary, because “by definition, such spaces become less ‘safe’ if shared with those who were not [B]lack and female” (p. 110). These groups are purposely exclusionary, with the intention that the space allows for the struggles of self-identity to be discussed creating between group knowledge based on the collective experiences of the individuals. The implications of Black feminist thought are uniquely related to this research for the reason that this study is centered on the idea of the lived experience. The unique social experiences of the participants and the creation of a safe space for dialogue, allow participants a space to explore and express themselves apart from the dominant discourse.

New Social Movement Theory and Collective Identity

Cultural changes over the past several decades have led to an increase in new social movements across the United States that are focused on challenging the traditional categories of social movement theories. Included in these new social movements are gender, race and ethnicity. There are literally thousands of definitions of what a ‘social movement’ is. A working definition of what we see as social movements and (their) collective actions is that social movements are interlocking networks of groups, social networks and individuals and the connection between them with a shared collective identity who try to prevent or promote societal change by non-institutionalized tactics (della Porta, D. & Diani, M, 1999).

Contributors to the theories offer a new perspective that supports the redefinition of the field of social movements and advances an understanding of them through cross-cultural research, comparing with older social movements, and an examination of the dimensions of identity—individual, collective, and melding of the two. How does a set of individuals become a collective entity we can identify and name as a social movement? How is it sustained over time?

The concept of collective identity is not unique to social movement studies, as it is also used in studies on nationalism, religion, political culture, behavior, organizational theory and psychology, among others. It has also been used extensively by social movement scholars who are seeking to explain how social movements generate and sustain commitment and cohesion between people over time (Hunt & Benford 2004; Hunt, S., Benford R., & Snow, D., 1994; Polletta & Jasper 2001; Snow 2001).

The concept of collective identity does not have one consensual definition (Snow, 2001). Polletta and Jasper (2001) locate collective identity within the individual, defining it as: ‘an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution’ (p. 285). However, it is more frequently understood as something generated and created between individuals, such as Snow’s definition (2001), which places collective identity in a shared space, explicitly linking it to collective agency. For Snow, it is “a shared sense of ‘oneness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one more actual or imagined sets of others (online document, no page number). Whittier (1995) conceptualizes collective identity as “located in action and interaction-observable phenomena-rather than in individual self-

conceptions, attitudes, or beliefs” (p. 16). Another influential definition offered by Taylor and Whittier (1995), define collective identity as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences and solidarity” (p. 105).

Snow (2001) and Taylor and Whittier’s (1992) definitions draw in part on the work of Alberto Melucci (1980, 1988, 1989a, b, 1995, 1996) who brought the issue of collective identity into the study of contemporary new social movements. Written in a European context where class-based movements were declining and new social movements (e.g. environmental, peace, autonomous, feminist) could not be explained by member’s shared class position were emerging, Melucci rejected the idea that collective identity was a given. Rather than analyze a social movement as an already constituted collective actor, Melucci sought to understand how it became a movement in the first place. He tried to bridge the gap between individual beliefs and meanings and collective action by studying the dynamic process through which individuals negotiate, understand and construct their action through shared repeated interaction.

Summary

The lived experiences of individuals are rarely congruent with distinct and exclusive categories. Instead they are situated at the boundaries of multiple identities: a neither/ nor rather than an either/or perspective (Boltagici, 2004; Gilbert, 2005). Offering space for individuals to share their stories as well as reflect on other stories that might awaken them to different memories or reflect on old experiences anew. This creates a new opportunity for transforming how we view identity construction, and how we talk about it. The opportunity to do that collectively where it can emerge may hold more value and meaning than for an individual to do it alone. The creation of this new

space, a third space, that is inclusive and beyond the existing notions of race and identity.

The lived experience of biracial people draws a stark picture of the ways in which mixed raced individuals are deeply impacted by a society that is highly polarized by race and the categories used to define it. We live in a society in which race and racial categorization matter very much to all people, both the White majority and the people of color minority; however, mixed race individuals are often located at the margins of the dominant racial paradigm, and are thus subject to categorization based on monoracial constructs. The bodies of research presented provide a foundation for understanding the experiences of individuals who are attempting to develop their racial identity, from adolescence to adulthood. To promote a healthy identity development process, racial and mixed race identity development models have been developed with the intention to help mixed race persons choose their identity and deal with any opposition they face.

What we do know about mixed race and biracial identity is that it is consistently in flux, fluid, and not able to fit within a designated set of pre-defined categories as described by stage theorists. Across multiple studies across multiple decades, there appears to be a common way to study and talk about these topics. Stonequist (1937) offered a historical look at being on the margins of a full identity, a concept that may perhaps link to the notion of in between, or a liminal space. Erikson (1968, 1980) and Kegan (1982, 1994) offer a universal understanding of human development, without specifying race, gender or other classification. Helms (1984, 1990, 1994, 1995), Cross (1971, 1991, 1995), and Atkinson, Morton & Sue (1979, 1989, 1998) talked about people of color as individuals and attempted to create a foundation for understanding racial identity development. Other scholars argue that identities are negotiated through social

interaction (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002), racialized through experience (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002; Rockquemore and Arend, 2002), embedded in racialized social encounters (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001, 2002; Jaret and Reitzes, 1999); and deeply connected to intersectionality (Gillem, 2000; Phillips, 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002). However, relying solely on these models as the only way to describe identity development leaves a gap in the knowledge about collective identity construction and the lived experience. Stonequist basically recognized that there are dominant groups that are defining the experience of the mixed race, but each of these models fail to offer a collective construct by which we can name what it means to be in this third space.

It is critical to understand these models in order to provide a historical basis for understanding the purpose of this dissertation. What is problematic is the focus on mimicking the monoracial theories, the staged linear development, and internalized *individualized* processes as the only way to understand identity development. Rather, it is helpful to consider the progression of these models, as they outline a movement towards a societal need to understand biracial identity formation.

This research it is not a call to abandon identity development models or their place in understanding this phenomenon. It is an attempt to build upon their scholarship, and offer alternative ways of inquiry into the conceptualization of identity that account for individual experiences within broader discourses of ideology and power. It is evident that there is a need for an examination of the impact of the collective, through dialogue on social construction of biracial identity formation. Sampson (1993) wrote,

We are now in a better position, I believe, to understand the claims of movement advocates regarding voice. To have voice when one is required to speak in the

forms allowed by the dominant discourse is still not to have voice, that is, not to have self-determining self-representation. It is merely to speak as the dominant discourse permits, which means either to speak as one has been constructed by that discourse or to speak through its gaze, perspective, and standpoint. It is not to have one's own voice but rather to be restricted to the voice that is given. (p. 1227)

Collective dialogue is a needed element in creating space for a new voice to emerge, because it is able to add another layer that is not necessarily present in current understanding, or at least discussed at any great length from or within a collective space model. A voice that speaks in collective terms may be a means to, or a sign of a shared identity. A voice can express the cognition of a collective identity.

This study sought to add an alternative resource to the growing body literature on identity formation and meaning making. In arguing for the ongoing scholarship of multiracialism, I propose the creation of an alternative viewpoint that focuses on the collective lived reality of these individuals using a liminal space lens. More specifically, the intention was to participate in the creation of a dialogic space that is free of dominant structure, by using a collective dialogue model for exploring the mixed race identity. The enhanced understanding that comes from this comprehensive qualitative examination will contribute to the foundational knowledge of mixed race identity construction.

I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently. - Cherrie Moraga, La Guera

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

This research was designed to construct a third space by arranging for an open collective dialogue from which a new discourse might emerge. This dialogue became the instrument for data collection, a scenario for an exploratory research methodology. Through a collective dialogical framework, an understanding of a collective sense of identity emerged and was documented in the voice and word choice of the women who participated.

As the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the collective on the formation of collective identity as unique from the individual process of identity construction, qualitative research methods were used. Key characteristics within the qualitative paradigm are grounded in the constructivist worldview. This includes a holistic way of approaching reality as time and context bound, rather than administered by a set of general rules (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research places a strong emphasis on “thick” description and interpretation, incorporating the “emic (insiders’) perception and perspectives (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative methods are highly appropriate when conducting research with marginalized populations (Patton, 2002).

The study of phenomena sets the intention to return and re-examine overlooked experiences and possibly uncover new and/or forgotten meanings. In order to explore the impact of the collective on the formation of collective identity as distinct from the

individual's process of identity construction, the following research question framed the study: *How can a dialogic approach create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White?* Under this question were four supporting questions: (a) What is the relationship between social constructions of identity and the lived experience? (b) In what ways does negotiating an in-between hybrid space influence one's identity formation? (c) What is the shared meaning attributed to the lived experience of being a woman with one Black and one White parent? (d) What is the impact of a collective dialogue on the construction and naming of a shared identity?

Rationale for Choosing a Qualitative Methodology

An investigation of this nature requires a deep understanding into the unique experiences and contexts of those social situations from the view of the participants. This calls for a methodology that allow for depth rather than breadth. Qualitative research places importance on the meanings expressed in the testimonials and on the interpretations as essential human processes for understanding the experience of others (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Because researchers are part of the reality of what they are studying, their neutrality becomes impossible. Instead, their goal becomes a "taming of the subjectives" (Peshkin, 1998), to become aware of their biases and prejudices, and to monitor them through the data collection and analysis processes. Qualitative methods assert that true knowledge is gained through prolonged immersion into the topic, and evidence for claims should be recorded and expressed through verbal and narrative means (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). According to Lindolf and Taylor, "qualitative inquiry is a

uniquely personal and involved activity” (p. 5). Therefore, the chosen method must lend itself to these requirements.

Since this research topic emerged from my lived experience, a method that was personal and promotes self reflection was an appropriate choice for this study. For this reason, I selected to use qualitative research methods, drawing heavily from the influence of phenomenology and autoethnography. I chose to pull from these two methodologies because each of them explores areas at the core of the lived experience. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that seeks to describe and interpret socially constructed realities through examining the lived experiences of the study participants, from the first-person point of view (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002). Autoethnography is the studying of one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture, where the researcher immerses herself in the “self” while also observing as researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology

With its roots in the traditions of Edmund Husserl (1920) and Martin Heidegger (1927), phenomenology seeks to gain “a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) with a focus on “how people interpret their lives and make meaning of what they experience” (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000, p. 5). The beginning and end point of phenomenological research is *lived experience*. The descriptive experience is the primary focus and utilizes an inquiry-based approach that employs questioning, describing, and narrative, followed by analyzing emerging themes to reveal a deeper understanding of the lived experience (Creswell, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The underlying premise within a phenomenological research

design is to study the participants' feelings, thoughts, words and perceptions in an attempt to understand the experience and "reduce individuals with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence, being able to grasp the 'very nature of the thing'" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). The goal of phenomenological research, then, is to reveal this deeper meaning of life events as experienced, constructed, and understood by the participants (Orbe, 2002; Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research is guided by research questions that are concerned with meaning, rather than answering a hypothesis. It serves to make the lived experiences of the participants and the researcher co-creators of meaning and reality (Orbe, 1998, 2002). The major instruments for data collection are open-ended interviews and reflective journals.

Autoethnography

Ellis & Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as an,

Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (p. 739)... autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation. (p. 742)

Autoethnography engages an ethnographical analysis where the researcher performs a narrative study pertaining to themselves as intimately related to a particular phenomenon. In autoethnography, the researcher shifts their observation back and forth between the self and culture in order to explore and understand their own lived experience within society (Alexander, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The goal of autoethnography is cultural understanding that is at the base of autobiographical experiences.

To achieve this ethnographic intent, autoethnographers undertake the typical ethnographic research process of data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and report writing. They collect field data by means of participation, self-observation, interview, and document review; verify data through triangulation of sources and contents; analyze and interpret data to decipher the cultural meanings of events, behaviors, and thoughts; and write autoethnography. Autoethnographers are expected to treat their autobiographical data with a critical, analytical, and interpretive lens to detect the cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told of them (Alexander, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). At the end of a thorough self-examination within its cultural context, autoethnographers hope to gain a cultural understanding of self and others.

Methodological Integration

By integrating aspects of phenomenology and autoethnography within the qualitative research method of this study, I intended to honor the tradition of these methods in order to reveal the deeper meaning of life events as experienced, constructed, and understood by the participants and myself (Orbe, 2002; Patton, 2002). These combined methods serve to make the lived experiences of the participants and the researcher the co-creators of a collective meaning and reality (Orbe, 1998, 2002). Through scholarly investigation, and application of these qualitative methods, this study uncovered the underlying meanings embedded within the narratives of the participants to construct the beginning of a new language. These narratives may represent a collective description of the lived experience. Phenomenologists use an intentional process of reflection to attempt to capture the essence of the phenomenon, the end result being the emergence of several themes that assist in giving "shape to the shapeless" (van Manen,

1990, p. 88), and in this case, perhaps the emergence of a new language to describe biracial identity.

Researcher as Participant

In this qualitative research, I was a primary instrument for the data collection and analysis. Because I am a woman who is identified as Black and White/biracial/mixed/other, it was essential for me to be aware of any potential biases I had as well as an awareness of the effect of the researcher might have on the participants (Locke, 2000). My lived experience is a part of this story, yet it just one part of the collective. It was imperative that I identified any bias or personal interests about the research topic, and pay attention to keeping the narrative focused on the research, rather than on me as the participant researcher. Moustakas (1994) describes the phenomenologist's research attitude in the following way: "presumably this person has set aside biases and has come to a place of readiness to gaze on whatever appears and to remain with that phenomenon until it is understood, until a perceptual closure is realized" (p. 73). Moustakas emphasizes that in phenomenological research "I, the experiencing person, remain present. I, as a conscious person, am not set aside" and "with an open, transcendental consciousness, I carry out the Epoché" (p. 87). Therefore, issues to consider were the validity of the study that would include my own lived experience, including the description, interpretation, researcher bias, and reaction. The use of video and tape recordings provided an accurate description of the dialogues. Additionally, one of the participants familiar with academic research, agreed to serve as a reviewer of my findings and interpretations of the data in order to confirm they represented the group accurately. Further, I conducted member checking by providing all the participants access

to transcriptions and audio recordings to make sure that responses were accurate.

The dialogues were held at a local community center in San Diego, California. This was needed to avoid researcher bias. According to Merriam, “The researcher must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it, including the physical setting, the people, the overt and covert agendas, and the nonverbal behavior” (p. 21). The post dialogue interviews were held at my home for two of the participants, at the house of one of the participants, the workplace of one participant, and my office.

The following section outlines the protocol procedures in contacting potential participants, the criteria for selection, as well as the methods to obtain data through a questionnaire, two dialogues, and the interviews. Additional areas in this section will discuss the analysis and coding of data procedures.

Participant Selection

In qualitative research, the collection of extensive data from a small group of participants is sufficient as the researcher can immerse him/herself in the data and generate a detailed interpretation of the meaning making (Creswell, 2007). As the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings to the whole population, a sample size calculation can be highly dependent upon the data and themes that emerge from the research and the stories that are recorded, transcribed and interpreted by the researcher and participants. Qualitative studies have been conducted with as few as three participants. Given that the research was conducted through dialogue, I recruited approximately five women to participate in the research. A sample size of six women, including myself as participant, allowed me to situate myself within their collective story and interpret the meaning of our intersecting lived experiences.

Participant Selection

Because of their unique history within the context of American society, this research focused on women with one self-identified Black parent and one self-identified White parent. Selecting women to participate in a qualitative study is purposeful because the research recruits women who have experiences with the phenomenon and who will articulate their experiences (Creswell, 2005; Lavery, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1995; van Manen, 1997). With this in mind, I utilized a purposeful sampling procedure with the following criteria: (a) Participants must be female. The reason for limiting the participants to being female is because I am a woman, and this may allow for a more resonate collective experience; (b) Using the Eriksonian (1968) definition of identity, participants must have one Black and one White parent that the participant identified as such; (c) Participants must self-identify as Black and White, biracial, mixed, mulatto, or other; (d) Participants must be born and raised in the United States. This is connected to the historical context in which this study is grounded; (e) Participants must be over 30 years of age in order to capture more of the influential development milestones associated with identity formation; (f) Participants must be willing and cooperative to share and discuss their life experiences with others during live onsite scheduled sessions during fall and winter. Since part of the purpose of this study is to understand meaning making across multiple identities, participants needed to be able to share with the group all aspects of their identities to the best of their abilities.

Participant Recruitment

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of San Diego on October 22, 2013. Once I received approval, I indicated to

friends and colleagues the general idea of my research study and ask for referrals to women who they believed to be identified as biracial and would meet the criteria above that may be interested in participating. In addition, I posted announcements on several mixed race social groups on Facebook, as well as posted a call for participants to mixedracestudies.org and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation. Interested students contacted me using the email listed on the announcement (Appendix A). I met with each participant at a mutually agreed upon location for privacy. I explained the purpose of the study, informed them of the audio/video taping, confidentiality, the required completion of a participant reflection questionnaire, participation in two group dialogues, and one post-dialogue conversational interview between each participant and researcher. After the study was explained and the potential research participants' questions were answered, those individuals who agreed to participate completed an informed consent form. Overall the participants were quite interested in participating in my research and asked questions about the time commitment and scheduling of the dialogues and interviews. The signed consent was obtained before data collection and a copy was given to each participant.

Data Collection Methods

Dialogue

Research and theory suggest that the experience of a collective dialogue is an opportunity for a potential emancipation from the dominant discourse (Bohm, 2004; Issacs, 1999). As conceived by David Bohm (1996), dialogue is a multi-faceted process that allows for a shared human experience at the collective level. Bohm argues that the use of dialogue as a process allows for the exploration of an unusually wide range of

human experience: our closely held values; the nature and intensity of our emotions; the patterns within our thought processes; the function of memory; the import of inherited cultural myths; and the manner in which our neurophysiology structures moment-to-moment experience (McDonald, Bammer, & Deane, 2009; Bohm, 1996). Bohm states, “In its deepest sense, then, dialogue is an invitation to test the viability of traditional definitions of what it means to be human, and collectively to explore the prospect of an enhanced humanity’ (1996, vii–viii). The purpose of such a dialogue reveals the incoherence in our thought process, and the lack of connection to a lived reality. Without dialogue, the lived reality can change, while the thought does not change to reflect the change in reality. The mental model rolls on, while the same individualized thought process stays stagnant, stuck in the past. In dialogue, people become observers of their own thinking, as they “ground-truth” their thinking with the thoughts of others (Senge, 1993, p. 242).

Dialogue is understood in this study as a collective thought process where knowledge and meaning are co-created by the participants and the researcher through the personal sharing of lived experiences, reflections, thought, emotion, and questions. Dialogue invites people to a present space where the deeper self is explored, understood, and created (Bohm, 2004; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004). It may allow the people involved to collectively create a shared meaning. Bohm defines shared meaning as the “glue” or “cement” that holds people and societies together. From culture, Bohm believes that a group between twenty and forty people allows for a representation of a “microculture”. At this point, it can be assumed that a microcosm is present—a diverse small group representative of the larger culture. This is where collectively shared

meaning emerges. Bohm believes that if people were able to think in a coherent way (i.e. all minds focused on the same thing), it would create tremendous power among them. He wrote, “The individual thought is mostly the result of collective thought and of interaction with other people. The language is entirely collective, and most of the thoughts in it are” (1996, p. 13). This power of coherence—of sustained shared dialogue—would exist not only on a recognizable level, but on a tacit level as well.

According to Bohm, the tacit level is that which is unspoken; it is beyond words. It is the knowledge in and of itself. When we are able to achieve this level of shared meaning, of shared consciousness, we are communicating collectively on a tacit level, allowing us to intelligently do whatever is necessary, together and unconstrained; we are simply free. We collectively think, suspending our opinions and looking at them and at one another’s. Through the dialogue and the sharing of collective meanings, truth will emerge, as if of its own choice. “Each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it” (p. 27). We start to move beyond these opinions to something new and creative. This is Bohm’s definition of dialogue. It is a culture of people sharing meaning, coherently thinking.

By critically examining the female participants’ collective experiences, this study examined dialogue and the resulting narrative in a shared discourse around identity construction. The research attempted to go beyond the familiar ways of viewing biracial identity. More importantly, it was a way to work with the actual experience of mixed race people that offers a representation of the lived reality of both an individual and their ‘only’ness, simultaneously with their concurrent recognition of the collective experience. Using dialogue to make sense of the lived experience allowed for the researcher and

participants to collectively become “aware of the deep connection between what is in them, and what occurs outside of them” (Dialogos Institute, 2013).

Leadership Lens

Given that this is a dissertation for a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies, it is important to make consider the connection of this study to conversations about leadership. Bohm’s concept of dialogue is not about leadership. However, leadership cannot be studied without considering how individuals engage in conversation, communicate their thoughts, or collaboratively work in groups. Dialogue allows people to go beyond any one individual’s understanding in order gain insights that may not be achieved individually, something that leaders are asked to do, and also ask others to do as well.

According to Bohm, a dialogue takes place when all parties come together to explore a subject in a totally open-minded way. From a leadership lens, this particular type of conversation is important for people to participate in and practice, in order to become or continue to grow as effective leaders: conversations build relationships, conversations develop others, conversations are needed to make decisions, and conversations allow us to take action. A new kind of mind comes into being which is based on the development of a shared meaning. Bohm wrote, “People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting: rather they are participating in the pool of common meaning, capable of constant development and change” (1996b, p.175). In dialogue, a group explores complex difficult issues from many points of view. Individuals are asked to suspend their assumptions so that they may communicate their assumptions freely. “The result is a free exploration that brings to the surface the full depth of people’s experience and thought, and yet can move beyond their

individual views (Senge, 1993, p. 241). This can lead to new and deeper understanding that offers new ways of communication for facing the crises of today's society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness.

Dialogue as a Design

Dialogue is a process where knowledge and meaning are co-constructed by the participants through a personal sharing of experience, emotion, and thought (Bohm, 1996). David Bohm's concept of dialogue, as extended by William Isaacs (1999) has been selected for my study based on his philosophical connections to the meaning of human experience. Bohm defines dialogue as a "multi-faceted process, looking well beyond typical notions of conversational parlance and exchange. It is a process which explores an unusually wide range of human experience... such an inquiry necessarily calls into question deeply-held assumptions regarding culture, meaning, and identity" (Bohm, 1996, p. xvi). He continues by stating that dialogue "is an invitation to test the viability of traditional definitions of what it means to be human, and collectively to explore the prospect of an enhance humanity" (p. xvi). Further, Bohm considers dialogue to be something qualitatively different from discussion or debate and not interchangeable with either. The intention is to share and create meaning through dialogue rather than to argue or debate our own truths or that of the dominant discourse.

What often prevents true dialogue is that as individuals become attached to their opinions or ideas, it is then used as a lens through which they experience their opinions or ideas as truth. What they fail to realize is that their different opinions are the result of past thoughts, past experiences, past conversations, and our environment, all of which they have allowed to be programmed into memory and social construct. At this point they

often identify themselves totally with these opinions and react in defense of them, sometimes unconsciously. Bohm wrote, “it is as if you yourself are under attack when your opinion is challenged” (p. 10). Bohm intends for dialogue to go into the whole thought process and shift the way in which the thought process occurs collectively in order to enrich the meaning for individuals.

Participant Reflection Questionnaire

The research process began with signing the Informed Consent form, followed by the release of a Participant Reflection Questionnaire. Once all the participants signed the informed consent form, I sent them a link to the questionnaire using SurveyMonkey.com (see Appendix D). This link was sent on December 2, 2013, and I asked them to complete the questionnaire by December 15, 2013. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit information about the participant’s identity development and construction, and their experiences as someone who has been identified as biracial. The intention was that the questions would allow the participant to shift into a reflective space around how they see themselves and their personal identity construction.

Collective Dialogue

Using dialogue as the method of data collection allowed for the inquiry to shift from a duality (interviewer-interviewee) to a process where all participants are co-inquirers with the researcher. It is important to remember that it was not the intention of the dialogue to solve a problem, but to create meaning making of the lived experience of the participants. As the participant researcher, I prepared a set of guiding questions (see Appendix E) to begin the space of inquiry, however, it was intended that the collective conversation would emerge into the direction it collectively needed to go. The process

incorporated the intentional, emotional, and experiential responses from the participants. Dialogue as a format worked because the conversation it elicited followed the natural, human thinking and reflective process. By the skillful use of questions, a facilitator can simply slow the process down so that the group can think and reflect collectively. This mode of guidance through the dialogue with an open script is intended to encourage collective thought – people collectively thinking together and arriving at a shared meaning and understanding that is free from hostility, and judgment; a participatory collective consciousness (Bohm, 1996).

Dialogue provides a basis for communication where a sense of meaning, purpose and significance can emerge (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999). It allows a group to share diverse perspectives in a non-confrontational manner creating an opportunity for people to expand their perspectives. Creswell (2005) suggests that the researcher reduce the entire study to a single overarching question and several sub questions. He proposes that the questions be “open-ended, evolving, and non-directional” (p. 99). This is in line with Bohm’s (1996) conception of dialogue in that there is no fixed purpose, no agenda, just a space for the dialogue to emerge. In this particular case, there is a purpose, however the intention of the research is to allow the conversation to “flow” as it needs to. Openness is critical to the conversation exchange, which is minimized by a limited set of direct questions (Laverty, 2003; Patton, 2003).

Prior to the first dialogue, I made myself available to all participants, should they wish to discuss the research or ask questions. I was open with the participants about my own identity and plan to co-participate in the dialogue. Consent for this type of research

study was an ongoing process involving the researcher and participants to ensure that each participant was kept informed of their rights at all stages. For this reason, I emailed a .pdf version of the signed consent form as well as provided printed copies as each dialogue.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Self-Identified Racial/Ethnic Identity	Socio Economic Class	Highest Education Completed
Kendall	38	Black and White	Middle	Graduate school
Tallulah	36	Human	Working	Some college
Jenny	53	Biracial (Black/White)	Middle	Graduate school
Sassy	32	Other	Middle	Some college
Lizzie Marie	43	Biracial: Black/White	Upper Middle	Graduate school
Miranda	36	Mixed or my dad's Black and my mom's White	Working/Middle	

First dialogue. The first dialogue was held on December 21, 2013 and lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. I provided light snacks and refreshments, as well as reimbursed any parking costs the participants endured. Before the dialogue began I went over the consent form information and clarified the nature of the study, the reason for audio and tape recording, and the confidentiality agreement. When we began, I asked the participants to introduce themselves to one another and provide a brief history in whatever way they choose to share. Guiding, open-ended questions were used to gain the

participant's perspective on their experience, while providing space for them to describe the experience in her own words. Minimal notes were taken during the dialogue.

Second dialogue. The second dialogue was held on January 11, 2014, and lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. It was anticipated that this schedule would allow each participant an opportunity to reflect on their own experience of the dialogue, and bring forward additional reflections that they may have had about their life experience. The second dialogue had a second set of guiding questions that was developed as a result of what emerged from the first dialogue. Minimal notes were taken during the dialogue.

Post Dialogue Interview

Participant interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that was based on the data collected from the dialogue. A semi-structured approach lent itself well to this study since it allowed the researcher to refer to guiding questions, while also allowing flexibility to probe participants on topics that arose from the dialogue (Patton, 2002). Each interview took approximately one hour. The proposal specified that detailed notes would be taken during the interview focusing on the dynamics of the conversation, the mannerisms, and emotions shown by the participant, however I chose not to take notes so as to allow the participant to feel like she was participating in a regular conversation rather than being interviewed. The interviews were digitally recorded, and analyzed for common themes and codes, according to qualitative methods (Creswell; 2003; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Participant Checking

Once the dialogue recordings were transcribed, I sent all the participants a link to

view the transcriptions and well as listened to the audio. Three of the participants responded to the transcription review and notated errors. Even if it was only a few participants, the member checking helped to increase the credibility of the data and therefore the study (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis Methods

The goal of this analysis was to reach a place of collective understanding of the lived experience through the construction of an integrated new discourse about the experience. Within qualitative research studies, data can include the researcher's personal reflections, information from participants, and depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research study itself (Laverty, 2003). I moved from an individualized understanding of my own lived experience, to an explicit comprehension of the collective meaning of the other participants,

...by looking and re-looking at the data, searching beneath the works and at what is not immediately obvious, the researcher aims to end up with an ontological perspective of the participant's experiences...the researcher attempts to 'read between the lines' and uncover the true essence of the experience. (McConnell-Henry, T., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. ,2009, p. 11)

The data collection method of this study allowed for a process of co-creation between the researcher and the participants, in which the very meaning and new language occurs through a circle of researching, reflection, and collective interpretation.

Analysis of Narrative

The original proposal detailed a data analysis process inspired by Polkinghorne's (1995) concept of analysis of the narrative. The term *analysis of narrative* was coined by Polkinghorne and refers to "paradigmatic analysis [that] results in descriptions of themes

that holds across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters or settings” (p.12). Polkinghorne notes, “Stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes” (p. 8). Analysis of narrative seeks to find common themes or concepts that become noticeable through the collection of data.

Transcription. Transcription is not merely an objective account of the recorded conversation, but an “interpretive and constructive” re-presentation of the participant’s story (Lapadat, 2000; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 72). While I used a transcription service to complete the task, I requested that they do a verbatim transcription of interviews, including pauses, silences, and expressions such as ‘like’ and ‘uh’. Had I chosen not to use verbatim transcription, I would have been responsible for selecting what text to include, while trying to maintain the integrity of the women’s story (Lapadat, 2000). By removing verbal cues such as pauses and silences, this would have limited my ability to interpret the whole essence of the experience, as I believe that pauses and silences add context and insight to the data. I felt that this was the best way to capture exactly what each woman said.

Development of a Thematic Structure. For the first read through, I printed each transcription and read the transcript through the end to capture the holistic meaning and discover the fundamental essence of the entire text (van Manen, 1997). Second, I read each transcription with the audio/video playing to confirm what was transcribed. Third, I used a qualitative software program to read each transcription again to highlight sentences, statements or phrases that seemed essential to the meaning of the phenomenon (Loiselle et al., 2007; van Manen, 1997). During each of these readings I asked myself,

“What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, 1997, p. 93). These statements or phrases were clustered together to serve as the building blocks for the thematic structure. Themes emerged from this reading and re-reading that became the units for reflecting and interpretation (Loiselle et al., 2007).

Through thematic analysis of the participants’ retrospective understanding of their lived experience, this study incorporated analysis of narrative in an attempt to integrate the lived experience of six women into a collective perspective. For data analysis I began with hard copies of the transcripts and then used a qualitative software program to begin coding. After reading each transcript several times in the manner described above, I began to highlight statements and sentences that appeared essential to the participants’ lived experience as well as their experience in the dialogue.

Emic Approach. To the extent possible, the analysis employed an emic approach to identifying themes and patterns in the narrative data (Patton, 2002, p. 454, 455). In taking an emic approach, a researcher tries to put aside prior theories and assumptions in order to let the participants and data “speak” to them and to allow themes, patterns, and concepts to emerge. During this process, key phrases and terms that appear to describe practices and ideas that the participants indicated were significant were used as categories and translated into codes. It does not reveal what someone really thinks or feels because any truth is simply a construction of their own perspective, but is skillfully woven to bring into being versions of the self that serve specific purposes.

The emic categories developed inductively were translated into codes. The first dialogue was transcribed and coded prior to the second dialogue. The second dialogue

was transcribed and coded prior to the post dialogue interview. I initially coded data within each of the four supporting research questions. I also indicated when pieces of data overlapped by coding to certain sub themes or words. Following the initial coding, I began highlighting the statements and sentences from each transcript. Within the software system, one can save a file that shows all the sections that are highlighted to a specific code. I used these emerging pieces of data and continued to cluster them together by research question. As I clustered the pieces of data together by research question, I returned to each cluster several times and reconsidered the significance of as well as other themes that emerged. This continuous reconsideration resulted in several pieces of data moving from cluster to cluster or being added to another theme.

As I worked, I became concerned that I was too focused on maintaining distinct themes based on the supporting research questions. I returned to the overall research question and purpose and asked myself what each theme said about the meaning of the essence of the experience. Then I asked myself what my evolving understanding of the whole experience of the participants in the collective dialogue said about that specific theme. As quotes and data clusters were reorganized throughout the creation of my thematic structure, several themes eventually emerged to answer the supporting research question, but four overall findings emerged as being essential to the meaning of whether a dialogical approach could create the conditions for the emergence of a potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White. The findings were: 1) The creation of a dialogic space allowed for shared meaning to emerge and for there to be shared recognition of one to another of an “only” experience that they had collectively; 2) There was not a rush to name this identity from a

race/ethnicity perspective because there were other identities or ways of describing self that were appropriated or created that allowed for their different yet empowering experiences; 3) Naming the collective lived experience was more important than naming the identity. 4) The use of dialogue as a methodology for exploring identity construction allowed for the complexities of being in between to be realized, and for the shared meaning of collective consciousness to emerge.

According to van Manen (1997), researchers must differentiate “between essential themes and themes that are more incidentally related to the phenomenon under study” (p.106). To achieve this, I focused on the purpose of this study throughout the reading of each transcript and data analysis. I reflected on each developing theme by asking myself if it was an element that made the phenomenon what it was, and if without it, the phenomenon would have been changed (van Manen, 1997). By asking these questions I was able to eliminate incidental themes and develop a final structure that captured the essence of the participants’ experience. This thematic structure is presented in Chapter Four.

Analysis of the Dialogical Framework using Theory U

In addition to using *analysis of narrative* as the data analysis process, I also chose to analyze the dialogical framework as the method using the concept of Theory U. I did not explicitly take into consideration Theory U in the design of the dialogue, but when I looked at the data, I found that it was a viable frame to understand and interpret the dialogical process that emerged and the collective lived experience shared by the participants.

Otto Scharmer's Theory U offers a unique combination of relevant theories and practices from the fields of phenomenology and systems thinking, organizational learning, and leadership (Nicolaidis, A. & McCallum, D., 2014). Theory U is a rich, multilayered framework some might consider challenging to apply due to its conceptual complexity. Yet it is helpful to explore Theory U through the lens of a distinct, yet related framework: Bohmian Dialogue. Bohm and Isaacs offer us a theory and method for creating shared meaning and collective space. Their concept of dialogue is an attempt to perceive the world with new eyes, not merely to solve problems using the thought that created them in the first instance. Otto Scharmer's Theory U process (2007) coincides with the dialogical framework and methodology of David Bohm (1996). Bohmian dialogue was the overall method for arriving in the collective narrative. Once the dialogical space was established, Theory U offered a way to understand the emergent process of a liminal consciousness that was created.

The essence of Theory U is a process of moving individuals, groups, and systems through the operative states, which Scharmer (2009) calls open mind, open heart, and open will. There are three main phases of the left side of the U-Process (seeing, sensing, and presencing). Theory U integrates subjective, inter-subjective, and objective dimensions in framing challenges, examining relevant data, exploring collective needs and intentions, and prototyping creative pathways for change, or the realization of shared vision (Nicolaidis, A. & McCallum, D., 2014). This gets people to the place where it is possible to access the highest future possibility, and then use that access to crystalize a vision or idea, prototype them in real, iterative actions, and eventually embody them in the form of new infrastructures and ecosystems.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative studies, researchers are most concerned with issues of bias, honesty, credibility, and authenticity (Creswell, 2003). The technique of member checking ensured the accuracy and the validity of the participants' discourse, as well as having one of the participants serve as a reviewer of my findings to ensure I was accurately representing the group. Verification instead of validity was used, placing heavy emphasis on the trustworthiness of the researcher (Creswell, 2003). My goal was to examine and set aside any biases that may have changed the way data was collected and interpreted (Creswell, 2007). I used bracketing to lessen my researcher bias as a means of being aware of presuppositions and approaching interviews in an open manner (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This method enabled me to bring to light as many aspects of the meaning as possible.

Limitations

Although this study had several strengths, it is not without limitations. Five methodological limitations have been identified. The first limitation was the restricted transferability of my study findings beyond females who are identified or self-identify as biracial/Black and White/mixed race, so results may not be applicable to other biracial individuals, males, or to other races. In general, transferability is a limitation of qualitative research, as the everyday experiences of one person will not necessarily apply to others (Walter, 1993). This limitation was addressed by focusing on generating findings that would best serve this specific group of women.

Secondly, I acknowledge that there are many contextual factors relevant to developing a deeper understanding of the lived experience. Only details that the

participants chose to share were available to contextualize and interpret participants' narratives. Therefore, certain data that may have provided additional context to the women's lived experiences were not available.

Third, those who elected to participate in the study may have been naturally more comfortable talking about biracial identity issues than those women who did not want to participate, resulting in overly optimistic findings. Because the results relied on the participants' verbal reports, it may have been difficult for the participants to state what they might have perceived as socially unacceptable feelings or viewpoints.

Fourth, because the design includes interviews and dialogues with individuals from a one location near San Diego and because of the limited number of participants, there is no intention to generalize finding in a traditional scientific sense to other persons in similar settings. The study was designed to explore what can be learned from the experiences of a small group of individuals collectively.

Finally, as the researcher participating in the experience and bringing forward my own lived experience, there is the potential for the interpretation of data to be biased based on my own lived experience and idiosyncrasies.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for my study included (a) informed consent; (b) confidentiality; and (c) potential risks and benefits.

Informed Consent

Each participant received an explanation of the purpose of the study. The women were given the opportunity to ask questions and to have these questions answered prior to consenting to participate by signing the consent form (see Appendix C). Women were

ensured that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Participants were reminded of their right to refuse to answer any question on the questionnaire, during the dialogue, and during the interview.

Confidentiality

In the context of research, confidentiality implies that researchers “protect participants” identities (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). As a researcher, I was obligated to ensure that by maintaining confidentiality I would do everything I could to protect the identity of the participants in this study (Loiselle et al., 2007). To ensure this, I used a secured storage for all transcriptions and signed documents so that the data could not be accessed by other people nor could the data presented in this dissertation and any report or presentation associated with this research be linked back to the participants (Loiselle et al., 2007). Pseudonyms were used in the writing of this dissertation to maintain confidentiality.

All material associated with my study, including consent forms, digital audio files, transcripts, were kept in a locked cabinet to which only I had access. Digital audio files were immediately moved from the recording device to my non-networked computer where files were protected by password access and firewalls.

Potential Risks

It was possible that participants could experience emotional discomfort because of the personal nature of the questions asked. If needed, participants were encouraged to pause or terminate their participation if they felt upset during the dialogue or interview and wished to consider withdrawing from the study. I also accessed contact numbers of crisis personnel in the event that a participant became extremely upset during the dialogue and

interview and required assistance. If needed, these numbers were available to the women to ensure that they were given options for safety if they felt they required support. None of the women required this support.

Potential Benefits

Before the women agreed to participate in this study, I explained that they may not receive any direct benefit from their participation. However, it was stated both verbally and in the consent form (see Appendix C) that they may find it helpful to talk about their experiences. The women were told that the information gathered during this study may help the researcher better understand in depth the experiences of women who have a Black parent and White parent, how they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as how their individual histories intersect with others.

Significance of the Study

The inspiration for this study began from my reflections on my own childhood experience and understanding of how I perceived my identity and interpreting how others perceived me. This journey is a representation of just one life experience, one story thus far. In order to move it out of the lens that I am the only one to have experienced this phenomenon, I want to know if my story is a true representation of other women who identify this way or have mixed race backgrounds.

The intention of this research study was to provide a new dialogical framework and discourse for understanding how identity is collectively constructed. Through a dialogic process, a collective experience of mixed race females was explored. While research on biracial individuals' identity formation steadily emerges, prior to this research, there had been no significantly new insight on the lived experience of the adult

female with one Black and one White parent, nor has there been an emergence of new language to describe the phenomenon.

According to Donmoyer (1990), much of the learning in qualitative research “develops experientially [and] can be categorized more as meaning making than as hypothesis generation and testing” (p.189); therefore generalizability (as that term has traditionally been defined) to other populations is not the purpose. Rather, the goal is to enlarge the understanding of a social phenomenon such as leadership constructs or development (Buchanan, 2008).

This study sought to broaden the understanding of identity construction from a dialogical third space lens, including how it is defined, constructed and discussed. This new understanding may be on the margin of mainstream academic literature on identity development. This research may contribute to the expansion of current identity theories in order to offer liberation from a dominant discourse where “the other” is categorizing and determining the experience of these individuals. More importantly, the findings of this study may contribute to a new definition for what it means to be “in-between”, a new language for how to describe and discuss this phenomenon, and the use of a more informed lens when examining how identity is understood and defined across a pluralistic society. It is assumed that the researcher and participants will be able to lead from the third space because we are willing to participate in the emergence of a collective voice, possibly creating the new language as a collective, to evolve towards higher order complexity and harmony (Bohm, 2004; Felicetti, Gastil, Hartz-Karp, & Carson, 2012; Sharmer, 2004). Based on the phenomenological nature of this study, the final results are still emerging. From a third space lens, the potential implications of this research may

allow for greater leadership efficacy for women with one Black and one White parent to describe their lived experience, move beyond current identity constructions, and collectively name their identity for themselves.

Summary

The chapter identified the methodology used to conduct this research, including the background of the study and participants, the process of data collection, and the approaches used to analyze the data. The benefits of using a dialogic framework were discussed as well as the instrumental part the researcher played in the study. Additionally, I identified all the actions taken to ensure procedures were practiced in an appropriate and confidential manner. Practices included obtaining informed consent from the participants and reporting all facets of the research. The next chapter reports the findings from the data.

Dialogue is about a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together. It is not something you do to another person. It is something you do with people . . . Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry within and between people. - William Isaacs

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The present study explored whether a dialogic approach would create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled *Black and White, Black, mulatto, biracial, mixed, or other*. A dialogic framework was used to explore in depth the lived experience of women with one Black and one White parent. Five research questions were developed to study the social constructions of identity, the influence of negotiating an in-between hybrid space on identity formation, the shared meaning attributed to the lived experience, and the impact of a collective dialogue on the formation of collective identity. Together, participants used dialogue to collectively look at how they described themselves, their processes for constructing identity, and how their individual stories intersected with other participants' stories. To gain information related to the research question and supporting research questions, data was collected through a reflection questionnaire, two group dialogues, and an individual interview. Dialogue transcriptions were coded to derive the central themes and categories that related to the supporting research questions. Each supporting question is discussed in detail, with excerpts from the dialogues included. It is from these findings and analysis that I made connections to the original research question, which will be discussed in Chapter five.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section will provide an account of who the participants were, a description of the dialogic space that emerged, and some noted themes from the dialogues and interviews. In all, these findings are not a general characterization of all women with one Black and one White parent. The participants' stories that were shared during the data collection phase are valuable in that they describe in their own words what their experiences have been. The second section will provide the results for the four supporting research questions.

Chapter five will discuss the four overall key findings that emerged. These findings were: 1) The creation of a dialogic space allowed for shared meaning to emerge and for there to be shared recognition of one to another of an “only” experience that was also voiced collectively; 2) The participants did not yet want to name this identity from a race/ethnicity perspective because they had other ways of describing self that allowed for their different yet empowering experiences to be present; 3) Naming the collective *lived* experience was, at this particular time, more important than simply naming a collective identity; and 4) The use of dialogue as a methodology for exploring identity construction allowed for the complexities of being in-between to be realized, and for the shared meaning of collective consciousness to emerge.

Emergence of a Dialogic Space

The emergence of the dialogic space created the conditions for shared meaning to be expressed by the women. Without exception, each spoke to entering the dialogue with a familiar normative sense of identity as being an “only” in the world. As the process deepened, more stories were offered to reveal an underlying collective identity that was as palpable as it was ineffable.

According to Bohm,

A new kind of mind begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning... People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning, which is capable of constant development and change. (1996, p. 175)

The dialogic space offered an opportunity for the participants to connect to other women of similar backgrounds, allowing a shift from “only” to what became “collective only”.

Once participants realized they were no longer alone in the space between, a new consciousness emerged, as did a collective voice, allowing participants to become present to a Third Space.

The dialogue was approached using a blend of the Public Conversations Project⁴ (PCP) model (Herzig & Chasin, 2006) and principles of facilitation associated with the work of David Bohm (1996). These two different orientations to dialogue when combined allow the necessary containment and structure to make the experience safe while, at the same time, afford optimal opportunity for the emergence of shared meaning. The beginning of the dialogue followed much of the PCP (Herzig & Chasin, 2006) method of organization: I introduced myself, described the intention for the dialogue, as well as my role as researcher, facilitator, and participant. In PCP’s model of dialogue, the facilitator is not a participant. However given the nature of the research, I knew that I would be participating. I explained the agenda for the two hours. I posted the guiding questions on a board so that the participants would be able to visually see them

⁴ A PCP-style dialogue aims to interrupt or prevent costly conflict-sustaining interactions and encourage new, more fruitful ways of talking and relating. PCP is rooted in the field of family therapy, and was developed by a group composed primarily of family therapists who explored the possibility that the concepts and methods of family therapy might be usefully adapted for conversations on divisive public issues (Herzig & Chasin, 2006).

throughout the dialogue. I offered an opportunity for the group to create agreements or rules for the dialogue, and asked if they had any questions.

While Bohm's method of dialogue does not follow the same steps as the PCP model, in that Bohm focuses on the exploration of the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and does not have an outline to follow to get to a particular conversation, I believed that beginning from the PCP framework was an appropriate way for the participants to connect to a common meaning, and feel comfortable with what was about to happen.

The dialogic method and process described above was used to obtain answers to the supporting research questions: (a) What is the relationship between social constructions of identity and the lived experience? (b) In what ways does negotiating an in-between hybrid space influence one's identity formation? (c) What is the shared meaning attributed to the lived experience of being a woman with one Black and one White parent? (d) What is the impact of a collective dialogue on the construction and naming of a shared identity? These questions were never directly shared with the participants because they felt more academic in nature and might confuse the participant. More direct questions were used that were intended to give the participants space to reflect.

After I obtained information about the participants and confirmed they met the criteria (i.e., they were female, over 30 years old, had one Black and one White parent that the participant identified as such, self-identified as Black and White, biracial, mixed, mulatto, or other, be born and raised in the United States), participants were invited to complete a reflection questionnaire and participate in two dialogues. The dialogue

questions were guided by domains of open inquiry to allow for rich in-depth description of the complexity of individual experiences, as well as for new meanings to be made (Creswell, 2007). The dialogues were guided and semi-structured to allow for flexibility within the conversation so that participants' stories could flow using their own direction, reflection, and word choice. The intention of the dialogue was to create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White. After the dialogue and interviews were conducted and the data was coded and analyzed, several categories emerged to generate the themes.

Creation of the Dialogue

Reflection Questionnaire

Each participant completed a reflection questionnaire (see Appendix D), which inquired about information such as racial ethnicity of the participant and her parents, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, education, and experience. This information was useful for developing a context for each participant. The participants came from various backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Their ages ranged from 32-53 years old. The racial/ethnic composition of the community in which three participants grew up was diverse, with multiple ethnic groups in and around their community. Two participants and the researcher's communities were primarily White. All participants have White mothers and Black fathers. All were college educated, and five were college graduates. The topic of race was not openly discussed in the family environment for all of them. They all felt generally accepted by others.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Self-Identified Racial/Ethnic Identity	Socio Economic Class	Highest Education Completed
Kendall	38	Black and White	Middle	Graduate school
Tallulah	36	Human	Working	Some college
Jenny	53	Biracial (Black/White)	Middle	Graduate school
Sassy	32	Other	Middle	Some college
Lizzie Marie	43	Biracial: Black/White	Upper Middle	Graduate school
Miranda	36	Mixed or my dad's Black and my mom's White	Working/Middle	

Before the Dialogue

Before the participants had arrived to the first dialogue gathering, I remembered feeling angst and a bit emotional in anticipation of what was to come. I questioned how I would balance my role as a participant in a dialogue about a topic I am very passionate about, and my role as researcher. How am I, as a “biracial” researcher, influenced, trapped, or privileged, by my own marginality? How might this show up as bias? What if my lived experience of being an only, really was just my lived experience and not shared by others? What if the questions I proposed to ask did not get to the heart of the matter? Part of my journey as the participant researcher was the opportunity to explore my own identity construction while exploring ways in which the other participants might navigate their journey.

As soon as everyone arrived and we began the dialogue, my anxious and emotional feelings subsided. The participants were laughing and connecting with each other with what seemed to be a sense of friendship and understanding. This was emblematic of when old friends come together.

First Dialogue

The first dialogue was held on December 21, 2013 and lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. When the participants first entered the space, they appeared friendly with one another. They shook hands, introduced themselves, and expressed excitement to be there. Once everyone sat down, I introduced myself, explained the intention for the two dialogues, and gave details about the individual interviews.

Following the Public Conversations Project model of dialogue (Herzig & Chasin, 2006), I explained the agenda for the first dialogue, and asked for any agreements or rules that they would like to have for this session, to which they had none. Once each participant went around the room to introduce herself, we were ready to begin.

The dialogue questions (see Appendix E) for the first session were intended to invite the participants into a reflective space. Aimed at getting to a depth of understanding of the unique and complex experiences of each participant, the intention of the questions were guided by domains of open inquiry to allow for rich in-depth description of the complexity of individual experiences, as well as for new meanings to be made (Creswell, 2007). I asked the participants to describe themselves, what they learned about race from their family, to offer a powerful/meaningful story that taught them an influential lesson about their racial/ethnic identity, and gave them each an

opportunity to ask the group a question that they had always wanted to ask another person with one Black and one White parent. Throughout the dialogue, we asked additional questions to further explore or clarify participant experiences. Overall, these questions allowed the participants to self-describe how they saw themselves and their identity, and to be heard by others who *got it*.

The first question was “How do you describe yourself?” At the beginning, I was aware that the conversation had taken on the form of a go-around, or turn taking, where each participant seemed to wait for the other to finish before the next one would answer the question. As the women began to answer the first question by sharing their stories, the participants would nod their head in agreement, laugh or say, “yes! I totally get that.” The conversation then shifted from a question/answer to a free flowing dialogue. It appeared that the group was able to get to a place that felt safe enough to be vulnerable with one another as evidenced by the openness of their comments.

Identity. Findings from this study indicated that there are common lived experiences among the women related to social demands of choosing to define one’s self based on the dominant discourse while negotiating a stigmatized ambiguous identity. All the participants were aware of the categories that they were placed in by the dominant majority. However their personal self-description of identity did not begin with race. Rather, they chose to describe themselves as humans or place more emphasis on another characteristic rather than on one’s racial background, such as fun and charming. Tallulah stated,

I think there is a whole bunch of things from just inconsequential things to big things, you know, that defined me to things that I’m interested in, the things, the way I look at my life, that have nothing to do with my race, you know, how I

identify...at this point in my life, I don't know what I identify as or I can't identify as Black or White or mixed or anything except I'm a human.

Given that they all felt they did not fully belong to either race, the participants discussed their processes of integrating their life experiences and perspectives into their identities and sense of self.

All the participants expressed that their racial identity was not at the forefront of their thinking on a daily basis, since their way of describing themselves did not revolve around race. However, when called upon to respond to people who expected a categorical answer to the "What are you?" question, their racial identity suddenly became a salient topic. While all the participants did identify as being women of color, some expressed frustration when pushed for a categorical answer. The nature of these moments described by the participants varied depending on the person asking, why they believed the person asking needed to know, and the continued challenges they received from others for an either/or category. Tallulah offered the following response:

I'll say I'm a dental assistant or just it depends on what the situation is. I'm a camp counselor. I'm whatever. And then, they'll say no, but what are you? And I've gotten to the point where I know what I'm talking about, but you definitely don't. I don't know. What do you mean, what am I? And they just dig and dig and dig, and what they're trying to do is get you to pick one or the other. You know, what are you? Are you really Black, you know? I know your mom's White but are you really Black? No, I'm not really Black. I'm not really White either. I'm ----I'm a dental assistant, again, you know.

The women stated that when they actually did provide a racial/ethnic identity answer, it was "Black and White", "biracial", or "my mom's White and my dad's Black."

Good Hair. Hair was a defining feature for the women, and brought of a lot of attention when others were trying to determine their ethnic background. The participants all had a story around hair: as a child having other kids hide pencil erasers in it, mothers

not knowing how to cut and style it, and people constantly wanting to touch it. Kendall said:

My mom didn't know what to do with my hair. And so at any time she had to do my hair, it was a negative experience for me because she didn't like to do it; she didn't know what to do. My hair was tangling and curly and then when I was with my aunts, they wanted to try to do my hair, plus I was tender-headed; very, very tender-headed. So I just still remember when I was about in fifth or sixth grade, my mom said to me, "You know what? I'm not going to deal with this anymore. We're cutting your hair." So she cut...we kind of get this little curly, frilly type haircut and I hated it. I hated it in middle school, and it was really hard on me 'cause I really grew up and still to this day having issues with my hair. It's like, "Your hair is so beautiful..." I've never ever, ever felt that. Like you, I wanted hair like my mom. I wanted silky, straight, long hair with not one...anything, you know. And I feel like that has really just probably contributed to not loving everything about me, you know, daily and that I was being like what kind of story was that. Yeah. It was really difficult on me.

Tallulah agreed with Kendall, saying:

My experience basically is the same as yours. Because I think it really has impacted me for, well, my whole life. I remember...my sister is White. And so my mom would take us to get our hair done, and she would take my sister to a haircut store. Then, "Oh, we have to find somebody who can do *Black* hair. Let me go find a *Black* friend and find out where *Black* hair and...well, she is mixed so better get too *Black*." Right, and then we'd go to these places, and it was always somebody different. You know, my friends would be like, "Oh, my mom has this haircutter she takes me to." And I was like, "Well, I don't know who I'm going to see this time, some other Black person." And I was about sixth grade, my mom had gotten...her hair was kind of short, and she'd gotten a perm and it was curly. Not Black curly, but curly, and I thought, "Oh, I would like my hair to be like that." I told her about it. She took me to a Black place and got something that I had never heard of before. Never in my life heard of it, but I got a Jeri curl.

Lizzie Marie reflected on the ridicule she tolerated as a child saying:

When I was in kindergarten, I remember kids would hide stuff in my hair. I never thought that was very nice. I couldn't understand why they'd always want to do that. My mom used to always say to me, "It's the most beautiful they've ever seen. They just think you're so magical," and I didn't really know what the difference was. I just thought this was kind of odd, so I remember kindergarten. Then in middle school, and mom cut my hair. And my hair is naturally Afro. This is...lots of working things to do to make it little bit listen to what I want it to do. They cut, looking short, so I was like the boy and I was just...this is what I was.

These vignettes offer a glimpse at the impact of one's physical characteristics that represent their different racial identity. Any visible "Black" physical characteristics, such as hair texture, lead others to treat these individuals differently. Their memories of how they imagine they appear to others, or how people treated them based on this characteristic had a significant impact on their identity construction, as evidenced by their comments.

In general, all the participants were proud of who they were and what their lived experience thus far has meant for them and their identity construction, yet a common reflection was that their lived experience had not been shared by others, until now. When the dialogue ended and the recording had stopped, the participants stayed for an additional ½ hour to chat and socialize.

Space Between the First and Second Dialogue – My Reflection

After the first dialogue, I left the room with a sense of confirmation in that the dialogical method was key to emergence of this conversation about identity. During the weeks after the dialogue, I reflected on the experience, both as researcher and participant. As a participant, I remember thinking to myself, "Finally! Somebody understands my experience!" The group connected, entered into a state of vulnerability and shared stories they had never spoke about to others. We reinforced one another and the lived experience, simply by knowing exactly what it meant to be us. As a researcher, it felt like a dynamic field had opened up for the participants to finally connect to other "onlys"; others who shared a similar lived experience. The dialogue had created a synergy for self-disclosure and a safe space for self-expression where the willingness of participants to *be themselves* was supported and encouraged by everyone. Emblematic of this was their

focus on one another, laughter, and mutual agreement with the shared experience. The self-expression of each participant created a sense of vulnerability that the group was able to hold for each other; we were willing to share the deepest parts of ourselves, parts that have been for so long, questioned by everyone. Further, the dialogue provided a place and space for the participants' to articulate to another, their most personal thoughts, feelings, memories, which they had for their whole life so far, kept private for internal reflection. By participating in the dialogue, the group appeared to have found a voice, a collective voice; a voice that we did not know we had and shared, and we began to speak with/from that voice.

When I reviewed the dialogue transcription, I noticed a shift from “only” to a “collective only.” At least one time, each participant had responded to someone else’s story with, “I can relate to that”, “YES!”, or “I know exactly what you mean” or a nod of the head in agreement with the reflection being shared by one of us.

For the second dialogue, I had planned to repeat the same questions, with the intention that the few weeks of down time would offer the participants even more time to remember and reflect on their lived experience. Based on what I read and my reflection, I rewrote the questions for the second dialogue (see Appendix E) to be more focused on the here and now, the present experience. I found myself really looking forward to connecting with the participants again.

Second Dialogue

The second dialogue was held on January 11, 2014 and lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. The second dialogue began differently than the first one did, possibly since the participants had an idea of what to expect. However it was more than

that – the participants appeared to enter the room as friends, greeting one another and catching up from the holiday break. The participants seemed to be very comfortable with one another. It appeared that the safe space they created from the first dialogue had carried over. Once the second dialogue began, there was a free flow of conversation; no one expressed any anxiety or apprehension of what was to come.

Reflection. Collectively, the group appeared to be more consciously connected to their racial identity as a factor for describing themselves now. Sassy expressed that prior to her participating in the first dialogue, she had questioned whether she really would have anything to offer since she never really thought about race. Sassy said:

I didn't realize like how heavy everything was until the next day. And I got really emotional about it. I was like...I didn't really notice that things were issues until like we talk about it like when you start talking about hair and stuff. I never really saw that as an issue because I don't know what it's like to do anything else and I don't know anything else. So, to me, if you were to ask me just straight up like...I think it came up just...Just being mixed or being Black and White - do you have those issues, have you had those experiences? If you asked me straight up, I'm going to tell you no because in my mind like, "No, I haven't had all the negative experiences," but typically what you hear [inaudible] Oh my gosh I'm like so naïve to think I've never had those issues, but every time I hear them, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, it's an issue.

Lizzie Marie stated,

I thought how quickly I was comfortable because I'm emotional when I come to this kind of stuff anyways, but it usually takes me time. My guard is up much longer, and we were talking like months and months longer. And I'm so surprised at my reactions.

All the participants agreed that they were more conscious to how they had chosen to construct their identity now, and found themselves spending quite a bit of time between the dialogues reflecting on their identity and speaking about it with friends and loved ones. Jenny reflected:

I was kind of disappointed with myself, but one thing I was struck by was how vivid my anger at some boys I mistreated as a kid, and how strongly that came back which kind of made me...It was just so strong and I haven't been upset about this kind of stuff for a long time. I guess I was startled as I get angry about everything. That's what I do. So, that was actually very familiar. I wasn't expecting to get as upset. I wasn't upset after but just at how strongly those memories came back.

Some participants expressed a curiosity of other "onlys", thinking beyond our group of six; they were so used to reflecting on their experience as an individual experience, they had not given thought to what other "onlys" were experiencing and how we were now our own group. Another participant voiced feeling a sense of pride in her identity now, and a new language to be able to talk about it with others.

The pride part was it for me, too. It's like, "It's OK. It's OK there." I mean, I couldn't...this is who I am. I don't have to explain. This is me. (Kendall)

I think...I know that I felt a bit more pride in the last three weeks or four weeks. I don't know how long it's been. I went home a week after Christmas, visit my mom, waiting for tables, and the lady was looking a table for two and I could tell she was wondering who I was with, and my mother was right there. So, I'm just a little bit more obvious probably. My mother and I, "Oh, oh..." I thought, "Huh-huh. Here I go again." But I thought more private like going, "It's OK you don't recognize us necessarily as mom and daughter. I'm OK with this kind of thing. So, I had a little bit of peacock feathers, I got a little bit more of that. And then, my brother, my little brother, got up with his wife who's Laotian and then his son who's now 20. And we've never had any kind of race conversation with each other, but my father initiated it. So, I asked his son, my nephew about his experiences and he says. Hey, tell her...He goes, "Hey, Auntie, tell about that time when you're in college." I thought, "Oh geez, I just told the story and he cried." But I was able to have a bit more pride about identity I thought and I felt like I was able to pass...I don't know. Like maybe the conversation gave me some more language to share with him and I had not...I had the opportunity to help him construct with my daddy differently than I probably would have previously. So, I felt some pride now in that ability that I didn't have before. We never have it done in a room of seven people with us without it being with my brothers and sisters. (Lizzie Marie)

Kendall shared that after years of marriage to a Black man who never understood her lack of feeling of belonging to their Black church, she found the voice and the words she needed to express to him how she felt about not belonging:

I talked to him about it because it has been something in our marriage like do we go to his church like he has been going to which is predominantly Black, and then, as I'm like thinking about I want to be in the church. I felt comfortable like at The Rock. You don't think about that. He doesn't feel as comfortable there and he's like, "I'm going to set a difference. I mean like it just feels different somehow, but then, he kind of got me to see that. Well, he thinks in his mind like no one's looking at you differently. But I feel they are. And so, him, my husband, and I had a few dialogues just about my experiences.

In the presence of other women who could share in the experience of being an "only", the women, in general, seemed to find their voice by connecting to one another's stories and finally finding validation for their lived reality. This connection is in line with Felicetti, Gastil, Hartz-Karp, and Carson (2012), who argue, "This shared eagerness connects people and makes them even more likely to find collective identities and voices. Finding a common identity and speaking with a collective voice is, we contend, a way to claim political action" (p. 6). Perhaps the women no longer had to perform a role placed on them by outsiders, and could just be themselves.

No Collective Naming of their Identity. What did not occur during the dialogue was the group's willingness to collectively name their identity. The women appeared to still be in deep reflection over understanding the complexity of their individual identities and the integration into a collective lived experience. They were still unlocking memories that they had either written off or had not thought about as a deeply connected part of their journey. The women did not feel a rush to name the identity because the story was still emerging. What seemed to matter most to the women was for a shared meaning to emerge around their lived experience; naming that space the collective only experience, was more important than naming the collective identity.

Overall, the second dialogue represented a movement from “only”, to “collective only.” The women eagerly shared their stories connected to the construction of their identity, stories that were being recreated within themselves, and were positioned at different points of their lives. They contradicted themselves, making strong cases for new ideas that felt recently espoused. The stories the women shared were not told as a simple retelling story, like one might see in the news, but the reflective experience of the participant in what they felt at the time, as well as how they were reflecting on it now, in the present day, surrounded by other women with a similar experience. A sense of deeper reflection and deeper connection to self was present.

Once the recording stopped, the participants expressed wanting to meet more as a group. Several voiced how enlightening and powerful it was to participate in the dialogue. Even after the dialogue ended, the women continued their conversation for about thirty minutes.

Transcription Analysis and Debrief with Validator

After watching and listening to the audio, I completed the coding for each dialogue. What was present for me as participant researcher was the shift in the currency of the group. To be present amongst people who understand my lived experience because it was also their own experience created a feeling of relief for me as an “only”.

Prior to conducting the individual interviews, I met with one of my participants, who also served as my findings reviewer. This allowed me to engage in reflexive dialogue and discussion with another individual who was actively engaged in research within the area of identity. During our conversation, we shared our individual reflections of how the dialogues went, particular stories that held power, and discussed whatever we

were experiencing from our participation. Overall, we were both in aligned in the belief that a powerful space had been emerged. Neither of us had ever participated in a group that evolved into “shared meaning” so quickly. The evolution of the group from “only” to “collective only” seemed to happen quicker than some anticipated. The body language of how we were all sitting invited others to feel comfortable and the eye contact that we all made with each speaker offered safety and connection.

Because of the difficulty that these women faced in trying to be themselves, and others not understanding, they would adjust their behavior in an attempt to maintain consistency in their identity. We agreed that any fear that was initially felt by each participant quickly diminished and was replaced with friendship. Lizzie Marie expressed, “We have been waiting our whole lives to speak!”

Interviews

While the interviews were held individually, the collective voice of the group continued to emerge within this space. Each participant spoke about how eye opening the weeks after the second dialogue had been. There was an amplified reflection in being an only, and also being in the space between. All the participants were deeply aware of how differently they thought about their identity now.

Reflecting on their lived experience now, several of them were re-engaging their internal voice and questioning how they identified. This was not about just including race as the identity descriptor, but of becoming conscious to the power it held for them as being a proud woman of color. Kendall expressed,

This experience let me be more proud of who I am... the way I felt about myself. I was proud to be in the presence of other women that sometimes have the same feelings I have and how they relate to other people.

They talked about re-evaluating their view of past experiences and what feeling or expressions of was now emerging.

Something that Tallulah said that has stuck with me and I have not let it go, was her talking about White privilege and how that has influenced my life. And I never ever thought that there might be some privilege with having a mother who is White and being raised by her... and her upbringing, some of the things that she has instilled in me. (Kendall)

I'm very aware of things – every once in a while I think about, “what did she say about that?” or, I'm in this situation and I'm looking at things differently... nothing big, just everyday life. I am more aware of it. I was aware before, but on a different level - the discomfort of “who should I stand by?” “What is this situation going to bring?” Now, I've become more confident in what I do... (Tallulah)

There was a reverberation of being the “only” for so long that they had not really considered others who had similar experiences, and how revealing and relieving it was for them to hear other women's lived experience; more importantly that they found a shared meaning in the stories. Kendall explained it when she said, “Wow. It makes sense. It makes sense why I felt this way,” and Tallulah expressed,

A big part of what I got out of this is more awareness, from the perspective of that there's other people like me thinking in this way. You might come to a different decision about it, but you are coming from the same place and questioning this, where it used to just be me questioning. You know, why do I feel like I don't belong in this place, or, obviously those people over there belonged together, and they never questioned it. And here I am by myself questioning that. But now here I am, wow, there are other people out there who are questioning the same things and possibly coming up with different answers, but from the same place.

While still giving power to their “only” experience, several of the participants expressed a deeper connection to the “collective only” after participating in the dialogues.

I feel like I'm a subset of a bigger group. I didn't identify with that before. And then after the dialogue I was thinking, wait a minute, I want to be considered one of the only, one of the minority because I feel it's an honor in that group. (Kendall)

Getting to know each of you better is something I'm interested in... not like a support group, but build friendships with people like me.... But I am wondering about all the rest of us out there... and who they are and how can I find them and relate to them. (Tallulah)

This was just a small sampling of what's possible in this new collective that we didn't really know existed because we hadn't manifest it. It was there, but it wasn't. (Miranda)

For these women it was a blessing to finally feel heard by others who got it. At the end of the interview, each participant shared their appreciation and satisfaction in having a space where they could share their lived experiences, as well as hear others. Kendall said,

It was a very positive experience, having this real sense of belonging. The shared experience was powerful. It really was. I don't think I've ever been in a room full of... just us! The "onlys"! Never! Everyone's experience was the same but individual at the same time.

Tallulah echoed the same sentiment, stating,

I feel like I have people to bounce things off of. I could say, "Hey, this thing happened to me, and my Black friends don't get it, and my White friends don't get it. So what would you do?" And now I have somebody that knows what it's like.

Many of the women noted that they had never been asked to share their stories about their identity construction. It was if the words were always on the tips of their tongues, waiting to be shared but they were never given the opportunity to do so, until now. They all expressed wanting to continue with the dialogues.

The following section will provide further data that related to the four supporting questions.

Supporting Research Question One: What is the relationship between social constructions of identity and the lived experience?

The women's understanding of their racial and ethnic identity began in the home environment and extended out to their communities and society. Awareness of their racial and ethnic identity emerged through interactions with others in social setting. All of the women experienced questions from others such as "What are you?" For some of the women, their awareness of the social constructions of race and ethnicity resulted in ambiguity about their racial and ethnic identity. Not knowing where they fit in the racial order, or not being grounded in one cultural heritage, resulted in identifying one way, but internally describing themselves another way.

Theme One: Self-Description

While identity is often viewed as fixed and unchanging, this study found it to be linked to activities, abilities, and attributes beyond race. The participants' felt they were more open to different ideas, cultures, and values because they did not see things dichotomously or simply in "Black or White." Each participant had unique experiences that were influenced by a number of intersecting factors. Identity choice was the process by which the participants constructed identities based on internal self-description rather than those solely being dictated by outside forces, including but not exclusively, salient racial groups. When the participants discussed their feelings about their identity being categorized as biracial, the women appeared to see beyond their race and cared more about describing personality characteristics.

The women made some of the following comments in response to how they described their identity. These responses were coded as "beyond race" since the

participants explained that race was not a defining part of their identity or self-description, and it allowed each to navigate the world of the “in between” space and still have a sense of owned and named uniqueness.

Table 2

Participant Self-Description

Participant	Response
Lizzie Marie	It's interesting 'cause my first reaction is fun, outgoing, that kind of stuff besides...before I would say biracial. So that's why I had this kind of awkward silence of where do I begin with that word? I consider myself biracial, but I don't necessarily describe myself that.
Jenny	I do think a lot of people who look at me, that's the first thing they're trying to figure it out. And I guess I'm used to that... Now, I just don't think that way (race as identity). I mean it is a big part of who I am, but it isn't the defining part of who I am.
Sassy	...for me, when I saw that, I always say charming, I didn't think of race either. I don't need to say anything. I don't see the need becauseI don't describe myself like mixed. I can fit in with everybody and it does not matter. I can get along with whomever.
Tallulah	I think there is a whole bunch of things from just inconsequential things to big things, you know, that defined me to things that I'm interested in, the things, the way I look my life, that have nothing to do with my race, you know, how I identify...at this point in my life, I don't know what I identify as or I can't identify as Black or White or mixed or anything except I'm a human.
Miranda	I'm not comfortable with just saying Black. I've never said I'm only White... it's just a weighted question, which is I'm still kind of trying to search for a way to answer it that feels whole, that feels like it's really getting to myself, and biracial doesn't do it for me, either. But I'll occasionally say that, but anybody can be biracial. Anybody can be mixed to me.
Kendall	I lived through a period where I said I was Black when I was younger. And now, I'm very specific I'm Black, I'm White. So that's how I describe myself if anyone asked me, and I get a lot.

To gain a fuller understanding of their identity choice, it is necessary to explore the nature and language they gave to their self-descriptors, which spoke to dimensions of self but differed from a static racial status. Because race is socially constructed and there is no objective way for these women to identity themselves in terms of race, they may rely on using characteristics to decide who they are and where they belong. As evidenced in the literature, or many biracial individuals, their race and identity is not as clear-cut and simple as it may be for monoracial individuals (Renn, 2000; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007; Smith & Leavy, 2008). Whether they used self-appraisals, social comparisons, or socialization processes, multiple processes were taken into account by these women to construct their identity.

Theme Two: Identity Disclosure

The participants explained that disclosing their identity was dependent upon who was asking and what they believed to be the intention of the question. For some participants, disclosing their identity the way they wanted to – “I am fun”, “charming”, “colorful” – did not lead to any clarity or association to their self-description, or what is referred to in the literature as “true identity”. The notion of “true identity” can be related to the identity development theories and models that describe final position or status as awareness and appreciation of one’s identity and the ability to claim one’s identity free of societal pressures (Renn, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Table 3 below illustrates the responses that these women gave when pressed for a categorical answer to the “what are you?” question. Five of the participants said they would typically answer as “Black and White”, “my mother is White and my dad is Black”, or “I am a woman of color”.

Table 3

Participant Self-Identification of Racial/Ethnic Identity

Participant	Response on Questionnaire
Kendall	Black and White
Tallulah	Human
Jenny	Biracial (Black/White)
Sassy	Other
Lizzie Marie	Biracial: Black/White
Miranda	Mixed or my dad's Black and my mom's White

The women all considered themselves as biracial, but did not typically use that term to describe their racial identity as they felt it was not descriptive enough and could be used by anyone of two racial ethnicities. Tallulah commented,

I was talking to my mother... and I told her what I was doing. And she said, 'Oh, well, biracial is a good term.' And I was thinking, 'Well, you're White so I don't know how this affects you.' And on the other hand that can mean I'm Chinese and something, you know, why does that describe me in particular when it can describe millions of other people in the world who are nothing like me because it...biracial is two different races. There is more than Black and White. So that doesn't work for me. Well, I mean, I guess technically in a general term, I am, but so do a whole bunch of other people who I don't identify with.

Tallulah's response was expressive of the other participants as well. Instead of using the biracial term, some of them chose to describe themselves as "I am fun," "I am charming," and "I am colorful", all parts of their identity, but did not associate describing themselves with race. They found, however, that this type of answer was met with confusion and displeasure by the dominant group, and ultimately dismissed.

While the women did not actively define themselves in racial terms, some explained that at times, they chose to identify a certain way for political and personal reasons when they felt it was necessary. Part of their lived experience as women of color made them witness to the detriment of racial status and privilege. Several of the women recognized that social demands were unfair or discriminatory and thus, they would adopt a fixed “Black” identity for personal and political reasons. By claiming “Black” on government forms or at work, may have been necessary to keep government money in their neighborhood, or to acknowledge diversity in their community. Tallulah questioned why people needed the information, stating,

When you're filling the box what race are you, like why do you want to know? If my people, whoever my people happen to be, are not being represented then I want to check the box to say, you know, give you proper statistics so they can properly serve my people. If you want to know so that you can discriminate against me, I'm not going to answer that. If you want to know just because, I'm not going to answer that.

Kendall expressed the importance of representing being Black in her school district:

I consider myself an African-American principal in this district. I don't consider myself a mixed one of only three, you know, mixed principals in our district. I put myself in that group of Black principals or vice principals. Why? I don't really know, I guess I wanted to be part of that group that's underrepresented in that system. While I talk about Black teachers, I was one of the Black teachers. That's just how I felt. They never thought of myself as one of the White teachers or one of the White principals. I feel a responsibility to represent people of color and my accomplishments in the way I live my life.

Kendall's comment is significant in that, while she may publicly identify herself monoracially as Black, she internally identified as something other than that. How these women externally identify in these kinds of situations likely has implications for their connectedness to their respective racial communities.

Tallulah also described challenging categories all together and refused to succumb to fitting in to a category. She did not like being racially labeled as something that she did

not understand or feel connected to, and chose instead to exist in the in-between space of humanness. She commented,

I don't know if all of you feel that uniqueness, like you're unique, and I've always not tried to be unique but I've never tried to fit in, you know, I was the kid in school and they're like, I don't know what she's all about because I knew I didn't fit in as a White girl or a Black girl and I knew I didn't fit in as a band geek because I wasn't, you now I didn't fit into these groups, so I made my own group and then I fit in. And there were other people out there, various other people who did not fit in to something that they should have been able to fit in to and carve out their own little space. I didn't know it had a name. They were in between something and then embrace that, I think.

Despite the dominant discourse and pressures to declare a category that forced them to label themselves as mixed/biracial/Black and White, the participants described their process of realizing their identities were choices that they could make beyond just naming race, and that describing their identity involved more than just racial ethnicity. All the participants expressed great value in who they were as individuals; they embraced their in-between identities since it integrated with other parts of themselves that were more salient than race. In this way, participants chose not to be internally bothered by or let others dictate the salience of their identities, despite the fact that people so often tried to.

Theme Three: Not Black Enough

Several of the women were aware of the fact that the way they described themselves caused people to question their identity choice, since they had chosen not to fit into a preconceived category. Because of this “in between” identity space, their peers, family, and society as a whole placed several assumptions about identity and notions of belonging upon these women. These included assumptions that the women would prefer to choose White over Black or Black over White, because they were ashamed of being

one or the other. At the same time that these women are told they are ashamed of being Black if they did not solely identify that way, they are also accused of not being Black enough.

The participants had a story to share of people accusing them of not being “Black enough,” whether it was the way they spoke, the music they listened to, or the hobbies they engaged in. The below comments shed light on the in-between status of their identity. The sense of not being “Black enough” became a normative experience and a constant reminder that these women were different from the majority.

Table 4

Not Black Enough

Participant	Response
Lizzie Marie	I went to the Black sorority welcome mixer, and they told me to leave. I wasn't Black enough. I called my mother and I'm like, "You never told this was going to happen. I wish you had told me." I walked out and felt like I'm not Black enough. I'm like 18 and don't know what I'm supposed to do now.
Tallulah	<p>I don't like Janet Jackson. If anybody here does... [laughter] I'm sure she has music that's great. Personally, I don't like her, and I happened to make the mistake of expressing that in front of my father. I said, "Oh! I hate her!" And my dad went, "Oh, honey." He was like, "You know what? You need to wake up. I was talking to this woman at work who knows about you, and she said that you are Black and you need to wake up and start being Black."</p> <p>You know, if I say, oh, I'm White. Oh, it's a joke. You know, you need to get with your sisters and, you know, celebrate the Blackness and like, "OK, well, I'm Black." "Well, how can you talk like that?" So when I describe myself, naturally what comes to mind is, you know, I'm fun. I'm something other than that, that doesn't come up. And then when they dig then I just, you know, tell them what they don't want to hear basically.</p>
Jenny	I think a lot of people just assume you're like what they have seen on TV and that's just... We're not like people, I should say. So, we don't match

	what people expect, but they adjust fairly quickly once you talk to them. We get a lot of, “You’re the Whitest Black people I’ve ever met.” We’re the only Black people you know. [laughter]
Miranda	<p>Over here, I’m not dark enough. Over here, I’m not light enough, you know, the same thing with the hair. Over time, it’s really shifted how I identify and I’m still in that kind of navigating space, you know, kind of in a space between not... To me, it’s more than just the both ends. It’s more than just identifying as Black and White. There is something else for me, and I don’t know what that is because the Black and White... I don’t know. Anytime I get a question like this or the what-are-you question, like my mind just spins in split seconds. You know, all of these thoughts just completely start jumbling up, but I don’t have an answer, and I’m sure I could make up a word and people would just be like, “Huh?” You know, but it just... for me, it feels like... not that there is a need to create another category but just something that I can call my own or like something where I know that there’re other people who are kind of in that between space.</p> <p>I’m not comfortable with just saying Black. I’ve never said I’m only White.</p>

According to Waters (1990, 1996), multiracial individuals with Black ancestry are largely constrained to identify as Black, arguing that certain ancestries are “essential” and become a defining aspect of a multiracial person. In American society, a non-black identity will likely not be accepted “if one looked [B]lack according to the prevailing social norms” (1996, p. 447). Yet, despite their ancestry, these women were not considered “Black enough.” However, no one could fully explain to them what “enough” would actually look like. As demonstrated in the above vignettes, awareness of not being “Black enough” occurred in situations where the women were racialized or forced to choose a racial identity.

Another assumption placed on these women by others was the notion that they were some sort of honorary spokesperson for “all things Black or White” depending on the group they were in. The following comment echoed the sentiment of all the

participants' feelings toward this role.

When we're in a group of White people, then I'm the Black person who knows all about Black people and what Black people do and what they eat and why they talk like that and I don't know the answer to that. I don't...I don't know what Black people do because I'm not Black. They say, well, 'Don't be ashamed with your Blackness.' The same thing about when I'm a room full of Black people... So, I can't answer for the White people and I can't answer for the Black people. And then, when I'm unable to do that, I must be ashamed of that part of me. I'm like, "No, I'm not ashamed of it at all. I just don't know what that person over there was thinking" [laughter and heads nodding in agreement from all the participants]. (Tallulah)

What this suggests is that while the women are not considered Black enough, or even White enough, they are still expected to know those parts of themselves and speak on behalf of each group. The messages that the women received in these contexts laid the foundation for their frustration in what society expects of them, and how they choose to identify themselves.

Theme Four: Being the "Only"

Defining one's identity outside of the social norm can be difficult to navigate. The decision to not choose one racial category over the other resulted in the women developing identity in other ways. Several participants expressed that growing up different than other children, with two ethnicities, two cultures, made them feel like they were the only one who felt like that.

Table 5

Embracing the Difference

Participant	Responses
Miranda	Yeah, there's a part that I have come to embrace my difference and embrace that unknown, the thing that people don't know. You know, it was more complicated growing up but I like being different... what I'm noticing just from what we've talked about to, is this in-between space allows us to have a

	heightened or a different level of consciousness or perception to something... there's a balance that we live daily and I mean multiple spaces, multiple consciousness that I like. I've learned to embrace it through my childhood and into my adulthood.
Kendall	I think being in-between to me means being able to kind of get my feet in both realms in some ways. And then having this uniqueness that's just me because of my experience in having to, you know, distinct races that make myself in.
Lizzie Marie	I can remember being frustrated with being the only. I used to always say that to myself why I'm the only...

Despite being ascribed a racial identity that was often in conflict with their personal identity, not fitting in allowed the participants to evolve in an in-between space, and embrace being the “only”.

Supporting Research Question Two: In what ways does negotiating an in-between hybrid space influence one's identity formation?

Theme One: Not Fitting In

The participants spoke about the recognition of the lived experience from an “only” perspective, and shared stories about feelings of exclusion and isolation. They tried to negotiate multiple social encounters inside and outside of the racial categories that did not accommodate their lived realities. The ability to fit in with different dominant (White) and subordinate (people of color) groups was dependent on the situation and context.

Table 6

Not Fitting In

Participant	Response
Jenny	We kind of were all raised, the kids in our family anyway, that you don't fit in the box. And everybody is going to want to put you in a box, and they talk a lot about how you...you are what you are. There's nothing wrong with what you are. You don't have to pretend to fit into a box because people want you to be in a box.
Sassy	I believe Black people treat me like I have betrayed them somehow if I don't just say that I'm Black. I never choose Black. I always choose other.
Tallulah	I think in deflecting these questions and I don't deny what I'm feeling. I just am not forthcoming with it, and I think, and probably in the back of my mind, trying to teach somebody a lesson, trying to teach people out there, "Hey, I'm a person just like you, and I'm not going to let you come in and pigeon hole me and say you must be this because you look like this or whatever.

The influence of context on their attitudes, assumptions and judgments and beliefs was evident as the women explained how they were encouraged to bend and twist in order to fit into society so that they would no longer be questioned or depicted as “different” or inherently inferior. The women expressed frustration over people’s need to identify their race or ethnicity and the lack of choice they had in responding to their questions. Several of the participants expressed that as children they tried to “be Black”, but could not fully understand what that meant since they were also White.

The participant responses highlight one of many struggles that people of mixed race face in regards to their struggle with the both/and of their racial/ethnic identity. In Maria Root’s (2002) Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People, she writes:

Countless number of times I have fragmented and fractionalized myself in order to make the other more comfortable in deciphering my behavior, my words, my loyalties, my choice of friends, my appearance, my parents, and so on.... fragmenting myself seldom served a purpose other than to preserve the delusions this country has created around race. (p. 355)

The frustration that the participants felt could be translated into Root's proposition: *I have a right not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.*

Theme Two: Family Experience

The home environment is where the development and social construction of identity begins. For individuals growing up in a multiracial environment, these experiences are unique since unions between Blacks and Whites were historically prohibited. Families from mixed ancestry live in between and amongst the dominant White society, bringing a level of complexity not experienced by monoracial/ethnic individuals. Being able to discuss race and experience within the family plays an important role in the emergence of identity consciousness for these women of color. Messages communicated from parents and extended family were relevant factors when exploring the influence on the social construction of identity. It is within these settings that they began to develop norms, values, and beliefs about themselves in relation to their external environment.

The impact of the family context on the construction of identity was not solely answered in one specific question but peppered throughout the dialogue. The women were asked about what they learned about race from their family and the ways in which they first became aware of their racial and ethnic identification. The participants discussed memorable experiences regarding race and identity and reported that external factors and situations such as the family environment brought about awareness of race.

Table 7

Family Experience around Race

Participant	Response
Kendall	I talked to my mom about it as well, and I talked to her about when I was young, the what-am-I question, and she told me...she said, "Well, I always said you're White and Black." But when you had to check a box, I just check Black because you can only pick one, and I felt that was the right thing to do, but we just didn't talk about it that much, like not even...no one talked about it.
Sassy	When I was little, my mom is White – Czechoslovakian – but I used to look at the palm of my hands and bottoms of my feet. And I used to cry because I wasn't the same color as my mom was. So for me, my mom was always really good about it. She's like, "Oh, my gosh, you know how many people want to have curly hair and tanned skin." And she always just asked me if I wanted to trade. When I was younger, I didn't know and I was like, "Yeah can we?" So growing up, for me, it was always...my mom was really good about that, just to make sure they celebrated both sides and not just one or the other.
Tallulah	What I've learned from the Black side of the family, they're not Black. Stereotypically Black, I guess. Same thing about the White side. If you want to go with stereotypes, they're the opposite. The Black side of the family is doing what the White people should do, and the White side is doing what Black people should do. So I don't get what they're getting at. Like what is it that you want me to say? And if I do give them an answer, pick Black or White, it's wrong. You know, if I say, oh, I'm White. Oh, it's a joke. You know, you need to get with your sisters and, you know, celebrate the Blackness and like, "OK, well, I'm Black." "Well, how can you talk like that?"
Jenny	I grew up on the East Coast, in Philadelphia, and I went to school in Rhode Island, and then I came out here 30 years ago, but I feel like I've been here so long. I don't know whether my impression of the East Coast is so much more race-conscious and touchy just because that was 30 years ago or because it's the East Coast. I don't know. I think it's all tangled together, the timing, and I think attitudes have evolved. But I immediately...when I moved here from the East Coast, I immediately noticed there were couples where it's a White guy and, you know, some kind of ethnic girl or whatever. Nobody's paying any attention. And I knew – I'd just been on the East Coast – people always noticed who I was with and what does that mean.

Participants reported differences in how race was represented and discussed in their families. For some participants, their White mothers were either disowned or

ridiculed for being in mixed race relationships. Kendall expressed not knowing any of her maternal extended family except for her grandmother and her mother's brothers:

My dad's side of the family, I spent a long time there, and it was just not brought up too much. And then my mom's side of the family, you know, I don't know. I guess I haven't...my mother told me that because she married a Black man, that her family pretty much disowned her and...but I don't know any of my extended family on my mom's side except for my two uncles and my grandmother, which is the immediate family but never a visit to Oklahoma where my mom is from. And so, I was really just shaped a lot by my dad's side of the family, but then when I think about it even more. It's more like it was just my mom and my brothers. That's how...and we didn't talk about race that often. But now that I'm getting older and thinking about these things, I'm listening to you and it is a very, very different experience.

However her grandmother did not want to discuss her ethnic identity when the conversation arose. Another participant spent a great deal of time with her paternal grandmother and reflected fondly on learning how to cook. Overall, participants agreed that none of them felt fully accepted by either race, and did not identify with one more than the other.

The women shared differing stories of their past and the ways in which messages and lessons regarding race and ethnicity were transmitted from their Black family versus their White family. Lizzie Marie stated, "We have in our minds my Black family is this way and my White family is that way." Sassy grew up predominantly with her White mother's side, stating,

We don't even call my dad's mom grandma. We call her dad's mom. My grandma on my mom's side like that's like my grandma would do anything for her. And my dad's mom, she's very cold. She's like ice. I went there to visit. She said one sentence to me in a week and I'm not used to that. My mom's side, they're really affectionate. We get together a lot... I have been around my White side in my whole entire life for the most part, I find myself just wanting to learn more and know more about my other side. So if my grandpa left when my dad was young, so I don't know much about my grandpa, but just even wanting to know more about my grandma, I feel like there's so much wisdom to be learned just from my elder people in general. I just have to sit down and hear her story?

My late grandma was like, “Sure, we came from Czechoslovakia.” My other grandma? Forget about it! She was like, “It’s none of your business.” And to me, I’m just like, oh, my gosh, is this how Black people behave? Because you learn those things from your family, your behaviors and your attitudes, and like those are your very first experiences.

Kendall’s experience of her Black family differed from Sassy’s.

My dad wasn’t around very much, either. But my mother felt always in her...and my mom’s family really wasn’t there for her. So it was my dad’s family who I got that sense of family from an extended family and cousins, and my grandparents taught me how to be Black, I guess you could say. And my mother, even though my parents were split up, she made sure that they were in our lives. And, you know, I’m very grateful for that because my grandmother was the type that I would go over the summers and help her cook and be...you know, she taught us all that stuff. My mom was working. But when I think about my grandparents...my grandmother’s from Alabama. My grandfather is from Ohio. They came out here with the Navy. But my grandmother had such wisdom that when she would talk about race because my grandmother didn’t...although she grew up with Jim Crow and segregation, she never had...she had friends of all races and she accepted all kids from all races. So she would work in the schools, Girl Scout leader and community member. And so, she taught us from very young that we don’t judge a book by its cover per se. And they could live until to this down in southeast San Diego. Now not to say that my grandmother’s brothers and sisters who did live down in southeast of San Diego had their...they had a different lifestyle than my grandmother and grandfather did. So I didn’t see that experience at all as a typical Black family... I’m thinking that from my Black side of the family I learned acceptance from my grandparents and that they were...there is racism but we don’t focus on it. We just work hard and try to be better people, like in Christian, you know.

Kendall expressed thoughts around the White side of her family and the lessons she’s learned from them.

From my White side, just from being...you know, I’ve learned about race, growing up, that they’re not so tolerant, and I also learned that White people, in my little kid mind, have problems with Black men because I heard a lot about how no good my father was and how no good my stepfather was, and how, no disrespect, but Black people da-da-da. I heard a lot of that. In my experience that it hasn’t been so positive, you know, from that side especially when...you know, like I said before, you know, Nana didn’t come to the baby shower because she didn’t want to have a Black child...grandchild, that kind of thing...

These vignettes suggest that women’s connection to racial and ethnic identity

differed in that their connection to their racial identity was interpreted through their appearance and interactions with others in their families of origin and in dominant society. The vivid memories expressed through the re-telling of stories document the women's perceptions of their home environment as it relates to the beginning construction of their racial and ethnic identity.

The initial messages the participants received in their social encounters with family seems to have added a level of complexity to the women's identity construction and the development of racial and ethnic consciousness. These vignettes are further evidence of the structural influences on the construction of identity and identification.

Theme Three: Double Consciousness to Emergent Consciousness

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) defined double consciousness as the way to explain the phenomenon in which African Americans viewed themselves, individually and as a group, through the eyes of the society in which they live. Du Bois described double consciousness as, "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1903, p. 299). Du Bois felt that outsiders (predominantly White people) looked at African Americans with disdain and felt sorry for them. The African American, thus, developed two personalities - American and Black - and so his skin color is an external indicator that defines his place within White society. Du Bois argued that the internalization of anti-Black sentiment from the outside world then shaped the Black American experience. As he defined it, double consciousness explains the individual sensation of feeling as though one's identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. It forced African Americans to not only view themselves from

their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the White world.

While it is appropriate to consider the notion of double consciousness as a useful concept in understanding the negotiation of the in-between hybrid space, it did not seem to fully fit the experience of the participants. The individual experience of these women seemed to go beyond the paradox of Black/White race relations. Rather it was something of a hybrid paradox of a both/and and neither/nor. They did not describe themselves as solely Black or solely White, nor did they seem to want to exclusively define themselves within those worlds, leaving them in a liminal position of not being White enough or Black enough. As women in a hybrid in-between space, they were constantly being looked upon by both the Black and White world, not just White. White people's perception was that they were not White enough, and Black people's perception was they were not Black enough. For White people, these women were considered the cultural representative of Blackness, something the women did not necessarily embrace or want. For Black people, they did not talk right or listen to the right music.

Table 8

Not Getting it Right

Participant	Participant Response
Lizzie Marie	But I'm always, still at 43, wondering what someone else is going to think of me when I come in the room first. What do they expect me to be? Should I be a little more Black ... I'm not so good at that... Whiter. I don't know. I'm not so good at that, either. Like what should I do right now, you know.
Tallulah	What kind of music do you like? And I just want to be able to say something without it being judged. I mean I will listen to classical music. I will listen to rap, but I don't like old school rap, don't like the new rap. Has nothing to do with the fact that it's Black music and I don't

	<p>like it or I do like it. I just happened to like this and not that, and to always be judged on that. I have a Led Zeppelin T-shirt, Oh, Led Zeppelin... You know, you must have White friends because you like Led Zeppelin. I'm like none of my friends like Led Zeppelin. I like Led Zeppelin.</p> <p>They'll say stuff that hurts you. I worked at Taco Bell some years ago and people would make fun with me, you know, you talk like a book. So my Black coworker says, "You know what? I'm going to help you out." You see he thinks that this is help. "Every day when I come in, I'm going to teach you a new word to use or a new term and you'll practice at that day and in a couple of months, you'll be fine." So he comes in the first day and he says "OK, what are you going to say? When you open the room, you say hello there, everybody. What I want you to say is let's crack-a-lackin'." He said, "Now, you try it." And I said, said no. You try it and I said, "What's cracking and lacking?" He said, "Don't ever say that again." And that was the end of my lessons.</p>
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The women were never certain what role they needed to play to "get it right", and were content with just being themselves. Rather than struggling to achieve a middle ground, "fit in" or gain approval within these dominant discourses, the women embraced their "difference" and forged their own individual identities, protecting the parts of themselves that distinguished them from the dominant society.

While Du Bois' theory of double consciousness argued that it was difficult or impossible for Black people to have one unified identity, what emerged in the collective stories was in fact a unified identity that each participant had created for herself. These women embraced their unique perspective and while they were aware of their "difference", what emerged from this place was a different kind of consciousness. Double consciousness was too narrow of a theory to describe their unique experience. One participant described the dissonance she felt when people told her to be more Black, or more White, and really not understanding what that even meant, since she was not either. From this space emerged something of a conditional consciousness, meaning the mental

games the participants would play depending on who was in the room and the role others expected them to take up. During the dialogue, what I became aware of was that this group was holding more than a “both/and” or “either/or”; it was an emergent consciousness of the in-between space of being in the Black world, the White world, and their own.

Theme Four: Redefining Identity for Self

As children the women struggled to locate their own identity and space amidst the labels placed upon them. 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. As they grew older, the women realized that they did not fit into a racial group, and began to feel like they were the only ones who felt that way. Rather than turning that into a negative experience, the women took ownership of their lives, and began to construct identity using other facets of their life, rather than allow that confusion to dictate the rest of their lives. This led to the notion of living “between worlds” as another dimension of social exclusion, but a space that the women came to embrace. To exist in-between, being neither one race nor another, the participants learned to balance the worlds they lived in. This balance was between the multiple spaces, multiple consciousness of not being Black or White, nor identifying as a both/and, that they learned to embrace through childhood and into adulthood. Participants accepted that they were different than others, and chose to embrace their “only” experience, while simultaneously living in other worlds.

Table 9

Redefining Identity

Participant	Response
Miranda	<p>My group of friends is everybody and anybody because that connects to all of those different sides of me as opposed to that feeling of you don't belong because you don't look like me.</p> <p>Yeah, there's a part that I have come to embrace my difference and embrace that unknown, the thing that people don't know... it was more complicated growing up but I like being different.</p> <p>No matter what, we're always going to be the minority just because of who we are.</p>
Tallulah	<p>(In response to another participant talking about being Black and White) I'm colorblind, I guess. You know, you're a person, you're a person and I want to know about you... No, I'm not really Black. I'm not really White either. So when I describe myself, naturally what comes to mind is, you know, I'm fun. I'm something other than that, that doesn't come up. And then when they dig then I just, you know, tell them what they don't want to hear basically.</p>
Kendall	<p>I'm finding as I'm maturing, I almost want people to know about who I am. So, I'll bring it up like, 'Yeah, my mother is White.' I do...I'm finally showing I'm Black and White, but it's more of just like opening myself up to learning more about me, but it's not the first thing. It might be, you know, a month after I met them, you know, but I just was thinking as we're talking, like I've been in this town for two months. No one has asked me anything about that, and I think it only came up when I was just in a conversation.</p>
Lizzie Marie	<p>I think I assume that people wonder and I wonder if what it would be like if they didn't wonder about me. Like part of my identity is the fact that people want to know. So, now, it's like what if they didn't wonder about me? How would I feel? ... I'm not fitting in by not fitting in so to speak. That's part of who I am.</p>

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 in between was complicated.

Supporting Research Question Three: What is the shared meaning attributed to the lived experience of being a woman with one Black and one White parent?

The participants created a shared meaning around being an only, being “in between”, and being safe space creators.

Theme One: Moving from Only to a Collective Only

The participants described growing up different than the people around them. Being an “only”, they did not fit in with one race or the other. While they may have racially identified themselves as Black and White, they did not describe themselves as such. During the individual interviews, the participants talked about being more reflective and proud of their identity, of being in-between.

Table 10

Moving From Being an Only to Collective Only

Participant	Response
Kendall	<p>I’m more reflective about where I belong and why... why do I feel that I can say 1 of 5 African American principals, I’m a Black vice principal, but I am a subset of a bigger group... but there are times that I am in a group of all African Americans, and I do feel different, because then I am the only. It’s really complex. I don’t think anyone would understand unless they’ve been in our shoes.</p> <p>The shared experience was powerful. It really was. I don’t think I’ve ever been in a room full of... just us! The “onlys”! Never! Everyone’s</p>

	<p>experience was the same but individual at the same time.</p> <p>I want us to have a club.</p> <p>I don't want to apologize for who I am anymore. I think the naming of it, and the realization of the dialogue, maybe I didn't think that deeply before.</p>
Miranda	<p>This was an opportunity to come together as a collective. A bunch of "onlys". And we were able to create a shared meaning. A new consciousness that was in us, the collective only.</p> <p>What needed to happen was for us to be able to name our shared stories, our lived experience.</p>
Jenny	<p>I was not aware that a big part of me was not fitting. I am so used to not fitting, it's what I do... I guess I feel like this is now a really big part of who I am and I just wasn't aware of it.</p> <p>(regarding being an outsider) I guess I've never put it into words or had someone put it into words... yeah that's exactly what it's like. It never really struck me before.</p>
Lizzie Marie	<p>My heart now leans toward a collective story to weave through. The evolution of lived experience.</p>

Theme Two: Safe Space Creator

During part of the dialogue, the participants were talking about their process for accepting being an only, Sassy asked the group, "At what point do you become okay with being an only?" The group paused for a moment to reflect on this question. To reflect aloud the answer to her own question, Sassy told a story about a relationship she had with a five year old girl whose parents are Black and White:

I kind of celebrate those things that make her different so to speak, make her an individual, so she doesn't come from the outside. I want her to have more positive reinforcement about the things that makes her an individual and that makes her a different so to speak from other people...

Lizzie Marie responded to Sassy's comment, stating:

Yeah. That's what I hear from this group is because we have all spent time in our lives creating safe space for others. You know, whether it's personally, professionally, that each of your stories you're all safe space creators. That's what we all do. And for us it doesn't matter we're saying it doesn't matter what race they have but we do it for children or family members or public... and we have to do it for ourselves which is a commonality that we all we have that, I mean we assume people of a single race might not have that ingrained something...a drive to create safe space for others.

Their lived experience is in the space between, not just a Black and White, a both/and or a neither/nor. It's the hybrid space between, and when outsiders realize they are in that space, they put them into a symbolic position of being the cultural liaison. However, the reality is while they may have one Black and one White parent, they did not grow up in that world, and therefore do not understand either race in the way that others expected them to. Tallulah did not like being put in that role, stating,

Usually the assumption somebody makes is that I am the other...It depends on what group I'm in. When we're in a group of White people, then I'm the Black person who knows all about Black people and what Black people do and what they eat and why they talk like that and I don't know the answer to that. I don't know what Black people do because I'm not Black. They say, well, 'Don't be ashamed with your Blackness.' The same thing about when I'm in a room full of Black people.... Going with a bunch of Black people and they're asking me what White people do. I don't know. I'm not White. And then, they're like, "Oh, we accept you, baby. That's OK." Either way, it doesn't matter where I go. I'm the different one and I represent the other side and I don't know what the other side is because I don't know what it's like to wake up in the morning and comb my hair just like this (mimics brushing her hair). I don't know. So— [laughter]. So, I can't answer for the White people and I can't answer for the Black people. And then, when I'm unable to do that, I must be ashamed of that part of me. I'm like, "No, I'm not ashamed of it at all. I just don't know what that person over there was thinking."

Others were okay with being in this safe space creator role; in fact, they sometimes embraced it, because it allowed them to be unique, as opposed to being pushed to choose one or the other.

**Supporting Research Question Four: What is the impact of a collective dialogue on
the construction and naming of a shared identity?**

Theme One: Naming the Experience, not the Identity

Earlier in the dialogue, Kendall expressed her reflection on the term biracial:

I hadn't really got there before when you had talked about biracial and that term, and that hit me like, "Well, maybe, that isn't the right term because biracial means two races," but I had never ever got that like detailed about it. It's like, OK, call me biracial. Yeah, I'm that. But there's lots of biracial not sold on [being labeled as] Black and White.

However, when asked the question at the end of the second dialogue, "If you had an opportunity to name your collective identity, what would it be and why?", there was a long pause before someone spoke. The following excerpt expressed the sentiment of the group regarding creating a new name.

Lizzie Marie: For the group [the women in the dialogue] that wants the name so badly; I don't want to give us a name.

Jenny: They're thinking mixed race and then we are back to the whole because...

Lizzie Marie I like mix the most because there are lots of things people can be mixed with [inaudible].

Jenny: Right. And then you can explain...it makes me uncomfortable this whole we need a name for this little group here, when I think we should be like all this other people who are also mixtures of things and be able to say, you know, I'm this sort of this and we're all really interesting because you know this explains why I like strudel. This makes me uncomfortable kind of even though I know its kind of the point of the dialogue, but the whole thing to come up with the name.

Miranda: Well, the reality is if the name is mix and that's what you want then that's OK, it's not that it has to be something different.

Jenny: I just found that's the fastest way, I guess, to convey a general idea, but I am fine with biracial. I don't have strong feelings on this. I kind of...I always end up explaining the particulars if that's what the question is.

Lizzie Marie: That's fancy to imagine that we're ever going to be in a place where our names aren't meaningful. We all want to have a name, we want to be a

principal. You want to be something and you want to have not just the humanness of us, we want to be labeled something. I'm a vegetarian, I mean something to people. So I don't want to pretend that I don't want that. I've always wanted to have a category. I just don't know what I want to be called.

Tallulah: My first reaction to that is the answer that I give when I know what people are getting at and they're not being rude, but they're not my best friend, you know they ask me, I'm human. And they don't like that answer then they're pushing me, you know push me into my category. But then a very strongly feel like my experience is my own and it's similar as our experiences are. There's a lot of stuff that we can relate to each other. We're still extremely different people. We've come from different places physically. We've had different experiences, different points of view on the same experience. So, how could I say for the rest of you guys that you want to be called human? You know, there's...what you are saying with family names and they're very proud of that, their groups, I'm sure there are people in that group who are proud of being whatever else they are, doctors, right? And because they are doctors they can say, "I'm a doctor and I'm proud and I am from this family and I'm proud." Some people feel the need to belong and they group themselves with their race, you know Black pride that's definitely a racial grouping. And so maybe there are people up there with the same color as me who feel the need to be grouped that way and that would be the name.

So, I can't say for myself or I can't say for everybody, this is what we should be called because I don't feel the need to be grouped with a certain race of people. I feel a connection with you guys here and I think it's neat that we've gotten together and been able to say some things, but one or the other side doesn't get. My White friends don't get this, you guys will. The Black friends don't get it, you guys will, so I'm glad that I can identify with you, but I identify myself in so many other ways that doesn't come down to this group of people or people like us. You know, again it depends on where I am and what the situation is. If I'm in a classroom, I'm a student and if I'm teaching, I'm a teacher. That's who I am. I'm not a Black student or a White teacher or anything like that. So, I have a hard time grouping myself in that way. I was thinking on the way here, what do I do in my life that is specifically racial. I'm driving here today, I'm like driving here as a Black woman or a White woman, you know I'm just driving like every other person on the road and I'm going to go have dinner, am I doing that as a certain kind of person? No. Every human, eats. Every human drives some place. Every human has a job or a family, you know.

Jenny: Yeah, we're so much more complicated.

Tallulah: These are our human things that I identify with, but even the things that I've talked to you guys about and that we see eye to eye on, those things aren't so huge in my life that I need to identify myself that way.

Lizzie Marie: If I change that word from collective identity, how would you name your collective experience? Because we all want to be identified but we don't, so

we're all just going to say this around. How would we name our collective experience? I don't have a name for that either.

Kendall: I never had a problem just calling out I'm Black and White, I'm White and Black. I mean I couldn't come up with a name that like you say to me biracial, you know I could then pick 2 boxes or three or four...

Jenny: Sometimes I call myself a woman of color...

Miranda: I'm going to throw this out there and you guys think about it. Something that you and I [gestures to Lizzie Marie] came up with and that was the collective only. To me that is...it represents this experience and what I...that's what I connected to. Having my story and my only and being the only one that feels this way and the only one that has had these feelings and then coming together with other people where you just immediately are being embraced or share a story and there's something similar or something that they've experienced that it's just like multiple ONLY that have come together to become that collective. So that's what I'm curious about how you think about that. Not as the identity, not as the naming of the identity, but when we think about this experience.

Sassy: For me, I've heard of that...my answer was I have no idea. Being in the middle all the time, you don't really know what it's like to go on to one group or the other and when I saw that... "collective only" yeah, I guess I kind of just went towards it. I'm so used to being an individual that's what I know. So it's something...

Jenny: Yeah. That's just a weird position to be...

Sassy: Right. So I like that, I like the collective only because to me all I kept thinking was individual. I don't really hang out inclusive like mixed girls, I don't know that many. I mean I'm Black and White, but that's all I kept thinking - it's individual, individual, but again because that's how I've grown up and that's all I want to know and those are my experience usually, I wanted to embrace them because I have nothing else to embrace.

Miranda: It's been my own experience. And so perhaps when we think about trying to name a collective identity is that there's just really no way because all of us have lived in that unique space that we have to carve out.

During the individual interviews, the concept of the "collective only experience" was present for all of the participants. Kendall stated that she was still reflecting on the experience and really liked the concept of the "collective only" since for her, it kept her connected to the group and our lived experience. For Lizzie Marie, she asked, "By

naming, what are we gaining or losing? Because I don't want to lose anything so I need to know what I am gaining. If I gained a name, would I lose? What if I get there and it's not what I hoped?" Lizzie Marie's reflection connects to the ambivalence of the liminal space.

Theme Two: Belonging

Participating in the dialogue gave the women a sense of pride, safe space, and belonging that they had never experienced before. The dialogue offered them an opportunity to collectively explore their lived experiences with other "onlys" and to share in the complexity of being and living in an in-between space.

I've never been in a room of only us! (Kendall)

How many times you're going to be in a room of six people who can go, "Yeah, exactly, you hear me, you get it," because you've had that experience... But there's something that emerges in a space where we have those kinds of conversations and can just start to connect and hit...get to talk about memories that we haven't thought of. (Miranda)

I'm not talking like I feel like I look at myself differently, not even just like other people, but looking at it a little different for a second. I see myself differently. And I don't know that I was ready for that only because I wasn't expecting that. I wasn't expecting to get as much out of what I did and I think for me how I process things like what is going on like, OK. And then, I'm involved and active, but they weren't going to have and I actually really sit down and think about it and I was just like, OK, I don't think I was prepared or what I was expecting to get out of this coming into this as what I thought of it. (Sassy)

We're different but we have that thing in common that we can together fight against. So, I've never thought of it as an organized kind of thing. Do you guys all feel the same way? Well, let's go and educate the world. You know, let's go tell them. It's always been a personal thing with me. (Tallulah)

And I thought how quickly I was comfortable because I'm emotional when I come to this kind of stuff anyways, but it usually takes me time. My guard is up much longer, and we were talking like months and months longer. And I'm so surprised at my reactions. (Lizzie Marie)

This is really specific and a unique experience, and then, being in a room with you ladies is really awesome like, wow, you've been in that...that very specific situation as me which was really cool and comforting. (Kendall)

Summary

Two dialogues were conducted on a voluntary basis with six women who are identified as biracial. In this chapter, a description of the participants' demographics was presented as well as the resulting themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes were supported and illustrated by selected participant quotations derived from each dialogue.

The themes that emerged from the narratives discussed above suggest that these women would often have difficulties finding comfort in the in-between space because it may be a space that is largely unexplored, filled with judgment, dominant discourses around their race, and the assumption that they should choose one identity or another. The women discussed complexities of both the positive and negative elements of their lived experiences. At times they were ambiguous about how challenges and benefits conflicted with one another. And yet, the underlying theme in their collective story was that as women living within the space between - possibly the third space - they were living more of a full identity than others would believe. While this balance might be the result of years of being an only, it is also the result of the active choices the women made about how they lived their lives and how they were socially defined. The women resisted imposed identities as defined by the dominant discourse. Instead they actively constructed their situational selves using various experiences that allowed them to self-construct and self-define their desired identity. Their experiences were multifaceted, consisting of a wide array of emotions, events, and personal relationships. While this in-

between space may bring discomfort and contradiction for some, these participants chose to transform it into their own space, a place of belonging and positive sense of self.

There were four additional findings that emerged from the data to create possible answers for the overall research question: *How can a dialogic approach create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White?* The findings were: 1) The creation of a dialogic space allowed for shared meaning to emerge and for there to be shared recognition of one to another of an “only” experience that they had collectively; 2) There was not a rush to name this identity from a race/ethnicity perspective because there were other identities or ways of describing self that were appropriated or created that allowed for their different yet empowering experiences; 3) Naming the collective lived experience was more important than naming the identity. 4) The use of dialogue as a methodology for exploring identity construction allowed for the complexities of being in between to be realized, and for the shared meaning of collective consciousness to emerge.

This chapter presented the findings of this study based on my interpretation and my understanding of the collective dialogue as it emerged. In order to move beyond description, in the next Chapter, I will present an interpretive discussion of the salient themes/subthemes that emerged throughout data analysis.

In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness. – Carl Jung

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Interpretation

Identity construction is clearly a multifaceted process that is experienced in varied ways (Erikson, 1968; Fearon, 1999; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002; Rockquemore, Brunσμα & Delgado, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tatum, 1997; Turner, 1982). The limited research addressing this process has been conceptual in nature and often based on outdated ideologies (Brunσμα & Delgado 2008). Most of the previous research has not addressed this development process by speaking with biracial individuals about their experiences, let alone in a collective environment. Given the increase in mixed race children over the past three decades and the impact that racial identity has on fostering a sense of self and belonging, this is an important phenomenon to study.

This qualitative study used a dialogical framework to examine the process of identity construction by exploring the subjective lived experience of six women who are identified as biracial. The women completed a reflection questionnaire, participated in two dialogues, and one interview. During the recorded dialogues and interviews, open-ended questions were asked around the participants' beliefs about their identity construction. Consistent with qualitative data procedures, the dialogues and interviews were analyzed and coded through an analysis process for the purpose of developing interpretive themes. Several themes emerged through the data analysis.

The final chapter of a dissertation normally summarizes key findings, interprets the findings and discusses implications for practice and/or policymaking, along with

potential implications for future research. I plan to do the above, but in a somewhat different way. My approach will be to share personal reflections and interpretations on what began as an open dialogic inquiry into the collective narrative that emerged from the study. My intention is to provide a possible insight into a new and emergent way for using a collective dialogical framework as a method for researching identity construction.

The chapter will be divided into the following sections. First, I will provide a summary of the four key findings that emerged to answer the research question: *How can a dialogic approach create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White?* Second, I will integrate and discuss those findings using the theory, method, and process of Bohmian Dialogue and Theory U. These areas will be discussed throughout the chapter in light of the relevant literature. In the final part of the discussion, I will reflect on (a) how I expect this study to influence my future research agenda (and, possibly, the research agendas of others who are interested in studying identity construction) and (b) what this dissertation research means for my (and possibly others') participation in a dialogical process.

Four Central Findings

The overall research question was: *How can a dialogic approach create the conditions for the emergence of a new potential language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled mixed race/biracial/Black and White?* The four central findings that emerged from this study to answer this question were: 1) The creation of a dialogic space allowed for shared meaning to emerge and for there to be shared recognition of one to another of an “only” experience that was also voiced collectively; 2) The participants did not yet want to name this identity from a race/ethnicity perspective because they had

other ways of describing self that allowed for their different yet empowering experiences to be present; 3) Naming the collective *lived* experience was, at this particular time, more important than simply naming a collective identity; and 4) The use of dialogue as a methodology for exploring identity construction allowed for the complexities of being in-between to be realized, and for the shared meaning of collective consciousness to emerge.

Research Finding One: Emergence of a Shared Meaning

We are often socially defined by identities that others ascribe to us. Amidst the inherent complexities of the women's lived experiences, the participants entered into the dialogue from an "only" perspective. None of the women had experienced being in a room with five other women who shared an "only experience". Additionally they had never engaged in a deeply reflective conversation with others about their lived experience: the opportunity to speak about their childhood from that "only" perspective, to verbally take ownership of being able to describe one's self on their own terms (and for others to understand and agree with it), to hear other stories that were so similar to theirs, to ask questions of other "onlys", and most importantly, to be *heard* without assumption, judgment, or argument. It appeared that the women began to shift their frame of reference; they moved from just recognizing themselves as "only" to the intersectionality of their experience and others' experiences.

For all of the participants, there was a realization that while they may still have experienced their life from an "only" perspective, they were actually others who also felt this way. In terms of presence, they began to deepen their understanding of self in relation to others, encountered women who shared "their" version of lived experience, and heard perspectives about the dynamics of the larger society that paralleled their own.

Through this process of sharing their stories, the participants recognized that they were no longer alone. Margaret Wheatley wrote, “Whatever life we have experienced, if we can tell our story to someone who listens, we find it easier to deal with our circumstances” (2002, para. 3). The participants are not yet done telling their collective story, but they were happy to have others who would not only listen, but completely understood the context of their experience. Their ability to express their authentic self and their identity process allowed for the discovery of the collective shared meaning (Bohm, 1996).

Consistent with the theory, the dialogic space fostered an environment through which the participants realized their interconnectedness to one another in the in-between, the liminal realm. What emerged from the dialogue was a movement from a kind of ineffable liminality to a different stance where their collective voice began to be expressed. At the level of the individual and the group, the capacity and desire to learn, take up, and speak from a voice that they did not know they had was placed powerfully into practice.

Research Finding Two: Naming Ourselves

Participants in this study experienced inconsistent social encounters with other people who would insist that they define themselves based on categories developed by the dominant discourse. Their resistance to overly simplistic, narrow renderings of identity is consistent with the literature, which argued that these individuals couldn’t be easily classified in either a monoracial majority or monoracial minority group. Without exception, each of the women expressed some variant of an experience where they faced rejection from both majority and minority groups (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007;

Smith & Leavy, 2008). Recognizing the demand to fit into the categories and assumptions of others that did not necessarily match their own self-concepts, the participants actively yet internally negotiated and made choices to construct their about their own identity. The adaptation of the participants was to carve out unique expression of identity that was based on characteristics other than race. While this approach allowed the women to experience a level of efficacy in naming their own experience of identity, it also left them isolated from others with whom they shared partial identification. As a consequence, moving away from an “either/or” racial identity exacerbated and intensified an “only” orientation to the world.

When I asked the women to describe themselves, the participants noted the difference in this question rather than “what are you?” and chose to adapt their answer to a more creative one, which included characteristics that they felt were more important, rather than rely on an externally created racial signifier. Through joining in the dialogue and participating in the creation of the dialogical space, the participants were able to collectively create the conditions for an emergent third space. This space allows for the suspension of judgment, open inquiry, creation of new knowledge, and connection with supportive and like-minded others (Bhabha, 1994, Bohm, 2004a). Through this process, participants came to collectively recognize that, not only were they not alone in their lived experience, they were no longer solely confined to social constructions of identity externally imposed by others.

One curious irony is that when asked to name their collective identity, the women were not quite ready to do this. They questioned the importance of a new label and its purpose, and expressed concern over why it was necessary to reduce a collective identity

to just one word, even though as one woman stated, “You want to be labeled something.” Her growing awareness of the importance of naming and its impact on her was stated this way:

That’s fancy to imagine that we’re ever going to be in a place where our names aren’t meaningful. We all want to have a name... You want to be something and you want to have not just the humanness of us, you want to be labeled something. I’m a vegetarian.... That means something to people. So I don’t want to pretend that I don’t want that. I’ve always wanted to have a category. I just don’t know what I want to be called. (Lizzie Marie)

Given that the women had built this connection to one another, Lizzie Marie voiced concern about what they might lose if they did “name” themselves, and asked, “If I gained a name, what would I lose? What if I get there and it’s not what I hoped? If by naming ourselves, are we trying to shift something, get something, are we doing it for them or for us?” Her question is consistent with literature that speaks to the fact that these labels embrace a dominant binary mindset, and the social world no longer lends itself to binary thinking when issues of race and ethnicity come into play (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). This sentiment is also consistent with Smith and Berg (1987) who suggest that individuals in this predicament may struggle with what they might have to give up as a consequence of belonging to a group. Even if the women were to create their own group or new name, a new question then emerges concerning what parts of their self-descriptions or individualized identity may they need to give up.

While the participants acknowledged the current racial naming practice, they did not feel it was accurate or consistent with their lived experience. The women connected to other aspects of their identity that they deemed more important. These aspects included acknowledgement of their familiarity with living and being in-between, inhabiting in the third space. They grappled with ways to personalize their identities. This

is consistent with the literature that discusses the complexities of this space and defining it for one's self (Brunsma, 2002). Their adaptive creations of naming personal identity created a certain kind of individual freedom. A new language has not yet emerged that would allow this group to actively identify with something that they can truly identify with that includes their unique self-description. I interpret this to mean that by creating a new label for their racial identity; it was yet another kind of limitation since there would be no way (currently) to encompass the diversity of people with one Black and one White parent, at least not within this group. Their self-reflections freed them of internalized oppression and internalized dominance from the outside world, and moved them beyond feeling stuck in a label that did not fit. Another interpretation of this is that the women were choosing not to even explore the collective naming, possibly because there would be some sort of responsibility they would have to take on for choosing the name for a large group of people. Additionally, they would also need to give up the learned experience of "only" being their lived reality. Once there is another that they agree is also "me"—then "only" is no more.

Research Finding Three: Naming the Experience

Given that this dialogue was the first time that any of the participants had shared space with other "onlys", they seemed eager to participate in the collective sharing of stories and lived experience. The participants were open and engaged in talking about the intersection of their identities with one another and the similarities in their personal histories. Through the exchanges afforded by the dialogue, there was abundant evidence of how the imposed social construction of "biracial" identity was a consistent source of ambivalence. Within the field of psychology, identity is normatively described as a

development process that is largely internal (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1994), with relatively little attention paid to the influence of external forces in constraining or co-constructing identity. In comparison, critical queer theory and postmodern constructions of identity place greater emphasis on how external forces involving power, dominance and social discourse influence identity (Butler 1990, Foucault, 1978).

The data that emerged from this study offers a perspective of identity formation as influenced by internal revealing processes of self-discovery and reflective choice. The women also made it known that they felt the influence of external processes embedded in power hierarchies that confer meaning and seek to define “the other” (Baumeister, 1997; Marcia, 1994). When joined together internal social construction and external social interaction yield identity changes. The findings in this study reflect more recent theory in feminist and multicultural psychology that understands identity as developing as a co-constructed process between self and others/groups (Baumeister, 1997; Smith & Berg, 1987; Suyemoto, 2002). Additionally, it pushes our understanding away from overly simplistic stage theories or linear development models. Through the interviews it was learned that the women, in the course of their lifetime, each had some experience of shifting how they would present and define their racial identity. Though often not having the words to express it, they lived through moments of seeking some balance between their efforts at some internal construction of “who I am” against the external realities that sought to define them.

The liminal space described by postcolonial theorists and feminists of color as the Third Space is a space of ambiguity and hybridity, where the boundaries between “same” and “different” are not so clear (Anthias, 2002; Bhabha, 1994; Runyan, 2003). Bhabha

(1994) stated that by exploring the space of liminality, “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (p. 66). In the Third Space, common binaries, such as universal and particular or local and global become melded together, and there is no longer a simplistic way of categorizing someone as one thing or the other (Runyan, 2003). For the participants, there was a sense of pride and exhilaration in being in this space.

All the participants expressed during the dialogue and in the individual interviews that participating in the conversation allowed them to actively reflect upon and question what identity really meant to them, including their racial identity. However, rather than come to some shared sense of a new label for this racial identity that would not sufficiently embrace their uniqueness and diverse characteristics as individuals, the participants focused on the connection with one another. As such they created a sense of belonging consistent with the emergence of a new group but not one they were prepared to label. Smith and Berg (1987) suggest that,

A group can become a group when individuals put themselves into it, for it is the contribution of individuals that enable connection among people to form, connections that become woven into a fabric from which the foundation of the group is constructed. (p. 100)

As a participant in the dialogue, I offered a name to the emergent group process: “the Collective Only Experience.” The women all found resonance with this descriptor. This language was a way for the participants to connect and integrate their personal stories into a larger collective narrative. The shared meaning and shared value place on being with other “onlys” affirmed each woman’s life journey to a unique identification. They could each hear their racial self in the stories of the other women while still feeling and being recognized for the value of their individual version of this collective narrative. The

connections that formed a sense of a group did not also come with a requirement for them to name a new identity. The focus remained powerfully on holding simultaneously the tenuous liminal space between the expressions of individuality and the connections to the collective.

Through participating in the dialogue, the women began to build deeper relationships with each other, particularly since the others were also similarly positioned in a system of inequality, but were moving through it. The participants began to see their new realizations of a shared meaning, a shared identity, as liberating. By socially connecting with others like them and also different from them, the women appeared to shift their consciousness from an individualized space to a collective Third Space.

Research Finding Four: Dialogue as the Method, Theory U as a Framework

The complexity of identity construction requires conceptual frameworks that produce transformative pathways of collective understanding. Otto Scharmer's Theory U is one such framework, offering a unique combination of relevant theories and practices from the fields of phenomenology and systems thinking, organizational learning, and leadership (Nicolaides, A. & McCallum, D., 2014). Theory U is a rich, multilayered framework some might consider challenging to apply due to its conceptual complexity. Yet it is helpful to explore Theory U through the lens of a distinct, yet related framework: Bohmian Dialogue. Bohm and Isaacs offer us a theory and method for creating shared meaning and collective space. Their concept of dialogue is an attempt to perceive the world with new eyes, not merely to solve problems using the thought that created them in the first instance. Otto Scharmer's Theory U process (2007) coincides with the dialogical framework and methodology of David Bohm (1996). Bohmian dialogue was the overall

method for arriving in the collective narrative. Once the dialogical space was established, Theory U offers us a way to understand the emergent process of a liminal consciousness that was created.

The essence of Theory U is a process of moving individuals, groups, and systems through the operative states, which Scharmer (2009) calls open mind, open heart, and open will. There are three main phases of the left side of the U-Process (seeing, sensing, and presencing). Theory U integrates subjective, inter-subjective, and objective dimensions in framing challenges, examining relevant data, exploring collective needs and intentions, and prototyping creative pathways for change, or the realization of shared vision (Nicolaidis, A. & McCallum, D., 2014). This gets people to the place where it is possible to access the highest future possibility, and then use that access to crystalize a vision or idea, prototype them in real, iterative actions, and eventually embody them in the form of new infrastructures and ecosystems.

As mentioned in chapter three, the way we are placed in life and how we make sense of space are continuously and inseparably linked to our lived experience of the actual and relational every-day life-worlds. These experiences are also interconnected to the social encounters we have with other people and how we make sense of those encounters. In this study, using dialogue as method for exploration of the collective consciousness allowed for:

1. The creation the potential space for something new to emerge (Bohm, 2004).

2. Examination of the seeming duality or polarity that informs mixed race identity that is expressed when individuals are in dialogue within what is called third space (Bhabha, 1994).
3. Exploration of how the embodiment of a hybrid identity is more than an either/or or a both/and experience (Green, Z., Elson, O., & van Linge, A, 2012).

Within this dissertation study, the participants and I created a collective dialogical space that explored some of the difficulties, dilemmas, and challenges in the complexities of mixed race individuals whose lives are often defined and constrained by the dominant discourse. Bohm (2004) and Isaacs (2008, 1996) view dialogue as a sustained collective inquiry into the process, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience. In speaking about the benefit of dialogue, Isaacs offered the following:

If people can be brought into a setting where they, at their choice, can become conscious of the very process by which they form tacit assumptions and solidify beliefs, and be rewarded by each other for doing so, then they can develop a common strength and capability for working and creating things together. This free flow of inquiry and meaning allows new possibilities to emerge. (1996, p. 25)

From the moment the women agreed to participate, they probably did not know what to expect or what they may have to offer. It was the dialogue itself that allowed their ideas to emerge.

Moving Down the U. Moving down the U begins with a collective intention to create space for an emerging future, and participants engage this intention as distinct individuals. While sustaining an awareness of one's own subjective experience, one is also aware of the interactions among the other participants and the facilitator who

supports the *moving down the U*. The women entered the room with no new knowledge that their participation in the conversation might be any different than other conversations they have had about their identity. Perhaps they entered the dialogue space prepared to respond with past patterns or “downloading”, from the first type of listening. From this space, one could assume they would probably reenact old habits of interaction, conforming to what is expected of them in a particular social situation. Scharmer might refer to this as the “I-in-me” or the “blind spot”, which is the place from where we operate when we are doing something. It is blind, in that it is “an invisible dimension of our social field, of our everyday experience in social interactions” (2009, p. 6). The participants are so used to playing various roles for others while internally knowing they are something “other than” what people ascribe them to be.

Scharmer states that there are three principles that can support the move from downloading to “actual seeing”: 1) clarify the question and intent; 2) move into the contexts that matter; and 3) suspend judgment and connect to wonder. The first question I asked the group was, “How do you describe yourself?” Lizzie Marie was the first to respond, saying:

Can you frame it again? Obviously, the title was “Beyond Biracial”, and it’s interesting ‘cause my first reaction is fun, outgoing, that kind of stuff besides...before I would say biracial. So that’s why I had this kind of awkward silence of where do I begin with that word? I consider myself biracial, but I don’t necessarily describe myself that way.

Her quest for clarification might infer the first step in movement from downloading to seeing. What Lizzie Marie did at the beginning of the dialogue was insightful and deeply reflective, and supportive of where the dialogue needed to immediately go. She opened up her mind to the notion of “what else is there?” and opened up the space by drawing the others into her personal story of self-description, and indirectly invited others to consider

a different way to answer. Bohm might consider this to be an opportunity of suspending judgment and illuminating the assumptions grounded in our thinking.

Lizzie Marie also created a space for the participants to feel safe enough to ask questions and seek clarification. She wondered about another way to ask the question, but also, offered another way to answer it. Scharmer explains that, “Wonder is about noticing that there is a world beyond patterns of downloading. Wonder can be thought of as the seed from which the U process grows. Without the capacity for wonder, we will most likely remain stuck in the prison of our mental constructs” (2009. p. 133). Before I had a chance to respond or clarify Lizzie Marie’s question and observation, the other women began to share their own response to it.

When the women realized that this space was an opportunity for them to show their authentic selves, they too began to wonder about other ways to respond. This might suggest that it allowed for the suspension of their unspoken social norms, their fixed positions of the habitual way to enter a room, their need to size up the other people, and the need to figure out what role they were supposed to play. The participants were able to let go of their usual way of responding to “what are you?” for a more open-ended “how do you describe yourself?” This was an invitation to each participant to not only answer the question how they wanted to, but also it offered them the opportunity to let go of assumptions of what the “right answer” was for the asker.

No longer did the participants feel judged. The women answered the self-description question by reflecting on all the ways they had answered it before, how they had internally answered it, connecting their stories to one another. They co-initiated a space where they were able to verbally reflect with one another on these habits and

expectations, open themselves up to other participants who also shared in those experiences, and thereby open a door to question their assumptions as necessary. Bohm wrote,

A new kind of mind comes into being which is based on the development of a common meaning that is constantly transforming in the process of the dialogue. People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning which is capable of constant development and change... The group thus begins to engage in a new dynamic relationship in which no speaker is excluded, and in which no particular content is excluded. Thus far we have only begun to explore the possibilities of dialogue in the sense indicated here, but going further along these lines would open up the possibility of transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise. (1996, p. 175)

The participants were awakened to the possibility of a new conversation that they had the power to collectively create.

As they moved down the U, the women began to share their individual stories, the meaning that they had created for themselves, and the connection it had to the social construction of their identity. It was as if the stories were on the tip of their tongue, waiting to be shared with others who would understand. Unconscious connectivity emerged from the group through head nods and smiles, or the simple “Yes! I totally get what you’re saying”. The women began to feel legitimacy to their feelings. Smith and Berg (1995, 1987) reference Benne (1968) in their discussion of the paradox of groups, in that “the group gains its solidarity as individuality is legitimated, and individuality is established when the primacy of the group is affirmed” (p. 109).

Dialogical inquiry places primacy on the whole, beyond just the telling of the individual’s lived experience, but the listening to the individual’s lived experience. This was a collective experience. The participants began to “co-initiate” the dialogical space. During this phase of Theory U, participants suspended their “voice of judgment” (VOJ)

and connected with their sense of wonder. Bohm (1996) warns us that without the capacity to suspend the voice of judgment, all attempts to get inside the place of most potential will be in unsuccessful. Suspending VOJ means shutting down the habit of judging and conversing based on the experiences and patterns of the past in order to open up a new space of exploration, inquiry, and wonder.

As the dialogue progressed, the group began letting go of their assumptions of what the right answers should be for the questions being asked. This deconstruction of the process of thought allowed the women to deeply reflect on how they have constructed their identity. They shared stories and reflected on memories previously forgotten or written off as unimportant. There were no words of judgment as the dialogue progressed. What appeared to be happening was that the participants were rejoicing in the fact that they were no longer alone, and no longer needed to identify based on past habits. In the Theory U perspective, this suggests the process of “presencing”. Reams offers us the following insight, “when we think about the future, it is always grounded in the context of what we have experienced in the past” (1999, p. 4) In addition to their *letting go*, the participants *let come* a new kind of vulnerability to share with others about how they really saw themselves and their social construction of identity. They let come the acknowledgement for being in-between, and the fact that they were no longer alone.

It could be that the participants had become aware of their collective potential. Not only were they listening to one another’s stories, they were hearing their own story from an emerging perspective, paying attention to the difference of telling it to this group, versus the downloaded images of the past. This is in line with Theory U’s transitional phase from Field 1 to Field 2 (I-in-it), where our minds are open to the world as it really

is around us, while remaining at a factual level (Scharmer, 2009). The group began to talk about their ways of responding to “what are you” questions, and made room for a more authentic way of responding. Part of their “downloading” process was to be able to answer the question by first, expressing how they typically answer, but then sharing how they internally felt about that answer and how they wanted to really respond. By virtue of speaking it aloud and more importantly for their answer to be received openly, the women began to let go of their guard; they suspended past patterns of response and began to pay attention to the emergent reality in front of them. From this place, a different kind of conversation began to emerge. Scharmer refers to this transition as “Open Heart”, a way to go beyond the social field and lay our own position within the system bare, feeling our way into the position of others.

As the women continued to build connection to one another’s lived experiences, they shifted to “empathic listening” and began to see the world unfold through someone else’s eyes. It was no longer just their story, or their “only” experience. The realization that “I am not the only one” was interchanged with the emergence of the “collective only.” The participants were more reflective and began asking questions of one another and themselves. It was apparent that something had shifted. Each woman spoke from a much more authentic and vulnerable place, and with deeply reflective sincerity for themselves and one another. The movement down the U continued.

By the end of the first dialogue, the participants had entered into a dialogical space of meaning making around their identity construction. The participants did not want to stop the conversation when the time was up. They wanted to remain in “the field”, in the dialogical space, in the newly established group. One way to interpret this is

that they seemed to sense that upon leaving the space they would take with them a timeless element of “presence” from the conversation, something more closely connected to a true authentic self. The authentic self can be experienced each time you engage in a deep generative conversation that enters the field of emergence. Another interpretation stems from the Smith and Berg’s concept that,

As individuals come together to form groups, their differences allow for the expression of both hopes and fears. The simultaneous expression of these contradictory reactions actually makes the group a safer place, albeit a place full of opposing forces. The coexistence of these opposing forces is as necessary as it is disquieting, for their presence in the *group* allows *individuals* to participate in spite of the ambivalence they bring to collective endeavors. (1995, p. 111, original emphasis)

When the conversation is finished, the participants might leave the dialogue as someone different from the person they were when they entered it a few hours earlier; still engaged as individuals *and* part of the group. When I became aware of these subtle shifts – the women still sitting in a circle, engaged in conversation, even after the recording stopped - the conversation shifted from normal reflective discourse to a deeper flow of meaning and essential emergence. When these changes happened, the conversation simultaneously deepened to provide a profound sense of timeless presence and flow. What had emerged was a shared experience, a shared meaning that each participant was not living in the in-between alone.

Co-Presencing: Connecting to the Future That Wants to Emerge. After deeply immersing oneself in the contexts of the first dialogue, the next movement for the group was to focus on accessing a deeper source of knowing, or connecting to the future that wants to emerge through you, or co-presencing (Scharmer, 2004). At the beginning of the second dialogue, the first question I asked was “over the last few weeks what have

you noticed about yourself and others regarding your identity construction?” This question possibly allowed the participants to experience “letting go”; Letting go of the old self and stuff that must die. The biggest obstacle to moving through the U comes from within: it is resistance (individually and collectively); but dealing with this resistance is essential when moving down the left side of the U. By talking about their emotions and feelings that had emerged after the first dialogue, and potentially overcoming their fear of letting go of your old self, or old ways of defining their identity, their beliefs began to take on a new and emergent shape.

What emerged in their answer to this question seemed to be congruent with Transition 3 “Open Will”. The suspension of attachment to our past and identities opened yet another door into a future that wants to emerge. Rather than just accepting the racial category placed on them, and internally describing themselves differently, the participants spoke of a sense of pride, of seeing themselves and their environments differently. They had let come the future. They surrendered to the future that wanted to collectively emerge within them; no longer just an only, a past way of understanding, but collectively with the other women who also were co-creating the shared meaning.

At the foundation of the presencing approach is a simple assumption: every human being is not one, but two. One is the person that we have become through the journey of the past. The other one is the dormant being of the future that we could become through the journey of allowing the future to emerge. Who we arrive to become depends on the choices we make and the actions we take now - that being of the future is our highest or best future possibility. Both of these beings are real in the sense that each one constitutes a specific body of resonance—the field of the past and the field of the

future. The participants had connected to the collective consciousness of the group - From “only” to “collective only” – micro to meso. The essence of presencing is to get these two selves to talk to each other, to resonate, both individually and collectively.

Scharmer defines presencing as “a moment when we approach our self from the emerging future” (2009, p. 163). Each participant had gone from being an “only”, to realizing there were other “onlys”, to the emergence of a “collective only”. We sat within the bottom of the U (connecting us to the world that emerges from within) and began noticing a shift in our individual consciousness towards a shared meaning. We were becoming present to their meaning. Isaacs wrote, “the group does not ‘have’ meaning, in other words, it *is* its meaning” (1993, p. 25). On that journey, at the bottom of the U, lies an inner gate that required us to complete the process of dropping everything that no longer considered essential. This process of letting-go (of our old ego and self) and letting-come (our highest future possibility: our Self) establishes a subtle connection to a deeper source of knowing. The essence of presencing is that these two selves, our current self and our best future self, meet at the bottom of the U and begin to listen and resonate with each other.

Moving Up the Right Side of the U. Once the group crossed the threshold into presencing, nothing remained the same. The group as a whole began to operate with a heightened level of energy and sense of future possibility. More often than not these experiences go unnoticed because people are not paying attention to them. However in this study, all the women commented on this new knowledge and wonder that had collectively emerged. They questioned how to create such places in our everyday life. I would argue that the participants had become acutely attentive to their collective lived

experience as this common field opened up to the deeper streams of presence and self. They wanted to hold tight to the field that allowed for the deeper flow of collective understanding to be sustained. This alignment of the individual and the collective allowed for a new vision of the future to show itself. By making space for an emerging future, that of a new vision and intention, it opened toward the future in the sense that exist both now and not yet; in other words, they are in a temporal state of potentiality, rather than manifestation.

Co-Creating and Crystallization . By the end of the second dialogue, the women had created a collective holding space in which the participants supported one another in making sense of and advancing their way of thinking about identity. They became in tune with both the unconscious and conscious dynamics at both the individual and collective levels (Smith & Berg, 1995). Each participant had developed the capacity to operate from the nothingness of the now, the ability to discern and take the next step in situations where old structures have broken down and new structures had not yet emerged. The result was a collective field of being present, activated by all the participants during the dialogue, which allowed the women to open their hearts, minds, and wills toward the coming future. The movement of co-creating a dialogical space that suspended judgment and encouraged reflective thinking, quickly evolved into naming the collective lived experience. The women reconnected to a deeper source and flow of inherent knowing. By connecting to one's best future possibility and creating powerful breakthrough ideas, they allowed access to the intelligence of the heart and the hand, not just the intelligence of the head.

Summary

The collective story told here is a beautiful demonstration of how Theory U can be applied to a dialogic process of discovery. The women in this study co-created a space that moved their apprehensions, aspirations and intentions into a full “letting go” of the external and internal narratives that sought to define them. Once the conditions were set for authentic, deliberative dialogue, each woman to varying degrees began to break the flow of old habits of thinking to embrace new ways of knowing that emerged from the collective sharing of their lived experiences. The deepest essence of presence could be observed in how the women paid attention to the ideas that began to crystallize into a collective consciousness. Together, they began to offer one another the potential for prototypic expressions of voice; one just on the cusp of a new language of their own. Ultimately what was revealed is the challenge that it will now take for a new narrative to be embodied and the sense of self so long silenced to have its own name.

Researcher Reflections

This study sought out women with one Black and one White parent; therefore, the results may not be applicable to men identified as biracial/Black and White/mixed race/other, or other biracial individuals of other races. The limited number of participants in this study makes it difficult to know if the full range of perspectives on biracial identity construction were covered. Those who elected to participate in the study may have been naturally more comfortable talking about biracial identity issues than those who did not want to participate. This may have resulted in overly optimistic findings. Additionally, the results relied on the participants’ verbal reports, possibly making it difficult for the participants to share what they might have perceived as socially unacceptable feelings or

viewpoints. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This means that the data was filtered through my subjective perspective, lenses, and worldviews. I examined and filtered the data through these three approaches, which may have precluded other analysis and findings.

In order to ensure “trustworthiness” (Morrow, 2005), active methods were taken to bring to consciousness (Creswell, 2007) my own theories, values, beliefs, thoughts, preconceived notions, and personal experiences and use this awareness responsibly. Through self-reflection and acknowledgment of potential biases, I examined these ideas with another participant, and consciously integrated them into the data analysis and research process. In this way my subjectivity consciously became a part of the data, as a participant, but also as a researcher (Finlay, 2002). While I did have another participant serve as a reviewer of my findings, an observer present and the dialogues, an anonymous review of the findings, or a comparative analysis might diversify the findings beyond just my perspective.

Furthermore, given that I am also identified as biracial and other labels, this may have further inhibited the participants’ responses. Thus, the participants could have portrayed their experiences in an overly positive light. Throughout this study I sought to empower and encourage dialogue, reflection, and interaction within the women who participated. I also attempted to give language to the results in a manner that offers a personalized reflection of the co-constructed process and is representative of the collective. Special attention was paid to the ways that dialogue attempts to suspend judgment, push back against the systemic hierarchies of power and privilege that limit the way we think about identity, and call forward a collective voice.

This experience allowed me to see that as someone identified as biracial, and living in the in-between, it is important to consider the possibility that identity emerges from different places. Because there is no common language, we succumb to describing ourselves based on what the dominant discourse think they might be able to understand. Yet, when a group of women dialoging about their collective shared meaning and identity construction begin to fully embrace a language that might become a commonality between mixed people, what emerges is a new conversation that allows for the exploration of what else is possible: that this hybrid identity is really more than an either/or or a both/and experience, it is a collective only experience. This research suggests that the time may be arriving for this new voice to emerge and this new language to be spoken.

Implications

This study demonstrated that women identified as biracial/mixed/Black and White/other, valued being asked about and having an opportunity to voice their lived experiences of identity construction. More importantly, the women were instrumental, through their participation in the dialogue in co-creating the conditions for exploring the collective nature of what may indeed be present and known *beyond biracial*.

This study yielded meaningful implications for understanding collective identity construction. In the United States, social and political trends point to what may now be more accurately characterized as beyond a post-colonial and post-industrial world (Appiah, 1991; Bhabha, 1994, 1990). We see the evidence of this reality through debates over immigration, increased numbers of interracial relationships, rapid pace of globalization, and the embrace of technology. Emergent knowledge around issues of self

and collective identity has correspondingly become more critical in the face of demographic changes in the United States. Through social networking and other internet media, individuals are accessing and encountering diverse histories, religions, upbringing, and cultural spaces dramatically and instantaneously as never before. What is now called “biracial” in the United States can also be seen as part of a larger global discourse that is being expressed in a virtual *mélange* that brings all manner of difference in direct contact with one another. In many respects, the question of what one calls oneself is becoming a global one.

The data that emerged from this study clearly has a broader cultural and political resonance. If global contexts and diaspora formations have served as a useful analytical tool for understanding the construction of identity in the present global world, then we are moving in a direction where we are being invited to reexamine the specific ways research is designed and data is collected. The global and virtual landscape will require all of us to take into direct consideration that cultural contexts are likely to be paradoxically real and disembodied, fragmented and re-integrated in new rapidly changing contexts. It is becoming evident that this research is potentially the beginning of a new discourse of the hybrid identity related to modern individualism as well as a kind of fluidity of collectivism that differs substantially from the current discrete categories such as nationality, race, and gender. It is also becoming clearer that the conversation that is emerging, may involve further review of post-industrial and post-colonial theory as a way to analyze the shifts in cultural identity of hybrid individuals (Appiah, 1991; Bhabha, 1994, 1990). One can see an analogy in how post-colonial experiences allowed for peoples who were under the dominance of another nation began a decades long course

of defining their own national identity.

As the boundaries of the world shift through globalization and the internet, a more meaningful the vocabulary and language, will be need to emerge to have a new kind of conversation. One such framework is dialogue on a hybrid identity, as two generations before now the dominance structure was such that this kind of conversation would not have even been possible, let alone the language and voice to carry it forward. With such possibility also comes, as found in Theory U, that a different future can be discovered with its own potent voice.

Findings around the notion of an emergent consciousness when speaking about these participants' racial/ethnic identity has implications as well for the reconfiguration of how women with one Black and one White parent choose to collectively name their identity, while simultaneously holding their unique self-description sacred. Certainly this is not the first time a group has had to define/name themselves. From a historical context, Blacks (or African American to some) were previously called colored or Negro. By the Black population choosing to rename and redefine themselves in a racialized society, some Black Americans were able to reconfigure their racial identity by connecting their black subjectivity to Africa through ancestry, roots, and transatlantic global circulation of slavery narratives, whilst taking ownership of their identity and collective name. These narratives are important to analyze because these

...narratives signify a connection to Africa that produces notions of ancestry as being constituted through and from one black ancestor to another. It describes black Americans as surviving incarnations of pre-slavery African societies, thereby enabling a self-identification of black Americans as not simply racialized but fundamentally embedded in genealogies of heritage. (Clark, 2006, p. 134)

There are hidden agendas around naming identity and culture that dispossesses and displaces people, and it is time to consider new and emergent ways of reconstructing the practice of research that speaks to the lives of marginalized and oppressed populations, and more importantly, includes them in the process. This examination is critical because it has implications for how a dialogical framework can contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals negotiate the anxiety, uncertainty, and possibilities that emerge as a result of the contact between personal, local and global forces of naming identity. The examination of collective identities using leadership and dialogical frameworks provides a very valuable foundation from which the culture and identity research has an opportunity to remake itself as a field that continues to be relevant in a world that is rapidly becoming global, asymmetrical, and increasingly diverse.

Considerations for Further Research

The prevalence of biracial, multiracial, and mixed race identity research continues to increase. This implies that the population of these groups will likely increase and become more diverse. This research merely serves as a stepping stone in the study of collective identity and the lived experience, and should be seen as neither complete nor comprehensive. For this reason, it will be important that researchers continue to explore these topics by going directly to the people.

This study also provided an emergent understanding of women with more than one race/ethnicity, how they view themselves as individuals, and how they discuss it in a group setting. Racial identity development theories and models exist to describe the racial/ethnic identity formation for people using categorical determinations

(Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Given the particularly unique participant population, this study revealed and explored the intersectionality among racially/ethnically mixed identity groups and their identification outside of the dominant discourse. If this study is any indication, researchers may consider dialogic methodologies to study collective identity. Further, it will be important to integrate the concept of dialogue into the study of identity construction to allow space for people to collectively explore factors that influence hybrid identity. This awareness may lead to reduction in the social disenfranchisement of being “not Black enough” or “not White enough”, and move towards creating an opportunity for individuals to define themselves, under their terms. Through these measures, a possibility exists to question and challenge racial/ethnic hierarchical continuums and reevaluate how the dominant discourse chooses to label these individuals.

Future research about this lived experience should be less exploratory and more empirical by going directly to the people themselves. Researchers who wish to continue the study of identity construction are encouraged to engage their participants using a dialogical framework that allows for the emergence of a shared meaning. What this approach may offer is further understanding of the group paradox. Such research can be employed to explore and better understand the interconnectivity of both unconscious and conscious dynamics of identity construction at the individual and collective level. This method encourages the participants to actively engage in the conversation, ask one another questions, and collectively explore the personal implications for each participant. In doing so, we are all enriched by the potential discovery of a new discourse that liberates the voice of those who have been rendered silent in their own skin.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Dear colleagues and friends,

I hope this message finds you well. I am a doctoral candidate in Leadership Studies at University of San Diego. I am trying to recruit female participants for a qualitative study that will explore whether a dialogic approach can help create the conditions for the construction of a new language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled Black and White, mixed race, and/or biracial. This study will explore in depth the lived experiences of women who have one Black and one White parent, and compose a collective narrative about they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as how their individual histories intersect within this new discourse.

Participants will be asked to complete a reflection questionnaire, participate in two group dialogues (each two hours long), and participate in one personal interview with the researcher. The dialogues will be held in San Diego, so participants should live within San Diego County or neighboring counties. If you, or someone you know qualifies for my study and are interested in participating, please pass along the word.

To participate in my study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be female and 30 years of age or over.
- Have one Black and one White parent that the participant identifies as such.
- Self-identify as Black and White, biracial, mixed, mulatto, or other.
- Be born and raised in the United States.
- Be willing and cooperative to share and discuss your lived experiences with others during two live onsite scheduled group dialogues in December and January.

If you (or someone you know) qualify for this study, please email me to set up a time to interview. My email address is roxannekymaani@gmail.com.

Blessings,

Roxanne J. Kymaani, M.S.

APPENDIX B

Email to Participants

Good morning,

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude for your willingness to participate in my dissertation study, titled “Beyond Biracial: The Complexity of Identity Construction for Women with one Black and one White Parent”. This is a qualitative study that will explore whether a dialogic approach can help create the conditions for the construction of a new language for the hybrid identity that is currently labeled Black and White, mixed race, and/or biracial.

This study will explore in depth the lived experiences of women who have one Black and one White parent, and compose a collective narrative about how they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as how their individual histories intersect within this new discourse.

You will be asked to complete a reflection questionnaire, participate in two group dialogues (each approximately two hours long), and participate in one personal interview with the researcher after the dialogues (approximately one hour).

- To participate in my study, you must meet the following criteria:
- Be female and 30 years of age or over.
- Have one Black and one White parent that the participant identifies as such.
- Self-identify as Black and White, biracial, mixed, mulatto, or other.
- Be born and raised in the United States.
- Be willing and cooperative to share and discuss your lived experiences with others during two live onsite scheduled group dialogues in December and January.

I would like an opportunity to meet with you in person to give you the informed consent form and allow you time to ask any questions prior to your participation. This won't take up too much of your valued time, and I am available to meet you wherever is convenient. Please let me know if you have time in the next week or so to do that.

Also, this link will take you to a doodle calendar, where you can choose the days and times that are convenient for you to participate in the two dialogues.

The available dates for the first dialogue are:

12/21, 12/22, 12/28, 12/29

The available dates for the second dialogue are:

1/4, 1/5, 1/11, 1/12

Link for choosing dates and times: <http://doodle.com/k2s6asd37358ekmd>

I realize that this is really close to the holidays, so I greatly appreciate you giving up a few hours to participate in what I hope to be a powerful study.

Action Items for you to complete within the next 2 weeks:

- Email or call me about meeting up to discuss the informed consent form and answer any questions.
- Complete the doodle calendar request

I am truly looking forward to this, and I hope you are too!

Blessings,

Roxanne J. Kymaani, M.S.

APPENDIX C

Research Participant Consent Form

University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board
Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:

Beyond Biracial: The Complexity of Identity Construction for Women with one Black and one White Parent

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. The researcher encourages you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

I. Purpose of the research study

Roxanne Kymaani is a doctoral student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of women who have a Black parent and White parent, how they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as how their individual histories intersect with others.

II. What you will be asked to do

There are four (4) parts to the research study. If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete one questionnaire that ask you questions about your age, ethnicity, and how you describe and experience your identity construction. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.
 - Time commitment – approximately 1 hour.
- Participate in two (2) dialogues with 5 participants about how you construct and make meaning of your identity.
 - Time commitment – approximately 2 hours for each dialogue.
- Participate in a private interview with the researcher about your experience in participating in the dialogue.
 - Time commitment – approximately 1 hour.

You will be audiotaped/videotaped during the two dialogues and audiotaped during the private interview. The audio/videotaping is mandatory for participation, so if you are not okay with this, you cannot participate.

Your participation in this study will take a total of approximately six (6) hours over approximately 30 days.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. These risks may include an emotional reaction to the questions being asked. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering. The benefits hoped for from this study include creating understanding and awareness associated with the experience of individuals with one Black parent and one White parent to further the knowledge in this area. Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped the researcher better understand in depth the experiences of women who have a Black parent and White parent, how they describe themselves and their processes for constructing identity, as well as how their individual histories intersect with others.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. This includes video/audio tape recordings. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of a group dialogue prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researcher would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the dialogue to others.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on you.

You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Questions

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. The research will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher(s), or faculty sponsor below:

1) Roxanne Kymaani

Email: roxannekymaani@gmail.com

Phone: 619.219.9136

2) Zachary Green, Faculty Sponsor

Email: zgreen@sandiego.edu

Phone: 619.260.7670

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of San Diego Institutional Review Board at (619) 260-4553 or irb@sandiego.edu.

VIV. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language that I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

☐ I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.

If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please see the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D

Reflection Questionnaire

There are four (4) parts to the research study. This questionnaire is part one (1). The time commitment is approximately 1 hour.

The intention of the questionnaire is to elicit information about your identity development and construction, and your lived experience as someone who has been identified as biracial. The intention is that the questions will allow you to shift into a reflective space around how you view your Self and your personal identity construction. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. How do you typically describe your racial/ethnic identity?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. How would you describe your socio-economic class?
6. What is your highest level of education you have completed?
7. If you are in a committed relationship, what race/ethnicity is your significant other?
8. How do you identify your mother's race/ethnicity origin?
9. How do you identify father's race/ethnicity origin?
10. Who raised you?
11. What information did your parent(s)/guardian tell you about their race/ethnicity?
12. Where did you grow up?
13. How was the topic of your race/ethnicity discussed inside your family?
14. Please share a powerful experience that you had growing up when you first became aware your race?
15. Was this also the age when you first become aware of race?
16. What was the racial/ethnic composition of your community during childhood (i.e. neighborhood, school, church, etc.)?
17. What do people typically assume about your race/ethnicity? How does this shape their interactions with you?
18. How do your feelings about your racial identity influence the way you interact with others? Or, how do you see your racial/ethnic identity influencing other aspects of your life?
19. How accepted do you feel by others? (This may include but is not limited to family members, friends, workplaces, neighborhoods, and other groups or communities in which you are involved).
20. How has your view of race/ethnicity changed over time? If your views have changed, how have these changes influenced how you identify yourself?
21. Is there anything else you want to share about your identity development and construction? Is there anything else you would like others to know?
22. Thank you for completing the questionnaire. A pseudonym for your responses will be used in the final product to ensure confidentiality. What would you like your pseudonym to be?

APPENDIX E

Dialogue Questions

1st Dialogue

- 1) Self - How do you describe yourself?
- 2) Family – what have you learned about race from your family?
- 3) Critical incident - Please share a story about a time when you learned something powerful/meaningful about your racial/ethnic identity that continues to influence you to this day?
- 4) Conditions of Voice – what do you want others to know but haven't been asked?
- 5) Questions of GI: what is one question you have always wanted to ask others with one Black and one White parent?
- 6) Closing – one breath one word

2nd Dialogue

1. Reflections - Over the last few weeks, what have you noticed about yourself and others regarding your identity construction?
2. Assumptions vs. lived experience - How are society's assumptions of you, or others like you, different or similar to your "lived experience"?
3. What does it mean to be "in between"?
4. If given the opportunity to name your collective identity, what would it be and why?
5. What has participating in this collective dialogue meant for you and your identity construction?

ENTERED
10/22/13
A

Institutional Review Board Project Action Summary

Action Date: October 22, 2013

Note: Approval expires one year after this date.

Type: ☐ New Full Review ☒ New Expedited Review ☐ Continuation Review ☐ Exempt Review
☐ Modification

Action: ☒ Approved ☐ Approved Pending Modification ☐ Not Approved

Project Number: 2013-10-043

Researcher(s): Roxanne Kymaani Grad SOLES
Dr. Zachary Green Fac SOLES

Project Title: Beyond biracial: a phenomenological dialogic study on the complexity of identity of identity construction for women with one Black parent and one White parent

Note: We send IRB correspondence regarding student research to the faculty advisor, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research. We request that the faculty advisor share this correspondence with the student researcher.

Modifications Required or Reasons for Non-Approval

None

The next deadline for submitting project proposals to the Provost's Office for full review is N/A. You may submit a project proposal for expedited review at any time.

Dr. Thomas R. Herrinton
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