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Diversity in Racial and Ethnic Self-Identification Intergenerational and Development Issues

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**DIVERSITY IN RACIAL AND ETHNIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION
INTERGENERATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES¹**

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes variations in racial and ethnic self-identification within broad racial and ethnic groups. The broad racial and ethnic groups found in the U.S. Census and on other official forms do not capture the richness and variety in people's self-identification. A major source of the diversity in self-identification within broad groups is nation or country of origin. There are also variations due to mixed ancestry, intergenerational differences (where parents and children identify themselves differently), and developmental differences (where younger children's conception of racial identification is qualitatively different from adolescents' and adults' conceptions).

The discourse on racial and ethnic diversity in the United States is often confined to the five racial and ethnic groups incorporated into census forms and official documents (White; Black; American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut; Asian Pacific Islander; Spanish/Hispanic origin). However, when given a chance, people use a variety of ways to identify their racial or ethnic identity. This paper attempts to capture the richness and variety in racial/ethnic self-identification and to describe some of the sources of this diversity.

America is a race-conscious society where non-Anglo-European people's race or ethnicity can overpower most of their other characteristics in social interactions. As the sociologist Mary Waters notes,

Who your ancestors are does affect your choice of spouse, where you live, what job you have, who your friends are, and what your chances are for success in American society, if those ancestors happen not to have been from Europe.¹

Another sociologist, John Stanfield further suggests that race is not only a category but an organizing principle of everyday life. It can play a decisive role in self-concept formation and in perceptions of others in addition to where one lives, one's employment, and one's choice of mates and friends.²

While the importance of understanding the role played by racism in the lives of people from racially and ethnically diverse groups can be readily appreciated, people may wonder why so much attention needs to be paid to racial/ethnic **self-identification**. One might ask, paraphrasing Shakespeare, "*What is in a name, a rose by any name smells as sweet?*" A large part of the answer to this question rests on the fact that when we talk about race and ethnicity in the United States we are not talking about a "sweet smell." Rather, we are talking about an

ongoing, albeit changing, legacy of discrimination and exclusion.

In their book on race, entitled *Race Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant discuss the ways race **classifications** have a direct bearing on one's opportunities in life as a member of a socially recognized racial or ethnic group:

How one is categorized is far from a merely academic or even personal matter. Such matters as access to employment, housing or other publicly or privately valued goods, social program design and the disbursement of local, state, and federal funds, or the organization of elections (among many other issues) are directly affected by racial classification and the recognition of "legitimate" groups. The determination of racial categories is thus an intensely political process.³

Still, one may acknowledge the social, economic, and legal ramifications of claiming membership in a recognized, "legitimate" group, yet wonder why one ought to pay attention to how **individuals** prefer to identify themselves. There are at least three reasons to be concerned with racial and ethnic self-identification.

One is that when a person's racial or ethnic self-identification is acknowledged, the acknowledgement serves as a validation. It gives a symbolic, "welcoming" signal of understanding and acceptance. This is because **personal** identification confers upon individuals both a sense of belonging and a sense of being special. What Maria Root points out in her discussion self-identification among multiracial persons is true of everyone:

In essence, to name oneself is to validate one's existence and declare visibility.⁴

When others acknowledge one's chosen self-identification, it conveys the message that the individual will be seen and respected as a member of a particular group.

The second reason to be concerned with racial and ethnic self-identification is that it is a

dynamic process, it responds to changes in social consciousness and ideological swings. Omi and Winant describe race formation as a fluid process.⁵ Specific racial and ethnic categories acquire and lose meaning over time. One of the contemporary manifestations of this fluidity can be seen in the increasing pressures for simultaneous differentiation and integration within broad racial/ethnic groups. For example, the decades after the civil rights era have been witness to a move toward integration among Asians and Native Americans. Recognizing the political power of numbers, people who have Asian ancestry, who hitherto had thought of themselves mainly in terms of their national or ethnic origins--e.g., Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino--have come to embrace a shared identity as Asian Pacific Americans. Espiritu refers to this movement as Asian American Panethnicity in her similarly titled book.⁶ The political clout Asian Pacific Americans have acquired through their panethnicity has been put to use to get mainstream society to recognize greater diversity among Asian Pacific Americans. This move toward greater differentiation has been captured in the 1990 census form which lists the same nine specific groups they could check off found in the 1980 census form plus the option to write in seven others.

A similar movement toward integration as well as differentiation can be seen among the indigenous people of the United States. There has been a dramatic increase from the 1980 to the 1990 census⁷ in the numbers of people who identify themselves as American Indian/Native Alaskan. This has been accompanied by a simultaneous increase in numbers of Native Americans also identifying themselves by their Nation, to the extent of using the native language to identify themselves in English--e.g., Lakota for Sioux. This fluidity is likely to have ramifications for **intergenerational differences** in racial/ethnic identification. As new ways to characterize race

and ethnicity are introduced, the younger generations will be more likely to use the contemporary labels than older generations.

The third reason is that, like all identity processes, racial and ethnic identity has a **developmental course**.⁸ The answer to the question, "What is my racial or ethnic identity?" evolves over time following the contours of general cognitive development. For example, what a seven-year-old African American girl may say about her race and what her seventeen-year-old sister may say are likely to be different, but not necessarily because the two girls have different preferences in self-identification. Rather, the differences in their responses are probably due to quantitative differences in conceptions of racial identity which evolve with cognitive development.

Sample

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger study on racial and ethnic diversity in Girl Scouting. The sample was recruited from the five broad demographic classifications differentiated in the 1990 U.S. population census. In the terminology used by the Census, the five groups are as follows: White; Black or Negro; Indian (American), Eskimo, or Aleut; Asian or Pacific Islander; and Spanish/Hispanic origin. In what follows, we use the following terminology to define these five groups: Native American, African American, Anglo-European American, Asian Pacific Islander, and Hispanic/Latino.⁹

Because there is considerable diversity within each broad racial/ethnic classification--e.g., the Asian Pacific American group includes Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Laotians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Thai, and others--specific efforts were made to recruit study participants from different subgroups within each minority classification. An additional source of

diversity within each minority classification is recency of immigration. Recent immigrants were represented in the sample to the extent possible.

In the East, the field sites included a metropolitan area in Ohio, a mid-sized city in New York State, and a city in New Jersey; in the Midwest we worked in a city in Kansas, a mid-sized city in Illinois, and a small city with its surrounding rural area in Oklahoma; in the South a city in New Mexico and the surrounding rural area which included several Native American reservations, a mid-sized city in Georgia, and a metropolitan area in North Carolina and its surrounding countryside served as field sites; and in the West a metropolitan area in Washington State and in California, and a city in Arizona with its surrounding rural countryside which included Native American reservations, were the field sites.

Designation of Race/ethnicity. Our study design dictated recruiting an equal number of respondents from the broad racial/ethnic groups to fill in slots in race/ethnicity by relationship to Girl Scouting by age sampling. Therefore, we needed to devise a way of designating racial/ethnic identity to participants in the research. In about one-third of the cases, names and racial/ethnic identities of respondents were provided to us by the Girl Scout Councils which served as the field sites. In the majority of the remaining cases, project interviewers recruited respondents through their contacts in their own racial/ethnic community.

However, mixed ancestry posed a challenge. How to classify a girl whose mother is African American and whose father is Hispanic or vice versa? We decided to classify mixed ancestry girls according to the race/ethnicity of the interviewer who recruited them. This decision was based on our strategy of employing community-based interviewers who were connected with their racial/ethnic community and recruited the girls from that community. For example, one of

our Native American interviewers recruited a family in which the daughter identified herself as Japanese/Native American. Because the family was recruited through its connection with a Native American community service agency, we considered the daughter to be part of the Native American sample. Had the same girl been connected to and recruited through the Buddhist Temple, we would have included her in our Asian Pacific American sample.

Girl Sample. We collected information from 77 Native American, 94 African American, 41 Anglo-European, 76 Asian Pacific, and 74 Hispanic/Latina girls. In total, we obtained data from 362 girls, 175 of whom were current Girl Scouts, 65 of whom were ex-Girl Scouts, and 122 of whom were non-members.

Adult Sample. A serious attempt was made to interview each girl's parent/guardian. Because the recruitment decision was made based on the girls' relationship to Girl Scouting and their age, no separate breakdown is reported for adult interviewees. In 90 percent of the cases, we were successful in obtaining information from an adult family member for each girl in the sample, which yielded 327 interviews with parents or guardians.

Interviewers

Interviewers were recruited through the research team's national networks in diverse communities and with the help of the Girl Scout Councils which served as field sites. The major criteria for recruitment were strong ties to their racial or ethnic community, a demonstrated interest in racial and ethnic diversity and a willingness to learn interviewing skills if they did not already possess them. Interviewers went through a two-day intensive training workshop carried out by the research team which was composed of researchers from the five broad racial/ethnic groups targeted in the research. The racial/ethnic self-identification of the 45 interviewers within

the five broad census categories are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Self-identification of interviewers within five broad racial/ethnic categories

<u>Racial/Ethnic Self-Identification</u>	<u>State in which they worked</u>
<u>Native American</u>	
Acama Pueblo/Irish	California
Cherokee	New Mexico
Dakota	Oklahoma
Dine/Navajo	New Mexico
Hopi	Arizona
Lumbee	California
Native American	North Carolina
Native American	California
Navajo	New Mexico
Yucimayan	California
<u>African American</u>	
African American	Arizona
African American	New Jersey
African American	Illinois
African American	Ohio
African American	Georgia
African American	New York
African American	California
African American	Washington
African/Indian/American(Black)	Kansas
Black African American/American Indian	Oklahoma
<u>Anglo European</u>	
Anglo European	New Jersey
Caucasian	Ohio
Caucasian	Georgia
Caucasian American	Kansas
Italian American	Arizona
Italian Descent	New Jersey
<u>Asian Pacific American</u>	
Asian American	New York
Asian American of Indian Origin	Oklahoma
Asian-Indian	Georgia
Chinese American	Ohio
Chinese American	North Carolina
Chinese American	Washington
Chinese Indonesian	California
First Generation Korean American	Illinois
Korean American	Ohio
Vietnamese	Washington
<u>Hispanic/Latino</u>	
Hispanic	Arizona
Hispanic (2)	New Mexico
Hispanic	Kansas
Mexican American	Illinois
Mexican American	Ohio
Mexican American	Kansas
Mexicana/Xicana	California
Puerto Rican/American	New York

Field testing

In constructing the race/ethnicity form, we kept in mind some of the complex reasons members of diverse racial and ethnic groups do not use uniform terminology to identify themselves: mixed ancestry, fluidity in racial identification and the simultaneous tendency to pursue panethnic labels while also making finer distinctions. After two months of preparatory work, the instruments were field tested in three separate trials in the East and in the Southwest.

One of the first lessons learned in the field tests was the futility of using the word "ethnicity" with any-aged girl. Regardless of how we tried to couch the introduction, we were not able to find a way of asking about ethnicity because, right up to age 18, girls did not seem to be familiar with that word. Therefore, we dropped "ethnicity" from the questions asking for the girls' racial background. Another lesson was the challenge of not offending large groups of respondents with a self-administered racial/ethnic identification form. Our goal had been to avoid having people check "other." Therefore, we experimented with several lengthy lists covering many ways of expressing one's racial/ethnic identity. No matter how hard we tried, we could not be exhaustive in our lists. Furthermore, the longer the lists became, the harder it was for the respondents to find their preferred racial/ethnic identifier. After approximately 50 tries, we settled on the two-part race/ethnicity form to be used with parents and guardians and open-ended questions with the girls described below.

Self-identification

Information on self-identification was obtained in several ways. (1) **Parents/guardians** were asked, at the end of the interview, to fill out a race/ethnicity form (see Figure 2) to be filled out for **themselves** and **their daughter**.

Figure 2. RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

Questions 1 and 2 are based on the way the 1990 U.S. Census asked people to identify their race and ethnicity--question 1 for race and 2 for identifying Spanish/Hispanic ethnicity. Question 3 gives you an opportunity to identify your own and your daughter's racial and ethnic background the way you prefer. Please answer all three questions for yourself and for the her.

Please fill in one column for yourself and one for the girl.	Your NAME _____	Your daughter's NAME _____
<p>1. RACE Fill ONE circle for race for each person.</p> <p>If American Indian, <i>print the name of Nation or Tribe.</i> →</p> <p>If Other Asian or Pacific Islander, print one group, for example: Hmong, Fijian, Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Laotian, Thai, Tongan, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on. →</p> <p>If other race, <i>print race</i> →</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> White <input type="radio"/> Black <input type="radio"/> American Indian</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Print name of Nation or Tribe here ↑</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Eskimo <input type="radio"/> Aleut <input type="radio"/> Asian or Pacific Islander (<i>please indicate nationality/ethnicity below</i>) <input type="radio"/> Chinese <input type="radio"/> Japanese <input type="radio"/> Filipino <input type="radio"/> Asian Indian <input type="radio"/> Korean <input type="radio"/> Vietnamese <input type="radio"/> Other Asian or Pacific Islander</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other Asian or Pacific Islander here</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other race</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other race here ↑</i></p>	<p><input type="radio"/> White <input type="radio"/> Black <input type="radio"/> American Indian</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Print name of Nation or Tribe here ↑</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Eskimo <input type="radio"/> Aleut <input type="radio"/> Asian or Pacific Islander (<i>please indicate nationality/ethnicity below</i>) <input type="radio"/> Chinese <input type="radio"/> Japanese <input type="radio"/> Filipino <input type="radio"/> Asian Indian <input type="radio"/> Korean <input type="radio"/> Vietnamese <input type="radio"/> Other Asian or Pacific Islander</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other Asian or Pacific Islander here</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other race</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other race here ↑</i></p>
<p>2. Spanish/Hispanic origin?</p> <p>Fill ONE circle for each person. →</p> <p>If yes , other Spanish/Hispanic Group, <i>print one</i> →</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> No (not Spanish/Hispanic) <input type="radio"/> Yes, Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano <input type="radio"/> Yes, Puerto Rican <input type="radio"/> Yes, Cuban <input type="radio"/> Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic <i>print one group, for example:Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other Spanish/Hispanic Group here</i></p>	<p><input type="radio"/> No (not Spanish/Hispanic) <input type="radio"/> Yes, Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano <input type="radio"/> Yes, Puerto Rican <input type="radio"/> Yes, Cuban <input type="radio"/> Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic <i>print one group, for example:Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>print other Spanish/Hispanic Group here</i></p>

3. We recognize that the U.S. Census forms do not make it possible for everyone to express their racial and ethnic identity in the way they would like.

a) How do you prefer to identify yourself?

b) What is the most appropriate way to identify your daughter?

The top part, which is a replica of the 1990 census form with slight modifications, asked them to check their race and also their Spanish/Hispanic origin. The bottom part of the form asked them to write out how they preferred to identify themselves and the most appropriate way to identify their daughter. (2) **Girls aged 9-18** were asked to write down an answer in response to the question, "**Please tell us your race,**" on the self-administered questionnaire. (3) **Girls aged 6-8** were asked in the focus group interview, "**Do you know what race you are? Tell me about your race.**"

FINDINGS

The results point out the diversity in self-identification. As can be seen in Figure 3 which lists parents'/guardians' preferred way of identifying themselves, in each racial/ethnic group there is considerable variability. Of course, the question asking how people prefer to identify themselves also elicited answers indicative of **resistance** to racial or ethnic identification, but only in less than five percent of the respondents. The following are examples of such resistance:

Don't identify as race, but as a person...

As a normal person...

Additionally, two people gave lengthy descriptions of themselves instead of a racial or ethnic identification. However, by and large, the vast majority of the parents/guardians had no resistance to or difficulty in filling out the racial/ethnic identification form.

Intergenerational Differences.

In the majority of the cases parents/guardians wrote down the same identification they gave themselves as the most appropriate way to identify their daughter. The cases in which there was a difference revealed three separate tendencies.

Figure 3. Self-identification of parents/guardians in response to the question, "How do you prefer to identify yourself?" listed in order of frequency from high to low.

Native Americans

Name of Nation (e.g., Navajo, Hopi, Lumbee, Cree)

Native American

American Indian

Name of Nation with Indian (e.g., Lumbee Indian)

Native American Indian with name of Nation (e.g., Native American-Navajo)

Native American Indian

Indian

American Indian with name of Nation (e.g., American Indian Navajo)

African Americans

African American

Black

Black American

Afro-American

Anglo Europeans

White

Caucasian

White American

American

Country of origin (e.g., Polish, German)

European or European American

Asian Pacific Americans

Country of origin with American (e.g., Filipino American, Japanese American)

Country of origin (e.g., Chinese, Korean)

Asian Indian

Asian American

Asian

American with country of origin (e.g., American Chinese)

Hispanic/Latinos

Country of origin with American (e.g., Mexican American, Spanish American)

Country of origin (e.g., Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexicana)

Hispanic

Hispanic American

American

One was to report racial/ethnic **mixture** which was specified for 10 percent of the daughters. Examples of mixed ancestry are *Japanese-Chinese American; Bi-cultural Indian and Irish; Anglo-European American/Mexican/Indian; Other--English, Irish, Chinese, German, Scottish; She's half (Navajo); Chinese-Thai; and Navajo-Hopi*. Additionally, two parents identified their daughters as "*Mixed races*," and one as "*Mulatto*." This tendency to specify mixed ancestry for 10 percent of daughters contrasts with the fact that only 2 percent of the parents/guardians noted mixed ancestry for themselves. It appears that more daughters in the sample were born into mixed race/ethnicity unions than their parents. Indeed, in instances of mixed ancestry, parents checked more boxes for the daughter in the census-based questions and many parents also wrote in the mother's and father's different ancestry in the margins of the form to explain the mix in their daughter.

The second tendency was parents' inclination to see their daughter as more **acculturated** into mainstream society than they, the parents, are. In Figure 4 is presented parents' description of their own and their daughters' identity in cases where the difference is not attributable to mixed ancestry. The most common form of indicating acculturation is foreign-born parents' inserting the word "*American*" into their daughter's racial/ethnic identification alongside their own country of origin. This accounts for more than two-thirds of the cases in which daughters' identification shows greater acculturation. Examples of this trend include a father who identifies himself as Chinese describing his daughter as Chinese American, or a mother who identifies herself as Mexican describing her daughter as Mexican American. This form of acculturation can best be understood as biculturalism whereby attachments to host society and culture do not supplant but are added to attachments to the home culture.¹⁰

Figure 4. Examples of greater acculturation in the daughters' generation as indicated by differences in parents' identification of self and daughter not attributable to mixed ancestry.

SELF	DAUGHTER
Korean	Korean American
Japanese	Japanese American
Chinese American	American with Chinese Ancestor
Asian Indian	American of Indian descent
Chinese American	American
Asian Indian	American
Chinese American	Asian American
Mexican	Mexican American
Hispanic Dominican	Hispanic American
Puerto Rican	Spanish American
West Indian	West Indian born in America
Black	African American

On the other hand, quite a few parents--one-third of those who indicated greater acculturation of the daughter--who variously identified themselves, for example, as Chinese American or Asian Indian, declared their daughters to be simply "*American*." Declaring one's daughter to be an American can be understood as parents' acknowledging--or desiring--greater assimilation of their daughter into mainstream society.

Not everyone who conceded intergenerational differences was eager to espouse either biculturalism or assimilation. Eschewing all suggestions of assimilation, one parent made the following fine distinction between herself and daughter: "*A Chinese who lives in the USA*" and "*A Chinese who grew up in the USA*."

The third tendency was to ascribe a more "contemporary" racial/ethnic identification to the daughter than to self. Examples of this trend can be found in one father calling himself Chinese American but indicating that the most appropriate way to identify his daughter as Asian American, similarly a mother identifying herself as Black but her daughter as African American.

Developmental trends in self-identification.

Information on girls' racial/ethnic self-identification comes from a self-administered questionnaire for the older girls and the focus group interview for the younger girls. The older girls--ages 9 to 18--described their race/ethnicity pretty much in the same terms used by their parents on the race/ethnicity form. Their responses are summarized in Figure 5. A comparison of Figures 3 and 5 show that girls used the same type of descriptors for their racial/ethnic identity as did their parents but they tended to make **fewer distinctions** than their parents. The distinctions girls made were somewhat less differentiated than the distinctions made by the parents.

Figure 5. Self identification of girls aged 9 to 18 in response to the question, "Please tell us your race?" on the self-administered questionnaire, listed in order of frequency from high to low.

Native Americans

Name of Nation (e.g., Navajo, Hopi, Lumbee, Cree)

Indian

Native American Indian with name of Nation (e.g., Native American-Navajo)

Native American

American Indian

African Americans

Black

African American

Black American

Afro-American

Anglo Europeans

White

Caucasian

Asian Pacific Americans

Country of origin (e.g., Chinese, Korean)

Country of origin with American (e.g., Filipino American, Japanese American)

Asian

Asian Indian

Asian American

Hispanic/Latinos

Country of origin (e.g., Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexicana)

Hispanic

Country of origin with American (e.g., Mexican American, Spanish American)

In every racial/ethnic group, the self-identification category used most frequently by the daughters tended to be the simplest category--**name of Nation** for Native Americans, **Black** for African Americans, **White** for Anglo-Europeans, **country of origin** for Asian Pacific Americans, and **Hispanic** for Hispanics/Latinas.

This tendency to simplify is in line with the field test results we obtained, which repeatedly showed that whenever we asked a question on ethnicity--regardless of how we posed the question--we were met with blank stares and open questions of what the word means. It appears that girls aged 9 to 18 do not have a comprehension of race which also encompasses variations in ethnicity. They understand race but not when it is coupled with ethnicity. This is not to say that girls did not understand mixed ancestry. Many girls did state their racial identity in terms of mixed ethnicity--e.g., Japanese/Chinese, Black/Spanish, Black American Indian French--but there was little in the field test which indicated they comprehended ethnic differences due to cultural differences within a racial group. This contrasts with parents who did not question the word ethnicity, neither in field testing nor in the actual data collection.

While the most prominent difference between adults and girls aged 9 to 18 is in the latter group having a simpler, less differentiated understanding of racial/ethnic differences, the major difference between girls aged 6 to 8 and the older girls is that the younger girls focus on concrete, visually accessible aspects of race.

Younger girls appear to focus on visually apparent physical aspects of racial/ethnic differences such as the color of their skin. In response to the interview question, "Do you know what race you are? Tell me about your race," three African American girls between the ages 6 and 8 said the following:

I'm kind of tannish.

I'm kind of brownish black.

Black and peach.

The focus on concrete aspects of race is even more clearly discernible in young girls' conversations about their image of a Girl Scout. In response to the question, "What does the Girl Scout look like?", two African American Brownie Girl Scouts made the following observations:

Beautiful. She has hair like chocolate, brown chocolate face and eyebrows like black jelly beans.

She is a beautiful girl with black hair, brown skin, ...

When asked how the picture they have of the Girl Scout in their mind is similar to them, the same girls answered,

I have a brown face and face that tastes like chocolate and my eyebrows are black, that's all.

She has beautiful hair, eyes and skin.

Finally, in response to the question, "Do you know what race you are?" the girls identified themselves in terms of the color of their skin. They both said, "*Brown.*" This answer is very much in line with younger children's conceptions of racial identity being anchored in concrete characteristics because children aged 6 to 8 are in the stage of cognitive development which the Swiss psychologist Piaget terms "concrete operations". At the stage of concrete operational thought--roughly between the ages of 6 and the onset of puberty--children can solve some logical problems tied to concrete objects in the real world and are capable of forming some abstractions but they lack the capacity to solve problems which require thinking through abstractions in a systematic way.¹¹

The conversation of two Asian Pacific girls gives another example of the tendency of young children to think of race in concrete terms. When asked about their race these girls said,

I am Chinese. Other kids are different because they can speak only English. I speak Chinese and English and that's special.

I am Chinese, but I can speak other languages, about three more. I can speak French, Japanese, and a little bit of Spanish and German. I go to Chinese language school on Saturdays and I like it because we can learn a lot and we're supposed to learn.

In these examples the African American girls' focus on skin (its flavor, texture, beauty, or color) is replaced by language.

On the other hand, the Asian Pacific girls' ability to identify themselves by their race/ethnicity was also seen in the African American girls. The same girls who said their race was "Brown," later identified themselves as Black when they were asked to elaborate, in response to the probe, "Tell me about your race."

I'm Black and I'm glad I'm alive and I hope I get a good future and a good education.

I'm a Black human being and I'm proud of it.

Their comments about being Black sound much more stereotypical, lacking the inventiveness of their earlier descriptions of race in terms of color, texture and taste. They appear to be repeating what they have heard about being Black, just as one of the Chinese girls saying she likes going to Chinese school on Saturdays "...because we learn a lot and we're supposed to learn." Clearly, alongside their more concrete notions of racial identity, younger girls are able to repeat, if not articulate or fully comprehend, notions about race not anchored to concrete physical characteristics.

IMPLICATIONS

The variety in the ways people identify their race and ethnicity underscores that there is diversity within officially recognized diversity. In more than half of the cases, individual members of a given racial or ethnic group identified themselves using different words than others with whom they were classified according to the broad census categories.

Secondly, the broad census categories totally ignore mixed racial/ethnic ancestry. There have always been intermarriages among different races and ethnic groups. Since the history of the world is essentially a history of migration, there is no such thing as "purity" in race or ethnicity except in cases of societies which have been totally isolated. Thus, whereas, all people have mixed ancestry, our results show that most people go back only one generation and a few go back two generations to indicate mixed ancestry.¹²

The third lesson to be learned from an analysis of the self-identification data is that there are generational differences between adults' and girls' views which reflect developmental differences, just as there are differences between conceptions of race between older and younger girls.

Finally, racial/ethnic identification is a dynamic process. The "correct" way to identify people changes, as does who gets covered by each racial/ethnic label. For example, the currently favored way to identify Americans of European ancestry as Anglo-Europeans--favored by scholars of racial/ethnic diversity and multicultural education, was not used by a single person in the samples we interviewed. Perhaps by the year 2000 more people who now refer to themselves as "White" will identify themselves as Anglo-European. Or perhaps Anglo-European will be supplanted by another word.

ENDNOTES

1. Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990):156.
2. John H. Stanfield, Methodological Reflections: An Introduction, in *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, John H. Stanfield and Rutledge M. Dennis, eds., (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993):15.
3. Omi & Winant, *Racial Formation in United States*, (New York; Routledge, 1986):3-4.
4. Maria P. Root, "Within, Between, and Beyond Race," *Racially Mixed People in America*(ed.), M. P. Root, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992): 7.
5. In their book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant argue that race is not so much an entity but a fluid process. Specific racial and ethnic categories acquire and lose meaning over time. An example of this fluidity is transformations in notions of African American identity. Even through the civil-rights era of the 1960's, race relations in the United States were dominated by Black-White relations where Blacks were viewed by Whites as a single, undifferentiated bloc. In the decades since the 1960's socio-economic, education, and rural-urban differences have come to be recognized among Blacks. More recently, the term African American has been embraced by many Blacks which has, in turn, highlighted the diversity among Blacks brought about by immigration and ethnic differences. Recent immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean are not comfortable referring to themselves as African American. Mary Waters, quoted in an article by Ellen Coughlin in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (March 4,1993, p.A8) talks about the impact of being Black and also ethnic on immigrants from Trinidad and Jamaica. The immigrants come to New York with a sense of identity based on their nationality--Jamaican or Trinidadian--and develop a broader "West Indian" identity soon after they arrive. They keep themselves separate from native-born Blacks. Second generation West Indians, however, lacking the identifiable accent and closer ties to their parents' native country, begin to identify more closely than their parents with native-born Blacks.
6. See, Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) for a discussion of the emergence of an Asian-American consciousness in the 1960's among Asian nationality groups on the U.S.
7. See Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Transformation of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
8. See J. Phinney, "Stages of Ethnic Identity in Minority Group Adolescents," *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13, 1990, 171-183.
9. For some of the issues surrounding the appropriate terminology for ethnic groups in the United States, see: Sonia Nieto, *Affirming Diversity* (New York: Longman, 1992); Christine Bennett, *Comprehensive Multicultural Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990); Donald R. Atkinson, George Morten, and Derald Wing Sue, *Counseling American Minorities* (Madison, WI: WCB Brown and Benchmark, 1993). The order in which information on the five racial/ethnic groups has no bearing on the importance or urgency we attach to the needs of a particular racial/ethnic group. We present data on Native Americans/Native Alaskans first because they are the indigenous people of the

Americas. The other groups are presented in alphabetical order.

10. See, for example, Raquel Marrero, "Bilingualism and Biculturalism: Issues in Psychotherapy with Hispanics," *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*, 1(4) 1983: 57-64.
11. See Jean Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, (New York: Basic Books, 1954) or Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1965). See also John H. Flavell, *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget*. (New York: Van Nostrand, 1963).
12. Determining what constitutes mixed ancestry is (1) a question of how far back one goes in history and (2) a political and social question regarding mixing what group with what group constitutes a mixed ancestry. With respect to how far back one goes in history, people who consider themselves to be of mixed ancestry are concerned with the current or the immediately preceding generation. With respect to what constitutes a "mixture" and how to label it, mixtures have been classified by observers (or identified themselves) not necessarily along biological lines but along socially constructed labels. For example, even a one-thirty-second mixture of "Negro" in a person of otherwise Anglo-European ancestry has been reputed to make the individual a "colored" person, whereas, Anglo-Europeans with only one-quarter Native American ancestry can claim Native rights, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs guidelines, if they are registered with their Nation.