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When Gray Matters More Than Black or White: The Schooling Experiences of Black–White Biracial Students

Rhina Maria Fernandes Williams[1]

Abstract

Although research is scant, there is a growing interest in the manifestation of the racial and cultural context on the schooling of biracial students. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the schooling experiences of 10 Black–White biracial students. Specifically, the goals of the study were to (a) identify the factors Black–White biracial students, ages 16 to 22, perceive as influential in their schooling; and (b) identify the factors the students' parents perceive as influential in their children's schooling. This study includes a brief review of the literature related to the schooling experiences of Black–White Biracial students. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was used to guide the design, implementation, and analysis of the study. The findings from the interviews with the biracial youth and their parents resulted in five themes, which were (a) region and school diversity; (b) peers; (c) teachers; (d) curriculum; and (e) socioeconomic status. Implications for researchers, policy makers, and teachers are outlined.

Keywords

biracial schooling, multicultural education, multiracial

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Education researchers who consider race as a factor in school-related issues generally do not consider the presence of multiracial students in their samples (Baron, Tom, & Cooper, 1985; Cross, 1987; Graybill, 1997; Hollins, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2009; Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Devitch-Navarro, 1997) despite the rise in the number of multiracial children in schools. Data collected by the 2000 Census indicated that 25% of the total United States population identified their race as other than White (Jones & Smith, 2001). The population that identified a race other than White includes a growing number of multiracial people. For the first time, the Census 2000 form provided an option for identifying more than one race, that is, a multiracial category. The Census 2000 reported that close to 7 million people chose to identify as multiracial.

One important educational concern that has not been addressed sufficiently, thus far, is the schooling and academic achievement of Black–White biracial students. For instance, teachers' perceptions of students have been shown to influence their expectations of students, in turn influencing the achievement of their students (Dusek & Joseph, 1985). Research further reveals that student race may contribute to teachers' expectations for students' academic achievement and also that teachers' higher expectations for White students, as compared to their expectations for Black students, may contribute to the Black–White test score gap (Ferguson, 1998). To date, researchers have not examined teachers' perceptions of Black–White biracial students and how those perceptions influence their expectations of these students. Moreover, no previous studies on the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students have been conducted to aid in identifying critical factors that influence the schooling and academic success of Black–White biracial students.

Given the turbulent history of relations between Blacks and Whites in the United States (Romano, 2003), the children of Black–White couples likely encounter unique challenges as they grow up Black–White biracial in the United States. Certainly, the discourse pertaining to desegregation during the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 was centered on opposition from political leaders and other White southerners who claimed that integration would inevitably lead to "miscegenation," which was outlawed at the time. Romano gave an excellent description of the intensity by which these fears permeated discussions in America during the time of the Brown ruling. From describing discussions of "preserving racial purity" and "maintenance of Anglo-Saxon institutions to "preventing mongrelizaton of children," Romano clearly depicted the deep opposition to interracial marriages between Black and Whites and the inevitable products of such unions—biracial children (p. 149). With only 56 years between then and now, Black–White biracial children continue to

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be the recipients of racist attitudes from teachers, peers, and society, whether overt or covert, as exemplified by Keith Bardwell, a justice of the peace for Tangipahoa Parish's 8th Ward, who refused to perform a marriage ceremony between an interracial couple, stating his concern for the children that would result from the marriage (Nottingham, 2009). Bardwell, who resigned after learning about the lawsuit against him, held fast to his beliefs that his conscience was more important than his job. Such attitudes could have a substantial influence on their success in school. Nonetheless, little research exists regarding the schooling experience of these students.

An exploration of the schooling of Black–White biracial students is particularly important, given the copious research on the academic achievement of various racial and ethnic groups. Academic achievement among some racial and ethnic populations, particularly Black and Hispanic populations, has raised concern among educators and the nation in general (Irvine, 1990; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lara & Pande, 2001; Lucas, 1990; McCabe, 1996; Nieto, 2009). The field of multicultural teacher education has been dedicated to promoting the academic success of underachieving racial and ethnic groups by assisting preservice teachers to use culturally responsive methods. Researchers in the field of multicultural education agree that students need to be taught in ways that are responsive to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 1991a; Gay, 1999; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2009). Proponents of multicultural education encourage teachers to use students' cultures for more effective teaching (Banks, 1991b). For example, multicultural educators recommend that teachers make learning relevant to students by using themes and examples that are evident in their students' cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010). This type of teaching is referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy. To apply culturally relevant teaching methods, a teacher needs to first learn about students' cultures or "see with a cultural eye," meaning that teachers must understand their students' cultures to be effective (Irvine, 2003). Although multicultural researchers prescribe culturally relevant pedagogy, these researchers are only now beginning to address the fact that many students belong to multiple cultures (Wardle, 1999). It would be difficult to categorize a biracial student accurately into a particular cultural group and teach the student in a culturally relevant way without first understanding the cultural identity of the student. However, research in multicultural education generally does not address the fact that many students do not fit neatly into one racial category. Often, students belong to several cultures, influenced in varying degrees by race, ethnicity, religion, and other affiliations. An educator would be erroneous to attempt to understand a student by taking into consideration only one of the student's several cultural determinants.

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However, Wardle (1999) noted that mixed-race students and students of mixed-ethnic background are "at best ignored by this multicultural emphasis and at worse suffer(s) from it" (p. 68) because educators do not know enough about these students nor are these students acknowledged in teacher education and in school curricula. In fact, many researchers have stressed the importance for educators to examine their conceptions of race to be better equipped to teach and conduct discussions about race issues (Durodoye, 2003; Lopez, 2003; Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003; Root, 2003; Tatum, 2003). Mukhopadhyay and Henze succinctly discussed the notion of race as a social construction and four implications of this concept for educators. The implications for educators were that because race and racial classification are part of a system that people created, educators have the ability to change it, transform, or even eradicate it. Although the use of racial classifications can be dangerous because it promotes the association of physical attributes to unrelated qualities, for example, skin color with intelligence, the use of racial classifications can also be useful in developing communities and also in identifying problems that are specific to particular groups. Mukhopadhyay and Henze urged educators to shift discussions from biology to culture and to analyze the factors that help perpetuate social inequality. An understanding of these factors would help educators address and dismantle them. Furthermore, Lopez (2003) examined the mixed-race data of school-age children and noted that multicultural education researchers should examine the way they conceptualize, discuss, and study race and ethnicity because of the increasing numbers of this population. Lopez noted that the effort made by multiracial organizations to assert their presence in the population should further prompt researchers to consider the aforementioned issues. It is evident from the literature that educational researchers and educators need to develop an understanding of race, racial classifications, and surrounding issues to better educate students from diverse backgrounds. This study is an attempt toward filling the research gap on understanding the schooling experiences of biracial youth through their eyes and the perceptions of their parents.

To uncover the existing knowledge of the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students, I explored and synthesized a variety of other literature in addition to the scant scholarly research. For a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature, refer to (Williams, 2009). Because education is a sociopolitical enterprise, understanding the contextual underpinnings that influence schools and schooling is an important step toward understanding the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students. Thus, I first offer a synthesis of the literature pertaining to the historical, social, and political context of biracial people then highlight key issues relevant to biracial students.

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Historical, Social, and Political Context

The salience of race is evident in the common history shared by Black–White biracial Americans, which has and continues to influence their social and political experiences. Black–White biracial Americans have been present since White slave owners fathered the children of many female Black slaves. Under the "one-drop rule" or hypodescent, these offspring were categorized as Black, serving the underlying motives of retaining a slave labor force, as well as relieving slave owners of their paternal responsibilities. (Fernandez, 1996). The idea of hypodescent, meaning that having any amount of Black blood placed one in the racial category of Black, originated in the anti-Roman traditions of northern Europe where mixing between communities was taboo. The tradition of hypodescent continued with the early Dutch and English Americans and was eventually translated to a taboo against racial mixing as other differences between communities became less apparent. The one-drop rule of identifying Black–White biracial Americans as Black is still adhered to and promoted even though the original reasons for it no longer exist. A glaring example is that of the current president of the United States, Barack Obama, consistently being referred to as Black with only lip service paid to the fact that he is biracial with stronger ties to his White mother than to his Black father. Prior to the Civil Rights movement, a person's racial categorization determined where the person lived and worked; thus a person's racial identity was determined by his or her racial categorization. A person who could pass for White could choose to identify as White and take on a White racial identity. With more freedom since the Civil Rights movement, people of different races have more contact with one another. Thus a Black–White biracial person growing up after the Civil Rights movement is likely to be exposed to and identify with both races and cultures. Inevitably, those people who identified with both cultures began to question society's means of racial categorization, resulting in the movement to change the Census to include a multiracial category; a change which went into effect with the 2000 Census. Consequently, more people who are multiracial and have strong ties to their different racial heritages are choosing to identify as multiracial.

Similar to Omi and Winant (1994), Sundstrom noted that races have not always existed the way they are today and that racial categories continue to undergo changes. He contended that human kinds are categorized in three ways: one categorization is imposed by some authority above the group; a second categorization is imposed from below when people act according to how they are labeled; and a third categorization is imposed when normative standards become attached to the label and are applied to those within and without the label. With regard to the social category of race, human kinds are real when the

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forces are present and nominal when they are not. Social categories become real when social forces, such as labels, institutions, individual intentions, laws, mores, values, and traditions, all combine to create the category. Human kinds can then be graded along a continuum from real to nominal. By this definition, racial categories can be regarded as real and dynamic.

Sundstrom (2001) discussed common criticisms of the multiracial movement and attempted to dismantle the myths associated with these criticisms. One criticism is that the search for multiracial identity is an attempt to escape being Black by promoting a hierarchy among races, instead of challenging the hierarchy. Sundstrom argued that in actuality the multiracial movement seeks to escape the denial of an identity, not the denial of Black as an identity. A second criticism is that the multiracial movement will undermine advances made by the civil rights movement because growth of the multiracial movement would lead to diminishing membership in communities of color. Sundstrom argued that this criticism would not even exist if society made it acceptable to be of any race without seeing races as being hierarchical. Alternately, if there were no existing racial hierarchy, it would be acceptable to be of any race and even the previous criticism of the multiracial movement as a means of escaping Black identity would not hold.

Literature on the social and political issues of multiracial Americans challenges the traditional concept of the one-drop rule as the United States continues to struggle with race relations and racial integration. In recent years, the growing presence of people in the United States who identify as multiracial has raised awareness among Black–White biracial Americans, empowering many to choose a biracial identity. Critics have argued that the racial identity one chooses matters less than society's perception of a person's race, especially if that person does not possess a "White phenotype" and is perceived as a member of a minority group (Brown & Douglass, 1996; Daniel, 1996; Fernandez, 1996; Glass & Wallace, 1996; Graham, 1996; Ramirez, 1996). Although categorization by phenotype is ineffective and confusing, society continues to attempt to categorize by phenotype (Begley, 1995; Morganthau, 1995) and to differentiate a White phenotype from a Black phenotype by skin tone, hair texture, and nose and lip shape. The multiracial movement continues to seek the acceptance of biracial identity despite claims that phenotype matters more than racial identity.

Issues Relevant to School-Age Multiracial Children

The limited existing literature on issues relevant to the schooling experiences of biracial students can be categorized into the areas of home and parental influence, and school factors.

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Home and parental influence

Wardle's (1989) chapter on the parenting of biracial children is relevant because, as Wardle noted, discussions about interracial families tend to lead to discussions about biracial children. Wardle investigated the prerequisites of parenting biracial children, whether in foster, adoptive, one-, or two-parent families. The author also offered suggestions to help parents of biracial children. The author identified good parenting in general as a prerequisite to parenting biracial children because parents of biracial children face many of the same parenting challenges as all families. In addition, he believed parents of biracial children must focus on respecting the heritage, culture, and race of both parents and their families. Furthermore, parents should recognize and not retreat from the challenge to society posed by interracial families. Wardle suggested that parents recognize and address this challenge by supporting their children's unique status in society instead of allowing professionals to define their children's identity. Other, more specific recommendations to help parents of biracial children included being open about racial differences as well as about their child's individual differences, advocating for their child, developing positive relationships with the extended family, exposing their children to their cultural heritage, having mixed-race friends, helping their children fill out government forms that include race categories, and finally, being careful about interjecting race and ethnicity when solving problems.

Based on a review of literature on multiracial children and their families, Wardle (1991) outlined recommendations for school counselors who work with these children. In the review, Wardle noted that, while some parents of biracial children support the notion that their child's identity is the same as that of the parent of color, more parents of biracial children are raising their children with a multiracial identity that reflects the child's total genetic, cultural, and historical heritage. Parents of biracial children, according to previous literature, are likely to be more sensitive to issues of racial identity and the pressure placed by society on their children. Wardle also noted that some parents were not clear on the direction to take with their children and needed the support and advice of well-trained school social workers and professionals.

School factors

The literature on school factors that influence the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students is scarce and highlights the need for more effective racial categorization methods in schools to help identify and address the specific concerns of multiracial students. The one study by Chiong (1998) is a clear indication of the difficulty associated with collecting information about

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school policies on handling multiracial students' concerns. A study by Harris (2002) denotes the need for school programs that promote cultural diversity and awareness as well as the need to address some of the possible stressors that biracial students may encounter.

The preceding review of literature offers a context in which to fit the findings of the current study to better identify school needs. Black–White biracial people in the United States have had to contend with the challenges society imposes on them due to the unsettled nature of race relations.

Method

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was used to explore biracial youth's and their parents' perceptions of the factors that influence the schooling of their Black–White biracial children. The research was guided by the following two questions:

Research Question 1: What are the factors Black–White biracial students perceive as having an influence on their K-12 schooling?

Research Question 2: What are the factors parents of Black–White biracial students perceive as having an influence on their children's schooling?

I attempted to uncover the participants' perceptions of schooling experiences to offer a description of the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students.

Race and ethnicity are frequently used interchangeably in the literature. Helms (1993) made the distinction that "race is a concept that is derived from a genetic designation based on phenotypic characteristics" whereas an ethnic group can be thought of as a group of people with common historical heritage, originating in the same place, and sharing cultural expressions such as manner of dress, art, music, food, literature, and other concrete manifestations" (p. 7). According to the Census 2000 definition, Black or African American refers to "people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2). White refers to "people having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa" (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2). To maintain consistency in this study, I use multiracial to refer to a person who identifies as belonging to two or more races. Because mixed-race sometimes carries negative connotations for multiracial people, I use it only when discussing work by an author who used the term in their literature. Biracial is used to refer to a person who identifies as belonging to only two

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races. Interracial is used to refer to married couples who belong to different races from each other. Black–White biracial refers specifically to people who have one socially defined Black parent and one socially defined White parent. Racial categorization is the label used to describe the race of a person. The literature generally uses the term racial identification and racial categorization interchangeably. For clarity, I will use the term racial categorization consistently. Finally, Sheets and Hollins (1999) define racial identity as the race with which a person associates and to which the person feels a sense of belonging and racial identity development as the process by which a person becomes aware of his or her racial identity and the significance of this belonging.

Participants

I included 3 male and 7 female ($N = 10$) Black–White biracial youth between the ages of 16 and 22 as well as those of their parents who had been actively involved with raising their children (see Tables 1 and 2). I was able to include at least one parent for each participant. Of the parents who participated, 3 were Black fathers, 3 were Black mothers, 3 were White fathers, and 5 were White mothers ($N = 14$). As is the nature of qualitative studies, the primary focus was to examine the perceptions of the participants, rather than to identify a large, representative sample. For the findings of the study to be applicable to a greater range of circumstances, purposeful sampling was used as a means of providing variety within the group of Black–White biracial youth participants. These participants were drawn from a variety of regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, urban and suburban schools, and private and public schools. The biracial students spanned the western, the southeastern, and the northeastern United States. The socioeconomic status of the participants was determined by the occupation of the parents, their descriptions of their neighborhoods, as well as their own reports. Five biracial youth reported being of lower middle class, two of middle class, two of upper middle class, and one of affluent socioeconomic status. Two students attended private schools and 8 attended public schools. Five of the participants grew up mainly in suburban neighborhoods whereas the other five grew up mainly in urban neighborhoods. All the participants were Black–White biracial and born and raised in the United States; however, they differed in the national origin of the parents. Two participants (siblings) had a Black Haitian father, 2 had White English mothers, and 1 had a Black, Zimbabwean father. The remainder of the participants had U.S. American parents. Following is a compilation and discussion of the findings from the interviews with the 10 Black–White biracial youth and their parents.

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Table 1. Demographics of Black-White Biracial Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Region	Black parent	White parent	Raised by	SES	School type
Arianna	Female	17	Southeast	Mother/African American	Father/American	Both	Affluent	Private
Elton	Male	17	Northeast	Father/Haitian American	Mother/American	Both	Middle	Public
Phyllis	Female	20	Northeast	Father/Haitian American	Mother/American	Both	Middle	Public
Sandy	Female	22	Southeast	Father/African American	Mother/English	Father from age 14	Lower middle	Public
Ramona	Female	20	Southeast	Father/African American	Mother/American	Mother & White step-father	Middle	Public
Craig	Male	21	Northeast	Father/African American	Mother/American	Both	Upper Middle	Public
Megan	Female	20	Western	Mother/African American	Father/American	Both	Lower middle	Public
Susan	Female	21	Northeast	Father/Zimbabwean	Mother/American	Both	Upper Middle	Private
Diane	Female	22	Southeast	Mother/African American	Father/American	Mother & Black step-father	Lower middle	Public
Jason	Male	16	Southeast	Father/African American	Mother/English	Mother(Father up to age 3)	Middle	Public

Indicates siblings.

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Table 2. Demographics of Parents of Black–White Biracial Participants

Name	Age	Child	Race/gender	Region	Occupation	Education
Julia	50	Phyllis & Elton	White/Mother	Boston, MA	Preschool & Adult Teacher	College
Harvey	55	Sandy	Black/Father	VA, NC	Supervisor/previously Air Force	High school
Layli	44	Ramona	White/Mother	Bentleyville, PA	Air Force & graduate student	Master's(total of 5 degrees)
Dustin	55		White/Step-father	Cleveland, OH	Salesman	Master's
Donna	52	Craig	White/Mother	Queens, NY	Consultant/Anti-Bias Trainer	College
Nigel	52		Black/Father	St. Stephens, SC	Director for Airline	Some college
Dan	55	Arianna	White/Father	North GA & Northeastern OH	Physician	Medical Doctorate
Jodie	55		Black/Mother	TX	Homemaker	Some college
Cindy	45	Diane	Black/Mother	Niles, MI	Printer	Some community college
Samuel	50	Jason	Black/Father	Various—military child	Musician, building computers, networking	High School & 2 years of college
Kim	44		White/Mother	United Kingdom	Interior Designer	College
Brent	50	Megan	White/Father	Kansas/Kentucky/ Southern CA	Salvation Army Officer/ college teaching	Doctorate
Gina	52		Black/Mother	San Francisco, CA	Salvation Army Officer/ college teaching	College
Katrina	59	Susan	White/Mother	Long Island & Queens, NY	Montessori Teacher	Law school

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Data Sources and Analysis

I was the principal investigator in the collection of data. The primary data sources were two interviews with each participant conducted 1 to 3 weeks apart. Because the study relied heavily on the personal narrative of each participant, both interviews were sufficiently open-ended so that each participant's experiences and corresponding themes had the opportunity to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The data acquired from the interviews on audiotape were transcribed verbatim and coded following recommendations by Bogdan and Biklen (2006) and Creswell (2006).

Researcher context. Being the primary investigator this study and identifying neither as biracial nor as Black or as White may have influenced the research because I did not have firsthand experiences with being Black, White, or biracial thus obscuring opportunities for probing and insight into responses. Alternately, the same fact may have been advantageous in three ways: (a) the participants may have chosen to offer richer descriptions to help me, as an outsider, understand their experiences; (b) the participants may have spoken to me more openly because they knew that I am neither Black nor White, thus making them less likely to have reservations about being offensive when talking about Black/White race issues; and (c) being an outsider, I was able to collect and analyze the data without convoluting it with my own experiences concerning race membership.

Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that the Black–White biracial youth in this study had some unique schooling experiences bound by their individual contexts, and also some shared schooling experiences related to being Black–White biracial. An analysis of the data across cases resulted in five school-related themes which were (a) region and school diversity; (b) peers; (c) teachers; (d) curriculum; and (e) socioeconomic factors. These themes offer a description of the schooling experiences of Black–White biracial students enhanced by their parents' perceptions of their children's schooling.

Region and School Diversity

"You're Black in Georgia, but in Boston, people think that you're mixed."

The participants for this study spanned the northeast, southeast, and the western United States. Findings suggest that the region of the country

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and the racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the schools may influence Black–White biracial students' schooling experiences. Phyllis, who grew up in the northeast where the racial diversity extended beyond Black and White to include other races and even multiracial people, stated that she was identified as biracial in the northeast. However, she was more likely to be identified as Black in the southeast because the area consisted mostly of Blacks and Whites. Megan reported that during her several moves between various schools in the west, which has a high multiracial student population, the one elementary school she attended for a short period in a Midwestern state was difficult to adjust to because there was little racial diversity.

The participants who attended schools that had a high degree of racial diversity, whether Black–White racial diversity, other races, or multiracial, noted that racial diversity was a positive factor in their schooling experience. Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris (1993) found that parents made a conscious effort to live in racially diverse neighborhoods or where they had family support in the community. Although this was not true of all the parent participants in this study, the ones who did live in diverse communities recognized that it benefited their biracial children. Four participants—Sandy, Susan, Arianna, Jason, and Ramona—lived in communities that were not diverse. Of them, only John and Sandy did not attend schools that were racially diverse. Naturally, the parents considered the quality of education their children would receive over the diversity of the schools they attended; but those parents whose children attended diverse schools, whether private or public, felt that the diversity was an added bonus to their children's schooling experience. Arianna's father said,

> We did want them to have contact with children from different backgrounds. So, that was one reason for choosing the private schooling in addition to the academics. We thought the academics would be stronger in a private school.

Craig's father stated similarly that academics were the priority but diversity was important. He said,

> We were looking for somewhere where our kids could go to school without being the only person singled out, which was not that easy to find, but we found a place in Long Island, which we thought was pretty balanced.

Ramona's mother said they chose to send her to a magnet school so she would know there was more than just White in the world and because the curriculum of the school promoted cultural and global knowledge. In fact, Ramona, whose

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middle and high school both had roughly equal numbers of Black and White students, had an opportunity to explore her Black heritage, which she was unable to do with her White family. She transitioned from identifying as White to embracing a biracial identity because of her relationships with Black students in her school. Sandy, who had attended all-Black elementary and middle schools, stated that once she entered her more diverse (Black–White) high school, she became a lot more comfortable with being biracial because she did not feel conspicuous anymore. In elementary and middle school Sandy had felt self-conscious because she looked White and was surrounded by largely Black peers.

The findings implied that being in a region and schools that were racially diverse and aware made a difference as to how well Black–White biracial youth adjusted. The participants felt less conspicuous and were also able to mingle with other students who had similar interests. This finding is important because it suggests that Black–White biracial students in schools or regions that are not diverse may have to contend with more challenges of which teachers and school officials need to be aware.

Peers

"I have more in common with them."

Peers played an important role in the schooling of the Black–White biracial youth in this study. Of note, racial groups with whom the students socialized changed as the students grew older. Eight of the students socialized with White peer groups when they were younger and Black peer groups or other people of color when they were older. These Black–White biracial youth found that they felt more accepted by their Black peers than their White peers or that they had more in common with Black peers than with White peers. The findings show that with the exception of two males, Jason and Craig, the Black–White biracial youth in this study currently have friends who are predominantly not White. Whereas Jason's reason was that he did not have the option of associating with non-White peers, Craig's reason for associating with primarily White friends was to avoid the pressure he felt amongst Black peers to not have friends who were White. He saw this as a limitation on his life that he did not want to accept. His mother was aware of Craig's position and stated

I think that my children never really liked the fact that they had to choose or that they were segregated. So, you were either in the African American Student

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Association or you were in . . . there were very few multiracial clubs even in high school. So, because they didn't see themselves as only African American, they tended not to join the African American societies.

Three female biracial youth reported that their circle of friends were racially diverse and included Indian, Korean, multiracial, Puerto Rican, and several other races and/or cultures. The other 5 participants expressed that most or all of their friends were Black. The participants gave various reasons for their choice of friends. In general, the findings suggest that the Black–White biracial youth in this study chose their friends because they had common interests. Ramona summarized this idea in her interview:

> [My friends are] all Christian. They're . . . middle-upper class African American kids. I have more in common with them . . . because of their socioeconomic status. . . . most of my friends, we either shared a class together or we have . . . really common interests.

In addition to having common interests, the participants who were in racially diverse schools chose friends who were racially diverse because they shared the experience of not completely belonging to all-Black or all-White groups. The participants explained that within their racially diverse schools, Black students and White students often segregated themselves. To avoid the pressure to choose one group over another, the participants opted to be part of the group that did not fit into either of the two racial groups. For example, Diane stated in her interview,

> . . . they say you sit with who you look like at the lunch table and I really think for the most part [mixed race students] really do group to each other, just like any other race does. It's really that we are our own race or culture of people. We don't really blend into either one group.

Having friends who were multiracial or not White proved to be helpful to the Black–White biracial youth in this study because they were able to talk about their experiences with others who shared similar experiences.

Seven of the parents of the biracial youth were aware of how their children changed from having chiefly White friends to having racially diverse or Black friends, but they were not aware of the reason for this change. Elton's mother was aware of her son's choice of friends but was not aware of his reasons for choosing them. She said, "I know that all of Elton's close friends are Black. I don't know how he made that decision or whether it just happened or . . . I don't know. I guess I've never really asked him."

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Susan's mother recognized that her daughter's friends changed from being mostly White to being mostly Black and thought that "it was just a sort of a natural progression." Ramona's mother revealed that Ramona began to associate more with Black peers when she got to middle school. Her mother noticed that Ramona began to change her speech to Ebonics and to identify more with Black culture. This code-switching behavior that Ramona learned was not understood by her mother. It was evident in the study that parents were not always aware of the need for their children to be bicultural. Understandably, the parents of the youth participants did not have the experience of being biracial and having to contend with certain issues that were exclusive to biracial people. Even though the biracial youth moved toward having more Black peers or peers who were not White there was still some difficulty for a couple of the participants who felt that either they were "not Black enough" or "not White enough" to fit comfortably with the racial group they chose. Fordham & Ogbu's (1986) notion of "acting White" may be evident as in the case of Ramona who felt the need to "act Black" to be accepted by her Black peers and Phyllis who chose to "act White" to be successful in her academics. Phyllis noted that she realized when she got to college where there were more Blacks who were high achievers she was able to choose a Black or biracial identity more easily.

This change in friends, which happened for 7 of the participants, indicates that a bigger problem may exist in that the biracial youth were not so much attracted to Black peers but were maybe also rejected by White peers. The implications for this are extensive because it would mean that society, schools in particular because they reflect society, is maintaining the separation between races instead of promoting more understanding and interaction between racial groups. In other words, pluralism is not being promoted sufficiently.

Teachers

"Not on their radar."

The data revealed three notable findings regarding the teachers of the Black–White biracial youth, which were their lack of awareness of the youth's experiences, their failure to incorporate knowledge of biracial people into their teaching of related curriculum, and their tendency to categorize biracial students as monoracial, specifically Black, thus affecting their perceptions of the biracial youth and their accompanying expectations. First, teachers appeared to be ignorant of the fact that Black–White biracial students might have experiences that differed from the experiences of Black students or White students. In her interview, Susan said, "It's just not on their [teachers] radar. It's not an

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intentional thing." In regions of the country with high numbers of multiracial children, teachers were aware of the presence of multiracial students but did not necessarily adapt their teaching to their multiracial students. Like the teachers in other schools, when they learned that a student was biracial, they tended to be indifferent and did not pursue further discussion of the issue. The following quotes describe the teachers' responses.

> Every once in a while a curious teacher would say, "Oh, you're biracial" and they would ask me about my parents and that's about it. But most of them knew. (Ramona)

> I think that he (the teacher) felt uncomfortable, like being ignorant and to classify me in that way, not really expecting me to say that. Maybe if he had some kind of perspective on it, I would have liked to have heard him say, "Oh well, that's different," but he really didn't know what to say about it. (Craig)

> He said, "Oh, okay." He didn't really respond. He was kind of a funnier teacher. He made a joke about it. Not a mean joke, but he was like, "Oh, okay" and I guess kept moving. But he would say something every now and then. (Megan)

> I was getting a scholarship. Not a scholarship, but recognition for PSAT's and it was given to Black students. She had called me into her office and she asked, "Are you Black?" I said, "Yeah." Well, I just told her what I was and she said, "Oh, okay." Then I went back to class. (Megan)

The findings of this study indicated that teachers often exhibited discomfort with discussions about race and none of the parents could recall teachers ever broaching the subject of race or even attempting to learn about interracial families by asking them about their experiences. Nonetheless, all the parents of the Black–White biracial youth stated that they would have been comfortable approaching the teachers to discuss race-related issues if necessary, regardless of whether or not the teachers were comfortable discussing the issues. Some researchers claim that teachers are not familiar enough with their own racial identity to discuss race comfortably (Howard, 1999). Howard wrote about how White teachers do not know enough about other racial groups, Blacks in particular, to be effective teachers. It is also conceivable that White teachers are uncomfortable with discussions of race because they are wary of being misunderstood and being perceived as racist or prejudiced. McIntyre

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(1997) postulated that White teachers often do not explore their White racial identity and are thus ill-equipped to discuss race because they do not understand race. Consequently it is not surprising that the participants in this study reported that their teachers appeared to be indifferent or uncomfortable discussing race.

The second finding was that teachers did not consider how some lessons, such as lessons on slavery and the Civil Right movement might be received by Black–White biracial students. Teachers did not anticipate that Black–White biracial students might feel torn between their Black and White heritages. Craig described his discomfort during lessons on slavery and explained that he was not always sure about his classmates' perceptions of him. He said,

> I thought it was interesting, but . . . I kind of felt a little uncomfortable at times just being around Black History Month, because I wasn't sure if I was perceived differently when people were talking about it. I wasn't really sure.

Other participants indicated that when teachers taught lessons surrounding race matters in the United States, the teachers kept the lessons separate from the students' experiences. Teachers may have believed that refraining from relating the lessons to the students' experiences was the best pedagogical approach because it gave students an objective view of the issues. Although a neutral reaction is better than a negative reaction, proponents of culturally relevant pedagogy would recommend that teachers use their knowledge of their students to enhance their teaching (Gay, 20; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Possibly, the teachers of these Black–White biracial students did not receive sufficient training on the practice of culturally relevant teaching. Teachers of multiracial students need to be especially conscientious about becoming familiar with the experiences of their students to adapt their teaching accordingly. In fact, nine of the ten biracial youth thought that it was a good idea for teachers to facilitate open discussions about race. The participants explained that such discussions might have been useful in making other students more aware of multiracial matters. The parents of the participants supported the idea of training teachers to become knowledgeable about race issues and also how to address these issues in the classroom. Yet, one parent was careful to express that if teachers were going to address race issues that they do it well or not at all. Ramona's father stated, "There's pros and cons because you know, if you don't handle it right, you can make it worse, and if you don't do it at all, you don't accomplish anything."

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All the parents also stressed that they would not have wanted their children to be singled out or given special treatment because they were biracial. The parents felt that the goal should be for teachers to generally address conceptions of race to help all students understand these matters and be accepting of people who are different from them.

The third finding was that teachers tended to categorize Black–White biracial students with Black students. In essence, teachers perceive Black–White biracial students as having the same experiences or background as students whose parents are both Black. For example, in sixth grade during a lesson on race relations, Craig was asked if he had a different experience as an African American and explained that the White teacher did not understand his background. Craig was the only student in the class who was not White. Another example is Ramona's experience in her predominantly White elementary school. Ramona recalled that her teachers would collect race information about students by asking them for a show of hands. The choices they were given were "Black," "White," or "Other." When Ramona raised her hand for "Other" and explained that she was Black and White, the teacher, who was White, told her that she had to classify as Black because that was how things were in this country. Ramona's teacher's words were, "You know, you're not other. Where I grew up, if your father was Black, you were Black. So you're Black. You're not other." Ramona's parents were not aware of this incident when I related it to them. Their response was not one of concern about the teacher's comments. Instead, they noted that Ramona displayed behavior that was typical of her personality by trying to assert her biracial belonging.

Overall, it was apparent through the participants' recollections of their teachers' responses that teachers categorized Black–White biracial students with Black students. Only two of the participants, Diane and Megan, recalled that they had been misidentified as White based on their phenotype. This happened far more frequently to Diane who has a White phenotype than to Megan who is more often mistaken for being Hispanic. The participants perceived that the majority of their teachers did not attempt to learn more about their experiences as biracial people. The exceptions were two of Susan's high school teachers. One of them gave her a book about biracial people which sparked her interest in delving into her biracial identity. The other person was a biracial woman who was in charge of a tutoring program at Susan's high school. Susan described the woman as a mentor and role model. She said,

> I think she was also an African American female image for me. That also helped me to have somebody who was an African American woman for the first time I felt like I was really like close to . . . because

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> I didn't have African American friends before that, or an older African American woman. I didn't have too many of them in my life. She was like important in that way. I felt like I started to form a relationship with her.

As Susan stated, having a role model who was Black–White biracial was important to her; however, none of the other participants had the advantage of having a biracial mentor.

One possibility for why teachers categorize Black–White biracial students as Black may be due to the long-held ideas of hypodescent discussed in the literature review. Teachers may still unconsciously abide by the law that any amount of Black ancestry meant that the person had to identify as Black. Chiong (1998) found similarly, that teachers tend to categorize multiracial children with the race of the parent who belonged to a minority group. Chiong also found that, as in Diane's and Megan's cases, teachers sometimes used skin color to define racial group membership. The teachers in Chiong's study further reported that teachers might be likely to treat lighter skinned multiracial children more favorably that they might darker skinned students. Ladson-Billings (1994) gave the example of a student teacher who is told to be careful to recognize that there are two types of Black students in the school.

There are "White–Blacks" and "Black–Blacks." The White–Blacks are easy to deal with because they come from "good" homes and have "White" values. But the Black–Blacks are less capable academically and have behavior problems (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 20).

The ways that teachers perceive Black–White biracial students are likely to influence their expectations for the students in the same way that Ladson-Billings' suggests teachers expectations influence student success. The literature on teacher expectancies suggests that teachers' perceptions influence their expectations for students which in turn influence students' academic achievement (Dusek & Joseph, 1985; Weinstein, 2004). An important related finding which came up with the parents was that, although teachers appeared to be neutral or indifferent to Black–White biracial students and often categorized them or perceived them as Black students, the teachers also seemed to have racial stereotypes or perceptions about these students that were noticeable and questionable to the parents. For instance, Sandy's father gathered from comments and reactions that some of his daughter's teachers (Black) had negative attitudes toward interracial marriage to White people. Ramona's mother stated that she was deliberately more involved and visible to her daughter's teachers because subconsciously she wondered if Ramona would experience more problems because of her teachers' perceptions of her race. Her mother noted that she was

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involved with her (White) son's schooling for academic reasons whereas in Ramona's case it was more so for social reasons.

A lot of the time that I spent there was not over academics. Perhaps it was just social and then social-type deal where I wanted to make sure that she was accepted or make sure she excelled. I think perhaps I suspected that she might be treated differently.

In Craig's case, his mother was disturbed by an incident which made her realize teachers' lower expectations for African American or students of color compared to their expectations of White students. The incident occurred after a conference with Craig's teacher:

> And Craig had a couple of goods mixed in with mostly excellents at the time, and I remember his teacher saying to me, "Oh, you know, he's doing the best he can. He tried really hard." And I remember my friend Brenda (White) going, and Justin (White) had a very similar report card, and the reaction was, "I know he could do better." So, at that point, I said to myself, here's this very gracious, nice teacher who I knew was really a terrific teacher, had a lower standard for my son than he did for Justin. And I thought that was an interesting thing and I never really forgot that story because it kind of really set the tone for, I think, how a lot of teachers view children.

Susan's mother indicated, likewise, that Susan's teachers expressed concern for her performance based on their expectations of her as a student of color. She related the following story:

> . . . between middle school and high school, her grades were okay. They weren't terrible. They were like Bs . . . B pluses, and a couple of Cs here and there. But when she went to high school . . . they called her in to ask her if she thought she could really do the work and whether she needed extra help and all of that, and I don't think if she had been a White student they would have done that . . . . Susan really resented it. And I think they did it because she was Black, and she did, too.

In this case Susan's teachers assumed that her grades were an indication that Susan may be struggling more than her (White) peers with similar grades due to her race. Had Susan needed extra help, it would have been provided, so it would have worked in her favor. However, the incident also indicates that teachers may have the expectation that African American students (as were their perceptions of Susan) were more likely to have academic difficulties.

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Curriculum

"Black like me."

The data revealed some important findings regarding the curriculum of the schools attended by the Black–White biracial youth in this study. First, all the youth participants reported that the curriculum did not acknowledge the presence of Black–White biracial people. Most of the youth could only recall lessons about slavery during which the teacher discussed White men raping their Black female slaves and bearing children who were called mulattoes, or that Thomas Jefferson had many biracial children with a Black slave girl. Other lessons or literature that involved race acknowledged neither Black–White biracial people nor any other multiracial people. The result of not acknowledging the presence of biracial people led one Black–White biracial youth to conclude that biracial people had not made enough literary or other contributions to be included in the curriculum. Ramona stated in her interview,

> I guess when you're not exposed to writers of different races, you think, "Oh, they just didn't write any text." So I guess maybe I just assumed. . . there just weren't enough biracial people who wrote text to be able to learn about them in English.

Ramona's statement shows that having some representation of biracial or multiracial people might validate their existence and their experiences.

Four youth participants indicated that there was some effort from their school to encourage dialogue about race issues. Although multiracial people were not discussed as a separate group from the races to which they belonged, the participants related that the opportunities prompted them to ponder their racial identity and other race-related issues. Susan described a Diversity Workshop held at her school in which a full day was set aside for students to discuss race issues in focus groups. Phyllis and Elton recalled that there was a program called "Black Like Me" that was meant to encourage dialogue about race. Multiracial issues were not addressed directly in either of these programs. All but Jason's parents named surface type acknowledgement of race in the curriculum. Some examples were events or lessons during Black History month and international day in which students were asked to bring in a dish associated with their heritage. None of these activities encouraged the students to delve into the deeper issues surrounding race in the United States. For schools which did support diversity, it was not apparent to the parents that there was any acknowledgement of multiracial people.

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When prompted, all the parents recommended that history be taught more accurately and that school officials be aware of the presence of biracial students. Breaux-Shropp (2003) found that the parents of Black–White biracial youth wanted schools to address the concerns of their children. The findings of this study were similar; however, the parents in the present study had not considered that the curriculum of the schools their children attended were not inclusive of multiracial students. They recommended attention to multiracial students only after they thought about it during my interviews with them.

It is possible that because schools were not required to collect information about multiracial students, there were no numbers to support adapting the curriculum to include multiracial students. Beginning in the year 2003, all schools are required to give students the option to identify as multiracial and to specify the races to which they belong. It remains to be seen if schools will begin to incorporate the information into the planning and organization of schools.

In summary, the curriculums of the schools the biracial youth attended generally did not acknowledge the presence of multiracial people. Although it is commendable that some schools attempted to initiate conversations among students about race-related issues, the few programs or events the schools organized did little or nothing to raise awareness of biracial people and their identity and unique experiences. The task of including multiracial people in the curriculum will occur more commonly, hopefully, as schools collect information about the numbers of multiracial students in attendance.

Socioeconomic status

"Economics is the great equalizer."

Although the socioeconomic status (SES) of the interracial families was not varied enough to provide clear evidence, tentative findings regarding SES emerged. The six parents who were of upper middle or higher SES communities indicated that living in an upper middle class society eliminated many of the concerns they felt their children would have had to deal with if they resided in lower SES communities. Arianna's parents in particular spoke repeatedly about how this worked in their children's favor. Her father said,

> I think our children have been fortunate in some respects. Once they've been able to develop their own sense of identity and their self-confidence and their self-esteem, it's going to be difficult for that to be undermined by people that are low-class or no-class, low-class backgrounds or have no class.

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Arianna's mother said,

> . . . economics is such a great equalizer that it is not a barrier or a hindrance whether or not I'm accepted. You don't have that there because my perception is the higher the social/economic levels of the individuals, a lot of that falls away, and you have more class prejudices than you have racial prejudices.

Despite such statements Arianna's mother was well aware that racism still existed. She stated,

> But don't get me wrong. The Black and White is still there. I can go in a hot minute saying everything I'm saying and go certain places and certain things and I will have an experience that is definitely Black.

Whereas Arianna's family belonged to the upper class, Sandy's belonged to a lower middle SES. For Sandy, whose school was in a low SES community with much less diversity and teachers who were not encouraged to promote diversity, contending with her racial identity and categorization was a challenge. She was not supported by the school curriculum and neither was she able to find support among her peers. Instead, she was teased for her light skin color and called "White girl." Schools in lower SES communities, which are already struggling with funding and raising student achievement are not likely to spend time and funds on programs or teacher training that promote cultural diversity. Such programs are often regarded as superfluous. Sandy's father also spoke repeatedly about the role of the poor neighborhood schools in not preparing his children sufficiently. This finding may only serve to propagate the well-established notion that schools in higher SES communities offer a higher quality of education to its students. Arianna's family may not have had to contend with overt discrimination or negative treatment but the findings do not indicate that these difficulties were absent from the community, simply that they did not interfere with their lives.

Although the review of research did not address social class, the findings of this study indicate that biracial students who are of lower SES may have to contend with added challenges in school compared to biracial students in higher SES communities. None of the three racial identity models (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1993; Poston, 1990) reviewed in the literature discussed the influence of SES on racial identity development, whether Black, White, or biracial identity development. Certainly, future research on racial identity development which examines the influence of SES will be useful.

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Limitations

As with any empirical research, there were some limitations to the current study.

First, I was not able to interview two of the Black fathers, both of whom were not American. Interviewing them would have allowed me to compare their attitudes and experiences to those of the parents who were born and raised in the United States. The one White English mother who participated in the study explained that race relations were very different in the United Kingdom and also that interracial marriages were more common then and not as taboo as they were in the United States when she married Jason's father in the 1980s. Because I was not able to interview the other two foreign parents, I could not explore this topic further to determine how it influenced the way they raised their biracial children. Racial socialization by non-American parents is likely to differ from American parents.

A second limitation was that I did not include teachers or school officials in this study. Undoubtedly, collecting data from teachers and school officials would have yielded information that clarified the participants' perceptions about schooling. It was beyond the scope of this study to do so because the purpose here was to identify and describe factors, as named by Black–White biracial youth and their parents, regarding their schooling.

Finally, the data collection method of interviewing the participants relied heavily on the recollections of the participants which can diminish or change over time. The only factor that aided me in this respect was including biracial youth who were completing or recently graduated from high school. The oldest of the youth participants was 22 years old at the time of the interview. Choosing biracial youth who were no more than 4 years past their schooling experience was an attempt to ensure that their recollections were less distorted by time than older participants.

Implications for Teachers, Policy Makers, and Researchers

The findings indicated that Black–White biracial students and their parents perceive that teachers are, in general, unaware of the context of Black–White biracial people. Thus teachers need to expand their knowledge of the experiences of these students. Teacher education programs need to address explicitly multiracial students' shared experiences as well as their unique experiences depending on the races with which they identify.

Furthermore, teachers must understand the significance of racial categorization and racial identity and be cognizant of the fact that their initial perceptions

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of a student's race may not correspond to the student's own racial identity. Teachers need to learn about their students' racial identities before assuming they know their background. Teachers commonly base their expectations of students on information such as gender, race, and physical appearance which are immediately discernible. Although information from these sources can be useful, teachers need to understand that students are influenced by a number of other less evident factors such as culture, religion, learning style, and biracial identification, some of which may have a greater influence than the observable factors. Hence, for the sake of accuracy, teachers should not simply rely on their initial perceptions, but should find ways to gain further knowledge.

Moreover, the findings showed that students and parents reported that teachers were generally unaware of or paid little attention to the fact that biracial students belong to more than one race and that these students' backgrounds may influence how they process what they learn. Although many biracial students identify as Black in middle and high school and experience similar racial identity issues as Black students, their biracial identity exacerbates their experiences. Biracial students live in the presence of their White and Black families and claim both. Yet, at school these students are forced to choose one. Under these circumstances one would expect them to encounter more challenges. Having to go back and forth between Black and White can cause psychological problems that can influence school success. This finding stresses the need for teacher education programs to include material that prepares teachers to teach in the context of schools as they are made up currently. Teachers need to go beyond simply knowing their students' racial identities to incorporating that knowledge into their teaching so that lessons become relevant for their students. To do this, teachers should examine or reexamine their conceptions of race, racial categorization, and racial identity. Teacher education programs should include in-depth discussions about race to help teachers explore the concept of race and how to address race issues in their classrooms. The findings of this study offer more support for teachers to be familiar with culturally relevant pedagogy and to implement it appropriately by probing beyond the superficial categories to which their students are assigned. Teachers need to learn how to broach the topic of race with sensitivity and also with a general understanding of the context of various racial, cultural, and ethnic groups.

The findings of this study indicate that the curriculums of the schools the participants attended did not reflect an acknowledgement of Black–White biracial students in school policies. Beginning in 2003, schools are required to include a multiracial category on school forms to allow students to categorize their race. Schools must go even further than simply categorizing students accurately. Schools need to use the information gained on these forms to adjust

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policies and curriculum to include these students in various programs and to ensure that they are achieving to their highest potential. Findings from this study indicate that texts, material, and lesson content do not acknowledge Black–White biracial people, or any other multiracial people. Textbook adoption policies should be attentive to the inclusion of diverse children's experiences beyond that of not only Black, White, Asian, and Latino but also multiracial. Because racial categorization was not done uniformly by parents, biracial youth, or teachers, policy makers need to consider how these haphazard categorizations influence assessment. Should multiracial students be categorized and assessed by their parent of color as has been done traditionally, or should they be clumped into a single group? With no clear policies on how to group them, multiracial students' scores are likely to be dismissed from assessment data thus limiting ways to identify potential problems. This issue is further complicated by the fact that multiracial students vary depending on the races of their two parents. As complex as this issue may appear, it still requires attention. Policy makers must reexamine current school policies to ensure that the goals of the school reflect knowledge of the students for whom they are created.

The findings of this study indicate that racial categorization and racial identity development have different connotations for Black–White biracial students. Despite findings from previous literature that racial identity development influences academic success, scant research exists about biracial identity development. Researchers should reexamine and test proposed biracial identity models such as Poston's (1990) to increase understanding of how racial identity develops among biracial youth.

More research is necessary to examine teachers' perceptions and expectations for Black–White biracial students. Because teachers have an indeterminate influence on their students, researchers need to conduct studies to learn about teachers' perceptions of Black–White biracial students to be able to address related problems. Learning about teachers' perceptions of Black–White biracial students will also help researchers understand the complexity and fluidity of racial identity models.

The similar socioeconomic status of the most of the participants in this study limited the analysis of experiences related to socioeconomic status. The one student participant of lower middle class socioeconomic status also had particularly negative schooling experiences. This participant also attended schools that were not racially diverse. More studies need to be done to determine if her socioeconomic status or the lack of racial diversity in her schools raised some challenges for her regarding her biracial categorization. Further research with larger samples also needs to be conducted to determine if this participant's experiences are typical of other Black–White biracial students of lower income.

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Additional research similar to this study needs to be done to learn more about the experiences of Black–White biracial and other multiracial people. As the numbers for multiracial people increases, multicultural education researchers need to recognize that racial and cultural groups now include multiracial people whose experiences and concerns are as valid as those of any other group. Multicultural education researchers must examine their own conceptions of race and how they categorize their participants by race. Furthermore, because multiracial issues are in the process of being explored and the context of multiracial people is dynamic, researchers should be careful to interpret their data based on the current context of this group. More researchers need to delve into exploratory studies on these groups to give teachers, counselors, administrators, and policy makers information that will inform decision making and planning.

Conclusion

Racial diversity in the United States is increasing and the multiracial population is increasing even more rapidly. Schools are enrolling more multiracial students than ever before. It is critical that biracial groups be studied and included in teacher education, school policy, and educational research. The concept of racial and cultural belonging also needs to be examined to incorporate the experiences of people who are biracial and bicultural. Educators and researchers need to reconsider how they discuss race and how they label their students and participants because race is not immutable. As social constructions of race change, so must educators, researchers, and policies change. This study explored Black–White students' perceptions of how various factors including family, peers, teachers, and school curriculum influenced their schooling experiences. The findings of this study indicate that Black–White biracial students have unique experiences that need to be considered by teachers, educational researchers, and policy makers. Black–White biracial students do encounter some challenges and lack assistance or acknowledgement from those around them, whether family, peers, or teachers. The participants of the current study had to rely largely on their own understanding of their situations to contend with them. If multicultural educators found a way to promote cultural diversity and acceptance by advancing candid discussions about among faculty and students, then biracial students may become better equipped to confront their challenges in society while other students gain some awareness and understanding of people who are not like them. Ultimately, understanding how biracial individuals contend with the two racial worlds of their parents could enlighten researchers who seek to bridge the gaps between racial groups.

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The current examination of the schooling of biracial students is useful in identifying school-related factors that are potentially problematic for biracial students. Some of these factors include family, teachers, peers, and curriculum. The implications for educators, policy makers, and researchers are important and timely. The insight on biracial students through this study can help multicultural educators understand the complexity of race and culture, and help eliminate teachers' tendencies to categorize and stereotype their students without questioning their initial perceptions and categorization. Reducing stereotyping among teachers is important because teachers can be a powerful influence on their students' achievement. Specifically, teachers' perceptions of students' academic capabilities are a predictor of student achievement (Brophy, 1985; Ferguson, 1998; Good, 1987). Given that student race is an important determinant of teachers' perceptions and resulting expectations for academic achievement, researchers need to learn about teachers' perceptions of biracial students to discern if these perceptions are problematic and detrimental to the achievement of biracial students.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of multicultural education research by bringing attention to the complexity of culture, ethnicity, and race while assisting researchers, educators, and policy makers in identifying some of the critical issues surrounding the schooling of Black–White biracial students. The findings help to distinguish the experiences of Black–White biracial students from the experiences of students of other races with whom they have been categorized previously and offer educators a deeper understanding of experiences that are specific to Black–White biracial students.

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