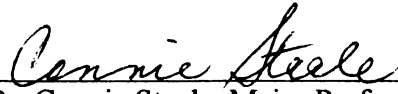
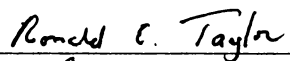


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Suzanne M. Prentiss entitled "A Qualitative Investigation into the Experiences of Parenting Biracial (Black-White) Children." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

  
Dr. Connie Steele, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

  
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Accepted for the Council:

  
Vice Provost and Dean of  
Graduate Studies



**A Qualitative Investigation into the Experiences  
of Parenting Biracial (Black-White) Children**

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Suzanne Prentiss  
May, 2002

## **DEDICATION**

I thankfully dedicate this manuscript to my family for all their support, patience, and love; to my participants for so openly sharing their parenting experiences for this worthwhile project; to all interracial couples, their biracial children and their families for believing in each other and in the power of love; and, most of all, to my precious son, Tyrel, who reminds me every single day of all that truly matters in this world.



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A doctoral dissertation, like so many things in life, is a collaborative effort and I am blessed to have had the assistance, counsel, and cooperation of so many wonderful people. I would, first and foremost, like to thank my doctoral committee for their support and patience on a very long and arduous journey. Both Dr. Delores Smith and Dr. Lane Morris from the Child and Family Studies Department inspired me while a student in their classes and continued to impress me with their insight and scholarly perspective as members of my committee. Dr. Ronald Taylor, Head of the Advertising Department, provided invaluable counsel concerning qualitative methodology and served as a constant source of inspiration and support. His belief in me and in my ability to produce a quality piece of research that I did not quite believe I was capable of is one of the many reasons I did complete this project. I am truly grateful for his expertise and unflinching faith in me. My major professor, Dr. Connie Steele, provided countless hours of scholarly advice and editorial critiques to this project. I am thankful for her commitment to my project becoming a worthwhile piece of scholarship that will contribute to the literature as it pays tribute to my participants. I feel she, too, treasured this study and appreciated what

this project meant to me. I am forever grateful for her support and commitment to excellence.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative investigation into the experiences of parents of biracial (Black-White) children was designed to explore and offer insight into the lives of these interracial families, including both the rewards they enjoy and the challenges they face. After an account into the history of interracial dating and miscegenation laws in this country was presented and a thorough examination of the applicable scholarly literature was offered, the rationale for this study became apparent. This project consisted of interviews with ten parents of biracial (Black-White) children. The ten participants were from the Greater Knoxville, Tennessee area and were either African American or Caucasian. Three married couples were involved in this study. Of the remaining four participants, one mother was currently married (though her husband chose not to be interviewed), one mother was separated and going through a formal divorce, and one male and one female participant had never been married. As a group, these parents were rearing eleven biracial children, ranging in age from eighteen months to thirteen years. Also, three step-children were included in these households, of whom two were also biracial.

The participants shared their experiences regarding their interracial romantic relationship, the initial reactions of family and friends to that relationship, and some of the early bridges and barriers that they

encountered as a couple. Each, then, discussed the birth(s) of their biracial child(ren), complete with the rewards enjoyed, the challenges faced, and the resources used or desired by the family. As parents of biracial children, they addressed the “race” issue and shared how they have or how they plan to talk about race with their child(ren). They also offered words of advice and support for other couples and families before discussing the “what about the children” question.

These ten participants presented an insightful, encouraging, and, at times, surprising glimpse into the lives and experiences of their interracial families. Though their individual experiences offer no statistical significance, their personal stories can provide information for other interracial families and serve as a reminder for all families that our children truly are our most precious resource.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is autumn. Two men meet for breakfast on a Sunday morning in Knoxville, TN. After exchanging pleasantries and placing their meal order, one man turns to his friend and, with a big smile and a finger pointing to the headline of the Sports page asks, “What about the VOLS?” It is winter. Two University of Kentucky students meet for coffee on campus. After handshakes, smiles, and the victorious waving of the daily campus paper, The Kentucky Kernal, they begin their conversation with “What about the Wildcats?” It is spring. Two professionals meet for a “working lunch” in Atlanta. After their formal business matters are concluded, the conversation turns more casual and they each become more animated. “What about the Braves?” one asks with a grin and a nod. It is summer. A young couple, very much in love, take the first step toward “meeting the family” and attend a casual Sunday barbecue together. Though the woman has spoken of her boyfriend numerous times to her family, each seems uncomfortable around him and their whispers and stares make them both feel quite awkward. Sometime before the meal is complete, they announce their engagement and upcoming nuptials. Afterward, an Aunt takes her twenty-five-

year old, Caucasian niece aside and after acknowledging that her twenty-five-year old, Black boyfriend “seems like a nice young man,” whispers, “What about the children?”

In the first three aforementioned scenarios, the phrase “What about the . . . ?” was encoded with positive feelings such as pride, excitement, and anticipation of more positive things to come. Unfortunately, in the case of the interracial couple, the phrase “What about the children?” did not evoke similar, positive feelings. Instead, that same question was a warning laden with concern, dread, and trepidation, (Steel, 1995) not the usual responses when marriage plans are announced. Why? Decades of research into interracial (specifically, Black-White) intermarriage and romantic relationships clearly show a lack of both acceptance and support within the larger society and often among close family and friends. Unfortunately, that prejudice still exists on various levels even today. In fact, in an upcoming book entitled Inappropriate Relationships, an entire chapter is devoted to “Interracial Relationships” (Adams & Rosen-Grandon, 2002).

Much of that scholarly inquiry has been focused in one of three general areas: (1) the historical and legal context of Black-White relationships here in the United States; (2) the process of racial identity development experienced by the biracial offspring of such interracial unions; and (3) the counseling strategies employed by mental health professionals working with biracial clients (and, to a limited extent, interracial families). As the literature review for this study illustrates, there has been considerable study of the interracial and biracial populations. Though much of that early work adopted a deficit perspective- -for example Merton’s 1941 study (Heaton

& Albrecht, 1996)- -as the numbers of these populations continue to rise dramatically (Besharov & Sullivan, 1996; Funderburg, 1994; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999; Steel, 1995), more researchers adopt a more culturally aware and respectful approach to their discovery of these individuals.

However, there is one area, in particular, that has been consistently overlooked: the role played by parents involved (either currently or previously) in interracial relationships in the rearing of their biracial children. In fact, Williams and Andersen (1998) stated that the “voice of interracial couples” (pg. 181) is missing from the research literature. In short, we have failed to investigate how these men and women respond to the question, “What about the children?” On a personal note, as the Caucasian single mother of a biracial (African American and Caucasian) son who was asked, “What about the child?” prior to his birth, I am very much aware of the challenges we, as parents of biracial children, face as well as the rewards we reap. This was a study conceived in love with a fundamental respect for the feelings and experiences of participants, a determination to create a project that will serve to inform and inspire, and a commitment to produce quality scholarly research that celebrates our children and families.

The purpose of this study was to examine, in detail using a qualitative methodology, the experience of parenting a biracial child by listening to parents of biracial children discuss their experiences, hopes, and concerns. Before actually talking with the participants, some possible responses were considered. Perhaps, their views would mirror those of most parents, especially the Caucasian majority. Perhaps,

their views would sound more like those of minority, Black parents. Perhaps, their views would be as unique as their individual families and experiences. Regardless of the outcome, their voices are definitely worth listening to and should be heard.

To discern meanings from what has been said by these parents of biracial children, some words or phrases need definition. Throughout this text, the terms African American and Black have been used interchangeably to refer to someone of African heritage (who would classify himself or herself as “Black”). Similarly, the terms Caucasian and White have been used interchangeably to refer to someone of European descent (who would classify himself or herself as “White – non Hispanic”). Though “biracial” has been the preferred way to refer to children borne of interracial (Black- White) relationships, much of the literature refers to these individuals as “multiracial.” That same term “multiracial” is also often used (or misused) in the literature to refer to interracial families (those with members representing more than one ethnicity or culture); in this project those families have been referred to as “interracial.” Also, as there is no real distinction regarding the legal or religious legitimacy of any romantic relationship that created a biracial child whose parents participated in this study, the terms intermarriage and interracial romance have been used interchangeably to refer to that relationship that produced one (or more) biracial child(ren). Finally, though there are an infinite number of racial and ethnic combinations with respect to interracial romantic relationships and intermarriage, this research project specifically targeted Black-White relationships and the Black-White biracial children they parented.

A fundamental premise motivating this research project was to make a positive contribution to the interracial community. It was a commitment to offer others, faced with the prospect of rearing a biracial child in whatever circumstance (as a single mother, an interracial couple, divorcee, widow, single father, etc.), the opportunity to read accounts of people like themselves and draw courage and ideas from those experiences. Ideally, it will serve as a source of validation, a point of reference, and a reminder that all children are to be loved and valued for all that they are. The purpose of this research is not merely to study teen mothers of biracial children, nor is it to analyze all two-parent married interracial families, or all single mothers. The intention of this study is to examine the full spectrum of parents rearing biracial children in whatever circumstances and with whatever resources and/or restrictions exist. This study is not intended to discover what parents of biracial are NOT. It is, most definitely, designed to uncover and celebrate who they ARE.

In 1989, Babbie set forth a challenge to scholars and researchers in the social sciences to "solve our social problems before they create a final solution for us" (p. 6). In the wake of increasing numbers of interracial relationships and marriages and the subsequent rise in births of biracial children; the mounting conflictual issues confronting all children and adolescents as they try to develop a sense of identity; and the intensifying atmosphere of racism and hatred; it is necessary, at this period in time, to examine the issue of parenting biracial children. Bowles (1993) encouraged study and examination of this issue, emphasizing its importance both on a societal level and on a more personal one. She argued that society should not impose a label of either

Black or White upon a biracial child or adolescent but that they, themselves, are entitled to make their own decisions (Bowles, 1993). How parents and families have addressed those issues and provided assistance in that process was another focus of this study.

Briefly, this dissertation addressed the following areas: comprehensive literature review (including statement of the problem under investigation), thorough discussion of methodology and procedures, analysis of results (including selections from interview transcripts), and discussion of scholarly value and areas for further research. It was the intention and goal of this research project to investigate the experiences of parenting biracial (Black-White) children.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review provides a comprehensive framework for the rationale behind this study, offers a contextual analysis of the historical and legal implications regarding Black-White intermarriage, and illustrates the need for this area of inquiry in both a scholarly and practical manner. Specifically, I carefully examined the substantial amount of scholarly work addressing Black-White romantic relationships and intermarriage, and racial self-identity development among biracial children and adolescents. Also, herein is a brief visit to the less-explored arena of parenting within interracial families and to the controversial issue of transracial adoption (the term used when children of one race or nationality are adopted by parents of a different race or nationality). Finally, applicable theoretical frameworks are presented that offer constructs and conceptualizations necessary to analyze thoroughly and accurately these phenomena. After completing this comprehensive review of scholarly contribution, it became apparent why this study was necessary and important - - to complement the existing body of research regarding this diverse and expanding segment of the population and to provide a reference resource for present and future interracial families and their biracial children.

## **Setting the Stage**

As the world is becoming more integrated and diverse, the frequency of interracial romantic relationships and marriages is increasing (Besharov & Sullivan, 1996; Qian, 1999; Suro 1999). According to the 1980 United States Census, over one million interracial marriages were reported- 121,000 of which were Black-White couples (Glick, 1997). By 1995, according to Census data, the number of Black-White interracial marriages had risen to approximately 328,000 (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999; Rosenblatt, 1999). Consequently, the number of biracial children born of these unions is also increasing. 1990 U.S. Census figures estimate the number of biracial (Black-White) children in this country at between 500,000 and 5,000,000 (Winn & Priest, 1993), with these numbers expected to grow. Research on Black-White biracial children (particularly adolescents) has focused primarily on the (internal) self-identity and (external) cultural conflicts they have faced, as they have been reared in a predominantly monoracial world (Bowles, 1993; Brandell, 1988; Gibbs, 1987).

With a majority of the empirical research based upon either a clinical population undergoing counseling or a small sample experiencing social and/or emotional difficulties (Gibbs, 1987; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995), it is not surprising that many of these studies adopt a culturally deviant perspective (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993). This perspective assumes that minority family-types



(including interracial families) are inadequate and substandard when compared to the majority cultural norm. This attitude is especially pronounced when researchers are intent on promulgating early culturally deviant inspired myths of “forbidden fruit” and “restless rebel” while examining interracial Black-White relationships (Davidson, 1992; Porterfield, 1982). In fact, research has consistently supported the evidence that interracial romantic relationships develop and blossom for many of the same reasons as do monoracial romances: shared values and interests, compatibility, and attraction (Brown, 1989; Davidson; Mills, 1996; Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999).

Though interracial marriages overall are relatively rare, accounting for roughly one out of every 1200 marriages in the United States (Solsberry, 1994), marriages between Blacks and Whites are the most uncommon of all (Davidson, 1992; Solsberry; Wehrly, et al., 1999; Williams & Andersen, 1998). Still, rooted in America’s history of slavery, the fury over miscegenation laws, and the prevalence of racism, it is these Black-White interracial relationships that cause the most uproar (Brown, 1989; Roberts, 1994; Solsberry). As the number of these Black-White intermarriages increases (Dainton, 1999; Qian, 1999; Roberts; Suro, 1999), it is unfortunate that the innocent children of these unions potentially face the greatest challenges. Consider the following stories:

An infant born without a completely formed skull died shortly after birth and was laid to rest in a local cemetery next to a family member. A few days later, the deacons of the church voted to have the child’s body exhumed and buried elsewhere. What atrocity could that innocent newborn baby girl have committed during her few precious hours of life that was so horrendous it warranted removal from her eternal resting place?

A female student is called a “mistake” to her face by the high school principal who then proceeds to threaten to cancel one of high school’s most anticipated traditions and revered- -the spring prom. The principal is fired, the school system sued, and the school burned down. The situation attracts the interest of the NAACP, the FBI, and the Ku Klux Klan. What could cause such a protest of a revered social event- -gang violence, drugs, illegal activity? None of the above.

A famous athlete faces one of the greatest challenges of his life. He is forced to sit idly by as leukemia ravages the body of his teenage daughter. Though this type of cancer is both rare and aggressive, a bone marrow transplant may save her life. However, due to her heritage her chances of finding a donor match are quite slim and no one in her family is a match. This baseball star loses his daughter despite a national campaign increasing the bone marrow donor registry, especially among minority donors.

All these stories have three things in common. First, they are all true. Second, they all occurred in the 1990’s in the United States of America (1994, 1996, and 1995, respectively). Third, the female subject in each story is biracial- -Black-White. In the first story, young Whitney Johnson’s only “crime” was being born to an interracial couple, her mother is White and her father is Black. She was buried next to her White great-grandfather in a Georgia cemetery that had banned minority burials since before the Civil War (Kallestad, 1996). In the second story, ReVonda Bowen was called a “mistake” by her high school principal because of her biracial heritage. He threatened to cancel the spring prom because several interracial couples were to attend (Reed, 1994). Later, the school was burned, the principal fired (though lauded by many), and the school district sued. In the last story, baseball legend Rod Carew’s daughter Michelle died from leukemia. A bone marrow transplant, often the only cause of treatment in battling such an aggressive form of cancer as hers, was an unlikely option

due to Michelle's biracial heritage and the fact that minority donors are very rare (Rosen, 1995).

## **Intermarriage: Historical and Legal Contexts**

Interracial romances are nothing new. Since Biblical times, people of different races have fallen in love and married. The history books are filled with such accounts. Throughout the ages, they have been the subjects of romance novels, plays, and films. The great Shakespeare tackled the subject in Othello as he explored the love between a Moor (a Black man) and a Gentile (white woman). In more modern times, in the United States of America (the "melting pot" of the world), a land known for its "freedom and individualism" (Black, 1973, p. 9) interracial romantic relationships, especially those involving Blacks and Whites, have historically been restricted. The exception is Hawaii where there is a quite diverse population and the rate of intermarriage among persons of many races is quite common (Solsberry, 1994).

Even in the dawn of a new Millennium, interracial romantic relationships are discouraged and are regarded by many as "wrong" and "unacceptable" (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). In a recent review of the literature on interracial relationships in the U.S., Orbe (1998) concluded that, "Black-White interracial relationships are fundamentally viewed as potentially problematic and pathologically based" (p. 6). Historically, Americans have been intolerant of intermarriages, specifically those involving Blacks and Whites (Porterfield, 1982; Solsberry, 1994). Close to a century before we were an independent nation, laws restricting interracial marriages already existed (Sollors, 2000).

While trying to study and accurately understand the phenomenon of Black-White marriages, it is important to understand the legal context that surrounds them. Miscegenation is defined as marriage or sexual relations between a man and woman of different races. These “miscegenation laws” declared marriage or sexual relations between a man and woman of different races illegal and were applied most severely to Black-White romantic relationships (Bennett, 1965). According to Perlmann (2000), “Race has always meant first and foremost the Black-White divide . . . (therefore) racial intermarriage meant first and foremost Black-White intermarriage” (p. 514). The catalyst of legal sanctions preventing intermarriage (as opposed merely to discouraging such unions) was the 1691 Commonwealth of Virginia law banning marriages between Blacks and Whites. Within the next thirty-four years, five other states (Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, and Pennsylvania) would follow suit (Bennett). In fact, at one time or another, forty of our fifty states had miscegenation laws in effect, with formal charges ranging from misdemeanors to felonies (Durodoye, 1994). As a country, we had not even created our Constitution or our Declaration of Independence, yet we had already decided that skin color was an acceptable and impermeable barrier to a marital union.

As recently as 1966 (the year I was born and one year before miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional), miscegenation laws existed and were enforced in nineteen states (Durodoye, 1994). In a groundbreaking decision that would invalidate all miscegenation laws in the nation, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v Virginia* on June 12, 1967, that miscegenation statutes violated an individual’s Fourteenth Amendment rights (Sollors, 2000; Pascoe, 1996). Decades after miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional, some states are still dealing with the issue. In fact, as recently as the spring of 1999, Alabama was finally considering

repealing its ban on interracial marriage (Knoxville News Sentinel, 1999).

Due to its former slave-based plantation economy and more current problems recognizing and protecting Civil Rights, the South has historically been a very active area for miscegenation laws and a disapproving, even outright hostile, climate with regard to interracial relationships. In the antebellum South, interracial unions were most common between White men and Black women (Higginbotham & Kopytoff, 2000). Though many of these liaisons existed within the power structure of the master/slave relationship, many others were the result of mutual attraction (Bennett, 1965). This trend, though not publicized or flaunted, did not seem to create too much of a stir, except among some of the more ignored and unforgiving White wives. It was not until the late 1800's, when White women began intermingling with Black men, that a great uproar was heard throughout the South. In fact, in 1879, one of the loudest and strongest arguments in favor of renewing the sanctions against intermarriage was that "many White women were living in marriage with Negro men" (Bennett, pp. 20/21).

Though still not encouraged or even regarded as "socially acceptable" within some regions (such as the South), communities, or families, the number of interracial romantic relationships and marriages between African-Americans and Caucasians has risen considerably and consistently since the repeal of miscegenation laws in 1967 (Overmier, 1990; Qian, 1999). Again, although the overall numbers are increasing, 1980 Census data reflect that the South still has the lowest number of interracial (Black-White) marriages in the nation accounting for a mere 1.6% (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). That is, however, a distinct increase from before the *Loving v Virginia* decision of 1967 during which the South reported the lowest percentage of Black-White intermarriage in the nation (Monahan, 1976).

In a recent attempt to understand and to illustrate accurately this “regional racism” toward Black-White interracial romantic relationships and intermarriage, researchers McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton (1999), concentrating specifically on the upstate region of South Carolina, conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-eight married couples. For research purposes, most studies have focused exclusively on married couples. Though it is important to remember, as Adams suggested, that though the actual number of marriages may be small, “interracial cohabitation or copulation is many times more frequent” (Adams, 1973, p. 66). This consideration was echoed by Suro (1999) in a similar analysis over twenty-five years later. For the purposes of this research study there was no distinction between children born to interracial married couples and those borne to interracial couples who were not married. Though the majority of the participating parents were married when their children were born (eight out of the ten) not all were.

While examining the status of a literature review on Black-White intermarriage in the United States (whether from a historical or more contemporary perspective), it is necessary to appreciate the incomplete nature of available data. In addition to problems of accurate data collection related to miscegenation laws and the fear of harassment or imprisonment, there has been no uniform policy in reporting such interracial unions. In fact, it was not until the 1960 Census that information was gathered on the race of spouses (Gadberry & Dodder, 1993). Prior to that year, large-scale studies on interracial relationships have been limited to specific geographic areas (such as Boston in the early 1900's, Chicago in the late 1930's, Philadelphia in the 1940's and 1950's, and Indiana in the late 1950's) and have relied on “only those interracial couples that it was possible to locate” (usually within easy access and through personal networks) (Bruce & Rodman, 1973, p. 154).

For all the concern generated and sparks ignited by the mere thought of an interracial romance, it is interesting to note that "the national frequency of interracial (Black-White) marriage has been conservatively estimated at approximately 2000 per year or 1 in every 1200 marriages" (Solsberry, 1994, p. 308); and the intermarriage between Whites and Blacks is the least common of all interracial unions, especially those involving White men and Black women (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999; Williams & Andersen, 1998). Another interesting piece of information contributing to the atmosphere of disapproval surrounding Black-White romantic relationships is the fact that African Americans are the only major ethnic group in America in which the rates of male outmarriage (marrying outside one's race) outnumber female outmarriage (Suro, 1999; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). In other words, Black females do not marry men of different races as often as Black males do. This is regarded as a very disturbing trend within the African-American community, especially when considering the unequal intraracial ratio of eligible males to females. Incidentally, this may help to explain why African-American women are historically the loudest opponents of interracial Black-White romances, especially unions between Black men and White women (Aldridge, 1978; Porterfield, 1982; Solsberry, 1994).

It is often prior to as well as during early courtship that many interracial couples feel the disapproval and hostility of members of one or both support networks. Though society, overall, does not condone or support interracial romantic relationships, it is most hurtful and damaging to those men and women involved in such relationships when they feel that hostility and lack of support from those closest to them- -family and friends (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1999). Though responses vary according to a number of different factors, such as educational and social homogamy of partners, level of racial integration in the community, and

community size (Aldridge, 1978; Wilkinson, 1975), there is an overall tendency of the White partner's family to refuse to acknowledge or accept the relationship, while the Black family usually has an easier time dealing with the news (Aldridge, 1978; Porterfield, 1982; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Solsberry, 1994; Wilkinson, 1975).

This, of course, does not hold true for all couples, support networks, and communities. However, findings consistently report that, overall, interracial couples generally receive more support from Black in-laws and the minority community than from their White relatives (Black, 1973). It is during the earliest stage (honeymoon phase) of marriage that the interracial couple feels the most pressure from their families and community, as outsiders come to accept their racial differences and appreciate each person's individuality (Kiev, 1973). In an attempt to examine the phenomenon more systematically, Foeman and Nance (1999) offered a model for interracial relationship development. According to their analysis, these distinct relationships progressed through four stages: "(a) racial awareness, (b) coping, (c) identity emergence, and (d) maintenance" (Foeman & Nance, p. 549). Within their model, each level involved the resolution of a conflict challenging the couple. Theoretically, the interracial pair become stronger as a unit with the successful resolution of the conflict at each successive stage.

Considering the history of secrecy surrounding interracial relationships and the negative repercussions experienced by members of those unions, empirical data on both dating and marriages may be viewed as sparse and incomplete (especially from the earlier studies) and, therefore, must be analyzed with great caution as generalizations cannot accurately be made much beyond the immediate data set (Murstein, 1973). Since the post-antebellum period, data clearly show a higher



frequency in intermarriage between Black males and White females than between Black females and White males on a national level (Aldridge, 1978; Brown, 1989; Porterfield, 1982; Suro, 1999; Wilkinson, 1975).

Furthermore, data from the 1950's also reflect a trend toward greater homogamy between spouses in interracial marriages. That evidence directly refuted earlier claims by researchers such as Merton (Porterfield, 1982) who in 1941 claimed that interracial marriage fell into one of two patterns- -either "hypergamy" when the female marries into a higher social class/economic bracket or "hypogamy" in which she marries into a lower social class/economic bracket (p. 26). In fact, in contemporary research studies, homogamy appears to be multifaceted, occurring at the economic, educational, and cultural levels (Gadberry & Dodder, 1993; Mills, 1996). In addition, it has been reported that intermarriage rates are higher in areas where racial integration is high (Wilkinson) and in urban as compared to rural areas (Aldridge, 1978).

As one may expect given its more diverse yet protected atmosphere, interracial dating is occurring fairly regularly on college campuses throughout the country (Larsson, 1965; Petroni, 1973; Porterfield, 1982; Solsberry, 1994). To translate that casual, dating interest into a marriage proposal, however, takes some time. Not many interracial couples make the leap from boyfriend/girlfriend to husband/wife as found in a 1991 survey, "almost one in five Americans has dated a member of another race" (Porterfield, p. 21). A possible explanation for that trend may be found in a reapplication of the "honeymoon" phenomenon mentioned earlier (on page 16). It would certainly be plausible that a similar "honeymoon" phenomenon may exist within dating relationships and may contribute to these interracial romantic relationships not progressing into marital commitments.

Data from many studies conducted in the early 1990's consistently reported that most interracial marriages involve older people, who have usually been previously married, are middle-class, and live and work in a more racially-integrated environment (Porterfield, 1982; Roberts, 1994; Solsberry, 1994; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). More recent studies, however, reflect a change in the interracial-as-second-marriage trend and, instead, report a steady increase in interracial marriage as first marriage, often occurring at a younger age (especially Black male-White female unions) (Besharov & Sullivan, 1996). Findings of a 1996 study indicate that interracial couples sharing a homogamous marriage had earned a higher level of education and enjoyed an overall higher status than similar intraracial homogamous marriages (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996; Qian, 1999).

Despite myths and misconceptions to the contrary, the most plausible explanations for interracial romantic relationships are not the genital endowment or prowess of a Black man, not the sexual promiscuity of the Black women, not the wanton lust of the White women, nor the enticement of "forbidden fruit" (Davidson, 1992; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999; Porterfield, 1982); interracial couples themselves consistently report that their motivations for marriage are similar to those of their intraracial counterparts. According to Black (1973), all marriages (regardless of race) need certain elements in order to succeed: love (complete with both physical and emotional intimacy), shared interests and compatibility, economic and emotional stability, and a shared set of core values. Brown (1989-90) echoed Black's sentiments regarding interracial marriage (which he termed "intermarriage") and specifically cited "love, mutual interests, shared values, and physical attraction" (p. 31) as reasons why all people marry. Finally, Solsberry (1994) also reported that research on Black-White couples supported the assertion that they intermarry due to "common values, goals,

interests, and perceptions” (p. 306).

As with all romantic relationships, the couple first evaluate each other on such characteristics as physical attractiveness, compatibility of values, role satisfaction, and sexuality (Murstien, 1973). Based on these and other factors, rooted in early socialization of attractiveness measures and desirability, each member of the dyad then makes a rational assessment of the relationship potential. According to dictionary definitions, this can be defined as a sensible judgment of the possibility of the relationship. Persons ask, “Could I truly care for this person? Might this develop into something committed and long-lasting?” However, for those men and women romantically interested in a person of a different race, as the review of literature attested, there are many other factors, influences, and consequences to consider.

### **Biracial Self-Identity Development**

Analysis of miscegenation laws makes clear that the true target of disapproval and fear was not the sexual act between Blacks and Whites nor was it the covenant of marriage, complete with both societal and financial benefits. The underlying, all-pervasive, and overwhelming concern throughout the history of interracial romantic relationships in the United States has been and continues to be the biracial children born of such unions (Pascoe, 1996; Perlmann, 2000). In fact, in 1959, the State Supreme Court of Louisiana defended its miscegenation laws as offering protection for biracial children. Specifically, the Court ruled that these laws would shield biracial (Black-White) individuals from experiencing “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone” (Zabel, 2000, p. 60).

Current research has focused extensively on biracial individuals (as children, adolescents, and adults) particularly with regard to self-identity development at various life stages. Some of that literature came from experiences gleaned within counseling and/or educational situations and are written to address specific concerns. Some work with young children, for example, has focused on early socialization skills and offers tips for school counselors and teachers (Morrison & Rodgers, 1996; Root, 1990; Wardle, 1992). In accordance with Erikson's stages of development, much work addresses adolescent self-identity development and how the variable of race may affect an individual's teen experience (Bowles, 1993; Steel, 1995). As adults, biracial individuals are interviewed to offer a recollective narrative on their process of developing a racial self-identity, the role of their parents/family in that process, and any suggestions they may offer for counseling professionals, parents, and other biracial individuals (Funderburg, 1994).

Critical issues and obstacles facing the interracial family and their biracial children have been identified as: discrimination, prejudice, and a response ranging from a general lack of acceptance to forthright rejection by either one or both races (Solsberry, 1994). Rose (1973) identified six major sources of conflict for the interracial family (listed in order of importance): lack of friends, disapproval of family of origin, conflicts in the children's minds about self-identity, economic difficulties, housing restrictions, and religion. It has been reported that during courtship many interracial couples feel the disapproval and hostility of one or both families of origin. Sometimes this "racial rift" is repaired when children are born (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993) but, in far too many instances, the wounds are too deep, resulting in those children being rejected by their own family members (Brown, 1990; Gibbs, 1987).

Though there is considerable new research in the area of biracial self-identity

development, a majority of the empirical research targeting biracial children and adolescents has been based upon either a clinical population undergoing counseling or a small sample experiencing social and/or emotional difficulties (Gibbs, 1987; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). Most, too, have adopted a hypothesis that biracial children will, undoubtedly, have social and emotional problems and have, in effect, discovered what they set out to find (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993). It has been mentioned that many studies of interracial relationships and biracial offspring have adopted a less than optimal, culturally deviant perspective (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993), assuming that minority family-types are inadequate and substandard when compared to the majority cultural norm. That statement is supported by scholarly work, such as that done by Foeman and Nance (1999) who reviewed the literature on Black-White intermarriage in the United States and concluded that the research is “peppered with stereotypes” (p. 542). Their analysis further discovered five myths of interracial relationships perpetuated by historical accounts as well as scholarly work. The last of the five addressed the “psychological shortcoming of interracial children.”

According to Foeman and Nance (1999), this deficit perspective has been used by many researchers for an extensive period of time, but new work may help shed a more positive light. It is their assessment that more recent studies have “begun to explore the possibility that interracial individuals can successfully combine cultural knowledge and behaviors” (p. 547). It is argued by Solsberry (1994) that interracial families need to be examined not simply in terms of their differences and weaknesses but, more importantly, in terms of their diversity and strengths.

As has been mentioned, the theoretical basis for much of the research regarding the biracial population can be found in the work of Erik Erikson and his

stage theory of personality development. During both middle childhood (elementary school years), with the crisis of industry versus inferiority, and adolescence, with the crisis of identity versus identity confusion (Muuss, 1996; Santrock, 1996; Schickedanz, Schickedanz, Hansen, & Forsyth, 1993), Erikson's framework serves as a strong base upon which to analyze constructively the concept of self-identity development among biracial individuals. In fact, having been explicitly applied in other research on this same issue (Bowles, 1993; Brown, 1995; Kerwin et al., 1993; Overmier, 1990), it is apparent that Eriksonian theory is at the forefront of this area of inquiry. Though it is certainly not the only theory with applicability to the concerns of biracial individuals, the psychosocial stage theory of personality development proposed by Erikson seems to offer strong explanation and insight into an area where more empirical research is necessary.

According to Erikson's theory (Muuss, 1996), during the elementary school years children face the crisis of industry (feeling capable and competent) versus inferiority (feeling unworthy and inadequate). He argued that at no other time in life is a person more ready and eager to learn. He cautioned, though, that this is a precarious stage and warned that if children develop a sense of inferiority now (in either the social, cognitive, or emotional arenas), they may never feel good about themselves (Santrock, 1996). Indirectly, the resolution of this crisis will impact the individual's future self-identity development during adolescence as, according to Erikson, successful completion of the present crisis depends upon successful completion of the previous one (Muuss). Resolution of the industry-versus- inferiority crisis impacts self-identity development in a more direct way when combined with feelings regarding race and its meaning. According to Root (1990), children develop a sensitivity to and awareness of color and ethnicity around the age of three, though they

do not form their own racial identity until later.

It is during the elementary school years that children start truly to understand racial differences and the meanings and values associated with those differences. Children at this age begin to internalize the reactions of others (such as teachers and classmates) to their race, often negatively impacting their self-concept and sense of self-identity (Morrison & Rodgers, 1996; Root, 1990; Wardle, 1993). Brown (1995) argued that one of the most important tasks facing the biracial child is to form a clear and strong sense of racial identity. Overmier (1990) reported that many studies have noted an awareness of race and a racial preference in children by age five. Researchers McRoy and Freeman (1986) reached a similar conclusion, suggesting that during the years of three to seven children are able to conceptualize and evaluate racial differences and implications. Johnson (1992), in her work with racial preference among biracial youngsters, suggested that a sense of racial awareness and identity may develop slower in biracial children possibly as a result of a less evaluative approach to race or may be due to greater exposure to diversity in general.

Not all, or even the majority of, biracial children and adolescents develop problems associated with self-identity development (Gibbs, 1987). According to the literature, though, it does happen to far too many children. The ambiguous nature of one's racial identity is paramount to this "identity crisis" experienced by some biracial children and adolescents, according to Root (1990). She declared that "it is the marginal status imposed by society . . . which poses a severe stress to positive identity development" (p. 188). How an individual resolves this "other" or "marginal" status, either alone or with the support of family and friends, will play a key role in that individual's identification with and acceptance of a racial identity (Bowles, 1993; Daniel, 1996; Gibbs, 1987; Gordon, 1995; Root; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995; Winn &

Priest, 1993).

In an effort to understand more completely the experiences of biracial children and their interracial families, researchers Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) employed a qualitative methodology to discover the issues most salient to nine biracial children and their parents. Major themes emerging from the interviews with parents included: the adoption or rejection of racially identifying labels, formal or informal preparation for discrimination, and concerns over where to raise the family. Major themes reflected in the interviews with the children included: racial identity and use of labels, self-description, and racial awareness (Kerwin et al.). From these interviews, the researchers concluded that those biracial children and adolescents who openly discussed racial and self-identity issues with their families and others were more likely to describe themselves as "interracial" and to feel membership in both groups (Kerwin et al.).

According to Erikson and other theorists analyzing adolescent development (Muuss, 1996), all adolescents wonder "who am I?" and "where do I fit in?" These questions and insecurities take on an even greater importance, however, in the lives of biracial adolescents unsure about their self-identity (Bowles, 1993; Gibbs, 1987; Overmier, 1990). Erikson proposed that during adolescence the individual faces the crisis of identity versus identity confusion during which he or she must adopt a definition of self. A strong family and support network is critical at this time, especially for the biracial adolescent (Root, 1990). With a sense of security in a biracial identity and an acceptance for self, an adolescent is better equipped to deal with the judgments of a society not yet ready to handle interracial relationships or the offspring of those unions. Peer relationships become increasingly important to the individual during adolescence and serve as a reference point for gauging self-identity



development (Gibbs).

According to Erikson's theory, adolescents who lack such support may be more susceptible to the negative and mixed messages they receive and develop a less positive self-identity (Overmier, 1990). Root (1990) proposed that biracial adolescents have four options in developing a self-identity: acceptance of society's label, identification with one race, identification with both races, or identification as a member of a new racial group. Whichever is selected, the adolescent feels best about himself or herself if he or she played an active role in the adoption of a racial identification and in the development of a self-identity (Root). Brown (1995) concluded that the majority of her 119 multiracial participants would identify themselves as interracial if given the opportunity. To many people the issues of racial classification and self-identity are as simple as checking a box on a form; however, to the biracial individual it means quite a bit more (Bowles, 1993).

### **Parenting in Interracial Families**

At any bookstore one finds hundreds of titles on parenting, everything from discipline to nutrition to gender differences. Books also offer tips on how to conceive, 1001 baby names, safe toys, and how to pay for a college education. Examine these books further and you will notice, almost without exception, that they are geared toward the majority culture. In fact, in preparation for this study, I could find reference to only two books written specifically for African American parents: The Black Child: A Parent's Guide written in 1973 by Harrison-Ross and Wyden, an older, minority version of the trendy "What to expect when you're expecting" series, and The Black Parents' Handbook, by Clara McLaughlin (1976), with a focus on

pregnancy and basic infant care.

In a more recent text, an academic, research-oriented book entitled Black Children edited by McAdoo and McAdoo (1985), a comprehensive analysis of social and parental influences was presented. Once again, though, this was an academic and research-oriented textbook, not a “light read” or parental resource. Though I am confident that there are other resource materials available for African American parents that were not uncovered, those written for Caucasian parents are more numerous. It is encouraging to note that there are an increasing number of resources for interracial families and biracial children. For example, there is a quarterly magazine entitled Interrace and a bimonthly publication entitled Raising Black and Biracial Children that is described as “America’s premier parenting magazine for African American, interracial, transracial adoptive, and foster families” (October 2001, p. 3).

Furthermore, I would speculate that due to two strengths characteristic of the Black community, its oral tradition and its close-knit, extended family system, (Nobles, 1997) the lack of these books does not create a substantial void. It does, however, leave many unanswered questions among members of a population (interracial couples and their biracial, Black-White children) that has historically been shrouded in secrecy and whispers; yet this constitutes a growing community that could benefit greatly from the wisdom and descriptive experiences of its members.

As I mentioned, I personally have noticed during frequent trips to bookstores in many states that, though some parenting books may include multicultural pictures of smiling infants and toddlers (as do the majority of parenting magazines), almost all are written for Caucasian parents. Common sense says that, though babies are babies, parents of minority children also face unique challenges in rearing their children in a

country where they are not part of the majority. One of the greatest strengths of minority families identified repeatedly in the literature is their ability to prepare their children for the racism and prejudice they encounter in the outside world (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1985; Franklin, 1997; Jackson, McCullough, & Gurin, 1997; Manns, 1997; Nobles, 1997; Peters, 1997). As minority parents, African Americans provide key cultural information to their children, serving as cultural advisors, coaches, and participants (Socha, Bromley, & Kelly, 1995, pp. 135-6). Unlike majority, Caucasian families, Black families must socialize their children to live (and, ideally, thrive) in a dual role as both a member of the Black community and modern American society (Peters, 1997). It is this familiarity with and subsequent development of coping strategies to manage an “outsider” status that may explain why interracial families often participate more within the African-American community and traditionally encourage their biracial children to embrace the “Black experience” (Orbe, 1999, p. 171). According to Franklin (1997), “The family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in the Black community” (p. 5).

According to US Census predictions, by the year 2030, members of minority groups will outnumber Caucasians (Perlmann, 1997). This trend coupled with the rising rates of intermarriage among some populations (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996) makes it imperative that ways to help these parents parent the next multicultural generation are addressed. Not all their experiences will be unique. Parents of biracial children face many of the same struggles and share many of the same fears as their monoracial counterparts, yet interracial families have some unique hurdles to face. How they succeed in doing so- -the tools they use, strategies they employ, and lessons they learn can serve as invaluable resources for new parents and families.

This research was proposed as a forum for these families. A prolific and

lauded researcher in this field, Frances Wardle (who himself is the father of four biracial children) has remarked that much of the work on biracial children is “useless” due to such problems as using single-race models, bias, poor sampling techniques, and posing the wrong questions (Wardle, 1998). Wardle questioned the likelihood that we will ever have quality research accurately reflecting the experiences of interracial families and their biracial children. The question that no study to date has examined is how parents of biracial children (whether single parents, married couples, or step-parent families) prepare their children for life in color-sensitive America. As a minority group faced with prejudice and discrimination from outsiders and often from family (Aldridge, 1978; Brown, 1990; Gibbs, 1987; Porterfield, 1982; Solsberry, 1994; Wilkinson, 1975) yet with an amazing resiliency and steadfast commitment to their children and partners, Black-White interracial families are worthy of our time and attention. Research is greatly needed to help parents successfully rear healthy and well-adjusted biracial children.

Of all the hurdles that must be cleared by the interracial couple, the highest and most crucial, by far, is the decision of how to handle the “what about the children?” question (Chowdhury, 1998). Often, it is that specific concern that weighs most heavily on the minds and hearts of the pair (Rosenblatt, 1999; Wehrly et al., 1999). Before, during, and after pregnancy and throughout childrearing, parents of biracial children probably wonder and worry about how their child(ren) will be viewed and accepted by society. Historically, American society and its legal system have been quite interested in limiting interracial romantic relationships and in questioning the impact of a dual racial heritage on the offspring of such unions. How much of a concern that is for the adults participating in this study as they parent their biracial children was uncovered and discussed.

Consistently, the literature has identified issues and obstacles facing the interracial couple as: "prejudice, discrimination, and rejection by one or both races" (Solsberry, 1994, p. 310). Often, partners in an interracial relationship find each path they turn down blocked with obstacles and, unlike other people in love, are discouraged from cementing the relationship with a marriage (Wilkinson, 1975). Yet, every single day in these United States men and women of Black-White racial ancestry meet, date, and fall in love. Many allow the romantic relationship to grow into a more committed union, sometimes even leading to marriage. Often from these relationships biracial children are born. As with all families, it is the responsibility of the parents to educate, support, and prepare that child for life in a monoracial world, for life as a member of a minority group (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1985; Peters, 1997; Root, 1990).

According to researchers Franklin and Boyd-Franklin, in their chapter addressing Black parenting perspectives (1985), it is the responsibility of parents and close family members to create "the social/environmental context for the child . . . (which may involve) exposing a child to his or her history, cultural heritage, and the impact of racism" (p. 202). Paramount to an accurate understanding of the internal and external processes influencing biracial children's self-identity development is their family. McRoy and Zurcher (1983) have identified six family practices that help to create a positive sense of racial identity among biracial youngsters. This list includes: encouraging open discussions about the child's racial heritage, fostering a sense of racial pride in each heritage, developing relationships with a diverse and integrated network of friends, and identifying as an interracial family.

According to Brandell (1988), parents of biracial children have three options when dealing with the issue of race: deny their child's duality, emphasize one race

over the other, or embrace their child's biracial heritage. Researchers Miller and Miller (1990) suggested that the major tasks facing the parents of biracial children are to: 1) counteract negative messages impacting self-identity; 2) develop and reinforce a sense of uniqueness; and 3) teach techniques for dealing with racism and discrimination, such as ignoring the ignorance, coping with the foolishness or educating the fool, or waging a battle against the hate.

More recently, Mark Orbe (1999) identified four communication options for the interracial family when discussing race: “(a) embracing the Black experience, (b) assuming a commonsense approach, (c) advocating a color blind society, and (d) affirming the multiethnic experience” (p. 170). Socha and Diggs (1999) echoed the important role played by family communication in the process of racial identity formation on the familial level and argued that this development is more complex and important in interracial (Black-White) families (Socha & Diggs). The intricacies and nuances of the family communication dynamic take on additional significance when examined within the context of interracial families. According to Dixon (1995), a conversationally-oriented approach to family communication helps children to withstand outside influences and to deal more effectively with societal pressures and judgments than peers from families with a “strong conformity orientation” (p. 54). Dixon also stressed the importance of a positive parent-child relationship (inherently involving good two-way communication) to a child’s development explaining that it serves as a basis for future “beliefs and expectations about relationships . . . and becomes the medium through which the child’s various relationships influence each other” (p. 47).

Whatever the depth of concern regarding societal acceptance, the approach toward family communication addressing race, and the level of familial and

community support experienced by the family, clearly parents are mindful of the self-identity challenges their biracial child(ren) will confront (Wehrly et al., 1999).

Overwhelmingly, parents of biracial children want to protect their children from the racism and prejudice of society (Wehrly et al.). Interestingly, these same children want to protect their parents, too. Winn and Priest (1993) found that an agonizing dilemma facing biracial children was feeling like a "traitor" to the parent with whom they did not racially identify. For some biracial children, to identify as either Black or White meant, in their eyes, denying the influence or even the very existence of their mother or father, causing profound internal conflict and pain (Winn & Priest, 1993).

### **Transracial Adoption**

For purposes of this study, referenced links to previous research in the areas of interracial relationships, the self-identity development of biracial individuals, and family parenting and communication issues are well established and clear. However, there is an additional link that may not be as clear or well-developed but that may offer important insights and discussion opportunities, as well. That link lies in the social-work arena of transracial adoption research and the debate surrounding transracial, specifically Black-White, adoption in this country. In fact, Hill and Peltzer (1982) utilized this connection to examine parenting of biracial children by White single mothers and Black children being reared in adoptive White families. They then used these data to develop a therapeutic parenting-group curriculum to help both types of nontraditional, minority families effectively parent their children. Though no proved strategies were specifically offered in the article, it was evident that multicultural support networks are useful and necessary for both types of family to

socialize and prepare their members successfully. A more thorough understanding and heightened awareness of racism was also suggested as being an important asset for these families (Hill & Peltzer).

Unfortunately, even with more and more children finding themselves in the foster-care system and with all the long-range individual and societal implications of such a trend, skin color (of both the child and any potential family) plays a pivotal role in any future adoption possibilities. The crucial question facing professionals dealing with these children and families (social workers, mental health specialists, judges and court advocates, among others) is: what is the true impact of an individual's race on his/her ability to parent effectively a child of a different race? Interestingly, when discussing the transracial adoption controversy, social workers and researchers on both sides of the debate agree to count biracial children (in this case, "any race" and Black) as "Black" (rationalizing with the "one drop" rule) (McRoy & Hall, 1996; Tizard & Phoenix, 1989), going so far as to label only the adoptions of these biracial children by Caucasians as "transracial."

In fact, some researchers have explained to their mixed-race participants that their being classified as Black regardless of their biracial heritage was a "social reality" (McRoy & Hall, 1996, p. 72) and not really a matter of personal choice or preference. Researchers have reported that a negative result of transracial adoption is that "mixed race" (what is covered in this study by the term "biracial") children are more aware of race and racial issues (McRoy & Hall). Others, more concerned with development of a healthy self-identity rather than a political debate, acknowledged the legitimacy for a self-defined biracial label (Tizard & Phoenix, 1989). Following this transracial adoption argument, that the color of the environment impacts a child's perception of himself/herself, it can then be proposed that interracial families be



examined in order to better understand the role they play in the socioemotional development of their biracial children- -in particular, their influence upon the development of the racial classification/identification component of their child's self-identity.

Though some research on transracial (also termed "cross-cultural") adoption has suggested ways families can successfully rear children from another race, the debate primarily has focused on the role played by race with respect to parental ability. As recently as 1992, over 450,000 children were on the foster-care rolls (McRoy & Hall, 1996), many of whom were children of color. In fact, in some states, such as New Jersey and Louisiana, over half of the children waiting for placement have been African American (McRoy & Hall). With an alarming number of Black children (ranging in age from newborns to adolescents) in foster-care and a strong market for healthy, Caucasian infants and toddlers, many of these children wait a long time for permanent placement in a stable family environment (Bartholet, 1996). Should White parents be allowed (and even encouraged) to adopt Black children or is their color too great an obstacle to their ability to effectively parent? Empirical research is cited by both sides of the transracial adoption debate as supportive of their viewpoints (Alexander & Curtis, 1996) yet little evidence is conclusive. What has been consistently established is that the child's age at placement has the greatest impact upon his/her sense of adjustment and overall level of well-being (Alexander & Curtis). All would agree that more time with a family is better for any child than an extended stay in the foster-care system.

As with any controversial issue confronting society, there are those who favor and those who oppose transracial adoption. In the academic series, Opposing Viewpoints, published by Sage, texts on a variety of current topics offer a forum for

discussion and debate. Taking a stand in the transracial adoption debate, McRoy and Hall (1996) argued that minority children should be placed, whenever possible, within minority homes. She acknowledged, however, that transracial adoption is a viable option “if same-race placements cannot be made” (p. 187). After asserting that most research on transracial adoption has found that those adopted have been well-adjusted and happy, she introduced research suggesting that these children struggle with a problematic and ambiguous racial identity.

From the “opposing viewpoint” (in favor of transracial adoptions), Bartholet (1996) suggested that there are multiple, long-range benefits to transracial adoptions, including heightened racial awareness, and lack of racial bias. She contended that transracial adoption will be successful “only if there is both appreciation of racial difference and love that transcends such difference” (p. 194). Frances Wardle (1996), a prolific researcher and writer about interracial families and the children they parent, advocated that parents need to help their biracial children develop a thorough understanding of and appreciation for both sides of their biracial heritage. He also served as a spokesperson/cheerleader for interracial families as he warned: “Don’t insist we must raise our children to belong to a distinctive (and arbitrary) racial or ethnic category. Don’t say that history and society must define who we are and what we want our children to become” (p. 202).

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

As discussed briefly during the examination of the biracial self-identity literature, Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory of personality development concentrated on the resolution of internal crises at set stages throughout the life span. That theory

also adopted an external perspective and acknowledged the impact of societal forces on these developmental processes. Ecological theory, as espoused by Urie Bronfenbrenner, emphasized the external arena and focused on the social development of people, their environments, and the dynamic interaction between people and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This is a framework especially applicable to the study of parenting biracial individuals. Bronfenbrenner suggested that there are five levels of influence that impact and may mediate the behavior of, individuals in our society- -the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Klein & White, 1996; Muuss, 1996).

The microsystem includes the immediate social and physical environments, such as the home, school, and neighborhood. At the mesosystem level interactions take place between several microsystems, such as extended family, classmates, and teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). At this level, what happens within one microsystem influences the dynamics of the others to varying degrees. Brown (1990) concluded that biracial children and adolescents are especially aware of societal attitudes. Elementary school children reared in a supportive interracial family may experience for the first time a conflict or negative reaction toward their biracial identity when they attend school which may, in turn, affect how they feel about their family and themselves (Brown, 1990; Morrison & Rodgers, 1996). According to Bowles (1993), defining one's self becomes particularly difficult for the biracial adolescent who must consolidate conflictual messages from the various levels (microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem) with a strong need for peer approval and acceptance.

The exosystem is the larger community setting in which an individual lives, works, and plays. This higher level of influence includes our major social institutions such as the economy, politics, the judicial system, healthcare, welfare, education, and

the mass media. Applying Bronfenbrenner's model, though this level does not directly involve an interracial family, the larger community has a strong impact upon the daily lives of its members. The fact that interracial relationships and marriages were considered illegal a little over two decades ago combined with the negative portrayals of interracial couples and biracial children in the mass media today (Kerwin et al., 1993), clearly illustrates the pervasive effect of the exosystem on the lives of interracial families and their biracial children. Based on her study, Brown (1990) concluded that a lack of social and institutional acceptance of biracial children and adolescents created a substantial obstacle in their path toward development of a solid, positive self-identity. It is also important to note that, though the individual may not be directly involved with the institutions and policies at this level, he/she may profoundly influence them. For example, it was the loud and sustained cry from the interracial/biracial community that resulted in changes in racial categorization on the year 2000 Census forms.

The macrosystem provides the foundation for any given society. It is the system that instills values, beliefs, norms, and lifestyles while providing guidelines, resources, and expectations. It includes ethnic, cultural, religious, and moral influences and policies. Often, at this level, the intricacies and vitality of individual microsystems, unfortunately, get lost within a broader, social context. Once again, in a society not yet ready to accept a "blending of the races," biracial children may be made to feel, from many sources, shameful and inadequate because of their racial heritage (Bowles, 1993). The interracial family may also face negative responses by judgmental persons questioning "why" they would bring a child into such a volatile situation.

Finally, at the chronosystem level a dynamic interaction occurs over time

between internal adaptations within the individual and external changes within his or her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In the case of biracial self-identity development, this is a particularly exciting concept, full of possibilities. It is at this level that a two- way interaction occurs between individuals and society; people may impact their society as well as be influenced by it. According to Brown (1990), biracial children have a unique sensitivity to and appreciation for cultural and racial differences and strengths due to their personal experiences. As society becomes increasingly multicultural and as the number of biracial births rise, these biracial children and adolescents may serve as an important source of insight and acceptance that benefits all of society.

According to Bronfenbrenner, at each level of the model there is a different focus or emphasis. Within the microsystem, there is strong emphasis on the reciprocal nature of activities, roles, and expectations influencing interpersonal relationships. For example, the effect of the experiences and expectations of the White female involved in an interracial romantic relationship is as important and as powerful as the experiences and expectations of the Black male with whom she is involved. At the next level, the mesosystem, the focus is placed upon the dynamic interaction between two or more settings or systems (multiple microsystems). The exosystem examines the larger societal context (both formal and informal) and its actual and perceived influence or control over its members. The following level, that of the macrosystem, emphasizes the operating system of given society, including norms and values and public policy.

The model ends with the chronosystem level (added by Bronfenbrenner in 1986) that highlights the dynamic interchange between individuals and society. Here the two-way processes of reflection and influences are examined, including transitions

and periods of redefinition and restructuring within both the individual and societal spheres. The experiences of interracial families may be examined to illustrate effectively this last level. For example, an interracial couple may be involved in a committed and loving relationship yet over time succumb to the external forces opposing their romance and decide to end their relationship. Another interracial couple may select an alternative response to pressures exerted by the chronosystem. They may choose to reject those people, institutions, and expectations that are not supportive of their relationship. In both cases, the environment (at the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels) impacted the couple (microsystem), yet it was, ultimately, at the chronosystem level where the information was internally processed, resulting in different responses to similar external factors.

As the previous discussion illustrates, ecological theory is an effective and applicable framework through which to examine the complexity of issues related to interracial families and how they parent their biracial children. According to the research literature, ecological theory serves as a common rubric for these areas of inquiry. In an analysis of parenting behaviors and the influences on both the parent and his/her actions, Luster and Okagaki (1993) selected an ecological perspective as the primary theoretical frame (in addition to the life-course perspective). They were particularly interested in examining internal and external forces and the contexts that exist within and through the clarity of an ecological lens. Wardle stressed the important link between ecological forces and interracial families consistently in his research. In particular, he noted the following factors as important: minority and majority context, “group antagonism” (pp. 45/46), family, and community (Wardle, 1993). Foeman and Nance (1999) proposed a new framework to analyze interracial families: “a new model of interracial relationship development,” (p. 548) that is based

upon the ecological model. Specifically, they proposed that interracial families journey through four successive stages: “(a) racial awareness, (b) coping, (c) identity emergence, and (d) maintenance (Foeman & Nance, p. 549).

Though there are numerous other theories within the child and family studies discipline that would add insight and depth to this project, only one more was considered as applicable to this study. According to symbolic interaction theory, people learn about and assimilate the attitudes, beliefs, and symbols of a society and a culture through socialization (Klein & White, 1996; Muuss, 1996). Through socialization people learn what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, and what roles are desired and available in society. The theory of symbolic interaction is based upon three fundamental premises involving social meanings, social interaction, and the process of interpreting those meanings and interactions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As thinking and feeling individuals aware of the world around them, people are aware of social meanings and act accordingly. Those societal norms and values affect how people act toward and with one another and also impact their perceptions of the world and its people. Through communication and a process of interpretation, individuals decide how they will allow social meanings and social interaction to impact their daily lives and outlooks.

Though conditions have improved for interracial couples and their children and will, hopefully, continue to do so, society still does not promote, encourage, or even accept these relationships. Historically, interracial couples have often kept their relationships shrouded in secrecy (Brown, 1989; Porterfield, 1982). Often, too, their children have been encouraged to assume either a Black or White identity by a society that regards them as such or by a community that values one identity over another (Bowles, 1993). An appreciation for the symbolic interactionist perspective may help

to determine what it means for these families and their children to live within a predominantly monoracial world and effectively assess how they deal with that reality.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As the previously cited literature has illustrated, the issues facing interracial families are multifaceted and complex. Much analysis has been conducted in both the areas of interracial relationships/marriages and the self-identity development of biracial individuals in response to the ever increasing numbers of interracial romantic relationships and the subsequent rise in biracial births. The research suggested that the level of support experienced by the couple as well as the atmosphere surrounding the response to the child's birth influenced the communication and functioning of the family as well as the self-esteem of the child(ren). Much of the literature regarding the personal experiences of biracial individuals and their process of racial self-identity development has been gathered through qualitative interviews with these men and women. In a reflective narrative format, they have revisited their childhood experiences and evaluated how well their families of origins prepared them for how society would inevitably challenge them and judge them.

This is, interestingly, a hugely popular area of study in recent dissertations. In fact, a recent exploratory search of the words "biracial" and "parenting," revealed that nationwide during the past four years (1997 through 2001) more than 17 doctoral dissertations examined issues related to biracial (Black and White) self-identity development. Meanwhile, during the same time period, only three doctoral projects addressed the topic of parenting biracial individuals. Though most of these research studies are qualitative in nature, a few quantitative studies were undertaken. Using a



quantitative methodology, one researcher examined the variations in parental perceptions of their biracial children's "early racial identification" (Taborn, 2001). Using the long-interview format, one scholar recently studied the influence of "racial identity, culture, and ethnicity" upon the "lives and parenting practices of White mothers of Biracial, Black-White adolescents" (O'Donoghue, 2001). Family identity, how that is created and maintained, within an interracial family was the area of inquiry for another recent dissertation (Fletcher-Stephens, 1998).

Two recent studies, in particular, in their "Conclusion/Areas for Further Study" sections offered support for the importance and potential contribution of this project (both to the related scholarly literature and to interracial families and their biracial children). Rosenblatt (1999) stated, "It is not the responsibility of people of color or multiracial families to educate others, and yet learning about their experiences may be helpful not only in knowing who they are, but also in understanding racism in the United States and the challenge of repairing the damage" (p. 277).

The second piece of research, interestingly enough, focuses on parent-child communication within African- American families. Since it is built upon a minority model, the suggestions for further study may easily be accepted as a challenge for this line of research. According to researchers Socha, Bromley, and Kelly (1995), future inquiry should address the cultural orientation and knowledge basis of minority parents and examine how they "communicate this knowledge and orientation to their children" (p. 135). It is also suggested that the rationale behind these choices and how those messages concerning cultural awareness (and closely related racial identification) are transmitted and processed should be analyzed in greater detail (Socha et al., 1995). Solsberry (1994) echoed a similar call to action when she wrote: "Greater effort should be made to gain an accurate picture of the role that interracial

marriages (and relationships) play in American culture as a whole; not only the potential problems encountered by such couple but also the strengths that such unions bring to the whole of American culture” (p. 315).

Clearly, this became an area worthy of further investigation and study that needed to be explored. It was necessary to capture and then appreciate the everyday experiences of parents of biracial, Black-White children and the perceptions and expectations held by those men and women as they managed their parental roles and responsibilities. What are their struggles, their triumphs, their challenges as parents? What have they experienced as a member of an interracial couple, and what impact have they had upon each of their lives? What do they hope for their children? What do they fear? In order to analyze their responses and try to answer those questions, it was necessary to understand the impact of every system of society upon that family and identify what resources each parent utilized to deal with them.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology considered most appropriate for this proposed area of inquiry was qualitative research- -specifically, the long-interview format. It had been suggested that this was the most appropriate method of scholarly inquiry by McCracken (1988) because “the first objective of the qualitative interview is to allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms” (p. 34). In qualitative research the goal is to gain an understanding of a phenomenon through the eyes and in the words of the individuals, who are referred to as "participants" not "subjects" (Taylor, 1994). Qualitative methodology is rooted in a profound respect for individuals with an emphasis on "listening" to their perceptions, experiences, and feelings (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

A qualitative design was followed in this project in order to capture the experiences of parents of biracial children in their own words, rather than impose meaning onto them. According to Taylor (1994), the qualitative perspective asks, "What does this mean to you?" It does not impose a meaning and seek a response; instead, it responds to a meaning (Taylor). It also strives to capture a broad, yet vivid picture of the phenomenon in question through the experiences of the participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Before assumptions can be made about their struggles or triumphs, that interracial families are maladjusted or better equipped to handle life's challenges as a unit, it is necessary to analyze comments from participating parents for themes and

commonalities among their life stories in order to determine what it means for each of them to be the parent of their biracial child(ren). The tool best suited for such a task, and the one employed in this project, was the long-interview method. According to McCracken (1988), "The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (p. 9). More than simply sitting down with someone and finding out their "story," the interview method is a structured and focused approach to gaining as much information as possible on a specific topic or subject area from the individual's point of view, while allowing their thoughts, feelings and experiences to flow freely and naturally (McCracken, 1988). Use of this approach has been advocated especially when sensitive and personal issues are being investigated (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). Without the more in-depth, personal insight offered by a qualitative paradigm, we would only report statistics and numbers without the contextual basis to understand the experiences reflected by each one.

Though without some of the rigors of a quantitative study, a qualitative design is not necessarily an easier choice. It, actually, poses its own unique challenges and considerations including: "(1) to develop a conceptual framework for the study that is thorough, concise, and elegant; (2) to plan a design that is systematic and manageable, yet flexible; and (3) to integrate those into a coherent document" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 5). In addition to providing rich and varied data, the interview format offers the researcher an opportunity to step into the shoes of the participants and better appreciate "the meanings people hold for their everyday activities" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 81). A long-interview is an especially wise choice within a qualitative design when the personal viewpoint and individual perspective are of paramount importance. The review of literature presented earlier in this paper clearly

documented the large amount of research conducted on interracial romantic relationships and biracial children born to those families.

Very often, however, the information reported included statistics, such as marriage and divorce rates of people from different races, and historical facts, such as miscegenation laws. However, in order to gain an accurate and thoughtful understanding of the experiences of interracial families rearing biracial children, it is necessary to read beyond the numbers and discover the reality in which they exist. A qualitative methodology is suggested when examining phenomena of this more personal and subjective nature, “to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known . . . (and to provide) the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). According to Smith (1988), a qualitative approach “involves the critical analysis and synthesis of narrative information to derive verbal rather than statistical conclusions about the content and functions of human talk” (p. 180).

Hill and Thomas (2000) selected a qualitative paradigm for their narrative study of the racial identity development of White women involved in interracial romantic relationships given that a priority was to “advance theory by collecting and analyze data that would generate research questions to be examined in future research” (p. 194). This methodology is especially appropriate when dealing with unique and personal issues that must be captured in the exact words of the participants. For their study, Hill and Thomas incorporated both in-depth interviews and focus-group research resulting in “thick description (that) provides rich contextual details and that allows for multiple interpretations” (p. 194). Davilla (1995) also favored the quality of the information gathered through qualitative research techniques and emphasized the important role played by the researcher to the contribution of the study. It is her

opinion that, though the scope and depth of the study is important (both in terms of the number of participants and the level of discovery visited by the questions), the most important variables are the “information richness of the cases and the observational and analytical abilities of the researcher” (p. 36).

## **Data Collection**

For this study, information was gathered from 10 participants during semistructured long interviews lasting approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and a half each (McCracken, 1988; Taylor, 1994). Though only 10 persons were interviewed, for many qualitative research studies “eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient” (McCracken, p. 17). Also, the rich insight and information gathered through these ten participants had reached the point of redundancy, (Taylor) whereas the information was repetitive and supportive of existing comments and experiences without adding any new depth or discovery. The participants in a qualitative study do not serve as the spokespeople for everyone affiliated with their experiences/conditions/qualifications, rather they merely provide “an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organization, and logic of culture” (McCracken, p. 17). Ideally, in the case of this particular study, the long-interview format offered the participants an opportunity to share their parenting experiences in detail, discussing those memories and feelings that they deem most important. In addition to the long interview, participants were asked to fill out a basic demographic data sheet (see Appendix A). The latter provided a basic framework of resources, such as education level, income, family size, etc., available to these families—to allow those reading the text to identify more closely with them and benefit from their wisdom and experience.

## **Participants**

First, it is important to note that the participants in this study were one (or both) of the biological parents of biracial (referred to as African-American and Caucasian or Black-White) children. As the Principal Investigator of this project is herself the mother of a biracial (Black-White) son, she was aware of a number of interracial families in the Knoxville area. Initially, she contacted people she personally knew for participation in this study and then employed a snowball technique to solicit other participants (Babbie, 1995). This snowball technique involved finding potential or actual participants and then asking them to refer or introduce the Principal Investigator to others (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The sample area was limited to the Greater Knoxville/Eastern Tennessee area. A crucial consideration of this study was that varied family types be included in order to make the suggestions and experiences more applicable and, therefore, more meaningful to others. It is hoped that any parent involved in the rearing of a biracial child or children reading this study would be able to identify with at least one of the participants' experiences.

A second important consideration to note was the bias of the Principal Investigator (PI), as a never-married, Caucasian mother of a biracial, nine-year-old child rearing him as a truly single parent. Due to concerns about bias, her personal experiences were not specifically included in this study, though they are addressed herein in both the "Introduction" and "Conclusions" chapters. In fact, in order to help her become more aware of those biases and show her doctoral Committee she could manage them, an audiotaped bracketing interview was conducted by an accomplished qualitative researcher. This step followed a recommendation by Taylor and Bogdan

(1984) that “The qualitative researcher suspends, or sets aside, his or her own beliefs, perspectives, and predispositions” (p. 6).

During that hour-long bracketing interview, some of the preconceptions, expectations, and motivations of the Principal Investigator surfaced. For example, it became evident that due to her own, personal experiences with prejudice and racism as a member of an interracial couple in the Northeast, the Principal Investigator expected to find more incidences of blatant discrimination in the South. Also, due to the relatively sparse literature and resource materials for parents of biracial children (as mentioned earlier), the Principal Investigator was quite interested in discovering what resources and resource materials were used by the interracial families and to what resources they wished they had access. Because of that revealing experience and discussing those feelings and expectations with the experienced researcher, she was then able to approach this project with a heightened level of awareness and appreciation for her own biases. Though not compromising the integrity of the study, the personal experiences of the Principal Investigator played a critical role in her respectful treatment of her participants, thorough analysis of the data, and an unfailing belief in the legitimacy of this line of research.

## **Limitations**

As there are concerns and problems inherent in any research design, so there are limitations with the qualitative nature of this study. It is hoped that through a respectful appreciation of these issues and a conscious effort to address clearly those applicable to this study, the integrity of this work and its contribution will not be compromised. According to Yin (1994), a potential problematic weakness of a



qualitative design (whether it be a case study or interview format) is bias- -by both the investigator and the respondent. The investigator may display and/or encourage his or her bias “due to poorly constructed questions,” (Yin, p. 80) that are, for example, either too limiting and directing or too broad and confusing. The respondent may (either consciously or unconsciously) display “response bias” due to poor prompts, the inaccuracies of recollections and answers, and the desire to give the interviewer what he or she wants to hear (Yin).

Each of the limitations explained by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) can be traced to the conversational nature of the verbal discourse providing information in a long-interview or semi-structured interview format. Among the concerns they addressed were the need to understand that (1) “interviews are subject to the same fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations, and distortions” of any interpersonal communication (Taylor & Bogdan, p. 81), (2) the artificial nature of the interview format may encourage “unreal” responses, and (3) responses often do not offer the complete contextual picture necessary to appreciate truly the individual experience of each and every participant. An argument often raised by qualitative designs, as discussed by Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell (1995) with regard to their study, is an ethical issue addressing the reality component of research. Specifically it asks, “Whose reality is it anyway?” Rosenblatt et al. acknowledged, “It is challenging to represent fairly the diversity of experience and thought of a group of people” (p. 18) and suggested that readers approach the study with the same critical thinking and analytical skills as the investigator(s).

Another suspect aspect of qualitative research, often regarded as a limitation, is the small number of participants and the resulting question, “What can they tell us anyway?” Unlike most large-scale quantitative projects with data sets that are

generalizable to other situations and populations, the actual findings of qualitative studies are most often confined to that group of participants. This does not mean, however, that qualitative studies do not contribute to scholarly knowledge. In fact, they not only offer insight and possible explanation for the current study but may also provide understanding and rationale for similar situations and populations. Small-scale, long-interview format qualitative research studies contribute to “the knowledge of possibility and perspective and suggest hypotheses to inform and inspire future research” (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 23).

Another consideration mentioned by Marshall and Rossman (1994) as a potential weakness requires a real conscious effort on the part of the researcher to devote all effort to the study while understanding the personal approach to the project and the motivation behind it. According to them, the interview method of data collection is “highly dependent upon the ability of the researchers to be resourceful, systematic, and honest, to control bias” (p. 101). This also supports the importance of the bracketing interview mentioned earlier (on pages 46 and 47).

## **Procedures**

This was a qualitative study examining the perceptions and experiences of parents rearing biracial children in Eastern Tennessee in the year 2001. Each participant was interviewed by the Principal Investigator about his or her experiences, fears, and successes as a parent of a biracial child (or children). After each participant was contacted and agreed to participate, an interview was scheduled. There was no specific, set location for the interviews with each site being determined by the participant(s). The interviews took place at a number of locations convenient for the

participants, most often their own home. As it is recommended that the interview situation be as natural, comfortable, and conversational as possible (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and since those that took place in the home were at the voluntary suggestion of each participant, it was considered an acceptable location.

It may be important to note that each participant knew prior to the start of the actual interview that the Principal Investigator was, herself, the parent of a biracial child. As the Principal Investigator knew some of the participants socially prior to the study that fact may not seem noteworthy; but since the snowball technique was employed to solicit other participants with whom she was not personally familiar, it was felt important that they be informed of her status as another parent of a biracial, Black-White child. In fact, self-disclosure is often suggested when the topic is of a sensitive, personal nature. According to Hill and Thomas (2000), "Disclosure of pertinent personal information promotes trust that results in greater depth and quality of data collected" (p. 196) and might have, in this case, resulted in a closer attainment of the recommendation set forth by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), toward understanding life from the participant's perspective.

Of the two interviews not scheduled in the home of participants, the first occurred in a listening room in the UT Library and the second met at the home of a mutual friend (it was a more logistically convenient location). In the three cases where both the husband and wife were participants, each was interviewed separately. In two instances, the other spouse actually left the room during the interviews. In the third case, upon finishing the first interview that participant stayed in the room to color with the children (with the permission of the other participant). Upon reading and signing the Consent Form (see Appendix B) and completing the Demographic Information Sheet (see Appendix A), the interview began.

The interview format followed a predetermined list of possible questions/prompts compiled from both the review of the literature (McCracken, 1988) and the objectives of this study (see Appendix C). According to McCracken, the challenge in posing questions during the long-interview is “not whether, but how, to impose order and structure on these data” and suggested the use of “prompts” (p. 22). A predetermined list of prompts offers multiple advantages/benefits including consistency of topic coverage and its order among each participant, and a focus for the “direction and scope of discourse” (McCracken, p. 24). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) also advocated the use of prompts or questions that would encourage participants to discuss their experiences in their own terms in a structured but not confined way. For this project, each interview began with the statement: “Tell me about your interracial relationship,” and then followed along the semi-structured interview protocol of prompts and subject area questions.

Certain guidelines were proposed when interviewing participants including withholding judgment, allowing people to respond fully, using active listening and paying close attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues, showing sensitivity, and having patience (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). It is important to note that some additional questions/prompts were added to the interview protocol following the first interview. These questions/prompts were raised from points either mentioned voluntarily by the first participant during the course of that interview experience or posed by the Principal Investigator in response to the remarks of that participant.

Each audiotaped interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes (though some were a bit shorter and two were substantially longer, lasting about an hour and a half each). No notes were taken during the actual interviews, though in a few instances field notes were written upon completion of the interviews. These notes

usually referred to external conditions that may have been captured by the audiotapes, such as phone calls, visitors, and disruptions by children. In one case, a few notes were made into the tape recorder upon leaving the home of the participants.

During the entire project each and every effort was made to ensure the privacy of the individual participants and their families. A code was assigned to each participant that identified all corresponding transcripts and written correspondence, such as Demographic Information Sheets and Statement of Informed Consent. Each audiotaped interview was transcribed by a transcriptionist within one week of its taking place. Nine of the ten tapes were transcribed by the same person, while another person transcribed the single, remaining tape.

Each transcriptionist agreed to protect the integrity of the project and the confidentiality of the participants, as evidenced by each individual's signature on a Confidentiality Statement (see Appendix D). When the tapes were forwarded to either transcriptionist, they were labeled only by the corresponding code and the interview date. The list matching the corresponding number to the actual names of the participants was securely stored in the office of Dr. Ron Taylor in a locked file separate from the transcripts. All materials are kept confidential and locked in the UTK office of Dr. Ron Taylor (476 Communications Building) for the duration of the project and for three years following its completion.

## **Method of Analysis**

Analysis of the transcribed data proved to be one of the most difficult and challenging aspects of the qualitative research process. A number of sources served as examples and references to create the necessary coding scheme. Following the work

of Taylor, Hoy, and Haley (1996), a comparative analysis was used to examine the data and then organize the data according to common patterns. This method involved looking for “themes or categories (in the transcripts), developing a working scheme after examination of initial cases, then modifying and refining it on the basis of subsequent cases” (pp. 5-6). Dainton (1999) applied set categories to her qualitative data regarding “meanings in marriages” and presented a table of her thematic categories (p. 155) that proved a helpful guide to constructing the categorical themes for my study.

Finally, insight was also provided by Strauss and Corbin (1990) during their in-depth discussion of coding procedures. They described “open coding” as “the process of breaking, down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61) that can be conducted on a variety of units of analysis including words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Comparisons are made, according to these scholars, by “drawing upon personal knowledge, professional knowledge, and the technical literature” (p. 84). Two other procedures also presented by Strauss and Corbin offered new insight and more choices for approaching the data analysis stage. Though these approaches were not followed exactly, they did provide options and help foster connections. These two methods of analysis were axial coding and process. Axial coding extended open coding further by “making connections between categories” (p. 96) and involved “the linkage of action/interactional sequences” (p. 143).

For this study, the transcribed data were organized according to the order of the interview protocol and were grouped by each major area of inquiry: the interracial relationship, the interracial family, and parenting the biracial child(ren). The first question, for example, invited recollection regarding the interracial relationship experience that resulted in the birth of the biracial, Black-White, child(ren).

Participants' responses to this one topical area resulted in over forty pages of text. Under this first heading (interracial relationship), an initial rough draft of over eleven preliminary categories was created. From that list and using the analyses guides mentioned previously, a second schema of four major themes was created encompassing fifteen sub- topics (see Appendix E). Statements from the participants, presented as quotes from their actual transcribed interviews, were grouped according to similar outlooks, experiences, and perspectives, often using remarkably similar terminology and description of experiences. The final, fourth area of data presented captures the participants' responses to the key question, "What about the children?"

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered from the ten semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place during the months of October and November, 2001, in Knoxville, Tennessee. Each of the ten interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes, though the actual time did vary. The total interview time for the entire project was roughly between seven-and-a-half and ten hours. Complete transcriptions of the audiotaped interviews totaled over 180 triple-spaced pages and yielded rich and varied responses to the interview prompts. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the project and out of a respect for each participant, little (if any) identification or attribution for select comments and quotes were used.

A summary table, based upon information gathered by the Demographic Profile Sheet (Appendix B), is located in Appendix F and is provided strictly to describe the participant population, not to generalize outside of that group. Of the ten participants, four were male and six were female. Five of the participants were African American and five were Caucasian.

Finally, there was substantial variation among the participants with regard to marital status: two of the ten were involved in a second marriage, one was going



through a divorce, two of the single parents had never been married, and for the remaining five individuals currently married it was the first marriage for each (though one did bring a child by a previous relationship to the marriage). Of the ten parent participants, three were married couples, one female was currently married yet her husband did not participate in the study (he was “too busy with work”), two participants were single mothers and one was a single father. Also, of the three currently married couples, two families included step-children from previous relationships. These ten men and women parented a total of thirteen biracial children, including two step-children (a third step-child was monoracial Caucasian).

Just as the Demographic Profile Sheet provided a preliminary description of each participant, the interview guide offered a basic foundation for structuring the interview experience. In addition to offering a consistent, chronological order for the prompts, the interview protocol also served as an effective starting point for preliminary organization and coding of the transcription data. By further coding the data using terms and themes captured within the words of the participants themselves, a clearer and more accurate picture of the experiences of these parents began to emerge.

The following text was not necessarily presented in any type of chronological order, not by the dates of the interviews nor by the actual evolution of each individual interview. Instead, this chapter presented the experiences and feelings of the parent participants in their own words within a context of the commonality of experiences, the clarity of insights, and the thoughtful exploration of multiple realities and their

meanings. For presentational purposes, the data were grouped into four major categorical areas: interracial relationships, interracial families, parenting the biracial child(ren), and “what about the children?”

## **Area 1 - Interracial Relationships**

As you read the following accounts of these men and women, the issues that concern them, the obstacles they face, and the resources they consider helpful, listen carefully for the absence of color, the lack of the word “race” being mentioned. The literature review led to an assumption that “these families” will have a harder life, a bigger struggle. It also assumed that their struggles would somehow be different, because their families were considered “different.” The experiences of these families were different in that they varied and encompassed a wide range of feelings, emotions, struggles, and triumphs.

With romance typically blossoming from mutual attraction and common interests, these couples faced the same bridges and barriers as others, yet also had to deal with the reactions of family, friends, and society to the interracial nature of their relationship. The participants explained the nature of their interracial relationships: their conception and beginnings, bridges and barriers that they have experienced as a couple, and the early reception their relationships encountered. As you read their words, you will notice that their experiences sound like those that occur in relationship development. Many of the participants used the word “normal” to describe various

facets of their romantic relationship and family life. Just as intraracial couples (those who pair with individuals from their own race) search for love, companionship, and security, so do interracial couples. Whether at school, work, or a social setting, these couples met, dated, and fell in love. They discovered “common ground” with one another and used that as a foundation upon which to build a lasting romantic relationship.

### Beginnings

One single mother whose interracial romance was with a male from another country described how the relationship began:

(It) began when we were college students, being from different countries that was something that I think attracted both of us to each other and maybe because we were in a student setting but we did not encounter too much (racial) discrimination as such . . . in the sense that we were both students and we lived in a student environment, it kind of protected us from a lot of what would go on outside of the student environment.

A single father described the early stages of his interracial, teenage romance in a similar way:

We started out when we were in high school, not real serious at first, kind of like what high schoolers do, go out once in awhile something like that . . . We had a good relationship, going places with each other. It wasn't like I was Black and she was White, it was just a normal relationship.

When a husband and wife commented on the beginning of their relationship, they offered similar, brief descriptions. The wife reported: “We were blind dates, pushed together by a mutual friend.” While her husband stated: “There is not much to

tell, girl meets guy, guy meets girl, guy and girl get together.” Another married couple met within a professional work environment, though initially they were not too impressed with one another. They each reported that their relationship began with a bet over a messy desk:

I bet him a lunch he couldn't keep it clean for two weeks. And he did and when I handed him five dollars he said, 'I want to go out, I want to be taken out,' so that's how it started and we were friends and things just developed from there. That was ten years ago.

(According to her husband) We made a bet about me being able to keep my office neat; I had to clean it for some inspection or something like that. And I won the bet and I won a dinner with her and we started seeing each other casually and that kind of blossomed . . . we grew to be friends and eventually quite a bit more than friends (laugh) . . . That's essentially how we met - - met, fell in love, got more serious.

### Bridges and Barriers

Many of the situations, feelings, and conditions reported by certain participants as facilitating their interracial relationships were mentioned by others as disrupting theirs. These statements grouped nicely under a bridges-and-barriers theme. Just as with all couples, issues such as religion, unplanned pregnancy, level of experience (personal or family experience with interracial relationships and general lack of experience with people of other races), and timing served to either strengthen or break the bonds of the couple. Many respondents gave testimony that referenced multiple codes as they described a life operating within certain limitations or enjoying personal connections. It did appear, however, that secrecy functioned strictly as a barrier for some couples.

A number of the interviewees mentioned that a similar religious conviction or spiritual connection could help the couple overcome other differences and serve as a bridge uniting them and their families. A married mother explained how a shared religion (bridge) helped to overcome the racial disparity (barrier) between herself and her husband in the eyes of her mother. She vividly recalled:

My mother had met G three years prior to that (the engagement) so I called her for Christmas; and I said "Mom, guess what, I'm finally getting married." She said, "Oh, thank God, I never thought you were going to get married." She is Catholic and she asked, "Is he Catholic?" and I said, "Mom he is as Catholic as the day is long. He is Catholic, Knights of Columbus, altar boy, twelve years of Catholic school, he's a straight Catholic." She said, "Oh good, okay." Several conversations later, days later, Mom asked, "What's this fellow's name?" And I said, "G" and she said, "Not the G I met?" And I said, "Yes, you did meet him that one time you were down here." She said, "Oh my God, he's Black" and I said, "Ya boy, but he's Catholic, Momma." And that's all that ever mattered in our family.

For another couple, it appeared that religious differences would be a formidable barrier. The female participant explained:

We came from different religious backgrounds (Christian and Muslim) and that was something that was important to both of us . . . but at the same time, it was not something that was deep in my mind at that age. I know for his family, they were more against it (a relationship/family) because of their religious background.

Another woman spoke of the primary objection her and her husband encountered, a concern over religious backgrounds and convictions. She explained:

There is a difference in religion between my husband and I and that was a concern on his family side . . . that our marriage would not last, would not be strong because of the difference of our religious backgrounds. I was raised Catholic. I left the Catholic Church and now I'm Protestant but he was raised Jehovah Witness and so there's big conflicts there. So they were concerned that since I was not a Jehovah

Witness we would not jell. (They wondered) how we were going to raise the kids, but it hasn't been so much of a concern that they have shunned me or rejected him or any of that. It was just a question, you know, brought up about that (unknown).

Even in the most secure of relationships an unplanned pregnancy may cause tension and distress. Depending on the resolve of the couple, the commitment they share to each other, and the reaction of family and friends, the unexpected pregnancy may serve as a bridge toward the future or as a barrier to a continuing relationship. According to one participant, her unplanned pregnancy offered her a sense of direction that her husband later followed. She detailed:

So we went out and started dating and I got pregnant, actually, and then we moved in together. He didn't want to make a commitment to get married right away and I wanted to get married, I had a baby on the way. Anyway, when (the baby) was fifteen months, I moved back to Tennessee. He said he wanted to move back but then at the last minute changed his mind but I said, "I'm going to go ahead and go because that's where my family lives and I'm not going to be without (the baby)". So I left and six months later he came to live here. Then we got married.

A second mother also regarded her pregnancy as a motivational force for her current marriage. During her interview she explained: "We were blind dates and hit it off . . . (then) got married in about six months or so. We met in January and got married in July. Kids (twins) came along in December." An unplanned pregnancy coupled with secrecy created a big problem for another couple. The single father described what had happened:

Her parents didn't find out until she was almost five months pregnant. It was almost inevitable that it was going to come out so when it did, I mean, it was like a double whammy like "I'm pregnant" and "I'm going with a Black guy." So they kinda got a big shock all at once.

They didn't accept it at all, even their extended family like the uncles they didn't accept it at all. And especially the fact that she was pregnant . . . so they never did really accept it. She was going to move out and actually my Mom was going to let her stay with me to finish high school and stuff, but she stayed at home. I think that's what they realized it was either have a daughter and a grandchild or have neither one of them in your life. They weren't ready for that so they accepted her (and the baby) and accepted me.

Experience or personal knowledge of an unexpected situation seemed to have helped both the participants and their families and friends handle the interracial dimension of their relationship, while a lack of that first-hand knowledge created obstacles. Three of the female interviewees explained that interracial dating already existed within their families, though the reactions they experienced personally differed. According to one mother, she was a little surprised that news of her interracial romance was met with such a cold reception. She explained: "But now on my father's side of the family, there's already a biracial relationship, my grandparents have another biracial grandchild (actually) great-grandchild." Another mother whose family was, overall, quite supportive explained her situation:

My sister had gotten pregnant by a Black man earlier . . . and, at that time, I was like, "How could she do that?" but I had always had an interest and an attraction. He (her husband) was the first Black man I had ever dated . . . My sister (now) has five biracial children as a single parent. So there are eleven grandchildren and eight of them are biracial, so it's a big part of our lives that is (just) accepted and it's never been a big issue.

Another couple reported that this level of experience also helped them. The wife remarked: "I kinda have a history of biracial dating (but) I think I was probably my husband's first White girl." Her husband stated: "There are other mixed marriages

in my family, so there will be no problems with these two (children) . . . there are other biracial children in the family.”

Unfortunately, a lack of experience with or knowledge of people from a different race or culture and the misconceptions and stereotypes that accompany that lack of personal knowledge and understanding often created barriers for interracial couples, especially among family and friends. One husband explained his in-laws’ initial reaction to him and news of his relationship with their daughter. He reported:

I figure it was the stereotype of the Black male. “Oh my God, my daughter is with a Black male,” but as they got to know me (as a person) it became totally different . . . completely opposite. We take family vacations together now.

A mother tried to explain the reaction of her family. “My aunt (who saw only) bad Black people in the news and never knew any Black people (personally) and so she was just scared for my safety . . . she just thought all Black people were criminals.” This participant also had encountered other less-than-positive responses. She recalled:

Oh my Dad’s wife did make comments to me like, “Black people can’t swim” and “What are you going to do, your children won’t swim because Black people’s bone density (is different)?” These stupid, ignorant comments . . . (and) “What attracted you to a Black man? They are not attractive?” Just stupid (comments).

Explaining the “generation gap” that causes misunderstanding and some concerns among older relatives to an interracial romance, one father stated: “I’m sure her (his White wife’s mother) wealth of experience with people of color was very



small and probably based on some generalizations and things she saw on televisions and things she was told.”

The various elements of time--passing/progression, timing, and context--served as either bridges or barriers to relationships, as well. As we have all heard, time can heal wounds and mend fences and maybe once the shock or hurt wears off, the passage of time can work in favor of the interracial couple. According to one husband, as time passed the shock wore off. He explained: “But as time progressed , I guess it is just like a normal relationship now, completely opposite from the way it was (lack of acceptance and support).” Good timing can also help a problematic or uncomfortable situation. As one participant explained: “Her Dad stayed mad more than anyone but once the baby actually got there it was like they had never had those feelings before, (like) they had never had a problem with it at all. It seemed like they changed their whole perspective.” The context of time, such as the 1950’s versus the 1980’s, also may profoundly impact the reactions of family and friends to news of an interracial relationship, especially elderly relatives and older individuals. According to the reports of one interracial family, age and experience may play as important a role as race in the reaction of family of origin to an interracial romance. The husband mentioned previously that his mother-in-law’s lack of experience with other races might explain her initial reaction (though it was never reported as negative) to the relationship. Here he described his own mother’s response, offering a context for her feelings and reaction to news of his interracial romantic relationship:

The same thing could apply to (my wife's) mother (too). Both of these women coming from long ago and both of them are fairly far removed from today's times. They saw and grew up in a very different place, a very different time and they have had some struggles (with race issues).

Echoing that sentiment, a female participant explained a similar problem with an elderly, very important, relative:

If I had any type of problem it was with my Grandfather, he is 77. It was kinda hard (for him) I think. He comes from a time when you didn't do things like that. Before I even had the baby, he came around and called me and apologized, told me how much he loved me. No matter what, I was still his Granddaughter. (After that) I didn't care who cared because he meant most to me, really.

The area of family responses and reactions to news of the interracial romantic relationship was mentioned by each of the participants to varying lengths. They discussed this question both in terms of their own family's response and that of their partner's family. In a broad sense, this thematic category can be grouped into positive, negative, or ambivalent or conflicted reactions. However, even within these divisions, this theme still had many tributary codes, some of which were hard to distinguish as dissimilar. The positive reactions to the news of the impending pregnancy were described in ways such as "open arms," happy, and supportive. Conversely, more negative responses were described in terms like "it's just wrong," actually being disowned, and the suggestion of abortion.

There was also an important dimension of how the couple chose to address the positive or negative reactions and receptions. An interesting element here was the dynamic of multiple realities. Though this is discussed in Chapter V in greater detail, it is interesting to note that many of the participants wavered in their initial responses

to questions regarding whether or not they had experienced racism and discrimination. Often the participants would respond quickly with a “no” but then would switch realities and describe a situation or exchange that they would regard as offensive. Again, an exploration of why this happened and what the multiple realities of racism and prejudice meant to an interracial couple as it parented biracial children are presented in the next chapter.

### Reactions of Family and Friends

The literature consistently mentioned that interracial couples reported reactions of family and friends to news of their romantic relationships. Some responses were positive and some were negative with variations among each. Ecological theory mentioned the importance of extended family and social networks (the mesosystem) upon the couple or family (the microsystem). The following statements reflect what these participants remembered feeling and hearing as they shared the status of their interracial romance.

One participant felt very fortunate to have the support of her parents. She explained: “I’m lucky . . . my parents were always behind me, they just wanted me to be happy, they didn’t care with who.” She also reported experiencing a similar welcome by her in-laws. She detailed:

Open door, open arms. Grandparents, aunts, even his Mom who is a very strong Black woman, very strong in her beliefs. She welcomed me in, loved me . . . I’ve never had any issues with his side of the family.

A single father explained the reaction of his family also as accepting:

I can honestly say that my family is a family conceived in love. If you are part of my family, we may judge and talk but we will support you in the decision you choose and that's the bottom line, you always have their support . . . To this day, they accept her (his son's mother) as part of the family, they welcomed her in with open arms.

Another female participant reported positive reactions by both families. She explained: "They (her husband's family) welcomed me into the family with open arms. There have been no problems with race at all." She described a similar immediate reaction from members of her own family. She continued: "I told my father over the phone and he said, 'Yeah, what's the big deal? I don't care what color he is as long as he treats you good.'"

Not all reactions were positive, however. Consistent with the literature, some participants reported experiencing negative reactions from family and friends to news of their interracial romance. This negative response varied greatly--from using harsh words or ignorant comments, to ignoring or avoiding the couple, to actually threatening or disowning--but all were hurtful and threatened the strength and durability of the interracial relationship and the interracial family. According to one male participant, his wife's family "did not accept it." He explained: "They thought it was something you just didn't do." Another female participant who was quoted earlier as saying that the interracial nature of her marriage "has never been an issue," also reported a different initial response. She stated: "My mother was like, 'I'm not sure if it is morally right.'"

Unfortunately, one of the participants experienced a more intense reaction to and a more drastic consequence because of her interracial romance. She recalled:

My parents actually disowned me for about a week (then) they couldn't take it anymore so they accepted him pretty good because you cannot not like him, you just can't . . . My father was the one who (originally) disowned me but now my mother's parents have disowned me and they still won't have anything to do with me. I haven't talked to them since they found out and they have never (even) seen this beautiful little child right here (referring to her biracial two year-old daughter).

The interviewees identified problems or difficulties that made certain situations seem much more serious and much less manageable than they might have actually been. According to their accounts, news of an interracial relationship and an impending, unplanned pregnancy seemed to create that compounding effect. Three of the participants spoke of the topic of an abortion being raised by friends and family (not by their partner) and their powerful reaction to that issue. Again, race may not be the only factor responsible for the topic of an abortion being raised as there are issues of religious differences, illegitimacy, and age, as well. One, single mother explained: "I knew from my standpoint of being Christian it was not an option for me to have to go through an abortion. I know for his family that was a consideration." A female participant, unmarried at the time of her pregnancy, reported a similar reaction. She explained:

Then my Grandmother, on my mother's side, when she found out I was pregnant, she wanted me to have an abortion. And I was like, "No! There's no way." I didn't care if I was right, it just depends on the situation. But "no" I wasn't going to have an abortion.

Though race may not have been the most important consideration when the issue of an abortion was raised in the previous situations, this male participant

believed it was in his case. He detailed the reaction of his girlfriend's family to the news of her pregnancy:

Their first thoughts was abortion and all this . . . "it's not fair to the child, you know people are going to be prejudice." I am Black you can't preach to me about being prejudice. I mean, there is just no way you can tell me about people and prejudice. He used that as an excuse not to have a child (and) he had to come up with a better argument than that.

Some participants received ambivalent responses or reactions to news of their interracial romantic relationships. In a matter-of-fact tone, a father reported: "They (my family) just kinda accepted it, I didn't hear any conflicts but, there again, there weren't any real positives." Unsure how to characterize the initial reaction of her family as positive or negative, a single mother explained: "My family was for it, but in a guarded sense."

A married couple offered very similar assessments of their mothers' reactions to news of their interracial romantic relationship. The wife commented: "I think both of our mothers, to be quite honest with you, preferred we marry someone within our own race (it) would be an easier life, to have had an easier life. But it hasn't been difficult so I don't know what an 'easier' life would have been." In his interview, her husband explained a similar sentiment:

Unspoken (message from his mother) was "Son I wish you would seek a different route, I wish you would take an easier way" . . . not being mean, just wanting in her own way, her best intention, wanting the easier, softer path for her son . . . I think that once she saw I was happy with this woman I picked, no matter what her shape, size, or color . . . no matter what, her child was happy.

## Reactions of Society

The reactions of the larger society were also often mentioned by the participants and were usually presented according to action or reaction- -action by society and reaction by the interracial couple. The course taken by society, according to the participants, either followed a path of whispers and “stares” or one of “being bold.” The “being bold” category also included the one instance of overt racism detailed by any of the participants. The participants also referred to their response or reaction in terms of their personal perception of the situation or instance and the intentionality or meaning they attached to it. Again, herein lies a reference to multiple realities, as the evaluation of an act as being motivated by racism or hatred is often more of a perception issue on the part of the couple (or parent) than a steadfast or legal one.

Issues of definitions and expectations also relate to the multiple reality phenomena uncovered in this project. Do racism and prejudice involve physical violence, overt displays of hatred or negativity, or do they include more subtle instances of stares and whispers, or exclusion rather than inclusion? Is it expected that those who do not approve of interracial relationships will say something out loud, will they snicker, leave the premises, or ignore the situation? These dimensions and complexities undoubtedly influence how the participants interpreted the interview protocol prompt, “Discuss if you or your partner have encountered prejudice or discrimination due to the interracial nature of your relationship” and how each formulated his/her response to that question.

How the prompt regarding prejudice or discrimination due to the interracial nature of the romantic relationship was interpreted by the participants and the variety of their responses are quite illustrative of how these families manage challenges and obstacles as related to societal reactions. One mother remarked: "I've felt that (stared at) before, but as far as somebody physically doing something, no." While a male responded: "It wasn't like I was Black and she was White, it was just a normal relationship. Every once in awhile you would get looks but for the most part . . . you just ignored the looks and stuff." This same respondent recalled an instance wherein the reaction was a bit more 'bold.' He expanded:

Going out to eat people would stare. There was an incident at a pizza place when somebody actually said something like, "I can't believe she's with a Black guy" or something like that, that kind of prejudice . . . so I just took it as "Right, we got their attention, no big deal." But as far as being bold and actually saying something to us (that's it).

A female responded to that question with a similar reference to staring. She replied: "(Usually) it was more discreet, just the stares and the looks and in the whispers and stuff, but 'no problem.' It wasn't any big deal in that way at all."

Another mother quickly responded with a "no" that she had not experienced any racism or prejudice but, as she spoke she truly considered the question and formulated a more accurate and detailed answer. She then replied:

Not that I'm aware of. If we got looks I have no idea. We've never had anybody voice an opinion, we have never had any mail or incidents . . . (is thinking). Now sometimes we may get, well, actually, I have noticed looks from time to time . . . I've seen some people look but I don't know if that is prejudice or just curiosity.



Her husband stated: "There is always someone out there that is going to have a problem, but usually they won't say anything or you'll be able to tell by their expression."

Other participants also remarked on this perception aspect as they interpreted and then responded to the question of experiencing incidents of racism or discrimination. One single mother reported: "To be honest with you, we never experienced it to our face. We did have one neighbor in Knoxville who never spoke to us. Whether that was because we were a mixed couple or not, I don't know." Another father responded: "I'm saying, 'I don't think so.' But it's probably out there somewhere . . . something just overlooked."

Each member of a married couple also spoke of the perception aspect of racism and discrimination. The wife stated:

I've seen some people look but I don't know if it is prejudice or just curiosity . . . Nine times out of ten they are looking out of curiosity . . . but it (makes) a big difference how your attitude is.

Her husband reported:

I will have to say not really . . . maybe it has or maybe our perception of it have changed . . . (just) because those people are looking at us doesn't mean I know what they are thinking. It doesn't mean I know what is going on behind their glance, their stare. Sometimes we will stare at an interracial couples and it doesn't mean we don't like them, it just means we have noticed them. To tell you the truth, over time I think I notice that less and less and I think she (his wife) does to. I think our antenna were up some years ago when we started and were more aware or concerned about or more fearful about what we were going to run into.

Only one of the ten participants described an overt act of racism. This married mother of biracial children excitedly described the incident:

The only specific incident, I'm sure there are times when people have made comments behind our backs or something but I have never had to deal with it face to face. One lady refused to rent to us, not to our face. She said, "Yeah, that's fine" but after we went home (after she had met him she and said she was perfectly fine with it), she said she had a "cross burning in her yard," that she "could not allow us to move in because she did not want to endanger the children." I could tell she made it up, she didn't have to go to that extreme . . . it will come back to her, those people have ignorance of not knowing.

## **Area 2 – Interracial Families**

When describing their families, these participants spoke primarily of challenges and rewards, with little attention being given to the interracial nature of the family except when the completion of standardized forms and the availability (or lack thereof) of resources were mentioned.

This second discovery area of interracial families was addressed by two main prompts (questions 2 and 3) with responses loosely falling into one of two groups: "Rewards" and "Challenges." The Rewards category included personal satisfaction experienced by the parent through his/her role and a type of healing or closeness experienced by the family because of the birth of the biracial child. The theme of "Challenges" was found to be more complex and included: parental status, family provision, forms, and resources. Responses by these ten participants were varied yet maintained some commonality of their experiences as they addressed the triumphs and

struggles of their families. A specific interview prompt, “What has been your greatest challenge as a parent?” was asked of all ten participants. However, the theme of “the rewards of parenting” was not a part of the interview protocol but was repeated often, usually mentioned in terms of personal satisfaction or the strength of the family.

### Rewards

According to one father, parenting is “the best thing we do.” While a single mother responded: “My son is my world.” Another father described his rewards of family life excitedly and in greater detail. He reported:

It’s humbling (laughing) . . . (they are young) and they constantly show me that we can’t control them. It’s probably the most important part of our day - the effort and the time we spend with them and teaching them about who they are, about the fact we love them and they are worthy and precious and special. It’s the best thing we do, outside of loving each other and keeping our private life, that relationship between us healthy and whole. That’s the next thing, passing our love on to our kids.

Interestingly enough, despite the protests mentioned earlier and the negative reactions these couples often experienced following news of pregnancy, the arrival of these biracial children often served to strengthen the families and heal old wounds. The mother who had been initially disowned by both sides of her family of origin described in detail the reaction to her daughter. She stated:

Oh, they (the family) love her. I mean, you can’t not love her. They (have) watched her grow up and, basically, with a child, you pretty much don’t have a choice but to like them, love them. I mean, they will pretty much make you.

Another mother described a similar reaction to her biracial child from her immediate family. She explained:

To put it simply, I don't matter anymore. My entire family is attached to my son. My Dad and my son are inseparable, my Mom considers him her own. Even his Great Grandparents, who had to come around, they worship him, they love him to death. He is just the most loving child, so it's easy to love him . . . he's just an all-around magnet for love.

Another participant, who had previously described the "double whammy" his girlfriend's family experienced upon hearing the news of an unplanned pregnancy and a Black boyfriend, explained the reaction once the baby arrived. He reported:

Because she was prepared to move out she wasn't going to stay at home when they didn't accept her son. There was just no way she was going to live under those conditions. So, I think, when they saw it wasn't just going to fade away, we were going to be together with or without their blessing, I think they started to head that way and gradually they started coming around. New baby in the house and as Grandparents, no matter how mad you are (when) you hear your Grandchild crying you want to run and help your daughter raise that child . . . (To ignore the baby is) something you can't do if you are any kind of parent, your instincts will take over . . . I think, at first, they tried not to be that way but just gradually, they just eased into the role of Grandparents. They just kinda eased into it and before they knew it they were full-fledged grandparents. . . . it just didn't just happen over night.

Often it is not just the extended family that finds themselves entranced by a new baby and the happiness it brings, sometimes, too, a parent can be pleasantly surprised by that feeling, as well. Describing the joys of family life, a married father offered a story. He reported:

I was telling my mother the other day, I was taking a trip out of town (when) it occurred to me (that) I was missing D and missing the boys. I called my Mom on the cell phone and I said, "Mom I have probably told you this before but it's not till you have kids that you know how much you love your kids. As many times as you told me, I'm sorry it took so long for me to be able to understand it." I had to have my own and experience that to understand it.

It is clear that the “rewards” mentioned by these parents are important to their parenting experiences. Whether it is the simple joy of watching their child(ren) develop day by day, the overwhelming feelings of love they experience towards their child(ren), or the healing effect that these children consistently have upon relationships with extended family and friends, it is evident that the “rewards” of parenting their biracial children are both real and substantial.

### Challenges

The challenges faced by these parents (as leaders of their interracial families) about which they felt comfortable speaking addressed a number of issues on multiple levels. As parents, they were concerned with status--as a single parent and as a part-time or custodial parent. One mother reported that her biggest challenge was being a single parent. She stated:

As a single parent . . . balancing both the mother and father (roles) and you want to be a friend to your child, you also want to be a parent, having to be . . . the good and bad guy in the same respect, especially when it comes to discipline situations. I have to be Mom and Dad at the same time.

A similar response was offered by another single mother who explained:

Being a single parent is difficult. I wouldn't trade it for the world, but I think having to be the good person and the bad person, and having to do the discipline, and having to decide -- every decision is made by you and your child's life is on that -- I think is the most difficult. The easy part is the loving, the kisses, and the fun stuff, but the difficult stuff is the stuff you would normally share with another.

Participants also felt challenged by the daily tasks of providing for one's family with regard to money, health, and safety. One mother found a health crisis to be the greatest challenge she faced. She reported:

The most challenging has been the hearing problem (retaining fluid in their ears) so they were speech delayed and they have only been talking about a year now and they're four, so they were very speech delayed. So the problems we have had with raising them have been communication- - them not being able to communicate with us and having problems communicating with them. So there have been some discipline problems coming out of that. A little bit of delay with social progress with them but they're catching up very quickly and they are doing very well.

Two of the fathers participating in the study experienced custody issues, one now has custody of his son while the other father has visitation. To both of these men, the issue of custody was very much a concern and priority. The first father described his struggle to get custody of his son and have him live in his household. He reported:

I think the biggest challenge was with R (eldest child) because, up until two years ago, I did not have custody of him. So it was very hard dealing with the ex-wife. . . . I had to make a plan, to make a situation where I can get custody . . . so I work toward getting custody of him . . . I think he needed to be moved to the right environment to develop correctly.

The other father echoed similar sentiments though his situation was different. He responded:

The biggest challenge is now because we are separated. It's probably the biggest challenge because you just feel as a part time parent and it's hard to have any say. I mean, you do, but you don't. (I) have a say when he's with you but like if she moves he's living with her that's just the way it is you just accept it. You decide how you are going to plan around it. Or what he does in school, where he goes to school . . . that's the toughest challenge is just to try and make a conscious effort to be involved in that stuff when you are so far removed from it. It's easy

when he is right there, you know you can have him come home but being we are separated I've got to make a conscious effort to go eat lunch with him when I can so I know his teachers I know who's in his class. I have to make that conscious effort or every time I'm with him, I talk to him about school, talk to him about swearing, talk to him about his friends and talk to him about drugs and I have to cram it into a short amount of time but I know I have to get it in. So that part is the toughest challenge, making sure you give in all the stuff you want to get in . . . (that) for me, more than anything, that's the toughest part.

The concerns of the mothers were typical and basic, issues and worries that may be felt by the majority of parents regardless of marital status, economic situation, or race. One mother remarked: "I have a really hard time with consistency, so with discipline, actually with anything, that's what I have the biggest challenge with is consistency." Discipline (one of the hallmarks of parental duties and concerns) was specifically mentioned by another mother. She stated: "The only (other) thing really we have had a problem with is discipline, not knowing how to discipline children to begin with."

Another mother discussed the desire to help her children become good people and raise them correctly. She responded: "Just, probably, as they get older for them to realize there are consequences for their actions and that the world does not revolve around them and that they have to think of other people. Making them realize you feel good when you give and it's not good to be selfish . . . just to do the best they can." A respect for and appreciation of diversity was mentioned by one of the mothers as a parenting challenge. She said: "I want them to learn about all the cultures . . . and all the different religions . . . I want (them to experience and appreciate) the whole variety."

For each of the four fathers, providing for their families (or children) was a primary concern. The first, profiled previously, was very concerned with the development of his son and the fact that, as the noncustodial parent, his influence may be limited. For another father, his biggest challenge was to provide financially for his family, another common concern. This man explained his situation. He remarked:

I'd say the most challenging would be the loss of the house . . . because providing for a wife and two kids, it was pretty hard. Losing your house and having to move to into an apartment, a small apartment, that's about the worst thing we have actually had to go through.

The third father described his need to provide security for and protect his family. He detailed his safety concerns, especially where his baby girl was concerned. He responded: "(I am) very protective, just like I'm the nagging father, y'know 'don't do that' try to protect, put a protective shield around her." The fourth father discussed his concerns to protect his child in a specific situation. He reported:

It wasn't challenging, I guess it was heart-tugging more than anything else. We had our oldest son in a daycare situation . . . there were two teachers and eighteen two year-olds . . . (he started) to say he didn't want to go to school, started telling us he was 'not going.' He wasn't secure, he didn't feel safe. It was crazy. Seeing that change in him, seeing the impact of having that craziness in his life was a little hard. Here we were putting him in that situation and we are supposed to be taking care of him, we are supposed to give him the best.

Many parents also mentioned the challenge posed by standard forms that inquire about race ("check one"). This is probably the one area of concern that posed a challenge unique to interracial families and their biracial children, especially those forms that ask to "check one box" for identifying racial classification. This was another point not addressed by the interview protocol but raised and discussed by



many of the participants. In fact, each of the mothers specifically mentioned forms.

One mother discussed her approach to the forms and how that now influences how her daughter completes them. She explained:

When we have to fill out forms it is very difficult to be able to do that and so I always put “Other” (figuring) if they want to have a discussion of what her race is (they will but) nobody has taken me up on that. So she has seen that’s what I do and that’s what she does. Whenever she has to fill out a form she automatically puts “Other.”

A second mother expounded upon her thoughts regarding the standardized forms and what relevance they may have. She stated: “I think that society, just from the forms I have had to fill out, will think of them in a category as being Black. Just because there is not a place (specifically) for them to check . . . not a lot of ‘biracial’ spaces to check.” Another female discussed her approach to completing the forms for her young children:

If I’m in a certain mood I’ll put “Other” or I’ll put “Black/White.” And sometimes I don’t care I just want to get the form filled out, so I just put down Black. It really doesn’t have a significance a whole lot to me. It just depends on how feisty I feel (when I am filling it out). (laughing) If I want to make an issue of it or not, but no, overall no, I don’t lose sleep over it.

The fourth mother offered a suggestion for a new racial category. She reported:

Unfortunately when they have to check the boxes (on forms), “Multicultural,” that’s what I’m hoping. And that’s what I hope to see on forms. I think it is ridiculous the Census Bureau didn’t have it on there, I would check it (laugh). But I think multicultural. Some people say ‘mixed’ but I don’t like that term.

The last female participant detailed a recent experience:

I went the other day to fill out a form and it asked his (son's) background and they didn't have anything (correct), they had "Black," "White," "Asian," and "Other." The lady was like, "Why don't you just check 'other'?" I go, "My child is not an 'Other.'" She goes, "I know, but that will basically explain it." I go, "No." So I hit "Black" and I hit "White" and (now) they have to deal with it. I just think it is wrong, it is so limiting like that. I will not check "Other" for my child.

## Resources

The final topic discussed by the participants in respect to their interracial families was included in the interview protocol and involved resources. This category was addressed on two levels, what each participant had used as parenting resources to provide for and take care of their families and what he/she would like to have had available. These were then categorized broadly as "utility" and "wish list". Though "Wish List" also functioned as the code for what resources they would like to have had available, there were multiple codes discovered within the utility (having been used) theme including: family (even self), elders, church and faith, community, and books. Here they are presented within those subgroups under the broader headings of utility and wish list. On more than one occasion, a participant discussed using multiple resources.

Many of the men and women interviewed discussed turning to family for advice and counsel. According to one mother, she looked to her mother for support and guidance. She stated: "My Mom, I always call her if I have a question. I mean, she's already done it. She raised two and she's also learned from her mistakes. So I really confide in my mother, I really do." A single mother echoed a similar sentiment. She explained: "I didn't have a ton of resources, I went on Mother's intuition (and) . . .

I just got a lot of advice from my Mom . . . (basically) you know your own kid and what's going to work for him and what's not."

According to one father advice can be helpful but the experience is the key.

He responded:

Well, first of all, my parents and my family and her parents and her family but outside that there isn't a blueprint, especially for raising biracial children which was really not different but there are some (differences). So there really is not a lot of help. You just get advice from you parents and just raise him how you was raised and if that was good use those examples that you had. It's trial and error, I don't care what anybody tells you, what race a child is. It's all trial and error. You try this time and maybe you try that the next time, so I think the biggest help has just been trial and error.

Another father described the couple as an important resource in addition to their extended family network. For him, being part of a two-parent household was a key factor in his parenting abilities. He explained:

Her mother and my family. Everybody helped but sometimes she could offer things I would never have thought about. And having a woman in the house (K) makes it that much easier because she will react to things much different than I would in some cases and vice versa. I mean, it is more stable to have both parents in the home, from what I can see because there is a child will have to have both elements, just one can't survive so they have to have them both. It makes it a lot easier when we are going to discuss discipline or what we are going to do I mean we actually talk about what we are going to do first.

For another family, the church has provided a valuable resource. According to that mother, involvement in that community has offered many benefits. She offered:

For me, the last two years, the biggest resource for me and the biggest help in setting role models for my children has been my Church (the Baptist Church where we are involved). There is Christian Boy Scout thing and children's choir and then karate has been awesome because it just helped (her eldest son) so much . . . the karate has helped him vent

his anger and to know when to use it and given him more self-confidence. They really teach positive attitude and that's helped him a lot to have to be involved in positive things so . . . by being strong in the background of their faith and be secure no matter what.

Another mother also described church as a resource, in addition to other sources of guidance and support. She stated: "Resources, my Mom, my Church . . . and prayer. That's just basically that, my family, the church, family books, the Bible, prayer. Just all those things have been my resources in trying to teach them to be good people."

The experience of others also has proved to be a valuable source of counsel and insight, whether it was a more formal or informal network. According to one father listening to and learning from others has helped him a great deal. He reported:

The biggest things I will probably use are people and books. If I have a question, I have come to find out that is a book out there somewhere that will not necessarily answer it but give examples of situations. Also, I tend to listen to older people. They've experienced it, their opinion of what happened or how they dealt with it might not be the correct way but by taking several different opinions you can form an opinion on which way to go so of course books and, like I said, I tend to stick to older people instead of younger people because they haven't experienced it yet themselves. Kind of where I get the advice from.

One couple, who recently moved to the area from another state, had the unique experience of belonging to an organized group of interracial families. Both husband and wife described that group as being a good source of information and support.

According to the mother it provided both information and support. She discussed:

I love the Interracial Family Alliance (IFA) that we belonged to (in Georgia). It was a wonderful group of people who got together it was not to discuss problems and woes and all this stuff. It was primarily for the children to see each other and when they walk into a room they saw

others like them. They started the group I think fifteen years ago. They saw the importance of when their children walked into the room they saw kids exactly like them. With parents that looked exactly like theirs.

Her husband described other resources in addition to IFA:

Our parents have been a resource. I've yet to read a book on parenting, I probably should but our parents have been very helpful. Our spiritual/religious life and upbringing and connections have been helpful. . . . So that's been helpful, church and other spiritual activities. We were involved in IFA. IFA was helpful. My involvement in Interracial Family Alliance was helpful. . . . And so that was a resource we had early on.

It seemed that the group described by that couple met many of the "Wish List" items mentioned by a few other participants. According to a single mother finding resources quickly rather than having to search them out on one's own would be nice.

She explained:

And as a parent it should be but you always need help and the community part of it would have been great to be able to have a group of parents going through the same situation that I'm going through or having gone through it in a similar situation to say, "Hey, yes, this is something I went through." Because it took awhile before I found those parents anyway (on her own).

A married mother also thought a group would be a nice idea. She stated:

I wish there was a group . . . of parents of biracial children that we could join, just a support group, in case there was an incident or just so your children could see there are others just like them . . . I think it would be neat to form a group of biracial parents.

### **Area 3 – Parenting of Biracial Children**

The area of inquiry about the parenting of biracial children was actually the primary focus of this study and, though intricately related to the first two areas, it is separated as the area most discussed by the participants. Most of their comments presented in this section were discussed in response to a follow-up to the question of whether or not a participant's child(ren) had experienced racism/prejudice and, if so, how it was dealt with. In total, the parents participating in this study were rearing twelve biracial children, ranging in age from 18 months to 13 years. Of these Black-White biracial children, two were females (ages 9 and 2 years) and the remaining nine were male (again, 18 months through 13 years of age). Though this question might yield a different response if posed directly to the children, according to the reporting of their parents, only one child had experienced racism/prejudice due to his biracial heritage.

Each parent, however, offered a detailed response to this particular prompt, "Have you prepared your child to deal with racism/prejudice? If so, describe how." Responses roughly fell into place along a timeline with three major points: children being too young with whom this issue could be discussed, parents already had "the talk," or parents who have not yet discussed this with their children. Clearly there was a distinction between a proactive as compared to a reactive approach. The theme of proactive response (whether the child is of age or not) included two codes: embrace and guard. Within the reactive position, codes of "wait and see," reality, and

perception were uncovered. Finally, as has been mentioned, there was one child whose parents did report that he had been the victim of racism and prejudice.

### Preparation for Prejudice

Again, parents adopted a variety of approaches and employed a variety of techniques when addressing the issues of racism and prejudice with their children.

Some approached the subject in a more proactive way, either guarded or embracing, while others were more reactive. One mother explained her perspective and rationale:

Because in trying to raise her I try to let her know the best thing is not to identify people when you are trying to describe people, not to identify them (only) as Black or White. If you have to describe someone, you describe them by the color of their clothes or as someone with black hair, those types of features because knowing what the potential can do. However, I also explained that in the “real world” . . . until some major change comes along, that’s going to happen. When you go to school, kids may call you names because you are “multiracial.” She understands, she is a very strong-willed person and she will have a smart word for those who decide to say something.

Though another mother had not yet had to address this issue with her young children, this is how she said she would handle it:

I would explain that they are Black and White, they are not one OR the other, they are BOTH . . . and that there are ignorant people out there who would find excuses to not like you or be mean to you and that (your skin color/heritage) is just an easy excuse. I want to raise them (my children) to be strong in who they are, not what they are and have a strong belief in where they come from and who their Creator is so when they face any kind of trouble, whether it is race, gender, or whatever, they can stand up and be who they are and stand for what they believe in and not be faulted by that.

Another mother had already broached this topic with the eldest of her sons and described the conversation. She recalled:

I told him that Daddy is Black and Mommy is White, so he got a little bit of both. That is the way God made him and he just thinks he's special because he's healthy and he has two legs and he has two arms and there are a lot of people who want to be Brown. A lot of people are never happy with who they are. Specifically, I told him, everybody is different and he is going to have Black friends and White friends . . . and just treat other people as you want to be treated, live by the Golden Rule. I don't think it matters what color you are, so he seems to agree with that.

Though her children are still young, a third mother had already begun laying the foundation for those conversations. According to this mother she was prepared to say to her children:

You are no different than anybody else. You have everything available to you that everyone else has, and you certainly have the ability and the intelligence and the strength to do whatever you want to do. And not to let anybody tell you that you can't because you are different . . . what do you think (and feel)? . . . I just plan on talking to them.

Other participants have adopted a more reactive, "wait and see" approach. One father explained that he does not want to create expectations. He remarked: "I have never sat down and said, 'People may be this way towards you,' (be)cause that gives him a preconception that people may, y'know, do something because they don't like him and that may not be it." A mother spoke of a similar perspective and response:

I don't think I'm going to sit him down and tell him the differences. I want him to grow up thinking he's just like all the (rest) . . . and he is, just like all the other kids. Every kid is different and special. Until he really comes to me . . . we've talked about Black people and White people and that he is both. I try to keep it on his terms right now. Until it needs to be anything more, I don't worry about it.

Another father explained his "wait and see" approach:



It just depends on how they are and how they feel when they come home. If they feel really upset, there would have to be some explanation of why they may feel that way . . . there is going to be some kind of racism out there, no matter what they do in life or where they go. It all depends on the way it was presented to them and how they held themselves afterwards.

A fourth parent appeared to have adopted a “reality” check approach and explained:

We would reinforce to them, because it won’t be the first time they have heard it, that different people think different ways . . . (but) they need to understand who they are, why they are so valuable, and that even those other people we may disagree with are valuable, too. I guess we just focus on the love, focus on the positive, focus on the real, and not the fear. Not the negative, it is just reality. It is a reality not just for biracial children, it is reality for people in the minority community.

#### Prejudicial Incident

It was reported by both parents that one of the children had already experienced racism and prejudice. They each discussed the situation from their perspective. According to the father the situation did not come as a complete surprise.

He reported:

He came home (from school) and asked the question “Am I Black or am I White?” Which was a tough question to answer but I answered it this way: “You’re mixed.” Basically, I told him it doesn’t matter. . . (When I asked my son “Why are you asking that?”) he replied, “There was a kid in school that asked me and my answer was, basically, it doesn’t matter.” So, he responded well to it. I haven’t heard too many more conflicts from it.

In response to that revelation, during the interview, a follow-up question was posed by this investigator to the father, “Did that question surprise you or had you been expecting it?” He replied: “I kinda had been expecting it. That kind of

concerned me, how will we handle it? How will the school system handle it? How will the kids around him handle it? It worked out real well, overall.”

His wife (this boy’s step-mother) offered her account and described the challenges faced by the male preteen as romantic in nature. She explained that he was experiencing some social problems:

Especially right now because he’s thirteen and likes girls. He likes White girls and he likes Black girls, he doesn’t have a preference, (it’s) whatever interests him. Of course, the Black girls, the families don’t usually have a problem with him but now the little White girls do. Okay, that’s a biracial thing and he handles it extremely well. He says, “Well, if they don’t like me because of that then, oh well.” (She advised him) ”If they (friends) want to judge you for your outside, then they’re not worth it. They’re not worth having your friendship” . . . I’ll let both of them know they’re beautiful as a person so it doesn’t matter what other people think of you . . . even though it really does when you get down to it. You want to be liked, you don’t want to be judged for your (skin color) but I’ll tell her over and over again and I’ll tell him over and over again, “You’re beautiful, so don’t worry about it.”

### Racial Self-Identity

A related area of inquiry was the racial classification of the children, both in terms of how society regarded them and how they viewed themselves. This was not an original question for this study, yet during the first interview experience, it seemed like a good question to ask and just evolved from there. The question was posed on two levels, (a) what the child considered his/her racial self-identity, and (b) what society considered that child’s racial identity to be. As with the previous question, on preparing for prejudice, responses to this question might be different if it were posed directly to the children. However, each participant did offer a detailed response

regarding this question. Generally, within each category, two primary codes were discovered: that of the label “Black” and that of “Other.” Finally, one participant discussed, at great lengths why he felt race should not be an issue to parents. In essence, this father felt that to focus on race was a mistake. He explained: “That’s not how you raise a child. I think you confuse him (or her).”

The majority of this study’s children are young, all but two are under ten, and, therefore, may not be as aware of race or able to articulate that understanding to their parents. One mother felt pretty sure about how her child would respond. She stated: “He would say ‘biracial,’ but I can’t imagine, it’s got to be hard, you’re not Black but you are and you’re White, you are both.” Another mother guessed at the response that her children might give. She offered: “They would say, ‘We’re both.’ (But) I’ve never really asked them that question.” Another mother was not exactly sure how her children would answer. She guessed: “They would probably say, ‘Black,’ well, they would say ‘Brown.’” One mother had actually watched her child face this. She explained: “I think for awhile he was classifying himself as Black. I just think he kind of ‘got over it’ (now) . . . he is biracial and that is just the way it is. He just kinda accepted it, I guess, or chose it.”

Another mother explained that, though her son is fairly young, he already is aware of the race issue. She responded:

Usually the first thing out of his mouth is “I’m Black .” . . he also understands that he is White . . . as smart as he is, he understands that he’s going to be viewed as a Black man in this world . . most interracial people are looked at as Black, they are not looked at as White and I think that is wrong.

One mother who had discussed this with her biracial child was confident in what her daughter's response would be. She predicted:

She would describe herself as an American. Well its interesting that she will describe herself as an American. Whenever it comes up she will say, "Hey I'm better, I'm Black and White. Where do you put that on the paper?" So I just told her to put it as "Other" because "You don't fit into any one category and if you have to put one or the other then you are denying. If you put White, then it means you are denying your Mom is around and if you put Black, then you are also denying that your father is around, despite what he may be going through in terms of what his parents are doing" . . . . So she identifies herself as an American. She says, "I'm American and my Mom is Jamaican" or "I'm an American, I'm from Knoxville." So she did not describe herself as Black or White because she knows it means denying half of herself.

#### Societal Racial Classification

Society, the same collective group that has passed laws banning interracial marriages, ostracizes families, and may discriminate against biracial children, may also have an opinion on the racial classification of these children. How that labeling will affect the children remains to be seen, but it will probably depend heavily on each child's own sense of self and how the parents of each child have prepared him/her for this reality. Regardless of the race or the gender of the parents, each response was essentially the same. According to one parent the race of those regarding her child may change the answer. She replied: "White people see him as 'biracial,' now the Black (people) may see him as 'biracial' too but they accept him more as their own, (more) than White people (do)."

One mother guessed: "I think society will probably consider them Black just because their father is Black." Another participant thoughtfully explained: "They (society) see him as Black . . . unfortunately they look at him as Black, they'll never give him an opportunity to be anything else." Very simply put, according to one parent, is the fact that race does matter. He explained: "Society will probably deem them as Black." Echoing the sentiments of other parents, one stated: "So I assume most people would see them and possibly classify them as Black." Another parent optimistically considered a more open society. She responded: "I think society sees her as a Black child and it depends on the person. Most, some, will see her as a Black child, once we have any amount of association with Blacks . . . There are others . . . (they) will see that she is a biracial child."

Of the ten participants, only two (both fathers) voiced a different (though interesting) perspective with regard to racial classification. According to one father, race does not play that big a role. He explained: "That all depends on the kids they come in contact with . . . but, on average, people don't actually look at the color." The other participant expanded upon this point in great detail, and it is worthy of both space and time to present those thoughts in full. This father explained:

It depends on your situation because like some parents, like I said earlier they reach out to raise a child either Black or White, they need to learn who they are before you try to teach them how to be somebody else and a lot of parents don't know that because they get caught up in society saying, "Well, you need to teach him about his Black side, his ethnic side. How to get in touch with that, he needs to know . . . where he comes from." (That is) ludicrous and I've seen it, there are some parents who believe that and they raise their kids focused on that kinda stuff even to the books they buy. I just wish somebody would tell those

parents that's not, to me and my opinion, "That's not how you raise a child." I think you confuse him. He thinks he's two different people, at a different times in his life he is going to have to be either or pick which time to be which and if he picks the wrong one, he's going to get chastised for being the wrong person at that time instead of being himself . . . that's why when you do see confused biracial kids it's not because they're confused it's because they were taught to be confused. So that's what I think would be the biggest help.

### Words of Advice and Support

A very important part of the data regarding parenting were the words of advice offered by these participants to other parents of biracial children or those involved in interracial romances who are considering becoming parents themselves. Each participant was quite generous with specific words of advice or support or encouragement or comfort for people currently parenting biracial children and adolescents or for those expecting the arrival of a biracial, Black-White baby. These "words from the heart" may be organized according to those comments that emphasized race and those that ignored it as a factor in parenting. According to most parents the advice was quite simple. One mother advised:

Always love and support them, give them all the love they need and all the support they need. Tell them over and over again they are beautiful as a person inside and of course they are going to have to work a little harder like Blacks have to work a little harder to get anywhere, whether or not . . . (that is fair). Teach them that they have to make a good impression from the outside, too. Don't let what other people say get you down and don't take it and live by it--just do what you think. You have your own head upstairs and God put it there for a reason.

A consideration for the environment was offered as sound advice by another parent, a father. He explained:

Being a parent, just a parent, is a tough job. But, being the parent of a biracial child, there are some things you really have to really think about. Number one is the area (and the racial climate/level of acceptance that exists there)--how will my children be accepted, how will my marriage be accepted? I think that is really a key, the environment that you're in. Being in the right area and being able to overlook the stares, or whatever you encounter. I think area is the key.

Other perspectives ranged from the more basic to the more complex.

According to one mother, the role as a parent is more profound than any color issue.

She offered:

Anyone who will have a biracial child or who's pregnant, you should be so thankful. Just love your child. Don't let anybody tell you anything, some people can put stuff in your head and you think, "Well, I gotta be different because I have a biracial child..." No, you're a mother; (or) you're a father of a child. That's all it is, a child, a blessing.

Another parent adopted a broader view of the task of parenting, especially when parenting biracial children. This mother suggested:

I think to expose them to more culture than just what they are living in. That's very important because you can't stick someone in the middle of a neighborhood and expect them to look around and say, "I'm just like everybody else." It's a little bit hard when physically they look different. I'm not saying that would be easy, but at least it is an attempt to do the best they can. And, to start educating them (about race) at a young age. Because so many times I've heard people say, "I'm just going to let them go because they shouldn't be taught anything, they are not any different, so why should I tell them they are different?" Because they are and are not different. You must prepare them to have good self-esteem. Just love em. Goodness gracious, they are just such wonderful blessings.

One father offered a pretty succinct, though eloquent, recipe. He offered:

(My) words of advice: to secure a relationship with a God they understand, secure a relationship with their spouse, with their significant other and do what they can to make that relationship strong.

And let the love flow from that relationship to that child and give him (the child) an example of a loving, caring home, caring parents.

Another male participant explained his response in a little more detail:

The biracial part of it (parenting) should be the last part, that shouldn't even be an issue. If you think of your child as (only) biracial or if you are going to have one . . . (focus) "This is a biracial child, oh, you've already got bigger issues." My biggest advice would be just to throw out the biracial (label) altogether. Sure, questions will come up when you make out forms and such but for the most part (think) my child. I mean, just throw out the window any race card. So, I just think the best advice is "Just let race be the last thing on your mind, if at all possible" (think about health instead).

#### **Area 4 – What About the Children?**

According to the literature review, one of the most common reactions to news of an interracial romance is: "What about the children?" The majority of these parents reported hearing that question, posed by close family and friends as well as society-at-large, and discussed their reactions and responses.

The final thematic category provided answers to the "What About the Children?" question. The majority of the parents who participated in this study (nine out of the ten) reported either directly/overtly (eight) or discreetly/subtlety (one) being confronted with this question by one or more persons, coded as family (6), friends (2), and/or society-at-large (1). Following are their accounts of those interactions and experiences arranged according to whom, either explicitly or implicitly, raised the issue. In categorizing these responses, it may be noted that many parents might have



faced this question from different groups and so may have had their responses appear in multiple codes.

### When Family Asks, “What About the Children?”

One mother recalled this question, “What about the children?” clearly and responded excitedly:

Oh my gosh, Yes, especially my mother and I wouldn't say she was a racist but you've always got that. She told me before we ever tried to conceive (our daughter), “You probably don't need to have any children because of the situation they will be faced with.” And that was with my own mother. I really didn't get in depth with what other people (think) because I really didn't care . . . It (the mother's reaction) hurt my feelings, but I didn't care (because) this is my life and I love this man. If we want to have a baby, we'll have a baby. And we're going to love her- -I knew she would love her (too) but I think her main thing was what the child would have to go through.

For another mother, the words might not have been clear but the sentiment was, as she said:

I think they (my parents) may have mentioned it - - what was society going to think about that? And, what I said was “To Hell with whatever people think about it.” I know it was a concern for his parents in the sense that I was not part of that race.

Extended family also seemed to raise this question consistently. For one father his sister's reaction seemed to come as a surprise. He recalled:

I can remember when my older sister was jealous when R's mother did get pregnant and said, “What are you going to do about the child? How are you going to raise a biracial child in Alcoa?” To me, again, he's a child, I'll do what I have to do. So, a guy has got to do, what he's got to do.

Another mother reported an incident with a family member and her reaction to such objections. She remembered:

When I was pregnant with the first child she (an Aunt) said, “My only concern is with the children.” To me, if it was a White baby it would encounter problems as a teenager anyway, it’s not about what color you are. I think it’s just problems if he is born with four fingers or if he is born without anything; kids are going to find something to make fun of- -the color of your skin or you shoe size, big ears, whatever. It’s just something everybody has to go through.

Another father expanded upon a situation he briefly mentioned previously. He detailed:

When her uncle came over (to talk to me) that was his first thing: “What about the children? Biracial children, that is not fair to the child, nobody’s going to like them, White people not going to like them, Black people not going to like them. Everybody is just not going to like them.” Like I say, there’s always going to be prejudice people. It don’t matter if you are biracial or not, if they don’t like you for some reason or other. I’m Black so I know what prejudice is. Now if you could tell me that nobody was prejudice and once I had him people were going to stop being (prejudice then) maybe, you might have an argument. But just to say, all of a sudden people are going to be prejudice, that is ridiculous. (He continued) So, you asked, “What about these kids?” (I, too, ask) What about them? It’s probably the best thing, cause from my opinion if you look around biracial kids are some of the most well- adjusted kids you’ll see. They just have a lot of extended families and they seem to be able to adapt good in certain situations . . . and have a set confidence about themselves.

A mother explained her experience with that question:

So many people have asked me. I know my mother-in-law thought that. She used to tell me, “If you can’t handle raising a Black child, I’ll take him.” I used to be like, “He’s my child.” If an alien came out of me, it’s still my child, I’m gonna raise him. You know my parents asked me, even before I got pregnant, when I first dated a black guy, “What about the children?” Of course, I was like, “We’re just dating!” Then it ended up, that’s who I fell in love with. It never really crossed my mind a lot because I knew how I was gonna raise my child. He or she was gonna be loved regardless and if other people had a problem with it, that’s their problem. I knew what went on in my household. It never was a huge concern.

Another mother vividly recalled a specific incident with a family member:

My father did have a comment at one point when we were in an argument when I was younger, cause I've dated interracial since I was a teenager. So there was one point where he made a comment about me sticking to my own race. But I think he did that more to hurt me at the time because we were arguing then he really meant it. He was there at the wedding and at the birth of my children and there wasn't a problem. I think that was just kind of a heated thing and he had never dealt with that issue before.

### When Friends Ask, "What About the Children?"

Family members were not the only ones to pose such a hurtful question.

Friends and society can both put additional pressure on the interracial couple either intentionally or not. One parent questioned the purpose of the question: "Like maybe it puts some kind of stigma on them, an unfair something or other?" She then responded: "Well, yes (in the past), I did have a 'friend' at one point who was trying to teach me the evils of my ways and posed that question. But I don't remember exactly what my answer was but her whole thing was, basically, she was prejudice and didn't want to admit it." A father described his wife's similar experience and then rationalized his response.

A friend of hers (his wife) alluded to something like that just several months ago when we were in Pennsylvania- -"It's hard on the children." And people with good intentions, I truly believe with "no harm meant," can still do damage or still feel part of the problem. We really do have to give people a break. For people who are acting in ignorance and with best of intent then I guess I think or realize my ability to really influence people or make drastic changes in the way they think is pretty small, really is pretty small. Somebody said, "People will change when people are ready to change or when they think they are ready to change not when you think they need to change."

### When Society Asks, "What About the Children?"

Finally, one mother tackled head-on the question often posed by society (either actually spoken out loud or whispered) with questions (and answers) of her own.

Yes! "What about the children?" That was my question, what about the children? What is it you want to know? And when they say, "Well, you know, the children may want to get into Harvard or something like that." I say, again, "It's attitudes and that mentality that pigeonholes people and perpetuates it through generations." And so I would recommend you change that attitude and the world would change. I'm not going to raise my child any different than you, (but) they don't know what I'm going to teach them to be. I'm not sure what they are expecting. I do hope they (her sons) are perfect examples of being loving and kind and considerate to others. To show them they don't have to be ugly. They're no different and that's what I'm hoping my children are examples (of) - - that "I'm no different from you," that type of thing.

So, what does it all mean? The ten parents of thirteen biracial, Black and White, children had a lot to say about their romantic relationships, their challenges and rewards as parents, and their concerns and preparations for the acceptance of their biracial children by a society that certainly favors monoracial individuals. In some cases, religious differences and news of an unplanned pregnancy may have negatively compounded the reaction to the interracial romance, while in other cases, the birth of their children served instantly to dissolve barriers and mend bridges. The challenges faced by these parents of biracial children were voiced as typical of intraracial parents and included their personal status (in terms of marriage and custody), their ability to provide a safe and financially secure environment, their concern for education, and their need to have healthy and well-adjusted children. The race of their child(ren) posed a challenge with regard to completion of standardized forms and the resources

available to the families. Race also became an issue with respect to the self-identity development of their child(ren) and how society views their child(ren) in terms of race.

However, issues of race (whether the interracial nature of their romantic relationships or the biracial identity of their children) did not seem nearly as important to these ten parents as the literature had suggested. They did not mention it as a “challenge” except when discussing standardized forms that have to be completed. It could be argued that, on a daily basis, race may not even enter into the equation but may rise only in response to certain specific instances or situations. That may have been due, in part, with the issues of “multiple realities” and perceptions discussed earlier as being revealed during the participant interviews. Over time and as the tasks of daily living are managed, does the racial composition of the family rise to the surface of concern? Is it a fact that the family’s identity, certainly with the passage of time, is more a result of its members, experiences, and memories than its diversity? Are incidents of prejudice and racism clear and objective or are they more a response to a perceived situation or attitude? These themes of multiple realities and perceptions and how these may alter and change depending on the needs and experiences of the interracial family are explored in the next, final chapter. It could also be, however, that these participants did not feel comfortable discussing racial incidents or that in an effort to “normalize” their families they chose not to discuss negative experiences that may be unique to interracial families.

# **CHAPTER V**

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of Findings**

The experiences expressed by the participants in this study showed great insight and openness on their behalf. The depth of discovery uncovered by this study, for this investigator, thanks to the forthcoming nature of the participants, was both exciting and encouraging. What does it all mean? Admittedly, the information gathered through this research and the insight that it yields are confined to this data set. These data reflected the experiences of these ten people, these seven families, and cannot be generalized to other populations, even those of other parents of Black-White children. What can be done, however, is to revisit the literature, both research and theoretical perspectives, in an attempt to draw connections between that body of knowledge and the new insight gathered through this dissertation project. What contribution does this study offer to a better understanding of interracial families and their experiences parenting biracial children? What areas for further research does it identify? For what voices does it provide a platform?

## **Link of Findings to Literature Review**

### **Connection to Research**

As was mentioned in the “Review of Literature” in Chapter II, the men and women who participated in this study fell in love with their partner of a different race for the same reasons intraracial partners connect: attraction, shared interests and experiences, similar outlooks on family and life, and compatibility (Brown, 1989; Davidson, 1992; Mills, 1995; Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999). As uncovered by the coding scheme, all couples shared a “common ground” that facilitated their meeting and developing a relationship, mutual friends, education, social situation, or professional work environment. This supported the claims referenced above that those individuals involved in interracial relationships fall in love for the same reasons as “everyone else does,” such as shared interests and experiences. This data also supported the claim that, as a more protected environment, collegiate life may promote interracial dating (reported recently by Solsberry, 1994).

Furthermore, this data indicated support of more recent research that categorizes interracial marriages as involving fewer older, previously married partners (Porterfield, 1982; Roberts, 1994; Solsberry, 1994; and Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). Instead, interracial marriages occur more frequently among younger, never married partners (Besharov & Sullivan, 1996). For example, according to Roberts (1994), Census information from the 1950’s and 1960’s showed that those Whites and Blacks who marry interracially are “more likely . . . to have been previously married

and to have a higher age at marriage” (p. 57), though that specific age data were not provided. In this current study, of the ten participants representing seven families, only two of the ten individuals had been married previously, one also interracial. Also, overall, these participants tended to be young at marriage (or birth of their child in the case of never married couples), with most being in their early to mid-twenties. Regardless of the age at marriage or the number of the marital union, men and women involved in interracial marriages want love and companionship, intimacy and good communication, compatibility and economic security, a home and a family, and, most of all, happiness.

This study’s data demonstrated that, even here in East Tennessee, there does not seem to be a lot of open hostility or discrimination aimed at interracial Black-White families and their biracial children. Only one of the ten parents actually discussed a specific incident of prejudice based on the interracial nature of her family and only one report of racism directed at a biracial child. It is unfortunate, though, that (consistent with the literature) the most negative responses to these interracial relationships and families appear to have come from loved ones and were, consequently, the most damaging and hurtful (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1999). In both of these aforementioned studies, participants reported initial disapproval of the interracial romance by those closest to them. Similarly, in this study, seven out of the nine instances of the query, “What about the children?” detailed by nine participants (one mentioned two particular instances, both with family members) involved family members, often mothers and fathers.



On the other hand, data revealed instances when the biracial child actually unified the family and helped to repair previous difficulties evoked by news of the interracial relationship and/or the pregnancy. This healing effect was reported by all those parents who had originally received a negative reception to the arrival of a biracial child. According to the interviews, the biracial child, who may or may not have been joyously anticipated, consistently served to strengthen the family, unite its members, and then to become a testament to the power of love. This finding was also consistent with previous studies of a similar nature. For example, in 1995, Rosenblatt and two colleagues (Karis and Powell) interviewed twenty-one Black-White heterosexual couples living in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul area. According to their report, of those couple who did report a negative or hostile reaction to news of their interracial romance “often opposition would lessen with time or with the birth of (biracial) children” (Rosenblatt, 1999, p. 274). Kouris and Lasswell reported a similar finding in their 1993 article. They echoed the sentiment that interracial romances are often met with disapproval and hostility but also found that these negative feelings lessened over time and “after the birth of (biracial) grandchildren” (p. 251).

In addition to the unifying effect of the birth of the next generation, it is also very encouraging to note the number of times these parents of biracial children mentioned turning to their parents as sources of parenting information, even in situations when there had been some very negative feelings before the birth of the biracial child. For example, the mother who reported being disowned from her father after revealing her interracial relationship and then having her mother try to dissuade

her from conceiving her biracial daughter, cited her mother as her greatest resource and spoke of how supportive her family now was.

Data gathered during this study supported a point consistently mentioned in the literature, that the family and friends of the White member of the interracial couple often have a harder time dealing with the news and are more likely to react negatively to the interracial relationship (Aldridge, 1978; Porterfield, 1982; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Solsberry, 1994; Wilkinson, 1975). In this study, two of the three discussions of abortion came from White families opposed to the relationship. Also, the only case of someone actually being disowned from the extended family involved a Caucasian woman and her paternal grandparents. Also, consistent with cited national demographic data trends, this sample population reflected a higher frequency of romantic relationships and intermarriage between Black males and White females than between Black females and White males (Aldridge, 1978; Brown 1989/1990; Porterfield, 1982; Suro, 1999; Wilkinson, 1975).

In 1973, Rose identified six major sources of conflict for the interracial family. Listed in order of importance, they were: lack of friends, disapproval of family of origin, conflicts in the children's minds about self-identity, economic difficulties, housing restrictions, and religion. Though I cannot ascertain value and order the obstacles, the participants in this study mentioned problems dealing with each issue, some more directly and in stronger terms than others, in the year 2001. I find it interesting, that the challenges faced by interracial families have remained constant for almost thirty years and that some appear to be the same conflicts intraracial families

must also resolve, such as economic difficulties. Again, a causal link may be hard to prove with some of the variables, though each has been a source of conflict for at least one of the parents interviewed. For example, one family spoke of losing their home due to financial hardship. The husband/father attributed the setback to his wife no longer working outside the home and a health crisis involving the children. He never mentioned race. As discussed in Chapter 4, religion served as both a bridge between some couples and a barrier for others. Also, the reaction of family and friends to the interracial family dynamic was reported by all participants, to one degree or another, as causing some distress, conflict, or turmoil.

According to Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (1985), "Parents and other key family members have the chief responsibility for creating the social/environmental context for a child. This might include . . . exposing a child to his or her history, cultural heritage, and the impact of racism" (p. 202). Though no real consensus was reached, the parents clearly were concerned with the assimilation of their child(ren) into society and questioned how society would racially view their child. Many spoke of exposing the children to diversity and multicultural viewpoints, while others spoke of focusing less on the race (and racial identity) of the child and more on individuality (and self-identity). Consistent with a minority model, a few of the parents reported preparing their children to "survive" and be ready to handle racism and prejudice. Peters (1997) explained, "It is assumed that Black families encourage the development of the skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary to survive . . . in a racially oppressive society" (p. 172). Could it be that all minority families (regardless of the racial

composition) function to protect and prepare their members in this way, or is it that all families (again, irrespective of racial makeup) seriously accept the parenting challenge of preparing the next generation to be happy and productive members of society? Perhaps, it is not a race issue as much as it is a family responsibility issue.

According to Wehrly, Kenney, and Kenney (1999), when involved in interracial relationships, “White parents, in particular, have the challenge of helping their children cope with racism . . . (such as) acts of discrimination or outright rejection . . . even on the part of relatives and family members” (p. 43). Mark Orbe, (1998) in his work with interracial families, identified four specific orientations regarding how the family, through communication channels, addresses race. Roughly, the approaches were: embracing Blackness, common sense, color blind, and multicultural celebration. In their own words (or the words their parents thought they would use), it was reported that many of the biracial children whose parents participated in the study would identify themselves as “Black,” (embracing their Blackness) while some would personally apply the label of “biracial” to themselves (engaging in a multicultural celebration). Though their children were often too young to be aware of the construct of “race” or too young to articulate an awareness of a racial identity, many parents participating in this study reported already discussing being biracial with their children. A few spoke of waiting until their child raises the issue in the future while one parent discussed, in great detail, his opinion that being biracial should not be a focus with regard to parenting or individual self-identity.

The work of Kerwin et al. (1993) also targeted interracial families. Their study reported a number of major themes being discussed by both parents and children. In their project, the adult population was concerned with the adoption or rejection of racially identifying labels, formal or informal preparation for discrimination, and where to raise the family. In the current study, each of the mothers discussed standardized forms and the dilemma of how accurately and respectfully to acknowledge the racial identity of each one's child(ren). This finding was quite encouraging as, though many of the young children may not be aware of their racial identity, it indicated that the parents are empathetic to this aspect of their children's identity and experience. According to Bowles (1993), completion of standardized forms and applications often holds considerably more meaning to the biracial individual than simply checking a box and is often regarded more as a statement of identity.

Also, among this participant population at least half of the parents interviewed mentioned the importance of a supportive and open racial environment. They addressed this concern on multiple levels, including the neighborhood, school, and community. In their 1999 study, Wehrly et al. discussed that parents of interracial children reported an emphasis on celebrating their child's dual heritage, advocating exposure to and celebration of both racial lineages. Many researchers have identified the family as both a source of racial socialization and racial identity development within biracial children and adolescents (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1985; Kerwin et al., 1993; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). In this current study, parents reported

understanding their role as socializing agent and the need to embrace and celebrate diversity, though the extent of that need varied among participants. This population also spoke often of their need to communicate with their children, not just about race. The interviews showed that this group of parents appreciated the need for solid interpersonal communication and understood its value in effectively parenting their children. Both Orbe (1999) and Dixson (1995) focused on the importance of solid, dynamic communication within the interracial family, especially in successfully resolving conflicts and managing racial issues.

In their 1999 study, Foeman and Nance proposed a new framework for analyzing interracial families (see page 37 of this paper) that involved a journey through four successive stages: “(a) racial awareness, (b) coping, (c) identity emergence, and (d) maintenance (p. 549). It seems from the data gathered through these ten long interviews that the experience of some of these families followed a similar path. For example, a couple of the participants reported a heightened level of self-awareness at the beginning of their interracial romances. One husband remarked: “Over time, I think I notice that (the reactions) less and less and I think she (his wife) does too. I think our antenna were up some years ago when we started, and we were more aware or concerned about or more fearful about what we were going to run into.” In terms of the “coping” stage, I think that is best exemplified by the families dealing with everyday issues, such as health, finances, and education. As an illustration, one family mentioned the financial setback it faced due to unexpected health problems. The father detailed: “Losing your house and having to move into an

apartment, a small apartment, that's about the worst thing we have actually had to go through."

The third stage proposed by Foeman and Nance was labeled "identity emergence." This transformation was discussed by the participants in a number of ways, such as how the interracial couple handled less than positive responses to their relationship and news of a pregnancy, how forms are completed, and how the biracial children's racial self-identity is nurtured. For example, one mother reported that she would like to see the term "multicultural" as an option for her child and continued, "Some people say 'mixed' but I do not like that term." The final stage is "maintenance" of the family and may be found in both the ways the families prepare their children for racism and in how they focus on the daily challenges of living as a family. One mother explained: "Because they are and are not different. You must prepare them to have good self-esteem. Just love 'em." A father advised:

Secure a relationship with a God they understand, secure a relationship with their spouse, with their significant other and do what they can to make that relationship strong. And let the love flow from that relationship to that child and give him (the child) an example of a loving, caring home, caring parents.

Finally, the literature review also briefly visited the transracial adoption debate. Though a direct link from that topic area to the current study may not have appeared as obvious, it exists nonetheless. In fact, a recent article appearing in the current issue of Interrace magazine highlights this connection quite effectively. The short literary piece (a "Feature" appearing under the heading of "Teaching Tolerance") was written for adoptive parents, specifically involved in transracial adoptions.

Interestingly enough, the author, Jennifer Bowman, acknowledged that the piece might provide information and insight to “biological interracial families,” as well (p. 36). Her tips to help families deal with issues of “color” included: find similarities, take comfort in a job well done, educate yourself on the topic, explore multicultural friendships and experiences, have patience, find and use your voice, be honest, be attentive, and examine your own biases and concerns (Bowman, 2001, pp. 36-38).

Though, in this current project there was no direct application of transracial adoption issues, the link is rooted in the literature and even mentioned specifically in an article on multiracial families (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 167). As all the parents involved in this study were the biological mothers and fathers of their Black-White children, the issues raised by that debate may be applied to this subject area (such as the Interrace article mentioned previously). According to McRoy and Hall (1996), transracial adoption should be discouraged. She cited research that reported Black children raised in White homes may struggle with racial identity issues. Bartholet (1996), writing in support of transracial adoption, suggested that adoptive families appreciate racial differences and celebrate diversity. Interestingly enough, many of the parents who participated in this project discussed exposing their children to diversity and educating them about their dual heritage. A few of the single, White parents who are, in essence, raising a child in an environment quite similar to a transracial adoption situation, spoke of the importance of exposing their children to both branches of their family tree. Again, however, for these single mothers, it was



their status as a single parent that concerned them more than the racial disparity between themselves and their children.

I, personally, question whether the race of a qualified and loving family truly threatens or even impacts the ability of that home environment to nurture, prepare, and protect a child for life in today's society, no matter how racist and closed-minded that world may be. I do believe that a critical factor to the success of a transracial adoption, similar to that of an intraracial adoption, is the support network and resources available to the family. Participants in this study spoke frequently of their reliance on their partner and family of origins in raising healthy, loved, and well-adjusted children. Though some may have reported more contact with one side of the family (and, hence, with one race) than the other, once again, race did not seem to matter as much as the love and support.

I would suggest that the transracial family needs to make a concerted effort to develop a better understanding of their child's ethnic heritage, as the interracial family should. Many of the participants spoke of their desire to acclimate their children into a diverse world and to help them appreciate their multiethnic heritage. It would also be wise for that family to develop a cultural sensitivity to overt and subtle racism and analyze the effect (both possible and realized) of that evil upon their child's self-identity development. Whether an interracial family was created through a biological or legal system, the fact remains that it is a family and will function successfully if given the support and information it needs to thrive. Unconditional love does not have a color, favor a color, nor see color. In fact, if unconditional love could be visually

represented, I think a bright rainbow would be the most appropriate symbol. As one participant advised: “Just love your child.”

One other area that was mentioned specifically in the presentation of data in Chapter IV (page 69) and implied throughout the transcribed interviews was the existence of “multiple realities” within the lives of the participants and their families. Both legal history and scholarly research would suggest that race is a primary focal point, maybe even on a daily basis, in the lives of these interracial families as that is what society considers to be so important. However, for the ten participants interviewed in this study, their status as an interracial couple and/or family clearly was not identified as a prominent issue. The participants often referred to themselves, their romantic relationships, and their families as “ordinary” or “normal.” The work of Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell (1995) reached a similar conclusion. According to their interviews, most members of their twenty-one interracial couples “said that they considered themselves ordinary” (Rosenblatt, 1999, p. 268). So, the predominant reality for these families is that they are “normal.”

Does that feeling of normalcy and that daily existence within a reality that the interracial family (despite its racial composition) is “ordinary” cause certain perceptions and judgment levels to be created? For example, a few of the participants immediately responded with a strong “no” when asked if they had ever “experienced prejudice or discrimination due to the interracial nature of your romantic relationship.” However, on multiple occasions, participants would quickly describe an instance or situation that they did believe (or now consider to be) negative. For example, one

mother immediately responded: “Not that I’m aware of. If we’ve gotten looks, I have no idea . . .” Then she verbally processed what had not happened such as “no mail or incidents in the yard” and continued. “Well, actually, I have noticed looks from time to time . . . but I don’t know if it is prejudice or just curiosity. So any particular incidence, no, I am not aware of any.”

Another component of this multiple realities phenomena is that it may change across situations and over time. For example, two participants spoke of their awareness (perhaps their feeling self conscious) about the interracial component of their relationship being stronger earlier in the relationship. According to one husband, in the beginning of their romance his wife “would take note of people who would take note of us out in public . . . But, to tell you the truth, over time I think (we) notice it less and less. Our antenna were up some years ago when we started and we were more aware or concerned or more fearful about what we may run into.” His wife offered her perspective, “If I was not right in my own head and if I were feeling a little insecure, I would feel people looking at me.”

Both of these two participants also articulated a third component to this multiple reality phenomenon, that of an individual’s perception or attribution of motive. The wife observed: “Nine times out of ten, they are looking out of curiosity.” Her husband shared their conversations about this: “And we have discussed that just because people are looking doesn’t mean we know what they’re thinking.” So, if an individual is a member of a relatively new interracial couple and, personally, does not think about race on a daily basis but may not yet feel comfortable about the attention

that the couple receives, he or she may be very aware of stares and whispers and may also attribute them to negativity and prejudice. Whereas, a veteran couple who is comfortable with their relationship and may be in a reality less attuned to societal expectations or judgments may not even notice the stares or if they do, does not attribute negativity to them. In short, multiple realities may also be associated, on some level, with selective perception.

### Connection to Theory

The primary theory applicable to understanding the experience of parenting biracial, Black-White children, before any actual data were collected and analyzed, was ecological theory (as discussed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In its most basic form, ecological theory proposed five levels of societal influence that are exerted to varying degrees of strength and effectiveness upon individuals. The smallest of these is the microsystem, comprised of such intimate associations as those found at home, work, and school. This is where some of the most hurtful examples of discrimination and prejudice can wield the biggest influence over the individual or family.

In this study, schools were mentioned as both a safe place where interracial couples met (coded as “common ground”), and where racism was experienced by a thirteen-year-old young man. It is within this microsystem sphere that the individual, and later the couple, and later the family will rely on others for support, guidance, and assistance. Unfortunately, it is also here that many of the participants reported experiencing racism and prejudice (at the very hands of those who should be protecting them). Again, this is the level where protection should be a priority and an

“us against the world” mentality should exist, encapsulating the interracial family and, especially, the biracial child in unconditional love and support.

At the next level, the mesosystem, interactions and exchanges take place dynamically between multiple microsystems. Here the influence of persons such as extended family, teachers, and fellow worshippers is felt. The prom incident presented earlier in this paper is an example in which a biracial young lady was insulted and then forbidden from attending her spring prom by her high school principal. Without knowing for sure, one could speculate that the young, biracial girl in the story comes from a stable and supportive microsystem, surrounded by family and friends, and, therefore, felt comfortable to attend the social function. It was the impact of the mesosystem (the school principal) that damaged her plans, as well as her self-image. It is also here that many participants spoke of finding solace and comfort in their faith and expressed an interest in, perhaps, starting a group/social network of interracial families to provide support and interactional opportunities for their children, as well as for one another.

The larger community setting, including healthcare, the economy, and legal restrictions, comprises the third level in Bronfenbrenner’s model, the exosystem. Though this sphere does not exert direct, daily influence upon the individual or family, it most certainly impacts them. One of the participants in this study spoke of an aunt whose mind was filled with television images of Black males involved in illegal activity, so much so, in fact, that she feared for her niece’s safety. Then there was the mother whose grandfather was having a hard time accepting her interracial marriage

because “that just wasn’t done” in his day. How did these people get these ideas? The mass media (as they perpetuate stereotypical images) and the legal system (as they once regulated interracial romantic relationships and intermarriage) both impact the individual by influencing the community within which he/she lives.

A current example of this level, mentioned repeatedly by participants, involved the completion of forms, any forms that question and try to categorize one’s racial identity. For the first time ever, during the year 2000 Census, there was an opportunity to explain one’s race as more than “Black,” “White,” or “Other.” On that form, instead of the familiar “check only one” rule, there was now a “check all that apply” guideline. This change was the direct result of civic involvement and an example of how the will of the people and the power of the government can work together for the benefit of all.

The foundation of a given society, its beliefs, norms, expectations, limitations, and influences, is provided by the macrosystem. This is where, in particular, this research study may be very helpful and influential. If nine of the ten participants reported being asked, “What about the children?” as if there were some big taboo or hideous implication of bringing biracial children into this world, then one can project that it is a pretty typical reaction to news of an interracial romantic relationship or pregnancy. Yet none of them discussed any horrible consequence for themselves, their child(ren), or their family from this query. Instead, they mentioned repeatedly that the birth of the biracial child(ren) served as a bridge connecting friends and families once again. Imagine if the happy news of a baby, conceived in love, were

accepted and celebrated even in cases where the baby was biracial and imagine all the memories that could be made, bonds that could be strengthened, and hurt feelings that could be avoided.

The final level of the ecological model, the chronosystem, is where a dynamic process occurs between individual beliefs and expectations and societal limitations and requirements. So, if this is the level where real change can take place, where a two-way exchange can truly benefit others, then how can societal misconceptions regarding biracial children be effectively addressed? These data suggested that by allowing these interracial families and their biracial children to just be, to face life's challenges and experience its rewards on a daily basis, and to be evaluated (not judged) for those accomplishments then maybe, just maybe, some of society's misperceptions, prejudices, and unfair judgments will dissipate. Probably, in the same way they were effectively addressed on the microsystem level, one child and one family at a time. But, one can also pursue more large-scale opportunities for gathering informational articles, publishing new research, creating more accurate media portrayals of interracial families and biracial children, and being a good example of what an interracial family can be, to name just a few.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study gives evidence to three fairly recent scholarly projects mentioned earlier (on pages 39 and 40), regarding interracial (or as they termed, "multiracial")

families and how future research could approach their examination, portrayal, and contribution. Rosenblatt (1999) suggested that by studying multiracial families others may learn of racism, its harmful effects, and how to mend the devastating wounds it leaves behind. Researchers Socha, Bromley, and Kelly (1995) focused upon the importance of analyzing the communication patterns and channels of the multiracial family and suggested that aspects of racial identity and the transmittal of messages regarding identity be explored in greater detail. This was suggested not in terms of a deficit perspective and a “what is wrong with these families” mentality but in order to appreciate the contributions of interracial families and biracial individuals (Solsberry, 1994).

This project was just one of a limited number of recent studies beginning to investigate interracial families and how they address and manage their parenting functions. Many more studies should be conducted with this population. Certainly, if the researchers have access to a larger pool of parents of biracial children who were willing to participate in such a project, they could increase the knowledge about how biracial children are parented. Though the number of participants in this study was optimal as redundancy was achieved, it may be helpful to increase the number of participants depending on the size of the interracial population in a given area. In the future, a larger number of participants may offer understanding of a greater variety of family types, such as more single parent custodial fathers and more Caucasian male/African American female couples. This may offer more insight into what other factors influence interracial families besides race, as well as instances and situations



when race does seem to matter considerably. Rosenblatt (1995) suggested that when studying multiracial families “the more important questions may be about (their) experiences” (p. 275). I think that the more accurately we can listen to more and more interracial families about their experiences, the more we can better understand and better appreciate this important type of family.

As another suggestion, as this is such a diverse experience for each participant, perhaps multiple interviews over the course of a month or longitudinally for several years might provide more in-depth information and lead to more personal discovery and insight. Also, if it could be logistically managed and if the participants were willing, it might be quite revealing, as well as socially rewarding, to conduct an open, group interview, similar in design to a focus group (Hill & Thomas, 2000). This study supported the notion that, though each individual experience is unique, these parents shared a common bond through their roles as members of interracial families and as the parents of biracial Black-White children. The combination of common understanding and diversity of experience should yield a wealth of insightful and thought-provoking data to all listeners. The addition of more demographic and regional elements might also strengthen future design and analysis- -for example, a comparison of the racial climate of Boston to the one enjoyed in Atlanta.

What this study demonstrated is that the experiences of parenting biracial children are both “normal” (such as worrying about health and safety, education and social activities, and financial provision) and “unique” (such as when filling out standardized forms and wishing for more specialized resources). The bottom line is

that race does not play a major role in the lives of these people, life is not harder for these families, and they share more in common with intraracial families than their differences. To answer the “what about the children” inquiry: they and their families are just fine.

### **Parting Thoughts**

This paper opened with three scenarios meant to illustrate the complex yet universal nature of the issues facing interracial families and their biracial children. This final paragraph offers as similarly illustrative, three meaningful quotations. The first comes from the historically famous “I Have a Dream” speech by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Long before I, myself, became the parent of a biracial child this particular line held special meaning for me: *“I have a dream, that one day my children will be judged, not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.”* For many parents of biracial children, as well as numerous other parents, that is our dream, as well. We hope that our children will be judged by their personality, intelligence, and humor rather than their shoe size, physical limitations, or skin tone.

The second passage is a remarkable statement from an interviewee that eloquently summarizes the experiences of parents of biracial, Black-White children: The greatest challenge *“didn’t have anything to do with color or race or anything like*

*that,” it was the challenge “to be a good parent and raise happy, well-adjusted children.”*

Hopefully this “labor of love” left you with a new outlook on interracial families and their biracial children, a renewed appreciation for the resiliency of the human spirit, and a profound appreciation for the power of unconditional love. Let me also leave you with these words from Mr. Walt Disney, *“The things we have in common far outnumber and outweigh those that divide us.”*

## **WORKS CONSULTED**

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

[Two-page cover letter printed on UT CFS Dept. letterhead]

October or November 2001

Hello, my name is Suzy Prentiss. I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, working on my dissertation project entitled: *Parenting biracial children* in the Department of Child & Family Studies.

For my dissertation project, I am interested in exploring how parents of biracial children parent. As a mother of a biracial nine year-old son, I am fully aware of the unique challenges and rewards that this blessing entails. I think our experiences- -the strategies we use and the lessons we have learned- - could help other parents of biracial children. Specifically, I would like to learn about your experience as a parent of a biracial child. I hope you will be willing to talk with me in detail about your experiences as a parent and discuss what parenting means to you. Also, if you are married or share parenting duties with a partner, I would be interested in speaking to that person regarding his/her parenting experiences, as well. Understand I will interview each of you separately for about an hour at your convenience at an agreed upon time and location. Individual responses will be kept in the strictest confidence. Once all interviews are finished, you will have an opportunity to read your transcripts, comment on their content, and make corrections (if desired) before my final paper is submitted.

Please complete the following Consent Form indicating your willingness to participate and how and when I may contact you to arrange the interview. I sincerely thank you for your participation in this research project; it is very much appreciated. I look forward to talking to you soon.

Cordially,

Suzy Prentiss



## **STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT**

Before we start the interview process, I would like to inform you of some very definitive rights.

1. Your participation is entirely voluntary.
2. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
3. You are free to withdraw from/cancel the interview at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits and any audiotaped material will be immediately erased at your request.
4. Confidentiality- -this interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of my committee with a number code for purposes of identification only.
5. Anonymity- -excerpts from your interviews, including quotes, may be included in my final paper but under no circumstances will your name or other identifying characteristics be included.

(Source: McCracken)

### **Statement of Risks & Benefits**

Minimal risk is anticipated through your voluntary participation in this study. However, as mentioned, you may refuse to answer any question and can withdraw from this study at any time. Furthermore, if the interview process creates any emotional distress, you will be referred to a counselor in the UTK Psychology Counseling program. A brochure about the program will be given to you upon completion of each interview or by request. Remember, this study involves only adults and at no time will your child/children be contacted or interviewed.

The primary benefit of participation in this research project is to increase knowledge of this subject area. Ideally, a fundamental motivation for this research is so that others faced with the prospect of rearing a biracial child in whatever circumstance (as a single mother, an interracial couple, divorcee, widow, single father, etc.) may read these accounts of people like you in your own words and draw courage and ideas from your experiences.

**Storage**

All research materials (including audiotapes, transcripts, notes, Demographic Information Sheets, and Statement of Informed Consent forms) will be stored in separate, locked file drawers in the office of Dr. Connie Steele at The University of Tennessee. The transcriptionist will sign a Confidentiality Statement prior to transcribing the audiotaped interviews.

**Contacts**

You will be given a copy of this signed consent form at the time of our interview. If at any time during this study you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself or Dr. Connie Steele. You may reach me by pager at 549-9992 or at work at 974-0696 or Dr. Steele at her campus office 974-4590. Thank you.

### **Signature of Informed Consent**

I have read the information about this project, have had my questions answered fully, and agree to participate. I understand that my total involvement in this project will be two to three hours (1 hour for the initial interview, approximately 1 hour to review those transcripts, and 1 hour for the group interview), but that I may cancel my voluntary participation at any time without penalty. Also, I have been informed that the person responsible for transcribing the audiotaped interviews must sign a Confidentiality Statement prior to hearing the interviews. Finally, I am aware that a copy of this signed Statement of Informed Consent will be given to me prior to my interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Phone or pager number where I may reach you

\_\_\_\_\_

A good time to reach you

\_\_\_\_\_

Also, if you would be willing to meet with other participants in this study (men and women who, like you, are parenting biracial children) after all interviews are complete to discuss any additional points or overall thoughts and feelings in general, again, at a mutually agreed upon convenient date and location, please check the appropriate box. Understand that you may change your answer to this additional involvement at any time during this process. I am just trying, at this time, to get an idea as to the level of interest for such a get together. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I may be interested in participating in a group discussion session at a later date.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I would not like to participate in a group discussion at a later date.

If you know of any other parents of interracial (Black and White) children who may be willing to participate in this project, please have them contact me at (423) 974-0696 or provide me with their name and telephone number(s). Thank you so very much. Have a wonderful day!

## APPENDIX B

# \_\_\_\_\_

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SHEET

*Please answer the following questions:*

The first eleven questions are about you:

Gender:

Race:

Age:

Current Marital Status:

Education level:

Current occupation:

Occupation at conception/birth of child:

Number of all children:

Number of biracial children:

Age(s) of child(ren):

Ages of biracial child(ren):

The next eleven are about your partner/spouse/child's other parent:

Gender:

Race:

Age:

Current Marital Status:

Education level:

Current occupation:

Occupation at conception/birth of child:

Number of all children:

Number of biracial children:

Age(s) of child(ren):

Ages of biracial child(ren):

Household income bracket (please circle one):

|                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Under \$10,000     | \$10,001-\$20,000 |
| \$20,001-\$30,000  | \$30,001-\$40,000 |
| \$40,001-\$50,000  | \$50,001-\$60,000 |
| \$60,001-\$75,000  | \$75,001-\$90,000 |
| \$90,001-\$100,000 | Over \$100,000    |

City and state (or country) where you grew up:

City and state (or country) where your partner/spouse/child's other parent grew up:

City and state (or country) where child(ren) was (were) born:

## APPENDIX C

### Instrument – List of Potential Questions/Possible Prompts

As this is a qualitative study, participants will be encouraged to discuss what parenting means to them, in their own words. Questions regarding clarification "what did you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?" or "can you please explain \_\_\_\_\_?" may be used. However, if the participant seems reluctant to talk or unsure as to what to discuss, the following four topic areas may be used as prompts:

I. Tell me about your interracial relationship

o *Possible questions/points of discussion may include:*

- How have your family of origin, relatives, and friends responded to your interracial relationship?
- How have the family of origin, relatives, and friends of your partner/spouse responded to your interracial relationship?
- Discuss if you and/or your partner encountered prejudice and/or discrimination due to your interracial relationship.
- If so, how did you handle it?

II. Tell me about raising your biracial child

o *Possible questions/points of discussion may include:*

- How have your family of origin, relatives, and friends responded to your biracial child?
- How have the family of origin, relatives, and friends of your partner/spouse responded to your biracial child?
- Discuss if your child has encountered prejudice and/or discrimination due to his/her biracial heritage.
- If so, how did your child handle that?
- If so, how did you handle it?
- Have you prepared your child to deal with racism/prejudice?
- If so, describe how?

III. Discuss the most challenging experiences you've had as a parent.

- IV. Tell me what resources have been the most helpful to you in raising your child or what resources may be of help to you in your parenting role.

Additional Follow-up questions/prompts  
(created following first interview on 10/22/01)

How would your child (or each of your children) describe himself/herself in terms of self-racial classification?

How do you think “society” sees/regards your child/children in terms of racial classification?

During any stage of this journey (dating, pregnancy, raising your child(ren)) has the question: “what about the child(ren)?” ever been raised? If so, how did you address that concern/respond?

Finally, what words of advice/support/encouragement/comfort would you offer to a parent of a biracial child or to a parent expecting a biracial child, if any?



## APPENDIX D

### CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT for TRANSCRIPTIONIST

*I \_\_\_\_\_ employed by Principal  
Investigator (PI), Suzanne Prentiss, as a Transcriptionist for her doctoral  
dissertation do hereby swear to keep all materials contained on the audiotaped  
interviews, in notations, and the resulting transcripts confidential.*

---

Name

---

Date

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Thematic Coding**

#### **Area 1 - Interracial Relationship**

##### **Beginnings - Common Ground**

Education

Social setting

Work

##### **Bridges & Barriers**

Religion

Pregnancy

Experience or lack thereof

Time

[Secrecy]

##### **Reactions of Family & Friends**

Positive – “open arms,” happy, supportive

Negative – “it’s just wrong,” disowned, abortion

Ambivalent or Conflicted

## Reactions of Society

Stares

Being Bold

Perception

Specific instance of prejudice

## **Area 2 – Parenting: Rewards and Challenges**

### Rewards

Personal satisfaction

Family healing

### Challenges

Parental status

Family provision

Child preparation

Forms

## **Area 3 – Resources**

### Utility

People

Organizations

Combination

### Wish List

#### **Area 4 – Preparation for Racism**

##### **Proactive**

Embrace

Guard

##### **Reactive**

“Wait and see”

Reality

Perception

Actual incidence of racism and prejudice.

#### **Area 5 – Racial Classification**

By Self

By Society

“Not an issue”

#### **Areas 6 and 7 – Advice and “What about the Children?”**

##### **Advice - Words from the Heart**

Racial parenting

Plain parenting

##### **What about the Children?**

Family (6)

Friends (2)

## APPENDIX F

### Summary Data Demographic Profile Sheet

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Race</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Biracial Children age(s)/gender(s)</b> | <b># of Previous Marriages</b> |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1A          | Female        | Black       | 37         | Single                | 1 girl/9                                  |                                |
| 2A          | Female        | White       | 27         | M to 2B               | 1 girl/2 *1 boy/8                         | #2M                            |
| 2B          | Male          | Black       | 34         | M to 2A               | 1 girl/2 1 boy/13                         | #2IM                           |
| 3A          | Female        | White       | 32         | M                     | 3 sons-7/5/18 mos                         |                                |
| 4A          | Female        | White       | 30         | Sep                   | 1 boy/5                                   |                                |
| 5A          | Male          | Black       | 29         | Single                | 1 boy/9                                   |                                |
| 6A          | Female        | White       | 26         | M to 6B               | 2 sons/twins age4                         |                                |
| 6B          | Male          | Black       | 32         | M to 6A               | 2 sons/twins age 4                        |                                |
| 7A          | Female        | White       | 39         | M to 7B               | 2 sons-4/2 years                          |                                |
| 7B          | Male          | Black       | 42         | M to 7A               | 2 sons-4/2 1 girl/10                      |                                |

NOTE: \*This one child (a boy, age 8) is not biracial, just White. He was born to Participant 2A during her first marriage to a White man. Her current Husband (#2B) was also previously married but it was an interracial, Black-White marriage that produced his 13 year-old biracial son.

## VITA

Born in Mexico, Maine, Suzanne Prentiss was awarded her high school diploma by S.A.D. #43 School Superintendent Courtney L. Prentiss (her father) on June 10, 1985. She would first attend New Hampshire College in Manchester, New Hampshire, before transferring to the University of Maine at Orono. At UMaine, Ms. Prentiss earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication and graduated with *Highest Distinction* in May, 1989. In pursuit of graduate education, Ms. Prentiss moved to Boston, Massachusetts where she attended Emerson College and graduated with her Master of Arts degree in December 1990.

After beginning a career in public relations and following the birth of her precious son, Tyrel, Ms. Prentiss reassessed her priorities and decided to return to college to earn a doctoral degree with the new career goal of becoming a college professor. She enrolled at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Fall 1995 and completed all coursework and exams by Spring 1998 toward her degree in Child and Family Studies. While pursuing her doctorate, Ms. Prentiss taught numerous courses through the Department of Speech Communication, first as a GTA and then as an Adjunct Instructor. Her commitment to and love of teaching earned her the Accenture Peer Achievement Award on March 6, 2002. During her time at UT, Ms. Prentiss also served as an Instructor for four First Year Studies classes and worked with the Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program teaching oral presentation classes for four summers.

Upon completion of her doctoral degree and her graduation on May 10, 2002, Ms. Prentiss intends to secure a tenure-track Assistant Professor position teaching Speech Communication. She and Tyrel hope to relocate to Florida.