Exploring Experience, Influence and Personal Truths: Biraciality and Educational Spaces.

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

According to the US Census, biracial individuals with Black and White racial heritage constitute the fastest growing demographic in the United States. While the availability of educational academic literature focused specifically on this population is increasing, much of the work in this area is limited to discussion of the identity development process. This theoretical dissertation bridges literature forwarding a holistic approach to biracial identity development with action-oriented strategies that can be taken up by educational practitioners and biracial individuals that encourage positive experiences in educational spaces. Frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) and the intersectional model of multiracial identity (Wijeyesinghe, 2012) provided a perspective for approaching this work. The guiding questions for this dissertation included the following: a) How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces? b) What are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces?

In response to these questions, data was collected from materials currently in circulation directed to educational practitioners working with biracial individuals, autobiographical material written by biracial individuals and user-generated video content shared by and about biracial individuals via the YouTube platform. The practitioner-directed data was considered using methods of document analysis (Bowen, 2009), and the primary sources were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analyses resulted in a series of
detailed, strategic approaches to be taken up by practitioners working with biracial students and for biracial individuals in educational contexts. Suggestions for future work in this area include further investigation into the effects of the subtly negative language often utilized in relation to biracial individuals as well as a consideration of the same research questions addressed here using data sources that include participants with whom the researcher can engage interactively.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my first born, Davis, for whom I hope this document one day serves as a source of pride and a testament of his own potential.
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I would like to acknowledge and to thank the many individuals who contributed in a range of ways—some seemingly big and some that appeared to be small—to this project.

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Fields of Study

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The field of multicultural education provides a frame for approaches to thinking about and working with students often pushed to the margins by mainstream, dominant notions of what a student is. Students who are not White, middle-class and Standard American English-speaking are often conceptualized as being outside of and different from the hegemonic image of a student, and such understandings result in educational circumstances that require the intervention of multicultural education. Though initial inceptions of multicultural education (see Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 1994; Grant & Chapman, 2008) focused primarily on work with African American pupils, the field has expanded to address multiple forms of oppression tied to characteristics of identity. When considering the dominant structures noted in place in many schools within the United States, students are denied access to “equal opportunities to learn” on the basis of many identity markers (Banks, 2010, p. 3). Students are ‘othered’ based upon their socioeconomic status, language usage, abilities, gender, sexuality, citizenship status and their race and, as Banks (2010) explains, this othering is a by-product of some systematically upheld characteristics of US schooling institutions. The social justice realm of multicultural education seeks not only to provide marginalized students access to equitable educational practices, but to complicate and challenge the acceptance and endorsement of their differences as deficits (see Banks & Banks, 1995; Hackerman, 2005). Part of doing so requires considering and critiquing

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our understandings of those identity markers that serve to exclude some from the center as it is currently conceived.

Race remains one of the most salient identity markers utilized in the United States to denote difference. Multicultural scholars concern themselves with how dominant school practices shape this difference into deficit (Banks & Banks, 2010). In society at large, phenotypic traits such as skin color and hair texture exert heavy influence on the ways we mark racial difference and are also qualities not easily hidden in our face-to-face interactions with others. Its visibility is one reason the salience of race has endured; another is the fact that it continues to be socially constructed as an integral and necessary component of American society (Mills, 1997).

The social history of race in this country is largely built around racial conceptions of Black and White, particularly upon the notion of the two being antithetical to one another. The oversimplified, binary nature with which race is viewed in this country necessitates the need for additional research in this area. Further inquiry, must be posed by multicultural scholars when thinking of work with individuals who can or do claim allegiance at once to both races. To date, the needs and perceptions of biracial individuals are included only sparingly within multicultural education literature (Cortés, 1999/2008; Harris, 2002; Root, 2004; Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005).

Additional examination of the educational issues pertaining to this group must be undertaken if a true attempt is being made to interrogate the marginalization of some who are othered.

In providing background for this study, it is necessary, also, that I locate myself within the work. I am a self-identified Black woman born of two self-identifying Black parents. Though I identify monoracially, one of the catalysts for my interest to purposefully consider biraciality from a multicultural lens is the racially mixed extended family of which I am a part. An equally influential motivation is a commitment to social justice, to an educational system that provides equitable access and opportunities for success and achievement to all students. As a
classroom teacher, I anecdotally witnessed an ‘invisiblizing’ of the sizeable population of biracial students at my school as disaggregated test scores, professional developments and teacher commentary dealt strictly with monoracial subgroups. These experiences have compelled me to consider the educationally-based experiences of biracial individuals who are rendered invisible in educational spaces as well as to seek out a framework for a novel approach to working with biracial individuals that is more inclusive and more in line with the social justice standards to which I hold myself.

**Statement of Opportunity**

Though biracial individuals have existed in the United States since these lands were first colonized by White Europeans and sown by the African men and women they enslaved, biraciality is not often treated as a central part of America’s racial discussion. While not yet a common topic, there has been a recent increase in discussion of biraciality across a range of fields, and this trend has been observed within the field of multicultural education as well. There is room for expansion in the breadth and depth of projects committed to this topic, however. A collective of scholars in pursuit of social justice cannot achieve goals of demarginalizing the marginalized without doing so for all students. Currently, a gap exists in academic literature concerned with the degree to and quality with which biracial students’ educational needs are met. As biracial individuals have been marginalized alongside those who have also been raced as non-White, their interests must be a part of the multicultural education conversation moving forward (Root, 2004). The work of this dissertation seeks to fill the existing gap in multicultural education by providing a framework through which conversations about biraciality within educational spaces can be held. As the field stands currently, an approach that adequately centers the interests of biracial individuals and those educators seeking to optimize the effectiveness of their engagement with biracial individuals does not exist. A filling of this gap is vital because, as
Grant and Sleeter (2010) explain, a multicultural education approach with a social justice orientation requires attention to serving the needs of all groups of people, not just those—such as monoracial groups—that are conveniently identifiable. The articulation of such an approach will allow for more and varied empirical work focusing on issues surrounding biraciality within the educational realm to be conducted.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this theoretical dissertation is to explore ways that biracial individuals can and do develop their multi-faceted identities and can and do interact in fulfilling ways with educators and practitioners in educational spaces. These goals lend to a proposal of an approach that encourages the holistic inclusion of biracial individuals within educational spaces. A large part of this consideration involves interrogating the socio-historical contexts that influence the racial component of a biracial individual’s identity. Decisions made by persons developing their identities and by those interacting with these actively engaged individuals are not made in a social vacuum. Rather, there are socially and historically mediated implications to the contexts within which important decisions are made. These decisions include how one sees and understands oneself and how one assesses which personal characteristics are worthy of showcasing. Currently considerable emphasis in academic literature is placed upon the identity development process experienced by biracial individuals. Explicit connection is not often made between these ideas about identity development and a consideration of how these identities are enacted by biracial students within educational spaces. Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide a bridge that transforms the implications of the self-understandings of biracial individuals into practices taken up by educational practitioners and biracial individuals themselves within educational spaces.
Significance of Study

The 2000 United States Census marked the first time that Americans were able to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race. Since that time, the number of Americans choosing to racially identify in this way has notably increased. While 6.8 million residents identified as belonging to two or more races in 2000, by 2010, 9 million people identified in this way, making it the largest growing racial population (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Considering the population of persons identifying their two races as White and Black, this group grew by over a million to 1.8 million at a rate of 137 percent, constituting the largest and fastest growing disaggregated group within the two or more races category (Jones & Bullock, 2012). In spite of the rising trends in young Americans racially identifying in this way, however, there remains little educationally-based academic work focused around issues pertaining to this population in particular.

Identity development is a vital part of the growth process of all individuals and a set of experiences that are especially vivid for adolescents in particular. Given the racialized nature of US society, racial identity is a necessary component of the holistic identity development process. While studies have shown that some biracial individuals adopt a monoracial Black identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Renn, 2004), this is not true of other biracial persons. Regardless of this fact, however, many biracial individuals are regularly assumed to be among the Black community both by researchers and those with whom they interact on an everyday basis. In order for biracial persons to be holistically engaged in educational contexts, their identities—as they are conceived by the individual—must be acknowledged and sustained. The ways in which one sees him or herself affect an individual’s life in innumerable ways, including how he or she navigates the many facets of the world of education. Within educational settings, it is intended that individuals learn how to navigate the world around them and how to be successful within it.
Some of the lessons that result in these understandings are explicit and intentionally taught, others are subtle and absorbed subconsciously. It is my hope that this dissertation can move fellow educators closer to the goal of establishing the most effective educational spaces possible and encouraging the most fruitful experiences for all of our students, not regardless of, but because of the differences that they bring to our classrooms. Through the provision of an approach that centers the interests of biracial individuals in educational spaces, this work can pave the way both for researchers to inquire empirically about the topic and for educational practitioners to interrogate and make intentional decisions about the impacts they have upon the educational spaces that they occupy alongside biracial individuals.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation is guided by two overarching research questions:

1. How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces?
2. What are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces?

Each of these larger questions is accompanied by sub-questions. Responses to the first research question and its corresponding sub-questions, listed below, are supplied by a document analysis of available educational practitioner-directed texts focusing on working with biracial and multiracial youth:

a. What educationally-based approaches are available to educational practitioners seeking to understand the educational experiences of biracial individuals and in what ways are these approaches beneficial and/or inadequate?

b. What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals?
Responses to the second broad question are formulated utilizing information gathered through a thematic analysis of available examples of biracial individuals’ experiences within educational spaces. The following sub-questions are also addressed:

a. How does the application of this approach contribute to/detract from current representations of biraciality within educational contexts?

b. What opportunities/lenses/points of view does it offer?

c. What are holistically encompassing ways educators and other educational practitioners can be encouraged to acknowledge and foster biracial individuals in educational spaces?

d. What are holistically encompassing ways biracial individuals can be encouraged to examine and enact their self-understandings in educational spaces?

The response to the second broad question and the aforementioned sub-questions culminate in the offering of an approach that I believe fulfills the noted criteria.

**Definition of Terms**

Some of the terms I utilize here do not have universally understood or adhered to definitions. The following are provided for the purpose of making clear how I am invoking their uses in this forum.

*Identity* - The choices one makes in understanding self. This understanding is not static or an essential, nascent part of one’s being, rather it is shifting, evolving and contextual. This understanding is informed by many combinations of a number of contributing factors including, but not limited to, those named by Wijeyesinghe (2012) that include racial ancestry, physical appearance, social and historical context, cultural attachment and spirituality along with age, gender, sexuality, language, socioeconomic status and abilities.
**Biracial** - For the purposes of this study, the term biracial is used to indicate an individual’s racial ancestry and refers to individuals with one White and one Black/African American parent. I use this term for the purpose of signifying the group of individuals I am considering here with acknowledgement that not all who could be classified as such would choose the same racial title for themselves.

**Biraciality** - The plethora of identities related to one’s biracial racial status. This term is used in indicating a broad group, but with recognition that individuals within that group embody the meaning of the term in varied ways, some that are similar across individuals and some that are different. I think of this term as having a similar function as the term “Blackness.”

**Tragic mulatto** - A qualification of the term “mulatto,” derived from the word mule which names the sterile offspring of a horse and a donkey, “tragic mulatto” became a widely accepted concept capturing the hegemonic supposition that people born of both Black and White racial parentage are destined to live a life of social affliction and emotional misfortune. As Orbe and Strother (1996) noted, narratives of biracial Americans have been portrayed in literary works and popular media as far back as the beginning of the twentieth century, generally telling stories of persons “endlessly tormented by their (bi)identities” (115).

**Race** - A concept used to differentiate and hierarchicalize groups of people that is continually socially constructed, reconstructed and reinforced and that has historically and pseudo scientifically-based but enduring roots in belief of biological justification for the groupings (Omi & Winant, 1994).
Racial identity - Meanings attached to the racialized understandings of self and others.

One drop rule - A colloquial term used in the United States (and largely within the Black community) to describe hypodescent, a formerly legal and now primarily social law that relegates individuals with mixed racial heritage to identification and alignment with the race having the more minoritized social status.

Educational spaces - Not limited to school settings, but places where some are identified as educators and others as learners (though these roles are flexible and interchangeable) rather than general instances in which one is learning. The reason for this delineation is that the latter could be constantly occurring, the boundaries of which are limitless. Additionally, current research provides more avenues for understanding the general sociological and psychological implications of biracial identity development; the gap attempting to be filled by this dissertation is specifically within the educational field through consideration of educational contexts.

Holistic - As the Oxford dictionary defines it, holistic means “characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole” (2015). The caveat that the parts can only be referenced in relationship to the whole is paramount; in application, the phrase ‘holistically encompassed’ emphasizes engagement of an individual as a complete, whole person, and not a sum of one’s many parts. This application of the term leads to the achievement of Patterson’s (2013) interpretation of wholeness as “the ability to feel comfortable in your skin regardless of your surroundings because your true, complete self is active” (149).
Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Biraciality in Educational Contexts

The adoption of an appropriate theoretical framework is of paramount importance to successfully conducting research. A theoretical framework allows for utilization of a common language and the resting upon a set of assumptions that guide interpretation of the data under review. In this theoretical dissertation, I use two frameworks to guide my thinking and approach to the data, Paris’ (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) and Wijeyesinghe’s (2012) intersectional model of multiracial identity (IMMI). Both perspectives help to frame my thinking in important ways. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is born out of a commitment to social justice, to seeking ways that all students can maximally benefit from school in ways that are most appropriate to them as individuals, not just in ways that benefit the hegemonic educational narrative and the dominant institutions which support it. The intersectional model of multiracial identity assists by encouraging the consideration of biracial individuals through an intersectional frame that acknowledges the many facets of influence that eventually result in a racial identity.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy.

As a framework for considering approaches taken when working with students, Paris’ (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy provides foundational assumptions for this project. Building in important ways upon Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes the importance of the role of the educator in helping to maintain the cultures that students bring to class. CRP grew out of a need to address gaps apparent in the presentation of critical pedagogy, a theoretical approach largely featuring the voices of White men. In developing CRP, Ladson-Billings saw a need for marginalized voices to be at the center of the discussions on how to best address the needs of marginalized students. As a foundational framework, CRP outlines aspects of a teaching approach that allow educators to “utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161). Ladson-
Billings (1995a) explained that culturally relevant teaching practices are more than “just good teaching;” she used the word ‘pedagogy’ and not ‘strategies’ as CRP is not contained in surface level actions, but rather taps into the “philosophical and ideological” foundations that inform what educators think about themselves, others, the world and society’s structures (p. 161). The goals of CRP as outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995b) included the ability to “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (p. 474).

Paris is not the only scholar who interrogated the ways in which Ladson-Billings’ work was being taken up. Around the time Paris’ reconsideration of culturally relevant pedagogy was offered, Sleeter’s (2012) concerns about the ways in which the concept was (and continues to be) regularly oversimplified were also published. While Sleeter’s worries were rooted in a fear of the attempts of neoliberals to decontextualize the original conceptions of CRP in order to serve their own interests centered around individualism and privatization, Paris’ concerns began with the linguistic implications of the wording, culturally responsive pedagogy. Paris (2012) questioned whether the work being done under this title was actually fulfilling what he considered to be its original intentions of “ensuring maintenance of the languages and cultures” of marginalized groups and inspiring “a critical stance toward and critical action against unequal power relations” (pp. 94-95). These inquiries, along with a question as to the ability of the term ‘relevant’ to capture the activism-based goals of social justice education work, led Paris to coin the new terminology, culturally sustaining pedagogy. Beyond acknowledging or making relevant the cultures and differences present in a classroom, CSP calls for practitioners (educators and researchers alike) to invest themselves in helping students to maintain their many cultures in order for them to be positive contributors to the pluralistic society that multicultural education seeks to foster. This process is not satisfied with utilizing student cultures “as a bridge to school
learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161), but rather aspires to help students discover and appreciate themselves as members of a multicultural society to which they have a responsibility to work for establishment of social justice in action and not only talk.

Beyond ‘lovingly critiquing’ the linguistic implications of culturally relevant pedagogy, Paris and Alim (2014) outline additional ways in which culturally sustaining pedagogy departs from the CRP shoulders upon which it stands. (This work is done with the endorsement of Ladson-Billings (2014) who identifies the need for thought processes to continue to grow and develop as time demands.) The authors identify specific areas that require extension. They contend that, in order to sufficiently move beyond ‘asset pedagogies’ such as CRP and its predecessors, CSP must demand “explicitly pluralist outcomes” that do not frame educational success in terms of “White, middle-class, monolingual, and monocultural norms” (p. 95). The authors insist that pluralism become a classroom norm not for the commercial feel good factors produced by superficial endorsements and decorative displays of diversity, but because the ability to skillfully navigate multiple languages and cultures is “increasingly linked to access and power” (p. 95). Paris and Alim warn that CSP must not be turned into an attachment to static, unchanging and unevolving notions of culture and race as these concepts are ever-evolving and must thus continually be considered and reconsidered in this manner. The authors end with an appeal that they anticipate being particularly difficult to achieve, that is to “seriously contend head-on with the problematic as well as the progressive aspects of our communities” instead of glossing over those components that warrant critique for the sake highlighting cultural assets that have been historically marginalized. Paris and Alim provide the example that fully embracing and endorsing hip hop as a legitimate form of literacy expression requires one to address the misogynistic and otherwise troubling aspects of the culture while simultaneously praising its
commendable components. In this work, this appeal necessitates a well-rounded presentation and interrogation of the ways biracial individuals are engaged in educational spaces.

Given these prerequisites, Paris and Alim (2014) foresee opportunities for evolution both at the research and classroom levels of educational work. As envisioned, a culturally sustaining pedagogy prepares students to assist in working toward the realization of a pluralistic society in which cultural and linguistic differences co-exist and interact without any subordinating another. It also readies students to be active, conscientious members of this society. Incorporating the ideas of this vision into my work guides me to think specifically about the spaces in that pluralistic society that are occupied by people with mixed-race backgrounds. A truly pluralistic society does not seek to hide its constituents’ differences or to unduly group differences for the purpose of simplification. Currently, some of the work even within the field of multicultural education does just this as the voices of biracial and multiracial individuals go unheard or are lost among their monoracial peers. Both culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies position learning as a dialogic process in which the roles of teacher and student are flexible and fluid (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Paris, 2012). A CSP approach supports action-oriented goals by which educators and students come to better know themselves and each other for the ultimate purpose of interrogating and acting to change societal inequities that seek to do harm to those understandings.

**Intersectional model of multiracial identity.**

The work of Wijeyesinghe’s (1992) dissertation featuring a qualitative analysis of the experiences of a group of participants with Black and White racial ancestry culminated in her development of the factor model of multiracial identity (FMMI). Wijeyesinghe’s (1992) model of multiracial identity development builds upon monoracial identity models (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984) that assumed in their presentations that the race of the individual,
Black or White, was a given and that the development revolved around the individual’s coming to understand and appreciate that given. Through her work with biracial individuals, however, Wijeyesinghe found that this assumption of race being a given could not be made for individuals with a multiracial racial ancestry. Rather, she understood that the process of choosing one’s racial identification needed to be a part of an understanding of the identity development of biracial individuals.

In presenting the FMMI, Wijeyesinghe (2001) distinguished her model from models that theorize about the development of a multiracial identity and those that describe the identity development of multiracial individuals. The distinctions she noted include that the latter is representative of “the diversity of experience within and between groups of Multiracial people” (p. 136). Wijeyesinghe’s choice to center multiple perspectives in her model is in line with the tenets of an intersectionality framework. Though intersectionality was initially offered within a feminist legal framework (Crenshaw, 1991), it has since been taken up by scholars in a range of disciplines (see Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Choo & Frerree, 2010; Dhamoon, 2011; Griffin & Museus, 2011). Initially, Wijeyesinghe (1992) did not explicitly note intersectionality as a foundational reference; however, her analytical choice to “complicate” the identities of her participants by considering the multiple identities represented within a single racial category and by a single individual are reflective of the core tenets of intersectionality identified by Crenshaw (1991).

Speaking largely in legal terms, Crenshaw’s (1991) original conception of intersectionality was based around the idea that one cannot best address the needs of a woman coming from marginalized segments of society without simultaneously addressing the multiple ways in which she is oppressed. Crenshaw provided contrasts between the experiences of middle-class, White, English-speaking women and poor, non-English speaking women of color.
seeking shelter from domestic abuse in illustrating her point. She warned against the potential for silencing women of color if analytical academic work does not simultaneously acknowledge both gender and race. The needs of women of color cannot be conflated either with White females or men of color because either approach serves to silence women of color within the discussion in terms of race in the former or gender in the latter. In articulating the strands of intersectionality connecting to the factor model of multiracial identity, Jones and Wijeyesinghe (2011) identified the following components upon which FMMI is built: centering the experiences of people of color; unveiling power in interconnected structures of inequality; and promoting social justice and social change. Wijeyesinghe’s (1992) study did not limit its participation to women alone, but included participants featuring a range of characteristics including age, gender, class, and chosen racial identity and attended to each of these various identity markers. In keeping with a frame of intersectionality, Wijeyesinghe simultaneously considered the various identity markers in attempting to best understand her participants as whole people. Resulting from the efforts produced by this work along with the efforts made by Jones and Wijeyesinghe (2011) to explicitly articulate the alignment of FMMI with intersectionality, in 2012, Wijeyesinghe published an updated version of the FMMI, titling it the intersectional model of multiracial identity (IMMI).

In introducing the IMMI, Wijeyesinghe (2012) notes a number of characteristics shared by multiracial identity literature and intersectionality. Both intersectionality and the emergence of multiracial identity literature were a response to an inability of overly simplified models and theories to address the needs of complex lived experiences. Both acknowledge that identity is a complex topic and that it should be considered holistically, both at the micro and macro levels. Finally, both prioritize inclusion of voices that were previously silenced while promoting social justice.
Wijeyesinghe’s factor model evolved to become the intersectional model in several important ways. While Wijeyesinghe (2012) maintained the component of the FMMI that “assumes that there is no one right or more appropriate choice of racial identity for a Multiracial person,” she determined that “the model does not adequately capture the interrelationship of, and interaction between, factors” (p. 91, p. 92). Thus, her new model emphasizes that the many factors influencing identity do not do so without influence and being influenced by each other, further complexifying the process that results in a racial identity choice. She also noted that the model used to represent the FMMI implied that each factor existed with the same salience for each individual making an identity choice. As a result, her new model emphasized individuality by better accounting for the ways in which factors are influential of individuals who are also members of mixed-race groups. The IMMI includes consideration of eight factors likely to influence the racial identification choices of multiracial people that were originally considered in the FMMI along with three newly identified factors. Not all of the factors are influential in every individual, rather various combinations of the factors may affect the racial identities of different persons and each to different degrees. The IMMI includes the following factors: racial ancestry; physical appearance; social and historical context; cultural attachment; early experience and socialization; political awareness and orientation; spirituality; ‘other social identities;’ geographic/regional environment; situational differences and global influences and generation (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). The visual representation of the updated model features a background photo of a galaxy upon which the many factors influencing identity are printed, capturing the vastness of the project of identity and complex, dynamic and interrelatedness of the factors that contribute to it.
Summary of Theoretical Assumptions

As newly introduced ways of thinking, the generators of both culturally sustaining pedagogy and the intersectional model of multiracial identity have acknowledged the potential for the stances to influence future theoretical and applied academic efforts. The authors also call for the taking up of these stances as a necessary part of the refinement processes as researchers “continue to think through the promises and challenges posed” by such ways of thinking (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 96). In part, this dissertation is a response to these requests.

The educationally-based frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy and the intersectional model of multiracial identity provide a structure for the thinking that will be engaged throughout this project. The following assumptions (and brief explanations of each) compose the theoretical foundations this work rests upon:

*When considering a group of learners, it is necessary to view the group as an evolving versus static entity by considering both “heritage” and “contemporary” practices of the community (Paris, 2012)*

The concept of biraciality is an evolving one. Only twice in the decennially collected history of the US Census have individuals with more than one racial background not been forced to choose an acknowledgement of just one. As considerations of biraciality have changed both among those who could claim such an identity and among those for whom the diversity of their racial heritage is less easily traced, it is vital that these evolutions in perspective be considered. To attempt to understand the contemporary practices of individuals within the biracial community, it is important to also have an understanding of community practices of the past.
Cultural pluralism should be understood and subsequently ‘perpetuated and fostered’ in both ‘traditional and evolving’ ways (Paris, 2012)

An understanding of the racial identities that contribute to a culturally pluralistic society necessitates a consideration of identity practices and their influences. While some of these practices are seemingly obvious and observable, others show up in nuanced, particular details. Regardless of how they appear, these practices must be attended to within sociohistorical contexts that give respect both to traditional and contemporary practices.

Racial identity choices of biracial individuals—none of which are more legitimate than any others—are influenced in different and complex ways by a variety of factors resulting in the growth and expansion of racial identity as new experiences and situations are encountered (Wijeyesinghe, 2014).

This project is much less concerned with the processes involved in developing racial identity, in deference to the ways in which those identities become legible within educational contexts. Given this, an assumption of the validity of any racial identity adopted by a biracial individual is paramount. Further, these identities must be understood in relation to their contexts; a biracial individual’s identity influences the ways in which she understands her educational surroundings as that surrounding simultaneously influences the ways in which she understands herself. Given acknowledgement of this dialogic relationship coupled with an awareness that the surroundings within which one is found continually change, it is thus expected that an individual’s understanding of herself will also evolve with novel encounters.

Limitations and Opportunities

As with any research endeavor, there are limitations to this study. This dissertation is theoretical in nature, and thus its final product is a work in progress. This single document cannot
encompass both the theoretical and the applied aspects of this work, and as such, once this framework is mobilized in the completion of empirical works considering biracial individuals within educational spaces, it may be that details need to be rethought or expanded upon. I look forward to this equally challenging and rewarding work.

Some may consider a limitation of this study to be the restrictive way in which I use the term biracial to refer to individuals with one Black and one White parent as other bi- and multiracial individuals are effectively excluded from consideration. I argue, rather, that this distinction allows for a more complete consideration of this particular racial population.

Individuals’ understandings of themselves (along with the ways in which they are understood by others) cannot be disassociated from the socio-historical contexts within which they develop.

Additionally, as biraciality has traditionally been conflated into Blackness, this study helps to break down the monolithic perceptions of Black America that are often portrayed both in academic literature and in popular discourses.

In this study, I limit the scope to the United States. Though mixed-race individuals make up portions of any racially pluralistic society across the globe, race relations between Blacks and Whites have been shaped in unique ways in the US. I draw upon the particularities of the racialized aspects of American society to inform the work I conduct as a part of this dissertation.

While this delineation allows me to focus my work in important ways, that limitation should not disallow it from being able to serve as a consideration (albeit likely an illustrative reference point rather than a parallel comparison) in other contexts.

Among the opportunities made possible by this dissertation, one is its contribution to the growing literature on multiracial topics. Particularly in the age in which the first biracial Black American is serving as president and when the option for Americans to ‘officially’ identify
themselves as belonging to more than one race is younger than the average high school student, issues around multiracial identity are timely and demand attention.

Another opportunity this dissertation presents is a shift from the positioning of biracial identity itself as the primary research consideration toward an inquiry into what biracial identity means inside of educational contexts. Moving the conversation from how and why does one identify in a particular way to how that identification affects one’s ability to navigate and find a place in educational settings provides opportunities for educational practitioners to apply the understandings that have been generated around multiracial identity. As our multicultural nation continues to diversify, the situated and complex functionalities of our identities become much more important than the words by which we choose to name them.

The complimentary use of the culturally sustaining pedagogy and intersectional model of multiracial identity frameworks also provide an opportunity. The ultimate purpose of this work is not to create a completely new theoretical framework, but rather to fill existing gaps within each of these guiding frameworks. In the concluding remarks of each article, the authors (Paris & Alim, 2014; Jones & Wijeyesinghe, 2011) raise a call for researchers to continue to tease out and respond to the ideas they present. Paris’ CSP is expressly concerned with classroom spaces that are multicultural and multilingual in composition. Within this space, he does not, however, directly address the needs of biracial individuals in particular. This work has the opportunity to fill that theoretical gap. Wijeyesinghe’s IMMI provides a framework for thinking about biracial individuals in a non-marginalizing way. In their chapter, Jones and Wijeyesinghe begin to discuss how this framework can begin to inform classroom spaces. They do so, however, with acknowledgement that they are only beginning the conversation and that their treatment is limited to the higher education setting. This dissertation has the opportunity to respond to these
identified gaps by continuing the conversation of the relationship between identity and educational experiences and by bringing that discussion to the K-12 setting.

Summary

In this chapter I have provided an introduction to the work presented in this theoretical dissertation in which I offer an approach for educators and educational researchers seeking to work with biracial individuals. I present the research questions that guide this study along with an explanation of terms that are central to the work. Upon outlining the frameworks that I rest upon in organizing the work and approaching the questions posed, I also indicate the specific ways in which these frameworks influence this study. I conclude with potential limitations and likely opportunities of the study.

Organization of Study

The first chapter of this theoretical dissertation has introduced the work, providing the study’s significance and the necessity of the establishment of a biracial identity-centered framework given the opportunities available for expanding current educational work in the social justice realm. Chapter two features a literature review that lays the foundation for answering the first overarching research question: How are biracial identities currently being engaged, interrogated, and encouraged to develop in educational spaces? In chapter three, the methodological decisions I have made in the process of theorizing this new approach are outlined. Chapter four builds upon the foundation laid in chapter two and reports an analysis of examples of experiences of biracial individuals within educational spaces. The final chapter provides a discussion of the results presented in chapter four and a conclusion to the study while offering potential future directions for the application of this work.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A social justice orientation to education makes the demand that all students are given a maximized opportunity to succeed in their academic pursuits. A necessary component of a socially just educational setting is that members of the educational community are allowed and encouraged to engage in critical evaluation of the setting and in critical introspection of oneself (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007). While each biracial individual being educated in the United States is sure to have a different and unique experience, this literature review will present support of generalizations that can be made about the degree to which biracial individuals are holistically engaged within educational spaces. Furthermore, a gap in the literature will be revealed, indicating that the translation of a focus on the identity practices of biracial individuals into an application of these understandings to educational spaces in a way that encourages holistic engagement are lacking in prevalence.

The content of this literature review includes an orientation to the socio-historical context that is necessary for understanding Black-White biraciality in America; an overview of research related to the topic of biraciality in educational spaces; support for the use of the data sources utilized in this study; and a conclusion tying together the main points drawn from the reviewed works. The literature gathered for this review was obtained primarily from university library databases including digital collections of academic journal publications and doctoral
dissertations. Publicly available search engines including Google and Google Scholar were also consulted.

**A Brief History of Biraciality in the United States**

Contestations concerning the humanity of Black people in the United States have been in place since they were brought to this country and enslaved by White, European Americans who colonized these lands. Kant (1775/1997), Hegel (1822/1997) and Hume (1885) are among respected intellectuals of the time who provided ‘data’ that served as ‘scientific’ explanation of the Black person’s inferiority. Though the biological foundation of race has long been disputed, the fact that it is socially constructed and impacts our daily lives in any given number of ways allows the concept to live on as a reality (West, 1993/2001). In the US, the social construction of race is tied to the politics of being Black or White, identities that are placed at opposite ends of a dichotomy. A two-fold function of these racial politics dictates that, one, White people to not have to claim a race and, two, anyone deemed non-White is required to make such a claim.

The history of biracial individuals in the United States is intertwined with the one drop rule. This application of the concept of hypodescent automatically places persons with mixed racial ancestry in the category of the race with the least cultural or socio-political capital. The phrase ‘one drop rule’ comes from the colloquial phrase, “It only takes one drop of Black blood to make someone Black.” This rule has been played out on America’s legal and social stages over the past three centuries and continues to carry weight though it is no longer a legally sanctioned order. The origins of the one drop rule are fueled by the efforts of Whites to oppress and disenfranchise Blacks. Many of the first biracial Americans were born as a result of the rapes of enslaved mistresses by their enslavers. It was imperative for the system of slavery to be upheld that the White fathers be released from any responsibility for these offspring and thus, the children were racially categorized along with their enslaved Black mothers. The socially
dominant narrative that biracial children simply could not be successfully absorbed into the White world was thus born. This narrative served to reinforce the ideology behind this rule of hypodescent and the image of the ‘tragic mulatto,’ the biracial individual that will be equally unable to find solace in her White heritage as in her Black background (Hickman, 1999).

Not limited to biracial individuals, the recently emerged multiracial movement pushes back against some of these ideals that have characterized the United States’ biracial population for centuries now. After the Loving vs. Virginia US Supreme Court case ruled upon in 1967 established the legalization of interracial marriage, families of multiracial children and multiracial individuals began to organize in a grassroots manner, forming support groups and more formal non-profit organizations throughout the country beginning in the late 1970s and continuing into the early 1990s (Wardle, 2013). Many of the issues considered by these groups were concerned with the day-to-day well-being of multiracial families and children, but some had political goals in mind, such as the revision of the US Census to allow for either a ‘multiracial’ or a ‘check all that apply’ racial option on the document (Douglass, 2003). Though the check all that apply option prevailed and was introduced on the 2000 US Census, factions within the movement had opposing ideologies about which option was more appropriate, and there is not a universal consensus as to whether a collective multiracial identity is an attainable or desirable goal (Douglass, 2003). (The movement also experienced, and continues to experience, opposition from those outside of the movement, see Wardle, 2013.) What cannot be argued, however, is that the population of people living in America who chose to identify in this way is sizeable. The 6.8 million ‘two or more races’ population according to the 2000 Census grew to 9 million by 2010. This population represents both the fastest growing racial population and the youngest (Jones & Bullock, 2012). As this population continues to grow and to define itself, Black-White biracial individuals remain an important part of the conversation as they make up the largest combination
of two or more races selected both in 2000 and 2010 (Jones & Bullock, 2012). A juxtaposition of the continued prevalence of individuals in the United States with one Black and one White parent with the lack of academic literature dedicated to the needs of this population supports the topic and objectives of this dissertation. As schools can represent a microcosm of the nation at-large, educational contexts are a worthy starting place for this discussion that has begun to be taken up and will be reviewed in the following sections.

Biracial Individuals in Educational Contexts

In this section of the literature review, I present findings shared by scholars from within the educational field as well as those whose works are sociological or psychological in nature. As the focus of this dissertation pertains to educational spaces in particular, I have excluded from this review examples that discuss biraciality in general or outside of the context of schooling and other educational experiences. This review also focuses on empirical pieces that make claims based upon the review of a range of data types. The majority of the literature reviewed focuses on biracial individuals with Black and White racial ancestry in particular, though some examples attend to mixed-race individuals without limitation to any specific racial ancestry. I first cover the ground of studies conducted within educational contexts, highlighting the lack of focus on the relationship between the biracial individual and the educational space within which she or he is being contextualized. I then move to a review of studies conducted within educational contexts that give more focus to this relationship but are lacking on the front of ‘holistic engagement’ as referenced in the key terms in chapter one.

Educational spaces in context only.

A number of the studies focusing on the experiences of biracial individuals discuss those experiences in terms of school or other educational settings. However, a significant portion of these works are primarily concerned with the identity development process of biracial individuals
without directly linking the nature of that identity development to the contexts within which they are developed. I discuss here examples falling within this category that were conducted in K-12 settings before detailing those with a post-secondary context.

In their piece drawing data from interviews with two Black-White biracial college students, Gillem, Coh and Throne (2001) shared the different patterns of identification exhibited by the participants. Whereas one student fiercely insisted on her biracial identity, the other student preferred a monoracial Black identity. The authors discussed the ways in which their social contexts (including school) influenced these decisions, but such educational spaces served solely as a backdrop providing the scenery in front of which the identity development occurred. Similarly, Wallace’s (1997) dissertation considered the ethnoracial identity development of biracial students with a range of backgrounds, honing in on their navigation of what she terms ‘cultural and ethnoracial borders and boundaries.’ Again, though the participants were high school and college students, their educationally-based experiences were only mentioned in relation to how these experiences influenced the students’ personal identities. Discussion of how the identities affected the educational experiences was not a major focus.

Interaction with peers within educational spaces is a common thread among these types of studies. Both Herman (2009a) and Khanna and Johnson (2010) analyzed data that discussed the school experiences of multiracial and biracial students. In each case, the participants’ social interactions with their peers were considered, though a conceptualization of how the students’ interactions could affect the educationally-based aspects of their lives was not. Herman (2009a) administered a survey to just over 10,000 students in seven public high schools in California and Wisconsin to gather information comparing identity and school experiences of multiracial students to those of their monoracial peers. Though the school experiences of her participants provided the information necessary for Herman’s analysis, only the social aspects of schooling...
were considered. The only survey item reported that dealt marginally with educational experiences asked respondents to predict how their own race would likely be identified by their classmates. Herman ultimately found that peer interaction did have a relationship with the identity patterns of biracial students as did Khanna and Johnson (2010) in a qualitative study published the following year.

Khanna and Johnson (2010) interrogated the concept of “passing,” a term typically used to describe the social choice of fair-skinned Black Americans to present themselves and to assimilate into society as White. In this case, however, the authors employed the term to refer to the choices of Black-White biracial individuals to present themselves as Black and to downplay or disassociate from their White racial backgrounds. Through analysis of data collected from 40 participants via semi-structured interviews, the authors found school contexts to be a highly influential factor in the participants’ racial identification decisions, but only delved into the social aspects of this influence. They concluded that responses and reactions received from peers in school settings dictated the behavioral choices the participants made in seeking to most effectively perform the racial choice they had made for themselves (e.g. by modifying of one’s hair style, using particular language, and/or purposeful affiliation with certain social groups). As with Herman’s (2009a) study, though the social encounters with peers were found to be particularly influential of the ways in which the multiracial individual understood her or himself, the level of analysis did not include the contextualized circumstances of that interaction.

Chilungu (2006) considered factors that influenced a sample of 107 Black-White biracial students to go to college. Using survey and interview data, Chilungu found that the participants reported feeling pressure when at school to pick a race and that some of the students’ self-understandings of race directly impacted their decision to attend college. Though subsections of the dissertation address school issues, the varied aspects of the setting of school itself are not
highlighted. Rather, school is offered either as a place where students are pressured to pick one race over another or (once they have the choice as to which institution of higher education to attend) a place where they can find the racial diversity they were denied in previous schooling experiences. Roberts (2003) took a similar look at the experiences of biracial students in college, but with a gendered lens. Interested in considering how biracial individuals navigated peer groups and campus organization involvement in regards to their racial identity, Roberts interviewed 22 Black-White biracial students at a Southeastern university. Her conclusions indicated that strategies for the communication of racial self-identifies were likely to be different in biracial men than in biracial women, largely because of the likelihood of receiving validation of their choices from peers. The bigger picture of college as an academic center in addition to its being a social space, however, was not considered.

Johnson (2005) and Guillaume (2012) also conducted studies in the higher education sphere, considering more specifically biracial individuals’ participation in college activities. Johnson’s (2005) guiding research question was, “how do biracial college students see themselves as racial beings?” (29). To respond to this question, he conducted a case-study analysis given the input of four participants. Johnson noted that his participants’ racial self-understandings were influenced both by their pre-college experiences and by their interactions with peers, participation with campus groups and their perceptions of the ways in which they were viewed by faculty and staff. The impacts of these interactions and perceptions were related back to racial identity, but not to other markers of identification as a college student. Guillaume (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study in which responses to an identity inventory and participation in a focus group were analyzed. An overall focus to the study was to consider how college environments affected racial identity development and the degree to which growth in the area of identity development was a by-product of the postsecondary environment. Similar to
Johnson’s findings, Guillaume found that while the amount of time a student had spent in postsecondary environments did not have a statistically significant effect on her or his racial identity, involvement in campus activities was more likely to play a role in this development. Also similar to Johnson’s report, Guillaume’s mentions of educational spaces were directly linked to racial identity development in particular and not to more broad aspects of one’s student experience.

Of the literature reviewed, Hyman’s (2010) commentary about multiracial college students most closely approaches an integrated consideration of both the educational context and experiences themselves and the nature of identity development. After providing background in the form of a synthesis of current research and an autobiographical narrative of her own experiences as Biracial adolescent, focusing mainly on the evolution of her racial identification practices, Hyman gave a call to student affairs practitioners. Though her perspective is still largely focused on identity, she makes application suggestions for working with multiracial students on college campuses and also suggests lines of inquiry to be considered by researchers in the higher education field. Across her input, Hyman encourages practitioners and researchers to move beyond the ‘surface-level’ issues associated with multiracial college students; as these highlighted examples of available literature have shown, it appears that the surface-level issues may be a consideration that is limited to identity development alone. In the following examples, authors move beyond a discrete focus on identity to include considerations of the broad reaching educational context as well.

**Educationally contextualized multiracial identities.**

Several of the works reviewed that took up a focus on biracial individuals within educational spaces dealt more directly with the educational contexts themselves. However, in many of these
examples, the consideration of the educational environment did not feature along with it a holistic approach to understanding the individuals at the heart of the study.

Educational spaces are traditionally defined by places where teachers teach and students learn. Several studies inquire about the interaction between the school setting at-large, educational practitioners and multiracial individuals. Utilizing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Cheng and Klugman (2010) quantitatively analyzed relationships between the proportion of White or Black students within a school and school attachment of biracial individuals. Statistically speaking, the authors found there to be little influence of the schools’ racial composition upon the expressed school attachment of Black-White biracial students. Further, though biracial students typically displayed less school attachment than their monoracial peers, the differences were generally small. In working with counselors and social workers employed within schools, Page (2002) inquired about how these ‘helping professionals’ understood their knowledge of, attitudes about and expectations for working with biracial children. In their interviews, the participants cited concerns including “lack of training, real-life experiences, awareness of comfort with identity, and acceptance of biracial children by others” (iv). Page found that these concerns were primarily focused on the practitioners’ own shortcomings in the professional relationships they had with biracial students; the practitioners had more concern about their personal abilities to meet the needs of this population than about the well-being of biracial students in general. Neither of these studies drew upon narrative input from biracial individual to provide support for the other data forms used or to include a firsthand perspective of the population for whom the implications of the work is most impactful.

Based upon a review of the literature, Cucino (2009) drafted a handbook for parents and teachers raising and working with multiracial and biracial children. Though the handbook was
created in response to the lack of information found available to teachers and parents falling within these categories, most of the educational suggestions offered do not recommend interaction with or input from the students as agents who are not only influenced by their educational contexts, but are also influencing of them. For example, the suggestions included to “launch a school mentorship program that targets at-risk minority students, with a special emphasis on marketing to the multiracial population” and to “increase multicultural activism and visibility on campus through a central hub or center specifically for those representing a blend of different cultures” (p. 40, 41). Many of the suggestions that more directly involved the students themselves also include subtly (or overtly) negative language such as “facilitate a confidential conversation with students to discuss concerns” and “offer books and material on identity development to conflicted biracial students” (p. 41). Though directly related to educational practitioners and school settings, these examples fall short of presenting biracial students as an impactful component of the educational spaces within which their experiences were contextualized.

Curriculum constitutes a large component of what is understood to be education. As such, curricular content and approaches to its delivery are the subjects of several of the pieces reviewed. Though her sample specifically excluded Black-White biracial individuals, Cruz-Janzen’s (1999) interview-based study revealed a common theme that biracial young adults reflectively lamented not having been exposed to K-12 curricular examples that allowed them to learn about Americans who shared similar racial identifications. As a result of repeated negative experiences around their biraciality in schools, the 10-person participant cohort displayed a general and “clear lack of trust” toward schools and teachers (p. 7). In her conclusion, Cruz-Janzen offered that the implementation of new curricula that is “truly multicultural, inclusive, and humane” will push the K-12 world toward the creation of a space that allows multiracial students
to feel welcomed and supported. In a complementary examination of the relationship between
the experiences of biracial individuals and school curriculum, Kight (2009) worked with six
biracial elementary school students and their parents to understand the degree to which the school
curriculum met their needs. Kight found that, though they were able to be academically
successful (as measured by standardized tests) as a result of the teaching they received, her
participants were subjected to a curriculum that was notably lacking in the visibility of biracial
individuals which affected the participants’ self-images. Even more so than Cruz-Janzen’s,
Kight’s concluding suggestions are focused primarily on adjustments that need to be made to the
curriculum and to the process of teacher preparation (i.e. educators should be required to learn
about biracial individuals in their trainings and administrators should evaluate teachers by their
ability to effectively teach biracial individuals). However, again, direct links between
recommendations she makes such as a push for the establishment of support groups for biracial
students, an option likely to tend to the whole child, and the school experience at large are not
offered. In another example, Bradley (2011) conducts an analysis of 30 ‘high-quality’ children’s
books, ten each that feature White, Black and biracial characters. Her findings indicated that, in
comparison to the others, the biracial books showed the least variety in themes and plots, and that
little range in characterization was featured in the Black and biracial characters. While each of
these studies provides information that is helpful to better understanding the representation of
biracial individuals within school curriculum and materials, they do not help practitioners to
bridge this understanding to ways in which they can engage their biracial students holistically as
individuals.

Moving beyond the curriculum, other studies focused on the learning outcomes
associated with it. In another consideration of her survey data gathered from approximately
10,000 high school students in California and Wisconsin, Herman (2009b) studied differences in
academic achievement based upon race, adding biracial individuals to the racial achievement gap disparity conversation. Herman’s data showed that the grade point averages (GPAs) of Black-White biracial students were statistically significantly lower than their White counterparts, and higher (though not significantly so) than their Black peers. In testing a hypothesis that students with biracial ancestry whose chosen racial identity was monoracially Black would have lower grades than those who self-identify as White, Herman found her hypothesis to be supported by the data. Biracial students self-identifying as Black reported GPAs .29 units lower than those who identified as White, a statistically significant difference. Further, she found these conclusions to hold when controlling for demographics such as socioeconomic status, school characteristics and prior grades. Because her data was exclusively quantitative in nature, Herman’s biracial participants did not have the opportunity to provide further explanation of these interesting findings, thus limiting their voices from being a part of the conversations had about them. In an experimental setting, Gaither, Corriveau, Ambady, Chen, Harris and Sommers (2014) observed the preferences of 246 native English speaking children aged 3-8 to learn from racially similar and dissimilar peers. After being shown a video of older children of different races demonstrating different ways to use a novel object, participants were asked how they would use the object. The researchers’ analyses were based upon the race of the participant and the race of the demonstrator whose instruction they followed. The authors found the in-group preferences of biracial children to be contextually based noting that “biracial children can identify more easily with racial minority informants than do monoracial minorities and just as easily with White informants as do monoracial White children in an experimental setting” (p. 2311). The researchers found biracial children to be flexible in identifying with ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ status racial groups, a revelation that can potentially be applied to an understanding of how biracial
students navigate their educational experiences from holistic perspective, but this strand of the work was not taken up here.

Both Campbell and Eggerling (2006) and Csizmadia and Ispa (2014) discuss psychological components of the schooling experience. Each study employed quantitative methods to analyze the results gathered from surveys inquiring about multiracial students’ psychological well-being. Campbell and Eggerling (2006) utilized data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to compare the multiracial adolescents’ self-reported psychological outcomes (‘depression, seriously considering suicide, feeling socially accepted, feeling close to others at school, and participating in extracurricular activities’) to those of their monoracial peers (p. 147). The authors found that multiracial students experienced significantly more negative outcomes than their White peers, but not more than their monoracial minority counterparts. Utilizing data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort administered to 293 parents and teachers of Black-White biracial children, Csizmadia and Ispa (2014) investigated the relationship between the racial assignment given to the child by her or his parent and the teacher report of the child’s likelihood of displaying internalizing (e.g. ‘social withdrawal, depression, anxiety and somatization’) or externalizing (‘aggression, disruption, opposition, and impulsivity/hyperactivity’) behaviors (p. 160). The authors found that children whose parents marked their race as monoracial were noted by teachers to exhibit higher levels of ‘acting out’ behaviors than those who were marked as biracial. Though this was not found to be the case for internalizing behaviors, the authors hypothesized that this finding could be related to the amount or type of socialization that parents engage in with their children, a construct for which the measure of how the parents named their children’s race served as a proxy. While each of these reports considers the context of school to be an important feature of the work (i.e. each poses questions about how the students are interacting with their school environments), neither
incorporates (or has the opportunity to incorporate based upon the exclusively quantitative data sources) student voice and the researchers are left to make assumptions about how to interpret the quantitative findings in lieu of any extended narrative input from the study informants. Though the studies reviewed here fall short of considering the individuality of the participants in terms of their racial self-understandings, the following studies move toward understanding the biracial participants as whole, complete persons with developed identities.

**Toward a holistic incorporation of biracial individuals.**

A limited number of the pieces reviewed here trended toward a holistic incorporation of biracial individuals in the research process and in the resulting conclusions. These examples fit loosely into two groups: those focusing on the approaches of educational practitioners and those related to school activities.

Harris (2002) surveyed school counselors across the country about their perceptions of biracial students, resulting in his insistence upon a critical interrogation of the structures that make it necessary for a holistic approach to biraciality in school settings to be actively sought out as such approaches are not naturally occurring within dominant societal narratives. Throughout the article, Harris maintained a decidedly positive orientation to biracial identity stating “regardless of race or ethnicity, when biracial children are raised in a nurturing environment with psychologically and emotionally involved parents, they can be expected to acquire stability and cohesiveness of the self, and those attributes intimately associated with healthy self-structure” (121). Having established this position, Harris then noted that the origin of many of the influences that negatively affect the otherwise positive self-identification of biracial students can be located in society rather than within multiracial individuals themselves. He noted that counselors working in schools with an “actively promoted cultural diversity and awareness program” had more accurate perceptions about biracial students (125). This is likely due to the
fact that these professionals have had the opportunity to consider the interplay between messages sent about biracial students by mainstream society and the racialized beliefs expressed by biracial students themselves.

Dutro, Kazemi and Balf (2005) reflect on an experience they shared as educators in a fourth/fifth grade classroom, resulting in their assertion of the promise associated with facilitating “critical literacy projects” within the classroom. The authors urged teachers to be particularly conscious of naturally occurring classroom conversations that can be transformed into critical literacy projects in which students interrogate how they came to hold understandings that they take for granted. The authors described critical literacy projects as “inherently political, reflecting, revealing, and, potentially, challenging power relations in specific contexts such as classrooms and the wider society” (98). In the example they provided, some multiracial students’ racial identities were called into question when the visual representations they created to express their heritages did not match their classmates’ expectations based on the racial identities the classmates had presumptively assigned to their multiracial peers. Instead of glossing over the incident, the educators capitalized on the teachable moment and, after reflecting and planning overnight, facilitated conversations about what racial identities mean and how they have come to embody such meanings as well as who has the power and the right to name whom in terms of race. The students not only discussed the matter theoretically, they were called upon to put their new understandings into action as a part of the evolution of the critical awareness of the classroom community. This example of incorporating issues around biraciality into the classroom agenda moves beyond surface level attention and even past encouraging a critical analysis to setting expectations that actions are modified for the betterment of everyone involved. Within the space created by the teachers, the multiracial students were able to think about and display themselves as multifaceted individuals whose racial self-understandings are just one
important part of the characteristics that make them a whole. The authors’ position is in line with Johnson Connor’s (2004) study involving eight Black-White biracial female high school students with whom she engaged in a literature circle featuring works by and about biracial individuals. She found that the women universally endorsed the importance of having a safe space within which they could have introspective, collaborative discussions and access to relevant materials. Johnson Connor highlighted links between the participants’ commentary within the literature circle setting and their feelings about their experiences as students within the broader school context as well. In both of these scenarios, the authors are paying attention to how the identities of the biracial students involved are dialogically impacting and being impacted by their educational surroundings.

In the piece most reflecting of the goals of this dissertation, Fernandes (2005) sought input regarding how biracial youth and their parents perceive their schooling experiences. Through multiple interviews with the participants, Fernandes found there to be an overwhelming perception that teachers are generally unaware of the complex, multifaceted components of the biracial experience resulting in the educational experiences of the students being shaped in particular ways. Based on these findings, her suggestions included the need for teacher education programs to address both ‘shared’ and ‘unique’ experiences of multiracial students and their monoracial peers. She proposed the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies to assist educators in moving beyond superficial constructions of biraciality, stressing the curricular components that such an approach would necessarily entail. Reliance upon Paris’ (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy as applied here allows for a consideration of Fernandes’ suggestions that also incorporates a focus on constructing a space within which students are able to continue to interrogate, develop and maintain their racialized self-understandings.
Data Sources

The data corpus for this project did not include information collected by myself from a sample of research participants. Rather, I drew from existing narratives shared by biracial individuals.

While the processes utilized to identify the autobiographical works and the user-generated video content comprising the data corpus are included in the following chapter, here I provide a brief rationale for the use of these data sources as supported by existing literature.

Memoirs.

One source of data for this project was autobiographies written by biracial individuals. Memoirs can be considered a “heuristic tool for exploring cultural identity” (Kyle, 2000, p. 1). Further, they provide an opportunity to gain insight into the author’s thoughts and into the sociohistorical contextualization of the narrative (Cantinello, 2012). Maniam (2014) discusses the use of memoir, speaking specifically of the memoir method conceptualized by Australian scholars involving participants who writes memoirs at the researcher’s request. Though I utilized data from existing memoirs not solicited by myself, the scholarly merits of the memoir that Maniam discusses still apply. Maniam describes analysis of memoirs as an avenue for understanding a particular cultural phenomenon as it is “understood and interpreted from the participant’s point of view and not from the perspective of the researcher who was studying the cultural phenomenon” (p. 51). This view is in line with Kyle’s (2000) description of the function of an autobiography being that it “emphasizes the active, self-shaping quality of human thought and the power of stories to create and reflect on personal and cultural identity” (p. 1). These authors and others (see Smolicz, 1979; Smolicz & Secombe, 1981; & Maniam, 2012) support the consideration of memoirs as a component of studies of identity given that autobiographical writing provides a window into an individual’s personal system for understanding themselves and the world. As this
type of understanding is a major goal of this project, this form of data is a particularly appropriate inclusion.

**User-generated video content.**

Social media is a growing mode of communication that transcends any specific marker of identity and national borders as well. YouTube is a video-sharing platform that allows users to post and view videos to the website that is free to access. In 2012, approximately 800 million users viewed about 4 billion videos daily and uploaded around 60 hours of video every minute (YouTube, 2012). By 2014, these statistics had grown to over 1 billion users uploading 300 hours of video per minute (YouTube, 2015). Giglietto, Rossi and Bennato (2012) note that video content shared via the YouTube platform is “a trace of a social behavior, a way for accessing meanings of a community” (151). In the context of this study, the videos posted by and about biracial individuals provide a mapping of the range of the community composed by these individuals within the YouTube context. Blythe and Cairns (2009) asserted that researchers beginning to utilize data available in YouTube videos were taking advantage of “unprecedented access to new forms of primary data” (1). As confirmed by the statistics noted above, there is a plentitude of data available via this platform, thus, guidelines for its use must also be considered.

As increasing numbers of researchers are utilizing YouTube as a field from which to sow data, Berger (2012) argues for the use of such publicly available data to be considered ethical as long as the creators/uploaders are properly referenced.

Both memoirs and user-generated video content constitute legitimate and substantive data sources. By focusing on data sources whose presentations are not mediated by myself as a researcher, I am securing myself the opportunity to interact with data that has not been influenced by my own subjectivity as an individual. As discussed in the next chapter, I take steps to be mindful of the ways in which my positionality affects the analysis of this data, however. The
recent influx of memoirs written by biracial individuals (for instance, eight of the twelve memoirs included in the corpus were published within the last decade), and the timely popularity of the ‘Mixed Girl Tag’ (explained in further detail in the following chapter) make each of these data source types distinctly useful components of this project.

Conclusions

The field of literature focusing on multiracial individuals is expanding and rightfully so given this population’s uniquely youthful distinction the growth it is seeing across the country. As shown here, there are a growing number of works that consider the experiences of biracial individuals as students within K-12 and postsecondary schooling settings. However, in many of these cases, the school setting serves as little more than an avenue for identifying research participants. Though the titles of many of the works reviewed gave the impression that the complexities of the relationship between biracial and multiracial students and their educational contexts will be addressed (e.g. “Other”: Biracial students in the college environment, “Negotiating Black-and-White biracial identities in a university setting”), this was not often the case. While the works falling into this category provide useful information about the nature of the development of biracial identity and helped to assess the advantages and shortcomings of various biracial identity models, they do not directly contribute to the body of work seeking to operationalize the resulting understandings about biracial identity into a form that can facilitate the holistic engagement of biracial individuals in educational spaces.

This extensive literature review has revealed an existing gap in the literature focusing on the experiences of biracial individuals in educational contexts. The emergence of ethnic studies departments at the university level in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked the precursor to the development of multicultural education (Boyle-Baise, 1999). The ethnic studies courses and programs were initially driven by goals of including silenced histories in the curriculum and
providing equitable educational access for college students of color (Banks, 1973). This work made clear the gaps in awareness in academia about the experiences and unique needs of racial minorities. These programs laid the foundation for these same concerns to be taken up in the K-12 arena. As the multicultural education movement was taking hold, Banks (1989) reminded those aligning their work with the newly developing pedagogical approach that doing so could not be limited to instituting inclusive practices within the classroom. He insisted rather that the heart of the multicultural education field centered on taking a critical stance toward the institution of education itself and pushing for reforms that would allow for equitable educational experiences for all students, giving all students the opportunity to be recognized holistically as agents of their own learning. I argue that this evolution from academic work that focuses on identifying missing information to academic work that focuses on establishing ways to apply newfound understanding to individual students is currently taking place in education research involving biracial students.

There is evidence that strides are being made in this direction. A number of the pieces reviewed here are beginning to make more direct connections between biracial identities and the educational contexts within which they are developed and observed. However, many of these examples fall short in considering the multifaceted components of individuality that are at work when studying and drawing conclusions about participants. Without such a consideration, the student is not being considered holistically, as a whole person can only be understood in sum of all of her or his parts; if this sort of analysis is not being undertaken, it is difficult to see how such efforts can encourage practitioners to holistically engage their biracial students. Other studies, as presented here, are beginning to include a consideration of biracial individuals who are positioned as active participants contributing to and drawing from their educational contexts while engaged
in identity development and to and this dissertation is an addition to this developing body of work.

Summary
The literature reviewed here sets the stage for the work to follow. Having provided an orientation to biraciality in the United States, I have contextualized the importance of a study focusing on the experiences of Black-White biracial individuals in this country. Review of existing works considering biracial and multiracial individuals in school settings revealed that many of the studies that take place in educational settings do not deal directly with the educational contexts themselves. Further, those that do engage more with the contexts often fail to consider the biracial individual as an agentive component of the work. I align the work of this dissertation with those pieces reviewed that usher the field of studies featuring biracial individuals toward an approach that assumes the participants’ wholeness as individuals. The following chapter presents the steps I take in selecting sources, collecting data and analyzing data points while keeping this goal of a holistic at the forefront.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides information about the approaches taken to addressing the guiding questions including how biracial individuals are currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces and what critical elements would mark an approach encouraging biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces. In this chapter I detail my role as a researcher in the study’s process and provide the scope of the research design. Research design components discussed include a substantiation of the chosen methodology composed of elements of grounded theory and narrative inquiry, a description of the sample and an explanation of the applied methods of document and thematic analysis. Having established a gap in educational literature that specifically addresses the needs of biracial individuals with school and other educational spaces, this chapter presents a detailed picture of the study’s organization.

A major aim of this dissertation is to put forth a theoretically-based approach with a two-fold purpose. The approach will lend itself to assisting biracial individuals and educational practitioners who work with biracial individuals to envision educational spaces as settings for holistic engagement and will also provide a foundation able to support future educationally-based empirical research considering biraciality. I focus here on biracial individuals with one Black and one White parent within contexts specific to the United States as my approach is grounded in the social history of race relations in this country in particular. While the specificity of this consideration limits the scope of the work, it also allows for a more rich and nuanced examination of the topic. Approaching the work with a social justice orientation, it is important that the data
and resulting conclusions are sufficiently contextualized and allow for interrogations of structures in place that serve to maintain stratifications within the educational system. My commitment to social justice and to engaging in research work that aligns with this commitment also serves as a caution against essentializing the group of people I am hoping will benefit from this work. As a result, though biracial identity is my primary focus, throughout the study I consider the multiple identity markers that simultaneously influence the ways one comes to understand oneself and thus to interact with one’s surroundings.

A dissertation that falls within the theoretical category of dissertation models seeks to provide a new approach or a new perspective to an existing framework for the purpose of filling a theoretical gap in a particular field (Walliman & Appleton, 2009). In her theoretical dissertation proposing a theory of living schools, Neilsen (2008) quotes a personal communication with a faculty member, Dr. Federman, who explained:

A theoretical dissertation can be explicitly and solely an exercise in theory building per se, in which novel ideas, frameworks (e.g. paradigms or worldviews), and perspectives about the nature of society and being human can be conjured, developed, constructed and delimited. In a scholarly context, such theory building involves some form of thorough review of the extant literature or discourse on the topic in question, so that the novel ideas are situated in relation to that discourse. That is, the novel theoretical constructs developed in the dissertation are built from, grounded in, or differentiated from, prior discourse on the subject. This discourse can include prior theory on the subject, as well as data previously generated through rigorous application of scientific approaches of a variety of kinds. (p.31)

Novel ideas come about in a variety of forms and fashions and through a range of approaches from the accidental to the systematic. Though my purpose here is to generate new
ideas in the form of theory, the nature of the development of such ideas prevents me from identifying a singular mode that would best lead to the desired result. The methodology employed drew from grounded theory as well as narrative inquiry. The methods utilized were thematic analysis, a form of data consideration that is appropriate for use in the development of theory (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Bryman, 2008) and document analysis. As a set of methods, thematic analysis encourages the researcher to consider the entire data corpus as patterns and contradictions are sought. Through the employment of a flexible though systematic process by which examples are coded, grouped into themes and revisited, a compilation of the observations and connections across and within themes can be produced in the form of theory. Thematic analysis is not limited to any particular framework positioning and can be applied given a variety of theoretical assumptions and within a variety of methodological structures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This course of analysis values both a classic grounded theoretical consideration in which the researcher does not begin analysis with a particular theory in mind as well as approaching the data having privileged a particular lens as I did in completing this dissertation.

Research Design

Methodology.

The methodological approach taken to responding to this dissertation’s guiding questions pulls elements from the methodologies of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Charmaz, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). An adopted methodology outlines assumptions made about the overall purpose of the research work, what qualifies as data, how the data should be interacted with, the bases of interpretation of the data and the role of the researcher. The guiding principles for working with the data that were applied during this work
are described below along with their relationships to the methodologies of grounded theory and narrative inquiry.

**Purpose.**

The purpose of this work is the production of theory that will be useful to understanding the social phenomenon of biraciality and to ensuring that educational spaces are settings in which biracial individuals can thrive. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed the methodology of grounded theory as a means by which to develop theory from data. Three decades later, Strauss and Corbin (1998) identify grounded theory as one of the most “influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research when generating theory is the researcher’s principle aim” (vii). The working definition of theory applied here, in line with Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) conception, is that of theory as a general enough statement that can accommodate a range of ideas, but specific enough that it lends a particular understanding in explaining a social phenomenon. Further, in his overview of approaches to qualitative inquiry, Creswell (2007) notes that grounded theory can lend to the development of theory in particular when models and theories related to the topic are available in the literature, but are missing specific variables of interest to the research which is the case here (i.e. the consideration of biracial individuals and identities specifically within educational spaces).

While the work reported in this dissertation is in line with the purpose as outlined by these original conceptions of grounded theory, it does not adhere to the prescription of methods outlined for use. Instead, a thematic analysis is applied (a set of procedures that follows generally the grounded theory approach of identifying codes that represent patterns in the data before developing those codes into themes or categories that provide the basis of the identification of a theory). This process has also been deemed an appropriate method for generating theory (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Bryman, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2006) note that the strong link
that exists between the data and the themes when an inductive approach to thematic analysis is utilized “bears some similarity to grounded theory” (83). This application of a different set of methods could be supported by Charmaz’s (2000) conception of grounded theory that places emphasis on searching for meaning within the data rather than adhering to a strict procedural recipe. Considering the methodology of narrative inquiry, its typical product is the ‘restorying’ of the narratives shared according to a theme or element that has become apparent as part of the analysis process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); theory development is not an expressed aim of narrative inquiry.

Data.

I believe that data points appropriate to understanding social phenomena are necessarily generated by humans, but can come in a variety of forms. Thus, the data being utilized in this work include existing texts intended for use by educators working with biracial individuals and the commentary of biracial individuals themselves about their experiences within educational contexts. While grounded theory does not exclude existing documents and stories of personal experiences from its list of appropriate data sources, the commentary of biracial individuals utilized here in particular falls squarely within the realm of data sources lending themselves to narrative inquiry. Though narrative inquiry largely assumes stories to be gathered in the form of interviews, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encourage the collection of ‘field texts’ or participant stories from a variety of sources.

I contend that while data can come in the form of what is explicitly reported in the text, it can also be drawn from what is not said or only subtly hinted to in the text. Both methodologies of grounded theory and narrative inquiry support this stance. Each approach urges the researcher to consider multiple angles of the data to get at the meaning(s) it has to offer. I understand data points as representing multiple truths and not a single truth. Similarly, Charmaz’s (2000)
characterization of grounded theory departs from the classic model that places emphasis on identification of a ‘truth.’ Rather, from her more interpretivist standpoint, the goal of grounded theory is to uncover and characterize “perspectival knowledge based on the lived experiences of the participants” (O’Connor, Netting & Thomas, 2008, p. 30). Similarly, in its position that experiences are represented through stories, narrative inquiry guides one more toward thinking about the range of possible interpretations than certainties about a topic (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

In this project, I begin with a theoretical framing that guides interaction with the data. At the same time, however, the researcher holds to the importance of being open to ‘listening to’ the data express ways with which it wants or need to be interacted. Classical grounded theory cautions the researcher from applying a priori theoretical understandings to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Narrative inquiry allows for this application of theoretical understanding. Both approaches emphasize the importance of continual and revisited interaction with the data for the purpose of developing as full of an understanding of its offering as the researcher is able.

**Researcher.**

In the context of this project, I consider my role as a researcher to be to weave together and present a story (in the form of a theory) that the data can tell and support, but with the understanding that the data could also tell other stories. This understanding of my role combines components of both methodologies. Charmaz (2006) notes that a researcher utilizing grounded theory should engage in reflexive practices that position the researcher as being in conversation with the data rather than understanding it from a position outside of or apart from it; the researcher’s subjectivity is a part of the process of code and theme identification that forms the foundation of theory generation. Similarly, Clandinin and Huber (2010) note that the researcher should be reflective and honest in considering how her positionality is included in the products
yielded by data analysis; they also emphasize that the participants voices should not be lost in the researcher’s retelling of their stories. In terms of this project, one particular way in which I must be reflective as a researcher is in monitoring the influence of the pervasive ‘tragic mulatto/a narrative’ on my interpretations and writing up of the data. As previously explained, the idea marked by this phrase that biracial individuals are destined to an irreconcilable racial identity is common in discourses around biraciality that have been in place since before the turn of the twentieth century (Orbe & Strother, 1996). The dominance of this notion requires that I be consciously aware of the ways in which this narrative could influence my interaction with and interpretation of the data, as well as the ways in influences the language I choose in discussing this topic.

One aspect of typical narrative inquiry research from which I depart in this dissertation is that, given the nature of the data sources, there is not an opportunity for the development of an interactive relationship between myself and the participants in which I actively involve the participants in the inquiry process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that relationships between researchers and participants that are effectively forged during the narrative inquiry process often result in opportunities for mutual growth. Because there is no contact between the research and the participants in this study, the type of relationship described by the authors is not a realistic goal; however, I seek to involve the participants as maximally as is possible through deep consideration of their shared narratives and the contexts within which they ground those stories.

**Research Questions (With Objectives)**

This dissertation seeks to meet several objectives in regards to the goal of introducing into the multicultural education field an approach that directly addresses the needs of biracial individuals
in educational spaces. In planning this study, the following were important objectives I sought to work toward:

- Articulation of a way of thinking about educational practices that centers biracial individuals
- Complex, contextualized consideration of biraciality as it is conceived by stakeholders and put to work in educational spaces
- Foreground the voices and perceptions of biracial individuals
- Work toward drawing conclusions that go beyond descriptions of identity development process to consider ways identities are put to work within educational contexts

In addition to these objectives, the work is also guided by gaps found in the theoretical frames utilized to guide the work. Both Jones and Wijeyesinghe (2011) and Paris and Alim (2014) make calls for researchers to continue work in the areas they have identified as having critical need. In terms of CSP, the identified research questions allow for the addition of insights specific to biracial individuals. In terms of IMMI, the research questions operationalize the identity work by contextualizing it in educational spaces. These objectives and calls for further research gave rise to the broadly reaching research questions this theoretical dissertation addresses along with further clarifying sub-questions:

1. How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces?
   a. What educationally-based approaches are available to educational practitioners seeking to understand the educational experiences of biracial individuals and in what ways are these approaches beneficial and/or inadequate?
   b. What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals?
2. What are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces?
   a. How does the application of this approach contribute to/detract from current representations of biraciality within educational contexts?
   b. What opportunities/lenses/points of view does it offer?
   c. What are holistically encompassing ways educators and other educational practitioners can be encouraged to acknowledge and foster biracial individuals in educational spaces?
   d. What are holistically encompassing ways biracial individuals can be encouraged to examine and enact their self-understandings in educational spaces?

Data Source Selection

The population with which this work is concerned is comprised of biracial individuals throughout the United States of America. As previously explained, the definition of a biracial individual being utilized in this study is a person with one Black and one White parent with the Black parent’s racial identity heritage being largely limited to the US national context. This racial heritage is the only limiting factor of the population being considered. This limitation is imposed due to the nature of racial understanding in the United States that is largely based upon a socially constructed understanding of race that places Black and White at two opposite ends of the extreme (West, 1993/2001; Mills, 1997). Race is not built in this same dichotomous fashion within many other national contexts. Black persons in America whose ancestors migrated voluntarily and/or intentionally are likely to have a different worldview than those whose forefathers were brought to this country by enslavers (Greer, 2103; Berlin, 2010; Edmondson, 2006; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). By limiting the informant pool in this way, I avoid unduly flattening the likely perspectives represented in the sample by conflating the experiences of US
native Black Americans and Black Americans with other national origins. No other identity markers (e.g. geographic location, gender, age, sexuality, socioeconomic status, etc.) exclude membership to the population under study. For this study, the sample is comprised of individuals from this population who have made their experiences of biraciality available to the public.

This dissertation is theoretical in nature, and thus I engage with existing presentations that capture examples of how biraciality is engaged within educational spaces. As an outsider to the population the study considers, the questions I bring with me about the educational experiences of biracial individuals are largely informed by anecdotal personal and professional encounters and by existing academic and popular media examples. The choice of utilizing existing data instead of data solicited in the form of interviews or surveys designed explicitly for the purpose of seeking responses to the questions posed was deliberate. This methodological determination served the purpose of allowing me to gauge the degree to which experiences in educational spaces are relevant and of importance for biracial individuals as components their overall life experiences. By removing researcher influence as a potential source of reflexivity, I was able to observe an array of stable data that would not be reactive to my probing and positionality (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, by working with existing first-person accounts, I was able to access a broad range of stories, particularly in terms of geographic location and the time period during which the reported school experiences occurred.

My data corpus included a range of sources for a variety of reasons. One set of sources was texts published specifically for the use of educational practitioners working with mixed race individuals. These sources also contributed to my understanding of the ways the current discourse around biraciality is being taken up and incorporated into educational spaces and the identification of appropriate practices within them. A limitation to this set of sources was the fact that the available resources address the needs of multiracial individuals and not Black/White
biracial individuals in particular. Another data source was autobiographical works by biracial authors. These memoirs provided a window into personal reflections of biracial individuals recounting a range of life experiences including those that occurred within educational contexts. In many cases, these reflections were insightful and revealing as they included the authors’ reflective introspections and their perceptions about the behaviors of others in these contexts. A final source of data was publicly available user-generated content posted to YouTube (a video-sharing website founded in 2005) by biracial individuals. Though not contextualized in the same way as the memoirs, these (typically brief) videos showcase the users’ personal reflections and recounts of significant life experiences.

Organizing the sample

I identified academic publications and texts published for educational practitioners through a thorough search of available literature via university library search engines and the free Google Scholar search system as well as through the perusal of academic publications, in particular those published within a certain theme or special issue. The search terms utilized included, but were not limited to the following (each combined using the Boolean term AND with terms such as education, teacher education, school, learning or academic): biracial, multiracial, mixed race, mixed, interracial, mulatto, multicultural, bicultural, and biethnic. As texts were identified and reviewed using these search parameters, the included reference sections were also considered for the purpose of identifying additional potential data sources. Through this search process, five examples of educational practitioner-oriented publications were identified. One additional source (Wallace, 2004) was located, but upon review it was determined to cater more to an audience of researchers than practitioners working with biracial individuals on an everyday basis.
The memoirs included in the data corpus were identified using a number of search engines (e.g. Google, Google Books, university library engines and public library engines). Terms including biracial, multiracial, mixed race, mixed, interracial, mulatto, multicultural, bicultural, and biethnic were matched with memoir, autobiography and biography to yield search results. Additionally, websites featuring suggested reading lists were consulted (e.g. Goodreads.com [www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/memoirs-biracial-families]; Boston Public Library [www.bpl.org/research/adultbooklists/multiethnic.htm]). References from scholarly articles as well as resource lists included in texts for educational practitioners also provided suggestions for memoirs included in the corpus. After an initial set of memoirs were identified, each was reviewed to ensure the author’s racial characteristics met the limitations of the study (i.e. the author had one White parent and one US-native Black parent) and that the author was primarily discussing his or her own personal experiences as a biracial individual rather than those of an ancestor or relative. This process yielded 12 memoirs that were included in the data corpus. A list of memoirs reviewed but not used in this study are included in the appendix.

I identified video uploads utilizing the YouTube search engine and many of the same terms identified above (though not combined with the education terms). YouTube’s “related videos” tool proved a valuable resource for identifying additional video entries; after any video is selected, the YouTube application uses algorithmic input to automatically suggest twenty or so additional videos that would likely be of interest to someone viewing the initial video. This search process assisted in the identification of over 230 videos that were then reviewed more closely. Some of the videos included were in the style of a diary entry featuring a single speaker while others included pairs or small groups of speakers. Other videos were documentary-style productions featuring speakers responding to prompts posed by off-camera filmers and edited to compose a final product. A subset of the videos was composed of responses to a “Mixed Girl
Tag.” Tag videos are a popular component of YouTube culture in which a series of questions related to a particular topic are generated. As users make videos of themselves responding to the questions, they also ‘tag’ other users for whom the questions are relevant to do the same. The “Mixed Girl Tag” (sometimes de- or re-gendered as “Mixed Kid Tag” or “Mixed Guy Tag”) began circulating sometime in the middle of 2012 and users with any configuration of multiracial identity were invited to respond. A list of the questions included in the tag is provided in the appendix.

While I do not make assumptions that the data corpus presented here is exhaustive of all available examples, I am confident that the result of the sampling is representative of a range of perspectives and is appropriate given the chosen methodology and methods for analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, because its fundamental purpose is to identify and interrogate themes that span an entire corpus of data, a thematic analysis approach privileges effective, nuanced analysis of the data being considered over collection of an overabundance of data pieces.

Data Collection Procedures

After data sources were selected using the aforementioned approaches, the following procedures were enacted in the process of extracting data points from each set of sources.

Educational practitioner-directed publications.

The educational practitioner-directed publications located served primarily in addressing the first sub-question of the first research question (*What educationally-based approaches are available to educational practitioners seeking to understanding the educational experiences of biracial individuals and in what ways are these approaches beneficial and/or inadequate?*). These texts were considered to be “social facts” or artifacts that provide insight into the way understandings of a particular topic are presented and archived as a social contribution (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, p. 47). Upon the basis of the research question and sub-questions, a set of predefined
questions were identified to guide the review of each text, resulting in the extraction of data points. Bowen (2009) notes that an a priori identification of guiding questions is appropriate for document review, particularly when the analysis taking place is “supplementary to other research methods employed in the study” (p. 32). Guiding questions were identified in this manner as the purpose of the document review was to contextualize the larger setting within which this study is situated (i.e. ways in which educators are currently being guided to understand biracial individuals with whom they work) (Bowen, 2009). The guiding questions addressed the following: intended audience; format; general argument being made; proposed role of teacher/practitioner; proposed role of student; stance taken on identity and attention paid to holistic student development. These questions were translated into a recording chart (see appendix). Each text was reviewed thoroughly and particularly relevant portions of the text were read word-for-word. (Many of the texts included large sections containing information that was outside of the scope of this study that were only skimmed.) The pertinent information read/reviewed from each text was recorded on the organizational chart. Specific examples and quotes from each text that demonstrated the topics under review were collected along with notes of overall trends and patterns observed in each text.

**Memoirs.**

The memoirs were primarily utilized to respond to the second sub-question of the first research question (*What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals?*). Each memoir was read thoroughly once, at which time I made note (using sticky notes) of any mentions of experiences within educational contexts that also had some relationship to the author’s race and/or understanding of his/her race. This step was repeated to ensure information was not missed. Ultimately, 174 ‘snippets’ composed of references to experiences
had within educational spaces were identified. Finally, a paper copy of each noted snippet was made.

**User-generated video content.**

The YouTube vlogs (video weblogs/digital diary entries) and other videos identified were used primarily in response to the second sub-question of the first research question (*What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals?*). Each of the 230 videos identified through the initial search were watched. Note was made of the reported race of each of the participants’ parents and further exclusions from the sample of videos were made accordingly. Videos were removed from the data corpus in cases where one of the following occurred: the races of the parents were not stated; the parents’ identified races included races other than Black and White; the parent who was identified as Black was also identified as not being native to the US. After this additional step in sample limitation, each qualifying video was watched in its entirety (approximately 22 hours of footage). Any mention of an experience within an educational context that also had some relationship to the vlogger/speaker’s race was noted. If the user made no mention of educational contexts, the video was removed from the sample pool. Ultimately, users in 51 videos mentioned educational spaces. On a separate document including the video’s URL, a note of the timestamp at which the comment was made. 137 mentionings of educational spaces were noted. The document also included additional information about the video/video uploader including the following: video title, uploader username, upload date, number of user subscribers, number of views at time of viewing, gender of speaker, race of speaker’s mother and father, notes on other demographic information as provided (i.e. geographic location, age, grade in school, socioeconomic info). After this initial view of the entire set of videos, the verbal commentary from each of the time stamped snippets was transcribed. A paper copy of each of the snippets was printed.
Data Analysis

The collected data was considered through two complementary analytical lenses. A document analysis was applied to the data derived from the educational practitioner-directed sources while the memoir and video source data was thematically analyzed. While data from each sources informed the overall understanding of each of the other sources, the educational practitioner-directed sources were used primarily in addressing the first sub-question of the first research question (what approaches are available to educational practitioners?) while the memoirs and user-generated content served primarily to provide insight as to the second sub-question of the first research question (what can be learned from biracial individuals’ experiences?).

Document analysis.

Bowen (2009) outlines a process of analysis for working with data in the form of documents that includes three phases. The first phase involves a skimming or “superficial examination” of the data at which time pertinent content is identified and distinguished from superfluous content (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). In the second phase, the researcher conducts a “thorough examination” of the pertinent content and identifies themes that become apparent through document review or examples that are representative of pre-defined themes (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). As the documents in this study were being used to help establish an understanding of the context within which practitioners are currently being guided to understand biracial individuals within educational spaces, the latter mentioned process of identifying exemplifiers of previously-identified themes was utilized. The third and final phase of the document analysis involves interpreting the data that has been identified and categorized. Bowen notes that this is the stage at which data drawn from the documents is compiled in a way that “capture[s] the phenomenon” under study (p. 32).

The following chart details the phases of the document analysis process as applied in this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Superficial document examination</td>
<td>Skimming of documents and determining pertinent selections based upon study purpose</td>
<td>Identification of aspects of texts that illustrate how educational practitioners are directed/encouraged to engage and encourage the development of biracial individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Thorough document examination</td>
<td>Carefully reading portions identified in previous phase, making note of examples that provide insight about pre-defined guiding questions</td>
<td>Identification and recording of textual examples that illustrate responses to guiding questions (listed above) that detail the guidance provided by the text to educational practitioners working with biracial individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Interpretation of data themes</td>
<td>Considering and synthesizing identified data points in order to respond to overarching question</td>
<td>Determination of ways in which it is being suggested to practitioners that they should engage and encourage biracial individuals within educational spaces (i.e. response to research question #1a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Application of document analysis

Thematic analysis.

Several recently published articles utilize a thematic analysis approach when addressing a range of identity-related topics within the education field (see Jazvac-Martek, 2009; Hokka, Etelapelto & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Luus & Watters, 2012; Holmegaard, Ulriksen & Madsen, 2014). The authors discussed understandings of identity and its influence within educational spaces from a variety of standpoints including those of doctoral students, rising post-secondary students, teacher educators and gifted adolescents. In each study, the authors drew from Braun and Clarke’s (2006) outline of six phases of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the process of undertaking thematic analysis that begins first with becoming familiar with the data.
Particularly because they encourage the use of thematic analysis when an array of data pieces are under review, it is crucial that the researcher become comfortable with the data and give balanced attention to each piece of it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). After this phase, codes are generated to begin to label observed patterns in the data. The next three phases are concerned with organizing those codes into themes; continual review of the data in order to review and refine the themes; and eventually defining and naming the themed categories in a way that is helpful to understanding the phenomenon under study. The final phase of thematic analysis is writing up the understandings yielded by the process with the inclusion of illustrative examples that provide compelling support for the conclusions drawn by the researcher. The chart below, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006), provides an overview of the goals and purposes of each analysis phase as applied to this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Familiarization with the data</td>
<td>Reading and rereading the data, noting initial ideas</td>
<td>Development of an overall picture of how biraciality is engaged in educational spaces and begin to understand nuances of individuals’ experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code</td>
<td>Accounting for the assumptions made given the frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy and the intersectional model of multiracial identity as guides for considering the data; Identification of broad themes observable in the data that are built upon and supported by analysis of single data points; Initial development of an approach describing a perspective for holistically engaging biraciality in educational spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a “thematic map” of the analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Writing up</td>
<td>Selection of vivid, compelling examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature</td>
<td>Production of a theoretically-based approach informed by the data (i.e. response to research question #1b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Application of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) p. 87
Complement of analyses.

Each form of analysis was applied as stated to the data sources identified. While the results of each analysis was used primarily in consideration of a particular component of the first research question (how are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces?), the results of both analytical procedures were utilized to respond to the second research question (what are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces?). The results yielded by both processes were necessary to understanding with the landscape upon which the theoretically-based approach developed in response to the second research question would be applied as well as the existing facilitators of and barriers to biracial individuals encountering holistic engagement within educational spaces.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the implementation of this study, efforts were made to maintain the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from the data. The production of trustworthy reports comes from a rigorous research process. I have attempted to assure rigor throughout this research endeavor in a number of ways as described here.

As an outsider of the group being considered as the focus of this project, I began the development of trustworthiness with the process of data selection. I deliberately chose to utilize data sources that were presented on the informant’s own personal terms and not expressly for the purpose of the research being undertaken here. This afforded me the opportunity to determine if ‘experiences within educational contexts’ was a topic considered by biracial individuals to hold some importance in so much as they were included in one’s sharing about life experiences in general. To further aid in the establishment of trustworthiness, I included a range of data sources
not only in terms of format of the sharing, but also diversity within the sources in terms of the age, gender, sociohistorical context, and geographic location of the informants.

An audit trail (Morrow, 2005) is established through provision of an explicit explanation of the methods utilized and the data yielded by the collection process. In this document, I have outlined the steps taken to consider the data and provide a detailed listing of the data sources utilized. In reporting, I have included “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, 1983) of the data points under analysis by contextualizing the data sources and the snippets pulled from them. I attempt to represent the multiple layers of the data by considering what the texts explicitly state along with the unstated messages they convey.

A final metric of trustworthiness is the reflexivity of the researcher (Gasson, 2004; Patton, 2002). Throughout each phase of the work reported here, from initial brainstorming to final edits of the written report, I have assessed my positionality as a researcher and the impact of that subjectivity on the work. I have attempted to make clear acknowledgements of my influence as a researcher; while it is not a feasible, realistic or even beneficial goal to be a ‘completely objective’ researcher, I have responded, through the transparency of my reporting to Morrow’s (2005) call to “[make] one’s implicit assumptions and biases overt to self and others” (p. 254).

Advantages and Limitations of Approach

There are several advantages and limitations influenced by the approaches taken to responding to the guiding research questions. Considering the data corpus, one limitation is that the informants cannot be further consulted for clarification about the information they have reported; however, this delimitation shapes the ways in which I consider the data. With knowledge that I do not have the luxury of seeking clarifying amendments to initial data collected or of member-checking as I begin to engage in analysis, the necessity that I develop as much familiarity with the data as possible and that I thoroughly mine it for examples that both confirm and raise questions about
my conclusions becomes ever the more vital. An advantage to the work is gained in utilizing the
dual methods of document and thematic analysis. Both can be applied under a range of
methodological orientations and the inclusion of the two in tandem provides an opportunity for an
additional layer and focus of analysis.

Summary

In this chapter, I summarized the methodological approach to the study along with the methods
utilized for analysis. The research questions were restated along with commentary on the
objectives in response to which they were selected. A detailed description of the selection of data
sources (educational practitioner-directed texts; memoirs and video sources produced by biracial
individuals) was provided along with the strategies employed for identifying the particular pieces
of data utilized to formulate the data corpus. The complementary methods of document and
thematic analysis were presented and the ways in which each was taken up as a part of this study
were offered in detail. Having oriented the reader to the theoretical underpinnings for the study
and the procedures carried out in order to respond to the guiding research questions, this chapter
prepares the reader for a presentation of the data, forthcoming in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Presentation of the Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected as a part of this dissertation. The information offered here was gathered and considered using the methods of data selection and analysis outlined in the previous chapter. To begin, I revisit my role as a researcher as it pertains to interaction with the data. I present a detailed description of the sources drawn upon, providing background information about the informants whose commentary comprised the bulk of this project. I then offer a brief description of how the methods and methodology described in chapter three were applied to the data. The remainder of the chapter features a presentation of the data in response largely to the first research question: How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces? I summarize the data collected from the educational practitioner-directed texts, utilizing this information to answer the first sub-question: What educationally-based approaches are available to educational practitioners seeking to understand the educational experiences of biracial individuals and in what ways are these approaches beneficial and/or inadequate? Through the provision of ‘thick descriptions’ that contextualize the information shared in the first-person sources and point to the complex, multi-layered nature of the data points, I build a response to the second sub-question: What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals? I conclude with a summary of the information presented. These foundational pieces comprise the background necessary for the discussion to follow in chapter five.
Role of the Researcher

Embodying many identities including researcher, educator for social justice and member of an extended multiracial family, my interest in this topic is many fold. My great-grandmother was born in 1914 to a Black house girl and a White doctor in a Midwestern US city. She was put up for adoption and raised by a Black family from the same city, though she was aware growing up of her biological parentage. Throughout her 94 years of life, she only ever racially identified as Colored. In many ways, this was the only option made available to her. Though in the 1920 US Census she had the option to identify her race as “Mulatto,” by 1930 the only applicable ‘official’ racial identity option for her was “Negro.” In her everyday interactions with family and peers, my great-grandmother pridefully maintained her Colored self-identification. Considering my family’s contemporary history, the newest generation in our family line features more potential for the births of biracial children than any in the recent past. The quality of these young (and some yet unborn) family members’ future educational experiences is of utmost concern for me both as a relative and an educator. Working in an elementary school setting with a sizeable number of students having one Black and one White parent, I experienced first-hand the ways in which students were racialized by practitioners within the school. Many of my co-workers did not have a basic understanding of concepts related to biraciality, and thus the biracial students in the school were often either not discussed in terms of race (though their Black and Latin@ peers were consistently discussed in this way) or were numbered among their monoracial Black peers without any obvious critical examination or justification for this presumption. These experiences and my current and past family history have contributed to an interest in identifying ways in which biracial individuals can be holistically included in educational settings.

Because the data corpus is comprised of publicly available documents and information, as a researcher I did not have opportunity to exert influence on the information shared by the
study participants. However, given my positionality as a researcher who is both personally and professionally invested in the topic, there is always potential for my personal and professional biases to impact the study. My positionality as a researcher could have influenced the data sources that were chosen for review, though I am confident that the corpus included in analysis was varied and representative of a range of the educational experiences of biracial individuals. Additionally, my positionality likely influenced my interpretations of the data provided by the sources I chose. I have attempted to mediate potential undue influences by acknowledging and accepting that my personal experiences and beliefs will always be a component of my data analysis. Throughout the study’s process, I engaged in reflective practices allowing me to take a step back from the work and assess the degree to which my biases were influencing the analysis; this practice did not eliminate personal influence, but rather made me explicitly aware of what may have otherwise been uninterrogated influence.

Another important way in which my positionality affected the work is that I am a part of the context that I am critiquing here and I have been a part of it both as a student and as a teacher. While I seek to influence my educational environment in ways that result in positive shifts, I am also impacted by it. The composition of that environment that allows the pervasive tragic mulatto/a narrative to thrive is an important aspect to note. Though I have identified this dominant thought pattern as regrettable and doing violence to the self-understandings of biracial individuals, I, too, have been socialized in an environment in which it prevails. As Tyson (1998) warns, without an acknowledgement of the potential for this inadvertent reification of an oppressive structure, I run the risk of deconstructing a damaging narrative only to reconstruct it in ways that allow it to continue to have the detrimental influence I am seeking to avert. As a result, though I make concerted efforts throughout to consciously avoid language falling within the
realm of this discourse, I acknowledge that the circumstances of my positionality make this a difficult—and thus ever-the-more necessary—task.

**Description of the Sources**

To respond to the questions posed as the focus of this study, three sets of data sources were identified as appropriate and potentially fruitful including educational practitioner-directed publications providing approaches for working with biracial students, autobiographical works written by biracial individuals and user-generated content shared by biracial individuals. The following is a description of the sources reviewed including brief profiles of the individuals featured in the sources.

**Educational practitioner-directed texts.**

Five texts were identified using the methods described in the previous chapter. Below is a summary of the texts under review.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Intended Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3. Practitioner-Directed Text Profiles

**Memoirs.**

Twelve autobiographical texts were identified using the methods described in the previous chapter. Below is a summary of the texts reviewed along with limited information about the identity markers of each writer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Author</strong></th>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th><strong>Born</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sex</strong></th>
<th><strong>Class</strong></th>
<th><strong>Parents’ Races &amp; Marital Status</strong></th>
<th><strong>City/Cities of Growing Up</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scott Minerbrook</td>
<td><em>Divided to the Vein: A Journey into Race and Family</em> (1996)</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lower/Low Middle</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black (Divorced)</td>
<td>Chicago, IL New York, NY Norwalk, CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Matthews</td>
<td><em>Ace of Spades: A Memoir</em> (2007)</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lower/Low Middle</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black (Divorced)</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Memoir Profiles
Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Parents’ Races &amp; Marital Status</th>
<th>City/Cities of Growing Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father - White (Divorced)</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin C. Hughes</td>
<td><em>Contrast: A Biracial Man’s Journey to Desegregate His Past</em> (2012)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father - Black (Married)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Father - Black (Divorced)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father - White (Divorced)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In considering the data generated by the memoirs, it is important to make note of several aspects of the data sample. The majority of the authors were born in the 1950s and 60s (eight out of twelve authors), the majority come from home settings that did not include both parents or in which their parents were not married (eleven out of twelve authors) and the majority grew up partially or primarily along the east coast (eleven out of twelve authors), all characteristics that contextualize the authors’ sociohistorical settings in particular ways. The researcher is alerted by the Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity that provided a theoretical framework to be aware of the potential influences of these identity markers. These potential limitations are balanced by the inclusion of the user-generated content described below.
### User-generated video content.

Fifty-two YouTube videos were identified using the methods described in the previous chapter.

Below is a summary of the texts reviewed along with limited information about the identity markers of each user.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User Name</th>
<th>Title (Posting Date)</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Parents' Races</th>
<th>Additional Demographics</th>
<th>Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alexisbelon</td>
<td>If this were slavery, you'd be in the kitchen! I'm Black pt. 2] (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>18,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AleXperience</td>
<td>Mixed Guy Tag (2014)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angelique Cody</td>
<td>mixed and tagged (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Henderson</td>
<td>The mixed girl tag (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beesbeautyandstyle</td>
<td>Mixed Girl Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney Gray</td>
<td>The Mixed Girl Tag! (2012)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>105,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carmen jackson</td>
<td>Bi-Racial Discussion (with a Black Ginger) (2011)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>2,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CelestialBeautyFly</td>
<td>Mixed girl tag part 1 (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dancebarbie</td>
<td>Mixed girl tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Gray</td>
<td>BEING MULTIRACIAL DOCUMENTARY (2009)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black and White</td>
<td>13 years old</td>
<td>27,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny Lynn</td>
<td>Mixed girl tag (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Barstow</td>
<td>Bi/Racial Me (2012)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin McNeely</td>
<td>MIXED GIRL TAG! (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Name</td>
<td>Title (Posting Date)</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Parents' Races</td>
<td>Additional Demographics</td>
<td>Views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham's Natural Curls</td>
<td>TAG: Mixed Guy Tag (Mixed Girl Tag) What's it like to be Mixed / Multiracial</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother - Black</td>
<td>Father - White</td>
<td>1,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heyitsdiva</td>
<td>Mixed Girl TAG :) (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey's Curls</td>
<td>Mixed girl tag (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>77,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instantclassic282</td>
<td>My Biracial/Mixed Story...and Hair! (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>56,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ItsMsNae</td>
<td>mixed girl tag :D (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black</td>
<td>Father - White</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ItsMsNae</td>
<td>mixed people problems (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black</td>
<td>Father - White</td>
<td>1,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaila Watts</td>
<td>Mixed Girl Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keli Gagen</td>
<td>Racial Documentary &quot;Other&quot; Mixed Identity (2012)</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>(several informants)</td>
<td>Current college students</td>
<td>36,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenesha Shana</td>
<td>Mixed Girl Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black and White</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ladyethebeauty</td>
<td>Mixed Girl Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black</td>
<td>Father - White</td>
<td>36,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luhhhsettyxo</td>
<td>The mixed girl tag (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>70,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maicangirl</td>
<td>why i hated growing up mixed (2012)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>21,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Daniels</td>
<td>Mixed Girl Tag (2012)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Watson</td>
<td>Growing up biracial with a white mom ~ can u dig it? (2009)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White</td>
<td>Father - Black</td>
<td>40,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Peden</td>
<td>What Are You?: A Dialogue on Mixed Race (2009)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(several informants)</td>
<td>St. Paul, MN area college students</td>
<td>147,573</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User Name</th>
<th>Title (Posting Date)</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Parents' Races</th>
<th>Additional Demographics</th>
<th>Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Girl Gurus</td>
<td>Mixed girl problems: growing up only with my white mom (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>9,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mulattodiaries</td>
<td>mulatto diaries #107 phillip interview pt1-3 (2009)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>Grew up in NJ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>mulattodiaries</td>
<td>The mixed girl tag (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWN TV</td>
<td>Why Lenny Kravitz Doesn’t Like to Be Labeled</td>
<td>Master Class</td>
<td>Oprah Winfrey Network (2013)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayne VanBuren</td>
<td>Biracial Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>High school student</td>
<td>932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roni'scurls22</td>
<td>mixed girl tag!! (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>In early 30s</td>
<td>634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling Hudson</td>
<td>Mulatto: Mixed Race In America (2010)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>66,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TashBrianna</td>
<td>The Mixed Girl Tag (2013)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - White Father - Black</td>
<td>parents divorced</td>
<td>2,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thecasefacee</td>
<td>Mixed girl problems: being a mystery (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td>College student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>thecasefacee</td>
<td>mixed girl problems: feeling obligated (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>1,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thecasefacee</td>
<td>mixed girl problems: split personalities (2014)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother - Black Father - White</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>2,690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that, in contrast to the informants represented by the memoir sample, the vast majority of users whose commentary was included in analysis were women (48 out of 59), gendering the data in particular ways. Additionally, most of the informants either stated that they were in their teens, twenties and early thirties or physically appeared to fall within this age range (54 out of 59). Again, the theoretical framework of this study alerts the researcher to consider how the identity markers of gender and age impact the informants’ self-understandings and interactions with others, but it is important to make note of this feature of the
sample. The characteristics of informants from this data set serve as a complement to the data available in the form of autobiographies.

Applied Methods of Analysis

In the previous chapter, I described the methodology guiding the analysis and the methods utilized to glean insight from the data. Here, I detail how the methods of document analysis and thematic analysis were applied to the raw data.

**Document analysis.**

The educational practitioner-directed texts served to contextualize the study by providing information as to how school-based professionals working with biracial students are encouraged to do so. The guiding questions used to help standardize the data collection from text to text proved helpful in limiting the document review to pertinent information. In some texts, examples supporting a response to the guiding questions were obvious or easily located. Others required a more involved perusal of the document in order to make sense of the stance toward interaction with biracial students being endorsed by the authors of the text. A comparative of each of the texts and a synthesis of the information gathered across them allowed me to respond to the related research question.

**Thematic analysis.**

The bulk of the data analyzed for this dissertation were snippets pulled from the memoirs and user-generated videos presented by biracial individuals. Using guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006) on conducting inductive thematic analysis, in coding the data snippets I “read and re-read the data for any themes related to” the experience of biracial individuals within educational spaces “without paying attention to the themes that previous research on the topic may have identified” (p. 84). While exposure to and consideration of previous data certainly influenced my overall understanding of and interaction with the data, I did not rely on the themes reported by
other researchers to develop my code and theme lists. The codes identified throughout the data and presented below represent “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). The following chart chronicles the initial codes that I assigned to the data snippets as I read and re-read them. The chart also includes a brief description of each code, and a quantitative measurement of its prevalence or the number of snippet that were marked as featuring that particular code. Note that many snippets were given multiple codes, so there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the number of snippets pulled and the number of codes identified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th># obs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Self-identification</strong> Mentions of racially-based self-understandings</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong> Mentions specific to interactions with/beliefs about teachers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Quorum</strong> Mentions pertaining to the existence/visibility (or lack thereof) of racially-similar others within educational contexts</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Home vs school</strong> Juxtapositions of experiences had at school with those had at home</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Teasing</strong> Recounts of negative interactions with peers (either verbal or verbal and physical)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Friendships</strong> Mentions of interactions with peers including both platonic and romantic relationships</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Association</strong> Discussions of how one associates oneself (or not) with groups of peers and/or individuals largely on the basis of race</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Monoracial identity</strong> Racial self-naming as “Black” or “White”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Content</strong> References to curricular/instructional/academic content in which individuals were engaged or to which they were exposed</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>College</strong> References specifically to post-secondary settings, often in contrast to K-12 experiences</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Parents</strong> References to interactions with or input from parents</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Biracial identity</strong> Racial self-naming utilizing terms such as “mixed,” “biracial,” “half and half,” “half Black, half White” etc.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Perceptions of perceptions</strong> Notations of beliefs about what others believe/likely believe about the individual or about observed/experienced situations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><strong>School</strong> General mentionings about school including the way it works and educational experiences within “school” settings not otherwise coded</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>Official Records</strong> Recounts of the process of having to “officially” record one’s race</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. List and Descriptions of Emerging Code Assignments (listed in order of prevalence)
After these initial codes were identified, I searched for themes by recording the codes on individual pieces of paper and manipulating them, organizing them into ‘theme-piles’ and into arrays and maps that represented their relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process yielded initial themes, titled ‘candidate themes’ by Braun and Clarke (2006) because their inclusion in the final analysis was not yet certain. This exercise helped in identifying that the “perception of perceptions” code actually applied generally across the other codes; the snippets initially coded in this way actually informed information pertaining to each of the candidate themes. These themes were reviewed, and I considered specifically whether those identified could stand-alone or whether any themes needed to be combined or eliminated from the theme list altogether. Using Patton’s (1990) categories of ‘internal homogeneity’ and ‘external heterogeneity’ as requisites for making these judgments (i.e. the data extracts within a particular theme should be mostly similar while extracts across themes should be mostly different), I identified four themes that effectively captured the bulk of the snippets making up the data corpus, each of which also featured sub-themes that provide further characterization of the data. The chart below details the themes and the related sub-themes.
**Influenced and Influential Identities**

- Requirement of a racial identity
- Impact of educational space on identity practices
- Reading content through the lens of identity

Identities are not formed in a vacuum. The both influence and are influenced by the contexts within which they develop. As children and youth a significant amount of their formative years in educational spaces, the interaction between the characteristics of these settings (i.e. peers, adults, academic content, etc.) and the ways in which individuals come to understand themselves is an important component of understanding the educational experiences of biracial individuals.

**“School”-Driven Context**

- Extremes in identity support
- Positive and negative adult interactions
- Self-image and curricular content

Educational spaces including traditional schools and other sites featuring teaching and learning come with a range of features. Educators and curricular content are a constant among these components and each contributes in specific ways to the educational experiences of biracial individuals.

**Peer-Driven Context**

- Implications of environmental diversity
- Racially-based peer association
- Indirectly unaccepted

The interactions had with peers who co-populate educational spaces are also influential components of biracial individuals’ experiences. Regardless of the specific nature of the interactions, how biracial individuals understand and project themselves impacts those experiences.

**Home and “School:” Contextual (dis)Continuity**

- Home as the safe space
- The school act
- Spotlight on difference

For many youth, the two spaces that often provide context for the bulk of their experiences are home and school. The nature of the relationship between the two is an influential component of the ways biracial individuals conceptualize each space and how these individuals represent and understand their identities.

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Table 7. List and Description of Identified Themes and Sub-themes
In line with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) direction, during the next phase of the process I organized the data into a narrative account of what was observed, ensuring that I explained what was interesting about the particular snippets and why these components were interesting. I considered each data snippet beyond the semantic or surface level content and tended to the latent level “to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Braun and Clarke (2006) note that as a result of such an approach, “the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized” (p. 84). As I considered and wrote the narratives to portray the specifics of each theme, I also attended to the connections between the entire set of themes. In selecting data extracts that supported each theme, I chose “vivid examples” that supported the arguments being made about the experiences of biracial individuals in educational spaces. As I concluded this process of analysis, I utilized Braun and Clarke’s following guiding questions to ensure that I was conducting a rich analysis:

‘What does this theme mean?’ ‘What are the assumptions underpinning it?’ ‘What are the implications of this theme?’ ‘What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?’ ‘Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?’ and ‘What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?’ (p. 94)

Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

Guidance for educational practitioners.

As previously stated, the sources that contributed to this set of data were specifically oriented toward educators practicing in schools, classrooms and other learning spaces. While some included features that could contribute to a research-driven understanding of biraciality, most of the content was more practical than theoretical in nature. I first present a descriptive landscape of what educationally-based information is made available through these practitioner-directed
documents and follow this presentation with an analysis of the benefits and inadequacies of the available literature. In this section, I use the term multiracial instead of biracial as this umbrella term both includes biracial individuals within it and matches the language used in most of the documents.

**Approaches to information delivery.**

Four of the five of the resources reviewed provided information on working with multiracial students, not limited to working with biracial students in particular. The fifth text paired concepts useful for working with biracial children to those suggested for meeting the needs of Black children. While issues pertaining to Black-White biracial individuals often constituted a bulk of the information provided, this level of specificity was not applied to the documents as a whole.

I observed considerable range in how the information was presented and in how the arguments being made were formed and supported. Wardle’s (1999) text was presented most informally, without citations or footnotes; the informational text reads as a series of opinions based upon his and his family member’s anecdotal experiences. The most formal presentation was provided by Wardle and Cruz-Janzen (2004) in the form of a textbook that could be utilized in college-level teacher preparation program. In between, Davis (2009) presented a workbook that invites involvement of the reader through reflective activities and allows for responses to be recorded in the book, and Root and Kelley (2003) provided a comprehensive introduction to the landscape composing multiracial studies. A common content thread was examples of input from multiracial individuals themselves, indicating that this component is considered to be an important inclusion in seeking to understand the needs of multiracial students.

In addition to differences in presentation, the purposes of each text differ as well. Though each document’s title indicates that it will discuss an intersection of multiracial experiences and schooling to some extent, the degrees to which this is done is highly variational.
The texts range in focus from adding to the available general knowledge-base of needs of multiracial individuals (Root & Kelley, 2003) to providing information specifically applicable within educational settings (Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004). While Davis’ (2009) expressed intent was to encourage the reader to develop intrinsic capacities for working with multiracial students, Wright (1998) sought to combat what she saw as the often blindly accepted notion that Black and biracial kids feel negatively about their race. The variance in objectives across the text contributed to the overall organization of each document and to the range of ways in which curricular interests were taken up in them.

**Curricular incorporation and classroom-level application.**

Though the documents reviewed purported to contextualize multiracial topics within school settings, the commentary featured in many of them focused more heavily on multiracial identity than on an incorporation of the information presented into curricular content or into instructional practices. Connections to classroom application were most often provided in the form of a list of detailed suggestions. Wardle and Cruz-Janzen (2004) offered an entire chapter entitled “specific suggestions for instructional techniques” and another sub-section presenting “twenty-five recommendations for teachers, education professors, and educational leaders.” As with the school and classroom suggestions presented by Wardle (1999), many of the recommendations are related to increasing cultural competence in general and some include more specific references to multiracial students in particular. For instance, Wardle and Cruz-Janzen’s (2004) suggestions include “support healthy racial identity development,” “treat all children as unique individuals” and “don’t stereotype any of your students,” all seemingly general pieces of advice applicable by any classroom teacher (pp. 194-199). In their descriptions, however, the authors forwarded the specific needs of multiracial individuals noting, for instance, that assumptions that all students will have a monoracial identity or that issues at school are caused by the interracial nature of
home life should be avoided. The authors also provided a series of tools that could be used by practitioners to evaluate a textbook, classroom activities and materials or a teaching unit to assess the degree to which the resource is appropriate for use with multiracial students. The generalizability and practical applicability of these tools were unique to this text.

Departing from the listing suggestions format, Davis (2009) included narrative responses from a variety of individuals asked to respond to the prompt, “What suggestions and strategies do you have for educators who want to meet the needs of mixed-race students?” The informants included multiracial individuals and education professionals (some of whom also identified as multiracial), and the insights provided ranged from general recommendations to specific strategies for deployment. The presentation of this input in the form of extended narrative and without an accompanying synthesis by the author, however, made the suggestions difficult to access. Similarly, the other texts included suggestions throughout, but not in a manner that made them easily identifiable to a reader using the text as a quick reference guide.

Attention to holistic student development.

The majority of the documents primarily discussed the role of the teacher as it relates to the establishment of a welcoming and accommodating classroom space. Surprisingly, the role of the student in this process was not often addressed. The inclusion of first-hand accounts of multiracial individuals was the most common way in which their voices were a featured part of the discourse about responsibilities for creating the desired classroom environment. This fact sends the message that multiracial individuals are responsible, at least in part, for educating their teachers about how they should be educated.

Mayes, Cutri, Rogers and Montero (2007) discuss a holistic approach to multicultural education in particular. The authors insist that all students be considered as whole beings made up of physical, psychosocial, cognitive, ethical and spiritual components that must also be seen in
terms of their cultural identities. The authors indicate the importance of bridging understandings of identity and pedagogy, explaining that educators should both “honor the fact that every student is a complex person” and “design their curricula and instruction accordingly” (p. 4). Addressing one part of the educational context (the self-understandings of those who share the space) without considering the other (the content being interacted with in the space) does not provide a complete understanding of the context and, thus, cannot prepare practitioners to holistically engage students. The texts reviewed generally fell short of considering biracial students in terms of their multifaceted natures while simultaneously placing equal emphasis on the pedagogical and curricular aspects of the educational space. Such observations lead to the conclusions drawn in the following section.

Beneficial components and areas for improvement.

The five practitioner-directed texts reviewed here represent a wide array of the ways educators are being encouraged to consider their work with multiracial individuals. Similarities and differences among the set of resources have been identified. Part of the purpose of this review was to determine the sort of information that is currently available to educators seeking to meet the needs of their multiracial students. The complementary purpose is to identify the components of these documents that should be retained along with those that should be rethought as a new approach for holistically engaging biracial individuals within educational spaces is developed as a part of this dissertation.

The point for improvement most notable to me is the use of subtly negative language when referring to the unique set of needs associated with multiracial students. This subtle language contributes to the development of an overall tone to the work that is likely impactful of the way in which the consumer of the information interprets it. References to the ‘challenges,’ ‘struggles,’ ‘dilemmas’ and ‘confusion’ of multiracial individuals were often included without a
complication of these terms. In other instances, multiracial students were not presented as having agency; they were sometimes described as if identity development processes or undesirable classroom circumstances were things that happened to them rather than experiences in which they were an active, integral part. Each document included at least one such reference within its pages, and I personally have made numerous revisions to this document to remove such allusions.

Given these considerations, I understand that this subtly negative language may be a difficult inclusion to avoid, but I also understand that this may be due to the fact that the experiences of multiracial individuals in this country have been characterized with negative undertones for so long that they have become a part of the hegemonic narrative and go unchallenged. For this reason, it is particularly important to me to steer clear from this sort of presentation and to consistently send the message that biraciality is not innately abhorrent or dysfunctional in any way.

Another opportunity for improvement is the striking of a balance between simultaneously maintaining cohesion and the inclusion of a variety of voices. While it is important to highlight the variety of opinions and perspectives that multiracial individuals bring to the table, the presentation of this multitude of voices must be done in a way that allows the reader to become accustomed (and thus following along with) a particular approach or line of argument. While developing the skills necessary to work effectively with any particular group of people is no easy task, it requires a significant amount of effort on the part of the learner to become accustomed to the positionality, writing style, and line of argument of the author from whom one is learning.

This effort is further complicated when each chapter is written by a different author as is Root and Kelley’s (2003) text. Again, a balance is necessary, however, because the insight of those who are experts on specific topics is also a crucial inclusion. Some of the documents more successfully complemented diversity of voice with cohesion of overall text than did others.
With a similar need to for more balance, an acknowledgement and presentation of the multiplicity of monoracial cultures cannot be sacrificed in deference to displaying the variety that characterizes multiracial cultures. In many cases, monoracial cultures were represented in monolithic terms which served to reify the same types of overgeneralization that many of these texts are working to combat.

These issues that require reworking provide as much insight as components of the texts that are successful when considering the development of a new approach addressing how to work with biracial individuals in educational spaces. Though I pointed to the potential shortcomings above when it comes to balancing the variety and a cohesive approach, it is necessary to include the voices and perspectives of biracial individuals. The opinions and insights about biraciality that can only be offered by biracial individuals are invaluable when attempting to establish an understanding about the diverse experiences of this diverse group. The intended goal of such inclusions, however, should not be to cover all of the possible viewpoints of every unique individual whose race happens to be categorized in a particular manner.

The retention of easily accessible suggestions for action is also important. Though it is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings that make instructional practices sound, the world of teaching is in many ways a practical one that ultimately requires input on how to do and not just how to think about doing. The conversational presentation style adopted by most of the documents reviewed helps to bridge what could potentially become the theoretical/practical divide. The components described here help to provide a response to the first research question.

Learning from the educational experiences of biracial individuals
The memoirs and user-generated video content written and uploaded by biracial individuals provided a plethora of rich data for contributing to an understanding of the educational experiences of biracial individuals. Further, analysis of these data points can provide insight into
how educational practitioners can holistically engage biracial individuals. As displayed in table 7, four themes were identified through the process of thematic analysis: influenced and influential identities; “school”-driven context; peer-driven context and home and “school:” contextual (dis)continuity. Each theme is illustrated in this section through the display of pertinent and representative data extracts. The data snippets are contextualized and their relationship to the theme and sub-theme is clarified.

Before providing data extracts to support the identification of these themes, I clarify the use of two terms. First, the term “school” is used because I am considering here the vast majority of situations that fall under the umbrella of traditional schooling in which there is one or more person whose responsibility is to teach and others whose responsibilities are to learn. The scare quotes modifier is included to emphasize this delimitation: not all such teaching and learning instances are tied to an actual brick and mortar school, so while I am being more expansive than the technical definition of a school, I am also not applying such a broad understanding of the term that any life learning constitutes an educational space such that all the world is a school.

The second term requiring further explanation is (dis)continuity. As has been referenced throughout this document, there are many instances within academic and popular literature featuring remnants of the “tragic mulatto/a” image of biracial individuals that show up in subtly negative language or an assumption of a lack of agency on the part of the individual. For this reason, I seek throughout my commentary to avoid such rhetoric. I chose to modify the word continuity in the theme title instead of presenting discontinuity as the standard. Though the data reveals examples in which home and “school” experiences were complementary, there are also a number of examples of ways in which the climate of one challenged or was challenged by the other. Another intent in titling the theme in this way is to locate these challenges in the home and
educational spaces and not in the individuals themselves. Following is a detailed presentation of each theme including illustrative data excerpts from across the data corpus.

**Influenced and influential identities.**

Insights about racialized self-understanding were the most commonly observed comment type across the data set as seen in table six. This is not surprising, as an exploration of their biracial identities were, for many of the informants, the expressed purpose of their writing or video creation. These racial identities interacted with educational contexts in a number of ways. The directionality of the interaction was two-way; the informants’ identities impacted the ways they understood their educational settings at the same time as which those educational contexts impacted their self-understandings. Regardless of the specific nature of the relationship between one’s racial identity and their educational surroundings, many participants recounted feeling that it was necessary to be explicit about the racial identity choices that were made.

**Requirement of a racial identity.**

Whether or not making such a choice was the actual desire of the individual, many informants noted feeling obligated to choose and express a particular racial identity. At times the identity was chosen for them by peers or educators. At other times, the choice belonged to the individual, but choosing an option of ‘no choice’ was not viable. As David Matthews (2007) explained it, “The choice was both impossible and necessary: identify myself or have it done for me” (p. 62).

thecasefacee (2014a), a college student interest in photography and journalism, described feelings she had during high school that her racial identity must be constantly confessed:

“Meeting new people in general in high school, I always felt like I was obligated. Like, I always felt obligated that, like, one of the first three things I have to tell you about myself is that I’m mixed.” She went on to explain her sentiments: “I would be like, ‘I have to put this out here so nobody asks, so they don’t assume.’” For thecasefacee, the prospect of having her racial identity
assigned to her was motivation to preemptively disclose her mixed identity. Angela Nissel (2006) experienced what could happen when others assumed her race. Nissel sent the playground of her predominantly Black middle school into an uproar when she quietly asked a light-skinned Black classmate if one of her parents was White. Not only did the girl take offense to the question, she and other students then called into question Nissel’s claim of having a White father, denying that this was possible. Remembering having held back tears as her peers teased her about her ‘lie,’ Nissel reflectively noted that giving in to the racial expectations of her peers could have deescalated the situation. She said, “I could probably have ended it right there by falling in line behind Maureen and agreeing with the reality she had chosen to give me” (p. 69). Likely to avoid situations like this, for the face case, it was important to retain agency in her racial identification process. Others made their identification declarations out of obligation to what others wanted to hear.

His first day at a new elementary school in Baltimore of the mid 1970s, David Matthews (2007) was accosted by both Black and White schoolmates demanding that he answer the question, “What are you?” Never having been asked this before, Matthews remembered the he was initially in a state of shock and unable to say anything. At the same time, though, he said, “I had a hunch—based on their avidity—that to the question: What are you? there was a wrong answer” (p. 61). Ultimately, Matthews sat at the White table in the lunchroom and, “by the code of the cafeteria,” became White in the eyes of his peers. Matthews credited his particularly fair skin and his mild nature as a large part of his decision. Knowing that he was not automatically phenotypically read as Black and that he did not have the skills to engage in the “posturing and braggadocio” that he considered to be a necessary part of Black expression, he shared the following fear: “If I had said I was black, I would have, perforce, to spend my life convincing my own people” (p. 66). Gregory Williams (1996) had phenotypic markers and mild temperament
similar to Matthews. He had actually grown up believing he was White until he was nine-years old and moved to his father’s hometown of Muncie, Indiana. His father—who had been passing as White when the family lived in Virginia, could not hide his racial background in Muncie.

Growing up in the era of the mid 1950s, Williams was not afforded the choice of Whiteness as a racial identity. Faced with a similar cafeteria room racial declaration scenario, Williams sat at a Black table after being gestured over by a cousin. Initially met with jeering, Williams’ decision was defended by a tablemate with seniority over the group who said, “Greg is making his life less complicated. If he sat over there the white kids would find him out in a minute, and he’d be an outcast. He’s over here with us, telling them, ‘Here I am, deal with me!’ Don’t bother Greg. He’s where he belongs” (p. 192). Given the racial climate of the times and of the small town in which he lived, Williams’ only option for racial acceptance was to align with his Black peers.

Like Matthews, an option of fluidity in the form of either a mixed-race identity or a sometimes Black and sometimes White identity were not available.

Not all informants complied with the rules dictating that they choose a race and stick to its associated expectations. Scott Minerbrook (1996) recalled having cut his long curly hair, the primary signifier of his Black heritage, during his freshman year of college in 1970, explaining that he did so in order to “create a breathing space” for himself (p. 195). He felt as if he did not stand out as much and did not invite the same level of scrutiny from his peers once he removed this marker. Others had used Minerbrook’s hair to associate him with a Black identity that he considered to be an oversimplification of his racial self-understanding. Mark Whitaker (2011) expressed similar sentiments about not wanting to be overly defined by his Black heritage. He explained, “Although in 1973 the pressure to ‘self-define’ as black was in the air even at a place like George School [the Quaker boarding school he attended], I saw no reason why I should be reduced to one thing or the other, why pride in my black heritage should rule other relationships
and experiences. I didn’t want to limit my horizons” (p. 162). Both men rejected societal impositions on their personal identities in terms of race.

As Minerbrook achieved by cutting his hair, others refused strict racial categorization through affinity choices. For Kym Ragusa (2006), the label of ‘different’ was something that was uninvitingly attributed to her. Attending high school in New York city in the early 1980s, she changed the dynamic of this distinction when she embraced difference by expressing it on her own terms:

Music became a kind of home for me, especially punk and the glam rock of the early 1970s. It was music made by people who didn’t belong anywhere, people who were in between: black and white, male and female. In high school I even won a prize for an essay I wrote about the cover of David Bowie’s album Space Oddity. With my dyed hair, my thrift-shop dresses and combat boots, and the safety pins in my ears, I found a way to feel comfortable in my own skin. To stand out because I wanted to, to highlight my difference instead of trying to fade into the background, gave me a freedom I had never known. (p. 221)

In pushing back against the requirement that she define herself racially, Ragusa carved for herself another space for identity expression. The educational context of high school was the stage for her identity performance. The examples to follow illustrate other ways in which the educational context is influential of identity expression decisions.

Impact of educational space on identity practices.

The dynamic of school (i.e. social hierarchies associated with race, acceptance by peers, expectations of teacher) influenced how informants thought about themselves as racialized beings. Scott Minerbrook (1996) noted the racial and class markings of his educational setting, and thus his self-understanding. When his family relocated from New York city to a suburb in
Connecticut, Minerbrook was required to repeat an elementary school grade. Before his new classmates found this out, he had felt “superior” to “darker-skinned Negroes who spoke more slowly than I did” and to “whites who were poor” and this inwardly held claim to superiority affected the way he understood himself (p. 129). After his academic failures were found out, Minerbrook explained that he “was cast among them [by peers and teachers], and it was humiliating to be judged a failure among failures” (p. 129). He goes on to say, “I tried to assure myself that I wasn’t like them, but this snobbery and prejudice did not rescue me” (p. 129). The self-understanding that he was ‘better than’ poor White students and Black students who were more darkly complected than himself was something upon which he had relied as a comfort and an armor protecting him from negative experiences had in school. When the complicated nature of the school setting and the necessity that he exist within it and by its rules stripped him of this protection, Minerbrook was left feeling humiliated.

A number of informants discussed the impacts of interaction in educational spaces within the context of college. Each of the following informants attended predominantly White institutions, and that setting influenced the ways in which they understood and projected themselves as college students. Devin Hughes (2012) arrived on Colgate’s campus as a part of the athlete summer preparation program in the late 1980s. While most of the athletes attending the program were members of underrepresented groups, this did not disguise from him the fact that Colgate as a whole was primarily White. Growing up in Washington DC, Hughes had embraced a Black or a biracial identity, but had not identified with his White heritage. In the new setting he began to think, “Then again, part of me was white. Could I connect with that untouched half of my identity? Would I still have to carry the biracial card with me, or could I just be me?” (p. 242). While Hughes hoped the college environment would be a setting within which he could explore more fully the contours of his racial background, Stephanie Leonetti did
find this to be the case (Peden, 2009). A student at University of Minnesota, Leonetti explains that she always considered herself to be mixed, both Black and White, and that, like Hughes, she had never really identified with her “White side.” Leonetti did not find opportunity to bolster the various racial components of her identity. She explained, “Personally I haven’t felt that much of a mixed racial identity, you know. At ‘the U’ I just feel like I’m kinda looked at as, like, an outsider in my classes.” The climate of the college did not foster opportunities for Leonetti to think introspectively about the diversity of her heritage, rather the setting positioned her non-Whiteness as a more impactful identifier than any specifics of her mixed racial identity.

Those given the opportunity within the college setting to highlight their biracial heritage do not always embrace it, however. As a student at Radcliffe, Harvard’s female coordinate institution, in the early 1970s, June Cross (2007) questioned the legitimacy of a mixed-race student group. Before visiting the group, she felt bothered by the term, questioning, “Who defined ‘mixed-race’?” (p. 163). In spite of her skepticism, Cross attended a meeting out of curiosity. She stood in the back of the room and listened as students discussed their racial backgrounds and the challenges they faced on campus and in the world as mixed race individuals. She did not contribute to the conversation and when a student posed the questions, “Why should we choose? What’s so important about it?,” Cross remembered her response: “Sucking my teeth, I turned and left” (p. 164). Cross attributed her inability to identify with the members of the group to her never feeling that her Black racial identification was a choice. She considered herself to be “black by law” and held the law of the one drop rule responsible both for her lack of identity options and for her having not been raised by her White mother who feared the difficulties their interracial presence would bring to both of them (p. 164). Though the college setting was the first time that Cross was offered an opportunity to consider her racial background as being composed of more than one heritage, she did not have the desire to take it up.
Reading content through the lens of identity.

The previous examples have shown how the educational environment affected students’ understandings of themselves. Students’ identities were also influential of how they understood their educational contexts, more specifically, the curricular content with which they interacted.

At times the students’ identities resulted in a heightened interest in or awareness of the classroom material. In other recollections, informants remembered feeling unable to fully or expressively engage with the curriculum because such a display would invite speculation about their identities.

Finally, some informants expressed frustration with the fact that racial identity was a lens through which their peers insisted on viewing world and their educational experiences.

Carmen Jackson (2011) filmed an autobiography project for a college assignment. As a part of the project she responded to the prompt, ‘What is the earliest memory you have of being taught about race?’ She replied:

Well, in preschool I remember learning about the Civil Rights movement, and I remember just thinking, ‘Oh, that’s so cool!’ I wanted to be Black, you know. So I went home and, um, I remember telling my mom about what I learned and she said, ‘You’re African American.’ And I was just, like, ‘Really? Awesome!’

(laugh) But, like, I had no real connection to what that is.

Though as a preschooler Jackson did not have a firmly developed concept of race or what it meant to be Black or biracial, reflecting back on the situation as a young adult, she identifies this instance as the first lesson she was taught about race. Though the prompt did not require her to include reference to how she thought about herself, the connection between her racial identity and the content of the school lesson was important for her to note in her commentary about it. It is as if she could not, or did not want to, separate her racial identity and the educational experience because the two were tied up in one another. Devin Hughes (2012) recalled the
interconnectedness of his identities and educational experiences as well. Hughes was diagnosed with dyslexia as an elementary school student. His mother secured for him a reading tutor with whom he developed a supportive relationship. She made a comment that helped him to work through his reading challenges and beyond: “You’re not dumb—you just see the world through a unique set of lenses” (p. 115). As an adult, the phrase still stuck with him and he said,

In hindsight, my lenses weren’t just those of dyslexia, but also those of a boy from a lower class, biracial family. My lenses were those of a boy who was always around thugs and seedy people, disconnected from family. My lenses were those of a boy who felt different from everyone around him, isolated from everyone due to circumstances outside of his control. (pp. 115-6)

For Hughes, it was more than just his racial self-understanding that guided the way he interacted with both school and worldly material; he names several identity markers that impacted the way he approached learning. With support from a trusted adult to help him identify these ways of knowing as legitimate, Hughes was able to appreciate his life lessons in a different way.

In some cases, the details of one’s personal identity affected one’s interaction with classroom materials. By the time he was in the fourth grade, David Matthews (2007) was actively passing as White while in school settings. At home, his single father was actively involved in Black political movements of the 1970s. Part of the reason he chose to project himself as White at school was because his worldly experience had taught him that Black people are disenfranchised and go without. He imagined he would escape this fate by disclaiming his Blackness. Reminiscing, though, about a classroom viewing of Roots he said:

I remember Tyrone Albermarle sniggering while the teacher discussed the
infamous whipping scene (your name is Toby! Thwack! Kunte Kinte!), I wish some honky would try some Toby shit with me!—a sentiment the class endorsed

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with hoots and hollers and slapped palms. While Will and a few other white kids squirmed uneasily, I pretended to feel their unease, but was also a little bit thrilled. (p. 159)

Matthews had to keep up appearances and side with the ‘fellow’ White students who were made uncomfortable by Tyrone’s comment and the other Black students’ praise of it. He was not able to openly express that he, too, could identify with the sentiment because it would have raised questions about the Whiteness which he was committed to identifying. On the other end of the spectrum, June Cross (2007) exclusively embraced her Black identity, largely because, growing up in the 1960s, she felt it to be her only option. After she got to the Harvard campus and began to associate with other Black students, she found that they, too, had stifled public expression of interest in ‘White’ curricular content in deference to a Black allegiance. She explained:

We soon discovered the common experienced we’d all had in high school, which bound us. We had echoed the ‘power to the people!’ slogans and supported black liberation while secretly admiring the language of Shakespeare, Donne, and Shelley (or Galileo, Pythagoras, and Einstein). It wasn’t that we disagreed with the supposition that black people were oppressed in the United States, but we had found things to appreciate in the culture of our oppressors. Like Kabuki players, we had learned to change masks. Finally we formed our own tribe; the young, gifted, and black, and we celebrated with libation and dance. (p. 154)

Cross hints at the inner-conflict she felt as a high-achieving high school student, both wanting to enjoy artifacts from the dominant canon, but also understanding the vital importance of feeling and displaying solidarity with fellow Black people. Cross’s racial identity influenced her interaction with the curriculum’s offerings, at least in public forum. Upon arrival to college where she found a critical number of peers whose identities had been similarly instrumental
components of their K-12 education, Cross’s racial identity served to influence her interaction with curriculum in a different way; with the backing of a core group of supportive peers, she was able to embrace instructional content without putting the interpreted clarity of her racial self-understanding in jeopardy.

Two other Harvard attendants had a different experience. Both attending college in the 1970s as well (one starting just before and one just starting after Cross), Scott Minerbrook (1996) and Mark Whitaker (2011) lamented the self-separation engaged in by Black students on the campus. Neither Minerbrook nor Whitaker self-identified as being monoracially Black. Both expressed understanding of the expectations of the racial climate of the times and associated more closely with Black peers than with White, but their racial identifications acknowledged both their Black and White heritages. This may have influenced the fact that both considered their college experiences to be opportunities to interact with and excel at a curriculum unattached to any particular racial affiliation. Both expressed disappointment at finding that Black students did not share these sentiments. Minerbrook (1996) noted:

As much as I believed that Harvard could be the source of personal salvation, however, the intense political struggles over identity among African-American students meant that Harvard could never be the place I had hoped it would be. I would learn that one could never entirely avoid the racial obstacles that came out of the separatism among black students. If there was a great deal of energy spent on “identity” among the black students, there was little of the same among the white students, who seemed to float free of any such difficulties or ambiguities or doubts. They seemed to feel they were at Harvard by right. Blacks should have felt exactly the same, but they could not. They chained themselves with doubts
about who they were and imposed those doubts on each other. To me, it seemed a poisoned atmosphere for achievement. (p. 189-90)

In his comments, Minerbrook does not align himself with either racial group of peers. His extra-racial identity provides the lens with which he is assessing the situation. For him, Harvard represents an opportunity for academic achievement that had not previously been available to him and he embraces this opportunity regardless of race. Whitaker (2011) judged the campus’ racial climate in similar fashion:

Although the college did some recruiting in poor areas, most of my black classmates had attended prep schools and elite public schools just like the white kids. Yet once they arrived at Harvard, they chose to isolate themselves. They sat at “that black table” in the dining halls and applied to live in the Quad, the former home of Radcliffe College, where Currier House was known as “the black house.” Such was their prerogative, I thought. Some of them were my friends, and I knew that they were enjoying the opportunity to have a “black experience” after being forced to fit in with white kids in high school. I just thought it was a waste. (p. 199)

Like Minerbrook, Whitaker looks beyond the characterization of college as a place to establish racial associations that were not previously possible. For him, the academic opportunities figure more importantly than expressions of racial identity into his assessment of this component of his educational experience.

Provided here were a number of examples of how identity influenced the informants’ interactions with their educational spaces and how the details of those educational contexts also affected the informants’ self-understandings. Commonality is not found in similarity of the nature of the experiences, but neither identity expression nor academic content and experiences
existed in a vacuum. Though it is difficult to tease out the nature of the relationships between the two at times because they are so inter-connected, it remains that the dual influence is undeniable. The following theme captures aspects of the educational settings that impact the academic experiences of biracial individuals.

“School”-driven context.
While the detailed characteristics of educational contexts vary in terms of setting, student composition, philosophy and a host of other descriptors, time spent in some sort of educational space is required for children growing up in the United States and thus a common experience among them. American youth are in schools or other educational spaces during their formative years and the lessons learned are not exclusively academic in nature. Though always within the context of curriculum instruction, as that is the expressed purpose of educational spaces, the social and academic experiences had in schools can be impactful moments in one’s overall development as seen through the reflections of informants that are shared here.

Extremes in identity support.
The informants remembered several instances in which they either felt particularly supported or unsupported by the adults with whom they were in contact. Individuals reported experiences at either end of the spectrum in terms of identity, they were either prodded and made a spectacle of, or one was unilaterally assigned to them. In Philadelphia in the late 1980s, Angela Nissel (2006) began speaking with a counselor after she explained to her mother that she was afraid to go to middle school where she was being bullied by a group of Black girls because they thought she was lying about the race of her White father. She did not enjoy the sessions and explained:

I also hated the way Sue always tried to pull ‘feelings’ out of me. Every session she’d ask, ‘How does it feel to be mixed? Do you feel like you have to choose sides? Is it confusing?’ Who cares about feelings when you’re popular? I
thought, I wasn’t confused at all, I just wanted people not to tease me. The more I insisted that I wasn’t confused, the more Sue pressed me on it. (p. 78)

This extract is an example of an adult prodding a biracial individual about her identity. From Nissel’s perspective, her issue was not with her racial heritage, but with the more general adolescent issues of popularity and getting along with peers. Though her self-understanding and biraciality were likely an influential component of her overall experience, the counselor’s approach was not effective in encouraging Nissel’s introspection. Additionally, the counselor appears to have been applying presumptuous notions of the tragic mulatta stereotype, causing her to assume that Nissel must naturally be having some degree of inner-turmoil and conflict.

In another example of an adult perceived by the students as being overly inquisitive about issues of identity, Jon Gaines (2014) remembered an experience from high school:

One time my freshman year in high school my Spanish teacher, who is Hispanic, asked me to come to her desk, like, in the middle of class and she was like, ‘My fiancé is Black. What do you think that our children will look like?’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know! I’m half-White, half-Black—have no Hispanic, Spanish blood in me. I have no clue!’ But, apparently, she thought that all mixed kids possess the power to predict what mixed babies look like.

It can be understood that the teacher’s intent was to engage Gaines in a discussion that she assumed would be pertinent to him, given his racial heritage. Though she was not asking him to talk about his own identity, necessarily, her question asked him to draw upon what she presumed to be his experiences as a biracial individual to provide her with the information she sought. For Gaines, this was an offensive inquiry about the knowledge assumingly associated with his racial identity.
On the other end of the spectrum, the racial identities of the participants were often dismissed, challenged, or assigned to them. Several informants recalled instances in which the process of completing required official records indicating their race was exasperated by the teacher’s input. For instance, CelestialBeautyFly (2013) tells a story from elementary school circa the late 1980s:

You know how we do those surveys in the classroom? Do a count of how many ethnicities are in the class, like, Asian, Hispanic or whatever?....So it comes to Black and White. So they said Black, I stood up. They said White, I stood up. I wasn’t trying to be funny about it, it was a very logical thing. And they was like, ‘Um, honey, don’t you know what you are?’ Like, that’s supposed to be funny?

Not only did she feel unsupported in her racial identity choices, CelestialBeautyFly felt as if she were being ridiculed for her self-expression and that it was assumed that she had only responded in this way because she was unaware of the ‘correct’ way to respond. Several other examples included informants being told by teachers to “just pick one” race and in some instances they were told which specific race to mark. Like CelestialBeautyFly, the informants recalling these experiences also remembered feeling unnerved by these situations. These individuals experienced their identities being dismissed or arbitrarily assigned. Others with experiences on this end of the identity support spectrum had their identities challenged by those in positions of authority, such as is seen in the following case.

While attending Harvard in the mid 1970s, Mark Whitaker (2011) sat in on a guest lecture of a professor he admired. The topic of discussion was the importance of ethnic identity. During the question and answer portion of the lecture, Whitaker asked:

‘So Professor Walzer,’ I said, ‘what would you tell someone who didn’t have a clear ethnic identity? For example, what would you tell someone who had one
parent who was black and another who was European? Who had moved dozens of times as a child and didn’t have a specific place to call home? And not to be coy about it, I’m talking about myself.’

Walzer pondered my question for a while. ‘I guess I would say that that’s too bad,’ he answered finally, ‘and that in the future I hope we don’t have too many more people like you.’ [audience gasped] ‘That is, what I mean to say is…’ Walzer resumed haltingly, realizing how hurtful his words sounded. (p. 231)

While Whitaker goes on to say that he understood where the speaker was coming from and though he was not personally offended, his provision of a concession does not diminish the potential hurtfulness of the lecturer’s comment. In his question, Whitaker played into the tragic mulatto stereotype, playing up the notion that someone like him would likely not have a ‘clear’ ethnic identity. Though it could be interpreted that this stereotypical allusion served to prime the professor, it remains that his comments challenged the legitimacy of a biracial or mixed race identity.

These examples represent experiences of having one’s racial identity be unduly open for interrogation by outsiders or, on the opposite end of the continuum, having one’s racial identity exploration be shut down. It is important to note that none of the snippets explicitly mentioned feeling encouraged by teachers or other adults to talk about identity as a normalized activity in which everyone was taking part or in a way that it was non-threatening. This is not to say that such happenings never occurred, but it is significant that such memories were not mentioned.

*Positive and negatively interpreted adult interactions.*

The informants reported a number of interactions with adults that they deemed either positive or negative. The component of these stories that are highlighted here is the participants’ perceptions
of these interactions. Perception is truth, and the informant’s understanding of the situation determines that truth. For this reason, the intent of the adult or the multiple ways in which a situation can be interpreted by an outsider are less important than the biracial individual’s understanding of the occurrence.

Roni’s curls22 (2013) remembered being in high school and having been chastised for talking during a music class. As the teacher gave reproval of her actions, she also commented, “you mixed girls always think that you can get away with stuff!” Shocked at the personal nature of the teacher’s criticism, Roni’s curls22 reflected, “I shouldn’t have been talking in class, but somehow me talking in class had something to do with me being mixed in her mind. Which leads me to believe that she had issues with mixed girls in her life.” The phrasing she uses, “which leads me to believe” indicates that while she cannot confirm her assumption, she does believe that the teacher had a problem with mixed girls in general that were being projected onto her. In a similar instance, Scott Minerbrook (1996) remembered his elementary school teacher: “Mrs. Rosen never stopped shouting. That was how she controlled us. But it seemed to me that she spoke differently when she talked to the white students, and this made me dislike her even more than I disliked Mrs. Daniloff” (p. 99). “It seemed” to Minerbrook that the teacher exhibited preferential treatment to White students over Black students. As this perception constitutes his truth, he dislikes her even more than another teacher who he considered to be indiscriminately mean to all students. While these examples illustrated negative perceptions, informants also perceived positivity in their interpretations of their teachers’ actions.

As a young child and one of only a handful of non-White students in his school and in his town, Mark Whitaker (2011) attended a school with a Black Portuguese principal. He remembered, “Mr. Holbert always winked and smiled when he saw me in the hallway, and I took it as a secret signal that we had a special bond and that he was looking out for me” (p. 107).
Whitaker did not mention having had any special introduction to his principal or having any connection to him outside of the educational setting. The only connection he made obvious was their shared racial otherness, and thus the “special bond” he referred to was likely their racial similarity. This point of connection influenced his perception that Mr. Holbert was sending him a “secret signal” of support and acceptance in his winks and smiles.

Gregory Williams (1996) also positively interpreted an interaction he had with a educational mentor. After discussing his intent to become a lawyer, Williams’ confidant told him, “I’m sure you will be successful, but I would like to encourage you to think about academic life. You’re putting together a fine record, and we need people with a rich background like yours in the university community. Don’t dismiss teaching out of hand” (pp. 270-1). Williams reflected on this encounter: “I pondered Dr. Ferrill’s words: ‘with a rich background like yours.’ No one had ever characterized my background so positively before, and it filled me with happiness and gratitude. I was overwhelmed that he considered me good enough to one day be a professor” (p. 271). In this example, Dr. Ferrill did not expressly identify Williams’ mixed racial heritage in characterizing his ‘rich background,’ but, as did Whitaker, Williams associates the phrasing of this positive feedback with his racial identity. The student perceptions of these interactions with adults are paramount because school climate—and thus the ability to be successful within it—is developed through a conglomerate of perceptions about experiences had there. A special set of academic encounters include those had with curricular content.

**Self-image and curricular content.**

Educational experiences are built upon instructional content. Whether the lesson objectives includes ballet plies or reading, writing and arithmetic, schooling and curricular content are closely related. The information shared in educational contexts is offered as a given of universal importance and often goes uninterrogated in its presentation. As a result, some students develop
an understanding that the lesson material they access in school is a representation of what is normal and what they should learn. Many of the informants shared stories of not being able to connect to the content to which they were exposed at school, and in many cases this disconnection impacted their broader views about their educational experiences.

Kym Ragusa (2006) recalled how the texts used in her early 1970s elementary classroom resulted in her questioning the realities of what she saw everyday:

Our textbook was *Fun with Dick and Jane*. We would practice reading out loud the same sentences again and again, following the story of heroic Dick and his blond little sister Jane, who lived in the suburbs in a big house, where their mother wore an apron and their father smoked a pipe. I remember when we first started reading the book I got very confused: I began to think that all boys were supposed to have brown hair and white skin, and all girls blond hair and white skin, and all cats were female and dogs male. I couldn't reconcile the world of *Fun with Dick and Jane* with our Harlem classroom and our black, brown, and yellow skin. I must have felt that the book was in some way authoritative—it was handed to us by our own teachers so that learning itself seemed inseparable from learning that world. At such a young age I couldn’t see that there was something wrong with the book, that it excluded most children in the “real” world. It was we who were somehow wrong, because we didn’t look like Dick and Jane or live in a house like theirs. (p. 157)

Ragusa captured an illustration of the ‘worst case scenario’ in her story. The lack of images with which she could identify resulted in her learning a lesson that was indirectly taught, that she and her peers were “somehow wrong” because she did not match the picture framed as ‘right’ by her “authoritative” textbook.
While Ragusa did not share in this experience, other informants’ parents exposed them to material outside of the school setting that filled the gaps left by the dominant narrative told by the school curriculum. Phillip Handy (Jones, 2009b) explains,

One time I remember, first grade, we read about Martin Luther King and at the end—and my teacher was White—and at the end, my teacher forgot the name of who assassinated MLK—and I was in first grade so, I was, like, 6 or 7—and I remember being like, ‘Oh, I think it’s James Earl Ray. At least, you know, that’s what I was taught, James Earl Ray.’ And she goes, ‘I think, I think that’s right.’ And her face was just like, ‘Wow. Why does a 6 year old know this and I don’t know this?’

This early encounter characterized much of Handy’s K-12 experience. Even though his school-based education was supplemented by his parents outside of that setting, Handy continued to encounter lessons while at school that did not adequately include information related to the Black components of his racial heritage. Talking about his first year at college he said, “I remember, especially in a class I took called ‘The Black Experience in America,’ just every time after class I’d be leaving like, ‘Damn,’ you know, ‘Why didn’t I know this and why hasn’t this been taught to me and to other people?’” (mulattodiaries, 2009a). Many students spend more waking hours in structured educational settings each day than they do with their parents. Even with parental intervention to balance the dominant narrative of school curricular content with additional material telling less told stories of American history, Handy still felt as if he had been cheated by his K-12 curriculum out of learning a fully comprehensive history of his country.

Scott Minerbrook (1996) had similar criticisms of the texts to which he was exposed in high school in the mid 1960s. He explained,
In our social-studies classes, there were still no books about the achievements of African Americans. In fact, the social-studies textbooks seemed to use words in a way that excluded Negroes entirely from the tide of history, except as African Bantus or pygmies, or in their ever-present guise as slaves. I could not identify with that at all. My home life had taught me otherwise. (p. 156)

In Minerbook’s case, his home life armed him with contrary exposure to images related to his racial heritage that supplemented and fought back against the sterility of the texts and information he endured at school, though, like Handy, this did not necessarily arbitrate the faults he found with the school curriculum.

Danzy Senna’s (2009) father also attempted to teach she and her sister that there was vital and legitimate information to learn outside of the school walls. Though her memories of her father during her childhood were sparse as he and her mother separated when she was young, she remembered random scenes from her school-age years in which he made a cameo such as the following: “His taking us to the museum when I was a child—to the Egyptian exhibit, in particular, pointing around at the room full of ancient artifacts and telling us that this was Africa too” (p. 35). Though he was not a constant fixture in her life, Senna’s Black father made concerted efforts to create in her a connection to her Black roots that he knew would not be engendered as a result of the classroom curriculum. Her father’s approach provided her with the tools necessary to critically consider the content she was taught:

We learn in school that the civil rights movement was about overcoming segregation. But as my father has pointed out to me, what an oddly neutral word—segregation—to describe what was happening in this country. We prefer it to more blunt descriptions of that social arrangement: subjugation, oppression. And perhaps, also, we don’t want to acknowledge the ways in which we were
not segregated at all, the ways in which the lives of black and white people have
always been intertwined at the most intimate level. Slavery was intimate.

Oppression is so often an act of intimacy. (p. 178)

Here, Senna’s thought process has illustrated a web of connections that are important to
acknowledge: the lessons taught by her father influence the way she considers and critiques the
information being presented to her at school, packaged in the curriculum. The interactions
between these two ways of knowing and of coming to know inform the ways she thinks about
society at large and the nature of humans. The ripple effect of the influence of the content with
which students come into contact at school must be recognized in order to understand the
importance of ensuring that students are able to feel connection to and to learn from that content.

These examples cover selected aspects of the experiences of biracial individuals within
educational contexts. Educational practitioners play an important role in students feeling
supported or unsupported in the process of coming to understand themselves as individuals. The
individuals’ perceptions about these interactions and the content provided in these settings
ultimately shape the ways they feel about the school space and their places within it. The
following theme includes considerations of how the peers located in these educational contexts
contribute to biracial individuals’ experiences.

Peer-driven context.

Schools are microcosms of society at large and reproduce societal norms. The peers with whom
students share a classroom are the same peers they will share the world with in adulthood. Peer-
to-peer interactions comprise a significant portion of the school day and the nature of the
relationships built through these encounters not only shape one’s feelings about and ability to feel
successful within school, but the feelings that stay with one into adulthood as well. This theme is
composed of examples of how the peers with whom the informants shared educational

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experiences affected those contexts. The diversity, or lack thereof, of the peer groups with which they had contact was an impactful component for many informants. Race also played a role in the types of peer-associations that the informants had or wished they had. Teasing at the hands of peers was also a common component of school interactions shared by informants; I include in analysis here particular instances of reported negative interactions that were subtle or covert.

Implications of environmental diversity.

A number of informants referenced the level of racial diversity to which they were exposed at school as an important component of their educational experiences. Largely, more diversity was associated with higher levels of satisfaction and comfort, while a lack of diversity was generally seen as a challenge. Relationships between academic performance and expectations and environmental diversity were also mentioned as a notable part of the educational experience.

A handful of informants noted the ease of navigating the educational spaces they experience due to the presence of a diverse school population. beesbeautyandstyle (2013) noted, “People were really actually accepting of [my biraciality]. I don’t know, I think it’s because of the schools I went to. I went to a K-8 school and it was a really interracial, multiracial school.” Priscilla Carter, a college student, featured in Peden’s (2009) video upload, also notes “Being multiracial didn’t have anything to do with how I grew up. It never really affected me because the schools that I went to, they were always just really diverse and no one really made a big deal out of be being multiracial or Black for that matter.” Remembering his early educational experiences in a similar way, CabbtheKidd (2013), a high school student, commented, “There was no problem growing up for me. Like, in elementary school, I went to a really diverse elementary school, so, I mean, there were Black kids, there were Asian kids, there were Hispanic kids, there were White kids, there were all types of children in my school so me being mixed really had no effect on it.” It is interesting to note that these informants contend that the presence
of diversity did not only lessen their negative experiences associated with race, it eliminated
them. Upon further review of the language choices, however, it becomes apparent that the
informants’ narratives are doing rhetorical work alerting the reader to unspoken aspects of their
educational contexts. For instance, beesbeautyandstyle’s saying that people were “really actually
accepting” of her race indicates that there may be some sort of surprise associated with this
observation, as if she actually would have expected them to be less accepting. In her
commentary, Carter downplays the attention her race drew as she says, “no one really made a big
deal” out of it. Her choice of the word “really” indicates that some level of inquiry by others was
likely experienced, and this contradicts her initial assertion that her race “didn’t have anything to
do” with her growing up. While it is important to consider the messages being sent that underlie
the words being chosen for the purpose of understanding the nuances of presentations of self-
understandings, ultimately, it is vital that the informants’ understandings of themselves be taken
considered under the terms with which they present them as well.

For some others, it was important that they had fellow mixed-race peers with whom to
associate. Responding to a question about whether she felt different as a biracial child,
HoneysCurls (2014) explained, “I really grew up in a culturally diverse area, and I knew there
were, like, a lot of kids at my school when I was in elementary school and stuff that were also
mixed, so it wasn’t really, like, that big of a deal.” Though he describes the area in which she
grew up as a “culturally diverse” in general, she also makes particular mention that her
 elementary school enrolled other mixed students. For instantclassic282 (2013), moving away
from an educational setting that lacked diversity to one where she could associate with other
multiracial individuals was a welcomed change:

Going to college and moving along out in the world, I’ve met a lot of other
people who are biracial and not just White and Black, mixed with so many other
things, multiracial actually. And so, I really feel like that whole—I might of had, like, a little identity crisis, like, in high school in terms of fitting in, but now I totally, I don’t even see that as a problem anymore cuz there’s so many other people I can meet and it’s just become, you know, something that is normal to me.

instantclassic282 credits exposure to more diversity in the college setting with allowing her to be more comfortable with herself as compared to her high school experiences during which time she had difficulties fitting in with her homogenous peer group. Conversely, heyyitsdiva (2013) did not have the support of fellow biracial students in her school and this was a notably lacking feature of her educational experience. She explained the she would “come home crying everyday because I didn’t fit in with the Black kids or the White kids and there wasn’t any other people who were mixed like me when I was in school, so I didn’t know where to fit in.” Each of these three informants grew up in the 1990s. For the first two informants, the opportunity to see their own multiracial identities in their peers was more important than seeing a more general racial diversity. The opportunity to feel association with someone they interpret to be similar was a crucial part of these informant feeling or learning to feel comfortable in their educational settings. As is seen from heyyitsdiva’s comments, the opposite was experienced when this opportunity for connection was not afforded to her.

At times, the racial makeup of the school population had a direct effect on the educational experiences of the informants. For June Cross (2007) and James McBride (1996), both born in the mid 1950s, attending school in a predominantly White setting affected the academic expectations their peers and teachers had of them. Both were assessed based on physical abilities typically associated with Black people that neither personally possessed. Cross shared a story of an experience she had after transferring to a predominantly White high school:
The first quarter my only ‘A’ came in gym, with the note that ‘June’s natural athletic ability holds her in good stead with her peers.’ I laughed out loud. At all-black Indiana a year earlier, I had flunked physical education! Aunt Peggy tried to argue that I might have grown more coordinated with the passage of a year, but I knew better. The idea that blacks were somehow ‘naturally athletic’ was one of the oldest stereotypes in the book. (p. 106).

Not fooled by what she saw to be the application of stereotypical thought patterns, Cross was unwilling to endorse the expectations that had been set upon her. McBride took a different approach, deciding instead to play into the stereotype assigned him by his peers. McBride noted that he would have preferred to attend a Black school like his neighborhood friends but that he was instead “stuck at that white school, P.S. 138, with white classmates who were convinced I could dance like James Brown” (p. 104). Though he initially tried to shirk their assumption, thinking of the fact that when he danced amongst his many brothers and sisters they laughed mercilessly at his lack of style and ability, he eventually gave in to their persistence:

The white kids in school did not believe me [that I could not dance], and after weeks of encouragement I found myself standing in front of the classroom on talent day, wearing my brother's good shoes and hitching up my pants, soul singer-style like one of the Temptations, as someone dropped the needle on a James Brown record. I slid around the way I’d seen him do, shouting ‘Owww—shabba-na!’ They were delighted. Even the teacher was amused. They really believed I could dance! I had them fooled. (pp. 104-105)

Neither Cross nor McBride made mention of the inflated academic expectations their teachers and peers had of them, likely because they did not exist. What was prevalent, however, was their being assigned unearned stereotypically Black achievements related to bodily performance.
In the predominantly White school settings of his K-12 experience, David Matthews (2007) had actively passed as White. The option to do so, however, was not available to him once he attended Coppin State, a historically Black university, in the late 1980s. He explained, “I did very well at Coppin, passing for the first time in a very long time, if also not passing. The campus was composed of so many shades of black, brown, ochre, and yellow that there I was just another brother. No way could I pass” (p. 230). Matthews does not specify the instigants of his improved academic performance, but he noted that he was impressed by the academic climate set by his Black schoolmates and lamented not having come to understand their academic potential before his college experience: “My father’s prophecies were becoming Delphie in their precision. He had told me to make friends with all different kinds of people, and I had scoffed. Now, sitting among my fellow students, who were funny, and shrewd, and a hundred times more motivated than I was, I was at a loss for words” (p. 230). The lack of environmental diversity—or at least the lack of his willingness to embrace it—put Matthews in a position with feelings about his belonging in a predominantly Black educational setting that he was unable to articulate.

Phillip Handy, a college student attending university in the late 2000s featured in Jones’ (2009b) video upload, took a different approach to thinking about the academic abilities of his Black peers within predominantly White educational settings. Handy first discussed feeling as if he had to represent the Black race when performing academically, surmising that this feeling was commonly experienced by biracial individuals. He then expanded on his thoughts saying,

Hypothetically, if I was in a class and there were other Black people in it and they did poorly on the test, but I did well on the test, I was afraid that people would say, ‘Oh, it’s because he’s half White.’ That, that’s not right. That’s not true either, so I felt, like, a lot of pressure, like, double pressure from both sides.
Being a student in a setting featuring only limited diversity, Handy feels discomfort around which of his racial heritages he will be stereotyped by. Neither is preferable and each has its own implications, but the potential for either causes Handy to feel pressured. Such complexities related to associating with particular groups of peers is an influential component of the informants’ choices about how to align themselves.

**Racially-based peer association.**

As was presented in the last theme, the schooling experiences of many of the informants took place within a sociohistorical context that did not allow them to embrace a biracial or mixed-race identity. The multiracial movement is largely a phenomenon that has taken hold post the mid 1990s (Douglass, 2003). As a result, some of the biracial informants discussed their associations with and disassociations from Black peers. These types of comments were less commonly observed coming from younger informants who were born during or after the beginning of the multiracial movement. As displayed by the previous sub-theme, this sub-group of participants were more likely to discuss their peer association in terms of the diversity of options available to them.

Devin Hughes (2012) grew up in Washington, DC in the 1970s and 80s. Hughes is fair-skinned and was commonly mistaken as White, though he felt strongly tied to his Black racial heritage. Throughout his memoir, Hughes provided examples the dynamics of his association with his Black peers. Attending a summer basketball camp, Hughes remembered,

> As usual, I gravitated toward the black kids. I didn’t have any white friends in my neighborhood or at school; I felt uncomfortable around them, and my neighborhood friends felt the same way. We saw white kids in the school cafeteria with their packed lunches, and I thought how nice it would be, just once, to have the luxury of someone taking the time to pack my lunch....In my
mind, packed lunches and vacations weren’t a class thing, they were a race thing, and for all intents and purposes, I was black. (pp. 70-71)

Hughes’ racial association is colored by his class consciousness. Though he separates race and class in his comments, I imagine that the two are more closely tied for him. It appears that Whiteness is tied to affluence while he associates Blackness with going without. Because he feels more comfortable around peers with whom he can assume some sort of shared experience, he gravitates toward the Black campers. His alignment with his Black peers dictated the way in which he established his presence and interacted with his fellow campers:

Of course, to those who didn’t already know me, I needed to show my street credibility. I needed to let people know that I, like most black kids, looked down on white kids who had no understanding of the issues and drama that went with our culture. I needed to prove I wasn’t one of them. The way I fit in was by cracking on everybody; I was sarcastic and witty, and I could make everybody laugh at themselves. (p. 71)

Not only was Hughes invested in associating with his Black peers in this educational setting, it was also a priority for him to disassociate from his White peers. Later, while in college, Hughes again finds refuge in association with college students of color while attending a predominantly White institution. He remembers visiting the Harlem Renaissance Center, a location on campus where many students of color congregated. He said, “Immediately on walking into their lounge, I felt on familiar ground. I scoped the place out, introduced myself to a few people, and had a few laughs” (p. 252). Though this was his first visit to the Center, Hughes felt an instant connection to the space as somewhere he could feel at ease and engage in laughter, something he had already established to be a soothing act for him.
For June Cross (2007), though she longed to associate with her Black peers as she had once done with ease in her all-Black elementary school, this association was only earned with difficulty in high school. Raised in Atlantic City in the 1960s and early 1970s by close family friends, Cross grew up in a Black household after her White mother, with whom she kept contact throughout her life, decided it best that she live there permanently. Cross explained the efforts she undertook during her high school years to establish the association she desired after having attended private predominantly White schools in the interim:

I finally felt accepted by my black classmates. I had worked hard at it. I had an Afro worthy of Angela Davis. I wrote Afrocentric, political poetry in the pages of the student newspaper. I went out of my way to be friendly with my classmates in the vocational-education and business tracks. I wasn't putting on an act—many of them I had known since elementary school. (p. 145)

Though she identifies her actions as intentional, Cross also points out that they were not in some way “an act.” The choices behind her actions were her efforts to be seen by her peers in the way that she saw herself, as a Black woman. Not all participants saw themselves in this way, however.

Other informants highlighted their efforts to disassociate from Black peers. Encouraged to do so by her Jewish father and step-mother, Rebecca Walker attended Jewish summer camp in New York during the late 1970s and early 1980s. She recalls having felt like an outsider to her camp peers from the moment a camp administrator came to her father’s house to advertise the benefits of the program. After she arrived at camp, the feelings did not dissipate. She noted,

I am one of the black girls at camp. There are no black boys. There is me, and this big tall strong girl named Rachel West and her little sister Michelle who live in New Rochelle. Rachel and I don’t talk much. It is like if we talk to each other
Walker was aware of Rachel’s presence, but saw association with her as a potential amplifier of her feelings as an outsider among the White campers. It is unclear whether or not Walker would have wanted or felt comfortable to associate with Rachel in another setting, but she makes it obvious that this particular educational space does not provide her the option of doing so while maintaining the presentation of herself that she has chosen. Before her camp experience, while in fourth grade in a predominantly Black school setting, Walker remembers having chosen to disassociate from the only other “light, not white and not brown either” student in the class (p. 94). She explains that they would occasionally walk home together if they happened to be going the same way, but that she avoided him in the presence of her peers. “In school I don’t talk to Marc, I am too afraid that the other kids will see that I am like him, yellow and awkward and afraid instead of cool and tough like I pretend to be” (p. 94). Given a consideration of the two stories, Walker’s concern lies with the potential for appearing different more so than it does with an intent to disassociate from one identity versus another. The acceptance of peers is more important than racial self-expression for Walker in these instances.

Growing up around the same time as Walker in New York City, Kym Ragusa recalls with less clarity a similar instance of disassociation as she considers a picture she came across of her own fourth grade class:

There was one other black student in my class—I think there were three or four of us in the whole school….The boy’s name was Robert, and we weren’t friends. Like most of the kids in the picture, I barely have any memory of him. I think now that I went out of my way to avoid him, to not call attention to my own blackness by associating myself with him. And I wonder how conscious this
decision was in my nine-year-old mind, how deliberate my averted eyes when we
passed each other in the schoolyard. (p. 189)

Ragusa admits to not having a strong recollection of interaction with the Black classmate, but she
imagines that if there was deliberateness behind their lack of friendship, it was likely due to her,
like Walker’s, attempt to avoid the scrutiny of her White peers. The reasons behind not wanting
to be recognized as racially different by peers range from wanting to be ‘normal’ and un-different
to wanting to actively avoid unwanted negative attention. The following sub-theme addresses
some of the negative attention experienced by the informants.

*Indirect unacceptance*

While there were several examples provided by the informants of overt teasing they received
from peers in the form of name-calling, restriction from participation in certain activities, and
intimidation, I focus here on more subtle forms of teasing. I also title this section in a manner
that places onus on those who are doing the ‘unaccepting’ rather than a description of biracial
individuals as being somehow unaccepted as a given or otherwise unacceptable. Instances of
teasing that are obviously observable are more easily addressed by teachers and school officials.
I highlight these examples of students recalling an indirect lack of acceptance due to the insight
they can provide educators working with biracial individuals.

Before providing examples of these references to indirect teasing, it is important to note
the frequency with which informants normalized these negative experiences. Often, informants
couched their comments with statement of a belief that the teasing and bullying they faced was
endemic to adolescence in general and not unique to their experiences as biracial individuals.

HairNBeautyFanatic (2012) did not put too much stock into the hurtful comments made by
elementary school peers explaining, “They have the most word vomit. I think little kids will just
blurt out something that sounds terrible, but that’s just kids.” She normalizes the negative
behaviors, explaining that such poor choices can be expected of young children as a given. Speaking of isolation she felt at the hands of middle school girl groups, Erin McNeely (2014) downplayed the existence of cliques in her middle school adding an aside that “every other normal school” had them as well. Brittney Gray (2012) briefly discussed having been teased while in middle and high school but then provides a list of other things people get teased for including race and aspects of physical appearance. She follows up the list by saying, “As you get older you kinda just realize, ‘OK. Those are some of the things that come along with being a young person in this world.’” Similarly, Natalie Moses, featured on Peden’s (2009) video, discussed discrimination she experienced while at college in St. Paul, Minnesota at the hands of people coming from suburbs with limited exposure to diversity. She minimized the uniqueness of encountering such prejudicial thoughts, however, explaining, “If I didn’t come to college, I’d face it somewhere else,” indicating, again, that dealing with small-mindedness is a natural component of existing in our world. Regardless of the severity with which individuals assess their negative experiences, educational practitioners must be skilled in identifying such instances and either intervening or using the experience as an authentic learning opportunity. The first step in being able to turn a teasing episode into a teachable moment is to be perceptive enough to detect various and particularly subtle forms of teasing.

As previously mentioned, many of the negative experiences had with peers came in the form of overt teasing. A number of other examples, however, chronicled more subtle modes of ostracism. Each of the following three participants denied having been teased while in school either before or after they shared an experience that could be interpreted as being at least negative if not teasing. Remembering her high school years, ladycethebeauty (2013) said, “I just didn’t have a good high school experience when it comes to feeling, like, accepted by my peers.”
Outside of three close friends, ladycthebeauty remembers girls being mean to her. Cafeteria times were especially difficult as she explained:

I remember, you know, getting my lunch and everything and then I’m coming out of the line and I’m looking across the cafeteria and girls are just, like, mad doggin’, you know. Basically just giving me body language that they don’t want nothing to do with me. I remember that happening a lot in high school. So, I wasn’t necessarily teased, I was just not invited.

ladycthebeauty describes the passive-aggressive actions of her female classmates in particular. Though she was not being physically or verbally intimidated and she reiterated at the end of her statement that she “wasn’t necessarily teased,” these regular cafeteria experiences (and any other similar experiences the details of which she did not share) were enough to cause ladycthebeauty to characterize her overall high school experience as one lacking acceptance by her peers.

In another recollection of high school, Ashley Henderson (2014) remembered the feelings of wanting to fit in:

Like I said, I did have a hard time with guys because, when you’re in high school, being different is not cool. You want to be like everyone else. So for that, yeah, I wanted my hair straight so bad I basically ruined it by putting relaxers in it and straightening it basically every day because I didn’t want to be different from everybody else. But no one else was mean to me….I think it was more me, like, just wanting to be like my friends, wanting to be able to fit in with them. No one was ever really mean to me, like, I wasn’t ever made fun of really bad.

Henderson engages in some of the downplaying tactics utilized by informants as discussed earlier (i.e. “I wasn’t ever made fun of really bad.”). She also, like ladycthebeauty, does not recount
having had aggressive or face-to-face experiences with peers who caused her to come to believe that she needed to straighten her hair nor did she mention any experience in particular where young men she was attracted to sent her the message that her un-straight hair was not desirable. Rather, she cited the general pressures of high school explaining the climate by saying, “being different is not cool.” Even without an identified antagonist, Henderson now understands that she “basically ruined” her hair as the result of the indirect messages she received that it was otherwise unacceptable.

In a final example, Tiffany Jones (2014) provides another illustration of an absence of teasing that ultimately results in feelings of ridicule. As she describes it:

This is where White people do this thing in a way when they don’t necessarily tease you for something, but you can definitely end up feeling ashamed. So, definitely when my friend was reading out loud in history class from the book and read ‘the River nigger’ instead of ‘the River Niger,’ that stands out as a time I was embarrassed. When a friend told me she couldn’t play with me anymore because I was Black…that was embarrassing.

Though she specifically characterizes the examples she provides as not being examples of teasing, she notes that they result in feelings of embarrassment as teasing often does. Another interesting note about teasing was observed across the user-generated data sub-set.

In response to both overt and covert teasing, a common response provided by YouTube user informants was the interrogation of the over-simplification of race to its representation as a color. A number of the young informants reported being accused by peers of acting or talking either Black or White. They were teased in this way when they spoke either with African American English or with Standard American English, when they chose to participate in certain sports or when they were achieving highly in school. Several pushed back against the notion
saying something to the effect of, “I don’t understand. How can someone *act* a color?” By choosing to interpret the phrasing intended to cause ridicule in this literal manner, the informants were disarming the venom the phrase otherwise held.

The informants related a range of experiences around interactions with peers from which educational practitioners can learn. Ranging from positive to neutral to negative, each of the experiences recalled was important enough to the informant to share for some reason and each snippet is an important contribution to understanding the educational experiences of biracial individuals. To illustrate the final theme, I present extracts that reference the relationship between home and school.

**Home and “school”: contextual (dis)continuity.**

Another theme that characterized the data was commentary about the relationships between the home and school environments. A healthy, positive connection between home and school is often cited as a necessary component of student success and thus an aspect of preparing an effective learning environment that should be of primary concern for teachers and administrators (Banks et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Paris, 2012). For many of this study’s biracial informants, the connection between the two entities was contentious or challenged. School was not always conceptualized as the perpetrator of the discord, but nevertheless, a lack of harmony between the two was often cited. The sub-themes identified that are helpful in making this theme digestible include a picturing of the home as the safe space within which one can be themselves; the idea that a component of the successful navigation of educational spaces is having to put on an act while there and the concept that a side-effect of participating in educational spaces is the spotlighting of differences that exist between home and school.
Across age and gender groups, informants commonly recounted experiences illustrating the safe space that their families represented. In these cases, the school setting was commonly presented as the antithesis of this safety, as a place where they were made vulnerable and their racial identities were made a spectacle. The combination of skills and aptitudes necessary to be successful at school are complex and multifaceted. This complicated network is easier to navigate, however, when one feels at ease in that environment. For this reason, it is important to consider the ways in which biracial individuals are not experiencing that type of support within the educational spaces they traverse.

The YouTube “Mixed Girl/Guy Tag” posed a question asking whether it was challenging growing up having two different backgrounds. In several responses, two of which are featured here, YouTube video posters cited the disruption by school experiences of the comfortable self-understanding that had been achieved at home. AleXperience (2014) discussed what he saw as his most significant challenge growing up mixed with a Black mother and a White father. He explained:

For me, the challenge being mixed or having two different backgrounds was, you know, the outside world where you had these people (say, like, in high school) these people telling me what I am, and these other people telling me what I am, and these people telling me what I’m not, and they’re telling me what I’m not and they’re telling me what I should be and they’re telling me what I’m s’poseda be and...challenges came from the outside.

AleXperience is specific yet general in identifying “the outside” as the instigant of his challenges, the entity that is attempting to delimit his options for self-understanding. He notes that high school in particular was a setting in which he had these experiences. It is interesting to note that
these sorts of divisions—an understanding that it is acceptable to present oneself in a particular manner in some spaces and not in others—are still at work for AleXperience. He notes at the beginning of his video that he has created an entirely new YouTube channel to respond to the “Mixed Girl/Guy Tag” as a space where he could talk about himself and experiences he’s had in his life. He explains that he has created this new channel as one that is separate from his primary channel that serves as a platform for his commentary on movies, video games and other general “geek culture” topics as he terms it, because he did not think the types of personal things he wants to share would be “appropriate” for the other channel. In contrast to the AleXperience channel which was seven months old and had 11 uploaded videos at the time of analysis, his other channel was almost five years old and featured more than 250 uploads. The inclusion of this explanation and the maintenance of these two different and separate channels and his commentary on the appropriateness of content uploaded to each indicates that he is to some degree compartmentalizing the spaces within which his interests and life experiences can be legitimately be showcased and is purposefully limiting the overlap between the two.

In another “Mixed Girl/Guy Tag” YouTube video, Ashley Henderson (2014) responds to the same question:

Was coming from two backgrounds challenging growing up? I would say, ‘Yes,’ because I lived in pretty much a completely White community….When I started elementary school, in Kindergarten, my mom had to come to my school and ask them to remove the confederate flag from the flagpole because her kid was Black, so…in that sense, yeah, coming from…I wouldn’t say coming from different backgrounds was the hard part, because it was never because my parents—one was White, one was Black—it was more from the simple fact that I lived in a place that was all White people and I’m obviously not White.
Like AleXperience, Henderson considers the home she shared with her parents to be a non-issue in terms of the challenges she faced as a biracial child. She does not identify the origin of the challenges as being innate to her personhood or to the image of herself that was created within her household. Rather, attending a school where she was a particularly noticeable minority constituted the challenge she experienced.

For AleXperience and Henderson, school experiences were recognized as being a particularly influential component of youthful development, though not necessarily the first occasions upon which such experiences were had. Others cited school as the location where they first understood the difference between home and the outside world. In a clip uploaded to YouTube by Oprah Winfrey’s OWN Network (2013) Lenny Kravitz, rock musician and actor, recounts the first lesson he had that taught him he was racially different:

I didn’t think about my parents being different races. It wasn’t something that I thought about. It wasn’t something that was discussed….This was normal to me.

I went to my first day of first grade and, uh—my parents walked me to school—and we were walking in the hallway, and a kid ran up to, uh, us and pointed his finger and he yelled, “Your father’s white!” And it was, it was like, “Yeah? What?” I didn’t understand what that was about, and why this was an issue, and why this kid called me out in the middle of this hallway the first day of school. And that was the first day I had to think about it, and it just let me know, ‘OK, this is how folks think.’

Kravitz comments that his family’s racial details were not something that he considered or discussed prior to entering school were echoed by other informants as well. For Devin Hughes (2012), who grew up in a home with parents sharing a tumultuous relationship and self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, his unstable home remained a shield from the racialized
scrutiny of the outside world. He explained, “Despite the chaos with my parents, I was largely happy with my life until it hit me that I was completely different from most of the other kids,” which happened on the first day of Kindergarten (p. 45). Alicia D’Angelone Brown, an artist who contributed to Sterling Hudson’s (2010) “Mulatto: Mixed Race in America” production explained:

Growing up my parents were completely normal. They never made comments to me being, like, mixed. It wasn’t until I got into elementary school that I realized that my family was different and, in that sense, I thought that they were different.

Similar to Kravitz’s characterization of his experience, Brown identifies her entry into elementary school as the moment in which she understood having two parents of two different races made her different. It is also important to note that both she and Kravitz learn this lesson and understand that it is informing of how others might see them; however, this experience does not change their positively oriented thoughts about their families. Kravitz explained, “it just let me know, ‘OK, this is how folks think.’” His inclusion of the modifier ‘just’ indicates the limits of the reach of the lesson he learned. Though he learned how other ‘folks think’ about him and his family, there was not necessarily an impact on how he thought about himself. Brown’s new understanding went further to lead her to conclude that those who were spectaclizing her family’s difference were themselves the ones who were different because they were lacking in racial diversity. Though the experiences had in educational spaces were important, they were not the final or sole piece of input as the individuals were allowed to maintain their self-understandings within the safe space of the home.

Informants revealed that the home space was something that needed to remain sacred and out of the reaches of the public scrutiny found in schools, even when this separation was maintained at the demand of the parent. James McBride’s (1996) mother was direct in requiring
that her children maintain a separation from educational spaces outside of the house in order to maintain the sanctity of their home:

She insisted on absolute privacy, excellent school grades, and trusted no outsiders of either race. We were instructed never to reveal details of our home life to any figures of authority: teachers, social workers, cops, storekeepers, or even friends. If anyone asked us about our home life, we were taught to respond with, ‘I don’t know,’ and for years I did just that. (p. 27)

McBride’s mother’s distrust for outsiders caused him to interact with outsiders with casual evasiveness during many of his developmental years. While his mother’s intent to keep her family safe in this manner was fueled by experiences of her own upbringing (i.e. growing up among the only Polish immigrant Jewish family in a southern Christian town, having fled her childhood home and been disowned by her family after falling in love with a Black man). Her experiences had taught her that she had to rely on herself primarily if she wanted to survive and this belief that was likely only further complicated by issues of race.

Home was not always this space of solace from the realm of judgment when contrasted with school, however. Dating often represented a link between school and home, an opportunity for school peers to become connected in some way to members of the home and the end result was not always well-received. Scott Minerbrook (1996) recalled the scrutiny his choice of dating White classmates drew from his Black father, “When Dad noticed my dating habits he accused me of being a traitor” (p. 178-9). Minerbrook sees his father’s disapproval as another representation of the chasm between the nature of self-understanding as it occurs within the home and outside of the home. He went on to speculate about his father’s comments, “Maybe that was how he had felt all along about having a white wife and half-white children. Maybe that had always been part of his burden” (p. 179). This discontinuity between what counts as truth among
the family and what constitutes the reality of the outside world causes Minerbrook to consider the underlying meaning behind his father’s comments as did the following informant.

After her parents separated, Danzy Senna lived in Boston with her White mother though her father was still a regular, though inconsistent, part of her life. She remembered an instance in which an educational space became a tool for supplying the racial self-understanding that was deemed to be missing from home by her father’s evaluation. She explained:

When our friends were white, [my father] blamed my mother for our lack of black friends. He insisted she bring us to an after-school program at Roxbury for black youth where my sister and I were outcasts. It was my mother’s job to drop us off and pick us up—to do the grunt work of his racial bidding. (p. 36)

Like Minerbrook, Senna is left to contemplate the motivations of her father’s actions and the manner by which he carried them out. Whereas Minerbrook deduced that his father’s position on race was influenced by his own choices to marry a White woman, Senna is less clear about her father’s motivations. She does note, however, that it is ultimately her White mother who has to endure the burden necessary to fulfill her father’s wishes that she and her sister are connected to their Black roots via the after-school program he has judged as being up to the task.

A final example of the complicated nature of home being presented as a safe space features David Matthews (2007) who grew up in Baltimore with a single Black father. Instead of finding refuge in his home space (a space where he had suffered physical and mental abuse at the hands of his father’s ex-girlfriend but where he also felt close to his father) Matthews believed he had to sever ties with his father and his home space in order to survive at his new, predominantly Black elementary school. Remembering when a White child was assigned to be his buddy on his first day of school, he identified that juncture as the beginning of his purposeful distancing from his father and his home space. “While we filed out of homeroom, [the kid who was assigned as
my buddy] made a game overture, a play date later that afternoon. There, en route to that first day of classes, the son of my father had only a few moments left to live” (p. 57). Matthew’s father was a journalist and active member of the Black community with Nationalist leanings. His father represented the essence of Blackness for Matthews and when he identified himself as “the son of my father,” noting that he “had only a few moments left to live,” he understood that disassociation from his father would also necessarily be a disassociation from his Blackness. A handful of informants relate similar experiences, noting a dissonance when comparing their home-based behaviors to those they display in school.

The school act.

In their existence as two different and distinct entities, for many of the informants, home and school demanded two different ways of acting. While some students unproblematically considered the different behavior displays to be varying projections of oneself, others found the performance to be an assault on the nature of their personhood. For some, the acting resulted in feelings of guilt prompted by the inability to reconcile personal feelings and the demands of presenting oneself in a particular way in educational spaces. Many reflected on these experiences of acting as being distinctly part of youthfulness that was shed with maturity.

Fifteen-year old ItsMsNae (2013) demonstrated her performance of the school act as she discussed some of the frustrating aspects of having a Black mom and a White dad. She explained:

The other thing [that bothers me] is I have to act two ways. So, like, this is me at school: ‘Hey you guys...so what’s up? Whatchoo doin?’ [Spoken with a ‘valley girl’ affect.] And this is me, like, with my Black family: ‘Girl [lipsmack] you look so ratchet!’ See. I have to have those two different sides, right? I don’t think that’s fair.

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As is seen by her concluding comment, “I don’t think that’s fair,” ItsMsNae sees the necessity of this performance as an imposition, not a willful choice.

Others were less willing to remove themselves from the decision-making process than this informant. For instance, college student thecasefacee (2014b) recounted a similar experience of putting on a school act that she called ‘split personalities.’ She compared the side of herself that she shares with her fellow newspaper staff with the side she shares with other college friends.

Ok, I work for the newspaper for my school. Most of the people are White, not all of them, but a lot of them are White. I get along with them great; I love my whole staff. But I’m, like, this different person with them, you know what I mean? Like we’re all about the paper, we’re all, like, talking school. It’s just very straight forward. We still laugh, we still, like, have a good time, good conversations….But it’s just like, I’m this person with them and then, like an hour later, I’ll be at the club or something with my friends, and I’m a whole different person, like, I’m a totally different Casey. And it always makes me wonder, like, if these people saw this side of me or if these people saw this side of me, like, would we still be friends? …I don’t know, at the end of the day, I’m still myself. If they all were to come in one room together, I would be like, ‘Well, what’s up?’ Like, I get along with both sides, which is, like, the beautiful part of being mixed. It’s beautiful….but at times i feel like i have split personalities.

thecasefacee sees her behaviors as more of a choice, but she also feels somewhat unsettled about the choice. Though she affirmed the beauty of being biracial, she also acknowledged that there is a complexity to this beauty. thecasefacee’s wavering commentary gives the impression that she is still considering how to reconcile her understanding of the way she enacts her split
personalities. She does not demean her choices, but she does not unequivocally embrace them either. thecasefaceee and ItsMsNae are not alone in their quest toward an interrogation of the issues surrounding the school act.

Some of the informants who recounted engaging in notably different behaviors while at school than while at home expressed self-critical thoughts as a part of their recollections. Rebecca Walker (2001) recalls a time when her fear of being discovered by the boy she had a crush on caused her to scheme to discourage her mother’s attendance at the school play in which she had a part.

I don’t tell my mother too much about the play, and she doesn’t ask. It isn’t a big deal, I say, hoping she won’t see through my mask of nonchalance; I don’t want to hurt her. I don’t want to lie, either, but how else am I going to convince her not to come to see me on the Play Night? How else can I explain that Bryan Katon doesn’t like black girls and if she comes he will definitely know that I am, in fact, a black girl, and all of my other efforts to be a not black girl will be washed away? (p. 71)

Though she and her mother, Pulitzer award winning writer Alice Walker, had a complicated relationship due to her mother’s travel schedule and her granting Walker adult responsibilities at a young age, they also shared a strong bond. At school, Walker is desperate to represent herself as not Black and her Black mother’s presence would completely disrupt the image of herself she is trying to establish. In the case, as in the next, the race of Walker’s parent is acceptable and normal within the home space, but becomes a threat when it leaves that safe space and enters into the realm of school.

By his middle school years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, David Matthews (2007) was exclusively passing as White outside of his home. His friends were unaware of the racial
heritage of his Black father and he made every effort for this to remain the case. Though he had no memories of his mother (she suffered from mental illness and left him with his father while he was an infant), he claimed to his school peers only the Jewish background she had passed on to him. He noted that his charade was occasionally tested due to the proximity of his home and his school and, along with it, the likelihood that he would come across his father without warning. He remembered one such instance in which the boundaries were breached:

As I was skateboarding with some friends in the park, my pop walked by, sipping coffee from a Styrofoam cup and smoking a cigarette. Peripherally, I saw him, but kept on, pulling a couple of three-sixties, and a trick or two, followed by a couple of ooohs and huzzahs. While I was proud that he had seen me, and had seen me commended by my friends, I was not proud enough to acknowledge the lone black man by the fence clapping gently, cup clenched in his teeth; and when freckle-faced Jimmy Gardiner nudged my arm and asked Who’s that? I shrugged Beats me...watch this, and skated away hard. (p. 88)

For Matthews, the importance of remaining racially White among his school friends outweighs any allegiances he has to his father. Like Walker, he finds himself straddled between desires to fit in and be accepted at school and to align with the person who both loves him unconditionally and can single-handedly uproot the self-image he has established within the school setting.

Throughout his memoir, James McBride (1996) conveys the love and respect he had for his White mother. Another White woman, a local wealthy benefactor who financed his band trip to Europe and provided occasional emergency financial assistance while he was in college, was another important figure in his life and they stayed in touch after he moved away to college. He remembered the following about the day he got a letter from her husband while at college explaining that she had died suddenly of cancer:
Later that day, I was standing on the street with a group of black students and one of them said, ‘Forget those whiteys. They’re all rich. They got no problems,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, man, I hear you,’ while inside my pocket was the folded letter holding the heartbroken worlds of an old white lady who had always gone out of her way to help me—and many others like me. It hurt me a little bit to stand there and lie. (p. 187)

Though not as close to him as his mother, McBride expresses disappointment with himself for not having spoken up against a pejorative comment that applied both to his benefactor and to his mother. He does not make clear the root of his choice to express agreement instead of a challenge, but he does not assess his decision with self-approval.

Several informants indicated that the experience of enacting school-specific behaviors was a part of the process of growing up, a part that would naturally be discontinued as maturity and life experience were achieved. High school student Rayne VanBuren (2013) reflected on behavior choices she made in middle school, acknowledging the behaviors as a part of a larger growth process.

When I was born in MO and raised there basically, I knew exactly how to act cuz I just had to be myself. Um, but when I moved up here to PA, I remember I moved here in 6th grade and it was really awkward….Because it was, like, all White people around me everywhere and it’s not like that where I came from. So it was awkward and I was like, ‘Ok, I need to [snaps] turn on that switch. I need to act White for these people to like me. And this sounds horrible too, like, change the person you are to get someone to like you, but I was in middle school and didn’t know any better. And then I got into high school and started acting, like, more like myself.
VanBuren dismisses the severity of the school act she displayed during her middle school years, acknowledging that middle school is a time for identity experimentation as adolescents within this age group don’t “know any better.” With nonchalance she notes that this phase was temporary and that since entering high school she has been able to present a version of herself that she considers to be more authentic.

Angela Nissel (2006) illustrates another example in which the informant conveys understanding that identity practices and the behaviors they initiate will evolve over time. In her comical, tongue-in-cheek manner, Nissel remembers being one of three non-White students in the class and being asked by her Catholic school teacher if she ate chitterlings:

“No!” I lied. I was too young to understand the word sellout or know that if I got older and denied eating soul food to be accepted by white people, some people would revoke my black pass for life. In that moment, there was no way I was going to be the new six-year-old Methodist girl who ate pig guts. Sister Mary’s husband would have to forgive me. (p. 12)

Nissel’s comment about being “too young to understand” the implications of her actions could be interpreted in a number of ways. This comment could be an indication of her belief that eventually this idea of having to put on an act will not be necessary. It could also reveal her understanding that, in the future, such behaviors that deny one’s racial heritage will come with repercussions that are more undesirable than temporary acceptance by elementary school peers is desirable. Either way, Nissel is communicating an acknowledgment that the complexity of her self-understanding had not reached its full maturation in that elementary school classroom and will continue to evolve as time passes on.
Spotlight on difference.

As has been shown, for many informants, school represented the place in which they began to see themselves as different from their peers. In the examples that follow, one specific component of the home—parents—serves to heighten the informants’ awareness of those differences.

Two informants, both of whom have White mothers, shared stories that pointed to the ways in which their difference was highlighted by their hair; more specifically, by the fact that their White mothers were ill-equipped to work with the hair of their biracial daughters.

instantclassic282 (2013), a graduate student at the time of her video post, discussed her primary school years, “In elementary school it was really difficult. Just for my hair. Just cuz my mom is White and she didn’t really know how to do Black hair. Umm, no one ever taught her and it was kind of hard to learn.” The fact that instantclassic282’s mother did not have the skills necessary to do her hair translated into her elementary school experience being “really difficult.” Mixed Girl Gurus’ (2013) mother was also unable to do her hair, but she insisted that she try to create a particular hairstyle:

I wanted pigtails. I wanted pigtails, you know, cuz my cute other friends with straight hair had pigtails….I wanted that, and I would tell my mom that, and she would say, ‘No your hair is not gonna look like that, you know, your hair doesn’t do that.’ I just insisted and insisted on that. So, she lets me go to school with pigtails and instead of, you know, probably braiding them up and stuff like you probably should, I went out with two big puffins. Two frizzy puffins, you know, thinkin’ I was cute. And the boy that I liked, Alex, he called me ‘Caterbee’ for the rest of the day. If you were into Pokemon at any time, that’s who he was calling me. Like, Mom, how would you let me wear that hairstyle? I was made fun of. I wanted to wear my hair like that so bad.
As a result of her hairstyle flop, Mixed Girl Gurus was made fun of at school and received negative attention from the boy she liked. For a young child, such an experience that positions difference in a negative light can greatly impact one’s general feelings about difference and about school, as seen by the fact that this story is still of importance for Mixed Girl Gurus even after graduating from high school.

For other informants, school experiences emphasized their difference from their peers or from their monoracial parents. June Cross (2007) was raised by Black family friends after her White mother could no longer disguise her daughter’s mixed-race heritage. The transition of moving in with her ‘Aunt Peggy’ had implications as to how Cross saw herself racially, but the cultural components of shifting from a White household to a Black one were amplified by her first day in her new school. Cross attended the same all Black school where her Aunt Peggy taught and when asked to introduce herself, she explained that she lived with “Peggy and Paul and their dog, Sarge” (p. 34). The teacher first asked then aggressively demanded that she repeat her statement and that she refer to her guardian as ‘Aunt Peggy,’ a sign of respect common within the Black community. Cross was alarmed and taken aback by the teacher’s response as she had not meant disrespect but was displaying the conversational normalities she had been taught by her mother. She reflected:

Until that day I thought the differences in the rules between Aunt Peggy and my mother were just that, differences between the two women who were raising me.

But that day I realized that I had entered another world. In New York I had been given free rein; in Atlantic City I would be reined in. (p. 35)

Cross’ experiences with her White mother and her experiences with her Black caregiver were not only marked as different, she also understood from her teacher’s aggressive treatment that one was the right way and one was the wrong way to do things.
In reflecting upon growing up with her single White mother and attending after-school events, Mixed Girl Gurus (2013) marked such experiences as occasions when she and her mother’s racial differences were highlighted. She remembers:

At school events—like conferences or, you know, like, the little events that you would have at school that everybody gets all excited to come back to school, like, after school hours—people would not understand that that was my mom. I guess just the whole being mixed thing isn’t like the first thing to click in people’s mind, yet.

While Mixed Girl Gurus’ mother’s racial identity was no mystery to her, occasions such as these made her more aware of her mother’s Whiteness than she otherwise noticed herself being. As a child, James McBride’s (1996) mother hid her White identity from him. She would respond to his questions about race with either an unforgiving subject change or an insistence that she was Black, same as he was. Though he initially accepted her avoidances and insistences, after enrolling in school, McBride revisited his questions about his mother’s race:

Gradually, as the weeks passed and the terror of going to school subsided, I began to notice something about my mother, that she looked nothing like the other kids’ mothers. In fact, she looked more like my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Alexander, who was white. Peering out the window as the bus rounded the corner and the front doors flew open, I noticed that Mommy stood apart from the other mothers, rarely speaking to them. (p. 12)

Though McBride had suspicions that his mother was not Black all along, the exposure he had through school provided him with evidence that confirmed his hunches and highlighted her differences, making her Whiteness clear to him.
The examples shared to illustrate this theme chronicle the relationship between home and school environments and experiences as seen by the biracial informants whose input contributed to this dissertation. Together with the themes previously delineated in this chapter, the data snippets that worked together to form this theme provide vibrant information that will contribute to a response to the second research question in the following chapter.

Summary

This chapter began with an orientation to what I understand to be my role as researcher in interacting with the data along with a description of the sources considered for analysis. A description of methods as applied to the raw data was provided before illustrative data extracts from the data sources were shared. First, an overview of the practitioner-directed texts pertinent for answering the first research question was presented. This was followed by a presentation of snippets of data collected from the memoirs and user-generated videos. The themes identified in the data include the following: influenced and influential identities; “school”-driven context; peer-driven context; and home and “school:” contextual (dis)continuity. In the following chapter, the implications of the themes shared and the information gathered from the practitioner-based texts are discussed in terms of answering the second research question.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the data presented in chapter four and a conclusion to this project. Here, I will summarize the data composing the narration presented in the previous chapter. I then discuss these results, providing an interpretation of the data gathered from educational practitioner-directed texts and autobiographic input from biracial individuals. I relate those interpretations to the questions that have guided this work and to the ways in which they contribute to the theoretical frames also providing support for this dissertation. Upon discussing the results, I will discuss their implications in relation to existing literature and to the broader field of multicultural education. I will discuss limitations to the study and suggestions for future research before concluding the dissertation.

Summary of the Results

The population of the United States is ever diversifying. The most recent additions to this diversification—at least when considering the formalized demographic measurement of diversity—are multiracial individuals. Though multiracial and Black-White biracial individuals (as are the focus of this study) have been members of the US population since its inception, the year 2000 marked the first time the census tracked the prevalence of those persons identifying with two or more races. Given the option to identify with more than one race, many individuals are making that choice. Along with being the fastest growing racial population in the US, the two or more races population is also the youngest (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Thus, many of those who
are identifying in this way are also students. It becomes imperative, then, that educators and educational professionals are prepared to work with and to holistically engage this group of students.

The literature reviewed as a part of this study revealed a gap in existing research: there is a lack of available information that bridges the knowledge about biracial identity development and educational practices that engage biracial individuals as whole beings understood to be made up of a host of characteristics, but not overly defined by any one of them. Though a number of studies considering biracial and multiracial identity development conducted in educational settings have been published in the past decade or so, the vast majority of these works did not consider the relationship between identity development and educational contexts. Another set of examples of research more directly contextualized the projects in regard to the educational settings in which they were set, though many of these studies displayed an oversimplification of the experiences of biracial individuals, either excluding their input from the research design or positioning them as passive members of the educational spaces instead of agents who both contribute to and receive from classrooms and other learning settings. A small portion of the literature reviewed featured a holistic incorporation of biracial individuals in the research process as well as a direct link to their educational experiences in particular.

This project was conceptualized in response to this gap. An overarching purpose of this work is to identify elements of an approach, the application of which will encourage the holistic engagement of biracial individuals within educational spaces. The overarching research questions guiding this work included: How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces? and What are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces?

The theoretical frameworks that contribute to the study’s orientation include culturally sustaining
Complementarily applying these frames made the following interrogational moves possible: viewing biracial people as an evolving group of individuals; focusing on ways in which biracial individuals and identities can be maintained and cultivated in educational spaces; and considering biracial identities as being complexly formed, but valid in any configuration. The methodology guiding this study pulled from elements of both grounded and narrative theory, though it does not fall squarely within the confines of either. The data corpus was composed of texts about working with multiracial students written for educational practitioners, memoirs written by biracial individuals and user-generated video content posted by and about biracial individuals. Document and thematic analysis were applied to the collected data resulting in responses to the study’s guiding questions as are presented here.

**Discussion of the Results**

The data presented in the previous chapter offered a description of the information currently being provided to educational practitioners working with biracial students as well as robust insights into the educational experiences of biracial individuals. Here, the implications of these results will be discussed. Broadly, the findings are a response to the gaps identified in the guiding theoretical frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy and intersectional model of multiracial identity (Paris, 2012 and Wijeyesinghe, 2012). CSP is a newly emergent framework and Paris (2012) makes note of this fact in its presentation. The work is focused on multicultural and multilingual classroom spaces. Though biracial individuals increasingly make up a sizeable portion of these classroom populations, CSP in its current iteration does not address their needs in any specific way. The findings noted here are presented within the language and perspective parameters set by CSP, but with a focus that adds to its discussion. Though IMMI has transformed in important ways from its initial presentation as the factor model of multiracial
identity, a gap remains in its application to K-12 educational settings. The findings and suggestions presented here address this limitation of IMMI as well.

The first portion of this discussion provides a response to the first research question and its sub-questions. I then provide a response to the second research question in the form of an outline of an approach for holistically engaging biracial individuals in educational spaces. The sub-questions related to this research question guide further discussion of the presented approach.

**Engagement of biracial individuals in educational spaces.**

The first research question asked, “*How are biracial individuals currently being engaged and encouraged to develop in educational spaces?*” The associated sub-questions are addressed in the following sections.

**Discussion of available practitioner materials: Beneficial components and areas for improvement.**

*What educationally-based approaches are available to educational practitioners seeking to understand the educational experiences of biracial individuals and in what ways are these approaches beneficial and/or inadequate?*

The five practitioner-directed texts reviewed as a part of this study represent the wide array with which educators are being encouraged to consider their work with multiracial individuals. Similarities and differences among the set of resources were identified. Part of the purpose of this review was to determine the sort of information that is currently available to educators seeking to meet the needs of their multiracial students. The complementary purpose is to identify the components of these documents that should be retained along with those that should be rethought as a new approach for holistically engaging biracial individuals within educational spaces is developed as a part of this dissertation.
The point for improvement most notable to me is the use of subtly negative language when referring to the unique set of needs associated with multiracial students. This subtle language contributes to the development of an overall tone to the work that is likely impactful of the way in which the consumer of the information interprets it. References to the ‘challenges,’ ‘struggles,’ ‘dilemmas’ and ‘confusion’ of multiracial individuals were often included without a complication of these terms. In other instances, multiracial students were not presented as having agency; they were sometimes described as if identity development processes or undesirable classroom circumstances were things that happened to them rather than experiences in which they were an active, integral part. Each document included at least one such reference within its pages, and, speaking from personal experience, I have made numerous focused revisions to this document to intentionally remove such allusions. Given these considerations, I understand that this subtly negative language may be a difficult inclusion to avoid, but I also understand that this may be due to the fact that the experiences of multiracial individuals in this country have been characterized with negative undertones for so long that they have become a part of the hegemonic narrative in place about this group and go unchallenged. For this reason, it is particularly important to me to avoid this sort of presentation and to consistently send the message that biraciality is not innately abhorrent or dysfunctional in any way.

Another opportunity for improvement is the striking of a balance between simultaneously maintaining cohesion of an overall text and the inclusion of a variety of voices. While it is important to highlight the variety of opinions and perspectives that multiracial individuals bring to the table, the presentation of this multitude of voices must be done in a way that allows the reader to become accustomed with (and thus able to follow along with) a particular approach or line of argument. While developing the skills necessary to work effectively with any particular group of people is no easy task, it requires a significant amount of effort on the part of the learner.
to become accustomed to the positionality, writing style, and line of argument of the author from whom one is learning. This effort is further complicated when each chapter is written by a different author as is Root and Kelley’s (2003) text. This does not mean, however, that a diversity of voices should be sacrificed in deference to simplicity. Again, a balance is necessary, however, because the varied insights of the range of voices and opinions of those who are experts on specific topics are a crucial inclusion. Some of the documents more successfully complemented diversity of voice with cohesion of overall text than did others and future texts should strive to establish the types of balance suggested here.

With a similar need for more balance, an acknowledgement and presentation of the plurality of monoracial cultures cannot be lost in a display of the multiplicity of multiracial cultures. In many cases, monoracial cultures were represented in monolithic terms that served to reify the same types of overgeneralization that many of these texts are working to combat. Without detracting from a focus on topics relating to multiracial individuals in particular, a complex presentation of monoracial persons must also be included.

These issues that require reworking provide as much insight as components of the texts that are successful when considering the development of a new approach addressing how to work with biracial individuals in educational spaces. Though I pointed to the potential shortcomings when it comes to balancing the variety and a cohesive approach above, it is necessary to include the voices and perspectives of biracial individuals. The opinions and insights about biraciality that can only be offered by biracial individuals are invaluable when attempting to establish an understanding about the diverse experiences of this diverse group. The intended goal of such inclusions, however, should not be to cover all of the possible viewpoints of every unique individual whose race happens to be categorized in a particular manner. Rather, in placing the
experiences of biracial individuals at the center of the sphere of focus, it becomes a necessity that their input (not pontifications about their input) is also centralized.

The retention of easily accessible suggestions for action is featured in many of the reviewed texts is also essential. Though it is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings that make instructional practices sound, the world of teaching is in many ways a practical one that ultimately requires input on how to do and not just how to think about doing. I am not suggesting here that prescriptive, “one-size-fits-all” suggestions should be the goal, but practitioners should be provided with entry points for thinking about their current practices and for generating and establishing new professional habits. The conversational presentation style adopted by most of the documents reviewed helps to bridge what could potentially become the theoretical/practical divide. The components described here provide a response to the first research question; both the successful and less-than-effective portions of the relevant texts inform the approach offered by this dissertation, as does the following data discussion.

Listening to and learning from stories of biracial individuals.

What can be learned from the self-reported educational experiences of biracial individuals?

A thematic analysis of the many data extracts composing the corpus resulted in the identification of four explanatory themes. Each theme provides input necessary for responding to this guiding sub-question. As discussed in the previous chapter, I considered the data pulled from memoirs and user-generated video content through application of an inductive approach to thematic analysis. This lens for data consideration required that I begin some of the interpretive work in chapter four as providing contextualization for the latent meanings of the data extracts is already an engagement in the process of theorizing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following is a continuation of this process.
Identities.

Data extracts corresponding with this theme related to the ways biracial identities showed up in educational spaces. The informants’ commentary indicated that their identities were shaped in numerous ways by their educational environments. For instance, some were required or felt obligated to choose a racial identification because of social norms or perceived racial climate (e.g. thecasefacee, Angela Nissel, David Matthews). At the same time, however, the informants’ identities also affected the ways they understood and interacted with their educational environments, particularly in terms of curricular content. One assumption at work when grouping data extracts into this theme that the nature of the identities being impacted are an important component of the discussion, but that they are only a part of the conversation. A more inclusive consideration of the interplay between identity and educational experiences is more concerned with how the identities are operationalized within educational contexts. For instance is the fact that Stephanie Leonetti (Peden, 2009) felt potential explorations of her biracial identity went unsupported on her college campus. In terms of the purposes expressed for this project, the fact that she was stifled from being engaged as a whole is more important than the fact that she has chosen to identify her racial identity as “mixed” instead of some other option when seeking to identify changes that need to be made to the educational environment. Another assumption at work is that students’ self-understandings impact their understandings of the curriculum. For some students (e.g. Carmen Jackson, Scott Minerbrook, Mark Whitaker), their expressed racial identities shaped their interest in and connection to certain curricular content, while for others (e.g. David Matthews, June Cross), their identities made engaging with certain aspects of curriculum problematic.

The organization of these data extracts in a manner resulting in the identification of this theme implies that identity is an intangible, fluid, evolving entity, but that its influences are
observable. Children and youth who find themselves in school settings are typically in formative years in which identity is being actively developed, so it is necessary that identity is a part of the consideration of their experiences. Again, however, the focus cannot be limited to identity itself when the larger goal is to create a space in which the student is seen as more than a reduction to the specifics of their racial identity choices. The ways in which individuals think about themselves must be a component of the conversation if a holistic understanding of those students is the goal. At the same time, the components that contribute to and shape that process are more important to understanding who the individuals are than any resulting identity title. For instance, thecasefacee’s racial identification of ‘mixed’ or Greg Williams’ identification as ‘Black’ become important to understanding these individuals as holistic beings in terms of the contexts that influenced those identities. thecasefacee is attending college in an era that requires educational institutions to provide an official two or more races identity option while Williams, though phenotypically able to pass as White, was required in the late 1950s to adopt and adhere to a Black identity. Isolated knowledge of how one identifies does not move one closer to the goal of understanding who someone is as a person, a prerequisite for holistically engaging that individual.

“School.”

The data points constituting this theme include educational experiences that are somehow tied to “school” itself, largely defined in relation to teachers and academic content in the given examples. The presentation of this theme assumes the importance of directly addressing the academic components of educational contexts, as displayed in the literature review. These vital components are often lost in studies that purport to examine biracial identities within educational spaces. The extracts supporting this theme imply that interactions with teachers are paramount and that it is vital that students are able to connect in some way to the curriculum with which they
are expected to engage. Both of these implications are in line with general tenets of multicultural education. Teachers, need to engage in reflective practices that allow for the interrogation of how they see themselves and how they understand the curricular choices they make (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Many multicultural education theorists assert that educators cannot expect to know their students if they do not first know themselves (Paris, 2012; Erickson, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Giving students the opportunity to see themselves in curricula allows them greater likelihood of connecting to and engaging with the material, and these benefits have a strong relationship with observed academic performance (McCarthy, 1991/2008; Banks & Banks, 1995; Au, 1998/2008). Several informants (e.g. Phillip Handy, Scott Minerbrook) echoed this position in explaining the disconnect they felt from curricular content in which they could not see representations of themselves. For Kym Ragusa, this disconnect even resulted in her questioning the legitimacy of herself as a student.

The interactions with teachers reported in the data snippets associated with this theme often featured teachers who either over-simplified or over-complicated views of their biracial students. The nature of these interactions are likely representative of the level of critical interrogation the teachers have engaged in concerning the views they hold about biracial individuals and why they hold them. Many of the examples shared in relation to this theme chronicle experiences had in the recent past, but in the past nonetheless. Even though the approach to be proposed here focuses on what is going on in classrooms today and what will take place in these spaces in the future, past examples give context to today’s experiences. According to the tenets of a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), this contextualization is an essential aspect of understanding and working with any group of students. As I ultimately want to be able to think of biracial individuals as a group in both historic and contemporary terms, even the interactions with teachers and content that seem archaic (e.g. Gregory Williams, Scott
Minerbrook, June Cross) are important aspects of understanding the current experiences of biracial individuals within educational contexts.

**Peers.**

Though the aforementioned academic components of school are vitally important—especially since they are often neglected in studies focused on biracial individuals—school does not happen in a social vacuum. Peers compose what may be the most influential factor in the social component of school. For this reason, the ways in which social interactions with peers impact school experiences must also be considered. In identifying the importance of understanding how educational contexts are shaped by peers, I assume that interactions with peers can have broader impact on student belonging and how they academically perform at school (Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010; Faircloth & Hamm, 2011). Peer interactions are an integral part of the school experience. Youth spend a significant portion of their time in school settings and most mentionings of peer and friend groups collected were referenced within the context of school.

Peer groups become an important part of creating spaces for biracial individuals to be holistically engaged because educators in these contexts have the responsibilities of setting, monitoring and being in tune with the tone of these peer interactions. Some components of peer interaction (e.g. racial composition of school environment) are outside of the control of the teacher, but this fact heightens the significance of the environmental pieces the teacher can reasonably impact.

Students need opportunities (and sometimes assistance with language) to discuss what they think about their peer context, to be able express what works for them and what does not and to be assured that they have been heard (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005). As a part of their obligation to be in tune with the prevailing nature of peer interactions that have been established within an educational space, the subtleties in experiences that can be interpreted as a lack of acceptance by peers become particularly meaningful. The data presented here (e.g. ladycythebeauty, Ashley
Henderson, Tiffany Jones) helpful because educators are not often privy to the inner thoughts of those who feel aggressed by peers, though it is imperative that they are aware of such learning conditions shaped by peer interaction.

*Home versus “school.”*

This theme incorporated data snippets that illustrated perceived and observed differences between activities and understandings considered to be ‘normal’ at home and those that were standard parts of the school experience. Though I am not intending to pass judgment that valuates either home or school practices as more right or more wrong, the perception of the student is what is most important and their identifications and value assessments of the differences and similarities between the two settings must be acknowledged. As is understood when applying a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach, students have important perspectives and ways of knowing to bring to school (Paris, 2012). For some of the informants, the navigation between the two settings was, at times, seamless. Others sometimes felt as if it was at the expense of their full, complete selves that they moved between the two; they felt required to act in a certain way or to project a certain image that was representative of only a portion of themselves either while at school or at home. When this is the case, the educator is at a disadvantage in terms of trying to holistically engage the student; how can one be expected to address and incorporate the whole child if the student is (intentionally or subconsciously) bringing only a part of themselves to school?

Home and school are separate entities and they are not expected to be exactly the same; however, it is concerning when their differences are interpreted by students as deficits. Educators have to be aware of these interpretations before they can adjust the components inspiring a deficit-based understanding. It is important for educational practitioners to not only understand that students bring knowledges and understandings with them to class, but to also understand the
unique contexts that influence that knowledge. In instances of incongruence between home and school, some students would prefer to leave their ‘home-selves’ at home; in these cases, educators have to be able to identify this and to interrogate why this is the case. Some other students want to bring their ‘home-selves’ to school, but do not feel they have a place; and educators must be prepared to make note of these occasions as well.

An approach for achieving a holistic incorporation of biracial individuals into educational spaces.

The second overarching question guiding this study was: What are critical elements of an approach that would make space for biracial individuals to be holistically encompassed in educational spaces? Two sub-questions associated with this one provide further guidance about what this approach should entail: a) What are holistically encompassing ways educators and other educational practitioners can be encouraged to acknowledge and foster biracial individuals in educational spaces? b) What are holistically encompassing ways biracial individuals can be encouraged to examine and enact their self-understandings in educational spaces?

It must be noted that I understand that these approaches could be interpreted as utopian or irresponsibly avoidant of the complex, complicated nature of classroom spaces. It is not my intent to argue that the taking up of these approaches alone will be the singular catalyst for educational spaces in which biracial individuals are holistically engaged. Rather, these approaches are a start, and without these or similar approaches, the other changes to educational spaces that are necessary if social justice in education is to be achieved must be a part of the larger process that spans beyond the classroom and into policy spheres.

As Ball and Tyson (2011) note, the conversation about teaching from a multicultural education standpoint must begin somewhere, and this dissertation is an example of such a location. The approaches discussed here follow Ball and Tyson’s suggestions that knowledge be
tied to practice and that connections be made between teacher training and the classrooms these teachers establish and maintain. The authors stress that educators need skills for working with marginalized students and that the voices of marginalized students be included in the work that serves to inform educational practitioners. This dissertation—again, without being a ‘silver bullet’ in terms of changing the structural dynamics that have resulted in the marginalization of biracial individuals—falls within these parameters. Additionally, the authors identify a necessary component of multicultural teacher traing being that it encourages practitioners to abandon their habitual ways of thinking by changing the ways they automatically or subconsciously think about members of marginalized groups. Based upon the data supporting responses to the above research questions, the following components of such an approach were identified.

**Approaches to be taken up by educators and other educational practitioners:**

*Help to build of a safer space where one’s racial identity is neither questioned nor assigned*

The term “safe space” is used to mean a number of different things in the education field. Here it is employed specifically to denote a space within which one’s chosen racial identity is not challenged. It does not, however, indicate that such a space is without risk of any kind. Any time we are called upon to share of ourselves and to make ourselves vulnerable, risks are necessarily involved in that process. A safe space, however, allows one to feel supporting in taking these risks that ultimately result in individual and collective growth. This is not to say that critical discussions around identity should not be had in classrooms, rather, the insistence is with the fact that individuals be provided autonomy in naming themselves racially and that their choices be deemed legitimate on a de facto basis.

*A component of that safer space should be that it invites open, honest questioning and discussion*

Such a safe space allows biracial individuals the freedom to try out new ways of understanding themselves and the world around them, with room to change, when ready, as well.
Growth is achieved through exploration and the classroom provides a rich opportunity composed of multiple viewpoints within which to do so.

*Be hyper aware of behaviors that may influence biracial individuals to think of themselves as ‘naturally’ or ‘necessarily’ challenged*

This goal can be accomplished in a number of ways. Practitioners can foster movement toward this objective by doing things such as providing positive examples of biracial individuals; including topics related to biraciality in the curriculum; intentionally including biraciality within the umbrella term of ‘diversity;’ and engaging in self-reflection about one’s thoughts and beliefs about race. It is also important to note that the student retains a lot of the agency necessary to achieving this goal. Though there is little doubt that some biracial individuals will experience challenges related to their racial identity as many youth of many racial backgrounds do, it is vital that an assessment of such challenges not be blindly assigned to members of this group of students.

*Raise consciousness of differences in a way that does not work to label them as abnormal*

Though the specific makeup of the classroom’s diversity is often outside of the control of the educator, diversity always exists in some form. It is important that, when highlighted, the differences present in the classroom are not spectacalized in a way that makes some difference appear to be more assigned a more positive valence than others.

*Develop skills for identifying subtle acts of aggression or isolation*

Increasingly, tools for combating bullying in school are more widely emphasized and focused upon (e.g. AERA, 2013; Smith, 2014; Schott & Sondergaard, 2014). Many of this study’s informants recalled situations in which the incidents that made them feel uncomfortable at school were subtle and often were not observed or intervened in by school professionals. These types of negative interactions must be afforded the same attention as more easily observed
incidents as their impactful influence has been made clear by several informants (e.g. ladycthebeauty, Ashley Henderson, Tiffany Jones).

*Require dialogue*

Dialogic interaction comes in a variety of forms—sometimes in the form of vocalized speech, sometimes in the form of silence, but always through some level of connection with others (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014)—all of which must be respected and considered legitimate. Students and educators alike should be required to interact with each other and with their own thoughts. An interrogation of difficult topics is an important means for expanding consciousness and biracial individuals should be provided the space to both contribute to and benefit from such conversations.

*Avoid making assumptions*

While it is a natural human instinct to want to categorize things, biracial individuals defy categorization in a number of ways. By encouraging open dialogue and sharing, one can avoid what may otherwise feel like a necessity to make assumptions about how a biracial student feels, how that student self-identifies or what that student wants to come out of a particular situation.

*Acknowledging the power of perception*

As observed in the commentary of many of the informants (e.g. roni’scurls22, Gregory Williams, Mark Whitaker), perception is reality. As an educator, this may mean that one’s speech or actions are understood in a manner contrary to one’s intentions. While educators may not have the opportunity to directly alter a student’s perception of him or her, they always have the ability to alter their own speech and actions to better align them with their intent. A part of this process includes critical self-reflection on the part of the educational practitioner.
Remember everything does not have to be about race

There are a number of identity factors at play at all times. Individuals’ racial identity markers are not always forwarded; for instance, at times someone may feel most closely connected to their gender or language identities depending on the situation at hand. Each encounter with biracial students requires its own separate assessment to determine if race is playing a fore grounded role in the exchange or if it is affecting the situation in a less obvious manner.

Approaches to be taken up by biracial individuals in educational spaces:

Participate in dialogue

I do not mean to suggest here that biracial individuals take on a burdensome responsibility of educating peers and adults about all things biracial, but I do encourage an embrace of the fact that each unique individual has a perspective to share and if she chooses not to, it will not be heard. This urging applies to academic conversations and social situations alike.

Engage in reflection

Examine perceptions and determine which may require additional follow-up.

Question images and experiences that do not suggest your wholeness as an individual

Notions about biraciality like that of the tragic mulatto/a are still at work in our society in some subtle and some obvious ways. If one encounters situations that challenge one’s self-understanding or otherwise result in unease, even if the origin of the unease is elusive, it is important to take a moment to interrogate the details of the circumstance at play. Doing so may allow for push back against situations that may otherwise go unnoticed or unchallenged.
Own your right to evolve

Changing the ways we think about ourselves and the world are natural parts of growth as human beings. Identity is a fluid entity and it is also very personal. While outside influences certainly impact self-understanding, ultimately, only the individual can think for themselves.

Consider your micro and macro contexts

Though input from others does not necessarily have to change one’s own understandings, it is important to be apprised of the multitude of viewpoints that are available. Though a crucial part of one’s life and experiences, those with whom one has close proximal contact—parents, siblings, family, teachers, peers—represent only a portion of the perspectives there are to be had.

It may be helpful to engage with texts and other forums for information sharing (i.e. social media, affinity groups, internet sources) in order to develop a more globalized picture of how others conceptualize their biraciality and how these understandings affect their school experiences.

Support for the offered approach.

Responses to the following sub-questions provide clarification to the proposed approach.

*How does this approach contribute to/detract from current representations of biraciality within educational contexts?* and *What opportunities/lenses/points of view does it offer?*

What I consider to be one of most valuable contributions of this work is that it positions biracial individuals as agents in their own educational experiences. While teachers are saddled with a great deal of responsibility for creating and maintaining a classroom culture that is conducive to holistic engagement, a classroom would not a classroom be without the students that populate it. Thus, the students themselves must also take active responsibility for the nature of the contexts within which they learn. The majority of texts reviewed as a part of this study
focused on the duties of the teacher, rarely mentioning the role of the students in the process other than the implied response to educate the teacher about their needs.

Another notable contribution is the focus on holistic engagement. As previously described, holistic engagement involves the consideration of each student in the classroom as a united conglomerate of all of the characteristics that result in their individuality without reducing them to a collection of disconnected features (e.g. race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, ability, home language, etc.). This viewpoint is in line with a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach (Paris, 2012) by which a pluralistic educational setting that endorses the importance of a multitude of cultures and ways of knowing is sought. For such an environment to be realized, each of its members must actively engage in the process of learning oneself so that all can learn from one another. This goal can be facilitated if those who share an educational space are each welcomed in their wholeness.

Four out of five of the educational practitioner-directed texts reviewed as a part of this study were written about multiracial individuals in general and were not specific to Black-White biracial students. One way in which this approach may be considered to detract from what is currently available is that it is more narrowly focused on Black-White biracial individuals. While it is likely that elements of the approach can apply more broadly to multiracial (and even monoracial) students, the data supporting the approach presented here pertained specifically to biracial individuals thus making it difficult to justify the generalization of the suggestions without further inquiry.

While issues related to biracial and multiracial individuals have begun to be incorporated into literature in the multicultural education field (e.g. Cortés, 1999/2008; Harris, 2002; Root, 2004; Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005), multiraciality is still not a notion taken up in any consistent way within social justice discourses. This work adds a specific perspective to the multicultural
education conversation. Additionally, the lens of this contribution is novel; by explicitly linking
the topic of biraciality to educational spaces, this study is moving toward an approach to
understanding the experiences of biracial individuals that has not yet been established within the
field.

The viewpoint offered here provides concrete, applicable next steps for action. The
suggestions are not overly theoretical or overly general, rather they were conceptualized for the
purpose of practicality. While some other available texts do similar work, something that sets
this work apart is that the foundation of this approach is based in the perspectives of biracial
individuals. In many of the other texts, student perspectives are included and utilized to validate
the suggestions being made or to provide a supplementary point of view that is complementary of
the position of the author (e.g. Davis, 2009); however, this study is grounded in input from
biracial individuals.

Finally, this study presents an opportunity to encourage a continued exploration of the
possibilities related to the integration of identity studies and pedagogical approaches currently
missing from the literature.

Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations to the work in terms of design and execution.
The limitations discussed here are not intended to diminish the conclusions drawn from the data,
but rather to further support my trustworthiness as a researcher in engaging in transparent critical
reflection about the overall process. While most of the limitations discussed relate to the data
utilized in this dissertation, other limitations are related to the process of analysis applied to it.

Several limitations relate to the data sources. As mentioned in the previous chapter and
illustrated by the data source profiles provided in tables four and five, the demographics of the
autobiographers and YouTube users lacked diversity in a number of ways. Many of the
limitations listed here are inherent to utilizing existing data, the costs of which (i.e. limited
demographic representation) were outweighed by the benefits (i.e. rich, in depth and varied
voices of input) in terms of this project. Limitations are encountered simply by the fact that the
data corpus is comprised of input from individuals who either had the means or the desire to share
their stories in the form of a published memoir or a YouTube clip. Those who choose to make
public their memories and reflections on their lives in terms of their biraciality are necessarily
engaged in some sort of grappling with those identities; this may or may not be true of biracial
individuals who have not chosen to share their stories in a public forum. While I remain
confident that the data sources utilized as a part of this project have provided useful, invaluable
insight when considered in conjunction with one another, limitations to the data still exist and
must be acknowledged.

The memoir authors grew up almost exclusively on the Eastern Coast of the United
States. Current census data does not provide a potential explanation of this characteristic.
Though census data on multiracial Americans does not exist prior to 2000 when many of the
memoir authors grew up in the Northeast, according to the 2000 and 2010 censuses, the
Northeastern region of the country featured the smallest and least rapidly growing population of
Black-White biracial individuals (Jones & Bullock, 2012). The majority of the authors grew up
in large metropolitan areas, however, and as of the 2010 census, individuals identifying with two
or more races were concentrated in such areas in the Northeast and Midwestern US (Jones &
Bullock, 2012). The memoir author group also lacked representation in terms of family makeup
and educational access. Only one of the authors grew up in a home with both of his married
parents. Additionally, all of the authors attended college, with a handful of them attending Ivy
League institutions. As previously mentioned, viewing of the data through Wijeyesinghe’s
intersectional model of multiracial identity framework, I was alerted to attend to these demographic factors.

While the demographics of the informants providing their insights via the YouTube platform balance many of the characteristics of the memoir authors (i.e. they are younger, most did not frame their experiences as being tied to their family makeup), another limitation is in the fact that this level of demographic information was not available for the vast majority of user-generated videos that contributed data snippets to the project because I was limited to the information shared by the informants in their brief videos. Compared to the gender-balanced group of memoir authors, however, the group of YouTube posters was decidedly female, contributing to another aspect of demographic limitations.

While the first-person accounts of educational experiences of biracial individuals provide much needed insight into how members of this group understand educational spaces, only voices from the student perspective were captured. I acknowledge that I have not included input from educational-practitioners who work with biracial individuals. The reflections of teachers, administrators, counselors, fellow researchers and others about their interactions with biracial individuals within educational spaces can provide a viewpoint not captured here. In the context of this study, the informants were able to provide their own perceptions of their interactions with educational practitioners, which are in themselves important contributions. It would also be informative to consider practitioners’ reactions to these perceptions along with their own interpretations of these interactions.

Another data-related limitation is the limited nature of the questions to which YouTube user informants responded as a part of the “Mixed Girl Tag” (see Appendix C). Though extremely timely in relation to this work as the tag only began to circulate in the mid 2012, the tag questions may have primed the respondents in a particular way. Several of the tag postings
included the sub-title “Embrace Your Race,” indicating that the dominant narrative attached to the tag was likely one of a positive endorsement of a mixed/multiracial identity. Again, because YouTube users were not required in any way to create and post these videos (or any of the others viewed as a part of this study), the likelihood of a participant to respond to this tag is also indicative of their belief that doing so was an important and/or desirable use of their time.

Other limitations are related to the analysis process itself. The YouTube clips contributing to the data corpus contain significant amounts of multimodal data including, for instance, the visual framing chosen by the vloggers, the music chosen to accompany the commentary and the digital editing choices made by the video uploaders. This study was concerned exclusively with the verbal commentary provided by the informants. Though an in-depth analysis of these and other components of the clips could also have yielded interesting information, this was outside of the scope of this project.

One approach to adding trustworthiness to qualitative research practices is a member-checking process by which participants in the study are given opportunity to review the researcher’s treatment of the raw data and to provide input about the degree to which they feel their positionalities have been captured. Because of the nature of my data sources, I did not have the opportunity to engage in back-and-forth conversation with my informants or to receive validation for some of my interpretations. As with many of the aforementioned limitations, this aspect of the study contributes to my ideas for future research in this area.

A final limitation must be clearly and emphatically stated: this work is not intended to be a handbook that can be taken up in its current form and utilized as an exhaustive guide to working with biracial individuals in educational spaces. This work is a precursor to work that addresses the larger social, political and educational conversations being had around biraciality in educational spaces. In itself, this work is not intended to be and should not be labeled as a stand-
alone ‘fixer’ of the issues that currently serve as barriers for biracial individuals being holistically engaged in educational contexts. There are several challenges posed by the nature of the work as mentioned here, not the least of them being the need for an examination of narrative, dialogic data. There are a number of missing components necessary for this work to be able to be used in the classroom as a fully-developed intervention, some of which are addressed in the following section.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

I have heard a academically colloquial phrase stating that good research often results in more questions than answers. While I believe I have arrived at several important conclusions as a part of this work, there are also avenues into which I can see this work expanding.

The first two recommendations were developed directly from the data. While I attended throughout to the multiple identity markers at work in addition to the informants’ biracial racial heritage and the ways in which these markers influenced the racial identity marker, in depth explanations and examinations of these additional identity factors were not included in this work. With the data comprising this study’s corpus, additional projects focusing more heavily on the intersectional nature of the various identity markers that were forwarded by the participants are possible. For instance, trends in the nuances of identity expression over time could be investigated through comparison of the memoir data and the data collected from the YouTube clips. Additionally, I made intriguing observations about the ways in which gender seemed to impact the experiences of the participants; however, some of these observations were not directly related to the guiding questions being considered for this particular study.

A second recommendation is related to the data generated by the educational practitioner-directed materials. As noted, all of the texts included at least a single instance of language that could be interpreted as negative in nature, if only subtly so. I have taken a firm stance against
such language that appropriates elements of the tragic mulatto/a narrative and positions biracial individuals as inherently conflicted in terms of racial identity or lacking in agency in terms of their abilities to self-define, and I have taken this stance from the position of a researcher for social justice who seek to eliminate objectification of any individuals in this way. However, future research concerned with determining the degree to which this sort of language is interpreted by biracial individuals to be negative, problematic or marginalizing could prove fruitful. Additionally, a consideration of the impact of such negative language on the responses elicited from biracial individuals could also help to interrogate some of the conclusions drawn from past studies that either overtly or subtly position biracial individuals as ‘tragic.’

The following recommendations were derived from some of the limitations of the research design. It is recommended that a study building upon the findings reported here involve a participant pool that allows for two-way interaction between the researcher and the informants. Not only does this interaction allow for an additional layer of trustworthiness to be added to the data analysis as participants are able to support or push back against conclusions forwarded by the researcher, this interaction also allows for refinement of interpretations throughout the research process. In this study, when a question about the potential motive for a particular position or opinion expressed by an informant arose, the only recourse I had was to either base my supposition on other components of the data or to present the various potential interpretations that I had considered. In a future study involving participants with whom direct interaction is possible, inquiries about the informants’ intended meaning can be made directly to them.

Continuing with thoughts about the participant pool, the current study did not seek the input of educational-practitioners themselves. While this methodological decision was made to privilege and center the voices of biracial individuals in order to best understand how to holistically engage them, it remains that input from teachers and other professionals is another
important component to establishing and maintaining an educational space that fosters growth of and consciousness about all students and their backgrounds. A future research endeavor could seek out and incorporate the views of educational practitioners (teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.) concerning modes for engaging biracial students.

The final recommendation is based upon a chosen delimitation of the study. Though the user-generated video content was collected in multimedia form, in considering the scope of this project, only the audio component of the videos was considered. As mentioned in the preceding limitations section, the video clips offer a range of points of analysis that may be potentially revealing of the ways in which biracial individuals choose to express themselves using this particular forum. As mentioned, the visual, creative and musical, and editorial qualities of the videos could each serve as forums for inquiry. Collectively, these recommendations for future research could result in an expansion of the work completed here either for the purpose of gaining a more nuanced understanding of the educational experiences of biracial individuals or for moving beyond this limited scope into other lines of inquiry that will contribute to the growing academic conversation about biracial and multiracial individuals.

**Conclusion**

My hope for this dissertation is that it is able to contribute to body of multicultural education literature working toward the achievement of social justice in learning settings. I see this work as a foundational component of more work to come, only the beginning of a journey of inquiry. Furthermore, I hope the practicality of the approach presented here is an avenue for educational practitioners and biracial individuals to collaboratively move toward the establishment of these socially just educational settings. Culturally sustaining pedagogy sets the stage for acknowledging and appreciating and fostering the many cultures and languages contributing to the diverse beauty of any classroom space. This work hones in on the slice of those educational
settings occupied by biracial individuals. CSP calls for the conscious-raising and maintaining of all the cultures present in any given educational context—not just those that are ‘easily’ identified or defined. The work presented here pushes the CSP frame toward being able to achieve this goal. While the intersectional model of multiracial identity allowed me to be less concerned with the identity development process of biracial individuals, it gave less guidance as to how to apply the understanding that each of the identity choices of biracial individuals are legitimate and potentially subject to change to an approach to achieving social justice in educational spaces. This dissertation work is the beginning of a conversation considering how this gap can be filled.

As India Burton explained about the goal of social justice, “A lot of it has to do with education, I think. And, I mean, that’s probably one of the reasons why I’m going into education is to educate our children...school is a huge part of their life” (Peden, 2009). I agree with India’s statement and this sentiment has served as a driving guidance throughout my educational career and will continue to do so as long as there are children in need of equitable educational opportunities.
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Appendix A: Related Literature for Additional Reading

**Memoirs**
- The House at the End of the Road: The Story of Three Generations of an Interracial Family in the American South (2009) *W. Ralph Eubanks*
- Climbing Life’s Mountains: Overcoming Challenges of Biracial Birth, Adoption, Gender Identity, and Depression (2012) *Jala A. McKenzie-Burns*
- Color Blind: A Mixed Girl’s Perspective on Biracial Life (2011) *Tiffany Rae Reid*
- Notes of a White Black Woman: Race, Color, Community (2001) *Judy Scales-Trent*
- The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White (1995) *Shirlee Taylor Haizlip*
- Pearl’s Secret: A Black Man’s Search for His White Family (2002) *Neil Henry*
- Fade: My Journeys in Multiracial America (2005) *Elliot Lewis*

**Novels**
- Caucasia (1998) *Danzy Senna*
- Passing (1929) *Nella Larsen*
- Quicksand (1928) *Nella Larsen*
- The Girl Who Fell From the Sky (2011) *Heidi Durrow*
- Iola Leroy (1892) *Frances Harper*
- The Professor’s Daughter: A Novel (2006) *Emily Raboteau*

**Children’s/Young Adult Books**
- Black, White, Just Right! (1993) *Marguerite W. Davol*
- Mixed Me: A Tale of a Girl Who is Both Band White (2013) *Tiffany Catledge*
- Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (2008) *Sundee Frazier*
- The House You Pass on the Way (2010) *Jacqueline Woodson*
- Destiny and Faith Series (2012+) *Teddy O’Malley*

**Movies**
- Yelling to the Sky (2011)
- Imitation of Life (1934)
- Belle (2013)
- Black or White (2015)
Appendix B: Memoir Summaries

Gregory Williams – *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black*

Gregory Williams, former dean of the Ohio State University Law School, shares the story of his childhood and youth. He begins life being raised the eldest of four white children in Virginia, the children of parents who owned a successful diner and other businesses. After his mother flees from his abusive father with the two youngest siblings in tow and the businesses crumble, Williams relocates with his father and brother to Muncie, Indiana. As they travel, his father explains that he was passing for white while in Virginia and that they are returning to his hometown where he is a black man and thus his sons will be as well. His father’s alcoholism necessitates that he and his brother find a more stable living situation and eventually they are taken in by an elder black woman in the town who fosters them from the end of elementary school through high school. In the era of his childhood (mid 1950s - 1960s), Williams was considered to be Colored and was not afforded a range of options.

Scott Minerbrook – *Divided to the Vein: A Journey into Race and Family*

Scott Minerbrook, a correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report*, tell his story of growing up through the lens of the research he conducted in an attempt to heal old, nagging wounds that were the result of rejection by his Southern White mother’s side of the family. He was raised by his mother and his father who hailed from the upper echelons of Black Chicago society. Though his parents endured a rocky marriage under the same roof for much of his life, they divorced in his adolescence. Many of the recounted experiences are related to educational contexts and the concept of race influenced much of his commentary.
June Cross – *Secret Daughter: A Mixed-Race Daughter and the Mother Who Gave Her Away*

June Cross, film and television producer, shares the story of her childhood which was also produced as a PBS Frontline documentary. As June’s skin darkened as she neared her 4th birthday, her mother made the decision for her to be raised by friends, a childless Black couple who lived in Atlantic City. When she visited her mother and her television star husband, the two introduced her as their adopted daughter. Attending school in the same building where her surrogate mother taught, June’s story includes a handful of educationally contextualized memories.

James McBride – *The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to His White Mother*

James McBride tells the story of his mother through the telling of his own story as well. The eighth of thirteen children, McBride was born to Ruth, a Polish Jew, and Dennis McBride, a Black man, though his father died before he was born. She remarried Hunter Jordan, a Black man, who raised McBride until his death when he was an early teen. The memoir juxtaposes interviews McBride had with his mother about her childhood and his recollections of his own childhood growing up in New York City (and later in Delaware) in a household where his questions about race were dodged and dismissed by his mother who explained away her race insisting she was Black and “just light.” Only snippets of McBride’s story are within an educational context; he focuses much more pointedly on his family life and structure. Race is a theme throughout the book, but is only directly addressed on occasion.

Mark Whitaker – *My Long Trip Home: A Family Memoir*

The memoir of Mark Whitaker, former CNN and Newsweek contributor, reads as part personal history, part reporting of a thoroughly researched past that incorporates a range of data sources including interviews, personal correspondences and published or archived materials. Much of the memoir traces the young lives of his parents, a Black father and a French mother who met when she was an instructor at Swarthmore College where he attended, both having chosen the institution based upon their Quaker beliefs. Whitaker remembers the relationship shared by his parents that was sometimes intensely supportive and at others notably difficult and ending in divorce.
**Alexis Wilson – Not So Black and White**

Alexis Wilson shares a personal history that is in large part a tribute to her father, ballet dancer, choreographer, and director Billy Wilson. Her relationship with her mother, former prima ballerina of the National Ballet of Holland, was much more tenuous. On the back of her memoir, the text reads, “What does it mean to be a family? What if you had interracial parents who had been ballet stars, your mother abandoned you at eleven years old, your father was your everything, the new love of his life was a man, and you lost them both to AIDS with the ballet world and Broadway as your backdrop?” As in this passage, the issue of race is largely missing from Wilson’s commentary. She identifies her parents as interracial, but does not often directly address her own racial identity or implications of it. Rather, her memories are steeped by experiences within the performance world and the majority of the intersectional introspection she does are around her father’s sexuality and not race.

**Kym Ragusa – The Skin Between Us: A Memoir of Race, Beauty and Belonging**

Born in 1966 to teenage parents, a Black mother and an Italian American father, Kym Ragusa grew up in New York City with her Black mother and grandmother, largely raised by her grandmother. In her elementary years, reunited with her previously estranged father, Ragusa went to live with him, his wife and his mother before their divorce necessitated that she moved back in with her grandmother. Ragusa’s connection to each of her grandmothers is a running theme throughout the memoir she writes as a sort of journey to understanding herself. Much of the story concentrates in her childhood years and a number of experiences take place in school settings.

**David Matthews - Ace of Spades: A Memoir**

David Matthews grew up in the Baltimore area with his Black father after being abandoned by his Jewish mother. Particularly fair-skinned, he recounts a story in which he spent much of his adolescent life actively or passively passing as White in public places, and educational spaces in particular. Matthews approaches the story with a snarky sarcasm and makes references that put the reader on edge, seemingly to purposefully make her uncomfortable as the issue of race caused him discomfort throughout his formative years.
Rebecca Walker – *Black, White & Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*

In this memoir, Rebecca Walker, daughter of White Jewish civil rights lawyer Mel Leventhal and renown Black author Alice Walker, tells the story of her bicoastal growing up with her parents who officially divorced when she was seven years old. Many of Walker’s school years were spent alternating every two years between living with her mother in San Francisco, CA and with her father in New York City and the Washington, DC area. Throughout Walker’s angstful story delivered with an artful presentation, she explores the complexities of memory and recounts a number of sexually-based self-discoveries. Much of Walker’s story is set in school contexts and the concept of race is considered directly.

Devin C. Hughes – *Contrast: A Biracial Man’s Journey to Desegregate His Past*

Currently an inspirational speaker, Devin Hughes began life growing up in inner-city Washington, DC to a White mother and a Black father a decade her senior who had left his first wife and two-children for her. Though his parents’ relationship quickly deteriorated, exacerbated by his mother’s drug use and his father’s irregular adherence to a bipolar depression management regimen, they remained married throughout his life. Diagnosed with dyslexia in middle school, Devin overcame academic struggles and utilized his basketball talent as a ticket to college. In a lighthearted and straightforward manner, he recounts highlights from his life’s story, explaining why he felt closest to his Black roots growing up, but was eventually able to feel some connection to his White background as well.

Danzy Senna – *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?: A Personal History*

Danzy Senna grew up in Boston the daughter of a woman from a historically high-class White Bostonian family and a Black man with mysterious ties to his racial past. In recounting her own childhood and growing up, Senna also explores the story of her father’s past (opting to tell the story of her father’s history instead of that of her mother that is already very well documented in a number of publications) and in doing so begins to mend a relationship with the father who was often absently present in her childhood. Her focus is on family history, especially that of her father, and as a result there are only occasional references to school/educational contexts. She grapples throughout the memoir with the concept of race and how it shapes her understanding of herself and of the world.
Angela Nissel – *Mixed: My Life in Black and White*

Angela Nissel tells a lightly humorous story of growing up the daughter of a Black woman and a White man in Philadelphia. After her parents divorced at a young age, she was raised by her mother and they often struggled financially. Much of the personal history shared takes place in school settings and she addresses race directly throughout the piece.
Appendix C: “Mixed Girl Tag” Questions

1. What are you mixed with?

2. What ethnicity have you often been mistaken for?

3. Is your hair curly or straight?

4. Was coming from different backgrounds challenging growing up?

5. Which backgrounds do you embrace the most?

6. Have you ever been teased for being different?

7. Have you ever been ashamed of being multi-racial?

8. Do you feel that being mixed has its benefits?

9. What makes being multiracial a beautiful thing?

10. Any advice to someone who struggles with their multiracial identity?
Appendix D: Practitioner-Directed Text Recording Chart

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