

While 20 years ago a person with mixed ancestry would be searching hard for some literature on their experience, it is now proliferating. Such books as *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk about Race and Identity* by Lise Funderburg (1994) and *What Are You: Voices of Mixed-Race Young People* by Pearl Fuyo Gaskins (1999) provide excellent first hand testimonials of what life is like as a mixed ancestry person in the United States. Others such as Rebecca Walker (2002), Shirlee Taylor Haizlip (1994), and Danzy Senna (1998) have incorporated their own experiences as multiracial people into award winning and best-selling novels and autobiographies. Furthermore, groundbreaking works entitled *Racially Mixed People in America* and *The Multiracial Experience* edited by Maria P. P. Root (1992, 1996) have brought multiracial issues to the forefront as important aspects of the human experience worthy of study in the social sciences. Most recently, the *Multiracial Child Resource Book: Living Complex Identities*, edited by Maria P. P. Root and Matt Kelley (2003), takes our understanding of the mixed ancestry experience even further.

What does it mean to be of mixed ancestry? Is it simply having parents from two or more different racial/ethnic backgrounds? Or does it go deeper and require personal identification as a mixed ancestry person? For example, what is the racial/ethnic identity of an adolescent who identified as a Chinese American on a school form, but yesterday confided in a mixed ancestry friend that she recently began telling people she is EurAsian? Furthermore, for the purposes of understanding the mixed ancestry experience, how should social scientists interpret mixed ancestry individuals' alternating identification. Stephan and Stephan (2000) suggest that stable definitions of racial and ethnic identity are inaccurate and the best classification system may yield the most inconsistencies over time because it allows a

person the freedom to state their identification at a given moment in a particular setting.

While literature produced during the late 1980s and 1990s can be viewed as important for bringing multiracial issues to the forefront, rigorous empirical research has lagged behind. A small number of studies using large sample sizes, recently produced by David Harris (Harris, 2002; Harris & Sim, 2002) have yielded important findings that can move our understanding of racial/ethnic self-identification among mixed ancestry people in new empirical and theoretical directions.

The goal of this paper is threefold: 1) to review current empirical and theoretical literature on racial identification and racial identity development of mixed ancestry individuals; 2) to provide new theoretical insights that can guide future research endeavors concerning the mixed ancestry experience; and 3) to propose a theoretical model that attends to the importance of development and context in racial and ethnic identity development among mixed ancestry individuals.

Before continuing, it is important to provide some definitions of terms used throughout this paper. Race is a socially constructed term that is used in the United States to describe a group of people who are perceived to be similar based on physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, facial features, hair texture; Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel, 1998). A racial group is a social group that consists of individuals who share similar physical characteristics. An ethnic group is a social group that consists of individuals who are likely to share similar culture beliefs, values, attitudes, customs, and behaviors (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996). Aspects of culture that comprise ethnicity include, among others, food, dress, celebrations, and behavior preferences.

Within the United States, most majority and minority groups have been identified as single races. While the terms race and ethnicity are often interchanged and the variety of ethnicities within a single race are not recognized, several social scientists (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; McGoldrick et al., 1996) have recognized this distinction. Various groups of people of African origin have been identified as a single race (i.e., Black), but are identifiable by several ethnicities (e.g., African Americans, Haitian, Jamaican). Individuals of European origin have been identified as a single race (i.e., White), but are identifiable by several ethnicities (e.g., Italian-American, Irish-American).

Various Asian American groups have been identified as a single race (i.e., Asian or Oriental), but are identifiable by several ethnicities (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Filipino). Finally, Native Americans have been identified as a single race (i.e., American Indian), but are identifiable by several ethnicities or tribes (e.g., Hopi, Apache, Navajo) (McGoldrick et al., 1996). Alternatively, Latinos are identifiable by several ethnicities (e.g., Puerto Ricans, Cuban, Central American), but not as a single race because a broad range of physical features are represented among this group (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; McGoldrick et al., 1996).

Individuals of minority groups have experienced racism and prejudice by others based primarily on perceived racial markers (e.g., skin color, eye shape, hair texture), but also based on ethnic beliefs and practices. The commonality of experiencing racism and prejudice based on physical appearance is the bond that ties racial/ethnic groups together to create racial solidarity in the United States. This view is particularly evident in civil rights advocacy groups such the

National Urban League, which is concerned primarily with civil rights advocacy for Blacks (a racial category that includes among others African, Jamaican, and Haitian-Americans) or the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium that is primarily concerned with the civil rights advocacy for Asians (a racial category that includes among others Japanese, Chinese, Korean Americans). These examples denote the inextricable link between the two separate constructs, race and ethnicity in the United States. Therefore, throughout this paper race and ethnicity are consistently coupled together (i.e., race/ethnicity) and used interchangeably with ancestry.

A person with mixed ancestry in the United States is an individual whose parents' heritages differ in a variety of ways including: 1) parents who are from a minority racial/ethnic group and a majority racial/ethnic group (e.g., African American mother and Irish American father); 2) parents who are from a minority racial/ethnic group and more than one majority racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Puerto Rican mother and Irish and Italian American father); 3) parents who are from two different minority racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Japanese American mother and Jamaican American father); 4) parents who are from mixed ancestry backgrounds constituting mostly minority racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Japanese American/Mexican American mother and Mexican American father); 5) parents who are from mixed ancestry backgrounds constituting mostly majority racial/ethnic groups (e.g., African American/Irish American mother and Dutch and German American father); and 6) parents who are from majority racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Italian American mother and German American father). In this paper, when I refer to the mixed ancestry experience I am referring to descriptions 1 thru 4.