

“TOO WHITE TO BE BLACK AND TOO BLACK TO BE WHITE”: THE CONSEQUENCES  
OF A COLOR-BLIND ORIENTATION ON BLACK/WHITE BIRACIAL STUDENTS’  
COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS AND RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES AND PRACTICE

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WITH A MAJOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2015

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA**  
**GRADUATE COLLEGE**

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### **STATEMENT BY AUTHOR**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everyone I've ever known.”

— Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters*

I want to start by thanking my Dissertation Committee Co-Chairs. Dr. Jeffrey F. Milem tirelessly guided me through this long journey. Dr. Nolan L. Cabrera pushed me to dig deeper. Thank you both for your continued insight, support, and encouragement. Without your wisdom and advice this endeavor would have been immeasurably difficult. I am also grateful to committee member Regina Deil-Amen for her enthusiasm for teaching and mentoring students, and opening her home to me.

I am indebted to my professors, colleagues, and classmates who continually challenged and broadened my thinking through spirited debates. To my forever lifelong friends from B.A.D.A.S.S.: Annette Bhatia, Ruthann Coyote, Monica Everett-Haynes, Mika Galilee-Belfer, Tanisha Johnson-Price, and Blanca Torres Olave. I am constantly inspired and amazed by the strength of these women. I am so fortunate for all the pep-talks, cheerleading, editing, venting, writing, distracting, tearful, and joyful moments I have spent with you all. I'm looking forward to our next reunion!

No amount of thank you could express my gratitude for John Raybuck and Bob Mittan! So surprised at how you two managed to take my sometimes disjointed thoughts and turn them into ideas. This paper would truly have never happened if it wasn't for you!

My education started with my parents, Clint and Vernitha Miner. My thirst for knowledge came from you. Reading books, visiting museums, and exploring new places will always be my foundation for knowledge. Mom, I'm especially blessed because of you. You raised me to be a strong woman, making me into the person I am today. So many of my

accomplishments I owe to you. Dad, thank you for never doubting my ability to do this.

To my seesters – Nicole, Jacqueline, and Christina. Thank you for being my built-in best friends (you're stuck with me because we are family). I would have never made it here without the support and love of so many other family members. Thank you Charles and Liza Anderson, Susan Hays and Bill Bishop, Suzi Messing, Noelle Matzik, and Klanci McCabe. I love you all! Luke Anderson, my best friend, this all started with our road trip to Arizona.

Finally, to my babies, Dylan and Noah Anderson, always be true to who you really are.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study examined how the racial identity of Black/White biracial college students shaped their college choice process, and the extent to which these students explored their racial identity at the University of Arizona. Sixteen self-identified Black/White biracial students were interviewed to learn what factors they considered during their college choice process. Additionally, these students were interviewed to understand how the context of this particular institution facilitated or hindered their racial identity exploration. This study found that Black/White biracial students approached their college choice process from a color-blind orientation which had unintended consequences on how these students explored and understood their racial identity in the context of a PWI. The predominantly White precollege contexts these students came from decentralized their racial identity early on; however, on campus Black/White biracial students were continuously confronted with messages that placed an emphasis on race. Implications for student services and for addressing the needs of Black/White biracial students are presented.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Cross

My old man's a White old man  
 And my old mother's Black.  
 If ever I cursed my White old man  
 I take my curses back  
 If ever I cursed my Black old mother  
 And wished she were in hell.  
 I'm sorry for that evil wish  
 And now I wish her well  
 My old man died in a fine big house  
 My ma died in a shack  
 I wonder where I'm going to die  
 Being neither White nor Black!  
 —Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes' poem eloquently describes the sparse social and political space for biracial<sup>1</sup> individuals within society. According to the 2010 Census data the multiracial population is 9.6 million individuals, an estimated 32% increase from the previous census. The 2010 Census data estimated a 50% increase in the multiracial population under the age of 18 over 2000 data (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Of those who indicated they are two or more races, almost half were under the age of 18, and 2.4 million Black/White individuals will be of college age in 2015. Due to this increase, higher education institutions need to take notice of the

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<sup>1</sup> This study is investigating the experiences of Black/White biracial students. However, some studies use the terms *multiracial*, *mixed race*, and *biracial*. When referencing students in this particular study the terms *Black/White biracial* or simply *biracial* will be used. To maintain the integrity of previous studies I will utilize the identity terminology used by the author(s). (For the debate on who is multiracial see: Morning, A., 2000).



growing and soon to be college-bound biracial population. Studying Black/White biracial students allows for institutions of higher education to position themselves to better respond to the needs of this significantly growing student population. One way to understand the needs of biracial students is to examine the reasons they chose to participate in higher education and their expectations regarding their college experience. However, currently used college choice models are based on monoracial students. Therefore it is possible that these models do not work for biracial students and their needs. Further, understanding why biracial students select a particular institution is important given that researchers assert the campus context influences the racial identity development process of this student group (e.g., Renn, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004).

College is marked by personal growth and development for students (Astin, 1993; Chickering & McCormick, 1973; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991); this includes growth in one's cultural identity and awareness (Astin, 1993, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Researchers have made efforts to understand the process of identity development for biracial individuals to help inform student affairs practitioners. Most of the scholarship focused on the following areas: racial identity development, self-concept/esteem or psychological adjustment, and/or influence of social context on identity (Harris & Sim, 2002; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Renn, 2003, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).

Numerous studies examined the role social context on college campuses plays in biracial identity development, particularly because multiracial individuals often receive conflicting messages about their racial identity and the extent to which society accepts their mixed heritage (Renn, 2008). For example, researchers indicated that identity is mediated through interactions with family members (Harris & Sim, 2002; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002) and peers (Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2000) suggesting that

biracial identity development is a reflexive process, in that identity is understood through an individual's interactions with others and society (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Other scholarship has shown that biracial identity varies across social spheres, such as the school or home environment (Harris & Sim, 2002; Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2000; 2003). Moreover, the racial composition of peer groups, specifically in an educational setting, significantly influenced how biracial individuals negotiate their understanding of racial identity mainly through group affiliation and approval (Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2000). The fluidity of biracial identity, moving between various racial categories, has been linked to changes in biracial individuals' self-identification over time and context (Harris & Sim, 2002; Miville et al. 2005; Renn, 2000).

The developing trend among studies on multiracial identity development applies an ecology framework in order to understand how various settings that contain the individual influence racial identity development (Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 1998, 2000, 2004; Rockquemore, 1999; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). College peer culture has been identified as an important factor in multiracial students' identity development. Peer culture, as defined by Renn (1998, 2000, 2004), is the campus climate for students of color and, in this application, for multiracial students. Peer culture establishes the attitudes regarding race and racial identity and determines accessibility to identity-based spaces. Given that peer culture and campus demographics can impact the experiences that mixed race students have on campus, attention should be given to the factors that go into a multiracial student selection of an institution to attend. Although the link between racial identity and college choice has not been fully investigated, studies support the idea that the college choice process can differ across racial groups (Freeman, 1997, 1999a, 1999b; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2004; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). In other

words, because identity development is linked to the college experience, it is important to know the relevance of their college choice process and how it is linked to Black/White biracial students' perceptions of the campus climate and peer culture, and opportunities to explore one's mixed heritage.

Studies provide strong evidence that students of color have a unique experience with the college choice process. Freeman (1997) argued that the decision of whether or not to participate in higher education must be understood in the context of race and cultural identity. A study by Freeman (1997) identified several race-related factors (e.g., family influence, racial make-up of student body, economic factors) that influenced the college choice process of African American students. Although researchers have taken a special interest in the enrollment behaviors of students of color, biracial students have been excluded from the studies. Multiracial individuals have reported that college is a critical period in their racial identity development (Miville et al., 2005), and college choice theorists suggest that students hold expectations about their college experiences and the opportunities college offers to explore their racial identity (Van Camp et al., 2010). However, in both multiracial identity and college choice theories there are unaddressed gaps that this study seeks to address. Thus, this study sought to understand how Black/White biracial students prioritized particular factors when deciding to participate in higher education, and the relevance of these decisions on biracial students' experience exploring racial identity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While there has been extensive research on multiracial *individuals*, there remains limited research on multiracial *college students*. Currently, the majority of these scarce studies on multiracial college students focused on the process through which mixed race students develop their racial identity on campus (Renn, 1998, 2000, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002;

Wallace, 2003) and how student services can approach multiracial identity development through practice and support services (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008; Literte, 2010; Wong & Buckner, 2008). All of these studies examined how multiracial students understand and negotiate their racial identity on campus. There are emerging studies that focus on multiracial students and academic performance (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007) and persistence (Sands & Schuh, 2004). As cited above, studies on multiracial students examined identity development within the context of postsecondary environments; however, the literature does not inform us about how multiracial students make their decisions to attend specific institutions and what factors influence their decision making. Some of the research suggested that students of color consider race-related factors, such as the campus climate (Freeman, 1999b) and opportunities to explore one's racial heritage (Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009).

There is a gap in scholars' knowledge when it comes to understanding how racial identity shapes the outcome of the college choice process for Black/White biracial students. Moreover, despite scholarship that emphasized the importance of the campus environment on the racial identity development process, there exists little research on the expectations that biracial students have regarding opportunities to explore their racial identity during college and if their actual college experience was aligned with precollege expectations.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study considered the following questions: What factors do Black/White biracial students consider to be important during their college choice process and in what ways does the institutional context shape their understanding and exploration of their racial identity. This study is significant in that it has a narrow focus on Black and White biracial students. Previous studies on mixed race students have included students from various multiracial backgrounds (e.g.,

Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Renn, 1998, 2000, 2004; Wallace, 2003). Conducting research on a single mixed race group allows for comparison of how the college choice and identity development process is similar or different for Black/White biracial students. Researching students from different racial combinations limits the analytic clarity achieved by focusing on one specific subgroup (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).

In addition, this study is also important in that it moves beyond the examination of how Black/White biracial students develop their racial identity to look at how their racial identity has consequences for the college choice process. As stated earlier, much of the scope of research on the multiracial population has focused on the development of their racial identity. There is emerging evidence that African American students select to attend Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) over Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in order to have opportunities to explore their racial identity (Freeman, 1999a). However, it is unclear if Black/White biracial students account for the racial diversity and campus racial climate in their decision-making process to attend college. The crux of this study is to understand how the racial identity of Black/White biracial students plays a role in the college choice process and in what ways the racial composition of a PWI and its related peer culture inform biracial students' understanding of their racial identity.

### **Intended Audience**

Higher education institutions should begin to carefully examine their diversity policies, practices, and programs for ways that exclude or include biracial students. The majority of race-based policies focus on the needs of monoracial students. Areas such as recruitment, retention, and student support typically exclude multiracial students or reassign them to a monoracial category (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). Literte (2010) emphasized the need for analysis of

diversity policies and programs, arguing that how they include or exclude mixed race students is important for two reasons: first, race-focused services were created in order to give voice to underrepresented minority students, particularly at predominantly White institutions; second, race-focused services serve as a method for legitimizing and institutionalizing (p. 117) minority identities.

Student affairs professionals and faculty members should understand how biracial identity influences patterns of attendance and how the social and historical context of the campus environment shapes biracial identity development. Having this knowledge can benefit student affairs practitioners with recruitment and retention of students, and help them find ways to academically and socially integrate these students into the campus environment. The findings of this investigation will be useful for student affairs practitioners as they develop programs and services related to individual and racial identity development, as well as having a better understanding of the types of students who choose to attend PWIs. Further, the findings can contribute to and expand current biracial theories. For sociologists and social psychologists this investigation will give insight on how biracial students construct their identities in different educational contexts, how they understand their racial identity within these contexts, and what factors inform their understanding of their racial identity.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the focus of the study: understanding the college choice process of biracial students and how a PWI influences the racial identity development of this student group. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature pertinent to the research questions, including college choice and multiracial identity development theories. This chapter also discusses the theoretical frameworks used to conduct the

analysis of the findings, namely, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase college choice model and Renn's (2000, 2003, 2004) application of the human ecology model to examine the racial identity development of biracial students. Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology of the study, the research questions guiding the study, site and participant selection and recruitment, and the process used for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings that emerged from the student interviews. In conclusion, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings, implications of the study results for policy and practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

In Freeman's (1997; 1999b) research examining how race-related factors influence the college decision-making process for African American high school students, she emphasized the importance of conducting research in the context of race and culture. She critiqued previous studies for "excluding cultural considerations" (Freeman, 1997, p. 525) because most college choice models and research studies have been normed on White, middle-class college students with at least one college-educated parent. Framing research using race and culture can provide educators, practitioners, and policy makers with more insight into decisions made by students of color about whether to participate in higher education, where to attend, and what expectations they have of their college experience. Additionally, looking at college choice in the context of race can shed light on a newly emerging theory that students' desires to explore their racial and cultural identity affect the type of institution they choose to attend (Freeman, 1999a; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009).

This study seeks to understand in what ways the racial identities of Black/White biracial students<sup>2</sup> influence their decision to attend college and the expectations they form about their opportunities to explore and develop their racial identity. Because there is no literature to date specifically examining biracial or multiracial students and their college choice process, much of the literature in this review is drawn from studies focused on African American students.

How mixed race individuals have been defined over the years has impacted the ways in

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<sup>2</sup> To maintain the integrity of the research cited, as well as the authors' definitions and classifications of race, when discussing specific studies I will use the terminology reported in the research. I will use the terms *Black/White biracial* or *biracial* to refer to participants in this study.



which scholars have studied and discussed biracial/multiracial people in research. Therefore, this chapter begins with a brief history of the classification of mixed race individuals in the U.S. in order to provide context for how this impacts the study of multiracial students. Next, I present empirical studies examining how race can influence or constrain college choice. Given the history of racial classification, this research draws primarily from studies on African American students. Then, I introduce research advancing the idea that race and the desire for cultural affinity influence the type of institution that the Black/White biracial students in the study select to attend. Finally, the chapter concludes with a presentation of the theoretical framework for my research.

### **A Short History of Racial Identity Classification**

Racial categories have often served as a method to establish a hierarchical arrangement that positions Whites above all other racial groups. Throughout history this hierarchy has determined the distribution of resources and opportunities within U.S. society (Thornton, 1996). Racial groups are believed to have their own shared historical experiences, affiliated behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. Many multiracial individuals occupied an “in-between” space in which they do not fit neatly into a single racial category (Root, 1992). Historically, there have been four approaches to conceptualizing biracial/multiracial identity and their position within the racial hierarchy. Research on mixed race people has evolved from viewing the individual as deviant and conflicted because of their inherently incompatible racial identities to viewing the multiracial population as a unique group whose racial identity is influenced by various social factors (Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado; 2009).

**Biracial identity classification in the 1900s.** Early scholars approached biracial identity as if it were problematic, by suggesting that biracial individuals had fractured identities because

of the racially segregated society in which they lived, an ideology that was a reflection of the Jim Crow era. Park (1928) suggested that biracial individuals had negative racial experiences because they lived in a racially divided society, which resulted in internal crisis and turmoil. Biracial individuals were often depicted as “the tragic mulatto[s],”<sup>3</sup> tortured souls with an internal war raging, their psyche reflecting the division between African Americans and Whites within U.S. society. Stonequist (1937) suggested that biracial individuals internalized the societal conflict between Blacks and Whites, thus creating internal conflicts in the *marginal man*: “pride and shame, love and hate, and other contradictory sentiments, mingle uneasily in his nature” (p. 6). Stonequist identified three life stages of the marginal man: introduction, crisis, and adjustment. Initially, the marginal man has some experiences being integrated into the dual cultural worlds of both of his parents. In the crisis stage, he has a profound realization of the incompatible nature of these two worlds. This realization creates disequilibrium within the psyche of the marginal man. Finally comes the adjustment stage, in which he must accept his position within U.S. society and adopt a Black identity, forever remaining, according to Stonequist (1937), a *marginal man*. Stonequist asserted that the rigid division between Blacks and Whites did not allow Black/White individuals the option of adopting a White identity.

**Biracial identity classification in the 1960s and 1970s.** The conceptualization of biracial identity evolved from the problematic perspective to the equivalent perspective, which proposed a positive resolution of biracial identity that resulted in embracing a Black identity (Rockquemore, Brunσμα, & Delgado, 2009). The Civil Rights Movement united the

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<sup>3</sup> Typically found in American fiction and drama, “the tragic mulatto” is a phrase used to describe an individual from a biracial background (often Black/White) who is depicted as suffering from an internal conflict arising from a mixed race background (Stonequist, 1937).

Black/White biracial population and the Black community in their efforts to gain equal rights (Jackson, n.d.). Although many biracial individuals embraced their Black heritage by adopting a Black identity, they simultaneously encountered messages suggesting that having a White heritage prevented them from being fully accepted into the Black community. According to Jackson, the Civil Rights Movement resulted in the development of the official racial classifications recognized by the Federal Bureau of Management and Budget in 1977. These official classifications were American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and two ethnicities: Hispanic and non-Hispanic. Biracial individuals found themselves restricted in their choice of racial identification because they were forced to select one racial category. The continued use of hypodescent<sup>4</sup> by society often forced Black/White individuals to mark Black on the U.S. Census.

In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 in *Loving v. The Commonwealth of Virginia* that miscegenation laws were unconstitutional, leading to the legalization of all interracial marriages. Although the dismantling of miscegenation laws removed legal barriers to interracial unions, it did not eliminate the social sentiment that the mixing of races is viewed as “deviant,” nor did it dilute the influence of hypodescent imposed on mixed individuals and their racial identity.

One important framework addressing the psychological process of racial identity development in African Americans was Cross’s model, “The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience” (1971). The ideology behind the equivalent approach was that biracial individuals who adopted an African American identity had a sense of belonging and a shared racial history. However, frameworks such as Cross’s (1971) suggested that a biracial individual must choose

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<sup>4</sup> Hypodescent refers to the widespread use of the “one-drop rule” in which one drop of Black blood resulted in the racial designation of Black used during and after slavery (Spencer, 2004; 2006)

one racial group over the other. Further, this approach implied that biracial individuals must reject their White or minority racial groups, even though not all biracial individuals come from the majority and a minority group. One limitation of stage models being applied to the racial development of biracial individuals is that they do not allow for the integration of multiple racial identities. This was due in part to researchers' understanding of racial identity and in part to who was defined as Black, which was still heavily influenced by the one-drop rule.

**Biracial identity classification in the 1980s and 1990s.** During the mid-1980s and early 1990s psychologists and sociologists argued that monoracial identity development models were unable to explain how multiracial individuals constructed a healthy and integrated mixed race identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Previous racial identity models suggested that Black/White biracial individuals should adopt a monoracial Black identity; however, new researchers were interested in understanding how a biracial identity was constructed. Many models of biracial identity development, which have moved from considering race as a biological factor to race as a social construct, have evolved to reflect these changing social positions on race.

Poston's (1990) biracial identity development model was widely accepted among researchers during the 1990s. It was one of the first models to introduce a healthy, integrated biracial identity as the outcome. Poston challenged previous models of racial identity development that had been applied to biracial individuals and outlined the limitations of those models. He claimed that some models placed value on one group over another group, causing biracial individuals to distance themselves from their minority and their majority identities at different times. However, he did not account for biracial individuals who have parents from two minority groups. He also argued that none of the previously used racial identity development models suggested an integration of multiple racial identities; all made the assumption that, at

some point in the development process, the individual will experience acceptance by the parents' racial groups.

**Biracial identity classification in the late 1990s and early 2000s.** By the late 1990s and early 2000s, psychologists and sociologists began to account for the influence of the ecology or environment in their conceptualizations of racial identity development in mixed race individuals. This approach to multiracial identity examined the development of racial identity with a strong focus on social interactions (Renn, 2000; 2003), an underlying premise in contemporary multiracial identity theories. Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) have identified three major assumptions from contemporary research on the racial identity development in mixed race individuals:

(a) mixed race people construct different racial identities based on various contextually specific logics, (b) there are no predictable stages of identity development because the process is not linear and there is no single optimal endpoint, and (c) privileging any one type of racial identity over another (i.e., multiracial over single-race identity) only replicates the essentialist flaws of previous models with a different outcome. (p. 19)

Rather than suggesting that there is one optimal, healthy identity that mixed race individuals should achieve, contemporary scholars argue that multiracial individuals tend to adopt racial identities dependent upon context.

Root (1996) was one of the first to introduce the idea that social settings influence the fluidity of racial identity, which she termed "border crossing." Root's notion of border crossings, having "*both feet in both groups*" (p. xxi, italics in original) or crossing into racial identities in different settings, contradicts the ideology that racial categories are fixed and immutable. Root's theory opened the door to further research into the influence of the social landscape on race and

race relations and on how mixed race individuals construct and negotiate their racial identity.

### **Challenges of Categorizing and Researching Multiracial Students**

Although scholars have been writing about mixed race individuals since the early 1900s, it is not until almost a century later that researchers begin to adopt more flexible models of identity and ideas about race and racial boundaries (Root, 1992). In the field of higher education, the study of multiracial students is still relatively young. This has presented several challenges for researchers studying multiracial students. First, as outlined in the previous section, how multiracial individuals were defined and categorized has evolved over time. The changing categorization of Black/White individuals has classified biracial individuals as a unique group, then as Blacks, and back as a unique group. Shifting classification of biracial students is also present in higher education. A NCES (2002) report, *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Institutions: 1999–2000*, estimated that multiracial students make up 2% of the total student population. However, inconsistent reporting has made it difficult to determine the actual percentage of the student population that is multiracial (Renn & Lunceford, 2004). As of 2003 all postsecondary education institutions were to adopt new methodologies for collecting and reporting racial and ethnic data. Renn and Lunceford (2004) found that 62% of higher education institutions had failed to make the required collection and reporting changes as mandated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Inconsistencies in collecting race and ethnicity data are problematic for quantitative studies wanting a large enough sample of multiracial students. Often multiracial students are excluded from studies because the small sample size does not lend itself to generalization. Other sampling problems include having a sample reflective of the region's general population or creating a sample of similar mixed race students (e.g., Black/White biracial) (Root, 1992). Related to sampling is recruiting multiracial

students for studies. How researchers define race can include or exclude certain multiracial subgroups. For example, for this specific study, recruitment material was carefully worded to avoid excluding Black/White biracial students who may adopt a monoracial identity. Further, categorizing mixed race individuals for studies becomes even more complicated when students are second generation multiracials (i.e., children who have a biracial parent). Despite the evolving classification of biracial individuals, it is important for researchers to understand the experiences of developmental patterns of this population.

### **Growth of Biracial/Multiracial Students in Higher Education**

The significantly growing multiracial population will be entering college in larger numbers (Jaschik, 2006), and a quarter of this population are college aged, Black/White biracial individuals (Pew Research Center, 2015). Because mixed race students are constantly defining and redefining their racial identity in order to fit in, Renn (2008) asserted that student affairs professionals need to evaluate the ways in which their institution helps or hinders the adjustment and development of multiracial students. Studying the experiences of mixed race students in the context of higher education will help institutions to shift their monoracial focus to be more inclusive of mixed race students (Kellogg & Noskode, 2008; King, 2008; Literte, 2010; Renn, 2000). Although there has been progress in theorizing the racial identity development of multiracial individuals, few studies have investigated how the biracial student population describe their college choice process and what they identify as having an influence on their decision.

### **Race and College Choice**

Although various factors have been said to influence the decision to attend college, scholars generally agree that the college choice process follows a three-phase model (Hossler &

Gallagher, 1987): predisposition—deciding whether to attend college; search—exploring the various college options; and choice—creating a focused choice set and determining which institution to attend. In order to increase enrollment rates of African American students in higher education institutions, scholars have explored how African American students engage in the decision-making process (Freeman, 1999b) Scholars have identified a number of factors that can influence the college choice process of minority students, such as family members (Freeman, 1999a; 1999b; 2005), educational attainment and socioeconomic status of parents (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hearn, 1991), and cultural and social capital (McDonough, Antonio & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000).

### **Brief Introduction of the Three Stages of College Choice**

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a three-phase developmental model of college choice to explain how various factors interact and influence the decision-making process. Unlike previous developmental college choice models (e.g., Chapman, 1981; Litten, 1982), Hossler and Gallagher's model accounted for the institutional (at high school and university level) characteristics and the interactions between students and colleges and universities. The three stages are identified as predisposition, search, and choice. In the predisposition phase, high school students determine if they will pursue postsecondary education. Hossler and Gallagher identify student characteristics, high school/college characteristics, significant others, and educational activities as influential factors during this phase. The search phase is marked by students seeking information about colleges and universities. Hossler and Gallagher noted that there is an increase in the interaction between students and colleges and universities. As students are researching school possibilities, institutions are simultaneously searching for potential matriculants. During the search phase students also develop their expectations of colleges with



regards to cost, financial aid, and educational and social opportunities. These expectations shape the college choice set, the schools students decide to apply to. The third phase, choice, is when students determine which institution from the choice set they will matriculate into. Hossler and Gallagher stated that the outcome of the choice phase is based on institutional characteristics, students' preferences (e.g., size, location, major availability), and courtship activities of colleges and universities (p. 216). One limitation to Hossler and Gallagher's model as they presented it was the notable absence of a discussion of the impact of race and race-related factors on the outcomes of each phase. In order to address this gap, scholars (e.g., Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Freeman, 1997, 1999b, 2005; Pitre, Johnson, & Pitre, 2006; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, & Allen, 2004) have applied the three-phase model to specific minority groups in order to explain how race impacts the college-going process.

### **Factors That Influence Minority Students' Predisposition (Do I Go to College?)**

Freeman (2005) asserted that predisposition cannot be understood without examining a student's "predetermination" or the "circumstances that often determine which students, or even whether students, will choose to go to college" (p. xx). Predetermination focuses on the context in which students are making their college choice decisions. Many conclusions about the influences of various factors on predisposition were drawn from studies using broadly aggregated data sets (Hamrick & Stage, 1998). In other words, studies were using data sets that did not disaggregate students along characteristics such as school environments, SES, race, and gender. Often these studies employed large nationally representative data sets and researchers would generalize their findings from these broadly aggregated data sets, suggesting that various factors had equal influence across different student groups; however, disaggregation revealed hidden factors not shown in aggregated data.

Hamrick and Stage (1998) took a more nuanced look at students' predisposition to attend college and whether the impact of their school environment, defined by schools with "high percentages of minority students and high percentages of students receiving free or subsidized school lunches" (p. 344), on their predisposition might be obscured within a broadly aggregate data set. By disaggregating the data in their models, they showed that factors universally thought to directly influence students' predisposition had differential effects on various student groups. Data for their study was drawn from the NELS:88 data set, which begins data collection in the student's eighth-grade year, with follow-ups in 1990 and 1992. Hamrick and Stage tested causal paths for college predispositions in five models: (a) all eighth graders regardless of school characteristics, (b) all eighth graders in high minority enrollment, high school lunch participation schools, (c) Anglo American eighth graders in high minority enrollment, high school lunch participation schools, (d) African American students, and (e) Latino/a students (p. 347). They found that socioeconomic status, grades, and parental expectations were consistently direct or indirect predictors of college predisposition across all five models. However, there were differences when looking at specific student characteristics such as race. For example, grade point average (GPA) was found to be positively associated with predisposition for Anglo American students but negatively associated with minority students. Family SES, which was a significant direct predictor of White students' predisposition to college, did not have a significant direct effect on the predisposition of African American students. However, family SES of African American students was significantly related to parental expectations and GPA. Overall, Hamrick and Stage found fewer significant causal paths or direct effects in their model using data from African American students at high minority enrollment, high school lunch participation schools. Only 21% of the variance in predisposition of African American students

was explained in their model. Their study emphasizes the importance of disaggregating data by student backgrounds in order to unmask the influence of race, SES, gender, and other student characteristics on students' predisposition towards college attendance.

**College presented as an option.** Being directed towards postsecondary education (Freeman, 1997; 1999b) or holding the belief and attitude that college attendance is a viable option (Pitre, 2006; Pitre, Johnson, & Pitre, 2006) can determine a student's college choice outcomes. Pitre (2006) asserted that African American students recognize the importance of college attendance but may perceive that others (such as teachers or parents) do not believe college is an available option for them. In his study, students who indicated "not well" as the level of preparation their high school provided them for entry into college were 33 percent less likely to aspire to attend college than students who indicated the level of preparation for entry into college as "somewhat well." Pitre, Johnson, and Pitre (2006) suggested that the Theory of Reasoned Action can provide some understanding of the college choice process by focusing on students' behavioral intentions, attitudes and internalization of subjective norms. According to Pitre and colleagues, The Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that an individual's intentional behavior is predicted by his/her attitude towards that behavior and how he/she thinks others would view the ability to perform that behavior. In other words, students' likelihood of attending college is influenced by their attitudes regarding college attendance, experiences in which schools present (or do not present) college as a possible option, and the messages or social cues they receive from individuals regarding their ability to prepare for and attend college. In her study exploring the college choice process of African American high school students, Freeman (1997; 1999b; 2005) found in her student interviews that college was not frequently presented as an option, especially by teachers or counselors. Although students in her study acknowledged

some benefits of college, some students felt that their high school was not adequately preparing them for higher education and the lack of culturally relevant materials in classrooms further diminished their aspirations. Freeman (1997, 1999b) concluded that African American high school students often faced psychological/social barriers to college attendance. For many students these psychological/social barriers were related to an intimidation factor and their preparedness for college, thus impacting their aspirations to pursue higher education. Students also identified lack of passion or recognition of the value of education as another barrier. Some argue that these psychological/social barriers form because many minority students have parents who are unaware of the importance of becoming academically prepared for college starting in middle school and do not receive this message from school personnel (Freeman, 1997, 1999b).

**Parental encouragement and support.** Parental encouragement and support can influence students' academic and occupation aspirations (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Chapman, 1981; Freeman, 1997, 1999b, 2005; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2006). Freeman's research (1997, 1999b, 2005) reinforced the importance of family among African American students when they are deciding whether to attend college. The messages that parents convey regarding college attendance can persuade or discourage their student from pursuing postsecondary education. For example, African American high school students reported that they were often told by their parents or family members to do better and were encouraged to attend college in order to achieve a higher socioeconomic status or get a better job (Freeman, 1999b, 2005). Other students in the study were motivated by the desire to avoid becoming like their parents or family members, who were not college educated or were perceived to be unsuccessful (Freeman, 1999b, 2005). Butner and colleagues (2001) explored factors that influenced the decision of African American and

Hispanic women to attend college and also found that family members were important in the decision-making process. Family influence took the form of encouragement and support, role modeling, and, for African American women, a need to please their parents (p. 26). The authors concluded that the value of education was conveyed to these women through the familial support and encouragement they received.

**Parental involvement (social capital).** Parental involvement in their children's academic and extracurricular activities is highly predictive of the student's likelihood to enroll in college (Perna, 2000). Perna and Titus (2005) argued that parental involvement functions as a form of social capital, referring to the information and resources gained through the relationships students create with others, their affiliated social class, and their parents' social networks, enabling students to navigate the college choice process. When comparing students across racial/ethnic groups, they found that the odds of African American students enrolling (odds-ratio = 1.248) in college had a positive relationship each time a parent had contact with school officials about their student's academics. Notably, this parent-initiated contact had a greater magnitude of effect for African American students than for students of other racial groups. Compared to students from other racial groups, parent-initiated contact had a greater influence on their student's decision to enroll than parent-student discussions about education-related issues. Perna and Titus (2005) found that students at high schools where the majority of parental contact was the result of behavior problems were less likely to enroll at a four-year institution. College enrollment for students was also positively influenced by higher volumes of resources (economic, cultural, and social) available at their school. In addition to parental contact with school personnel, school resources were key in providing necessary social capital to navigate the college choice process.

**Role of counselors in providing information.** Freeman (1997, 1999b, 2005) argued that when African American students have role models from the same background, opportunities to engage in African American culture through school curriculum motivates students to participate in higher education and provides African American students with the support and guidance they need to learn about the college application process. High school guidance counselors and college recruiters become vital sources of information for many African American high school students and can help them start the application process much earlier in high school. McDonough (2005) argued that high schools with large minority populations often have high student-to-counselor ratios, and underqualified and inexperienced high school teachers who are typically White. Students at these schools are frequently uninformed regarding college entrance requirements and the application process.

MacGowan (2002) qualitatively explored the informational needs of and resources available to African American students. Participants in the study discussed the importance of attending a high school that expected and supported college attendance by providing college guidance. MacGowan found that some students encountered “guidance approach problems,” or “an approach, attitude, or philosophy of the guidance counselor” that negatively impacted the process. For example, some students reported that they were directed toward a particular type of institution (e.g., community college or small liberal arts school) (MacGowan, 2002, p. 23). This led students to believe that their school counselor did not deem them academically prepared for four-year or research-oriented institutions.

Butner and colleagues (2001) also found that negative messages from counselors can present a barrier for African American women. Students reported that, despite being placed in Advanced Placement courses, they received negative messages from their high school

counselors. These negative messages took the form of decreased information and time dedicated to advising them. For example, one participant in the study stated that her high school counselor continually directed her toward a vocational track despite her strong SAT scores. The lack of time counselors are able to dedicate to college counseling is important because the research has demonstrated that counselors can influence students' aspirations, development of postsecondary plans, understanding of the college application process, and knowledge of available financial aid (McDonough, 2005a, p. 22). Several studies concluded that large student-to-counselor ratios prevented counselors from providing the information students and their parents need to make informed decisions about postsecondary options (McDonough, 2004, 2005a; Orfield & Paul, 1994).

Freeman (2005) found that high schools that provide a structured counseling program had a larger number of students who enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Freeman described these characteristics of structured counseling programs: (a) they have linkages with higher education institutions to ease students' transition from high school to college, (b) they have and demonstrate high expectations of their students, and (c) they understand the importance of mentoring and use it (p. 73). Freeman emphasized the importance of structured counseling programs given that many of the African American students in her study reported that they were first generation or self-motivated to pursue higher education and needed targeted guidance on how to conduct the college search process. In Freeman's study, students who attended schools with structured counseling programs reported that they were scheduled to meet regularly with guidance counselors to discuss their postsecondary plans.

Freeman's (2005) research with African American high school students indicated that the choice of whether to attend college is influenced and sometimes constrained by race. In the case

of African American students, factors such as level of parental encouragement and support, whether college is presented as an option, and guidance from school personnel on the college choice process influence students' decisions on whether to attend college. African American participants in these studies perceived their race to be a real factor affecting their postsecondary options. For educators, practitioners, and policy makers, possessing an understanding of the influence of race on the college choice process can lead to the development of specific programs aimed at increasing enrollment of African American students.

### **Factors that Influence Institutional Choice (Where Do I Go to College?)**

There is also empirical evidence that a student's race can also influence the type of institution he or she attends. In order to understand student enrollment behavior, researchers have investigated not only the various factors that influence students' decisions about whether to attend college but also the characteristics that students tend to evaluate when selecting a particular institution (Paulsen, 1990). Hurtado and colleagues (1997) found differences in application behavior across racial groups. McDonough, Antonio and Trent (1997) found that African American students applied to fewer schools and were admitted to their first-choice institutions than their White counterparts. Other studies have shown the quality of high schools and availability of college preparatory opportunities can influence where African American students choose to apply (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2004; Perna et al., 2005).

**Application behavior.** Conducting efficient searches can help students develop a better understanding of the postsecondary options available to them. Through searches, students become more informed about admission requirements, total educational costs and financial aid availability, degree programs, and the academic and social reputation of the institution. Litten (1982) reviewed literature focused on how students conducted their college search process and



concluded that Black students and their families engage in college searches that start later, take longer, and rely more heavily on additional information resources such as college recruiters and admissions counselors.

Hurtado and colleagues (1997) also focused on the college application behaviors of students from different racial groups in order to identify barriers to college access and choice. Their data indicated that almost 40% of high-achieving African American twelfth graders either had no plans to take the SAT or planned to take the test at a later date, delaying their college entrance. Furthermore, 45% of African American twelfth graders had not applied for college entrance by the end of their senior year in high school. By delaying their plans to take the SAT, students were limiting their available college choice set. A study by Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) showed that 27% of White students apply to only one college, compared to 17% of African American students. African American students who participated in an academic track were more likely to submit applications to more than one institution. McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) found that African American students are accepted at their first-choice institutions at a rate of 55%, compared to an acceptance rate of 70% nationally. Additionally, they reported that most African American students only applied to three or fewer colleges/universities and about three-quarters were accepted at their first-choice institution. Hurtado and colleagues (1997) suggested that the differences in application behaviors across racial groups is due in part to the fact that college choice models are based on assumptions regarding application behaviors of high income students. In other words, other student populations may only have a choice between one or two schools because they are unable to afford to apply to multiple schools.

**Quality of high school and college type.** Where students attend college/university is

often based on their perception of their academic ability to succeed at that institution. There are two major measures of a student's academic preparation and achievement that institutions of higher education use: high school GPA and standardized test scores from the SAT or ACT. How students perform academically can affect their available choice set. Hearn (1991) found that Black students are more likely to attend less selective institutions when compared to their White counterparts. Related to a student's academic preparation is the type and quality of high school they attended.

Studies by Perna and Titus (2004) and Perna and colleagues (2005) asserted that Black students have limited college choice sets due to changes in state public policies related to academic preparation in the K-12 system. While college entrance requirements have become more stringent, K-12 schools, particularly those that serve low-income and minority students, have not kept up with the changing requirements. For example, Perna and Titus (2004) pointed to the number of available math and science courses as indicators of whether students are being adequately prepared for college. A study by Engberg and Wolniak (2009) focused on understanding the relationship between race and the various factors and resources that influence students' decisions to attend a particular institution. In a national, multi-institutional study of eight private colleges and universities, they noted several differences across the racial groups. For example, they found Black students to have significantly lower academic backgrounds, to have attended high schools with higher proportions of students of color, and to have previously attended lower quality high schools. Further, Black students were less likely to attend higher profile and more selective institutions compared to White and Asian students. The variance in patterns of enrollment among Black students was attributed to academic profiles, the social networks of their high school, and total grant dollars offered (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009).

**Perception of affordability.** For many African American students, enrolling in college is based on current perspectives of affordability, not necessarily on long-term gains from a college education (Freeman, 1997). The financial aid application is one of the most confusing and complex aspects of applying to college (Avery & Kane, 2004). Increases in tuition are much more visible to students than the available funding through financial aid.

Researchers have pointed to continual increases in tuition costs as a factor that contributed to racial stratification in higher education (Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005). One of the seminal pieces of research demonstrating price sensitivity among African Americans is Heller's (1997) study. Heller conducted a meta-analysis of 20 quantitative studies examining the relationship between price and higher education enrollment. One question he addressed is whether tuition and financial aid effects differ for students of different incomes, races, or college types. He concluded that the sticker price of education is more likely to be a barrier to enrollment for African Americans than for Whites. Specifically, enrollment of African American students was significantly impacted by the percentage of financial aid awarded, in that African American students were more likely to matriculate if awarded larger percentages of grant dollars (Heller, 1997). Sensitivity to tuition changes is related to the fact that many Black students are less likely to have average expected family financial contributions as high as those of White or Asian American students (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009). Kim (2004) found that 71% of African American students reported that the financial aid being offered was "somewhat/very important" in influencing their decision about where to attend. Further, as compared to Whites, African Americans were less likely to attend their first-choice institutions, and cited financial concerns as a key reason (Kim, 2004). Students who have greater financial need may eliminate some institutions from their choice set because of perceived costs.

**Perceived racial climate of the institution.** Characteristics of an institution and students' perceptions of the college experience there can also shape decisions about which institution they attend. Hurtado and colleagues (1997) noted that the importance of the social atmosphere, or perceived racial climate, of an institution results in large choice sets for White students but smaller choice sets for African American students.

There has been a growing interest among researchers to understand why African American students select Historically Black Colleges and Universities over Predominantly White Institutions (Freeman, 1999b; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Tobolowsky, Outcalt & McDonough, 2005). Scholars have found influential factors such as personal connections to an HBCU (Freeman, 1999b; McDonough et al., 1997; Tobolowsky et al., 2005), the religious affiliation of the school (McDonough et al., 1997), the academic reputation of the school (McDonough et al., 1997; Tobolowsky et al., 2005), and opportunities to explore cultural roots (Freeman K. , 1999b; Tobolowsky et al., 2005; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009) as reasons why African American students consider or attend an HBCU.

There are two major veins related to the study of HBCUs and college choice. The first is understanding what factors students weigh when considering an HBCU over a PWI. The second line of research is what factors related to a particular HBCU attracted the student to enroll there. In Freeman's (1999b) interviews with African American high school students, she found that the type of high school a student attended was an influential factor. African American participants who attended predominantly White private high schools were more likely to consider HBCUs than those who attended majority minority high schools. Most often students from predominantly White private high schools cited that HBCUs provided an opportunity for them to develop a

connection with their African American heritage and community. Similarly, some African American students expressed a fear of experiencing racial isolation if they attended a predominantly White institution (Freeman, 1999b; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Freeman (1999b) argued that, for some African American high school students who attended predominantly White schools, the pressure of “living in two different worlds” (p. 100) and having little knowledge about their own culture made HBCUs more appealing because of opportunities to actively engage the African American culture through curriculum and co-curricular activities.

Having existing ties with family members, friends, or mentors who are alumni of an HBCU was likely to influence a student’s predisposition to develop an interest in attending an HBCU (Freeman, 1999b; McDonough et al., 1997; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). Having a strong reputation for providing prestigious academic programs was another reason that African American students decided to attend an HBCU (Tobolowsky et al., 2005), and along with it, graduates’ ability to secure good jobs (McDonough et al., 1997).

McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) conducted a retrospective study with first-time freshman African American students to investigate the factors that affected students’ decision to enroll at HBCUs. McDonough and her colleagues (1997) found that Black students in HBCUs were more likely to have engaged in activism while in high school, have a mother who is a college graduate, and identify as Baptist. The authors concluded that the Baptist affiliation and the school’s tendency to engage in social justice issues attracted students with similar backgrounds.

**College as an opportunity to explore and develop racial identity.** There are emerging data that indicated that Black students chose to attend an HBCU because the environment

provided them with an opportunity to engage in activities to develop their racial and cultural identity and awareness (Freeman, 1999b; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). For some African American high school students, attending predominantly White high schools created a sense of cultural isolation, thus fueling their desire to explore and develop their cultural knowledge and increasing their motivation to attend an HBCU (Freeman, 1999b; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010). Van Camp, Barden, and Sloan (2010) found that Black students who felt they had little contact with other Blacks were more intent on engaging in behaviors on campus that related to developing their racial identity.

Multiple studies show that students who indicated race-related reasons for their choice of an HBCU intended to engage in race-related course work and student organizations (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). Van Camp, Barden and Sloan (2010) asserted that “having a racial identity that is more central to the self is likely to have an impact on a variety of important life decisions, including the reasons students have to attend a given college or university” (p. 241). In other words, the students in their study who had higher racial centrality identified race-related reasons, such as exploring their racial identity through course work, as core to their decision to attend an HBCU. Similar to Freeman’s (1999b) finding, Van Camp and colleagues (2010) found that Black students who had little contact with other Blacks prior to college were more likely to cite race-related reasons for choosing an HBCU.

Viewed as a whole, the empirical studies on college choice presented in this section indicate that African American students experience and perceive decisions about whether to attend college and where to attend college differently than their White counterparts (e.g., Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Freeman, 1997, 1999b, 2005; Pitre, John, & Pitre, 2006; Teranishi,

Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004). For example, among African American students, parents can have a significant influence on the college choice process regardless of the parents' educational background (Freeman, 1999b, 2005). African American students have also reported experiencing psychological or social barriers during their decision-making process such as lack of guidance from school personnel or the fear of racial/cultural isolation on college campuses (Freeman, 1999b).

There is also growing evidence that where African American students enroll is linked to distinct race-related reasons (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). The qualitative research indicated that Black students with a strong racial identity considered race-related factors in the college choice process. These factors included being in a racially supportive environment, seeking cultural/racial exploration opportunities through curriculum and social activities/organizations, and racial self-development (Van Camp, Barden & Sloan, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

The current body of research on race and college choice is limited in several ways. First, the majority of the studies exploring race-related factors and college choice for African Americans have taken a quantitative approach (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2000; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). While quantitative research is useful to understand the extent to which various factors play a role in the decision-making process, it is unable to explain how participants experienced the college choice process and what influences they perceived to be important (Maxwell, 2005). For example, both qualitative and quantitative research have emphasized the important role of family members in encouraging and supporting their student to

pursue postsecondary education. But qualitative research has shown that, beyond the family support and encouragement, students are motivated to do better than their parents (Freeman, 1997, 1999b, 2005) or by their need to please their parents and make them proud of their educational attainment (Butner et al., 2001). And while quantitative studies indicated that students selected to attend an HBCU because of the desire for more cultural knowledge and awareness (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009), it is Freeman's (1999a, 1999b) qualitative studies that provided a fuller explanation of how African American students' fear of racial isolation on predominantly White campuses and lack of education regarding their cultural background motivated them to select an HBCU. Additional qualitative studies can help researchers and practitioners understand how students prioritize economic, social, and institutional factors during their decision making. Moreover, since to date there are no studies, qualitative or quantitative, on the college choice process of Black/White biracial students, a qualitative study can help inform institutions on how to best attract and serve this student population. A qualitative study such as this would be especially beneficial to help expand emergent quantitative studies that suggest students who come from predominantly White high schools or have higher racial centrality are more likely to indicate race-related reasons for their college choice and greater intentions to engage in racial identity behaviors (Van Camp, Barden & Sloan, 2005; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009).

### **Multiracial Identity Development**

Multiracial individuals have always been a part of the historical fabric of the United States (Morning, 2000). Mixing of the races began when early male settlers engaged in interracial relationships with the indigenous people and later with African slaves (Morning,



2000), which produced an intermediary group between White slave owners and Black slaves, historically referred to as mulattos, quadroons, or octoroons. Smedley and Smedley (2005) argued that race ideology and the slave trade developed simultaneously, creating a racial hierarchy between White slave owners, Black slaves, and the indigenous Native Americans. This tension between Blacks and Whites has shaped and influenced how Black/White individuals understand their racial identity and their social experiences within the United States. The implications of this hierarchy are related to social dominance, political power, and resource allocation. Within the U.S. racial framework, the dominant group has been Whites; all other racial identities are constructed around what it means to be non-White (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Beginning in the mid-1990s, a shift occurred in the understanding of racial identity formation. One ideology contributing to this shift was the advancement of the argument that race is a social construct that is accordingly “formed, transformed, destroyed and reformed” by society and sociohistorical context (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 12). As more mixed race individuals began to claim their multiracial heritage, multiracial theorists debated what race is, how biracial/multiracial identity is constructed, and how to define and categorize multiracial individuals.

As the field of mixed race studies developed, researchers investigated how various factors impact the racial identity development process and outcomes for multiracial individuals. Based on their review of the empirical literature, Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) concluded that there are four major themes found in the research: “(a) racial identity varies, (b) racial identity often changes over the life course, (c) racial identity development is not a predictable linear process with a single outcome, and (d) social, cultural, and spatial context are critical” (pp. 20-21). For example, studies have pointed to the link between the racial

demographics of neighborhoods and how an individual chooses to racially identify (Harris & Sim, 2002; Miville et al., 2005). Other scholarship has shown that multiracial identity varies across social spheres, such as the school or home environments, because of the presence of the primary caregiver or available peer groups (Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Miville et al., 2005). This section will look at how each of these themes has been studied in the general population outside the field of higher education. This is followed by a discussion of the themes in research conducted with multiracial students in higher education. Finally, I examine the ecological approach to understanding multiracial identity development as applied by Renn (1998, 2004).

### **Contemporary Research on Mixed Race Individuals – Not Specific to Higher Education**

**Racial identity varies.** The debate surrounding the addition of a multiracial category on the 2000 U.S. Census gave rise to the questions, “Who is Black?”, “Who is multiracial?”, and “What does it mean to be multiracial?” The singular Black identity has historically and culturally been the norm in the United States because of factors such as the one-drop rule, essentially enforcing a singular Black identity as the only identity option for mixed race people (Rockquemore, 1999). However, a shift in ideology occurred in the 1990s when researchers began to view the multiracial population as a unique racial group. Scholars became increasingly interested in how mixed race people understood their racial identity in contemporary America. Poston (1990) and Root (1990) were the first scholars to introduce models for biracial identity development that resulted in a healthy biracial identity. Since Poston (1990) and Root (1990), other scholars have confirmed their findings that mixed race individuals vary in their expression of their racial identity (Kich, 1992; Rockquemore, 1998, 1999; Kilson, 2001; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006).

Poston's model followed the more linear approach taken by monoracial identity models (e.g., Helms, 1995). Poston presented a stage progression biracial identity model, suggesting that biracial identity develops over an individual's life span by incorporating all racial identities rather than restricting his or her racial identity outcome to a monoracial identity.

Poston's model includes five levels:

1. personal identity not necessarily linked to a racial reference group, typical of young children
2. choice of group categorization: based on personal appearance, perceived group acceptance and approval
3. enmeshment/denial: internal conflicts stemming from not being able to identify with all aspects of racial heritage
4. appreciation: individuals broadening their racial reference group through learning about all aspects of their backgrounds, though individuals may choose to identify with one group more than with others
5. multicultural existence: valuing all identities (pp. 153–154)

Poston's model introduced several important issues and assumptions: (a) mixed race individuals may experience identity conflicts when they encounter prejudice or discrimination from their reference groups, (b) racial identity options can be influenced by external factors such as family, (c) identity choice may cause alienation and internal discomfort, (d) choosing one identity over another may create feelings of guilt, (e) an integrated identity is associated with psychological wellness, and (f) the choice and enmeshment/denial phase may be categorized as a difficult adjustment period resulting in identity confusion (p. 154). The major limitation of his conceptualizations of racial identity development in mixed race individuals is the assumption

that there was one universal outcome for racial identity, suggesting the optimal endpoint resulted in embracing a biracial/multiracial identity.

Root (1990), took a more phenomenological approach to multiracial identity, and accounted for social-cultural, political, and familial influences in her conceptualization of mixed race identity development. Root described her model as a “spiral where the linear force is internal conflict over a core sense of definition of self, the importance of which is largely determined by socialization (e.g., race, gender)” (p. 198). In other words, biracial individuals will experience tension between their racial identities and look towards social, political, and familial environments to help develop a sense of self. Unlike Poston’s (1990) model, Root’s presented four strategies for biracial identity resolution without placing an emphasis on one strategy over another. First, biracial individuals can accept the identity society assigns them, usually their minority status (e.g., Black, Latino/a). Root claimed that this is a more passive resolution to biracial identity, often through more oppressive means because these individuals typically live in more racially oppressive regions of the country. Second, biracial individuals can identify with both racial groups (e.g., Black and White). One challenge to asserting a biracial status is opposition from society to that chosen identity; thus, these individuals must develop coping strategies for societal resistance to their identity. The third strategy for biracial identity resolution is identification with a single racial group. This is similar to accepting the identity society assigns, however the individual chooses to identify with a singular racial group through an active rather than oppressive process. And the final strategy is identification with a new racial group, biracials. Root stated that individuals using this strategy will often move between racial groups but biracial individuals serve as the reference group for an individual’s identity. Those individuals who claim that biracial individuals are a part of a new race will “continually

experience being assigned to a racial identity and would need to inform people of the inaccuracy when it felt important to them” (Root, 1990, p. 201). Root advanced the theory of biracial identity development by suggesting that there are patterns to biracial identity rather than a singular outcome. Further, her model allowed for individuals to move between the four strategies and acknowledges the tension between the racial identity imposed by society and an individual’s chosen identity.

Kich (1992) developed a three-stage model of biracial and bicultural identity based on his research with 15 Japanese and White mixed race individuals, ages 17 to 60. Kich proposed that biracial individuals undergo three stages of racial identity development over their life span. During each stage, mixed race individuals experience tension between racial labels imposed on them by society and the individual’s own experiences and understanding of his/her racial identity. The first stage, which he termed “awareness of differentness and dissonance,” occurred between the ages of three and ten. This is during a period when an individual’s reference groups expand outside the family context, which results in an awareness of racial differences between self and peer groups. The noticing of difference creates feelings of dissonance, or the devaluing of self because the individual is racially different from peers. The second stage, age 8 through late adolescence and young adulthood, is “struggle for acceptance,” during which biracial individuals attempt to exhibit “passing” behaviors and attitudes of a particular monoracial group in order to gain approval (p. 312) . Participants in the study described experiencing tension between identification with parents and identification with peer groups. Many believed that having a stronger identification with one parent over another was a question of loyalty. This stage is marked by participants exploring their racial identity through involvement with various peer groups. The final stage is “self-acceptance and assertion of an interracial identity,” which

took place in late adolescence and throughout adulthood. The outcome of this stage is an increased recognition of a self-determined biracial and bicultural identity and the ability to use passing behaviors to move between different racial groups. For successful resolution of this stage, biracial individuals need to develop racial identities defined by their own experiences and self-definitions rather than ones imposed on them by society. Similar to Poston's (1990) model, Kich's suggested a healthy resolution is the adoption of a biracial identity. However, Kich emphasized that, although individuals may value their identity, they will experience an ongoing process of asserting their chosen identity.

**Racial identity changes over the life course.** One unique theme of biracial and multiracial identity development models is that, for some mixed race individuals, racial identity changes over their lifetime (e.g., Kilson, 2001; Miville et al., 2005; Hitlin et al., 2006). Monoracial identity models (e.g., Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995) have suggested that racial identity development is a linear process that results in a single outcome. However, studies show that multiracial individuals reported changing how they racially identify depending upon critical life periods (e.g., childhood, entering college) or context.

Kilson's (2001) ethnographic study of mixed race young adults of the post-Civil Rights generation provided narratives regarding changes in participants' racial identity over a lifetime. Most of her biracial participants (58%;  $n = 30$ ) reported that they had always claimed the same racial identity; however, some reported changing their racial identity at least once in the past. A common theme to changes in racial identification were "turning points" which Kilson described as experiences "altering a person's racial self-identity or strengthens their racial self-identity construct" (p. 48). The majority of the turning points were associated with a change in the participant's community; for others, it was their increased sense of being "different," physically

or culturally, or experiencing racial rejection. These turning points for participants occurred anywhere from preteen years to high school, college, and even after college. Participants reported changes in their racial identity due to an increase in comfort level with their chosen racial identity, the demographic makeup of school and communities, rejection from parent, peers, or other individuals, or gaining an increased sociopolitical awareness and understanding. Kilson asserted that these changes in racial identity among biracial adults indicate that biracial identity is continuously evolving based on social, cultural, and political contexts.

A qualitative study by Miville and colleagues (2005) also indicated that racial identity of mixed race individuals evolved during certain critical periods that increased their awareness of their multiracial background or facilitated the integration of a racial identity, either a monoracial or multiracial identity. The findings from their study indicated that participants' childhood and the elementary school years were identified as one of the first critical periods in which mixed race individuals felt "different" from others. Participants described this feeling of being different based on their physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and cultural attitudes and beliefs compared to their peers. The second period identified was during the high school years, when participants in the study began to understand their racial identity in relation to their peers. The social groups that participants were members of were highly influential in how they understood race and racial identity. The third period occurred during college and was marked by an integration of racial identity. Each of these critical periods was experienced in relation to peer interactions. As participants grew older, they found that they had more available peer groups and experiences through which to explore their racial identity. Having more options may have permitted participants to engage parts of their identity central to their sense of self (Miville et al., 2005).

Previous studies (e.g., Kilson, 2001; Miville et al., 2005) provided narratives regarding changes in racial identity over time. Hitlin, Brown, and Elder (2006) empirically documented the “pathways of racial identification,” or the fluidity in racial identity formation among biracial individuals in a longitudinal study. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add-Health survey), they established nation-level evidence of fluidity of racial identity. The first measurement of racial self-identification was taken when the adolescents were between ages 14 and 18 and then it was taken again five years later. Hitlin and colleagues distinguished six possible pathways of racial identification: (a) non-switching monoracial or multiracial identities, (b) starting with a monoracial identity and then adding multiple racial identities (diversifiers), (c) starting with a multiracial identity and ending with a monoracial identity (consolidators), (d) switching between multiple racial categories at each time of measurement (switching multiracial), and (e) switching between monoracial identities at each time of measurement (switching monoracials).

In comparisons across the groups, the authors found nearly twice as many adolescents expressed fluidity in their multiracial identity than those who reported stable ones, and there were half as many individuals who consistently reported multiracial identity as compared to consolidators or diversifiers. Further, when multiracial individuals who had identified Black as one of their races consolidated, they almost always selected Black as their monoracial identity, “lending support to traditional notions of hypodescent underlying Black racial identification” (Hitlin et al., 2006, p. 1303).

Further analysis of the data revealed that there were similarities in background, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem in adolescents who exhibited racial fluidity. Adolescents who were less likely to switch their racial identification exhibited higher levels of self-esteem,



were more likely to be from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and came from predominantly White neighborhoods when compared to adolescents who were more likely to switch their racial identity. Hitlin and colleagues (2006) suggested that family background can influence how adolescents racially identify. And higher levels of intelligence were associated with adolescents who were more likely to switch their racial identification, which the authors believe indicates a capacity to have more flexibility in thinking about racial identification. However, they noted that there is a need to further investigate the factors that impact adolescents who switch their racial identity. This study highlights two important findings: a longitudinal method shows the fluidity in multiracial self-identification among adolescents, and there are particular characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic backgrounds, neighborhood demographics) associated with adolescents who switch their racial identity.

**Racial identity development is not predictable or linear.** Charmaine Wijeyesinghe (2001) developed the Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) based on her research on Black/White multiracial adults. The basis of her model is the premise that there are no universal outcomes of racial identity for multiracial individuals. It also assumed that racial identity is determined by individuals rather than imposed upon them by people or society. Additionally, FMMI differs from biracial identity models such as Poston's (1990) in that it examined the impact of factors on the choice of racial identity rather than taking a stage development approach. Wijeyesinghe's model proposed eight factors that impact an individual's choice or racial identity: (a) racial ancestry, (b) early experiences and socialization, (c) cultural attachment, (d) physical appearance, (e) social and historical context, (f) political awareness and orientation, (g) other social identities (gender, class, etc.), and (h) spirituality. She asserted that the FMMI acts as a filter for the impact of the experiences of multiracial individuals and how these

experiences shape how they create meaning and understand their racial identity. The factors presented in the FMMI can interact with one another, resulting in factors either “fitting” together—giving rise to few intra- or interpersonal conflicts challenging the person’s chosen racial identity. Conversely, factors can contradict one another—increasing the possibility for internal conflicts regarding the person’s racial identity. For example, many multiracial individuals experience validation and gain acceptance within particular racial groups when their chosen identity is consistent with their physical features and the identity imposed on them by society. However, for multiracial individuals whose physical appearance is ambiguous or incongruent with their physical appearance it can prevent some multiracial individuals from gaining access to and acceptance by certain racial groups. Because the FMMI does not take a linear stage approach to multiracial identity development, it is able to account for the complexity and fluidity found in the racial identities of mixed race individuals.

### **Factors that Influence Multiracial Identity**

**Parents.** As with other factors in human development, parents are found to be some of the most influential individuals on racial identity outcomes. Harris and Sim (2002) suggested that having parents who are from two different racial backgrounds or who identify as multiracial is not a strong indicator that their children will adopt a multiracial identity. Harris and Sim’s (2002) study supported the claim that the presence of other individuals, specifically parents, can influence how biracial individuals racially identify themselves. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the researchers selected students for in-school interviews, then in-home interviews without a caregiver present, and finally in-home interviews with the primary caregiver (in most instances, biological mother). At one stage of the study, the adolescents were told that they could select multiple racial categories and at a later stage they

were asked to select the best single race category. In total there were four measures of race: school race, home race, best single race (selecting one monoracial category), and parent-based race. Survey data showed that, in terms of racial self-identification, there was no single multiracial experience. Rather, the authors found that patterns of racial identification were dependent upon the racial groups which compromised the student's racial background. For example, White/American Indian adolescents were more likely to have greater variation between their school (2.4%) and home race (1.5%). In contrast, Black/White adolescents demonstrated no significant difference between their school (.6%) and home race (.6%).

The data also indicated inconsistencies between the child's best single race answer on the survey and their response when a parent was present during the at-home interview. One possible reason for this irregularity is the differing viewpoints of race and racial identity between the two generations. Further, the researchers (Harris & Sim, 2002) noted that the data showed that mixed race adolescents who live with only one of their biological parents were more likely than other adolescents to report being multiracial. Though Harris and Sim (2002) did not offer an explanation for this finding, another study suggested that mixed race children frequently racially identified with the parent they felt was more emotionally supportive or dominant in the home, typically the parent of color (Miville et al., 2005). Harris and Sim's study highlighted two important social factors and their relationship to fluidity in racial identity. First, when students had greater anonymity, such as during the self-administered school survey, they tended to follow more contemporary patterns of racial identification (e.g., marking multiple races). Second, there were strict rules governing patterns of racial categorization for particular subgroups of the multiracial population. This was seen in White/Black individuals, where students in this subset were more likely to indicate Black as the best single race response. Harris and Sim (2002)

attributed this pattern to vestiges of the one-drop rule. Overall, the study's findings supported the assertion that racial identity development for mixed race individuals is not a predictable, linear process with a single outcome.

**Social, cultural, and spatial context.** The question of how multiracial individuals should identify is often at the center of studies on multiracial identity development. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2003) asserted that researchers and practitioners should be asking, "What is a healthy (in terms of overall health) racial identity outcome for each mixed race individual?" rather than assuming that there is a singular outcome. The empirical data from their study suggested that multiracial individuals have multiple identity options and that it is the level of social (in)validation regarding the individual's choice identity that is more important than the specific racial identity selected. Rockquemore and Laszloffy's Black/White clients described experiencing invalidation when society challenges the identity the clients have chosen for themselves. One form of invalidation to Black/White biracial individuals who embrace their mixed heritage is being perceived by some Black communities as believing that they are better than Blacks (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Another form of invalidation occurred when White individuals express disbelief when Black/White biracial individuals state that they are half White. The authors contended that it is important for Black/White biracial individuals to develop a strong sense of self-validation to help against the internalization of self-doubt and shame of their biracial identity.

A study by Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005) succinctly summarized the major contextual factors which shape the racial identity of multiracial individuals as critical people, critical places, and critical periods. The authors asserted that racial identity development is an interaction between the individual and people, places, and time. The varying social contexts

of socialization impact how multiracial individuals understand and express their racial identity. Because multiracial communities do not have high visibility, monoracial groups tend to serve as a reference group for mixed race individuals (Miville et al., 2005). This often leads to a sense of not belonging or fitting in. Although for many multiracial individuals one primary racial or ethnic group serves as the reference group, mixed race individuals simultaneously acknowledge that they experience the world as multiracial (Miville et al., 2005).

### **Contemporary Research on Mixed Race College Students – Higher Education Specific**

One social, cultural, and spatial context that has garnered increased attention from scholars studying multiracial identity development is institutions of higher education. College is a critical period in identity development, “characterized by an integration of identity” for mixed race students (Miville et al., 2005, p. 513). College is also viewed as an opportunity for students to explore racial identity because of the availability of new peer groups, race-related courses, and activities (Milem & Umbach, 2003).

**Peer groups.** Astin (1993) contended that the single most important influence on student development is the available peer groups on a campus. Renn’s (1998, 2000, 2003, 2004) findings demonstrated that peer culture maintains the boundaries of campus spaces (e.g., residence halls, student organizations, classrooms) in which students explore their identity, which can only be accessed by having a common cultural background, engaging in culturally relevant activities, or having a physical appearance that is not racially ambiguous. King (2008) also found in numerous studies that mixed race college students viewed their peer groups as gatekeepers to cultural groups and spaces by controlling access to the spaces. This control was mediated by expected physical appearance, cultural knowledge, or behaviors and attitudes. Often, multiracial students found their monoracial peers would ask, “What are you?” because their racially ambiguous

physical features were interpreted as not belonging to any specific racial group. When mixed race students were rejected by their monoracial peers, they often sought other mixed race peers in order to have a sense of belonging and shared experiences.

The growing numbers of multiracial students enrolled in higher education spurred Renn (1998, 2000, 2003, 2004) to explore how mixed race students view their racial identity in the context of higher education. Renn applied an ecology model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993) to explore multiple spheres of influence, or the impact of the interactions within and between particular environments related to the student. Renn (1998) proposed a model in which the student is centered and the various environments that influence his/her racial identity development are nested around the student. Renn's study identified five patterns of racial identity in mixed race students. In the first pattern, multiracial individuals select a monoracial identity (e.g., Black or White). The second pattern involves moving between monoracial categories, or situational monoracial identity. In the third pattern, individuals create a multiracial category (e.g., mixed or hapa<sup>5</sup>). In the fourth, mixed race individuals avoid racial categories altogether, often choosing to identify as a human being. In the fifth pattern, called situational identity, multiracial individuals have a stable racial identity but certain aspects of this identity are more prominent in different contexts. Renn's findings demonstrated that the racial identity patterns of mixed race individuals are not mutually exclusive; therefore, respondents fit more than one pattern. In a subsequent study, Renn (2004) expanded her research to account for gender, class year, institution, and various racial combinations. She found little difference across

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<sup>5</sup> The term *hapa* comes from a Hawaiian Pidgin word that denotes a part or fragment of something. When applied to people, this denotes that such people are of mixed descent, often referring to an individual who is part Asian or Pacific Islander.

these factors, confirming that students have a propensity to move among these five patterns of racial identity. Renn's research called into question the use of racial categories in higher education and the appropriateness of the categories for multiracial students.

Using an interactionist framework, Rockquemore (1999) explored how social, contextual, and interactional factors impacted the selection of racial identity options for Black/White biracial undergraduate students from two Detroit area schools. She contended that racial identity is mediated through social interactions, and meaning is produced through the social interactions with others: "[i]f identity is conceptualized as interactionally validated self-understanding, then identities can only function effectively where the response of the individual to themselves (as a social object) is consistent with the response of others" (p. 34). Similar to Root (1991) and Renn (1998, 2000), Rockquemore (1999) introduced a typology of four categories of racial identity options for biracial individuals. The four typologies of racial identification are (1) singular Black or White, (2) border (exclusively biracial), (3) protean (sometimes Black, sometimes White, sometimes biracial), and (4) transcendent (no racial identity). Singular Black or White identity refers to individuals who exclusively identify as either Black or White and view the term *biracial* as a reference to the fact that their parents come from two different races. Border identity refers to mixed race individuals who create a new biracial or multiracial identity, incorporating all aspects of their racial heritage.

Rockquemore noted that students with a border identity fall into two distinct categories, validated or un-validated border identities. Validated border identity categorizes an individual who self-identifies as biracial, which is validated through the social interactions with others. Those with an un-validated border identity find their biracial identity challenged through social interactions. Rockquemore proposed two explanations for this validation or un-validation. First,

some individuals in society see racial categories as distinct and mutually exclusive. Second, related to the appearance of the mixed race individuals, students in the study described being perceived as racially ambiguous, or looking Black and thus perceived as Black. The third typology is the protean identity or the movement across various racial identities (Black, White, biracial). The final typology is transcendent identity, in which individuals create their identity around personal traits, characteristics, and talents rather than a racial category. These four typologies indicate that there is no one specific racial identity outcome for mixed race individuals or a universal understanding of what it means to be biracial (Rockquemore, 1999). Rockquemore's study highlighted that socialization contributes to how multiracial students understand their identity and why they select various identity options.

Multiracial college students in several studies have reported having difficulty "fitting into" monoracial groups because it was clear that they did not look a particular way. One underlying assumption about how multiracial individuals self-identify and are socially categorized is related to their physical appearance. Brunσμα and Rockquemore (2001) found a strong link between Black/White biracial students' skin color and the way they understood their appearance. In other words, Black/White biracial students who were able to "pass as White" had lighter skin color and Black/White biracials who had darker skin color and appeared to be Black were perceived to be Black by others. Students in the study were issued a Survey of Biracial Experience, in which they were asked about their racial identity, their self-perceived skin color, their assessment of how others categorized them based on their physical features, the racial composition of their pre-adult networks, and whether they experienced negative treatment from Blacks or Whites. The study findings revealed that mutual identification is important to both identity construction and maintenance. For example, almost two thirds of the respondents



indicated that they held an exclusively biracial identity but many reported finding their biracial identity invalidated by others through social interactions. Further, the authors found a link between the physical appearance of biracial students and how others identified them; the majority of respondents who identified as biracial described themselves as racially “ambiguous but people assume I am Black,” indicating that there is a strong association between skin color and how mixed race individuals understand their appearance. Again, the significance of context is brought to the forefront by this study. The authors concluded that social context appears to have an important role in the interaction between phenotype and socially perceived appearance, more specifically the racial composition of pre-adult networks and experiences of negative treatments from Blacks and Whites.

These findings are similar to those from another study by Rockquemore and Brunσμα (2002) in which they found a relationship between skin color, racial identity, and neighborhood composition. Black/White biracial students whose pre-adult networks were predominantly Black were more likely to identify as singular Black and assumed to be Black by others if they had darker skin. In instances where they had lighter skin and identified as biracial, they were still viewed as Black by others. Rockquemore and Brunσμα (2002) argued that racial identity is not a “choice”; rather, it is socially determined by how others racially identify an individual. This lack of choice is evident in Black/White individuals who identified as biracial but found their racial identity invalidated by others. Often negative encounters with racial groups, especially among peers, can push or pull multiracial individuals from or to other racial groups (Brunσμα & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002). Evidence from both studies indicated that negative treatment from Blacks can push biracial individuals away from a singular Black identity and pull them into a border or exclusively biracial identity.

**Race-based space.** Studies have shown that multiracial college students find the lack of multiracial space or support (such as multiracial student organizations or culture centers inclusive of all racial identities) a constraint on expressing their racial identity (Literte, 2010; King, 2008; Renn, 2000). Students enter an institution of higher education with certain expectations of their college experience regarding the types of courses they can take, the peer groups on campus, and the kinds of community spaces available. For some multiracial students, their racial background can limit the availability of community spaces in which they are accepted. For example, several studies reported that multiracial students attempted to join monoracial organizations but found they did not fit in, prompting them to seek out multiracial students and spaces (Literte, 2010; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; King, 2008; Renn, 2000). Ozaki and Johnston (2008) claimed that multiracial student organizations can help students advocate for multiracial issues on their campus, navigate potential racial politics, and create opportunities for dialogue between leaders of multiracial and monoracial student organizations. Other scholars have called for the inclusion of multiracial identity in classroom discussions about race and ethnicity (King, 2008; Renn, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

Studies focusing on student affairs in higher education have recommended that institutional leaders reassess the racial framework that they use to address the growing biracial student population (King, 2008; Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; Literte, 2010; Renn, 2000, 2003) because higher education institutions have a significant impact in shaping the discourse of race. Studies suggested that the context of an institution affected the experiences of multiracial students and how they thought about race and racial identity. However, scholars have only recently began to understand how multiracial identity is constructed and negotiated in the context

of higher education. The college campus remains an important environment which promotes personal growth and development for students (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). For many students it is within the campus setting that they first begin to explore questions and issues related to race and racial identity outside of the family context (Shang, 2008). There are indications that multiracial students have expectations about the opportunities available for them to explore their racial identity. Numerous studies have included narratives in which multiracial students looked for opportunities to engage their racial identity through student clubs and organizations (Renn, 2000). However, current research has not yet asked the question, “Do biracial students enroll in higher education with the expectation of available public spaces to explore their multiracial identity?” Several studies have shown that African American students choose to attend an HBCU because of the available opportunities to explore their cultural and racial heritage (Freeman, 1999a; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). Therefore, it would be relevant to explore whether biracial students select one institution over another because of the expectation that various courses, public spaces, and co-curricular activities will be available to investigate their racial identity.

This study asked if Black/White biracial students have unique experiences during their college choice process, what factors informed their decision making, and what were the students’ perceptions regarding their ability to explore their racial identity on campus. The first part of this question can only be understood within the context of college choice theories. Using Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-phase model provides insight into specific factors that contribute to the students’ decision-making process. An ecological model of human development can help identify how the campus context influences the development of racial identity in multiracial students (Renn, 2003). This framework allows for an examination of the “personal interactions

with individuals and groups, as well as the interactions between and among those settings” (p. 386). In the following section I will discuss my application of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model and Renn’s (2000, 2003, 2004) use of the human ecological approach to understanding biracial identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this section I present a review of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-phase college choice model and a discussion of its limitations in understanding the college choice process for students of color. Then I discuss the application of the ecology model to understand the exploration and development of racial identity in Black/White biracial students (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004). Together these two frameworks shape the lens through which I will examine my data.

#### **Understanding the College Choice Process**

**What is the Hossler and Gallagher model?** Hossler and Gallagher (1987) framed the decision to participate in higher education as a three-phase process: predisposition, search, and choice. Their model explains how traditional aged students progressed from considering postsecondary education, to seeking out an institution that fits their aspirations, educational achievements, and college experience expectations, to finally deciding which institution to attend.

**Predisposition phase.** The literature on college choice showed that the process of deciding to attend college begins around seventh grade and each phase is associated with specific cognitive and affective outcomes that influence subsequent phases, as well as the end outcome pertaining to the student’s decision to participate in higher education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000) (see Table 1). For instance, the level of parental support in the predisposition phase can affect a

student's decision to explore various institutions of higher education and the educational experiences they offer.

Table 1

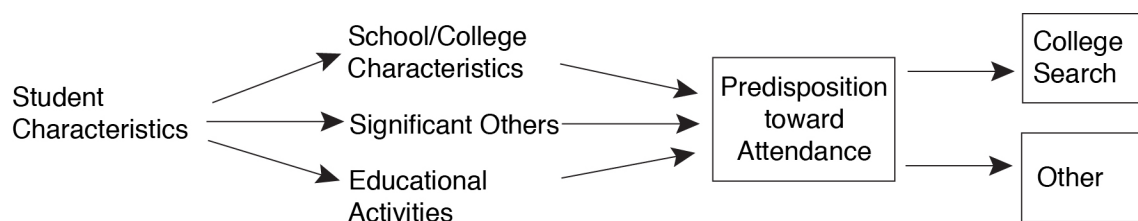
*College Choice Process: Stages, Factors, and Outcomes*

<u>Stages</u>	<u>Factors</u>	<u>Outcomes</u>
Predispositions: Grades 7 – 9	Parental encouragement and support Parental saving for college Socioeconomic status Parental collegiate experiences High school academic resources Student ability Information about college	Reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills Career and occupational aspirations Educational aspirations Enrollment in college-bound curriculum
Search: Grades 10 – 12	Parental encouragement and support Educational aspirations Occupational aspirations Socioeconomic status Saliency of potential institutions Student ability High school academic resources	Listing of tentative institutions Narrowing list of tentative institutions Securing information on institutions
Choice: Grades 11 – 12	Educational aspirations Occupational aspirations Socioeconomic status Student ability Parental encouragement Perceived institutional attributes (quality, campus life, majors, availability, distance) Perceived ability to pay (perceived resources, perceived costs)	Awareness of college expenses and financial aid Awareness of institutional attributes and admission standards Attaining scholastic aptitudes and attitudes Perceived support from family and friends Institutional commitment Submission of applications Preregistration Attendance Application for financial aid

Source: Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000

During the first phase, predisposition, students decide whether to attend college. The

outcome of this phase is the result of an interaction between student characteristics, high school characteristics, and available postsecondary options (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209).

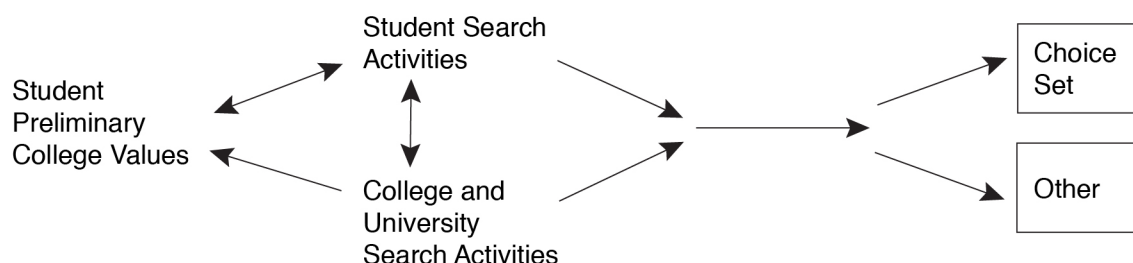


*Figure 1.* Phase One: Predisposition. (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

Student characteristics identified as influential by Hossler and Gallagher are socioeconomic status and student ability or academic achievement. By “significant others,” Hossler and Gallagher mean parents, who have a significant level of influence on their student’s decision about whether to attend college, and school personnel, such as guidance counselors and teachers. Peers can also shape students’ predisposition towards college attendance. In this schema, educational activities such as curriculum, participation in school athletics, and involvement in extracurricular activities serve as the third factor that can determine the pathway students take after high school. During this phase college/university characteristics are shown to have little impact—the focus is not yet on institutions of higher education as such—though Hossler and Gallagher identify proximity to a campus as a factor that can shape a student’s trajectory.

**Search phase.** By the end of the predisposition phase, students will have determined whether they will continue on through the process by gathering more information about colleges and universities. For those who do elect to continue, the second phase, search, involves the gathering of information about various institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This phase focuses on the interaction between high school students and higher education institutions, concentrating on the process of the student collecting information on institutions at which she or

he would like to enroll and institutions actively recruiting potential matriculates (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).



*Figure 2. Phase Two: Search. (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)*

Information gathered can come from multiple sources: campus visits, searches conducted by students and/or their parents, and recruitment materials sent by institutions. Based on the information at hand, students develop their expectations about campus life, educational and extracurricular experiences, and ability to finance their education.

**Choice phase.** In the choice phase, students select the institution they would like to attend based on the information gathered during the search phase such as perception of school quality, tuition costs, available financial aid, and expectations of college experience. The choice phase involves an interaction between the courtship procedures of institutions, institutional characteristics, and preferences of the student (p. 216).



*Figure 3. Phase Three: Choice. (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)*

Hossler and Gallagher argued that the outcome of the choice phase is determined by “preferences of the applicant, the attributes of the college or university, and the courtship procedures” (p. 216), though factors such as student achievement in the form of ACT or SAT test

scores, financial aid and tuition costs, and recruitment strategies by an institution can narrow a choice set.

### **The Utility of the Three-Phase College Choice Model in Understanding the Role of Racial Identity in College Selection**

There are several factors of this model that contribute to its use in research studies on college choice. For one, the three-phase model captures the major variables found in econometric and sociological college choice models, enabling the model to combine the powerful indicators of college attendance from previous models (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Further, this model takes a longitudinal perspective in understanding the processes involved in college choice and how each phase influences the outcomes of subsequent phases. Ultimately, Hossler and Gallagher created a model intended to capture the process of college choice for students with different background characteristics (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989).

**Limitations.** Hossler and Gallagher's 1987 model has long served as the theoretical framework for studies seeking to understand the college choice process. Muhammad (2008) conducted a review of college choice studies in the social science index and found 33 published studies citing Hossler and Gallagher's model, and that their model is used both in part and in whole to understand the college choice process of students. The components of the three-phase model have been repeatedly quantitatively tested to demonstrate its effectiveness in understanding the college choice process for traditional students—White, male, middle to upper SES; now, contemporary scholars are using the model to understand the college choice process for unique student populations (Muhammad, 2008, p. 83) (e.g., Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Freeman, 1999b, 2005; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Kim, 2004; Muhammad, 2008; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004). However, the notable absence of race as a student



characteristic necessitates the expansion of the model to account for the influence of race, racial identity, and race-related factors. This restricts the model's ability to explain the process of college choice for students of color, limiting its ability to fully explain how various variables influence the process of college choice for students of color.

### **Applying, and Advancing, the Model in the Case of Biracial Students**

Despite the limitations of Hossler and Gallagher's model, it is still applicable because it provides a framework for the processes involved in deciding to attend college. The decision to attend college is accurately framed as a longitudinal and sequential staged process (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Hossler and Gallagher's model will also assist in the identification of economic and social variables that influenced the college choice process of Black/White biracial students. Previous studies using their framework on African American populations (e.g., Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Freeman, 1999b, 2005, 2005; Muhammad, 2008) have not disputed the importance of the variables from Hossler and Gallagher's model. Rather, these studies have suggested that variables have a differential impact on African American students when compared to their White peers. For instance, Freeman (1999, 2005) pointed out that her findings suggested that African American family parents, including extended family, play a role in the process and that they motivate and inspire their children to pursue postsecondary education in ways that are different from families from other racial groups (pp. 8-9). Hamrick and Stage (1998) demonstrated that factors that are shown to increase the likelihood of attendance in White students did not always have a positive relationship with college attendance for minority students. For example, for White students, family SES was a significant predictor of college predisposition. Family SES of African American students did not have a significant direct effect on predisposition by itself but, when paired with parental expectations

and GPA, it increased African American students' predisposition towards college. Thus, this model will be useful in determining what factors Black/White biracial students consider to be important during their decision making to attend college. Further, this model will highlight which external individuals play a role in biracial students' predisposition and choices. It also provides opportunity to understand how the precollege environments shape their college choice process.

Freeman (1999b, 2005) argued that college choice models that meaningfully seek to incorporate the consideration of race/ethnicity would need to take a closer look at the impact of race-related factors. By looking at the college choice process through the context of race, researchers and policy makers can understand the role of cultural affinity in selecting a college/university for students of color. Freeman's central argument is that by ignoring race and race-related factors institutions, policy makers, and practitioners have an incomplete understanding of the factors that are considered during the college choice process for students of color. In order for colleges and universities to successfully target Black/White biracial students, models must be developed that account for their unique experiences deciding to participate in higher education.

There is also room for expanding Hossler and Gallagher's model to incorporate new factors, specific to students of color. For instance, although Hossler and Gallagher's model gives consideration to institutional characteristics such as cost, size, and location, the model does not account for factors related to campus climate like the diversity of the student and faculty body or perceptions of racial/ethnic tension (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005). Studies suggested that the fear of cultural isolation on college campuses can influence where a student chooses to attend (Freeman, 1999b; Hurtado et al., 1997; McDonough et al.,

1997). Conversely, while some students are intimidated by the thought of cultural isolation, other students see college as an opportunity to seek out culturally relevant experiences (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). From these studies this generated the question, Do Black/White biracial students consider race-related factors in their decision?

This study presented an opportunity to assess the model's usefulness in understanding how race and racial identity played a role in Black/White biracial students' decision-making processes regarding participation in higher education, important given the popularity of the model, and the need to study the experiences of the growing biracial student population. The review of literature revealed that, although researchers have begun to test Hossler and Gallagher's model's applicability to African Americans, there are still significant gaps in the understanding of the process of college choice for minority students. Further, there is a total absence of literature on the college choice process for Black/White biracial students. Given that there are differences by racial group across all three stages, it is important that researchers use what's useful in the model—the attention to both individual and contextual factors—but also find ways to expand the model to account for the unique experiences of biracial students, whose identity straddles racial groups that are differentially impacted by influences in each of the three stages. This study, therefore, aims to fill in the gap in Hossler and Gallagher's model by learning what factors Black/White biracial students believe played a role in their college choice process and, specifically, if they considered any race-related factors.

### **Understanding Racial Identity Development in Black/White Students**

Renn (2000, 2003, 2004) was one of the first multiracial theorist to use the human ecology model to understand the development of multiracial identity in college students. The

ecology model suggests that multiracial identity is developed through the interactions of the individual and the various components (person, space, and time) of the environments they interact with. This study uses an ecology model first developed for use in the field of human development and later applied to higher education—more specifically, racial identity development. What follows is a discussion of how the ecology model serves as a conceptual framework of racial identity development in Black/White biracial students as applied by Renn (2000, 2003, 2004) and Renn and Arnold (2003)

Renn and Arnold (2003) asserted that the application of the ecology model in higher education research can help researchers:

1. examine the reciprocal nature of student interactions with the environment,
2. examine how student characteristics relate to the type of responses to environments, and
3. identify processes by which these interactions induce changes in individuals. (p. 264)

### **Bronfenbrenner's Development of the Ecology Model**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) specifically developed the ecology model in order to examine human development across various social settings. Bronfenbrenner framed human development in a multilayered system made up of complex and interconnected social settings in which individuals develop. Further, his model accounts for the *processes*, or the reciprocal nature of individual interactions with the environment, which result in human development outcomes.

There are four elements that characterize the ecology model: “the influences of individuals (person), their interactions with the environment and the responses they provoke from the environment (process), their interactions within immediate settings (context), and changing sociocultural influences on development (time)” (Renn, 2003, p. 386).

**Person and process.** *Person* refers to student characteristics and life experiences, such as social identities, academic experiences and performance, family background, and privately held attitudes and beliefs that can influence the developmental *process*. *Developmentally instigative characteristics* are individual attributes, which can put “a spin” on a student’s propensity “to seek and explore increasingly complex questions about their racial identity” (Renn, 2003, p. 386). There are four developmentally instigative characteristics described by Bronfenbrenner (1993). First, he described characteristics that elicit or prevent specific responses from the environment. These various responses can be viewed in the diverse interactions students have with individuals on campus. The second type, “selective responsivity,” captures how students choose to explore and interact with the campus environment. For example, some students are more likely to engage in course work that examines race and race relations in the United States, whereas other students will avoid any and all discussions of race for their fear of uncomfortable conflicts or self-exploration. The third type is “structuring proclivities,” referring to a student’s tendency to seek out and engage in increasingly complex activities. The fourth characteristic Bronfenbrenner described is “directive beliefs” or a student’s individual perception of self-agency as they interact with various social settings. Developmentally instigative characteristics can help researchers understand what particular types of students are more likely to seek and explore their racial identity.

**Context.** Context refers to the settings in which the person and process interaction occurs, facilitating the developmental projection of an individual. In the ecology model the student is placed at the center with “ever-more-distal developmental influences arrayed around him or her in a series of nested contexts called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems” (Renn, 2003, p. 387) (see Figure 4).

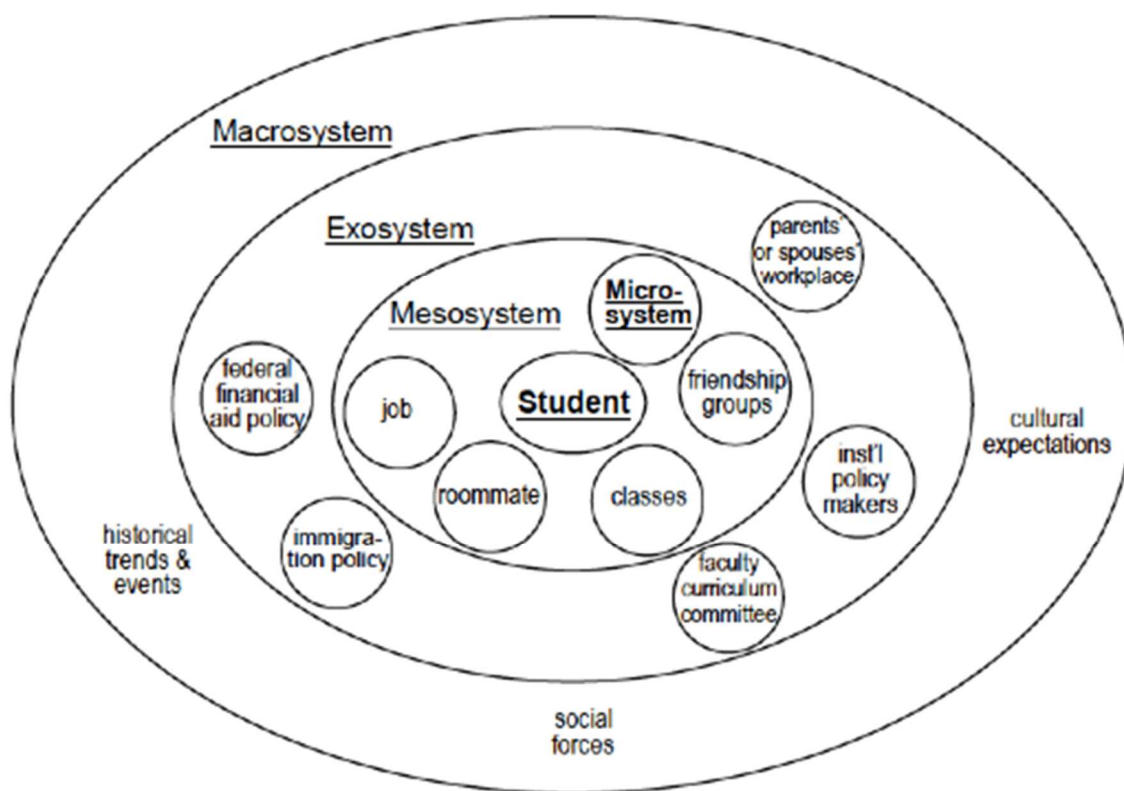


Figure 4. Applying the Ecology Model to a Campus Environment. (Renn, 2003)

Each level of the model conveys messages about students' racial identity that may or may not be congruent to messages from other systems that the students interact with. And various contexts provide students with different levels of resources and support systems to resolve different developmental influences and conflicts. Further, each system possesses developmentally instigative or inhibitory characteristics. For instance, culturally themed residence halls promote student exploration of race, racial identity and race relations, whereas athletic focused residence halls promote student wellness and team involvement.

The inner-most system is the *microsystem*. Renn (2003) and Renn and Arnold (2003) described microsystems for college students as the face-to-face settings in which student development occurs, such as classrooms, peer groups, student organizations, clubs, or athletics. Because students vary on the types of social networks they possess, the diversity of their

neighborhoods, whether they live on or off campus or with friends or family, students may have overlapping or different microsystems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), these microsystems elicit and inhibit different developmental responses dependent upon the student's individual background and developmentally instigative characteristics.

The next context level in the model is a *mesosystem*, the interaction between two or more microsystems. For example, the campus environment is a mesosystem made up of “academic, social, and work life” microsystems (Renn, 2003, p. 389). As with microsystems, mesosystems have compatible and opposing developmental forces and resources that impact a student's racial identity development. For instance, a Black/White student may privately hold a biracial identity; however his or her racial identity may be invalidated in classroom discussions on race or involvement in African American student organizations. Or students might attend an institution that supports biracial student organizations and even includes them in cultural awareness events (e.g., Loving Day or student panels on multiracial identity) but faculty members do not incorporate multiracial identity or issues into courses focused on race and race relations. How each student responds to these congruent or incongruent messages about identity is dependent upon his or her individual developmentally instigative characteristics. For example, in response to conflicting messages about their racial identity, some multiracial students might create an organization supporting and exploring their multiracial heritage, whereas other multiracial students may easily gain acceptance into monoracial peer groups or organizations, and still others may respond by outright rejecting any racial identity. This interaction between the individual and the responses from the environment results in human development.

A more distal system to the individual is the *exosystem*. This system refers to the “developmental possibilities” of a student, but does not directly contain the student; this might

include institutional decisions on recruitment and admissions, state and federal policies on financial aid, and curriculum decisions made by faculty or governing boards (Renn, 2003). For instance, students may be impacted by the decisions the governing board makes regarding available majors to select from. Renn noted the importance of examining exosystems because they “affect a measurable variable attached to students” (p. 389).

The last level of the ecology model is the *macrosystem*. Again, Renn pointed to the lack of research on this environmental influence on students. Renn (2003) characterized macrosystems as

defin[ing] and is defined by patterns of developmental possibilities held in the face-to-face and second-degree influences of the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems, as well as the interactions between and among those systems. The macrosystem is dependent on time, place, and culture. (p. 390)

An example of a macrosystem is the evolving ideology on race and ethnicity and cultural expectations associated with different racial identities and, although this system is the most distal, it nevertheless impacts individuals’ understanding of their own racial identity.

**Time.** Finally, Bronfenbrenner’s model accounts for time, or the developmental change of individuals over their life course (Renn, 2003). This component is relevant for this study because it examines an individual’s racial identity prior to attending college and the effect the college environment has on the individual’s continued racial identity development, while considering the impact of current racial ideology. A student may enter college with a very limited understanding of his or her racial identity; however, after engaging in various coursework and co-curricular activities, the student’s understanding of his or her racial identity may have evolved as he or she seeks to answer more complex questions about identity.



### **Renn's Application of the Ecology Model of Human Development**

The applicability of the ecology model is that it combines the sociological, psychological, and ecological factors that influence biracial identity. As discussed in the review of the literature, multiracial individuals are influenced by their parents (Harris & Sim, 20002; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Miville et al., 2005), peers (Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2000; 2003; Rockquemore 1999), and social contexts (Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 2000; Renn, 2003).

The ecology model allows for the examination of the impact of all of these factors on an individual's racial identity. Further, this framework moves beyond the influence of key individuals to the examination of the interactive effects of various individuals and environments. The ecology theory assumes that because each individual has unique psychological characteristics they will have differing responses to the environment; thus, it is difficult to apply a universal blueprint to biracial identity development (Renn & Arnold, 2003). The ecology model is flexible in that it recognizes that individual students will have their own unique micro-, meso- and exosystems; by starting with the individual, the researcher can examine the interaction within and between environments and how this interaction influences the development and understanding of students' racial identity. Prior to the 1990s biracial identity development was largely understudied. Black/White biracial individuals were classified as Black individuals through the application of the one-drop rule. Biracial identity was understood through monoracial identity development models (e.g., Cross's Nigresence model, 1971); however, these models constrained biracial identity in that they conceptualized the process of racial identity development as linear, involving the rejection of the majority culture, and leading to a universal outcome (Renn, 2003). As biracial individuals pushed for recognition of their multiracial

background in society, researchers in the fields of sociology and psychology simultaneously developed models to explain the experience of mixed race individuals. As suggested by Renn (2003), exploring the “cumulative, interactive influences of overlapping social settings...calls for more theoretical flexibility than [previous] racial identity development models...can provide” (p. 386). Renn (2003) identified Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) ecology model of human development as a more appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the racial identity development of mixed race individuals because it accounts for the various ecological, sociological, and psychological influences that shape identity.

The use of the ecology model to examine the data will shed light on several key issues. First, how do microsystems and the ecological niches (e.g., biracial or multiracial student organizations) within them support the development of biracial identity, and do all students have access to these ecological niches? Second, are the messages that biracial students receive in regards to their racial identity congruent across the various microsystems they interact with? And finally, how do other key individuals in the campus environment such as faculty or higher education personnel convey messages regarding biracial students to other peer groups and the biracial students themselves?

## **Conclusion**

To summarize the review of the literature: to date there exists no research on Black/White biracial students and their college choice process. Researchers wanting to study Black/White biracial students and their decision to attend college can only draw upon studies conducted on African American students. There is empirical evidence that African American students are impacted by race-related factors during their college choice process. Further, when modeling college choice pathways, it is apparent that various factors have differential effects on African

American students when compared to other racial groups (Hamrick & Stage, 1998). Based on these studies one assumption is that Black/White biracial students approach their college choice process from a color-conscious orientation. Given that many Black/White biracial students experience the world as a person of color, as either a Black or biracial individual, it is assumed that this student group's decision to attend college is also shaped by race-related factors (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Additionally, college is marked by a period of personal growth and development. Researchers have asserted that during college many biracial students explore and develop their racial identity. Within the context of previous studies that African American students select HBCUs because of opportunities to explore their racial identity (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp et al., 2009), the assumption is made that Black/White biracial students may enroll at a particular institution with the intention to explore their racial identity. Given that it has been unexplored as to what factors contribute to the college choice process of Black/White biracial students and whether this population views college as an opportunity to explore and develop their racial identity, it is this study's intent to fill in this knowledge gap. The following chapter addresses my process of gathering and analyzing data to answer this study's research questions.

### **CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The overall purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black/White biracial students when deciding to attend college, and the factors they considered during the decision-making process. Second, this study sought to learn the ways in which Black/White students perceived the institutional context as having an influence on their racial identity development process. To accomplish this goal, currently enrolled Black/White biracial students at The University of Arizona were asked to share their experiences during the process of selecting an institution to attend: what factors did they prioritize during their decision making; and what, if any, race-related factors were considered about the institution; their expected college experience, in particular experiences focused on the development of their racial identity; and the process through which they explored their racial identity. This chapter discusses the research questions guiding this study, the design and methodology applied, site and participant selection, and the analytic processes used to evaluate the data.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways does the racial identity of Black/White biracial students influence their college choice process?
  - a. In what ways do their described choice processes align with existing models and in what ways do they offer alternative insights? What can be gleaned from the findings of this study to inform and improve college choice models?
2. How do Black/White biracial student interpret the influence of the campus environment on the development of their racial identity?
  - a. In what ways do peer groups influence racial identity development?

- b. What campus activities do biracial students seek out at their institution?
- c. How do the college experiences of biracial students compare to their expectations of their college experience, particularly when it comes to the development of their racial identity?
- d. What do these student narratives mean in terms of racial identity development models?

For the purpose of this study qualitative inquiry was applied. Qualitative methodology is relevant when scrutinizing how the conditions of a particular event elicit an individual to action, interaction, and/or emotional response while pursuing a goal or solving a problem (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). One aim of this study is to understand the college choice *process* for Black/White biracial college students, specifically how race-related factors motivate an individual to attend a particular institution. Further, qualitative research can provide detailed narratives exploring the lived experiences of Black/White biracial students as they construct and negotiate their racial identity in distinctive institutional contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This methodology is appropriate since it is located within the context of an interpretive framework. Burrell and Morgan (1979) state that the interpretive paradigm seeks “...to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participants (p. 28).” Given that this study is focused on understanding the experiences of Black/White biracial students, a case study is an appropriate strategy of inquiry. In addition, it is ideal for examining a specific process embedded within a specific historical moment, such as the process of selecting a college or human development at a specific life period during a time when much of society considers the U.S. to be post-racial (Creswell, 2009;

Merriam, 1998; Yin 2009).

As defined by Yin (2009), a case study design is a method for empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary social phenomenon, such as student development, within its real-life context. This research is a case study because I am examining the real-life experiences of 16 Black/White biracial college students during their college choice and racial identity development processes. Through the method of interviewing, students related and reflect on their experiences during a particular time of their life. This reflection on their life is what helps individuals make sense or create meaning out of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Further, this study is guided by questions that seek to answer “how” racial identity influences the college choice process and “how” the campus environment shapes racial identity development. How questions are more exploratory in nature, thus making a case study research method more appropriate (Yin, 1984).

### **Site Selection**

Public land grant institutions were created in order to broaden access to higher education and increase the available opportunities to students (Kellogg Commission, 1998). Data collection for this study took place at The University of Arizona (see table 2) a large land-grant public institution. The University of Arizona was selected because it has a goal to be as inclusive as possible; intends to show diversity with respect to many student variables, including race, ethnicity, age, geographic origin (in-state and out-of-state, urban and rural) and disciplinary perspectives; and a goal to provide strong multi-cultural student affairs support from institutional administrators and personnel. A diverse student body can maximize opportunities for educational engagement across racial and ethnic lines through student interactions and a variety of curricular and co-curricular activities (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Compositional diversity of this institution is relevant to this study in that participants should have more opportunities to explore

their racial heritages, whether it is through interactions with their peers, courses they select, or activities and events they participate in.

Table 2

*2012 – 2013 Undergraduate Student Characteristics at The University of Arizona*

*(n = 31,565)*

Full-time undergraduates	89%
Female	52%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	6%
Black or African American	3%
Hispanic	20%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
White	55%
Two or More Races	4%
Race and ethnicity unknown	3%
Nonresident alien	8%

Source: IPEDS 2012 – 2013 Fall Enrollment Survey for The University of Arizona

### **Participant Selection**

Narratives from twenty Black/White students were collected on students' college choice process, development of college experience expectations, and how the campus environment influenced their racial identity development. Prior to recruiting participants the Call for Participants was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which regulates and evaluates studies that conduct research with human subjects. The approved Call for Participants was disseminated through listservs for Arizona Assurance Scholars, a scholarship

program for low-income students, the African American Student Cultural Center, and social science majors (e.g., psychology, agriculture and life sciences, women and gender studies). The call requested the participation of students with “one African American/Black biological parent AND one White biological parent.” The intention behind this wording was to recruit students who may or may not identify as multiracial despite having parents from different racial backgrounds. Several scholars investigating patterns of racial identity in the multiracial population noted that some individuals adopt a monoracial identity, whereas others adopt a multiracial identity (e.g. Root, 1990; Renn, 2000, 2004). Originally 20 students were interviewed for this study; however, four students were removed from analysis because during the course of the interview they revealed that their Black identified parent was from another country. All four of these students identified more with the country of origin (like "I'm half Kenyan") rather than their race, suggesting their ethnicity was more salient than their racial identity. The interviews were conducted in the spring semester of the 2012 – 2013 academic year in order to increase the likelihood of the students having an opportunity to engage in co-curricular activities.

**Description of sample.** The participants in this study were a very specific subset of Black/White biracial students (See Table 3). The majority of the students interviewed were women, of the sixteen students only three were men. Another characteristic of this student group was that slightly more than two-thirds identified their mother as White. This makes sense given that the national trend is more incidents of interracial marriages between White women and Black men (Pew Research Center, 2012). A little more than half ( $n = 10$ ) of the students indicated that they were raised in single-mother households, with a large majority raised by single, White women. Being raised in a household lead by a single White mother is revealed to be relevant given that many of the students indicated that they had little to no relationship with



their Black fathers. Further, this placed many of the students in predominantly White precollege contexts. Sixty-two percent ( $n = 10$ ) of the students indicated that they lived in predominantly White neighborhoods and many attended predominantly White high schools (56%,  $n = 9$ ). Another characteristic of these biracial students is that all of the mothers had at least some college education, 69% ( $n = 11$ ) earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. This suggests that these biracial students come from families that placed a value on college education. The reported income level of the family was another unifying characteristic of these Black/White biracial students. Half reported their annual family income level was less than \$50,000, and three-fourths of the students reported their family income under \$75,000 a year. As discussed later in the findings chapter, there is a relationship between the students' family income level and college choice process. Finally, the vast majority of these students ( $n = 13$ ) are residents of Arizona. There are several important outcomes related to the specific characteristics of these Black/White biracial students. Having White mothers, coming from low-income families, and growing up in predominantly White environments appears to have predisposed these students to choose an in-state institution and emphasize racial identity.

Table 3

*Participant Characteristics*

	Race – Response to form	Race – Self-identification	Family SES	1st Generation Status	Mom's Race	Dad's Race
Bree	Black/White	Black/White	\$ 25, 000 - \$49,999	No	Black	White
Emily	Black/White	Black/White	\$50,000 - \$74,999	No	Black	White
Jane	White	Black/White	\$175,000 and over	Yes	White	Black
Jackie	Biracial	Biracial	\$100,000 - \$149,999	No	Black	White
Katie	Black/White	Black/White	Less than \$12,500	Yes	White	Black
Kamyrn	Multicultural	Mixed	\$50,000 - \$74,999	No	White	Black
Mary	African American	Black/White	\$ 25, 000 - \$49,999	No	White	Black
Marie	Other	I don't think about it	\$50,000 - \$74,999	No	White	Black
Sandy	Black/White	Mixed	\$100,000 - \$149,999	No	White	Black
Suzi	Black	Depends on context	\$ 25, 000 - \$49,999	No	White	Black
Samantha	Biracial	Black/White	Less than \$12,500	Yes	White	Black
Aaron	African American/White	African American	\$ 25, 000 - \$49,999	No	White	Black
Annie	Biracial	Biracial	Less than \$12,500	Yes	White	Black
TJ	Biracial (African American/White)	Biracial	\$50,000 - \$74,999	No	Black	White
Thomas	Mixed	Biracial	\$175,000 and over	No	White	Black
Beatrice	African	Black/White	\$ 25, 000 - \$49,999	No	Black	White

**Participant interviews.** A methodological approach using interviews of currently enrolled Black/White students at The University of Arizona was utilized in this study. The purpose of the interviews was to learn how biracial students made sense of their overall experience. Interviewing participants provided a detailed description of students' experiences, as well as the meaning(s) they gave to the events, contexts, or phenomena they offered (Seidman, 2006). However, the use of interviews has its limitations. One limitation of interviews is that

participants have the opportunity to reflect, and then decide on what information to share with the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Further, the presence of the researcher may bias the responses of the participants, shaping what information the participant decides to relay to the interviewer (Creswell, 2009).

The interviews conducted were semistructured allowing for comparability of data within the student sample, while having the flexibility to be reflective and to interact with individual participants (Maxwell, 2005). Each participant was interviewed face to face for approximately forty-five minutes. The student interview protocol (see Appendix A) focused on the steps and decisions involved in the student's college choice process, if they believed race-related factors influenced their decision, and how they understood, constructed, and explored their racial identity on their campus. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by an outside transcription company and then reviewed by the researcher to ensure accuracy. Each interview covered all protocol questions and concluded with asking participants if there was anything they would like to add about their experience as a mixed raced college student or if there were any questions the researcher should ask subsequent students about their college choice process and exploration of their racial identity.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers describe the process of analysis as the systematic categorization of data into themes, patterns, or concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006). The purpose behind qualitative analysis is to classify the data into manageable units which the researcher can later interpret and use to answer the study's research questions. In order to manage the large volume of data created by the interviews I employed the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti™. Atlas.ti enabled me to not only conduct a line-by-line audit of the interviews

but also allowed me to detect relationships, themes, and patterns among the various codes. Audio interviews of all the participants were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company. During the initial review of the transcripts, I employed the use of memo writing to note any emergent themes or patterns in the data relevant to the college choice process and how students developed their racial identity during college. Maxwell (2005) asserted that one advantage of creating memos during analysis is that memos can help the researcher understand the subject being studied as well as record personal reflections and ideas in response to material read. Based on the research questions, the review of the literature, and initial review of transcripts, I developed a list of preliminary codes. The data were coded for the three phases of the college choice process and the various influential factors in each stage, expectations of college experiences formed prior to entering college, interactions with peer groups, campus involvement through student organizations, how the student explored and developed his or her racial identity, and how the student understood what it means to be biracial. Overall, the analytical process was informed by the research questions, the literature, theoretical frameworks, and the data themselves; thus, the analysis became a process of interaction between the researcher and the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2005).

### **Validity of the Study**

The validity of data in qualitative research refers to the accuracy of the data in describing or explaining the event, phenomenon, and/or experience of the subject(s) being studied, or having an “objective truth” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). Given that this is a qualitative case study, the objective truth that the data should reflect is the experiences of and meaning made by biracial students when deciding where to attend college and how they experienced college once in that environment. Maxwell (2005) identified two main types of validity threats in qualitative

research, researcher biases and participant reactivity. Researcher bias, as Maxwell defines it, is the influence of the researcher's values and expectations of particular outcomes in the study. He argued that a researcher's background does not necessarily need to be limited from the study, rather it can help generate presuppositions, insights and validity checks. In other words, researchers can draw from their personal experiences to help inform the study. In this instance, my racial identity as a Black/White biracial individual and college experiences led me to pursue a research study focused on the experiences of biracial students. Further, my experiential knowledge informed my research and interview questions. To counteract potential biases in my questions, my protocol was also informed by previous studies on college choice and biracial identity development. These questions were reviewed by higher education colleagues, biracial students (who were not participants in my study), and biracial individuals outside of the academy for face validity. Based on the reviewers' feedback, I made any necessary modifications to my questions. Further, I employed an interview strategy in which I asked for clarification or additional questions in order to avoid imposing my personal interpretation on the experiences of the participants, and to fairly represent the experiences of the Black/White biracial students being interviewed (Morrow, 2005). Consulting with peers and previous research checked my processes and interpretations of the data.

In another effort to reduce researcher bias, I engaged a sampling strategy in order to interview students who not only could provide key information not found through other sources (Maxwell, 2005), but also included biracial individuals who may or may not have similar experiences as my own or those of other participants in the study. I also continued to conduct student interviews until I hit saturation of information, and students were no longer providing new and additional information. Conducting interviews until saturation ensured that the data

collected depicted an accurate representation of the experiences of Black/White biracial student (Morrow, 2005). By establishing my position as a researcher and providing accurate and sufficient information about the participants, institutional study site, and data collection processes and analysis, the reader can determine how applicable the study's findings are to other mixed race students or institutional contexts (Morrow, 2005).

### **Positionality Statement**

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is the active participation role of the researcher. According to Creswell (2009), because the researcher is more involved when conducting qualitative inquiry, it is important for the investigator to identify how their personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and background can impact how the data are collected and interpreted. By including a positionality statement the researcher is able to clarify how her past experiences act as a backdrop for the implementation and interpretation of the data collected. As a Black/White biracial individual I have no doubt my personal experiences developing my own racial identity motivated me to pursue this line of research. Throughout college I was acutely aware that the voices of bi- and multiracial students were frequently missing from the discussions of race and racial identity. Further, the lack of visibility of multiracial students at my campus made it difficult to connect with students like myself. I began to ask myself if other mixed race college students had similar experiences exploring their racial identity. Although my research project provided me an opportunity to connect with other Black/White biracial students and hear their experiences as a biracial individual, I was aware that my experiences are not their experiences. I made the conscious decision to identify myself as biracial in my recruitment materials. My hope was that participants would be more comfortable discussing racialized experiences with me because they would assume that I would have some insider knowledge. It is

difficult to say what impact this truly had on recruitment because none of the participants mentioned my racial identity at the start of the interview. In order to ensure the interview did not become an exchange of personal experiences, when students asked me if I had a similar experience I would inform them I would be happy to share any of my personal experiences at the end of the interview. I also utilized colleagues in my dissertation writing group to provide feedback on how my own racial identity and experiences as a Black/White biracial individual may be influencing how I implemented my study, and analyzed and interpreted participants' responses. Although it is impossible to totally eliminate researcher bias, I strived to minimize the effect my personal experiences had on my role as a researcher.

What surprised me through the course of my study was how similar the campus experiences of these Black/White biracial students were to my own when I attended college. I too attended a public research institution that was predominantly White. I saw college as an opportunity to engage my African American heritage through student involvement and taking race-related courses. However, like many of the biracial students in this study, I felt out of place at my first meeting of the African American Student Association. Further, I had difficulty relating to the experiences of the Black students in attendance. As a result I did not participate in another AASA after that initial experience. I found that through coursework I was able to explore my racial identity. However, this was not done through race-related courses; rather, I explored my identity in psychology courses. During my time in college I enrolled in an African American studies course. While the content proved to be interesting, my professor was so Afro-centric I felt that there was no place for my voice or experiences. Another surprising similarity between my college experiences, more than 10 years earlier than this study, and the students in this study, was the lack of social spaces for biracial students on campus. I anticipated that with the changes

to the 2000 Census to account for mixed race individuals, as well as the increasing popularity and visibility of multiracial politicians, actors, musicians, and activists that campuses had begun to position themselves to address the needs of this growing student population. Generally, the findings in my study show that the institutional context, as it relates to the inclusion of mixed race students, has changed little over the years.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The overall goal of this study is to explain the process of college choice for Black/White biracial students, how racial identity influences the decision, and once enrolled at that institution how these students construct and engage their racial identity. The biracial population is very diverse; there are numerous racial background combinations and at least four patterns of racial identity. This study is limited in that it only investigates the experiences of Black/White biracial students. This study does not describe a universal experience for biracial students for those reasons. It does aim to explore the experiences of Black/White biracial individuals selecting an institution to attend, and what influence racial identity has when deciding on the type of college experience they are seeking. Another limitation of the data is related to the self-selection to participate in the study which could result in sampling bias (see Table 3 for Participant Characteristics). Half of the participants come from families making less than \$50,000 a year, qualifying these students for tuition and room and board assistance through a scholarship program targeting low-income students. As discussed by some of the participants in this study, having a low-income background can limit the student's ability to participate in various activities due to cost (e.g., Greek System) or having to work in order to support him/herself. Additionally, eleven of the participants have White mothers and Black fathers and out of this subgroup eight of the students were raised by their single White mothers. This is significant in that students raised



by single White mothers can have different experiences encountering and exploring race and racial issues than students who were raised by Black single mothers or who lived with both parents. Thus, the results of this study may not be generalizable beyond institutions with similar student demographics and Black/White biracial students with similar backgrounds.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction to College Choice Findings**

In this section I will discuss the college choice process for Black/White biracial students enrolled at the University of Arizona. The student narratives presented relate to the research question, “In what ways does the racial identity of Black/White Biracial students influence their college choice process?” I found that the majority of students tended to take a color-blind orientation to this process, prioritizing finances and geographic location over institutional diversity and the campus racial climate. For example, the majority of the biracial students shared that their families place little importance on race and racial identity; thus, the students did not give consideration to race-related factors. There were a number of factors contributing to biracial students’ color-blind orientation. First, a large number of the students came from single, White mother households where the mothers did not take a color-conscious approach to the process. Further, more than half of the biracial students reported that many of their precollege environments (neighborhoods and high schools) were predominantly White. Second, for many of these students, their institutional choice was constrained by economics and geography. This was highlighted by students limiting their choice set based on affordability and the decision to enroll at the University of Arizona due to financial aid awarded. Essentially, students were predisposed to developing a color-blind orientation shaped by the decentralization of race by predominantly White precollege contexts, and an emphasis placed on the students’ socioeconomic status.

There were four major themes regarding college choice found in the narratives of these biracial students. The first theme was that students were largely assisted in their college choice process by their mothers, many of whom were college educated, White women. The second theme that emerged was that Black/White biracial students relied on a predominantly White

network and high school environment for assistance. The third theme was related to economic access, as financial factors constrained students' college choice set because of their inability to pay for higher education, and their desire to live near home. All three of these previous themes contributed to Black/White biracial students having a more color-blind orientation to the college choice process. The final theme I found was that many of the students wished that they had given institutional diversity some consideration because of the culture shock they experienced attending a predominantly White institution. In the following sections I use Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model to discuss how these themes were influential during each phase: predisposition, search, and choice.

### **Predisposition Phase**

**Importance of college educated, white mothers.** In Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model, during the predisposition phase students determine whether or not to pursue higher education. The authors identified student background characteristics, significant others, and high school characteristics as some of the factors that shape a student's predisposition towards college. For this particular group of Black/White biracial students, the factors that contributed to their predisposition towards college attendance were parental encouragement and expectations as well as parental education level. Freeman (2005) asserted that there are predetermining factors or environmental influences such as the background and culture of the student's family, that make it more likely that a student pursues higher education. This group of Black/White students shared some similar predetermining factors. First, the majority of the students were female (81%). Second, all students have mothers with some college education, and sixty-eight percent of these mothers possess a bachelor's or graduate degree. Third, more than two-thirds of the students ( $n = 11$ ) have White mothers. These predetermination factors,

student's gender, mother's race, and mother's education level, support the findings from previous models which indicated that these are positive predictors of a student's predisposition towards college attendance (Hamrick & Stage, 2009).

**Encouragement and support.** Hossler and Gallagher (1987) identified "significant others" such as parents, peers, and educators, as being influential during the predisposition phase. Mothers were often identified as the most important individual influencing Black/White biracial students' decision to attend college. Parental influence took shape by means of encouragement and support in the student's pursuit of education. Given that the majority of the students were raised by single mothers, it makes sense that mothers take on a central role in the student's predisposition towards college. Beatrice pointed to the importance of her mother by stating, "I suppose my mom. When my mom and dad got divorced, I was like four, five or six. He is out of the picture, but my mom and I think my family, they pushed for it [going to college]." Beth's father also had little presence in her life. She described her mother as her best friend and highly influential in her decision to enroll in college.

However, not all students from single-mother households identified their mothers as the most important individual. Katie's parents were divorced but she was encouraged by both parents to pursue a college education.

[M]y mother and my father because they were always like, "You can go far. You can do everything." And I remember, my father, like every night before bed, like we just talk about like science and stuff. He [was] like, "You could be a scientist one day." And I was like, "That sounds awesome."

Samantha's encouragement to do well in school in order to attend college came from a sister who was eight years older than her and had earned a full scholarship to an out-of-state

institution. Jackie, TJ, and Thomas were students who indicated they were from two-parent households. Each student stated that education was valued and encouraged by both parents. All but one student identified their parents as highly influential in their motivation to attend college. Among students from two-parent households, it was mainly their mothers who instilled the idea of college. Suzi, in contrast, believed her parents did not place much emphasis on education, “They’re like hippies. They don’t really care about most things like that.” Thus, it was her grandmother who pushed her to go to college. “...I used to slack off in high school and she was always like, ‘What are you doing? College is where you’re going to end up. You’re going to get it together.’ She said it’s not an option; you’re going.” For every student, the value of education was instilled by family members, whether it was their mother, father, or extended family.

**Expectation to attend.** The importance of education was conveyed through the expectation of college attendance after high school, typically introducing the idea of college attendance at an early age. Mothers were key in shaping the attitudes of students towards higher education. It is likely that mothers had a positive attitude about college attendance given that all have at least some college education. Black and White mothers alike expressed an expectation that their student was going to attend college after high school. Beth, raised by her single Black mother stated, “I always knew that I was going to college. It was never really like a question about if I’m going... in my family it was just given that after high school you go to college.” Marie was another student whose mother introduced college attendance at an early age. Marie, who was raised by her single, White mother stated, “I have the kind of mom where it was like never a consideration. So, I don’t really remember a time thinking about not going to college.” Likewise, Sandy’s single, White mother emphasized college attendance early in her life. She stated that she thought about college “pretty much my whole life. It wasn’t really an option not to

go to college.” Annie was another student who grew up in a household headed by a single, White mother.

I don’t actually remember when I really started thinking about it. It was just assumed that it was something I was always going to. There was a never any point where I thought, “Well, maybe, I won’t.” It was always kind of like, “Well, I’m going to go to college eventually.”

Students from two-parent households also were expected to attend college and learned of this expectation at an early age. Both parents of TJ expected him to go to college but TJ emphasized the role of his mother in his attitude regarding college:

I knew from since I was a kid that that’s a requirement basically like being an only child too. I mean if I pursue a military career or technical schools, my parents would be very supportive of that. But it was from the jump, so to speak, that it was an expectation. My mom made that very clear from the very beginning since I was young.

Thomas pointed to both his parents instilling the idea of college attendance, “I think my parents kind of always expected me to...It was almost like not really an option not to, I guess.”

The majority of the students pointed to their mother or parents giving automatic support for college attendance. There were a few instances that Black/White biracial students identified an extended family member influencing their predisposition towards college. For example, for Suzi, it was her grandmother.

[B]ecause I used to slack off in high school and she was always like, “What are you doing? College is where you’re going to end up. You’re going to get it together.” She said it’s not an option; you’re going.

Jane described that her aunt expected her to go to college after high school. “My aunt is a

lawyer so she really values education. She always speaks so highly of it.” Several students indicated that their mother or another female family member held a professional degree, this provided these students a role model of a college graduate.

A message that was often coupled with the expectation of college attendance was that higher education can provide the student more opportunities in their future. Black/White biracial students who came from households headed by single mothers and/or low-income families were more likely to view college education as a vehicle for upward mobility. Kamyrn, raised by a single, White mother, discussed how her mother wanted her to have more opportunities through a college education: “She is a teacher. She’s a preschool teacher. She was my preschool teacher, actually, and because she was my preschool teacher, she help me get a lot of opportunities that I wouldn’t have otherwise.... Because of her I got to go to a private school for most of my life.”

Samantha was raised by a single, White mother who worked multiple jobs. She was encouraged by her mother and sister to go beyond their education level so she could have a better life.

Jane, who came from an intact family with a White mother and Black father, remembers her parents talking to her about college around the age of 10 and the idea of having more opportunities with a college education. Jane stated, “because my parents couldn’t afford to go, and now they can afford to send my sister and I, so they just wanted us to go so you know, more opportunities.”

For some Black/White biracial students, their parents’ level of education served as a driving force towards higher education. Again the importance of mothers is present in the student narratives. This is to be expected given that more than two-thirds of students’ mothers ( $n = 11$ ) have a bachelor’s or graduate degree. The educational level of parents played out in two ways,

either students were inspired by their parents' pursuit or level of education, or students were driven to go beyond their parents' level of education.

Emily described how she was motivated by her single mother's pursuit in obtaining higher education. "Yeah, my mom. She got her master's while raising four kids. So, it was pretty awesome. It took her forever but she did it, so it's really cool." Kamryn, raised by a single mother, was also inspired by her mother to attend college. "She just works so hard and she put herself through college. So, [she] inspired me to go to college." These are examples of how students with at least one college-educated parent are more likely to pursue higher education.

For some Black/White biracial students, having parents who had to work harder to advance their careers because they lacked a college education increased students' desire to obtain a postsecondary degree. For example, Jane wanted to attend college because her dad only obtained his high school diploma.

[M]y dad because he started out in entry levels doing basic...for a company that has bad debt, and now he is vice president of finance for the company. So, he worked his way up from when he was 18 to 55. I would like to be like him but you really can't do that anymore. You can't really work your way up with that level, and that's the reason I kind of I wanted to go [to college].

Similarly, Samantha, who was raised by a single mother with only some college education, stated, "[S]eeing my mom have to work all the time and then is so tired, that made me think, there's more out there, I can do better kind of thing." The motivation of these students to go beyond their parents' level of education was similar to what Freeman (2005) found in her study of African American students and college choice. Freeman identified three ways in which family influenced African American students' college choice: family members had an automatic



expectation of college attendance, students were motivated to go beyond their family's level of education, and students were motivated by negative role models.

### **Summary of Predisposition Phase**

The predisposition towards college for Black/White students was influenced by strong parental expectations and encouragement, particularly from mothers. At an early age students learned that they were expected to get a college degree and the value of education was often conveyed by the parents' very own education level. In the instances that extended family members were sending messages of college attendance, students often identified another female family member such as a sister, aunt, or grandmother. It is apparent from these student narratives that female family members were important individuals relative to fathers in the student's decision to attend college.

### **Search Phase**

**The influence of a color-blind orientation.** Regardless of the student's racial identification, the majority of the students took a color-blind approach when developing their college choice set. For this specific group of Black/White biracial students, their predisposition to develop a color-blind orientation was largely shaped by their precollege environments. For instance, within the family context students indicated that there was a decentralization of race by parents, specifically White mothers. Additionally, these biracial students largely came from predominantly White environments, their family, high schools, and communities, all of which placed little importance on the students' racial identity. Rather, the search phase of Black/White biracial students was shaped by economic factors, such as family income and proximity to home.

**Family discussions of race.** The role of family was integral in Black/White biracial students' color-blind orientation as they developed their college choice set. One common

narrative among Black/White biracial students was the absence of discussions on race-related issues. Students indicated that race was not typically a topic they discussed with their family; therefore, students did not know to look into factors such as the campus diversity.

Katie, who was raised by her single, White mother, stated that she does not recall ever having discussions on race or racial identity with her mother; thus, they did not talk about race-related factors during her search phase. Marie was another student who pointed to her White mother as a key individual helping her gather college information. “[M]om is a counselor for schools and she did college and career counseling for a little while...so, she had a lot of the people in her contacts early on.” Although Marie believed her mother was open to discussing issues pertaining to race, the topic of diversity was rarely addressed between them and certainly did not come up during the time when Marie looked into potential schools.

Being raised by an African American parent did not lead to a more color-conscious orientation. The student narratives did not reveal any salient differences between Black and White parents and the students’ likelihood of having a more color-conscious orientation. Jane was raised by her White mother and Black father, and diversity was not openly discussed in their family since “[m]y family is very diverse, so we’ve never really spoken about it because it’s obvious.” Because her family did not place importance on racial identity, Jane only considered academics and economic access when researching possible schools. Similarly, Beth who was raised by her single, Black mother, felt that race was not a subject talked about and did not recall diversity of college campuses being addressed.

There was one student who did report open discussions with his parents regarding race and the diversity of campuses during the search phase. TJ had regular conversations with his Black mother concerning race and his experiences in the world as a “Black man.” He considered

diversity as an important institutional factor because of these discussions.

**Family income level.** Another influence contributing to this color-blind orientation was the cost of returning home for visits. Students described having close relationships with family members and stressed the importance of having family as a source of support. Although ten of the sixteen students applied to out-of-state schools, as they narrowed their choice set, cost and location became major factors in their decisions. Many of the biracial students reported that they wanted to remain in state to attend college in order be close to home. Kamyryn described having a close relationship with her mother so with her mother's help she narrowed her choices to in-state schools. Likewise, Beth indicated that her choice set was influenced by her mother wanting her to consider in-state schools because "[s]he didn't want me to go far away." When narrowing his potential schools, TJ identified the cost of returning home for visits as an important factor:

I looked at it hard and I really thought about what if that would happen, but when I consider what was most realistic for me in terms of staying in-state, tuition wise, seeing my family.... Not to mention that like it's so far for me it is something that I really had to think about. It's just so much more convenient being two hours south versus when you think about plane rides and plane tickets and what are you going to do with your storage and all your stuff versus you'll just get in the car, I mean two hours is two hours, but that's nothing compared to Atlanta or Hampton or DC.

Katie, who was raised by her single mother, also identified cost and proximity to home as factors when narrowing down institutions. "I wouldn't want to go [out of state] because I'd be in like a bunch of debt for just undergrad... And I would like cry every day because I'd be like, 'My mommy'."

In contrast, out-of-state students developed their college choice sets based on institutional

characteristics such as program offerings and athletics. For instance, Sandy wanted to play soccer and created a choice set based on the soccer program at the institution. Thomas stated his choice set was based on his goal of obtaining a degree in Anthropology. He stated he wanted a program that focused on indigenous rights and tribal differences and few schools offered opportunities to explore this area. Mary, who hailed from the east coast, wanted to pursue a nursing program and “do something new” by attending a school out of her home state. One central pattern that emerged from the data was that female students were more likely to have family members who encouraged them to remain in state than male students. Further, in-state students were more likely to have to account for economic factors than out-of-state students.

**Predominantly white high schools.** The majority of the Black/White biracial students received their college information from predominantly White networks and, as a result, few learned about other institutional types such as HBCUs and institutional factors related to campus diversity or the racial climate. Almost two-thirds of the students attended predominantly White high schools, and slightly more than half also lived in predominantly White neighborhoods. Although students in my study received assistance from school counselors, much of the information was restricted to the application process and financial aid opportunities.

McDonough (2005) argued that the role of school counselors is often limited to dissemination of college information due to the changes in counselors’ roles such as increased testing and schedule responsibilities. This limited role of counselors was true for students in my study. The narratives of Black/White biracial students revealed that school counselors provided them with application support and information on potential schools and scholarship offerings. Emily attended a predominantly White high school where she built a close relationship with the career counselor at her school who assisted her with the application process, “We have a career

specialist girl at our high school, and that's what she did, help kids go to college... So, she helped me and then my mom helped me with my personal statement and everything." When asked if she considered diversity, she stated, "No, I didn't really think about it. I just figure it was going to be like a whole bunch of rich White people." Emily also pointed out that much of the assistance she received was with completing school and financial aid applications. The student narratives indicated a relationship between the students' social class and information provided during the search phase. Many of the Black/White biracial students reported that their high schools focused their efforts on providing information related to financial aid opportunities. This makes sense in the context that the majority of the students come from low-income families. Beatrice, who identified her family as low-income and who attended a predominantly White high school, shared, "[T]hey would have announcements to come to the career services. [School counselors] will help you get your scholarships." Similarly, Samantha identified as low income but attended a high school that was mostly people of color. She stated that her counselor contacted her regarding available scholarships based on her standardized state test scores.

Limited contact with school counselors was another factor that constrained the scope of help Black/White biracial students received. Only five students indicated that they received some assistance from school counselors during the decision-making process. Having regular contact with school counselors shapes students' and parental expectations of appropriate institutions, as well as increases the students' knowledge of financial aid opportunities (McDonough, 2005a). For instance, Beatrice described her school counselor as only engaging students who sought her help:

[She] was kind of counselor, you know, she gets students all the time. ... [I]f you tell her and you show that you're interested in higher education, she will get as enthusiastic as

you and help you through the process. But if you're like I don't know, she is kind of the same, like I can put my effort for someone who does...

In other words, students at Beatrice's high school only received assistance if they expressed an interest in going to college.

Beatrice later makes the point that she was not informed about how to properly research colleges and this led her to ignore race-related factors. "I didn't know how to properly research, so I didn't know that some people look for diversity and things like that." Katie, who indicated that she went to a predominantly White high school in a low-income area, believed that her counselor restricted access students had to information on four-year institutions which she believed was due in part to the fact that she attended school in a low-income community.

My high school counselors kind of sucked a lot. So, they didn't really help at all because I went to a high school here in Tucson... And, my senior year, they got a new counselor for my name range... she was new and she was terrible. Because we live in such an area of poverty. She's like, 'Oh, you can go to beauty school.' Or, 'Oh, you can go and be a mechanic,' like she never even brought up actual college.

School counselors influenced the search phase of Black/White biracial students in two ways. First, school counselors provided narrowly focused information on potential schools and financial aid. Secondly, students tended to have infrequent contact with school counselors. Students who had limited contact with school counselors did not have in-depth discussions regarding the postsecondary options. In most instances school counselors provided information regarding in-state opportunities. Regular contact with school counselors is particularly important for students of color because research shows that African American students are more likely to be positively and negatively influenced by school counselors than White students (McDonough,

2005a).

**Other institutional types.** Another research question guiding this study was whether or not Black/White biracial students considered Historically Black Colleges and Universities and what information they were provided about these schools during the search process. When discussing schools on their college choice set more than half of the students reported that they considered out-of-state institutions. While many of the students had at least heard about HBCUs, only four gathered or were presented information on HBCUs.

Annie and Aaron were two students who attended high schools that were at least half people of color. During their search phase these students did get some information on HBCUs. Annie learned about HBCUs through her AP high school courses.

I'd heard of them because I remember we researched them ... basically if you were in honors or AP classes [teachers] will pull you aside for a special session maybe once a month or so and they would do these exercises of choosing a college what to look for, and they talked about historically Black colleges and they talked about women's colleges like is this something that you could consider, could this be right for you kind of thing, it exists and keep it in mind.

Although Annie's school encouraged her to explore HBCUs as a possibility, she did not apply to them. "I mean, I thought they were very interesting, but it never really occurred to me to like try to apply myself." Aaron stated that he was directed to consider HBCUs by his teachers and guidance counselors. However, he eliminated the schools from his choice set due to his perception of a lack of diversity of HBCUs. "[Teachers and guidance counselors] tried to get me into them, but I just...being raised on my White side of the family, I didn't really have a preference for all Black [school]." What was interesting about Aaron's comment was that he was

uncomfortable with the idea of attending a school that was predominantly African American but did not consider that attending the University of Arizona meant he would be at a predominantly White institution.

TJ, on the other hand, attended a predominantly White high school, and learned about HBCUs while doing research for an article he wrote for the school paper:

I actually wrote an article on the lack of HBCU information, pamphlets and speakers at our school. [My article] made the front page of our high school newspaper. When I started exploring that, it just really interested me... it's cool to have a school where you're valued by people with similar background as you go there.

However, in the end TJ eliminated HBCUs from his choice because of the question of where he would fit in at an HBCU, stating, "Am I too White to be Black? Am I too Black to be White? Where do I fit in?" Although Aaron and TJ questioned whether or not they would fit into a predominantly Black campus, they did not ask the same questions about fitting into a predominantly White institution.

TJ's statement also makes an important point about predominantly White high schools not providing information regarding HBCUs. Given that half of the Black/White biracial students in this study attended schools that were predominantly White, it is likely that school personnel did not provide information to students on HBCUs. Further, the geographic distance to HBCUs makes it less likely for college recruiters to visit these high schools. Black/White biracial students also developed a perception that HBCUs lacked diversity when compared to PWIs. This perception was captured by Samantha, who was the only student who received college information from HBCUs. "[HBCUs] sent me stuff, but I always feel awkward when I'm surrounded by one race. So, I tried to like stay away from that." However, Samantha, as well as



other students, did not take into account that non-HBCUs typically had a predominantly White student body. This finding supports Guiffrida's (2003) study that indicated that Black students who come from predominantly White precollege contexts expressed discomfort in predominantly Black contexts. Instead of Black/White biracial students examining the institutional diversity of PWIs they had an embedded assumption that they would not be uncomfortable in PWIs because it is a context they are familiar with.

### **Summary of Search Phase**

In summary, a major theme that emerged from the interviews is that these Black/White biracial students approached their college choice process from a color-blind orientation, likely due to lack of conversations on the issue of race in the home and the majority of students coming from predominantly White precollege environments. Further, students developed their college choice set by prioritizing economic factors such as affordability and proximity to home.

### **Choice Phase**

**Economics and geography trumps racial diversity.** The influence of Black/White biracial students' economic and regional identities continued to be a prominent theme during the choice phase. According to biracial students the choice to attend the University of Arizona was largely influenced by student background characteristics, Arizona residence, family income level, coming from single, White mother households, and predominantly White networks. These factors predisposed the large majority of these biracial students to select one of the three public in-state institutions. McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) found that economic access, or the ability to pay for college and college-related expenses (e.g., wanting to live near home and financial aid awards) were positive predictors of student attendance at PWIs. The reason most often cited by biracial students for selecting the University of Arizona was financial aid awarded.

Three-quarters of the students were on some form of scholarship (merit or need-based), and half received the Arizona Assurance Scholarship, financial aid for low-income students specific to this institution. Program eligibility requirements include: student is an Arizona resident, earned a 3.0 (unweighted) GPA the first six semesters of high school, eligible for Pell Grant, and family reported an annual income of \$42,400 or lower on FAFSA. The goal of Arizona Assurance (Arizona Assurance Scholarship Program, n.d.) is to assist students with their entry into the university by providing services such as mentoring, leadership, and academic preparation. Further, the program seeks to support students throughout their college career in order to aid students with the completion of the bachelor's degree (The University of Arizona, n.d.). Over half of the Black/White biracial students reported their family income was under \$50,000, placing financial factors as a major influence.

**Financial aid allowed them to go to college.** For a few Black/White biracial students, receiving financial aid made college an available postsecondary option. These students discussed how figuring out how to pay for college was a major obstacle during the college choice process. Emily initially planned to attend a local community college because she could not afford the cost of a university. She explained,

My friend told me about [AZ Assurance] and I was like, oh, OK, I will apply. I guess, all I had to do was fill an application for U of A, and I got it. So, it was really weird, out of nowhere I got this awesome opportunity, so I ended up coming to U of A.

Beatrice was another student who reported her family could not afford to pay for her to go to college. "I got it, and I was enthusiastic and crying with the family - I got in. I can go to college." Other students shared how the size of their scholarship placed the University of Arizona as their top choice school. For example, Samantha reported,

Well, I really was going to go to Hawaii, but then someone from the U of A came to our school and talked to us and then she passed up these flyers about Arizona Assurance. I was like, “That’s me, I qualified. I’m going there.”

Marie stated that she initially wanted to attend the University of California - Berkley; however, financial reasons were the biggest factor in her decision to attend the University of Arizona. She stated that receiving the Arizona Assurance scholarship made higher education more affordable when compared to the cost of going out-of-state. Annie reported that she applied to multiple schools in California, in addition to the state schools, but once she was accepted into the University of Arizona and awarded scholarships she decided to remain in state.

[T]he biggest thing for me was the fact that it was close and it wouldn’t be far from home and it would be cheaper because I got quite a few scholarships through the U of A that pay for everything.

Jackie, who was awarded a scholarship based on her test scores, had a similar response:

I had thought of other schools I wanted to go to, but I kind of knew that, by the time that I applied, I was going to make it a full ride to come here. So, knowing that, I just kind of say, “You know, it’s fairly close to home.” And I like that.

Katie was another student who selected the University of Arizona over another institution because of the financial aid offered.

I really thought about Menlo and U of A. I’m pretty sure I had to choose the day that we had to have our decisions in, but I chose not to go to Menlo because even though they offered me a good chunk of financial aid, it wasn’t enough where I wouldn’t have debt. They offered me loans and stuff, but I don’t want to have to take out \$10,000 in loans a year. So, U of A offered me the best financial aid where I could take out loans and still

have money left over for living.

In summary, Black/White biracial students' perceptions of the affordability of attending college strongly influenced their selection of the University of Arizona. For some of the students financial aid made college an option because their families could not afford it. For other Black/White biracial students, the size of the financial aid made them change their first-choice institution to the University of Arizona.

**The school is close to home.** Coupled with students' discussion of how scholarships provided them an ability to pay for college were also discussions that attending the University of Arizona allowed them to remain close to home. More than half of the students came from single-parent homes, and remaining near family was an important factor in their decision to attend the University of Arizona. For example, Samantha, raised by her single mother, stated that her decision was based on cost as well as proximity to home. "If they would pay for everything, why not--it was also close. Me and my family are really close." Beth also discussed how her relationship with her single mother influenced her decision to remain in state:

Well, I really wanted to go to Colorado or San Diego, but I think the distance from my mom would just be too much for her and probably myself, so I just decided to come here because it's not too close to home. It's just far away enough to where I can go home if I want to in the weekends and stuff, so that's probably why and then there is the financial situation.

Some of the students discussed how the University of Arizona allowed them to pursue affordable education, remain within driving distance to home, while giving the feeling of being "away at college."

Kamryn described having a close relationship with her mother, which swayed her

decision to remain in state but she did not want to attend the university in her hometown. Jane also wanted the experience of going away to college but remain close to her family,

I like the idea of being close to my parents because they live in Phoenix but not so far away at the same time, so that's why I want to move out here and experience new things...I was considering USC, but I love that U of A's business school is ranked just as good as it and it's a fifth of the price, so it's probably better, and the same time I didn't really know how I wanted to go that far away.

The majority of the students who discussed the importance of maintaining a close family connection were in-state students.

**Campus diversity and college choice.** Many of the Black/White students in this study reported that their college choice was constrained by cost of tuition and proximity to home. For most of these biracial students, only in-state institutions were affordable. For the students who received the Arizona Assurance scholarship, they viewed their financial award as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not to be taken for granted; thus, they abandoned their search of other institutions of higher education. Additionally, students weighed the cost of out-of-state tuition and the cost of returning home during school breaks. These two factors were reported as having the greatest influence on the students' decisions to attend the University of Arizona. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described the choice phase involving the careful consideration of the institutional characteristics, the preferences of the applicant (such as available academic and social programs), and information the student receives and gathers during the search phase. For Black/White students in this study, their socioeconomic status was much more salient than their racial identity, driving them to prioritize affordability and the location of the institution in their decision-making process.

Prior research has identified college choice factors for African American students to include academic, economic and social factors, and more recently, race and racial identity (Van Camp et. al, 2009). Black/White biracial students in my study were asked how campus diversity factored into their decision to attend the University of Arizona. With the exception of a few students, diversity was not part of their decision-making process. During their search and choice phases many of these students were not encouraged to look at institutional factors such as the racial demographics of the student body. These students were oriented to have a more color-blind approach because their largely White family and social networks placed little importance on the students' racial identity. The few students who did look into HBCUs were worried about feeling racially isolated at a predominantly African American institution; however, they did not express concerns about racial isolation at a predominantly White institution.

There were some Black/White biracial students who indicated that during their search and choice phases racial diversity of the student body was not something they looked into or recall discussing with others. Katie stated that she did not consider diversity because of concerns of economic access to college. "I didn't really think about the diversity that much. I think I was more focused on finances and stuff." Samantha described how she did not see other students like her during orientation, which made her feel racially isolated; however, in the end her decision to attend was based on the full ride she received to the institution.

I just felt really out of place. Just because everyone in the room was super skinny and tall and blonde hair and model status. I had on the most colorful shirt ever and big blue earrings and my hair was super curly that, you know. I was just like "Great."

Several students did not consider diversity because of their personal definitions of diversity. For example, Jane believed campuses are diverse just because students come from

different parts of the country or world:

I feel like a lot of colleges are diverse, some more than others, obviously, but I feel like people from all over the U.S. go to a certain college. My boyfriend is from Illinois and my neighbor is from New York. U of A has a lot of different people from different backgrounds. There are a lot of international students especially in my economics classes.

Aaron was another student who stated where students come from contributes to the diversity of a campus. "I think that most colleges have diverse groups because there's diverse people around the world especially in the United States." Beth also believed the University of Arizona offered some racial diversity based on her precollege campus tour: "I just remembered when I toured the campus, we were trying to find some Black people on campus and I saw a good amount...." Whether these students believed campuses are diverse based on where students come from or their perceptions formed on campus tours, none of these students had discussions with counselors or parents regarding the racial diversity of the student body while making their decision to attend the University of Arizona.

TJ was one student who did consider campus diversity and even considered attending an HBCU. TJ stated that he attended a university-sponsored event targeting African American students which led him to believe the school emphasized diversity.

I came here and one of the things that they actually had was called an African American College planning day, so basically an event tailored to African American students... So ASU and NAU didn't have anything like that when I was considering, so I just thought, you know that's pretty cool that it seems like they recognize the importance of diversity on campus. So that was something that when I kind of thought about everything, it really stuck out in my mind...

This event signaled to TJ that the UA would offer a strong African American community to which he could belong. This was one of the main reasons TJ articulated for his decision to enroll at the University of Arizona. Sandy was the only other student who selected the school based on her perception of the campus racial climate: “But there at the University of Alabama and Auburn University were definitely more race issues especially for us Blacks, so that’s why I decided to go to University of Arizona instead.” Her statement suggests that she believed that those schools would be susceptible to racial tensions among the student body. Ultimately, it was Annie’s comment that astutely captured the reason why most of the students in the study did not think about diversity when selecting an institution.

I mean, it wasn’t necessarily something I thought about. It was only kind of an afterthought kind of thing because I was like, OK, it’s a good program and it’s close and it’s cheap. Honestly, I didn’t really think too much about what the student population would be like. Because that actually wasn’t something that everyone really got to talk about much in high school. It was always the academics, what kind of programs and classes and stuff like that. The extras like getting involved in student groups and studying; that stuff was never really mentioned.

The student narratives did not fully support previous studies which suggest that African American students consider race-related factors in the college choice process. While I expected Black/White biracial students to take a more color-conscious approach, the majority of students in this group approached their college choice process from a color-blind orientation. It is likely that this trend was found in my data due to the characteristics of my student sample, given that the majority of the students are Arizona residents and are from low-income and predominantly White families.



### **Conclusion of Choice Phase**

For many of the students, economic access, cost of tuition, and proximity to home were more important than institutional diversity. As several students indicated, their family's ability to pay for college and their close ties with parents placed the University of Arizona as their top choice. In the following section the student narratives elaborate on how institutional diversity affected their understanding and exploration of their racial identity.

### **Introduction to Racial Identity Findings**

The narratives of Black/White biracial students revealed that the majority of students took a color-blind approach to their college choice process. This contradicts previous studies that suggested that African American students have a more color-conscious approach to their college choice process (Freeman, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2005; Van Camp et al., 2009; Van Camp et al., 2010). I anticipated race and race-related factors to play a role in Black/White biracial students' decisions of where to attend. Rather, these students did not consider the institutional diversity during the choice process because cost and school location were major priorities. The interviews suggested that a more color-blind approach is related to having a White mother, and/or attending a predominantly White high school. However, as discussed in the findings below, having a color-blind orientation to the college choice process has some consequences as this group of students explored their racial identities on campus. Attending a predominantly White university placed biracial students in a context similar to their precollege environments, but the students found that their college peers placed a greater importance on the racial identity of biracial students.

I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) human ecology model to understand how these Black/White biracial students defined and understood their racial identity in the context of a predominantly White institution. The ecology model is centered on the student with "ever-more-

distal developmental influences arrayed around him or her in a series of nested contexts called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems” (Renn, 2003, p. 387). Renn (1998, 2000, 2003) was one of the first scholars to apply the model to the study of racial identity development in mixed race individuals. Renn (2003) stated that the value of the model is that it looks at the “cumulative, interactive influences of overlapping social settings, some or all of which may be sending contradictory messages regarding racial identity and identification...” (p. 386). Using the ecology lens, I examined how the campus environment defined and redefined the racial identity of Black/White biracial students.

### **Microsystem**

Microsystems are immediate settings which contain the students. In these settings, student development is instigated or inhibited by the interactions between the student and the environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Microsystems for college students can be comprised of classrooms, residence halls, friendship groups, work, student organizations/clubs, and dating life (Renn, 1998, 2003). Students in this study indicated that friendship groups, residence halls, classrooms and student clubs and organizations were settings in which their understanding of race was defined. At the University of Arizona, slightly more than half of the student body identified as White (n = 55%), 3% identified as African American/Black, and 4% indicated they were two or more races (specific racial breakdown is not reported). Biracial students observed the student body to be largely White, with race-designated spaces throughout.

**Friendship groups.** Many of the Black/White biracial students contrasted the cross-racial interactions among the general student body, and within their own friendship groups. While the general student body tended to socialize with members of their own race, students in this study created friendship groups with other mixed race students or groups that had greater

racial diversity. The lack of cross-racial interactions in the general student body subtly conveyed the message that there was not a space for the multiracial student population. Aaron commented,

There is segregation based on diversity...because people feel more comfortable I've noticed with their own race, but being multiracial, it's kind of wading from group to group, seeing where you fit in.

Mary also pointed out the racial divisions among the student body: "Usually, it's like the White people will kind of sit together and the Black people will kind of sit together, and then the Hispanics kind of sit together." Samantha also described her awareness of the racial silos on campus. "It sounds a little racist, but I feel like all the White people hang out with the White people..."

Sandy pointed out that coming from a more racially diverse high school really heightened her awareness of racial isolation at the University of Arizona.

There's definitely a lot of social segregation here that I'm not used to. The area I came from was really racially mixed and I know my high school was pretty much exactly 25% Black, Asian, Latino, and White. So, it's definitely very different coming to an all-White campus.

The way the student body segregated along racial lines presented a problem for Black/White biracial students who wanted to belong somewhere. As a response, many of the Black/White biracial students created friendship groups that were racially diverse in order to feel as if they fit in. Jackie made this comparison: "I noticed that a lot of the Black students on campus tend to stick together, but I do know that I've met quite a few and I do have friends who like, you know, everyone just kind of mixes together." Katie discussed how she looked for friendships with students who could relate to her experience of not belonging.

I've always said I'm always attracted to people who don't fit in because I feel like I don't fit in. And so, my best friends are Vietnamese and Indian and people that don't really seem to belong into the big ethnic groups.

By developing friendships with a diverse group of students, Black/White biracial students were able to create a social space in which they felt accepted and not racially isolated.

The majority of these Black/White biracial students indicated that they had a least one multiracial friend. Students placed a value on this relationship because it normalized their experience as a mixed race student. Aaron explained,

My friend Emily is several races. She has an African American in her, but it does not show at all. It's really camaraderie. We both, we all know what it's like to be mixed. And it's fun to fit in a few different places because of that. Like being accepted among African Americans and being accepted among White people as well.

Beth pointed out that her monoracial friends do not understand what her experience is like as a Black/White student; thus, it is through her friendship with her multiracial friend that she can explore her racial identity.

I know that I have a bunch of different mixes of friends. I think that with certain way, some of my White friends, it's really hard to connect with them just because they're kind of ignorant to little things that go on.... Sadly to say, I don't have that many Black peers. Sometimes I feel since I'm mixed I'm kind of in the middle and some Black people don't...they kind of take it as a joke that I'm Black and it's kind of weird because I don't really fit in with my White peers either, so that kind of gets jumbled but I don't really have many Black peers to be honest. Well, my roommate, he is half White and White Mexican and everyone just mistakes him for being White and that he is not mixed or

anything, and we can just really get into deep conversations about how hard it is to be in the middle of these two identities and it's who are we, where do we belong. It's very interesting and no one gets that. They can listen to you but they can't share their own experiences. So, with mixed people, it's just I feel more of a connection to them because they understand the awkward moments that I have.

Friendships with other multiracial students gave Black/White biracial students an opportunity to relate to the experiences of other mixed race students. In this type of friendship biracial students were able to share and hear about similar experiences and normalize their perception of being “stuck in the middle” between two racial groups.

Marie observed that her best friends were mixed race and she wasn't sure if that was a conscious choice or if she was naturally drawn to multiracial individuals.

My best friend has the same background as me. His mom is Polish or something and his father is Black, and I have another really good friend who I think is Hispanic and African American. So, I think I have only ever really been close to biracial people and I don't know if that was an active thing or if it just happened.

According to the biracial students in this study, many of them came from precollege contexts in which little importance was placed on their racial identity. Yet, they discovered that their peers at the University of Arizona elevated the importance of race. This was illustrated in biracial students' observations of racial segregation among students. The racial divisions of social space on campus was one obvious way the student body conveyed the importance of racial identity. The friendships that some of the Black/White biracial students developed with other multiracial students provided a social space in which Black/White biracial students felt their racial identity was accepted. The shared experience of being a mixed race student validated

Black/White biracial students' understanding of what it means to be biracial.

**Residence halls.** The ecology model examines the messages regarding racial identity that biracial students' encounter in various microsystems on campus (Renn, 2004). These messages across the various campus settings may or may not be congruent with each other. Renn and Arnold (2003) found that conflicting "norms and values of friendship groups and other campus microsystems was cited by many students as a source of awareness and growth of multiracial identity" (p. 275). Biracial students reported that experiencing or witnessing acts of discrimination within the residence halls emphasized that their White peers view them as people of color. Further, biracial students felt that they were not welcomed in some of the predominantly White residence halls. Sandy recounted that during her first year in the residence halls she witnessed various statements and acts of discrimination from students which almost made her consider transferring to a school back East.

[Y]ou wouldn't expect so many racial problems in the honors dorm...but I met kids who are really against interracial dating-- I'm just getting used to being here, but this year has been much more mellow.... This semester has definitely been much better. I don't know if it's also because there's a greater diversity in the dorm I'm now living in where I spend most of my time. And I think they're actually making it into a Black community.

Sandy expressed that she was surprised that much of the racism was perpetrated by peers in the Honors program, who she believed would be more open minded and more socially aware. Furthermore, Sandy remarked that racialized incidents in the hall were not handled properly by the Residence Advisor (RA), stating that the RA was ill equipped to address the acts of discrimination and often would dismiss the racist nature of comments made by White students in the hall. As a consequence of these racialized interactions, Sandy almost considered departing

the school, but because of a newly created culturally themed hall focused on African American students she found a space in which she felt more comfortable.

Katie, who was also a resident in the Honors Hall, noted the lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity among the residents. Although she stated that none of the students made any discriminatory statements directly to her, she felt uncomfortable living in a predominantly White environment. After her freshman year Katie moved into another hall that had more racial diversity. “Yeah, it’s a much more diverse dorm that I like so much more and, sure, I sometimes miss the private study rooms that Arbol had and the nice amenities and the nice showers, but I’d rather be in Coconino than Arbol any day.” Students who lived in other residence halls experienced racialized interactions with White residents. Thomas described a racialized incident with a White male student one evening in which he was called a racial slur:

One time, it was like the beginning of the year and there was this kid in my dorm who...he lived here last year. He didn't live here this year and he was like really drunk and he was yelling at some girl about something or whatever. I was in the hallway and I gave him like a dirty look and he started yelling at me and he called me a nigger. And then, I saw him a couple of weeks ago and he saw me and he waved at me or didn't expect me to be upset or anything and, of course, I gave him another dirty look.... And then, one time, he talked to me. He’s like, “Why do you dislike me just because I yelled at you that one time?” And I was like, “Not because you yelled at me, it was just because you called me a nigger.” And he was like he didn't realize that he had said it because he’s drunk and he apologized a lot for it.

Thomas stated that outside of this one encounter he did not have other problems with students in the halls; however, he added that in the following year he would be an RA in another

hall that provided more diversity. While the majority of the Black/White biracial students did not respond to racially charged interactions, TJ, who was an RA during the time of this study, saw these incidents as an opportunity to have a dialogue about race with his residents. He stated that he often held discussions with White students regarding their use of derogatory language or choice of music with inappropriate language.

I think some people they just feel entitled to what they're given, which I think is really unfortunate or even the way they portray themselves in terms of the language they use or the music they listen to. I know some people will blast a 2 Chainz song in their room ...that's probably not the best thing to use the N word or different language that could be offensive to women.... OK it may be fine if you stay at home and you blasted whatever, but when you come to college and you're in an environment with people you have never met before that's something that you shouldn't take lightly. ...I'm telling specifically White students, "You don't think that's offensive especially with me being your RA, like you think I'm just cool with that?"

Although TJ described his overall experience as an RA as positive and an opportunity for him to be a student leader, he did state that he was moving into a culturally themed residence hall the following year.

I'm going to be an RA in the stadium dorm, Navajo-Pinal, and we're starting a community, a living learning community called BLACK and it's an acronym for Building Leaders and Creating Knowledge specifically tailored to African-American students. And I was offered the opportunity to be the RA for that wing... So that's something where not only have I embraced [social justice], but I know the other people see that I care about those issues and they want to give me those opportunities.



Similarly to Sandy, TJ believed that moving into the living learning community BLACK will provide more opportunities to further explore his African American identity.

All of the Black/White biracial students who described experiencing or witnessing race-related incidents in the residence hall moved the following year to a hall that they believed was more inclusive. Students like Sandy and TJ moved into a culturally themed hall to increase their exposure to African American culture and peers. And other students moved into what they described as the “cheaper” or “less expensive” halls which provided more racial and socioeconomic diversity. In either case, Black/White biracial students who lived on campus sought out residence halls that were more racially diverse and had a sense of inclusion. Further, this highlights the consequence of these biracial students having little awareness of the campus racial climate during their college choice process. Almost none of the biracial students anticipated that they would encounter discrimination on campus. To the contrary, biracial students encountered negative messages regarding their racial identity from White and Black peers alike.

**Classroom based interactions with peers.** Peer-to-peer interactions in the classroom setting were found to be important instigators for racial identity development in Black/White biracial students. It was commonplace for these students to have their racial identity questioned, challenged, or assumed by their classmates during face-to-face interactions. Having to assert their claimed racial identities created a sense that Black/White biracial students did not fit in their peers’ preconceived notions of race. For Black/White biracial students in my study having their racial identity questioned was a challenge to their self-selected identity.

Every Black/White biracial student in this study reported that at one point in time their peers would ask them, “What are you?” Beatrice stated, “Yes, they’re going to ask. I’ve been

asked in every class, every year, every semester, by at least one person.” In Samantha’s case she stated that her peers were dissatisfied with her response that she is “mixed” and continued to ask her about her racial identity until she specified that she is Black and White. Through this line of questioning Black/White biracial students are made aware of their peers’ lack of understanding of who is White and who is Black. Beth expressed frustration when peers challenged the legitimacy of her identity.

I say that I am mixed, and that I'm Black and I'm White and people pester me with questions. It's not just they leave it at that and is like oh, cool. I always get, “Are you kidding?”, “Are you adopted?” “You’re not really Black,” “You’re lying, right?” and they just look at me, and then I'm like “Why would I lie?” It really offends me, and I really stand my ground because I used to just laugh it off with them, but now I just stand my ground and I don’t laugh because it’s not funny to me, I am Black and I am White and I don’t think it’s funny, and I don’t think that’s something to joke around about.

Several Black/White biracial students reported that they were offended when their Black and White classmates did not accept their stated racial identity. Beth explained,

I'm just like what do you mean? And then they're like what ethnicity or what race are you? I'm just Black and White, and they're like no, and I'm like yes. I just get offended when people don’t believe me. I'm just like why would I lie about that? What do you think I'm getting out of this?

By questioning Black/White biracial students’ claimed identity, their classmates are conveying the message that racial identity is how others perceive them, not how biracial students understand their identity.

Some students became more comfortable with their racial identity and they were less

offended by challenges to their racial identity. Annie commented,

But it's like a lot of times that I told people the truth, "Oh, well, my dad was Black," and they're like, "No, you're probably blind. There's something else going on there." One of those things is like people's reactions usually have a really big effect on me. I was always kind of very attuned to whether or not they believed whatever I said. So, thankfully, it didn't come up very much as I got older, but I definitely feel since getting to college, I'm a little bit...I'm much more confident of saying it and then just letting people react however they want.

A few students developed a response strategy that would fluster the questioner. For example, when asked, Aaron replies, "I'm a human being," which often deters his peers from asking about his race any further. Beatrice reported that she avoided being specific about her race until she is explicitly asked if she is Black and White.

I say I am racially ambiguous. "If you can't tell what I am, then I'm everything." ... That is why [I don't answer] until they ask, "Are you this?" "No." "Are you this?" It's pretty mean, but I'd rather have them directly ask me which one of the two, they got to be like, "Are you White?" I'm like, "Yes." It makes it easier for me, I guess.

This strategy of forcing the questioner to directly express their racial assumptions of the Black/White biracial student's identity serves as a means to push back on the questions of understanding and expectations of racial identity.

Sandy also responded in such a way that forced her peers to ask directly about her racial background:

I hate that question, actually. I don't answer the question. I'm always like what you do mean and so... it takes nine extra questions to get to the real one "What's your

ethnicity?” People would be like so where are your parents from and I’ll be like Delaware and Virginia...It’s just too broad... I don’t even understand why asking someone their ethnicity is such a like...it feels like they’re like scared or something. I get asked that question a lot.

Another way Black/White biracial students understood their identity in the peer context is being classified based on who the student frequently socialized with or how much the student physically resembled a particular racial group. For example, Emily reported that she is often assumed to be Mexican American because she often associates with Mexican American friends. Likewise, Marie discussed how individuals presumed her racial identity based on her friendship groups.

It kind of depends on who I’m hanging with, too. I have a lot of Indian or Middle Eastern friends and so people just kind of assume I’m that sometimes... And it kind of depends on where I am, too, what people think.

The physical appearance of the student was one factor contributing to how classmates would categorize the racial identity of Black/White biracial students. Annie remarked how many of her peers assume she is Latina because of her physical appearance:

[M]ost people assume that I’m Latina. So, when something happens and they find out, oh, you’re not, and they kind of look for the sort of clarification. Normally, depending on how comfortable I feel with a person and how much time I actually have explained it, I might just say, “Well, my mom is White and my dad is actually Black.” And then, kind of just let them go with that. I just said, “Oh, I’m White,” there would always be these people who do not believe me... “Oh, you’re just the light-skinned Latina who’s using the fact that you light to deny your heritage.” And I was like, “No, that’s not it.”

Similarly, Jane discussed how her light skin color causes her peers to challenge her claim that she is half Black.

[They think I'm] probably White because nobody really believes me if I'd tell that I'm Black. I don't have more Black features... So, I feel it's more of how people perceive you is how you classify it.

The narratives of Black/White biracial students suggested that identity development is an interactive process between the student and his or her peers in which racial identity was projected on to them. Some students experienced a wide variety of races and ethnicities imposed on them by others. Students describe these interactions occurring in various campus settings; however, most of these interactions took place in the classroom. TJ explained,

I personally hear a lot of different things in terms of what I am before people know me or get to know me, like what they think I am versus like whether they'd be Black or Hispanic or I think one time I'm like Cambodian, I said, OK, thank you, but I'm not Cambodian, so I hear a lot.

Peers racially define these Black/White biracial students based on their assumptions of "Who is Black or White." TJ stressed that being racially ambiguous is perceived by peers as an issue because he is not easily categorized by race based on his physical appearance:

But I think that's really cool that people can't or aren't able to paint me with one stroke so to speak, like there's that ambiguity to me, that's not negative stuff, but that gives me a lot of opportunities where I'm diverse and I can interact with different culture and interact with people from different spectrums.

Being asked "What are you?" was a common theme through all of the student interviews. This question informed Black/White biracial students on their understanding of their racial

identity and how others define the student's racial identity. Several of the Black/White biracial students found the question to have negative connotations and negative consequences for them. Other students responded in a way to challenge the questioner to examine their motives for asking, such as Aaron, who responded "human being" to the question. Regardless of how Black/White biracial students responded to the question, having peers question their identity pushed these students to define and redefine their racial identity and membership in other racial groups. Renn (2003) stated that these contradictory messages can influence how likely students are to seek out other microsystems in which to explore their racial identity. This influence can be seen in the students' likelihood to participate in race-related clubs and organizations.

**Student clubs and organizations.** The final microsystem biracial students in this study identified as a major influence on their racial identity were student clubs and organizations. In Renn's (2000) study, multiracial students noted that "they knew they were accepted when they were invited to and welcomed at activities of different groups and when their arrival at events attracted no unusual scrutiny from peers" (p. 407). The African American Student Association (AASA) on campus was one space that the majority of Black/White biracial students felt they were not accepted. Many of the students were already sensitive to their peers perceiving biracial students as racially ambiguous or not legitimately African American. This led most of the Black/White biracial students to believe involvement in AASA would present more conflict regarding their racial identity; many were reluctant to attend AASA events. My findings here are parallel to Guiffrida's (2003) findings. Guiffrida found that Black students from predominantly White precollege contexts reported that they were uncomfortable interacting with other Black students for the first time. In other words, the biracial students in this study largely came from White communities and high schools where they had few interactions with Black peers.

Attending college presented them with opportunities to interaction with Black peers; however, biracial students felt that they would not be accepted by their Black peers because of physical appearance and/or having little familiarity with Black culture. For instance, Beth described interactions with Black peers in which they did not consider her authentically “Black.” Hence, she anticipated that she would receive the same response if she attended AASA events.

Sometimes I feel since I'm mixed I'm kind of in the middle and some Black people don't...they kind of take it as a joke that I'm Black and it's kind of weird because I really don't fit in with my White peers either. So that kind of gets jumbled but I don't really have many Black peers to be honest. I'm on the African American student affairs listserv and stuff and I want to go to all of these events, but I feel like I won't be welcomed or like judged because you can't really tell that I'm Black. I only have one or two people say, oh yeah, I could see that. But everyone else's just astonished so it's interesting.

Similarly, Emily was hesitant to attend AASA events because her identification with the African American community was often challenged.

No one ever believes me. I took a class freshman year and I had to work with two Black people and they were like, “Oh, we're like the only Black people.” I'm like “Yeah we're the only Black people.” And they were like “Are you Black?” And I was like “Yeah,” and it was just kind of awkward because they didn't believe me and they were like “You don't know the struggle, like you don't know.” Sometimes it sucks because I want to join the African American Student Association. I was just really out of place. It just doesn't really feel like I fit in with Black people. I don't think I feel that accepted. Their attitudes towards me and stuff. Anytime I'm with a couple or with a group of Black people or something, I just feel like, I don't know, they just don't really fully accept me.

Beatrice expressed a similar anxiety that eventually her identity would be discussed if she decides to attend AASA events:

I hope to go when I'm comfortable, yes. I've actually been in there. I've seen people.

There are various races in there. It's like whoever feels comfortable coming. It's like anywhere else, but I still feel like when I'm in there, someone is going to ask, "How are you mixed with these two?" For me, it's scary when people have to bring it up.

These students shared a common concern, that their identification with the African American community would be contested by their Black peers. Having their racial identity challenged inhibited Black/White biracial students' inclination to explore and engage their African American heritage. Biracial students reported that they were concerned that Black peers would question their involvement because they did not look "Black enough."

Some of the students who felt excluded from the AASA sought out or created spaces to explore their African American identity. For example, to help support African American journalism students, TJ helped establish a campus Black Journalist Chapter.

I'm the president of our Black Journalist Student chapter here at the U of A and that's something that I was fortunate enough to be a part of last year and that's when we founded at the Club actually. There had never been any type of Black journalist club that actually happened prior to me arriving last year and meeting other students who are interested in us and collaborating and making it happen.

TJ reported that it was important to him to create a Black journalist student group because the department did not have a single African American faculty member to support and understand the experiences of African American students. It is likely that TJ developed a predisposition prior to college to explore his racial identity. He discussed how in high school and after the



election of President Obama he became more interested in learning about his African American heritage

So growing up, I've never really thought about race issues, I was comfortable with who I am, I just want to play basketball and play videogames and I'm cool. But high school is when I started to think about those issues especially with the election.... I started to care about [race issues] especially with the election and just seeing how where I fit into that picture and then especially moving into college is when I kind of found what I care about and who I want to be.

Kamyrn was another student whose interest in her African American identity started in high school and continued on through college. She attended a high school in which she felt discriminated against by her White peers. Through this experience Kamyrn participated in boxing and began exploring her racial identity through that sport: "I started to box and that gave me confidence and it made me...I started researching Black boxers like Muhammad Ali. It just made me proud to be Black." In college Kamyrn became involved in the Black Engineers Club. She noted that, despite the name, the organization was comprised of students from various racial backgrounds. The diversity of the club made Kamyrn feel more accepted and included. In Aaron's case he grew up identifying himself as African American, even though he was raised by his White family. In college Aaron connected with his African American heritage through music.

I'm currently in Noterietty (an A cappella) and that takes a lot of my time, so that's it for now, but in the future, me and my friend Ray are going to audition for one of the hip hop groups here on campus.

For TJ, Kamyrn, and Aaron, these activities allowed them to explore their racial identity in a context in which they felt their claim to an African American identity was accepted by others.

It is evident in the student narratives that the majority of biracial students have an interest in connecting with their African American culture. However, because Black/White biracial students have had their racial identities challenged by Black and White peers and felt that their identities would not be validated at AASA, the majority of students opted to not participate in race specific student organizations.

### **Mesosystem**

The mesosystem, the next distal level from the individual, is comprised of two or more microsystems that interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Renn, 2003). It is through this interaction that “mesosystems provide a variety of forces and resources that affect identity development” in biracial students (Renn, 2003, p. 389). Renn (2000) identified the peer culture as the racial climate on campus. It describes the relationship between the various racial communities and the extent to which these communities are accessible by other students. One important variable in racial identity development is the peer culture mesosystem and whether or not the context is predominantly White, racially diverse, or largely composed of students of color (Renn, 1998). Renn (1998) noted that the peer culture is “a powerful medium to transmit messages of exclusion or inclusion” (p. 101). In this section I will discuss how the racial segregation of the student body and lack of social space for mixed race students influenced the experiences of biracial students on campus. Although the majority of Black/White biracial students came from predominantly White communities, these precollege contexts largely decentralized the racial identity of biracial students. This is in stark contrast to the University of Arizona where, although it is a predominantly White context, peers placed a greater emphasis on race and racial identity.

**Lack of racial diversity on campus.** Almost all of the Black/White biracial students

noted the influence of the predominantly White student body on their experiences on campus. One consequence of the biracial students' color-blind orientation when selecting a college to attend was that students were unaware of the lack of racial diversity and cross-racial interactions on campus. A few students revealed that campus tours, recruitment materials, and events gave a misleading sense of racial diversity. During Beth's campus tour she was under the impression that the school had some racial diversity; however, once at the school she found the campus to be largely White. She stated, "I feel like there's a lot of racial, ethnic and other like minority identities that don't really have as much visibility as I'd like to see, but I think that that's changing." Thomas received recruitment materials that gave some statistics on racial diversity on campus: "I think it is not as diverse as I thought, I feel like the numbers are different than the experience." After attending an African American College planning day TJ, left the event feeling the school had a strong interest in diversity and inclusion; however, he found that the school did little to facilitate cross-racial interactions. Students described how they experienced racial isolation in their field of study. Some students reported that they were the only or one of a few minority students in their classes and/or departments. For instance, Emily stated,

I'm in Family Studies, so it's like mostly women, and its all White women. I think I'm probably the darkest person in some of my classes, and that's how it is all the time, though. If you go on any social setting around U of A, I feel like where I go is usually like that. I mean it doesn't bother me but I know the setting, though.

TJ, a journalism student, noted that not only was he one of a few African American students in the department but also there few students of color all together.

....when I look around the class, and I'm the only person of color, specifically the only Black person there, maybe I know one young lady who is in one of my classes, but in one

of my classes about 20 to 50 students and I'm the only one...they're maybe one or two women of color in there, but I'm the only Black person in there. And then another journalism class where there are about 70 to 80 students, I may be overestimating that, but maybe 60 to 70 and there's myself and another young lady....

Katie, a student in the psychology department, described how her department does not provide much cross-racial interaction because her field is predominantly White and Asian American students. It makes sense that these students find that they have limited opportunities to engage in cross-racial interactions given the student body is predominantly White, and certain fields like the sciences and business tend to lack racial diversity.

**Lack of space for biracial students.** The classroom setting was not the only environment in which Black/White biracial students were trying to fit into a predominantly White space. These students discussed how there was a lack of social space for mixed race students. While many of the biracial students did not enter college with the explicit expectation that they would explore their racial identity, their narratives suggested an implicit expectation when students pointed out the lack of space for mixed race students. At the University of Arizona there are four cultural centers, each dedicated to a monoracial group (African American, Chicano/a, Asian Pacific/Islander, and Native American students). TJ asked where mixed race individuals fit in these monoracial spaces:

... There's the cultural centers, obviously the White center is the U of A; that's the whole campus basically. But then there's like the MLK Center, there's the Cesar Chavez.

There's all these different places, but where do we fall into that mix... I don't know how to go about that, but it can just be kind of tricky sometimes to find your spot, not only on campus but to find who you are.

Suzi was one of two students who attended some African American Student Association events. She also discussed the lack of space for biracial students in monoracial spaces.

I mean, I go to the AASA, back-to-school night... They'll talk to you about what are you doing, what's your plan after this, let's make a connection... You have some common thing here, where you struggle together.... I think AASA tries really hard and they put on all those things...but at the same time, it segregates people because it makes them uncomfortable if I bring White friends to it and they're like, "What?" Well, she's my friend --Should I leave her at home? ...They need to mix it a little bit better ...it's literally all Black people. And I don't know any of them. If you go and you don't know someone, I literally sat there before by myself and I'm like, "This is awesome guys thanks." I think I might have been the only multiracial people in the room which is it's kind of interesting.

Suzi saw that it was problematic that other racial groups perceived they were unwelcomed in that space. While she saw providing a social space for African American students to connect was important she also believed that racially designated spaces only encouraged racial segregation among the student body and left little room for biracial students.

Several students also noted the absence of clubs/organizations for multiracial students.

For instance, Beth commented,

I feel there should be [a multiracial student organization] started, and I feel like it's a fast growing population of people, obviously, and maybe it will just become dominant and people won't really have to think about it, but I feel like, now, in my college career, there needs to be more visibility about that.

Jackie suggested a multiracial student organization would help connect that student population

and increase visibility and knowledge of multiracial individual:

I think that would be interesting to kind of have like a multiracial club, and I don't know, just to kind of get out there and meet with people who are multiracial because I know that really...I mean, I don't like walk around advertising my racial identity.

Annie also believed the campus needed to create a safe space for multiracial students to share and relate their experiences as mixed raced individuals.

I didn't actually know very many people who are like bi- or multiracial that I felt close with and talking about it. So, it's one of those things I've been interested in, but it's sort of weird because I don't know anybody else who has an experience that I could compare to mine or ask them questions like, have you ever had this happen to you or how do you deal with this kind of thing?

Campus spaces for Black/White biracial students can include the curriculums offered. Curriculums that include voices of mixed race individuals can help students connect with their history and learn from the experiences of other multiracial peoples. Katie was one student who suggested that the university should provide courses that focus on multiracial identity or history.

There could be maybe a class on what being multiracial is. I would love to know the history of multiraciality; that's totally not a word, but it is now, in history or something rather than African American history or White history which is the rest of history or Asian history, but what about the history of mixed people.

Regardless if the student had an interest in exploring his/her racial identity, many of them noted the need for social spaces on campus that support multiracial students. TJ remarked that mixed race students need an officially designated space so that the voices of this student group are cared about.

If there are some ways to meet other students who identify as biracial because I mean it's one thing to be a minority, but to have that as well that's very complex. So just that...I mean we're out there. I'm not sure what the statistics of biracial students of U of A, but we're out there and we face challenges, but we're also very ambitious and want to go places. So we're definitely a part of the student demographic and our issues should be cared about too. We may have the Black issues as well but we also have issues of being biracial. We're out there and we need to have a voice on campus and you know we're here and so the support would be nice as well.

The overall context of the campus mesosystem is important when it comes to how these students were able to explore and express their racial identity. Negative interactions with peers, Black and White, created a campus environment that did not welcome multiracial students. Students believed that institutional decisions not to provide social or academic spaces to support mixed race students contributed to their feelings of racial isolation. Biracial students entered college with little consideration given to institutional diversity, and an embedded assumption that they would not be uncomfortable at a PWI. Despite many of the students coming from predominantly White high schools, they were taken aback by the lack of racial diversity and integration on campus, and by their peers being more race conscious. Contributing to this was the fact that the majority of these biracial students had few precollege interactions with African American peers, and were socialized by family to place little importance on race.

### **Exosystem**

The next distal level of the ecology model is the exosystem. Exosystems are environments that do not directly contain the student but can still have an indirect influence on the student's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Renn 1998, 2003). Renn (1998) identified

possible exosystems for college students as institutional policy makers, faculty/departmental course and curriculum decisions, federal and institutional policies on financial aid, and the family and home communities of students (neighborhoods they grew up in and high schools they attended).

**The influence of the family exosystem.** Renn (1998) argued that during college the primary setting for student development shifts from the family context to the campus and peer culture. I argue that for this particular group of Black/White biracial students, most of whom are from in state and still have regular interactions with White family members, the family exosystem remains very relevant to the students' development and understanding of their racial identity. Yet there was tension between how families viewed and discussed race and the overall attitude the peer culture had about race. The extent to which these students had precollege exposure to their culture(s) and how these students were socialized by their families to address race and racial identity is related to which microsystems the student chose to engage during college (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 274).

**Precollege discussions of race and racial identity.** Many of the Black/White biracial students reported that they did not grow up having many conversations about their experiences with race. Some students received messages from their family that race was not important. When these students entered college they felt out of place or lacked a strong sense of racial identity. Kamyrn, who would like to explore her racial identity, commented,

I've been so confused, so culturally confused, because I'm all over the place. I did talk to my mom about this actually. I said, "I don't know who I fit in with exactly," I said, "because I've seen people in their own groups and I'm like should I be in the group, too, and should I just stick with one thing?" She said that I should just be friends with whom I



want to be friends. Race doesn't matter. I said, "Well, yeah, I know that, but it's confusing."

For Kamryn, exploring her racial identity has created some tension between her need to have a sense of history and identity and the fact that her mother has taught her that race is not an important part of one's identity.

Students like Marie and Jane did not seek much exposure to their African American heritage because they felt that their racial identity was not central to who they were as individuals growing up. For example, Jane stated that in her family there was never a need to discuss race.

Well, it's funny because every single one of...like my mom has two siblings, they're both married to Black people, and my dad has four siblings and they're all married to White people so my family is very diverse, so we've never really spoken about it because it's obvious. I feel like there isn't really anything to talk about because our family is really diverse. My aunt is Black. She is married to a White woman, and they adopted a Chinese baby. I have a lot of family like that so I feel we don't even need to discuss it since that's just the way it is.

Marie believed that being raised by her single, White mother had created a sense of detachment from her African American culture:

I don't really know how much we talked...I mean, my mom is educated and then super aware, so I think she was very open if it had ever been an issue, but I just don't think I cared a lot. But my mom was definitely one of those people who wanted me to explore whatever I needed to. And my dad wasn't really a part of my life, so I think she definitely wanted to compensate for that, if necessary, but it just never really affected me when I

was young. ...I'm sure that I've rejected the Black side of my family to an extent, and I think that I know a lot of people that feel that way... And I think some of that to an extent because, especially for me, was I was raised entirely by my White family...I don't have much to identify with in terms of being Black, but I also think that it's probably like socially influenced rejection of that, that's not a very healthy thing.

There were other students who held the perception that their family did not acknowledge the discrimination the students felt within their own family context, which discouraged the student from talking about their racialized experiences on campus. Beth, who was raised by her African American mother, also indicated that she felt that she could not have discussions with her mother about feeling excluded by her African American peers on campus. In fact she felt she could not even discuss how family members point out how she physically looks racially ambiguous.

We haven't really. I know to other people I don't look like I'm half Black at all so that's kind of a shock and it feels like they would kind of joke about that, and then two of my other cousins look very White but they're really half Black and half White, so it's just kind of funny to see how that turns out, so we talk about that in a funny sense. So, I feel like, I guess, identify with them even though they don't identify as being Black but I think it's like maybe the Black community is, I don't know if it's harder to fit in with a different community but I've never really had the chance to talk with someone who's mixed with Black and identify, like I don't feel welcomed or anything. So, even in my family, all my aunts are darker skinned and they would make fun of me being the White girl in the family, and even that hurts, I can't even go to them say that. I never talk to my mom about it.

In this instance, Beth was receiving competing messages from the peer culture of the campus, “race is important,” and her family system, “we don’t talk about race.” Moreover, messages from her family about her physical appearance, that she did not appear to look Black, were reinforced by the messages she received from her college peers. Multiple times Beth explained that her fear that she did not appear to be “Black enough” prevented her from engaging predominantly African American contexts.

For these students, although their families helped them define their racial identity, by avoiding discussions of race, parents did not provide their students with the cognitive skills needed to resolve conflicting messages regarding their own racial identity. In other words, through parental socialization these students were taught to avoid environments that presented conflict with regards to their racial identity.

There were two students who believed that they were able to discuss race and their racial identity with family members. TJ stated that his Black mother often talked to him about race, in particular what it would be like for him in a society that would perceive and treat him as a person of color. He also discussed how growing up in a two-parent home offered opportunities to have cross-racial discussions with his Black mother and White father. He indicated that both his parents encouraged and supported his exploration of his African American roots even at a young age.

I was really fortunate having grown up in that environment with parents of two different races. I just wish more people would have that, not necessarily that experience of having parents with two different backgrounds, but just other things that you learn and the different experiences you see and the different discussions that we have, it’s just...it’s really beautiful to have that experience so I feel very blessed to have that to identify

definitely it's biracial...I would say I definitely have identified more with my Black heritage and my Black roots. Again, I think possibly in part because I think how society views me and the different experiences that I've had where I felt that I have been discriminated against or just feelings that I get looking the way I do, whether that means smirks or different expression.

This exploration continued throughout college through TJ's involvement with the Black Journalist Student chapter, and becoming an RA for the African American themed residence hall. Sandy also reported that her family had open and ongoing dialogues about race and race relations within U.S. society, "My family are talking a lot now or at least messaging each other about race. If one of us find some article involving it we'll talk about it or share it with each other." She stated that she believed her family had raised her with a sense of social consciousness. While her business major did not provide many opportunities to explore her racial identity, Sandy was moving into the African American themed residence hall the following semester. Both of these students had a strong sense of racial identity and sought out opportunities to connect with their African American heritage throughout college.

**High school and neighborhoods context.** Coming from predominantly White neighborhoods and high schools is another importance influence on student development during college. There was a link between the students' precollege exposure to monoracial groups and their propensity to seek out more racial diversity during college. Several students who felt they would be excluded from African American Student Association activities also described precollege experiences in which they felt uncomfortable in environments that were predominantly African American. Samantha mentioned on several occasions how she felt out of place when surrounded by African Americans since she attended a mostly White high school.

I always feel awkward when I'm surrounded by one race because I always feel like I'm just that one person that stands out. I don't know. I just feel like people judge automatically. And then, it's just...it's just an awkward situation.

Other students found their precollege environments to be racially divided, leaving little to no space for mixed race students. Beth, who described her precollege environments as predominantly White, felt she was stuck in the middle but really felt out of place. "I feel it was really divided in high school, Hispanic students would hang out together, same with White people, you know, it just segregated that way." While Beth found the campus to be racially segregated, she found it to be less so than her high school.

For the majority of the Black/White biracial students, attending a predominantly White high school meant that they had little precollege exposure to African American peers and culture transmitted through the curriculum. These led students to be less comfortable in predominantly Black settings. Predominantly White high schools also meant Black/White biracial students had few opportunities to develop friendships with Black or mixed race peers.

Several students noted that in high school the majority of their friends were White but since college they have developed friendships with other mixed race students. Emily indicated that she attended a high school that was mostly White and since attending the university she has met other multiracial students.

Actually, most of my friends are multiracial. Like, I have a friend that's like Puerto Rican and White. It's a lot of something and White. Jonathan is Black and White. My friend, Gabe, he is Costa Rican and White, so it's like that.

Mary also noted that her friendship group has changed since high school and since college she has connected with biracial students like her.

Not all students attended high schools that were predominantly White. Kamyrn and Aaron went to high schools that were at least half students of color. However, both indicated that the large majority of the students at their high schools were Hispanic. The student body of their high school limited the opportunities Black/White biracial students had to interact with students from other racial groups. As Kamyrn explained,

I wasn't really able to hang out with all Black groups. So, it just opened up and I just hang out with so many people I know. I have friends who are foreign exchange students from like different countries. Different cultures, so that's how it's changed since then. I have much more diversity in my life.

The family and community exosystems influenced the developmental possibilities of Black/White biracial students. Students who grew up in families that did not discuss race and racial identity were more likely to seek out environments in which their racial identity would not be questioned or challenged. Likewise, students who were raised with a more color-blind orientation or who had little contact with their African American heritage reported experiencing discomfort when in predominantly African American contexts. For some students, coming to college gave them more opportunities for cross-racial interactions given that they attended predominantly White or Hispanic high schools. Regardless of the racial demographics of biracial students' precollege environment, the most notable difference was that, within the campus, racial identity is more salient among their peers.

**Curriculum design.** The literature shows that the classroom setting can provide multiracial students an opportunity to develop their cultural knowledge, express their racialized experiences through course assignments and discourse, and give students the language to understand racial identity development (Renn, 1998). In other words, curriculum helps students

expand their intellectual understanding of race and racial identity. I found that Black/White biracial students who had majors in social science fields were more likely to explore their racial identity through a variety of course offerings related to their studies. Several of the social science majors discussed how identity was a central theme of their curriculum. On the other hand, students who were in science or business fields were more likely to explore their cultural heritage through the required diversity course, an emphasis on gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or non-Western Studies.

Annie changed her major from journalism to Gender and Women Studies (GWS). She remarked on how the GWS program encouraged students to explore their racial identity through the curriculum whereas in Journalism, race was not discussed.

We look at how ethnicity plays a role...and how that changes things the cultural experience and historical experience for different ethnic groups and what that means for the women of that group in the modern era.... I'm taking over the summer...an upper level GWS classes that's called I think Women, Writers, and the Gods, and with that, they are actually serving literature from African-American women and they talk about their experiences as women in the U.S. dealing with so many issues of motherhood and sexuality and beauty but also races and racism putting it with like this historical context...

I'm really looking forward to that class.

Kamyrn has been able to combine her interest in African American studies and music through her minor in Africana studies with a concentration on hip hop. Through her course work, she has become more connected to her African American heritage.

I didn't learn much about various cultures until now. And now, in the Filipino club, I'm learning how to speak a new language there. I'm learning about Blacks coming from

Africa which I knew a little bit about already. Because I really love to read, but I'm just learning about all the different parts of me and it's kind of crazy. I'm just now learning about my culture. Because before, it was race doesn't matter and it did kind of get brushed under the rug by my mom.

For Kamyrn, her course work has helped her discover more about her culture and think more about race and racial identity.

Students in fields outside the social sciences often explored their racial identity or culture through the diversity emphasis course required by the university. Sandy, a business major, made this point.

I did the history of Islam.... So, I specifically took that class just to learn more about [Islam] and the only other African-American class I've taken is this hip hop class that I'm taking now and deals with race, but it's all online.

Sandy found the drawback of having this course online was that there wasn't "a substantial discussion of race among the students, and the class is really easy." Throughout Sandy's interview she emphasized the importance of having thoughtful conversations on race in order for individuals to learn and grow.

Not all students had a positive experience exploring their racial identity through course work. Jane, an economics major, stated that she took a course through Africana Studies focused on French African Literature to fulfill her diversity course requirement. She expected to enjoy the class because of her interest in French and her desire to learn more about her culture, but was disappointed by the course content.

It was just about this child in Africa who discovered this ball and how the ball came to life. I'm not interested in things like that. I'm more interested in...if it was a racial class,



I'd be more interested in maybe slavery or politics or something like that because I'm interested in history, because that's why I took the class. I thought it was French history. So, if it was Black history or maybe slavery or anything from 1800 to present, how things have changed, or even a class that's about Obama or about the presidency and how it changed over the years, something like that where I feel it would grab my attention that I would definitely be interested.

Jane stated that she does not plan to take any additional courses focused on race because she has fulfilled her diversity requirements and her major does not provide room for courses outside of her business major.

Black/White biracial students who were pursuing majors in the social sciences were provided more opportunities to engage race and racial identity through curriculum. Several students discussed how components of their degree requirements focused on identity. In contrast, students in majors like business or sciences typically only took one course on race to fulfill the general education requirement for diversity because their degree program allowed little room for further exploration of race and racial identity through coursework. What was notably absent from the student narratives was the suggestion that curriculums should include the multiracial experience. It is possible that biracial students do not believe there is a separate history or multiracial experience, or that they are more interested in learning about their African American culture. Regardless, it is evident that biracial students are very unfamiliar with the voices of popular mixed race scholars, authors, artists, and activists.

### **Macrosystem**

The macrosystem is the final and most distal level in the ecology model. The macrosystem is comprised of the influential forces from historical context, societal values,

cultural norms, and ideology of race and racial identity. The macrosystem influences the “patterns of developmental possibilities in the face-to-face and second-degree influences of the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems, as well as the interactions between and among those systems” (Renn, 2003, p. 390). There were two important societal ideologies pertaining to race and racial identity which influenced how Black/White biracial students experienced and understood race and racial identity: the idea that the United States is a post-racial society and cultural expectations about who is Black, White, and Biracial.

**Post-racial society.** Media outlets, political pundits, and even the general public believe we are living in a post-racial society due to the election of the first African American president and a growing population of people of color (Apollon, 2011). Younger generations of White individuals have difficulty describing contemporary acts of racism, often defining racism as intentional and interpersonal; on the other hand, young people of color are able to broaden their definition to include institutional and systemic racism (Apollon, 2011). This disconnection between how Black/White biracial students and White peers view acts of racism was seen surrounding the issue of having a Black president. For instance, after the reelection of President Obama, Sandy saw an increase in racist remarks and propaganda from White students in the honors residence hall. She described that, when White students were confronted about the racial undertones of their message, White students argued their intentions were not racist.

[T]here’s just a lot of issues especially with having a Black president and then there’s...the Re-Nig 2012 shirts, the anti-Obama shirts. They wouldn’t understand that actually has racial connotations. But they’re like...No, no, no. What are you talking about?

TJ also noticed an increase of White students on campus participating in Anti-Obama

organizations after Obama's reelection in 2012 while claiming the issue was about political views, not race.

Seeing "Nobama" stuff and hate groups [on Facebook], that's something that's really unfortunate and we were in 2008, 2012, 2013 and that still happens and it's real. Where people that they just don't disagree with your policies, but they just don't want you to...they don't want a Black man to be in that position....

Other Black/White biracial students found that their White peers failed to recognize their inappropriate and racist language. Their White peers did not see how it was inappropriate to use the word *nigger* during everyday conversations, even in their presence. For example, Emily described an occasion where White students were freely using "the n-word."

When we go to parties and stuff like that they would be like, oh, hang on, the Black kids, blah-blah-blah. Can we say the N word? Are you cool with that? We were just like are you for real right now? You know what we would just like laugh, you know, because if you don't want to ruin the mood, but still it's kind of like disrespectful, like, man, are you serious right now?

Beatrice stated that she would hear White students in the residence halls use the n-word when she was around. "I don't like hearing Caucasian students say that n-word. I was taught by my family that it was demeaning and horrible, so I wish people won't do that". These examples demonstrate that for Black/White biracial students living in a post-racial society means that racism has taken on a more subtle form, hidden through indirect acts of discrimination. The message from society is that racism is a thing of the past, and that acts of discrimination only occur at the individual level. However, these individual acts are a reflection of the larger societal attitudes of race and racism. White students openly using the word *nigger* suggests that these

students have little understanding of the historical context behind this powerful word. Further, the fact that few of the Black/White biracial students were able to confront acts of discrimination by White peers suggest that students have few tools to discuss race and racism with their peers because we live in a society in which students are taught race no longer matters.

**Cultural expectations of who is black, white, and biracial.** Another cultural trend is society's reliance on monoracial categories to help define individuals. Although the definition of race has been changing and expanding to include multiracial individuals, the average American has difficulty categorizing racially ambiguous multiracial individuals based on the traditional monoracial categorization system (Chen & Hamilton, 2012). Black/White biracial students in this study frequently encountered peers who perceived them to be racially ambiguous. When Black/White biracial students seemed racially ambiguous to others, they often were asked to clarify their racial background. Annie captures the overarching push and pull relationship that multiracial people experience when they do not look like they are Black or White:

[T]here's still kind of this kneejerk reaction that when you see somebody to put them into one box and then feel like...you know, if you're a multiracial person who's really ambiguous-looking, or if you really do look like one part of who you are and not the others, but you still feel connected to them, it can be really, really hard identifying with that and trying to assert that identity without being attacked. Because I feel, for a lot of people, race and ethnicity is so much bound to what your skin color is, what your hair texture is like, the shape of your features and I feel, in some ways, it can be really limiting, not so much because the fact of being multiracial, just how other people perceive you.

Kamryn described her experiences with peers wanting her to clarify her racial identity

because she appeared to be African American *and something else*: “[P]eople will come up to me and they’ll know that I’m Black and they’ll just mostly see that and they’ll be like, ‘What are you mixed with?’ because it’s obvious I’m not completely Black.”

When peers were unable to classify Black/White biracial students, they relied on context to help racially define the student. For instance, Marie thought her peers racially categorized her based on who she was with.

I tend to be a little bit ambiguous-looking, so it depends a lot on setting and who I’m with and... I’m not really sure what just like people think when I walk in. I think it does have a lot to do with setting.

The purpose of the question “What are you?” is to help place racially ambiguous individuals within the racial landscape. Even students who had dark skin coloring were asked “What are you?” One’s race defines his/her expected behaviors, values, attitudes, and cultural norms. Despite the media’s, political pundits’, and researchers’ claims that the United States has developed into a post-racial society, it is still the experience of individuals that their race defines who they are and what is expected of them. These biracial students are attending college at a time when the multiracial population continues to expand, but society’s understanding of race and racial identity is still locked into discreet monoracial categories.

## **Conclusion**

The ecology model allowed for a closer examination of how Black/White biracial students’ racial identity development is influenced by people, place, and time. One major theme found in the narratives of biracial students was the fact that they experienced a major shift in attitudes regarding race and racial identity when moving from their precollege environments to the campus context. Although there was not an overall change in the racial demographics

between the environments, the majority of biracial students found that their precollege environments socialized them to have a more color-blind orientation, whereas the campus environment had a more color-conscious orientation. Approaching the college choice process from this color-blind orientation had some unintended consequences on how biracial students assigned meaning to their experiences exploring their racial identity at the University of Arizona.

Based on the narratives of the Black/White biracial students, the overarching pattern is that racial identity matters to their college peers. Biracial students discussed the tension between their prior socialization that race doesn't matter and how the general student body placed a value on race. Biracial students observed that race is still viewed as discreet and monoracial categories by their peers. This belief regarding who is Black and who is White was conveyed through the question "What are you?" as peers attempted to categorize the biracial students. Moreover, biracial students learned that, while their White peers may view them as Black or as a person of color, many biracial students did not feel accepted by their Black peers.

Biracial students also spoke of the lack of institutional support for mixed race students. The University of Arizona does not have a designated cultural center, residence hall, or student organization for multiracial students. Further, many of the biracial students who took race-related courses on African American studies found that the voice of Black/White biracial individuals was conspicuously missing.

In order to gain a sense of belonging, biracial students cultivated friendships with other multiracial individuals or within friendship groups with greater racial diversity. It is through friendships with multiracial peers that biracial students were able to have their experiences and racial identity accepted and validated. Prior to college, many of the Black/White biracial students rarely discussed their experiences as biracial individuals, even within their own family. The

students' narratives support the argument that there is a link between the extent to which families transmitted culture and the students' propensity to explore their racial identity in college.

Students who had frequent discussions of race and racial identity with their parents had a stronger sense of racial identity. These same students were more likely to challenge their peers' misconceptions of race and racial identity, and actively participate in African American focused activities. Students who either did not feel comfortable discussing race with their parents or who were socialized to have a more color-blind orientation expressed a desire to learn more about their African American heritage but believed that they would not be accepted among their Black peers.

While these Black/White biracial students are members of the most diverse generation in history, these narratives suggest that there is still rigid adherence to racial boundaries and race remains a subject that many are not comfortable discussing. Students in this study live in a culture many say is post-racial. Initially many of the biracial students started their narratives with the belief that race does not matter; however, these same students were able to identify multiple racialized events that challenged their understanding of their racial identity. This suggests that the racial landscape still lacks space for multiracial individuals. The following chapter discusses the findings, contributions to the literature, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPT FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **Statement of the Problem**

College is recognized as a period of personal growth and development for students (Astin 1993; Chickering & McCormick, 1973; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The student interactions that occur on campus can influence students' growth in leadership, academic development, critical thinking, and cultural awareness (Astin, 1993). The expectations that students develop regarding their college experience and perceived future outcomes play an important role in their decision to attend college or not and which institution they select. Econometric models suggest that when students decide to enter higher education they carefully weigh costs of attending against potential future earnings (Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Sociological models indicate that family factors such as socioeconomic level and parental education shape the student college choice process (Anderson & Hearn, 1992; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). As the research on the college choice process has developed, scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of understanding how different student populations (e.g., African American, first-generation, low-income) choose to participate in higher education. Researchers have begun to write about the postsecondary education plans of African American students (e.g., Freeman, 1997, 1999b, 2005; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna, 2000). However, current models do not sufficiently capture the college choice process for Black/White biracial students.

To address this gap I interviewed Black/White biracial students in order to explore their decision to attend college. Further, this study examined the dynamics between college choice and racial identity development through the campus environment. Emerging studies suggested some African American students see college as an opportunity to explore their racial identity (Van



Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). Given that multiracial identity theorists point to college as a period marked by personal growth, development, and exploration of racial identity (Miville et al., 2005; Renn, 1998, 2000), this research examined whether there was a link between college choice and racial identity development for this student population.

Themes found in the data are presented in two sections: major factors that influenced the college choice process of Black/White biracial students and how the campus culture shaped the racial identity exploration of this student population in the college environment.

### **Discussion of College Choice Findings**

The results of this study support Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) three-phase college choice model and many of the factors they identified as influential in each stage of the decision-making process. The data did not reveal that Black/White biracial students were influenced by race-related factors, diverging from studies that indicated that African American students considered race-related factors during their college choice process (Freeman, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2005; Van Camp et al., 2009; Van Camp et al., 2010). Rather, for this particular sample of Black/White biracial students, largely low-income, in-state, and from predominantly White families and precollege contexts, much of their decision making was informed by the students' family income level. However, as biracial students discussed their experiences exploring and understanding their racial identity, their narratives revealed unintended consequences to their color-blind orientation when deciding where to attend college.

The experiences of these Black/White biracial students navigating the college choice process indicated that several factors contributed to their color-blind orientation. Biracial students reported that many of them were socialized by their parents to place little focus on their

racial identity. In fact, half indicated on the Student Demographics Survey (Appendix B) that they thought about race and racial identity once a week and thirty-seven percent thought about race only once a month. Further, only two of the students indicated that they had regular discussions about race and racial identity with their parents. For the majority of students, the only extensive conversation about race they had with their parents occurred in early childhood when students first asked about their racial identity. For this group of biracial students their parents de-emphasized race. Further, there was a lack of transmission of African American heritage to Black/White biracial students largely due to the fact that many were raised in households led by single, White mothers. This supports Renn's theory (1998) that parents are the primary source for mixed race students to gain cultural knowledge prior to college. Most of the students in this study felt that being raised by their White mothers did not give them "much to identify with in terms of being Black" (Marie). A few students did have periodic contact with African American family members; however, students indicated that they felt out of place in the predominantly Black context. As a result of their socialization process about issues of race, Black/White biracial students were predisposed to have a color-blind orientation during their college choice process. Thus, these students and their families prioritized financial considerations over the importance of race-related factors.

Previous studies have identified parents as key individuals in students' predisposition towards college in both White and African American students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Chapman, 1981, Freeman, 1997, 1999a; 2005; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Perna, 2006). Mothers were found to be especially influential for female African American students (Muhammad, 2008). The biracial student narratives echoed this finding, in that White, college-educated mothers were identified as the

most influential individuals during the decision-making process of Black/White biracial students. Biracial students identified involvement by their mothers in each phase of the college choice process. Students reported that their mothers encouraged them to attend college, helped them gather college information, and helped them decide where to attend. Many Black/White biracial students emphasized the importance of their mothers' and families' support while pursuing their goal of an undergraduate degree, and reported that they drew from their mothers' previous experiences with the higher education system. This finding supports Guiffrida's (2005) research indicating that second-generation, high-achieving African American students relied on parents' previous college knowledge when navigating through their own college experiences. However, given that many of the biracial students in this study were assisted by White mothers, their mothers were an unexpected hindrance to the outcomes of the decision making, in the sense that mothers guided their students' college choice process through the lens of color blindness.

Approaching the college choice process from a color-blind orientation, Black/White biracial students limited their choice set to PWIs. These students lacked familiarity with HBCUs and only a few had researched them. The majority of the students reported that their mothers did not encourage them to explore the idea of attending an HBCU. This supports McDonough and colleagues (1997) finding that African American students were more likely to attend an HBCU because of their parents' familiarity with those institutions. Black/White biracial students in this study drew from their White mothers' personal experiences during the college choice process. White mothers were not likely to have any previous experiences with HBCUs, eliminating these potential institutions. Further, it is likely that White mothers possessed an embedded assumption that their biracial students, who grew up in predominantly White contexts, would be comfortable at a PWI.

The predominantly White precollege contexts, high schools, and communities also appeared to play an important role in decentering race and racial identity during the college choice process. Previous studies found that African American students were more likely to select an HBCU as a means of exploring racial identity, if they had little precollege exposure to their African American culture (Freeman, 1999a, 2005; Van Camp et al., 2010). However, this was not true for Black/White biracial students, even though slightly more than half attended predominantly White high schools, and the majority came from predominantly White communities. Having little precollege exposure to African American culture did not increase the likelihood of biracial students considering an HBCU. Further, the predominantly White precollege contexts did not encourage these students to look beyond PWIs. There were a few students who investigated HBCUs because they had family members who were alumni, were contacted by an HBCU, or had teachers who had familiarity with the schools.

The data indicated that biracial students who have little engagement with African American individuals felt uncomfortable with the idea of attending a predominantly Black institution. Many students related this feeling of discomfort to the fact that they had little contact with African Americans within their family and communities. Biracial students believed an all-Black context would place greater importance on the racial identity of Black/White students. In other words, biracial students with few opportunities to explore their Black identity were less likely to consider HBCUs because these institutions are centered on students' having a strong sense of Black identity. Biracial students selected a PWI because they were accustomed to socializing with White individuals and they assumed that the peer culture on campus shared their same norms and values when it came to race and racial identity. The narratives of biracial students suggested that they believed the campus racial climate would be similar to their White

community from home. However, Black/White biracial students reported that they were surprised to discover that they felt some discomfort at a PWI, and to see how much emphasis was placed on race by their peers at this institution.

For this sample of Black/White biracial students, their family's socioeconomic status was more salient than racial identity in the decision-making process. The students' ability to pay for college was an institutional factor that was prioritized as very important. When examining economic factors, biracial students focused on two components: ability to pay and proximity to home. Ideally, when students select an institution they are carefully weighing institutional characteristics, their expectations of their college experience, and financial considerations (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). For Black/White biracial students, financial considerations and maintaining strong family relationships were the biggest drivers of the students' decisions to attend the University of Arizona. This finding supports Turley's (2009) argument that students who reside within commuting distance of a college are more likely to select an in-state school because living in close proximity provides students with an easier "transition to college logistically, financially, and emotionally" (p. 141). Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model does not account for the context of geography (Turley, 2009). The student narratives in this study indicated that they eliminated institutions from their choice set by proximity to home. Consistent with findings from McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997), Black/White biracial students attended a PWI because it was close to home. This has important implications because the state in which students live can enhance or restrict their college choice options. In this case, geography eliminated HBCUs from the majority of Black/White biracial students' choice set because there are none within the state of Arizona. Further, students were limited to making a selection between three public institutions that are predominantly White.

Remaining in state also allowed Black/White biracial students to maintain strong family ties. The University of Arizona is a short commuting distance back home for most students. Coming from single parent homes appeared to play an important role in the strength of family ties, as well as the importance of family support during students' college experiences. This finding supports research indicating that families are important assets to African American students attending PWIs (Guiffrida, 2005). The results indicate that Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model is limited in that it does not account for the strength of family ties influencing the college choice set of Black/White biracial students.

The second reason students selected the University of Arizona was the financial aid awarded, largely through the Arizona Assurance Scholarship Program. The majority of the students in this study were recipients of need-based scholarships. Several students discussed how having their financial need met immediately placed the University of Arizona at the top of their list. Similar to findings from previous studies, Black/White biracial students in this study were limited to in-state institutions because the cost of an out-of-state institution was too great (Kim, 2004; Perna, 2006).

Previous studies indicated that African American students consider race-related factors when forming their expectations regarding their college experience (Freeman 1997; Van Camp et al., 2009; Van Camp et al., 2010). This study's results were not consistent with these previous studies. Rather, discussions of race-related factors were notably absent from the college choice process of Black/White biracial students. These students tended to approach the decision making from a color-blind orientation because of family socialization regarding race. Many of these Black/White biracial students grew up in predominantly White communities that also de-emphasized the importance of race. The data indicated that biracial students based their college

choice decisions on economic factors, such as ability to pay and closeness to home.

Even though the majority of these students thought little of the college experience as it related to their racial identity development during the process of choosing a college to attend, in retrospect biracial students believed that they should have given more consideration to institutional diversity and the racial climate. This supports Freeman's (1997, 1999b, 2005) findings that the contexts of race and racial identity need to be incorporated into the college choice process.

### **Discussion of Racial Identity Findings**

Multiracial identity theorists argue that college is a critical period for racial identity development of mixed race students (Miville et al., 2005). The identity development process is influenced by the various settings in the campus ecology, as well as the interactions that occur within and between the settings (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004). This particular group of Black/White biracial students enrolled in college with little consideration given to the campus racial climate for biracial students. Biracial students hailed from precollege contexts that frequently de-emphasized the importance of racial identity. The narratives revealed that biracial students received contradictory messages regarding their race and racial identity from the campus peer culture and their families. Those incongruent messages shaped how biracial students viewed their racial identity and they struggled to find a sense of belonging on campus.

The narratives of Black/White biracial students indicated that many grew up in predominantly White families and communities that provided few opportunities for students to connect with their African American heritage and to have meaningful discussions about race. The majority of the biracial students reported that they were raised to identify as "Black and White" but White families did not actively transmit to their students what it means to be Black

and White or “biracial.” Rather, biracial students were socialized to have a more passive approach to developing their racial identity. In other words, biracial students adopted the label Black identity without actually engaging their Black identity through meaningful interactions with Black communities. It was through interactions with their peers on campus that biracial students moved from a more passive to active approach in understanding their racial identity. This supports the finding that racial identity development is “not a passive intellectual activity but [is] instead a process of emotional and cognitive engagement that emerged from meaningful relationships with significant others” (Miville et al., 2005, p. 511). Few of the biracial students had developed meaningful relationships with other Black individuals as a means to develop their Black identity.

Biracial students assumed that they would be more comfortable and accepted at a PWI as a mixed race individual, given that they came from predominantly White families and communities. However, students were continually forced to scrutinize the conflicting views on race between the family and campus settings. Many of the Black/White biracial students entered college with the belief that race would not matter; however, they became aware of the saliency of race when they described their perceptions of the racial climate. Biracial students were surprised when they encountered racism from White peers. These interactions forced biracial students to acknowledge the importance of race to others and the existence of racism, which forced these students to reevaluate their color-blind orientation.

Racists acts involving White peers increased biracial students’ realization that White peers lacked sensitivity towards race and racial issues. These encounters also pushed biracial students to seek out more diverse individuals and environments. Students who encountered racist incidents in the residence halls responded to these acts by moving into halls that provided more



student diversity or were culturally themed. This finding supports Rockquemore and Brunnsma's (2008) assertion that negative experiences with Whites can push biracial individuals away from identifying with that group.

Black/White biracial students found their White peers often viewed them as persons of color. For some students, negative encounters with White peers pushed them away from having a color-blind orientation and towards opportunities to explore their Black heritage. The data showed that the majority of these students did not have a sense of their Black identity. Biracial students had few precollege opportunities to engage their Black identity and develop meaningful relationships with Black individuals.

When Black/White biracial students sought to identify with their African American peers, they encountered messages that they were outsiders. Kellogg and Liddell (2012) and Miville and colleagues (2005) argued that having the legitimacy of one's racial identity challenged is essentially an encounter with racism. This was especially true for Black/White biracial students whose racial identity was frequently challenged when they answered the ubiquitous question, "What are you?" The findings indicated that African American peers often challenged the claimed Black identity of Black/White biracial students. Biracial students stated that the responses from peers either took the form of disbelief or of challenge. As a consequence biracial students typically avoided interactions with Black peers on campus because they feared the legitimacy of their Black identity would be questioned. These interactions also reinforced biracial students' more passive approach to racial identity development.

Because Black/White biracial students were concerned that their racial identity would be questioned by Black peers, many were deterred from engaging in race-related spaces, despite having an interest in connecting with their Black heritage. This finding lends support to

Rockquemore and Brunsma's (2002) findings, which suggested that Black/White biracial adults who had negative interactions with Black individuals were more likely to move towards developing a biracial identity and away from a singular Black identity. This was especially evident when biracial students in this study discussed the African American Student Association on campus. Based on negative experiences, such as having their Black identity challenged by African American students, Black/White biracial students were less likely to participate in AASA because they feared being publicly rejected from this racially designated space. This further limited biracial students' opportunities to actively engage their Black identity.

Biracial students were more likely to describe having positive experiences exploring their racial identity through a more passive and intellectual approach. Almost all of the students investigated their African American heritage in a classroom, either through major or general education requirements. The exploration of racial identity through academics gave Black/White biracial students the tools and language to engage in discourse about race, racial identity, and racism (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Renn, 2004). Biracial students reported that, through their course work, they moved from a color-blind orientation to a color-conscious perspective. Further, the classroom setting allowed biracial students to explore their racial identity without negative encounters from peers challenging biracial students' claimed racial identity. This makes sense given that biracial students were socialized by parents to have a more passive approach to their racial identity development.

Through their campus experiences exploring their racial identity, biracial students were more aware that race was an important factor in how their peers organized and identified themselves and others. Biracial students described a process in which they moved from group to group until they found a space they fit into, frequently with other mixed race students.

Friendships with multiracial students were especially important for biracial students as their friendships provided a shared and affirming racial experience. A common theme in the narratives of Black/White biracial students was that their mixed race friends understood what it was like to be biracial. Feeling racially supported by multiracial friends was very important to this group of students, given that a large number reported that they were unable to discuss race and racial identity with their own family because “they don’t understand what it is like to be biracial” (Beth). Although parents labeled their students as “Black and White,” many parents did not engage in meaningful discussions about the students’ racial identity, pushing their student towards a more color-blind and passive approach to racial identity development. However, the campus interactions that biracial students had forced them to recognize that race was important in the college context and that having a Black identity meant more than having a Black parent. The interactions that biracial students had shifted their orientation from a color-blind to color-conscious approach. One consequence of the negative interactions with Black peers was that biracial students tended to engage their Black identity through a more passive approach in the classroom setting. The messages about race and racial identity that students received from the various settings were that their personal definitions of their racial identity were not always in alignment with the definitions of racial identity imposed by their peers (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Miville et al., 2005; Williams, 1996).

### **Implications**

The results from this study support Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) findings that students’ SES, parents, and high school characteristics influence the outcomes of the college choice process. However, the data in this study indicated that racial context should be accounted for when applying Hossler and Gallagher’s model to describe the college choice process of

Black/White biracial students. The experiences of the Black/White biracial students in this study indicated that racial identity also shaped the decision-making process. Although biracial students did not engage the college choice process with a color-conscious orientation, not accounting for race-related factors such as institutional diversity and the campus racial climate resulted in some unintended consequences in how biracial students experienced the campus racial climate.

Biracial students believed that they should have been more informed about the importance of race-related factors during their decision making.

The Black/White biracial students in this study indicated that parents should help their students have a more color-conscious approach to the college choice process. Students attributed their color-blind orientation to early socialization by their parents that race does not matter. The two students who had considered institutional diversity in their decision making reported that they had conversations about race and racial identity frequently with their family members as they were growing up. Biracial students also believed that a lack of precollege contact with the African American heritage and community contributed to their color-blind orientation. Presenting these students with precollege opportunities to interact with their African American heritage would increase biracial students' awareness of potential race-related factors to consider during the college choice process. This is especially important for White, single parents of Black/White biracial students, who may not be able to transmit African American culture to their students. High school curricula that address race and include voices of mixed race students can also help biracial students develop a more color-conscious orientation.

Because these Black/White biracial students came from predominantly White families and communities that were mostly low-income, they tended to focus primarily on economic factors such as affordability and proximity to home in their decision-making process. To

effectively support these low-income biracial students, families, high school counselors, and college representatives need to help students investigate ways to pay for college early in their students' lives. Having full funding for out-of-state institutions may have changed these students' college choice set. Further, student affairs professionals need to recognize that prioritizing financial considerations over students' expectations of their college experience can have serious consequences regarding how biracial students experience the campus climate. Biracial students expected to feel comfortable at a PWI, given that these precollege contexts placed little importance on race. However, they found that racial identity was more salient in the campus environment. As Freeman (2005) suggested, students need to question the advantages and disadvantages of attending institutions that are mixed, predominantly White, or predominantly Black. If ability to pay is not an important factor in the decision-making process, institutional characteristics may become a priority in the college choice process.

In retrospect Black/White biracial students indicated that those assisting during the college choice process, such as parents and school personal, should have discussed the importance of considering institutional diversity. Parents and high schools need to help biracial students explore a wider range of institutional characteristics when gathering college information. It is also important that institutional leaders not misrepresent the level of racial diversity among the student body and ensure that students of color are familiar with the support services provided in order to help students feel more fully integrated. When institutional leaders direct their efforts to recruit minority high school students, they should broaden their definition of who is and is not considered a student of color. Institutions can provide open houses in which mixed race high school students can meet current multiracial college students, professionals, and faculty.

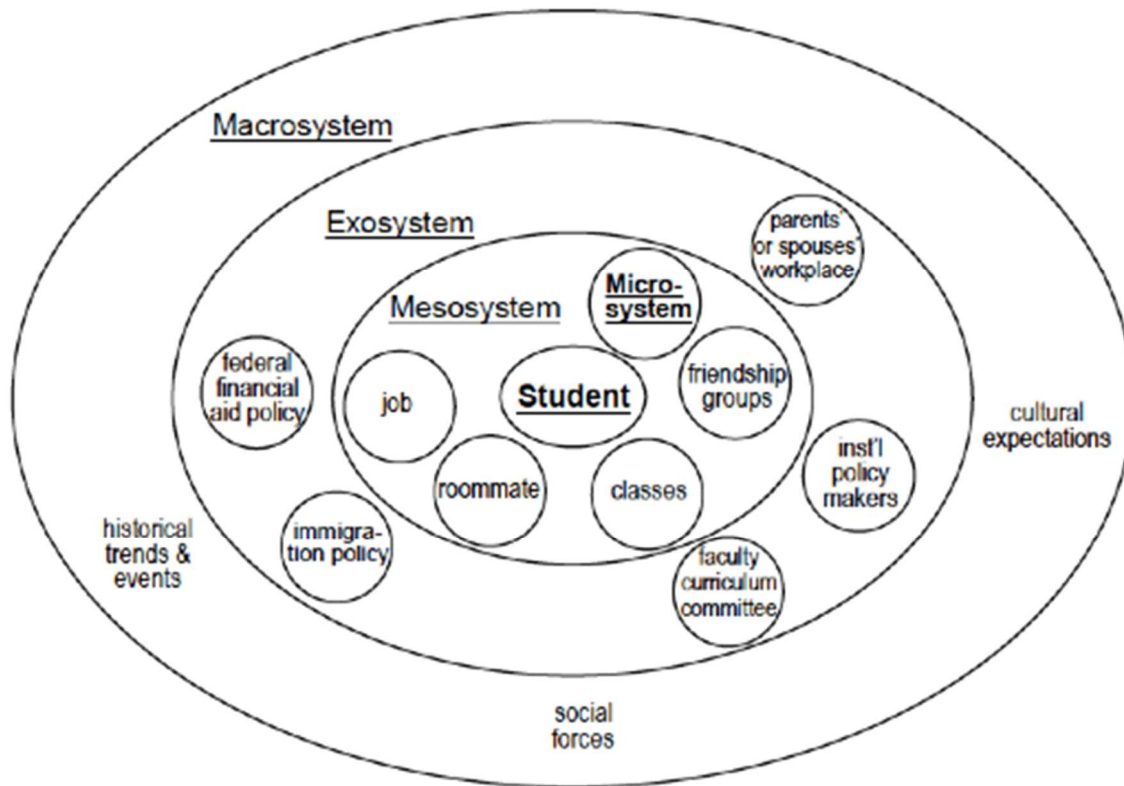
Institutional leaders should evaluate whether their support services adequately address the needs of multiracial students once they are enrolled on campus. Assessing how diversity-related policies, procedures, and funding include or exclude the needs of Black/White biracial students can help create more welcoming environments. Institutional leaders should conduct self-analyses of the extent to which the school's views and definitions of race are unaligned with how students define themselves (Literte, 2010).

Students in this study stressed the importance of having race-related spaces for mixed race students. Students explained that being able to participate in a multiracial student club would give them a chance to talk about their experiences as mixed race students. One student stated that a club would help students “talk about experiences and where you grew up and what exactly your background is made of, how that influences how you perceive yourself, how people treat you” (Annie). Black/White biracial students also believed that a multiracial student organization would increase the visibility of this student population on campus, allowing other mixed race students to connect. Ozaki and Johnston (2008) stated that creating a multiracial student organization can provide opportunities for cross-racial dialogues with monoracial student organizations.

Another suggestion offered by Black/White biracial students was to create diversity courses on multiracial history and identity. Renn (2004) asserted that curricula that include the voices of mixed race individuals can help students develop the language to discuss and challenge beliefs around racial identity and classification. Further, possessing cultural knowledge can affirm each student's racial identity (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Renn, 2000).

These results indicated that modifications to Renn's (1998, 2003) conceptualization of the ecology model for multiracial identity development may be necessary. In Renn's (1998)

application of the ecology model (See Figure 5), she largely limited the family influence to precollege interactions within the family microsystem, such as the extent to which parents had discussions of race and racism, and transmitting culture to their students. These interactions determine how biracial students viewed and engaged their racial identity on campus (Renn, 1998).



*Figure 5.* Applying the Ecology Model to a Campus Environment. (Renn, 2003)

However, findings in this study suggested that for this group of Black/White biracial students, mainly in-state and low-income, the family system is more appropriately placed closer to the student as a microsystem (See Figure 6).

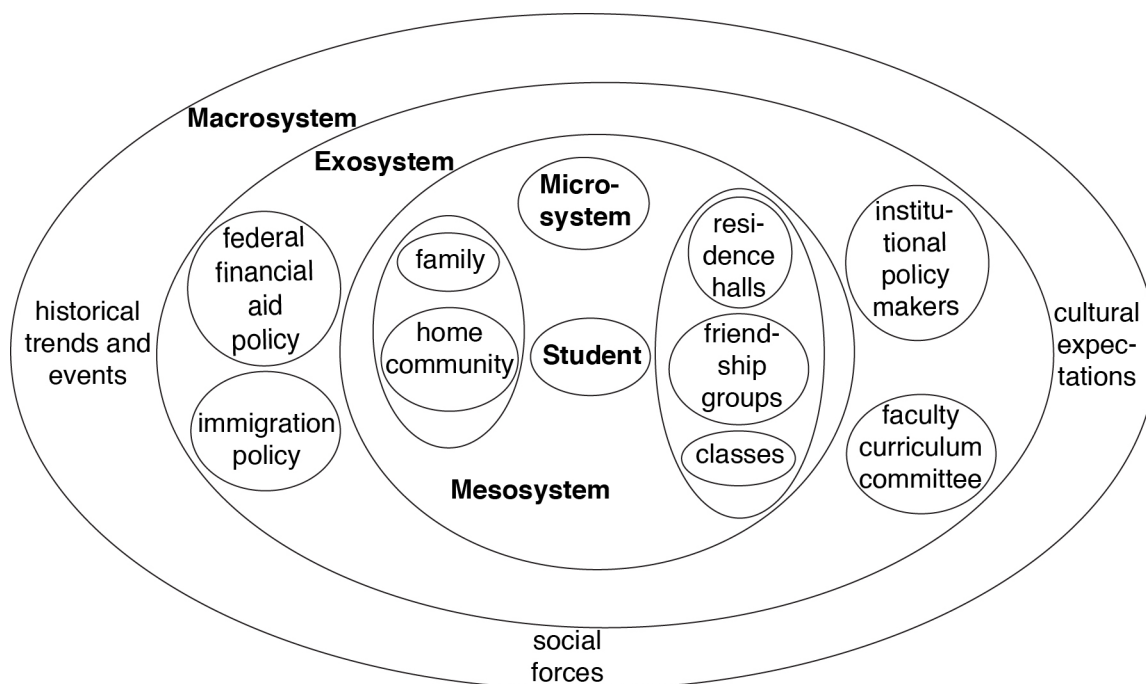


Figure 6. Reconceptualization of Ecology Model.

Biracial students indicated that their families continued to play a prominent role in their understanding of their racial identity within the campus context. These biracial students had frequent interactions with the family system; essentially, the family system became an extension of the students' campus experience. When Black/White biracial students were with family, their racial identity was de-emphasized; however, when students were on campus, their peers placed more importance on biracial students' racial identity.

Few biracial students would discuss their experiences with race and racial identity on campus with their parents. This influenced these students' inclination to avoid environments that emphasized their racial identity. Recognizing that families can have on-going and direct influence on the racial identity development process for Black/White biracial students allowed for a more careful examination of the interactive nature between parental socialization regarding race and the attitudes and norms of peer culture regarding race.



## **Limitations of the Study**

The overall goal of this study was to explain the process of college choice for Black/White biracial students, how racial identity influenced those decisions, and how these students constructed and engaged their racial identity once enrolled. The biracial population is very diverse; there are numerous racial background combinations and at least four patterns of racial identity (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2000, 2004). This study is limited in that it only investigates the experiences of Black/White biracial students. One reason that this is a limitation is that there are social norms that can influence patterns of racial identification.

A particular challenge to studying multiracial students are the variations of how mixed race students self-identify. A limitation of the data is related to the self-selection to participate in the study, which could result in sampling bias. How biracial students chose to identify is likely to create sampling bias because students who did not identify as Black/White biracial may have decided not to participate in the study. Black/White biracial students who strongly identified with their African American heritage may have opted out of participating in the study. Thus, missing from the overall narrative are biracial students who embraced their Black identity. This study had a large number of biracial students with White mothers and Black fathers. Having a large sample of students with Black mothers and White fathers may have painted a different picture. Additionally, half of the students were raised by single, White mothers. This is important because students raised by single, White mothers reported having different experiences encountering and exploring race and racial issues than students who were raised by single, Black mothers or those who lived with both parents.

Another limitation of the study is the issue of socioeconomic status of the students. Half of the participants reported that their families had an income of less than \$50,000 a year, which

qualified these students for tuition and room and board assistance through a scholarship program targeting low-income students. As discussed by some of the participants, having a low-income background limited their ability to participate in various activities due to cost (e.g., Greek System) or having to work in order to support themselves. The setting of the institution is another limiting factor of this study. The University of Arizona is a large, public research institution with its own unique ecology-system. The results of this study provide some insight into the experiences of this particular group of Black/White biracial student at this institution.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings in this study suggest that the college choice process for Black/White biracial students has some similarities to the process of African American students. Student interviews showed the importance of family, especially mothers, during each college choice phase. However, given that more than half of the participants came from single-mother households, it would be useful to examine the influence of mothers in students from two-parent families. This would allow further study into the role of each parent during the decision-making process. It would also provide an opportunity to see if the minority parent is more likely to encourage a student to use a color-conscious approach. Second, like Muhammad's (2008) study, my findings indicated that the influence of mothers is particularly important for female students. Because of the overrepresentation of female students in my study, another area for future research involves determining if there is a relationship between maternal support and the choice process for female *and* male students. Students in my study stressed the important assistance that mothers provided during the search and choice phases. What would this assistance look like for first generation Black/White biracial students? Moreover, what would this assistance look like for Black/White biracial students from higher SES families? Are students from higher SES families able to look

at and consider a wider range of institutional characteristics when selecting a school?

Continued research into factors that influence racial identity development is needed. Future studies could focus on parental socialization on race and racial identity and how this influences students' propensity to explore their racial identity on campus. Are students from two minority racial backgrounds more likely to have early discussions of race with their family? How do neighborhoods and high schools with large minority populations shape early racial identity development? Institutional leaders need to respond to mixed race student populations. Case studies on campuses that have successfully changed the campus climate for multiracial students are needed. Another area for future scholarship involves a more in-depth exploration of what factors increase biracial student propensity to seek out opportunities to explore their racial identity. Finally, like previous studies, this study was conducted at a predominantly White institution. There is a void in the literature on the experiences of Black/White biracial students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the need for expanding the college choice model to account for the experiences of mixed race students. As Freeman (2005) argues, it is important for researchers to develop college choice models that consider the influence of culture. By looking at the college choice process through the context of race, practitioners and scholars can better understand the influence of family background, school contexts, neighborhoods, and other race-related factors on the decision-making process of Black/White biracial students.

This study also opens the door for further investigation into the impact of factors that facilitate or hinder the racial identity development process for Black/White biracial students. Findings indicate that the manner in which the family microsystem addresses race shapes how

students engage their racial identity in college. This study also shows how students respond to confrontation regarding their racial identification. It remains clear that Black/White biracial students are still constrained in how they choose to express their racial identity.

**APPENDIX A: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. When did you first start thinking about going to college?
2. Who influenced your decision to attend college? In what ways did they influence you?
  - a. Who encouraged you the most to attend college?
3. In what ways did your high school help you with getting into college?
4. What are your reasons for wanting to attend college?
5. Who do you know who has attended college?
  - a. Where did they attend college?
6. What other institutions did you consider?
  - a. Were you recruited by this or any other institutions?
7. What factors influenced your decision to attend this institution?
  - a. In what ways did you consider the institutional diversity in your decision?
8. What are your perceptions of your peers at this institution?
  - a. How would you describe the interactions between the different racial/ethnic groups on this campus?
9. How do you currently racially identify yourself?
  - a. Has this changed from childhood/elementary years?
  - b. Has this changed from high school years?
10. How are you racially identified by your family members?
  - a. How are you racially identified by peers at this institution? Faculty member?
11. How would you characterize the nature of your interactions with your White peers?
  - a. How would you characterize the nature of your interactions with your Black peers?
  - b. How would you characterize the nature of your interactions with multiracial peers?
12. How have your interactions with different racial groups changed since high school?
13. Please identify factors that make you feel welcomed on this campus.
  - a. Please identify factors that have made you feel unwelcomed on campus.
14. What clubs and/or organizations are you participating in or planning to participate in?
15. Are you taking or planning on taking any courses that deal with issues of race or ethnicity? Please explain why or why not.
16. What individuals here on campus have helped you to explore your racial identity?
  - a. Please explain how they have helped you to explore your racial identity.
17. What individuals here on campus have discouraged you from exploring your racial identity?
  - a. Please explain how they have discouraged you from exploring your racial identity.
18. What does being multiracial mean to you?
  - a. What similarities or differences do you see between yourself and other multiracial students?

- b. How do you respond to the question “What are you?”
- 19. What role should institutions have in students’ exploration of their racial identity?
- 20. What should campus leaders know about students who are multiracial?
- 21. Is there anything else you would like to share about multiracial identity or being a multiracial student at this institution?



9. Approximately, what proportion of the people in the neighborhood where you grew up were White?

- ☐ All or nearly all White                      ☐ Mostly White                      ☐ Half White/ half  
people of color  
☐ Mostly people of color                      ☐ All or nearly all people of color

10. Approximately, what proportion of the students in your high school were White?

- ☐ All or nearly all White                      ☐ Mostly White                      ☐ Half White/ half  
people of color  
☐ Mostly people of color                      ☐ All or nearly all people of color

11. How often do you think about issues of race?

- ☐ More than once a week                      ☐ Once a week                      ☐ Once a month  
☐ Less than once a month                      ☐ Less than once a year

Please sign if you received a \$10  
giftcard \_\_\_\_\_



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