

## - WHO ARE WE? -

### *Reflections from the Autobiographical Sketch*

The insight for this research project came from the class assignment to write an autobiographical sketch. In writing about my self several things seemed to shine a little bit brighter in my mind and thus became possible research projects for this current study. In deciding what exactly I wanted to do, I had stopped and merely ask myself, *who I was?* It seemed easy enough of a question to answer, but those three words held way more than just an easy response. The “*who*” required that I reflect on the experience of my experience and that I attempt to derive some kind of a series of events with that of the outcome I saw myself as encompassing. The “*T*” required that I ask myself to mirror WHO I thought this “*T*” was with both WHO I wanted to be, and lastly, WHO I thought “*T*” was expected to be. The final part of this question was easy. WAS this “*T*” someone I saw as real to my experiences of everyday life? This was what I asked myself.

In writing the autobiographical sketch I found that in order to answer the question “*who am I?*” I needed to start with “*who are we?*” This is ultimately where my interest in writing about the experiences of biracial individuals came from. Who are we, as a demographic, as a personhood, as an identity? I was interested in comparing and contrasting this seemingly “similar” experience of the marked biracial self with that of my own. I wanted to explore others marginalized, defeated and silenced experiences of otherness. At last, I decided that I would explore the process of identity formation among biracial individuals. I thought that I would be able see pieces of my self within these voices. But instead I found I had my own voice, my own experience and my own individual identity.

What follows on the remaining of these pages is more than just an independent research project. This is more than a process of producing sociological knowledge. What entails is a discovery towards the power of voice, the aspiration to be heard, and the

devotion to truly listen. This report includes the voices of 8 men and women who embarked on an experience towards being heard and truthfully listened to. These are their words.

## **- PROPOSED RESEARCH -**

### *Literature Review*

“I am 20 plus years of age and deep down, I don’t know who I am. I am always fearful that others will not see me as White and that makes me anxious all the time. My boyfriend asked me why I didn’t not identify as Black or Mixed and I fell apart. I cried on and off for a week – not because I thought he would leave me or did not love me, but because I do not know who I am. I cannot be who I am.”  
(Bowles, 1993: 420)

### *Summary:*

Identity is a social construction which is undeniably influenced by the social world with which the individual lives (Hall, 2001). As such, “identity” is analogous with other social constructs in that it is subject to change (Hall, 2001). The biracial individual’s everyday experience is one such social world which is affected by numerous social conditions (Hall, 2001). If identity is in and of itself non-existent and instead socially created, the question exists what messages are being sent to these individuals and what social experiences are leading to the creation and maintenance to the claim of this self?

The issue to be addressed in this research follows these previously stated questions. These issues are problematic not only for the biracial individual, but also for other socially marked bodies, including the disabled, the homosexual and the gendered. Such situations present for these individuals an attempt to “pass” as something that is socially defined as *real*. Unquestionably this social fact is detrimental for these “non-persons” in that a true self can never be known.

Through an examination of the processes of identity formation a richer understanding of the pressures to “pass” as well as the social influences directed at biracial individuals will be had. This analysis will advance the already existing knowledge specifically

dealing with the experience of being biracial. In the end, such an analysis will allow for respondents to question the mirrors through they are reflected as marked bodies.

Objective:

This research will embark on an investigation into the everyday experience of biracial students. While biracial students make up the minority of many higher education institutions, it has been suggested that in such environments, biracial students are left to “negotiate highly racialized climates” (Renn, 2000: 416). The biracial experience of everyday life reveals the complex nature of identity. Identity based on race is a socially constructed experience in which biracial individuals can literally mark the mirror through which to see themselves. As Hall (2001) suggests, biracial individuals can choose to belong to one group over the other, can claim both; or alternatively, can reject the constructs of identity as simply “Black” or “White” (Hall, 2001). Specifically, I am interested in exposing the social determinants with which the concept of self for biracial individuals is constructed and maintained. I am also interested in exploring the individual motivations behind the conception of “identity”.

Context:

The development of identity is one which not only enables the individual to grasp the concept of “self” and “other”, but also allows for an appraisal of the self in comparison to the socially defined “other” (Rockquemore, 2002: 23). The question remains how such an appraisal is had when the self is delineated as the “other”. Whereas personal identity asks questions of “who am I”, group identity asks questions of “who are we” and “who are they” (Bowles, 1993: 418). The question befalls how, an individual socially categorized as unlike, develops a sense of both personal and group identity? What experiences make “othered”

identity possible? Can a group identity be shared among those living in seemingly comparable social experiences?

Social reality is experienced differently among individuals. The social reality of being biracial *for some* is one such occurrence in which everyday life is pieced together as distinct from the “normals”. Research has found that the formation of identity is not identical for all biracial individuals (Rockquemore, 2002). Whereas some may come to see themselves as a combination of both backgrounds (borderline identity), others may either identify entirely with one racial background, identify with neither or manage between both depending on the social situation at hand (Rockquemore, 2002).

In portraying divergent biracial experiences of everyday life, a real idea of how one’s racial identity develops will be better understood (Rockquemore, 2002). In order to proceed with this analysis two issues must be presented. The first requires that a distinction be made between identity and identification. These concepts reflect two separate and distinct phenomena (Brunsma, 2003). Identification suggests the labeling an individual is subjected to by means of the community, whereas identity reflects that which the individual prescribes (Brunsma, 2003). It should thus be argued that both identification and identity are manifestations of social interaction and that one could be more dependent on the other in terms of which is more salient for the individual.

The second issue surrounds the conceptualization of the term biracial itself. Race is a social construct so in essence defining the experience of being *biracial* inevitably involves the construction of this experience. Again, this is something that this proposed research plans to explore. It will be interesting to see how biracial individuals define this experience and how such a definition is translated into their own constructions of identity.

Theoretical Approach:

Symbolic Interactionism (SI) has been used as a theoretical framework with which to examine the process of self-identity. Former ideas regarding identity have suggested that the reflexive process of the self being both an object and subject is valuable in understanding the process of self (Callero, 2003). According to some this reflexive process is transformed and maintained by both external constraints and individual agency (Rockquemore, 2002). Consequently, symbolic interactionism perceives identity as a “negotiated process by which individuals understand themselves and others and evaluate their selves in relation to others” (Rockquemore, 2002: 488).

Specifically, the “looking-glass self”, proposed by Charles Horton Cooley, has been proposed as a means through which the self is created (Hall, 2001). From this view the self is nothing more than a reflection of the public view of the individual (Hall, 2001). This symbolic interactionist thought of the self uses social interactions to explain the changes the self may endure in the experience of everyday life (Lundgren, 2004). Yet, in the similar respect identity has been explained by the relationship between social interaction and self cognition (Lundgren, 2004). This idea was proposed by George Herbert Mead, who suggested that individuals “assess their experience in terms of expectations and anticipated reactions of others” (Lundgren, 2004:268). As such the “Cooley-Mead” argument focuses on the relationships between the responses of those around us in comparison to our own “self-assessments” (Lundgren, 2004:268).

Alternatively, other approaches have been suggested as means through which the “self” is formed. The social construction of self suggests that neither the individual themselves, nor the world within which the individual is situated act independently, yet both interact continuously in the development of the self (Callero, 2003). The social construction

of the self, suggests that a conflict exists between the categorization of the “self” by others and the categorization of “self” created by the individual (Callero, 2003). The “self” is thus considered in this theoretical approach to exist as both a “social product and a social force” (Callero, 2003).

This proposed research will attempt to investigate these theoretical thoughts. It is hypothesized that due to the social construction of everyday life, biracial identity is a function solely of individual *experience*. Due to the pigeonholing of individuals, an exclusive “biracial” experience does not exist and cannot be had. As biracial individuals we do not fit into preexisting categories of “self”. The biracial experience is one in which categorization is idealistic. Categorization, I would argue, suggests a labeling process by which the individual comes to see themselves. If, in reality, a “biracial” category does not exist, how can any of us really experience our true selves? I am interested in investigating how this absent social experience is dealt with and how the self comes to negotiate a constructed identity.

#### *Beyond the Constructed: From Non-Person to True-Self*

Some have suggested that literature is complete with ideas surrounding black identity and that such does not “speak to the issue of biraciality since societal attitudes decree that any person with a drop of black blood is black” (Bowles, 1993: 419). Others have suggested that research in the last two decades has shown a heightened interest in investigating biracial identity and experience (Brunsma 2006). Few studies have both considered gender differences as well as biracial students’ experiences of everyday life in terms of the process of identity construction (Renn, 2000). The importance of existing research is far reaching. Ideas regarding the process of racial categorization for biracial individuals as well as the social factors employed to maintain such identities have been investigated (Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002). This proposed research will also explore such processes and social factors.

Additionally, such research may facilitate a richer appreciation of identity for the all those involved in this research. It is anticipated that the thoughts and perceptions of these participants will contribute to the existing knowledge of identity and more specifically of the experience of a marked existence.

**-INITIAL THOUGHTS -**  
*Initial Assumptions*

The basic assumption entering this research surrounded the idea that all biracial individuals experienced their biracial-ness as a socially constructed condition which served to mark their bodies as “non-persons”. This assumption was held so firmly in that such an experience has been had personally where I have felt that my socially ambiguous skin colour has unquestionably coloured my essence as an outsider.

The second crucial assumption dealt specifically with that of identity. Being biracial I possess qualities from both my Mother who is Italian, and my Father who is Nigerian. In terms of my Nigerian features I have larger hips, a bigger bone structure, dark eyes, dark curly hair, a button nose, and bigger lips. But most evident is that of my brown skin. However, I also have quite a few Italian features. I have big hips, a larger bone structure, dark eyes, dark curly hair, and two unmistakable moles that make my face unique. But less obvious is that of my white skin. In case it is not obvious, the features I report as being from my father are basically identical to those I report being from my mother. Features must not be seen as classifiable, but must be seen as simply features.

Embarking on this research I assumed that even though biracial people possess qualities from both of their parents, the more salient features would override, thus determining their self-reported identities. Needless to say, I assumed that biracial individuals, appearing more “black” would identify if not as “black” then at the very least as “biracial”.

## *Expectations*

In hindsight my initial expectations were as follows:

- ♦ I expected that my already stated assumptions would be correct.
- ♦ I expected that participants would be both willing and dedicated to their words of participation.
- ♦ I expected that I would be able to stay on track.
- ♦ I expected that I would not question my own racial identity, and more specifically my self.
- ♦ I expected to see past these participants as research subjects to further the existing research.

Instead I found that:

- ♦ My initial assumptions were not reflected in any of the voices I heard
- ♦ My participants also lead busy lives and that I had to work around their schedules.
- ♦ My timeline, designed to keep me on track, merely served as a loose guideline and more recently as a reminder of the lack of time.
- ♦ My own racial identity was definitely questioned. Questioned not because I do not know “WHO” I am, but questioned as to “HOW” I derived such a self. I questioned whether I was motivated externally or internally in labeling my self as black, white or biracial; and even questioned why I had to put a label on my experience of biracial-ness.
- ♦ My participants were more than just subjects. These people were more than just friends, but were individual voices who spoke to individual experiences that could neither be typified nor clustered. Behind society’s apparent attempts to socially construct bodies and thus experience lies more than just a stranger. My research has demonstrated this. Behind these attempts are people.



## **- METHODOLOGY -**

### *Participants*

The initial criteria for participants was that they be (1) Biracial, (2) Under the age of 25, (3) Currently be in a post-secondary program, (4) Willing to discuss their experience of being biracial either in a face-to-face interview or via an email interview schedule. For the purposes of this research, biracial-ness was conceptualized as an individual having biological parents who were either “black” or “white”. The participant need not live with, both or either of these parents, but must have met the first requirement. This initial list of participants included individuals from school, from friendship groups and my parents’ friends’ children. In essence the technique that was used was snowballing and such had provided me with 10 potential participants. Of this original list, 9 of the 10 potential were female, yet my original research has proposed to look at both males and females. So inevitably this list was eventually revised.

Eventually the completed list included 4 males and 4 females. The second criterion of age was changed to include anyone over the age of 18 years. The third criterion of post-secondary education was also altered to include those who either were currently in or had previously completed such programs. Both revisions were a matter of convenience, and were not suspected to affect the end data or analysis.

### *Materials*

Interview questions were devised prior to embarking on any interviews. General ideas of specific questions were created before exploring the issues of identity among biracial individuals. It was decided to include some of the questions discovered in Rockquemore & Brunnsma’s (2002) research on biracial identity in the United States of America. In total, 30 questions were asked which looked at the definition of race, the meaning of being labeled “black”, “white”, or “biracial”; as well as an examination of past

experiences potentially leading up to ones current notion of the self. Very few throw away questions were included in an attempt to include as many relevant questions dealing with identity.

Interviews that were conducted face-to-face were done so in a semi-standardized manner so to allow for the greatest amount of flexibility and comfort. Participants were instructed to include any additional comments throughout the interview, and were encouraged to “story-tell”.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were contacted primarily through email and were instructed to respond back if they were both interested and willing in taking part. After such, an interview schedule was set up so to complete all interviews prior to end of February. Most of the participants were currently completing courses in their last year of undergraduate degree programs. As such, email interviews were arranged. Three face-to-face interviews were conducted and recorded on a mini-cassette to allow for easier transcription. These interviews were conducted in semi-private areas of the participant’s choice and lasted from 30 minutes to just over an hour. Additional notes were taken during these face-to-face interviews regarding body language, and additional comments on specific responses. The interviewer also used probing techniques to obtain further details in specific responses.

Email interview questions were sent to participants after consent forms were received, either via mail or email (signed and then scanned electronically). Respondents were asked to complete questions fully in a word document as resend it back to the interviewer. In terms of probing, additional questions of the interviewer were emailed after an analysis of the completed transcription took place. Participants were made aware of this potential before the questions were sent to them.

## - ANALYSIS -

### *Patterns*

Upon analysis several presenting patterns have emerged. Participants were all under the age of 30. Six of these respondents were all currently working towards a university degree. One male respondent had already completed a university degree and was now working towards a diploma program. The final female respondent has completed her schooling and was now reported as working full time.

The first observed pattern regards that of siblings (q: 5). It was noted that all of the 8 respondents reported having at least one sibling including half-siblings. Several of the respondents reported having more than one sibling (respondents: 2, 5, 6, and 7) and several reported being the eldest child (respondents: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8).

The second pattern dealt specifically with question 15, 16 and 23. These questions asked participants to reflect on their childhood friendship groups as well as their current friendships groups. Participants noted either qualities of the group (participant 6), or made reference to the groups race. The majority of respondents noted that their childhood friendship groups included mostly white individuals. As respondent 4 noted of these groups, “they changed pretty constantly. I have always had a good group of friends though. In terms of race, all of my good friends were Caucasian/white, besides one friends who was Chinese” (q: 15).

The next observed pattern surrounded that of lived neighbourhoods. All 8 respondents reported growing up in either urban or suburban neighbourhoods that were all predominantly white. In these neighbourhoods, elementary schools were reported in 7 out of the 8 interviews, as containing “mostly white” persons, where high schools were reported as either being “mostly white”, “multicultural”, or “something else”.

The final detected pattern resides only among female respondents in this research. All 4 of the female respondents somewhere within their interview made reference to “straightening” their hair. No direct questions were asked of participants regarding this experience. As respondent 2 remarked on reasons why this was done she notes, *“because my hair wasn’t like everyone else’s in my school. And you couldn’t do anything with it, and I wanted ‘white hair’. I wanted straight hair that I could put in a ponytail. And I wanted bangs.”* Respondent 3 laments on becoming aware of her apparent difference as a reason she sought to “straighten her hair”. Respondent 3 is quoted as saying, *“I remember I was in a walk in clinic... and I came outside because I was done. Then I forget my hat or something, so I went back in without my dad and these teenagers were sitting down, and were like ‘ha ha ha... look at her hair’, because I had big afro hair. And they made fun of me, and I cried. I was like ‘daddy..’ and he was like ‘we’re going home to straighten your hair’.* Three of the four female respondents made note throughout their interviews that straightening their hair was done to fit in (respondent 2) or to make their hair more manageable (respondents 1, 3). The final female explained straightening her hair as more of a preference towards “variation” (respondent 4).

## - ANALYSIS - Themes

### RACE:

#### ~ Defining Race ~

What is race? Race has been observed to exist as a real entity while others have deemed such a concept to merely exist as a social construction. Race as defined by the participants in this study circled around several notions. The first regarded that of physical characteristics, such as skin colour or other visual characteristics including facial features (respondents: 2, 3, 4, and 7). The second notion surrounded place or origin. Race was also defined as dealing with different background and ethnicities (respondents: 1, 3, and 6).

Additionally, race was characteristic of a process towards “self identification” (respondents: 1 and 7). Lastly, the majority of respondents noted that the concept of “race” merely works to categorize and distinguish people.

~ Race of Parents ~

Participants were asked to state the race of their parents. All of the respondents, reported their mothers to be Caucasian/White and their father’s to be Black. In terms of how such was reported, an interesting theme emerged. Half of the respondents reported one parent in terms of race only; for example their mother as Caucasian or their father as Black. The other parent was labeled by their ethnicity. The transcriptions reveal this pattern. Respondent 2 reported her mother as “Italian” and her father as “Black”; Respondent 3 reported her mother as “Caucasian” and her father as “Trinidadian”; Respondent 6 reported his mother as “Caucasian” and his father as “African”.

~ Please State Your Race ~

Prior to the interview questions, respondents were given a face fact sheet. One of the questions required that the respondent report what their race was. One male respondent self reported as being “black” (respondent 7), the rest of the respondents made note of their biracial-ness by using such terms as “mixed: black and white”, “biracial”, or “half black and half white”. This question was asked first as an attempt to un-bias further responses dealing specifically with racial identity.

~ First Awareness of Race ~

The male respondents were found to be more likely to report having had an experience in which they remembered becoming aware of race. Three of the four male respondent did report having remembered such an occurrence but did not go into great details. Two of the female respondents made note of such experiences. Respondent 3

recalled, *“they were even a little more cruel than that, because I also came home and told my mom, that the kids told me that I could be arrested if the police saw me walking down the street holding hands with my mom, because she was white and I was black, and that wasn’t allowed. And I remember coming to my mom and being like “how can you be my mom?” I didn’t really understand all of that stuff.. so I don’t think that I really believed them, but I thought about it, and I had to go home and ask. So that was probably one of the earlier experiences I had growing up that I remember. I don’t remember anything else too crazy from when I was a kid.”* Whereas respondent 3’s recollection dealt primarily with other’s reactions to her, Respondent 1 made reference to a self-identification of her apparent difference. As such, Respondent 1 recalled, *“I didn’t even consider myself different. Like there was no one else that I could say “oh we are the same” so I would just like see other people constantly coming out of their houses , white white white white white. Like I never considered race really because, there was no other race that “oh you’re different”. So then I remember this one time, my mom was in the grocery store and I was in the car waiting and I was like, pulled down the mirror and I was like “I’m black”. It was like obviously I knew I was. But I actually conceptualized that I was not the same as everyone else. I don’t know it was weird.”*

#### CONTACT:

Questions of contact were used in the interview to assess respondents’ experiences with a variety of individuals. It was hoped that such questions could then be correlated to questions regarding identity. Six of the eight respondents reported their parents still being married, while 1 respondent reported her parents never having been married, and yet another reported his parents as having been married, but now divorced.

The second question dealing with contact dealt specifically with respondents’ experiences with both their mother and father’s side of the family. It is noted that six of the eight respondents reported having had infrequent or no contact with their father’s side of the family and having had either frequent or infrequent contact with their mother’s side.

The remaining two respondents noted having infrequent contact with both sides of the family. Reasons for such infrequency or no contact dealt with location. Respondent 5 is quoted as having said, *“I have frequent contact with my mother’s side of the family. I see my grandparents at least once a week and communicate with the rest of my mother’s side often. Infrequently with my father’s side. They live in the US or Trinidad.”*

The last set of questions dealing with contact included questions of neighbourhood populations, types of neighbourhoods and schools. As has already been discussed the trend was towards urban/suburban neighbourhoods, with the majority of contact being with Caucasian/White individuals.

It was anticipated that contact would be related to how individuals perceived their own identities. Such was found not to be the case. A further discussion on identity follows later in this report.

#### NAME CALLING:

Name calling can do more than merely hurt feelings. Name calling arguably can come to define a person as such a label. Respondents were asked to recollect on names, either positive or negative, that they had remembered being called. The question was not asked in terms of racial names, but was instead asked in a more general manner. In terms of the female respondents, 2 reported being called names that did deal with the colour of their skin. Respondent 3 recalled being called *“The black girl”*, and Respondent 4 recalled being called *“creamy, caramel, blacky and curly”* but did not feel that such names were meant to be hurtful. The male respondents in this research reported having been called negative derogatory names. Such names included, *“mulatto, nigger, whitewashed or other names to do with race that were always about being black”* (respondent: 5).

Name calling seems to exist on a gender line. Females possibly recollected fewer negative instances or possibly had never had such experiences. Males, on the other hand, had not only had such poignant experiences but had also not forgotten them.

#### BEHAVIOUR:

Several respondents did make reference to the expectations of behaviour for themselves as well as other individuals who were black or white (respondents: 1, 3 and 6). When asked “what it meant to be black and what it meant to be white”, respondent 1 stated, *“I guess I will just have to be really honest. When I think of someone who is Black, I usually, I don’t know, there is a sense of pride with it. Like it’s different with other races I guess each race would have it. But I don’t know, there is this different feeling that I guess maybe because you’ve been through hard times, like now its ‘I’m BLACK’... (\*ba ha ha\*) . I guess there would be the stereotypes, like good at basketball and stuff, have attitude, but I don’t.... Stereotypically, prim and proper and not really realistic... but that’s not really true. Oh I feel so evil for saying that. (\*ba ha ha\*) .”* Through this voice there exists a struggle to articulate this distinction yet such inevitably becomes her reality. In knowing how this respondent identifies it becomes interesting to note such reported distinctions in behavioural expectations. This female respondent reports not feeling like a “black girl”, and not realizing *“most of the time that [she] was black, because [it] was never acknowledged”*. What’s more is that this respondent describes her self as *“always prim and proper”*; suggesting that she sees her self as white. What is unclear is why she describes her self in this manner, sets out to act in such a way, yet sees such as a description of behaviour exclusively for Caucasian/White individuals.

Other respondents reported their own behaviour as changing in the presence of Caucasian/White, or Black individuals. Respondent 5 states, *“The way I speak is different. The way I will approach a conversation, as well as the way I will answer is different”*. Respondent 3 continues on this theme by stating, *“I mean I guess it’s stereotypical even in men. Even though I know*



*there are differences and there are not differences and I am one person, but I associate I guess my 'white side' with my professional side. So when I go to work I am professional and I speak differently, and I am respectful of people, and you know I listen to Q97.5 and you know what I mean... Mrs. And Mrs... hand shaking.. but when I'm at home its sweats and sweatshirts and BET."*

Why are such expectations so persistent in the voices of these respondents? It is confirmed through these interviews that such stereotypes exist and these stereotypes are indeed reflected in individual behaviour.

#### MISTAKEN IDENTITY:

Biracial-ness is not definitive in terms of an experience and of a label. It becomes difficult to determine that one is indeed biracial when they may possess qualities that seem to reflect other ethnicities. Respondents were asked what they think people assume about them in terms of their identity (q: 25). Respondents were also asked if they have ever tried to make themselves appear more or less Black or White (q: 26). It was hoped that these questions would shed light on how others see them and how potential attempts have been made to coincide with these labels.

All respondents reported having had an experience, what will now be called a mistaken identity occurrence. A mistaken identity refers to being deemed something that the self does not see as real, or does not accept as truth. Respondents' reported having their identification as biracial mistaken for Jamacian, African, South American, Spanish, Black, Indian, Persian, a tanned white person or Chinese. While all respondents made an identification towards being biracial, previously stated labels were seen to falsify an established sense of self.

This theme leads to a clear distinction in these voices between that of identity and of identification. To clarify, identity seems to refer to the self assigned sense of being, whereas

identification seems to denote more of an experience of “otherness”, an experience in which others both the defined “Other” and the self can agree upon the self label (Brunsma, 2003). So where one individual may have made an identification towards being biracial, their self identity may have been towards being solely black (respondent 7).

## IDENTITY:

~ Living in the Margins ~

The proposed purpose of this research project was to investigate the racial identities of biracial individuals. Interviews revealed that experience did not seem to predict how an individual would identify. Even the face sheet question asking individuals to report on their race was not consistent with some of the respondents continued interview. However, four typologies were initially created in an attempt to manage the experiences of the respondents. These typologies included the “Black identity”, the “White identity”, the “Biracial identity” and the “undecided”. In spite of these initial typologies, a second review of the transcriptions suggested that such merely acted to classify the individuals this research was trying to prevent.

This research has instead suggested that identity ought to remain in the fourth originally created typology; that of the undecided. Identity is a process. It is not concrete and it is not singular. Identity is not based on experience, nor is it based on defined expectations. These voices make clear that identity is a continual process of change.

Participant 1: *The objective would be to say half black.. but subjective I honestly feel like.. I don't know... I don't really think about it enough to come up with how I feel..... I think that when I was with my cousins I felt like I was completely white....*

Participant 4: *After a recent trip to Ghana where my father is from, I have since been far more aware not so much that I am my African father's daughter, but rather that I am half African (this realization is more about place than race however).*

Participant 5: *I don't think I have a racial identity. In high school I use to think more about race, and how I was supposed to act. I have an identity, which isn't based on my race, but on my values and beliefs.*

Participant 6: *I am biracial, and truthfully I feel as though it's enabled me to identify easily with both Caucasians and Blacks.*

Participant 7: *The understanding of my racial identity has changed as I have become more knowledgeable*

#### BIRACIAL-NESS AS AN ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE:

The last theme found through this analysis deals with the reported advantage or disadvantage of being biracial. These responses cannot be summarized and thus must speak for themselves.

Participant 2: *An advantage because you can kinda relate to both sides. You are kinda in the middle.. you can write about how a black person feels, and you can write about how a white person feels. But also, that can mess you up.. because a black person could be like "Oh your'e not a black person, you don't know really know because you are really black..." or you don't really know because you aren't white in colour" So its kinda disadvantage. you can't really speak for anyone. Because biracial people have completely different experiences than any other race. And... so like when we go sign up for something with the government we don't even have our own box. So we are not Asian we are not Caucasian and we aren't black.. we are other. That's what we are? An other? Like so have that disadvantage because we aren't even considered a race. We are just other. So like a mutt.*

Participant 5: *I think it is definitely an advantage to be of mixed race. I'm more tolerant of other races and different people. Also I get to experience the best of both worlds, such as culture and food.*

Participant 6: *Huge advantage. I have been forced to reflect on the multiplicity of identities that an individual may have, and how our assumptions affect others. I've essentially gained unearned respect from others based on the perception that we have similarities; but that being said, I have noticed that I have similarities with both white people and black people that I would not have had if I was one or the other. Furthermore, being an educated "minority" in Canada opens a tone of doors, and it makes you a role model whether you like it or not. As such you have an opportunity to shape the Canadian identity, which is often aspired to by the other nations of the world.*

#### - DISCUSSION -

##### *Experience of the Experience*

This research has been more than an independent project but has been more of a reflection on the experience of an experience. This research has provided the respondents as well as my self with an opportunity to reflect upon the experience of being biracial and

the experience of the self. What has resulted is an understanding of the complexity of grasping both identity and this thing called the self.

#### TRUTH AND TRUTHFULNESS:

Knowing and acting towards one's self with congruency is much harder than it seems. These voices demonstrate the difficulties in distinguishing between the truth and truthfulness. What is spoken as truthful may not in reality be the truth. This is not to suggest that the voices heard throughout this report are false. Instead what is being suggested is that identity and the understanding of the self, requires a disembodiment that many may not be possible to carry out.

#### PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS:

##### ~ Finding Participants ~

The first issue that must be addressed is that of what exactly the criterion of biracialness mean. As these voices clearly demonstrate, a mistaken identity is often experienced by those who are biracial. May I have overlooked some potential participants merely by the fact that I had mistaken their identities? The point to be made here is that simply by looking at someone, it cannot be determined who or what they are.

##### ~ Interview Type ~

This sample was collected out of convenience. Had this sample been collected at random other themes and patterns may have surfaced. Also, many of these interviews were collected via email and thus could have been edited or altered to appear more socially appropriate. The use of face-to-face interviews allowed for more forward answers to be expressed as well as additional notes on body language to be taken.

## - FURTHER RESEARCH -

### *What is Next?*

This research may serve as a pilot study into many numerous other research projects.

Outlined below are several different directions this research could potentially take.

- ♦ An investigation into the racial identities of biracial individuals whose mothers are “black:” and their fathers are “white”
- ♦ An observational study, after having done some interviewing, specially looking at the interaction of biracial individuals with people who are “black” versus people who are “white”
- ♦ More in-depth interviewing of both the biracial individual and of their parents. A more complete understanding of issues being presented in within the biracial individual could thus be explored.

## - I AM -

### *Conclusion*

To start off this report the question *who are we?* was asked. It was hoped that this question could provide answers to the more important question of *who am I?* The last question asked of respondents in this research was simply to fill in the blank, “I AM....” These responses are a fitting way to end off the report of eight individualistic voices. The voices of these biracial respondents suggest that regardless of experience, or seemingly similar circumstances, one can still maintain their individual quality. To the question WHO ARE WE, the response is easy, WE ARE INDIVIDUALS. To the question WHO AM I? the response is....

“I am **Mixed**”,  
“I am *Beautiful*”,  
“I am *grateful*”,  
“I am **strong**”,  
“I am *myself*”,  
“I am *Unique*”,  
“I AM ME”,

“I am **NOT DEFINED BY A LABEL.**”

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