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FOCUS ON STUDENTS AND STUDENT CULTURE

Patterns of Situational Identity Among Biracial and Multiracial College Students

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Despite significant and increasing numbers of biracial and multiracial¹ students, almost nothing is known about their development and interactions in the college environment. This topic has special relevance to higher education at a time when multiraciality has become a matter of political and popular interest. A political movement of mixed-race people emerged in the last decade, demanding attention to mixed-race students in K-12 edu-

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¹ Throughout this article, I use the words "biracial," "multiracial," "mixed race," and "multiple heritage" interchangeably. To create parity between mono- and multiracial descriptors, I do not capitalize the names of racial categories (i.e., black, white, asian) except when a word relates specifically to a nation of origin (i.e. Samoan, Chinese). Because there is no general agreement in the multiracial literature about terminology or conventions of capitalizing racial designators, my choices are designed to minimize the notion of racial categories as immutable entities.

cation and changes in data collection by racial group membership on the U.S. 2000 census (Schnaiberg, 1997; Yemma, 1997). For the first time, census respondents will be offered the option of selecting one *or more* racial categories (Baron, 1998; U.S. Office, 1997).

Prior to the October 1997 change in the census guidelines, studies showed that less than 2% of the population claimed to belong to more than one of the government's existing racial categories (Schmidt, 1997). While this number is not very large compared to the general population, a change in how these individuals indicated their racial group categorization on the census could significantly influence racial group statistics used to enforce various civil-rights laws (Baron, 1998). In the ongoing battle over access, equity, and affirmative action policy in higher education, racial statistics matter. At present there is no accurate count of multiracial students and no systems in place to deal with the new check-as-many-as-apply option.

This study does not attempt to develop such a system, but it begins to explore how multiracial students might see themselves in the context of higher education. While raising larger questions about the use of racial categories in higher education, this study focused on how campus peer culture influenced the ways in which multiracial students made meaning of their racial identity in college. Using qualitative grounded theory framed by postmodern racial identity theory, I explored how multiracial students' interactions with peers, involvement in activities, and academic work influenced the kinds of identity-based spaces they chose to occupy and what caused them to create new, multiracial spaces on the monoracially defined campus landscape. Among 24 students at three institutions who identified themselves as biracial or multiracial, five patterns emerged in how students occupied existing identity-based spaces on campus or created new, multiracial spaces. The major determinants of students' identity choices were campus racial demographics and peer culture. I developed a conditional model to explain the construction of public multiracial space on campus and ask how it might be applied in other situations.

The results of this study provide insight into the experience of multiracial students and can be used as a model to explore multiracial students' lives at other institutions, as well as to explore other areas of socially constructed identity (gender, sexuality, class) on campus. The study builds on the multiracial identity development literature and fills a gap in college student development literature. It does not claim to represent the lives of all multiracial students, but it raises issues and questions that transcend institutional boundaries: How do students choose, create, and occupy public space on campus? How does peer culture mediate these choices? How might higher education address the needs of a growing population of multiracial people through programs, services, and policies?

MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Multiracial students are thought to comprise 1 to 2% of the college population and their numbers are growing (Schmidt, 1997), but their experience is not reflected in either the student development literature or the literature on multiracial identity development. College offers a variety of settings in which students explore identity—residence halls, academic work, campus activities, etc. (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reiser, 1993)—but still unexplored are the questions of whether or how the college environment facilitates or inhibits the identity development of young people whose parents are of different federally defined races.² Current theories of multiracial identity development take a postmodern³ perspective on race as a social construction (Chandler, 1997; Root, 1996a), and some students are well versed in both postmodern and identity development theory (Renn, 1997). However, these students live on campuses that are highly modernist in structure and outlook (Bloland, 1995; Tierney, 1993), where peer culture regulates group membership and where race is considered a “master status, an identity that overrides all others in others’ judgments of the self” (Stephan, 1992, p. 51). A sense of racial identity is therefore part of understanding oneself on campus and in society as a whole (Chickering & Reiser, 1993; Stephan, 1992).

Several models of racial identity formation have been created and applied to college students. These models generally rely on a progression from conformity with majority (white) culture through stages (or “statuses”) of dissonance and resistance to an immersion in minority culture, ending by integrating racial identity with other aspects of the person’s self-definition (Atkinson & Sue, 1993; Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995). On college campuses, immersion occurs in friendship groups of others who are like oneself, in student organizations, and in interest housing based on identity. All of these spaces provide environments in which individuals can explore

²According to U.S. Office of Management and Budget Directive 15 (1997), the federal government defines five racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. In addition, the government recognizes one ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino. Participants in this study were multiracial (parents from more than one federal racial designation, such as white and asian) rather than multiethnic (parents from more than one ethnicity, such as Korean-Japanese).

³In educational research, there is no universally understood definition of “postmodern.” For the purposes of this report, I rely on Tierney’s (1993) explanation of postmodernism as a perspective that “challenges the cultural politics of modernist notions of rationality, norms, and identity” and “rejects the assumption that through reason we will be able to achieve agreement about the nature of truth or oppression” (pp. 4-5). Postmodern theory holds “the idea of difference as an organizing concept” (Tierney, 1993, p. 5) and “focuses on the indeterminacy of language, the primacy of discourse, the decentering and fragmentation of the concept of self, [and] the significance of the ‘other’” (Bloland, 1995, p. 4).

racial identity and experience racial pride, away from majority group members (Chickering & Associates, 1981). Individuals form meaningful cultural reference groups through this immersion stage and acquire both a personal identity and a reference group orientation (Cross, 1987). Lack of immersion in a reference group or rejection by one's selected reference group can inhibit identity formation.

The (mono)racial identity models do not necessarily address the needs of mixed-race students, who cannot engage entirely in an immersion in one of their component cultures without putting aside, at least for that time, other aspects of their heritage (Kich, 1992; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). Furthermore, even when these students do choose to affiliate with monoracial student cultures, they are often rejected if they express their multiraciality (Daniel, 1992; Renn, 1997; Yemma, 1997). The communities of like-others that support the development of many students of color are not generally available to multiracial students (Williams, Nakashima, Kich, & Daniel, 1996). Accordingly, models of bi- or multiracial identity formation generally do not include a stage of immersion in a monoracial minority culture.

Early models of biracial identity development (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) were stage based and modernist in orientation, but more recent theories take a postmodern approach. Multiraciality is seen as a state of "positive alterity" (Weisman, 1996) or "positive marginality" (Daniel, 1996) in which the outcome of multiracial identity formation is an individual's ability to engage in a variety of "border crossings" (Giroux, 1992) between and among social contexts defined by race and ethnicity (Root, 1990, 1996a; Wallace, 1999). Maria Root (1996a) proposed a theory of identity formation that does not depend on an orderly progression through developmental stages but which relies rather on an individual's ability to be comfortable with self-definition in, across, and/or between categories. Root's (1996a) model of healthy biracial identity development describes how an individual resolves "other" status through one of four "border crossings." She identified these border crossers as (a) having "*both feet in both groups*" (p. xxi; emphasis hers) or being able to hold and merge multiple perspectives simultaneously; (b) choosing situational ethnicity and race, or consciously shifting racial foreground and background in different settings; (c) deciding to sit on the border, claiming a multiracial central reference point; and (d) creating a home base in one identity and making forays into others.

A pilot study (Renn, 1997) showed that mixed-race students at one college faced the paradox of acknowledging the social construction of race (and wished to dismantle it as such) while also acknowledging the need to create and maintain a self-identified multiracial community on campus. Armed with postmodern theory but living in a racialized society, they simul-

taneously rejected race as a valid construction and valorized it through their campus involvement, academic work, and personal identification. Based on that research, I was curious about how a broader sample of multiracial students made sense of their identities in college.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

Twenty-four students (ages 19-23) participated in this study, with eight from each of three New England institutions: Carberry, an Ivy League university; Ignacio, a Catholic university; and Woolley, a liberal arts college. (All names are pseudonyms.) I chose these institutions because they resembled one another in several important respects and would therefore allow some reasonable comparison across campuses: all were private, residential, co-educational, undergraduate-focused campuses that attracted well-prepared students from an international applicant pool; average SAT I scores for entering students ranged from 1150 to 1380 of a possible 1600.

The schools differed from one another in three respects that, based on the pilot study, I anticipated might be important to the experience of multiracial students: size, selectivity, and racial diversity. Carberry enrolled 5,500 undergraduate students, accepted 19% of applicants for admission, and had 27% U.S. citizen students of color. Ignacio enrolled 9,000 undergraduates, accepted 41% of applicants, and had 16% students of color. Woolley had 1,400 students, a 75% acceptance rate, and 12% students of color.

Of the 24 participants, four had two parents of color and twenty had one white parent and one parent of color. There were four first-years, eight sophomores, four juniors, and eight seniors. Fifteen women and nine men participated, divided evenly among the institutions. I recruited participants through flyers, e-mail lists, targeted mailings (at Woolley), and snowball sampling. Each participant selected a pseudonym for use in the study.

There were four main components to this study: individual interviews with all participants, written responses by participants, observations of and archival data about each campus on the topic of multiracial issues, and a focus group of 3-4 students per campus. I developed interview questions and prompts for written responses from the results of a pilot study (Renn, 1997). Each semi-structured interview began with an invitation to describe life before college, then progressed to questions about academic work, involvement in activities, friendship groups, and identity. Written responses gave students a chance to reflect more deeply, in their own time and fashion, on how they made meaning of their identity. I asked students to describe two salient experiences—one before college and one since their arrival—related to being of mixed heritage and to write about what those events meant to them.

Archival research and observations provided background information about each campus milieu, particularly as it pertained to multiracial issues. Resources included student newspapers and other media, administrative publications, student organization files, and programs and videotapes of events. I observed meetings, activities, and events of student organizations, informal gatherings of friendship groups, and the general campus climate as enacted in such common spaces as student centers, cafeterias, libraries, and sports areas. I combined archival and observation data with data from interviews and written responses to create an early "portrait" of each campus. I presented the evolving portraits to all participants for discussion and feedback during focus groups or, for those students who did not attend the groups, individually.

The focus groups accomplished several goals. They were an opportunity to watch how multiracial students interacted when asked to discuss their identity development; they provided students with an opportunity to interact with their multiracial peers; they helped verify data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994); and they served as preliminary member checks on the campus portraits. The data for this study therefore consisted of audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes from the interviews and focus groups, the students' written responses, archival information and field notes from campus observations, and information gathered during focus groups.

The interpretive framework for this study included the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the generation of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1994) consider grounded theory methodology appropriate for generating theory from data or for elaborating and modifying existing data. Furthermore, because grounded theory relies on the researcher's interpretation of data but also includes the perspectives and voices of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), it is a compelling methodology for a study that explores participants' meaning-making.

I began data analysis with line-by-line coding of transcripts of individual interviews. Based on the pilot project, I had anticipated that codes relating to academic work, friendship groups, involvement in activities, and identity development would emerge. I developed additional axial codes relating to family, international experience, race, culture, and personal development. I was concerned about how my identity as a monoracial white woman might influence my data coding and analysis. I therefore enlisted a biracial colleague and a multiracial Carberry student, both of whom had experience coding data for developing grounded theory, to code two transcripts each. They independently agreed with my major code categories, and each also made suggestions for modifying subcodes slightly.

To assist in constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I used HyperRESEARCH software to build codes and themes throughout the

course of data collection. I also relied on Miles and Huberman's (1994) description of cross-case displays to manage, organize, and diagram data. In the next section I will discuss emergent themes.

MAJOR THEMES

Two main themes emerged from the data: the notion of space and the impact of peer culture. By space, I mean both the public spaces of social groups, formal student organizations, and physical space in which students felt as if they belonged as well as the private space of students' reflection and intimate conversations about who they were and who they wanted to become. By peer culture, I mean the forces, often tacit, that shape life on campus in terms of group membership, acceptable discourse, and desirable behaviors. On these three campuses, peer culture regulated the flow of students between and among public spaces on campus, and the experience of fitting into public spaces impacted how students privately constructed their identities. In this article I will focus primarily on how mixed heritage students made meaning of identity-based spaces on campus. (See Renn, 1998 for a full report.)

Like their monoracial peers, multiracial students went about the business of developing meaningful definitions of who they were and who they wanted to become. They were doing the work of identity development on campuses not set up to accommodate those who do not fit into previously defined categories. Their solutions to this challenge demonstrated their ability to define themselves situationally and to create new spaces to express multiracial identity. In this section I will discuss three critical elements in the students' stories about space: the meaning and importance of identity-based spaces, the kinds of spaces these students chose to occupy, and the institutional conditions that influenced mobility among and the creation of identity-based spaces.

The Meaning of Space

On all three campuses, students spoke of finding space—both physical and psychological—to fit in. Space was both a public and a private concept. Students talked about having spaces on campus with others who shared their interests. These were the public spaces where peer culture was enacted: residence halls, student organizations, classrooms, and social events. Students also talked about having space to define their own identities. These were the private spaces created as individuals sorted through the meanings of peer culture, family background, and personally held notions of culture, race, and self. Private spaces took the form of individuals' reflection on identity, whether that reflection occurred through journal writing, academic projects, or conversations with trusted others. What went on in public spaces

shaped students' sense-making in private spaces, but students also brought their privately held ideas about race, culture, and identity into the public spaces on campus. They wrote about issues of race for campus newspapers, they spoke up at forums on interracial dating, and they created theater pieces expressing their multiracial identities. This public-private dichotomy reflected the literature on biracial identity development (Brown, 1995; Root, 1990) and formed a dialectic in which identity was questioned and shaped.

The construction of public space was sometimes obvious and at other times was more subtle. Usually definitions of group space remained unspoken, though occasionally the boundaries were clearly articulated. The borders were made visible when students tried to enter a space, often when they were new to a campus community. Students found some borders more permeable than others. The three main elements of public space-making were shared culture, physical appearance, and participation in legitimizing activities.

Students gave numerous examples of times when they felt that they fit in with a group because they held shared cultural knowledge generally accumulated through family and home communities before coming to college. Knowledge of the language, food, religion, customs, and values of a culture enabled students to participate, for example, in the Filipino Society at Ignacio, the Middle Eastern Club at Carberry, or the Latino Student Association at Woolley.

A cultural knowledge deficit was just as powerful in keeping a student out of a certain space. This phenomenon was especially true at Carberry, where the various ethnic groups within the self-identified Third World community⁴ had the critical mass and political will to demarcate rigid boundaries, but it existed at the other schools as well. Though Dan chose Carberry in part because he could explore his Chinese heritage there, he felt that he lacked the cultural knowledge required to participate in activities of the Chinese Student Association. Elektra avoided the group for Chinese students at Ignacio because she lacked cultural knowledge and felt excluded by students who were "whole Chinese." Alexandra said:

⁴Historically, the community of politically active students of color at Carberry was known as the Third World community. Only those students of color who actively participated in the monoracial student clubs (such as the Black Students Association or Native Americans Group) or the university-sponsored Third World Center (a freestanding building with its own professional staff) were considered "Third World students" by their peers. At Ignacio, the administration-assigned acronym "AHANA" (African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) had become the campus shorthand for both students of color and the identified community of students active in organizations for students of color. Although they described interactions among students and student organizations in ways that confirmed a sense of community among students of color, participants from Woolley used no specific word or phrase to denote it.

I guess I am not the type that would feel comfortable in a place like [X] where I would feel like an outsider because I don't speak the language. I know a little bit about the customs but not enough to be really part of the group.

Another major element in maintaining boundaries was a student's physical appearance. A striking example of appearance as a boundary-setting device occurred at Woolley when a member of the Black Student Association looked around the room to determine who "looked black enough to belong." Marisa, a light-skinned Jamaican woman of mixed heritage, passed his test for blackness but was left feeling "singled out." Several students told or wrote about times when they had entered a meeting of a group of monoracial students of color and people had looked at them questioningly, as Jennifer put it, as if to say, "Are you *sure* you belong here?"

While appearances quickly marked someone as not belonging in a particular monoracial group, most students also looked "ethnic" enough to be perceived as "not white." This perception created space for them to belong to a general community of students of color on any of the campuses. They said they knew they were accepted when they were invited to and welcomed at activities of different groups and when their arrival at events attracted no unusual scrutiny from peers.

The final element in the definition of space was participation in legitimizing activities. Through participation in certain clubs or classes on each campus, students negotiated the boundaries of various communities. For example, involvement in campus media at each institution was a means to establish borders. Students writing for campus papers took on the public role of representing students of color and, in addition to establishing themselves as insiders in the pervasive campus dialogue about race, influenced the formation of peer culture and definitions of who belonged in what spaces on campus. Other legitimizing activities common to the three campuses were social, educational, or political events sponsored by groups within the community of color.

Carberry students spoke the most about issues of legitimacy and the ways in which different activities marked one as an authentic member of the Third World community or individual cultural groups. Carberry offered a preorientation program for new students of color, and attending this event was a key requirement for being an insider, according to Kira, who did not attend and felt that she had had to "prove herself in the Third World community" ever since. Students who had attended the preorientation event talked about the ways in which they felt included by Third World students from the start of their time at Carberry.

It was also possible to join activities that marked students as outsiders to the Third World community or to particular organizations in it. Jeff pledged a predominantly white fraternity, a move that put his insider status in the

Third World community at risk. Even joining Spectrum, a group for multi-racial students, marked students as not fitting in. In the focus group at Carberry, participants strongly agreed that belonging to Spectrum was considered antithetical to fully belonging to the black student organization or to one of the nationality-specific asian student groups (Korean Students Association, Japan Club, etc.). They felt that they could fit into monoracial groups only if they did not claim membership in Spectrum or otherwise assert their multiple-heritage background.

On the other hand, through Spectrum, students created a new cultural space. Repeatedly, participants told stories of feeling comfortable, of fitting in, or of finding a space in Spectrum. Unlike other organizations in the Third World community, Spectrum was a space where students could identify however they chose. Dan described the beginning of a Spectrum meeting at which students went around the circle introducing themselves by name and how they identified, "and it was 'biracial,' 'multiracial,' 'black,' 'asian,' whatever." The annual Multiracial Heritage Week created another space for student belonging. These involvements helped students maintain their own space on campus. They created a multiracial community, with a history, activities, and traditions. Paradoxically, these were the same students who believed strongly that racial categories were socially constructed and were convinced of the importance of eliminating social categories based on race. To operate in a racialized campus climate with rigid boundaries around racial groups, they felt compelled to create their own space in the Third World community and they patterned its activities after traditions in the black, latino, and asian communities.

The Importance of Having a Space

Both student development and racial identity development literature discuss the importance to people of feeling that they fit in, that they belong, and that they have space (Chickering & Associates, 1981; Daniel, 1996; Root, 1990; Weisman, 1996). Across institutions, participants in this study emphasized this need, though they talked about it in different ways. Access to and inclusion in public space created opportunities to explore or to validate privately held ideas about identity. In their stories about life before and during college, students described times when they felt that they belonged to a group, family, or community; but they also described times when they felt left out or were unable to find a place to fit in. In this section, I will discuss the ideas students held about the importance of having a space as well as the theoretical basis for the importance of having public, identity-based space.

The Importance of Space to Students. Several students selected their colleges because they believed they could find certain kinds of community spaces there. For example, Dan wanted to explore his Chinese heritage and

selected Carberry in part because it had an active community of asian students. Vincent chose Ignacio because of its location in a city with a large international student community. Five students chose Woolley because it offered a small, tight-knit college community. For them and others, the desire to find a place to belong was critical in their decision to attend a particular institution.

Once they arrived on campus, however, their experiences of finding that space differed greatly. Five Ignacio students and four from Woolley seriously considered transferring after their first year. At institutions with first-year retention rates over 80%, the fact that one-half of the Woolley students and nearly two-thirds of the Ignacio students in this study considered transferring was striking. All nine would-be transfers discussed race or campus race relations as an aspect of their dissatisfaction.

Alexandra talked about her desire to be in a more diverse community than the one she found at Ignacio. Although she decided to stay for academic reasons, she disliked the way campus culture split students into "AHANA and everyone else." Because the campus climate around issues of race was so highly segregated compared to her high school experience, Elektra admitted that, in her first year, she "hated Ignacio so much that I wanted to leave and never come back."

Marisa cited the small size of the community of color at Woolley as a reason for wanting to leave but said that positive experiences with faculty convinced her to stay. She said:

I never really feel like I completely belong. Sometimes I just have to put myself in the mentality that "you're just here to go to school and don't worry about it." I don't feel like it's my school, just like how I couldn't call it my high school. I'm just a student and I really don't have any connections outside of academics with the school.

Other students had very different initial experiences of college, notably those who attended the preorientation event for students of color at Carberry. Those six students were struck immediately by the size and diversity of the Third World community there, and several remarked that it was their first opportunity to identify with a group of bi- or multiracial people. A space on campus had been created for them ahead of time, and they received formal invitations to enter it from the dean of the college. At the preorientation event, David found that "so many people are out there just to help me feel comfortable."

Some students acknowledged the importance of space to their identity development and attributed aspects of their growth to the various spaces they occupied. The experience of not fitting into monoracial student groups prompted them to explore their multiraciality, and the lack of a formal biracial space at Ignacio prompted Phil to begin the process of forming a

student organization. Kayla and Dan questioned if they would have done as much thinking about their identities if they had not gone to a school with a visible biracial student community. Summer felt freer to express her biracial identity when she switched friendship groups and moved into an apartment with her new biracial friends. Two-thirds of the participants specifically attributed elements of their growth and development to different aspects of space and to the experience of fitting into existing spaces, not fitting in, or creating a new space altogether.

The Importance of Space in Identity Development Theory. Finding a space to fit in was not just a matter of having people with whom to hang out. The importance of reference groups and immersion in groups of like-others are common to theories of identity development. Traditional models of (monoracial) minority identity development include a stage or status of immersion in the minority culture (Atkinson & Sue, 1993; Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995), but the stage theories of biracial identity development (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) do not include immersion because there is generally not a public biracial space in which to immerse oneself. In these models, racial identity remains more of a private construction. Carberry students, however, could immerse themselves in a public community of multiracial people and acquire a meaningful reference group on campus. Students did not necessarily share the same combination of heritages (a fact noted by several participants in the study), but they shared the experience of navigating campus life as multiracial people. This common experience formed the basis for the sense of belonging that students felt in Spectrum at Carberry and for the informal network of multiracial students at Ignacio. Students were able—some for the first time—to identify publicly with a bi- or multiracial reference group.

Participants' Patterns in Occupying Spaces

All of the students described times when they felt that they fit in somewhere on campus, and most had multiple points of connection both within and outside of the mainstream culture on their campus. In this section I will focus on the spaces specific to their experience as multiracial people. Five patterns emerged, showing how participants occupied spaces on the racial landscape of each campus. Of the existing biracial/multiracial identity development models and theories, these patterns correspond best to Maria Root's (1996a) notion of "border crossings," a developmental model emphasizing situational, fluid definitions of identity. Like the border crossings, the patterns I found among participants describe times when they identified as monoracial, as belonging to more than one racial group, as multiracial, or as moving among options. Participants experienced an additional choice, that of opting out of the system of racial categories altogether.

In the first pattern, students chose one existing monoracial category (“black,” “asian,” “latino”). These were the students like Dee Dee and Mike who identified as black or Sapo who identified as Mexican-American. Fourteen students always or sometimes identified monoracially.

In the second pattern, students moved between existing monoracial categories, adopting situational definitions of monoracial identity. This group of seven students moved between or among their different heritage groups. BJ felt comfortable with the Filipino Society and with the Black Student Forum. Erika divided her time between her “American” (white) friends and her Japanese friends. Jeff, in joining a predominantly white fraternity and maintaining ties to the Third World community at Carberry, essentially moved between two defined categories.

In the third pattern, students created a new identity-based category—“multiracial.” Students called this identity “multiracial,” “mixed,” “biracial,” “half,” “mixed heritage,” or “hapa” (an abbreviation of the Hawai’ian term “hapa haole,” meaning half white); and 20 of the 24 sometimes or always fit this pattern. Elizabeth and Audrey identified as multiracial but did not have a campus base of support for this identity at Woolley, while Sina and Julia found their primary home in Spectrum at Carberry. Though there was no formal space at Ignacio, there was the informal network of mixed-race students to which BJ, Phil, Vincent, and Summer belonged.

In the fourth pattern, one-third (eight) of the students opted out completely by deconstructing the category of race or choosing not to identify along U.S. racial lines. Though they described times when they could not sustain this position against the forces of institutional bureaucracy and peer culture, there were other times when they stood their ground and refused to place themselves in any category defined by race. Some students focused on culture as a more salient factor than race, while others focused on the deconstruction of race and the fluidity of identity. Dee Dee knew that “it’s already been established that the human race exists but not in racial categories based on physical characteristics,” and Kayla asserted, “If you accept race as a social construction, that gives us even more legitimacy in the freedom to choose what you want to identify as, because there’s no biological thing tying you to one or the other background.”

Five of the eight students in this group attended Carberry, where the academic and student cultures were replete with the language and concepts of postmodernism. Participants had taken a variety of courses that focused on deconstructing social categories and analyzing historical, literary, and media representations of race and race relations in the United States. Attending a student-sponsored lecture, one participant heard philosopher Naomi Zack say, “Race isn’t real, but racism is.” The student adopted this phrase as a personal motto for managing the conflicting messages she received in the classroom and from everyday life. Exposure to theories of

deconstruction and the knowledge that race is a construction rather than a biological fact seemed to give Carberry students access to the cognitive means to opt out of or deconstruct racial categories.

In the fifth and final pattern, students moved between or among the above options. The 14 students who shifted between patterns identified themselves as required in different situations, including the multiracial or “opt out” choices among their identity positions. Alexandra avoided any racial categorization but, when forced, would identify as multiracial and would check off hispanic, asian, and native american on institutional forms. Jazz checked “multiracial” on Woolley’s forms but felt most at home with other students from the Middle East. Jeff identified as hapa, a constructed category, but could also fit comfortably with his monoracial asian friends.

Nearly all students said that a key factor in how they identified was where they felt that they fit in, which was in turn determined largely by the messages they got from campus peer culture. It was a matter of trying to figure out not only where they could fit in but also where they felt that they belonged to a group and whether that group affirmed their multiracial identity. For example, biracial students could fit in with monoracial groups at Carberry by letting go of their biracial identity in those contexts, which they sometimes chose to do; but to feel that they *belonged* in a group, they had to find a space where they could maintain their biracial identity. Though theoretically any participant could have identified in any of the patterns, the spaces available for multiracial students to identify in different ways varied across the campuses according not only to values espoused by peer culture but also by the availability of public multiracial spaces. Table 1 shows students’ identity choices by campus.

Conditions Influencing the Creation of Public Multiracial Space

The three campuses represented different phases in the construction of space for multiracial identification. Carberry students had a public multiracial space, Ignacio students had an informal network on the brink of creating a formal organization, and Woolley students had only private space to identify as multiracial. In this section, I will consider two major factors that influenced the creation of public multiracial space and the likelihood of students occupying it: peer culture regarding group membership and the size of the multiracial population.

Peer Culture. Each campus had its own climate for students of color in general and for multiracial students in particular. Participants described various identity-based communities on campus, how they related to one another, and the ease with which students could move from one group to another. Participants described the boundary between the community of students of color and the general (predominantly white) milieu as either permeable, allowing students to move fluidly from one group to another,

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS' CHOICES OF RACIAL IDENTITY SPACES
TO OCCUPY ON CAMPUS

	<i>Chooses a mono-racial space</i>	<i>Chooses two or more monoracial spaces</i>	<i>Chooses a mul-tiracial space</i>	<i>Decon-structs race/opts out of spaces</i>	<i>Moves be-tween or among public spaces</i>
Carberry	4	1	7	5	7
Ignacio	4	4	4 informal, (3 private)*	1	5
Woolley	6	2	(6 private)*	2	2
Total	14	7	11 (9 private)*	8	14

*The student privately called herself or himself multiracial but did not have a formal or informal multiracial space on campus; these students are not counted in the fifth pattern.

or as rigid, preventing easy movement. Within the community of color, a similar phenomenon occurred; groups based on a monoracial identity (Black Students Association, Asian Student Caucus, etc.) maintained borders of varying degrees of permeability. For example, many participants who called themselves “half-asian/black/etc.” came to college in search of cultural knowledge but found themselves unwelcome in groups of peers who were “whole” ethnicities.

Permeability of boundaries around communities was a major factor in determining which spaces students would choose to occupy. Peer culture at Woolley supported the most permeable boundaries of the three campuses. Students said they moved among social groups easily and were not considered “outsiders” because of participation in certain activities. Though they did not have a formal multiracial space on campus, the borders around identity-based student groups allowed them to enter without abandoning their privately held, and sometimes publicly expressed, multiracial identities.

Boundaries were less permeable at Ignacio, primarily the border between AHANA and the general milieu. Students found that they could easily join the AHANA groups but that, once they did, they could not bring their AHANA identities back into the mainstream. The boundary was permeable in one direction only. Once in the AHANA community, multiracial students found more stringent borders around the individual groups; be-

ing part of the general AHANA community was easier than being part of a specific ethnic group. Summer felt that, "It was either I joined AHANA and had all asian friends or I hung out with everyone else. So it was like two really separate paths I could have taken, and very rarely can you do both." BJ, who decided to immerse herself in the AHANA community, described her initial difficulty in convincing both black and Filipino groups that she was "legit."

Of all participants, Carberry students encountered the most rigid boundaries around individual ethnic student organizations. Participants described the ways in which identification as a Third World student required legitimacy in the eyes of peers. To enter the Third World space one had to demonstrate one's commitment to its political and social ideals. It was the opposite of the situation at Ignacio: students could easily move out of the Third World space into the rest of the general milieu at Carberry, but getting into the space required proof of legitimacy. Described Kayla:

And this year, especially, I've felt really kind of upset at the way the multiracial community gets treated as part of the Third World community. . . . A lot of comments were made [at a forum on campus] to imply that the only reason people identify as multiracial, or identify differently in different situations, is to get some sort of economic advantage out of it. People were accusing other people of trying to quote "escape their blackness" by identifying as biracial.

In contrast, Spectrum's borders were more loosely constructed and students felt that they could move in and out of the group depending on how they self-identified at a certain time. Participants attributed this permeability to multiracial students' shared sense of exclusion from monoracial groups and to their consequent desire to create an inclusive community on campus.

Size. The second factor in the creation of multiracial space was the size of the multiracial population. Was there a critical mass of multiracial individuals on campus willing to create and sustain a public multiracial space? Students at Carberry demonstrated that there was; they had over time maintained a visible and vocal presence in the community of color which had been incorporated into the institutional structures of campus life. They were well known on campus, and incoming biracial students had easy access to the community, a circumstance that helped sustain its membership and activities. At Woolley, on the other hand, the number of students identifying as multiracial was very small. About 35 students on campus checked "Multiracial" on registration forms, but some of these students were not, in fact, of mixed race. It did not seem apparent to me that the population had reached a critical mass for organizing, and few participants indicated that they knew other multiracial students on campus. At Ignacio, the population of multiracial students was large enough that they had created infor-

mal networks and begun to take steps to formalize a group. It remained to be seen if enough students would join such a group to keep it going over time, but the sentiment among Ignacio participants was that there probably was a critical mass who would be interested. Phil said he was organizing the group because, “it’s nice to have some place where you’re accepted for who you are as opposed to not being [accepted].”

Summary of Findings

Public space was important to students’ private construction of multiracial identity. Through common cultural knowledge, similar physical appearance, and group involvements, peer culture on each campus defined who could occupy which public spaces. The creation of a public multiracial space required a critical mass of students both willing to identify as such and feeling a need for a separate multiracial space. Carberry had both. Woolley seemed to lack critical mass, but students also did not express a need to create a separate space because they were already able to carry their multiracial identities into existing spaces. At Ignacio, an informal, private network had developed in response to the need to have a space for multiracial students, but it remained to be seen if enough students would be willing to identify as such—and risk being seen as AHANA outsiders to the general milieu—to create a formal organization.

The combination of demographic factors (the number of multiracial students in particular) and peer culture had a powerful impact on the experience of multiracial students. If it is true that students benefit from maximum freedom to experience and participate in different identity-based spaces, then information about how students move in and out of communities on campus can be used to consider whether an individual institution or higher education as a whole is meeting the needs of multiracial students and others. In the next section, I will undertake such a consideration as well as indicating future research directions in the areas of multiracial students and constructed identities.

A THEORETICAL MODEL AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

This study demonstrates the importance to multiracial students of having a space to occupy and examines factors that contribute to students’ freedom in creating and selecting spaces on campus. Given the importance in student development and racial identity development theory of having a group of like-others with whom to affiliate, the inability of most multiracial students to find such a group is cause for concern. In having an established multiracial student group, Carberry is an exception; only a few dozen campuses currently have these groups (Renn, 1998; Wallace, 1999). As the number of multiracial students in higher education increases, these stu-

dent groups may proliferate; but for now, most multiracial students are left on their own to negotiate highly racialized campus climates.

What, then, are the conditions that facilitate the creation of a public multiracial space on campus? From the data, I propose the following: If identity-based space is important to students, but they cannot belong to existing monoracial groups, and if there is a critical mass of multiracial students willing to organize, then students will create and maintain their own space. Individual needs create the desire for identity-based spaces, peer culture determines access to existing spaces, and campus demographics create the critical mass (or lack thereof) necessary to sustain a community. Research with multiracial individuals at other institutions can test this model for its generalizability, and its usefulness may extend beyond racial identity to other populations who comprise a very small minority of students at their institutions. Do these students feel the need to create their own space? And if so, what conditions are necessary for them to do so?

The model I propose implies actions for faculty and administrators who believe that multiracial students should have opportunities to find identity-based space on their campuses. They can assess campus climate to determine whether mixed heritage students are satisfied with existing monoracial spaces and enjoy fluid access to them. If students do not have access, administrators can take steps to create a public multiracial space by ensuring a critical mass of mixed-race students through admissions and retention programs and by providing leadership in bringing multiracial students together. Providing a "multiracial" or "check all that apply" option on institutional forms gives mixed-race students an institutional means of self-identifying and facilitates accurate record-keeping. Faculty can offer courses that deal with multiraciality and offer opportunities in all courses for students to think, read, and write about identity. Administrative and faculty attention to the concerns of multiracial students, as well as to the campus racial climate as a whole, may help multiracial students find places on campus where they can try on different identities and find identity-based spaces that suit them.

At a time when there are calls for an end to the "balkanization" and "self-segregation" of identity-based groups on campus, this study speaks generally to the need to create and maintain spaces where students can explore their heritages and experiences as racialized people. Campus leaders can continue to provide programs and services for various identity-based groups while aggressively promoting cross-racial dialogue about race and race relations on campus.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of identity-based spaces on campus, the results of this study raise the issue of college curricula in students' identity development. One of the main differences between the Carberry cohort and those at Ignacio and Woolley was the way Carberry

students used postmodern theory to explain aspects of race and racial identity. Five of the eight sometimes occupied the “opts out of spaces/deconstructs race” space (see Table 1) while only three of the sixteen other students saw this option as available and desirable. The connection between access to theory and possible identities is strong; more students at Ignacio and Woolley might have elected the “opts out/deconstructs race” identity position if they had been aware of current theories about race as a social construction. Including these theories in the curriculum for all undergraduates might provide both multiracial and monoracial students—and faculty—with more ways to think about identity and identity-based space.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides a window into the experience of multiracial students at three particular institutions and proposes a conditional model for the creation of multiracial space on campus, but it is limited by the nature of the sample and by the effects of my (monoracial white) identity on data collection and analysis. There is still much to learn about the lives of multiracial students, about identity construction in college, and about the use of racial categories in higher education.

I have already suggested research to test the conditional model and would specifically recommend a broadening of the research sample to include students at public, two-year, rural, single-sex, and historically black, latina/o, or native american serving institutions. Because the history of racial dynamics varies by geographic region in the United States, exploration of multiracial construction at colleges outside the Northeast would be an important contribution. The on-campus construction of identities based on gender, class, and sexuality bears further exploration, especially when students’ identities do not fit into predetermined categories. Testing the conditional model for the creation of new space in these categories might be fruitful as well.

Identifying potential multiracial research participants presents special challenges to the researcher, and this study reflects some of those challenges. Because I recruited “biracial and multiracial” students, the sample was comprised of students who in some way identified as such. Students who may also have fit the criteria (parents of more than one federally defined race) but who did not identify with the labels “biracial” or “multiracial” may not have volunteered. Future research using other recruiting methods (see, for example, Wallace, 1999) would add new voices to the work.

Limitations based on researcher identity might be addressed in future research through collaborations among researchers who identify in a variety of multiracial and monoracial ways. I believe that studying the multiracial experience in higher education will benefit from both insider (i.e.,

multiracial) and outsider (monoracial, both white and of color) research perspectives and that the area of multiracial scholarship is prime ground for collaboration.

More generally, the college student development literature would benefit from further research on how peer culture impacts students' individual identity choices, including how patterns of belonging in identity-based space emerge on campus and how students who do not fit into prescribed categories fit in or create new spaces. The field would also benefit from research that could provide a framework for the introduction of more postmodern, context-based identity models that allow for situational and nonlinear identification.

Finally, the research process raised several questions for me about institutional policy. Currently little research and no statistics are available on multiracial college students in the United States. There is no way to tell if they are over- or underrepresented in higher education, how they fare, or how satisfied they are. Though the use of the "check all that apply" standard on the 2000 census may prompt more institutions to gather data this way, there is no evidence that all, or even most, mixed-race students will indicate all aspects of their racial heritage on institutional forms. How do institutions treat multiracial individuals in the ever-important counting of racialized bodies on campus? How do affirmative action policies, quotas, and race-based scholarship programs treat multiracial students? Are services for (ostensibly) monoracial students of color equally available for multiracial students who have white heritage? As the number of multiracial college students grows, these questions will become increasingly important at all institutions, but especially at those which, like those in the California public higher education system, are likely to enroll significant numbers of multiracial students.

The results of this research point in a number of directions for the future study of issues of race and multiraciality in higher education, from analyzing individual campus climates to considering systemic use of racial data. The experiences of participants in this study speak to the need to think broadly about the construction of race in higher education and to challenge the notion of race as a rigid, immutable category. Future research in the area of multiraciality and higher education will facilitate both.

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