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## Understanding the Experiences of Multiracial Faculty Members: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Understanding the Experiences of Multiracial Faculty Members: A Phenomenological Inquiry

by

Gianna E. Nicholas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction  
with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration  
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education  
College of Education  
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## **DEDICATION**

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”. I dedicate this dissertation to anyone who has ever felt out of place or has been treated differently because of his or her identity. I hope this dissertation inspires you to use your knowledge and create positive change in the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful to my husband for his constant support, patience, and kindness throughout this process. Aaron, every day you inspire me to be my best self. Knowing that I got to come home to you every night after late nights on campus studying and writing was what kept me going. I love you, boo. To my mom and dad, thank you for raising me to see the value in an education. I am so grateful for your love and support. To the rest of my family, thank you for loving me and cheering me on from both small and great distances. To my dearest friends, thank you for sticking with me throughout this journey and providing me with unconditional love and support. My friend Ebony, thank you for believing in me and my research. I appreciate you more than you know.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to understand the experiences of multiracial faculty at a public, four-year university in the United States, including the challenges and supports that may affect their role and responsibilities within academia. Another objective of this research study was to center the voices of multiracial faculty. While there is much research on faculty of color, research specifically on multiracial faculty is limited, indicating an even greater need to explore the experiences of this population. This qualitative, phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews with six, multiracial faculty members. This study's findings have implications for institutional policies and practices regarding faculty culture and environment in order to create a more inclusive and supportive environment on college campuses.

Common themes were found throughout the interviews. Participants discussed how they began to understand their multiracial identity as children and how their identity is perceived in their current role as faculty members. Participants also mentioned the importance of mentorship, supportive colleagues and students, and diversity within their departments. These were all indicators for a positive, welcoming departmental climate and culture. Lack of support and diversity created a challenging departmental work environment. Implications for policy and practice are discussed in Chapter Five, including ways to improve the faculty experience for multiracial faculty members.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to the Pew Research Study (2015), the number of multiracial Americans is growing at a rate three times as fast as the population as a whole. By the year 2050, it is projected as many as one in five Americans will claim a multiracial background (Lee & Bean, 2004). While a number of studies examine the experiences of monoracial faculty and faculty of color, research on multiracial faculty is scant. There is an abundance of available information pertaining to multiracial students and their experiences on college campuses. For example, Renn (2008) conducted extensive research on the identity of multiracial students at three postsecondary institutions and found the following patterns: (a) students hold a monoracial identity; (b) students hold multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to the institution; (c) students hold a multiracial identity; (d) students hold an extraracial identity by deconstructing race or opting out of identification; (e) students hold a situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts. These findings help to understand the identity patterns of multiracial students, but do not consider multiracial faculty and what has been researched on their experiences within academia. This may be due to the limited number of faculty members who have identified as multiracial. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2016), members of minority groups make up 20% of all faculty members, and only 0.7% identify as two or more races. The dearth of research about multiracial faculty may be due to the lack of multiracial representation in academia. While there is much research on minority faculty, research specifically on multiracial faculty is limited, indicating an even greater need to explore the experiences of this population. As more students identify as multiracial, they may seek support

from faculty members who identify the same way. In fact, student affairs professionals have also seen an increasing number of students from two or more races (Renn, 2008). Multiracial faculty members provide mentorship and a sense of connection towards multiracial students (Fries-Britt, Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, Milem, & Howard, 2011; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009). They also have a stronger commitment to service and the community of which they work (Spafford, Nygaard, Gregor, & Boyd, 2006; Umbach, 2006). Without representation of multiracial faculty, students may have a difficult time picturing themselves in the professional realm of higher education (Poloma, 2014).

The focus of this study was to understand the experiences of multiracial faculty at a public, four-year university in the United States. This study also sought to investigate the challenges and supports that may affect their roles and responsibilities within academia. In order to create positive change within higher education, there must be more research on the experiences of those individuals who are underrepresented in the academy. Another objective of this research study was to center the voices of multiracial faculty. Finally, the findings of this study may provide useful insight about the experiences of multiracial faculty that may be instrumental in creating a more welcoming environment for this population.

### **Problem Statement**

Within societal context, the option to identify as multiracial has not always been a choice for individuals. It was not until the year 2000 that the U.S. Census offered an option for respondents to identify in more than one racial category (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Many individuals who were limited to selecting one race on the U.S. Census were then able to select more than one. The decision to change identity option choices demonstrates how long it took for society to recognize multiracial identities. This could provide some insight in regards to

why higher education professionals have conducted very little research on this population. Renn (2008) stated during the 1990s, increased attention about the multiracial experience began to grow. Higher education institutions have only recently come to recognize multiracial individuals on college campuses, and with this population continuing to grow, there is a greater need to add to the research on this population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of full time, multiracial faculty members at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States. This study adds to the body of literature on people of color in higher education and fills a critical gap concerning the experiences of multiracial individuals within this context. There has been previous research pertaining to the student experience, however research on multiracial faculty is scant. This research study addressed the need to have more scholarship on the experiences of faculty members.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this phenomenological study:

1. How does full time, multiracial faculty make meaning of their experiences at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States?
2. What components do multiracial faculty identify as challenges and supports within academia?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework chosen for this study is supported by three bodies of literature: Gee's (2000) identity theory, Van Maanen and Schein's theory of organizational socialization (1979), and the notion of campus climate. Figure 1 shows the integration of these

frameworks. Further, this framework represents the most common themes found through an extensive review of the literature on multiracial and faculty of color.

### The Multiracial Faculty Experience

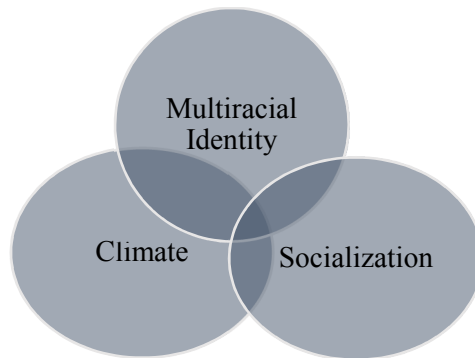


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### **Multiracial Identity**

The current research study considers identity development through a postmodernist perspective. The postmodernism perspective views the identity process as multidimensional. Postmodernists believe identity construction is complex, socially constructed through multiple dimensions, and constantly changing (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Gee (2000) viewed identity as multidimensional as well. Being recognized as a “certain kind of person” in a given context is one’s identity. Gee (2000) proposed four ways to view identity: nature-identity (a state); institution-identity (a position); discourse-identity (an individual trait); affinity-identity (experiences). These four perspectives are discussed in more detail in the following section.

First, being a multiracial faculty member is a position in which a set of authorities determine this position. In turn, the source of this power that determines a person’s identity is an institution, hence institution-identity. The second perspective, discourse-identity, comes from a personal trait or quality arising from the dialogue of other people. The sources of power in this case are the ‘rational individuals’ associating an individual with a particular trait (Gee, 2000).

The third perspective is nature-identity, which refers to being multiracial as the state an individual is in, determined by one's genes, over which one has no control (Gee, 2000). Lastly, affinity-identity is formed by a power that determines the person is a distinct set of practices. For multiracial faculty, they may align with certain principles and practices primarily and secondarily align with other people who share those same principles. Gee's (2000) analytic lens can be used to determine the ways in which multiracial faculty members are perceived on campus, and how this contributes to their identity formation.

Based on a qualitative study using narrative inquiry, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) restructure the model of multiple identity formation by incorporating meaning-making into how it is structured. The new model suggests that the incorporation of a meaning-making capacity filter would more thoroughly depict the relationship between context and self-perceptions of identity. Contextual influences in this study would include aspects such as colleagues, peers, and stereotypes. Self-perceptions of multiple identity dimensions include factors such as race and ethnic background. How these contextual influences move through the meaning-making filter depend on the permeability, depth, and size of the filter. Depending on the complexity, contextual influences pass through in qualitatively different ways. Multiracial faculty members may not be as influenced by contextual influences if their meaning-making filter is less permeable, or they have a stronger sense of self. This model takes Gee's (2000) theory a step further with the addition of how much or how little one's identity development is influenced by external contextual influences.

### **Faculty Socialization**

The second part of the conceptual framework considers faculty socialization for multiracial faculty. Socialization occurs through informal and formal actions (Waddell, Martin,

Schwind, & Lapum, 2016). Informal actions include conversations around the coffee machine in the break room, while formal socialization involves clearly delineated cultural structures, such as through faculty development programs (Nalls, 2014; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Both types of socialization are important for multiracial faculty and faculty of color to feel a sense of inclusion. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) found inadequate anticipatory socialization to be a major obstacle for faculty of color. Anticipatory socialization refers to the opportunities that prospective faculty members have as graduate students to be introduced to the roles of the professoriate. The concept of organizational socialization attempts to understand the process faculty members embark upon as they begin their role within a new institution.

Van Maanen and Schein's Theory of Organizational Socialization (1979) is a conceptual framework to be applied to the experiences of multiracial faculty. Organizational socialization is defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p.211). There are six dimensions: collective vs. individual; formal vs. informal; sequential vs. random; fixed vs. variable; serial vs. disjunctive; investiture vs. divestiture. All dimensions may assist in understanding the problems faced by faculty of color, however some may be more effective than others. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) suggested an emphasis on serial socialization, or connecting newcomers to senior faculty mentors, as a solution to the lack of role models for new faculty. A focus on collective socialization processes for faculty of color, such as through initiation rituals within a group, create networking opportunities. Sequential socialization, or providing clearly spelled out expectations for faculty members, may assist in understanding the divergent demands placed on faculty of color. Finally, a solution to the additional demands often placed on minority faculty is for institutions to encourage and reward diverse groups for being involved in campus

life. This relates to divestiture socialization. Using these dimensions within the theory of organizational socialization may assist to better understand and improve the integration and socialization process for non-majority faculty members.

### **Climate**

The third and final component of the conceptual framework for this study focuses on climate. Kuh (1990) stated that campus climate is made up of the attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about an environment. Campus climate/environment plays a crucial part in the experiences of multiracial and minority faculty members. Multiracial faculty can experience discomfort trying to navigate their own social and cultural identity, in addition to how they interface with the overall university environment (Stanley, 2006). Turner, Myers, and Creswell (1999) explored minority underrepresentation at seven institutions in the Midwest, where participants reported several issues of racial bias within one's department. These issues contribute to what the authors call a 'chilly climate'. Being denied tenure, being held to standards higher than those of White faculty, being a "token" faculty member, and being expected to handle minority affairs contributed to this negative climate. As a result, participants felt isolated, unsupported, and less satisfied in their professional position (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Thompson & Louque, 2005).

Cultural insensitivity and racism from non-minority faculty members and administrators have contributed to a chilly campus climate for minority faculty (Thompson & Louque, 2005). According to Thompson and Louque's (2005) survey of 136 Black faculty members, 66% of respondents said the racial climate at their institution had caused them stress, and 67% said it actually affected their job satisfaction to some degree. One way to create a more positive campus climate is to value diversity among faculty, staff, and students (Fries-Britt et al., 2011).

Institutions, specifically the leaders within institutions, must become proactive in acknowledging that racism exists and create policies and practices to address this issue.

Campus climate is largely a function of the people an individual interacts with regularly (Trower, 2009). Forms of racism and a culturally insensitive climate stems from the actions, interactions, and lack of actions and interactions, with students, colleagues, non-department chairs, supervisors, and non-dean administrators (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Thompson & Louque, 2005). Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education's (COACHE) annual survey of pre-tenured faculty found collaboration with other faculty members and professional and personal interactions with peers as some of the factors contributing to the climate of an institution. There were significant differences in minority satisfaction versus White faculty satisfaction when asked to respond to the aspects mentioned above (Trower, 2009). Faculty with positive perceptions of campus racial climate indicated higher levels of satisfaction than those with negative perceptions (Victorino, Nylund-Gibson, & Conley, 2013). Changes in institutional climate come from increased recognition by both majority and non-majority parties (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Stanley, 2006). Until then, there will continue to be disconnect between racial groups.

A hostile, racial climate can result in feelings of alienation and otherness. The radicalized structures and practices that undergird institutional racism in predominately White institutions unseeingly promote White faculty members over faculty of color. Jayakumar et al. (2009) analyzed data from a 2001 national survey of teaching faculty in order to understand the influences of institutional and environmental factors on the retention of faculty of color. Findings suggest a negative racial climate does not only impede job satisfaction for faculty of color, but is associated with greater retention for White faculty. Campus climate and institutional



environment may not always appear significant, but research has shown it does have an influence in the retention and experience of faculty of color.

Medical schools have strived to better understand the overall institutional climate for minority faculty members as well. Kaplan, Gunn, Kulukulualani, Freund, and Carr (2017) conducted a qualitative study with 44 senior faculty leaders from 24 different medical schools across the United States. Findings showed underrepresented minority faculty members described the climate as neutral to positive. When there was high investment in programs specifically for minority faculty, faculty of color members felt the institution had a commitment to diversity, which created a more positive climate environment. Additionally, participants stated that the diversity efforts of institutional leadership and authority figures on campus also made a difference in the environment. With these factors present, faculty of color felt more supported and more engaged within their institution.

Positive faculty socialization into one's department, including whether or not they receive any mentoring from senior faculty, remains one of the most important factors in the success of any faculty member (Jayakumar et al., 2009). Some institutions, such as Harvard University, have taken steps to improve minority faculty retention through the appointment of a Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity. Additionally, nine top research institutions have created an official group with the sole purpose to address issues of gender inequity in higher education and to share best practices (Victorino et al., 2013). The National Science Foundation (2011) created the ADVANCE program to address aspects of academic culture that may adversely affect women faculty members. Since 2001, ADVANCE has invested over \$130 million at more than 100 colleges and universities to support projects and institutional policies focused on increasing the number of women faculty within the science field. These are some

examples of the positive efforts being made nationwide to improve campus relations for minority faculty members.

### **Research Design and Methods**

In order to capture the detailed experiences of multiracial faculty members, I conducted a phenomenological, qualitative study through a social constructivist lens. Phenomenology was an appropriate methodology for this study because of its aim to explore the experiences of multiracial faculty members (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). A social constructivist paradigm was utilized to frame how these experiences were interpreted. Social constructivists assume that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. The goal of the research was to rely as much as possible on the participants' views (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the freedom to discuss their experiences without feeling constrained by specific questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Creswell (2014) advised the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as it is important to listen carefully to what people say or do in their life settings. Interviews were then analyzed and searched for significant statements. Additional justification for these methods is further explained in Chapter Three.

#### **Definition of Terms**

*Biracial:* Biracial refers to a person whose parents are of two different socially designated racial groups, for example, Black mother, White father.

*Faculty:* A faculty member refers to an individual who spends the majority of his or her time teaching. For the purposes of this study, adjunct instructors are not included in this definition.

*Multiracial*: In this study, multiracial refers to people who are of two or more racial heritages. It is the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes. Therefore, it includes biracial people.

### **Delimitations**

The first delimitation of this study was the choice to include multiracial faculty members from one institution as opposed to multiple, four-year institutions. A single institution was chosen because of convenience and ease of access to the participants and second, in hopes of gaining a more specific perspective about the multiracial experience within one institution. The second delimitation of this study was that the sample included only faculty members who identified as multiracial. Staff members and administrators were not included. This was due to past research indicating that high faculty/student interaction is strongly correlated to student success (Kuh, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Faculty members are a major factor in how a student experiences college and if that experience is positive. My hope was to gain a more in-depth perspective on what it means to be a multiracial faculty member within the selected institutional context.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study were trifold. First, as a qualitative researcher, I was part of the study and so personal bias was always present. Although I took every precaution to ensure my personal beliefs were controlled through bracketing, I recognize my bias as a limitation of this study (Creswell, 2014). Second, participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. This could be considered selection bias; however, I applied the purposeful sampling technique in order to identify multiracial faculty members at this particular institution. Finally, this study cannot be used as a generalization for how all multiracial faculty members feel within their

positions in academia. While these findings may be transferrable to multiracial faculty in academia, the generalizability of these findings beyond this study are limited.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes valuable information about an understudied population. Limited research has been conducted on the multiracial population and much has been focused on the multiracial, student experience without specific attention to multiracial faculty. When considering faculty members, much of the previous literature considers the experiences of faculty of color within academia while research on multiracial faculty is scant. It sought to examine the experiences of multiracial faculty within academia and how these experiences shape their roles and responsibilities within higher education.

Findings from this study could help multiracial individuals in their journey towards becoming faculty. Insight from participants currently working in higher education will provide a more authentic picture of the types of experiences multiracial persons encounter. Understanding these experiences could potentially help prepare new or junior level faculty members for the types of questions or situations they may face. It could also provide multiracial graduate students who aspire to become faculty members an honest picture of what working in higher education looks like. Graduate students may find a sense of support and inclusivity through the study participants' stories.

Additionally, information on the experiences of multiracial individuals could potentially influence institutional policy and practice. Higher education administrators and policymakers may see a need to change or adapt new policies in order to promote a more supportive and inclusive environment for faculty of color and multiracial faculty. The University of California system, for example, adapted a new policy that promotes and recognizes teaching, research, and

professional and public service focusing on diversity and equal opportunity (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). This research study could improve policy and practice within higher education institutions and possibly improve retention rates among faculty of color. As the number of multiracial individuals continues to increase in higher education, educators and administrators should continuously review and update their policies to ensure inclusivity of all backgrounds and recognize the roles and responsibilities these individuals tend to take on.

### **Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

Following Chapter One, Chapter Two will discuss previous research studies and literature conducted on minority and multiracial individuals. Previous research has focused on faculty of color, and so the literature review highlights many studies with a similar focus. For the purpose of my research study, I will focus on multiracial individuals' identity and how this plays a role in the workplace. Chapter Two also includes the conceptual framework used to frame this study. Identity, faculty socialization, and climate are the three main components of the framework. Chapter Three will discuss the research method and design. Qualitative methods, research paradigm, data collection, participant recruitment, data analysis, trustworthiness, and role of the researcher are all discussed in this chapter. These components will assist in providing a context of the subsequent research results. In Chapter Four, the participants will be described along with the results. Data will be presented by common themes. Chapter Five will present implications for the research as they relate to institutional policy and faculty support. Suggestions for further research are also described.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research on the experiences of multiracial faculty is scant and as a result, much of the literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on faculty of color. In reviewing the literature across all disciplines, it was difficult for me to find studies and research specifically on multiracial adults. Much of the research has been on multiracial children, or young adults, and growing up in multiracial households. Root (1990) and other theorists focused on multiracial identity development, which is not central to this study. Although it offered insight about identity and how identity is formed, it did not focus on adult identity formation. Despite the lack of specificity in the research, common themes were found throughout various studies and research on the topic of multiracial faculty and their experiences. Chapter Two will focus on what past researchers have found about the experiences of minority and multiracial faculty. This information is important in order to understand the historical context in which multiracial faculty have been studied, in addition to discovering areas that need more research. The literature review section is informed by the following constructs: multiracial identity, isolation and support, and faculty role and responsibilities.

### **Multiracial Identity**

Acceptance and validation of one's identity by others is an important premise in the discussion of multiracial identity development. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) asserted that without acceptance and validation, multiracial individuals may experience feelings of conflict and rejection. The struggle of being placed into a racial category unaligned with the racial category with which one identifies is known as racial identity invalidation (Rockquemore &

Brunsma, 2004). Consequences of racial identity invalidation include decreased self-esteem, promotion of resentment towards the perpetrator of invalidation, and contributions to negative mental health outcomes (Rockquemore, 2002; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). These three consequences can create a negative experience for multiracial faculty members when their colleagues only see them as one race. This perception and label may or may not be how the multiracial faculty member identifies internally, hence the conflict and struggle that may occur.

The concept of identity integration can also relate to multiracial individuals. Identity integration refers to the degree in which two seemingly conflicted social identities are perceived as compatible (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Academics who perceive their identities as compatible are more committed to their profession, optimistic about future professional success, and have a perceived sense of acceptance by peers and colleagues (Darling, Molina, Sanders, Lee, & Zhao, 2007). They also experience lower levels of stress, and are able to build larger, more diverse social networks (Mok, Morris, Benet-Martinez, & Karakitapoglu-Aygun, 2007). Cheng and Lee (2006) found individuals with multiple identities most likely have both positive and negative past experiences. These past identity-related experiences may influence how people currently feels about their identity, and can assist in understanding how multiracial faculty members navigate and make meaning of their surrounding environment.

Multiracial identity integration (MII) is a construct used to measure individual differences in perceptions of compatibility between multiple racial identities (Cheng & Lee, 2009). Cheng and Lee (2009) state MII is composed of two independent variables: racial distance, or whether racial identities are perceived as separate from one another, and racial conflict, whether different racial identities are perceived as contradictory towards one another. Lower levels of racial distance and conflict correspond to higher levels of MII. In their study, 57

self-identified, multiracial individuals completed an eight-question survey about their identity. Interestingly, results showed that environmental cues played an important role in MII. Multiracial individuals are likely to have both positive and negative experiences, and external cues that bring forth some of these experiences can affect MII. A faculty member who is exposed to negative, racial stereotypes may be reminded of past negative experiences related to their multiracial status, which in turn decreases MII (Cheng & Lee, 2009). This suggests that support and mentoring is important for multiracial individuals, especially new multiracial faculty, who may be unfamiliar with their campus environment.

Not only can there be an internal struggle for multiracial faculty members, they may also experience an external struggle as well. While multiracial faculty members who identify as an ethnic minority may achieve a sense of internal racial identity stability, they may be placed in situations where they feel conflicted (Gaither, 2015). Kayes (2006) described this as a constant subtle tension between identities. For example, a faculty member who is the only person of color in the department may be secure enough to work comfortably with White colleagues, but still seek opportunities to be more involved in minority faculty-staff organizations. Multiracial individuals often have to navigate both identities (Root, 1990) and have been shown to adopt flexible cognitive and behavioral strategies that enable them to function effectively within both minority and majority environments (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013). This concept can also be referred to as border crossing and is a fluid process for multiracial individuals (Cuyjet, 2008).

Multiracial individuals may also face discrimination based on how they are perceived by others. In a study conducted by Sanchez and Bonam (2009), individuals who identified as multiracial were viewed as less warm and even less competent than if they had identified as



monoracial. Disclosing one's biracial identity can make biracial people vulnerable to negative feedback. Following negative feedback, biracial people reported lower levels of self-esteem when they had disclosed their biracial background compared to nondisclosure (Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). Discrimination can lead to a wide range of emotions, including hurt, anger, guilt, and shame (Buckley & Carter, 2004). Consequently, findings from the current study may provide insight for racial perceptions on campus and how multiracial faculty members suggest they are perceived by monoracial individuals.

Societal context and societal pressures can make multiracial individuals feel they have to choose only one racial background (Gaither, 2015). Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005) interviewed 10, self-identified multiracial adults from a variety of racial backgrounds. The majority of participants self-identified as both monoracial and multiracial, however because of societal pressures, the monoracial label was publicly acknowledged and socially supported. This identification was deemed important to participants and seen as a way of connecting with similar persons, building a sense of community, and providing a buffer from racism. Interestingly, the lack of a visible multiracial community is likely one of the greatest challenges faced by multiracial people (Jackson, 2012; Miville et al., 2005). Having this knowledge could influence practice in higher education to develop communities for those who identify as multiracial.

Maria Root (1990) discussed the concept of biracial identity and feelings of otherness. Many models of identity development do not accommodate individuals who identify as biracial versus monoracial. Root (1990) proposed biracial faculty have the right to choose how they wish to identify and must develop coping strategies when others ask questions pertaining to their identity. It is also important for multiracial individuals to accept both sides of one's racial

heritage. Campus perceptions may improve if there is a conscious effort from majority faculty members to refrain from placing others in racial categories.

Past research has shown the identity struggle that minority individuals face in navigating their role within the context of higher education. Through interviews with minority, pre-tenured faculty participants, Martinez and Welton (2015) found the majority of participants experienced stress trying to navigate the dominate White culture, while also maintaining their personal identity. This is also known as a form of social marginalization. It occurs when a group of people, based on physical or cultural characteristic, are identified by members of the dominant culture as being different from mainstream expectations (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009). This internal conflict may manifest into a version of what Dubois (1969) called the “double consciousness” of African Americans. This concept refers to feeling that one’s identity is deconstructed into several different parts, making it difficult to have one unified identity. To assist the formation of a more unified identity, multiracial faculty may seek academic or research opportunities alongside their racial peers, as it provides a more culturally comfortable professional experience (Cuyjet, 2008).

Coping strategies entail a number of various practices that multiracial individuals enact in their everyday experiences (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Allen et al., 2000, Diggs et al., 2009; Turner & Louque, 2005). Being true to oneself, expecting to be the token or spokesperson (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Allen et al., 2000, Turner & Louque, 2005), anticipating misunderstandings, and creating opportunities to educate others about diversity are all possible solutions to ways in which multiracial individual can cope with identity conflict in the workplace (Diggs et al., 2009). Without these coping strategies, navigating the higher education experience can be stressful and can lead to alienation from other faculty members. The concept of code

switching, or applying feelings of being and knowing to different situations when appropriate, is another common practice used by faculty of color (Sadao, 2003; Stanley, 2006). Having to do this, however, can involve time and effort, eventually depleting one's mental strength and lead to occupational stress (Stanley, 2006).

### **Isolation and Support**

The next construct that emerged from the literature examined feelings of isolation and lack of support within the work environment. Through 42 in-depth interviews with racially minoritized academics, Spafford et al. (2006) found the level of inclusion depends on the following experiences: (a) acceptance through promotion and tenure; (b) visibility in terms of perceived power in work interactions; (c) support and encouragement and assistance from others; (d) the presence of mentoring experiences. The majority of study participants found more support from their colleagues, while administrative support was mixed. Participants felt they were welcomed into the university as long as they did not seek tenure or promotion, which often went to the non-minoritized group (Spafford et al., 2006). This is considered a subtle form of marginalization in which institutions only hire minority faculty members to look good on the outside, or what Thompson and Louque (2005) refer to as window dressing purposes. Marginalization in departmental meetings, professional jealousy, and undermining behavior are all factors found to create a non-supportive environment and even compel some faculty of color to leave their institutions (Thompson & Louque, 2005).

Feeling supported is an important factor towards the retention of minority faculty members. Other impediments related to retention include feelings of isolation and the difficulties of balancing life both as a person of color and as a professor within academia (Stanley, 2006; Thompson, 2008; Turner et al., 2008). Collegiality, or the nature of the relationship between

colleagues in the college and the university, is another aspect of the promotion process (Stanley, 2006). The difference in culture between faculty of color and White faculty can cause faculty of color to have a difficult time trying to interpret unwritten expectations about collegiality. This can then result in feelings of isolation and lack of support networks. According to Stanley (2006), if a minority faculty member does not feel a sense of support, he or she may be unaware of resources and information pertaining to tenure and the promotion process. As long as unwritten rules and procedures remain hidden, problems will continue to exist (Thompson & Louque, 2005).

Turner et al. (2008) conducted a meta-synthesis of 252 publications on faculty of color within academia. In their review, multiple emerging themes presented themselves throughout 20 years of research. Isolation, perceived biases in the hiring process, and unrealistic expectations of doing work and being representatives of one's racial/ethnic group are all noted throughout as the challenges within their departmental context. Although service can be detrimental to faculty of color as they strive for promotion and tenure, it can provide a sense of fulfillment for the individual faculty member, in addition to a sense of community and purpose (Turner et al., 2008). The synthesis highlights how difficult it can be for faculty of color to balance all of their responsibilities and still strive for tenure and promotion within their department, especially when there is lack of support and feelings of isolation.

### **Overview of Subsequent Section**

The subsequent section highlights key findings regarding the different forms of faculty support and the various roles and responsibilities of faculty members, particularly faculty of color. These themes emerged through an extensive review of past research and literature. Highlighted below are two forms of faculty support, including mentoring and the concept of

New Faculty Orientations (NFO's) within institutional systems. Additionally, the day-to-day work functions and workload for monoracial faculty members and faculty of color are discussed. This includes increasing teaching responsibilities and how collaboration with other faculty members can help ease workload demands.

## **Forms of Faculty Support**

### **Mentoring**

One solution to creating a more positive campus environment is through mentorship. Nalls' (2014) phenomenological study of five male, African American pre-tenured faculty members showed a well-matched mentor improved self-esteem, made them feel empowered, and assisted in goal attainment. In addition, being able to relate to the specific struggles of minority faculty created a more positive relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Nalls, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2015). Mentoring does not have to occur solely in the classroom and can be formal or informal in nature (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Stanley, 2006; Thompson & Louque, 2005). Sadly, Thompson and Louque (2005) found nearly 30% of their 136 participants said they were not mentored at all. Many faculty of color may not seek mentors because of the stigma associated with seeking help (Gothard, 2009). One way to address this is through new approaches to mentoring, including group mentoring sessions that bring together multiple people with various titles (Austin, 2010; Waddell et al., 2016). Lack of mentoring often leaves scholars responsible for their own successes and more isolated in their professional work environment.

Mentorship is especially important for new faculty members. Waddell et al. (2016) found the most effective mentors were not only invested in the professional development of their mentees, but also in their personal well-being. Mentorship circles created a sense of belonging and a safe space for new faculty to discuss their concerns and learn new strategies. The

reciprocal nature of mentoring for both the mentor and the mentee was also more prominent in this type of mentorship group setting (Paludi, Martin, Stern, & DeFour, 2010). Positive mentor/mentee relationships can act as a catalyst for change within the culture of the university to create a stronger sense of collegial support.

Examining the dissatisfaction of new faculty members, Kanuka and Marini (2005) found that new faculty of color will most likely be paired with a mentor of a different race, since White faculty make up the majority of those in the professoriate. Aryan and Guzman (2010) stated that one of the primary reasons faculty of color feel isolated and get fewer opportunities that White faculty is, in part, because they lack mentors of color. A challenge found in cross-race/ethnicity mentorships was that both the mentor and mentee must be willing learn about one another's culture so the faculty member of color does not feel pressure to adapt to White social norms (Kanuka & Marini, 2005). Additionally, Griffin and Reddick (2011) found Black male faculty restricted their interactions with their White mentors in fear of being misinterpreted and because they felt they were being watched closely, or under surveillance. This is why it is so important for a mentor and mentee of different backgrounds to be open to learning about one another.

Specifically, for faculty of color, support systems are crucial towards their success within academia. In a questionnaire distributed to 136 faculty of color from various U.S. postsecondary institutions, 83% of respondents said they felt supported by some African American faculty at their current institution (Thompson & Louque, 2005). Thompson and Louque (2005) used regression analysis to find predictors of how faculty responded to this survey item. The first and strongest predictor was whether or not the respondents believed their professional success was important to their colleagues, departmental chair, and dean. Respondents who said their professional success was important to their colleagues and administrators were more like to

indicate some feelings of support. This can help anticipate what minority and multiracial faculty members need in order to feel supported, valued, and respected in their roles at colleges and universities.

### **New Faculty Orientation**

In addition to mentoring, another way to increase faculty support on campus is through new faculty orientations (NFOs). When faculty experience a supportive environment at orientation, they transition into the university or college more seamlessly. Faculty are then more likely to feel connected to the school's culture, resulting in retention (Morin & Ashton, 2004). Cullen, Harris, and Hill (2012) recommend creating these orientations on a learner-centered model, which shifts the focus from instructor-directed pedagogy to student-driven learning experiences. The results were learners who were more open to learn because they felt empowered to take responsibility for their learning within a creative environment. Learning-centered models also create greater faculty collaboration, suggesting that when faculty experience a fostering environment, they are more likely to immerse into the institution's culture. Scott, Lemus, Knotts, and Oh (2016) suggested modeling pedagogical practices, utilizing students as experts, and incorporating technology as practices to be included during NFOs. Being strategic about how new faculty are integrated into a university's culture can be crucial towards the inclusion of faculty members of color.

### **Faculty Role and Responsibilities**

#### **Changes in faculty life**

The day-to-day work functions and workload for faculty members have expanded over the years, due to changes in teaching practices, student demographics, and a focus on globalization efforts. The number of faculty members working more than 50 hours per week has

doubled since 1972 (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2008), due to increased responsibilities in research, teaching, service, mentoring, and other duties. Faculty today have also expressed their increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional academic work environment, including a lack of coherent tenure policies, collegiality, and integrated life (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2012; Cullen & Harris, 2008). Eddy and Garza-Mitchell (2012) suggested the creation of thinking communities to help bring faculty members together in a more creative platform. Here, there is a greater focus on process and less on immediate product, in order to get new faculty members to think beyond just teaching their next class. Learning lifelong strategies may help aid some of the stress faculty members feel.

While an emphasis on research is often the mission of many universities, there is still speculation about whether or not it is an essential piece to being considered a good university teacher. By breaking down research performance into productivity and quality components, Cadez, Dimovski, and Zaman Groff (2017) found the amount of research output is not related to teaching quality. Research quality, or the impact of research being produced, is positively related to teaching quality. Quality, not quantity, leads to a better learning experience for the student, which is a responsibility that can sometimes get lost when faculty are trying to keep up with their research in order to receive tenure.

### **Teaching**

An understanding of what faculty members perceive as challenges and hindrances to effective teaching practice is important when considering the faculty experience as a whole. Briseno-Garzon, Han, Birol, Bates, and Whitehead (2016) discovered increased class size, perceived lack of support for teaching, and limited flexibility in one's existing learning spaces were challenges for faculty members who were heavily responsible for teaching. Enablers of



effective teaching included informal discussions with colleagues, feedback from students, and participation in professional development opportunities. Informal interactions can be just as beneficial for faculty members as more formal mentor/mentee relationships. A faculty member's personal experience as a student is the single most influential factor impacting how he or she teaches (Stigler & Hiebert, 2000), and so without guidance, feedback, and resources, it can be difficult for a professor to adapt new teaching practices and activities within the classroom.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration with other faculty members is one option to help ease workload demands. Intentional efforts to create faculty learning communities (FLCs) allow for knowledge creation, collaboration, and creativity (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2012; Cullen & Harris, 2008). FLCs meet regularly to discuss new ideas, projects being worked on, and allow faculty members to share feedback and recommendations. New faculty members may feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities when first beginning at a college or university, and so encouraging collaboration may decrease some of those initial nerves. According to Grant-Vallone (2011), other benefits of collaborative work include increased productivity, increased diversity of thinking, and expansion of one's knowledge base. Senior faculty members many find support in what is called peer-to-peer coaching, where two faculty members voluntarily work together to improve or expand their approaches to teaching (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Faculty who are open to self-reflection and eager to learn and improve (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2012) may see a change in not only in their personal development but in their students' development as well.

### **Faculty life among faculty of color**

Changes in student demographics may create the need to increase diversity efforts within the faculty realm. There are many benefits of a racially diverse faculty for the purposes of

research, teaching, and service. While there is limited research on the experiences of multiracial individuals in faculty roles, much has been written on faculty of color who hold a monoracial identity. Faculty of color take on greater teaching, mentoring, services, and administrative/committee responsibilities than do White faculty (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Allen et al., 2000; Fries-Britt et al., 2011). They more frequently encourage students to interact with peers from different backgrounds and engage in service-related activities (Spafford et al., 2006; Umbach, 2006). Additionally, faculty of color are more likely to employ active learning and collaborative learning techniques in the classroom (Umbach, 2006). Despite these interactions with students and colleagues, minority faculty are more likely than White faculty to experience isolation (Spafford et al., 2006; Stanley, 2006).

Faculty women of color in particular face a multitude of responsibilities when compared to their White and male counterparts (Stanley, 2006). These additional responsibilities include mentoring and advising students, and often being called upon for additional service as the token woman of color. Research has shown faculty of color feel they are always in the spotlight and have to work twice as hard to be treated as equal (Stanley, 2006; Turner & Myers, 2000). These extra commitments can lead to what is known as identity taxation (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Identity taxation occurs when faculty members “shoulder any labor - physical, mental, or emotional –due to their membership in a historically marginalized group within their department or university, beyond that which is expected of other faculty members in the same setting” (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012, p. 214). This additional labor can influence a faculty member’s productivity and social integration within his or her department.

Being expected to care for students' well-being outside of academics is an additional responsibility for faculty women of color. In a sample of 32 in-depth interviews with women of various racial backgrounds at a public research university, Hirshfield and Joseph (2012) found women of color reported being expected to nurture or 'mommy' their students, and at times this expectation was a burden. This feeling stems from gendered and racial norms. Students of a similar racial background tend to gravitate towards faculty members who look the same for their emotional support. Some women in the study felt uncomfortable with the expectations of providing emotional support, rather than the intellectual wisdom they had hoped to provide as professors in the classroom.

Faculty of color may face opposition from other faculty members and students as members of authority. Stanley (2006) found students more frequently questioned the authority of Black faculty than that of White faculty, especially when the conversation of integrating diversity into courses was being discussed. Feeling this constant pressure from not only other faculty members but students can be detrimental to one's overall experience. Participants also discussed how stereotypes about African-American women allowed students to treat their instructor with less authority and respect than other White, male colleagues. In this case, additional time and energy must be spent coming up with new strategies to gain and maintain students' respect (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). Presented herein were some examples of how the day-to-day experience for faculty of color is much different than the experiences faced by their White colleagues.

With all of the different roles and obligations that faculty of color tend to take on, it should come as no surprise that many may experience high levels of stress. Researchers suggest a linear relationship between stress and job performance, and the direction of this relationship

depends on the type of stress experienced by faculty members (Eagen & Garvey, 2015). Hindrance stressors are caused by interpersonal conflict and role conflict, two areas often experienced by faculty of color and multiracial faculty. Unequal expectations and perceptions are placed upon these faculty members that they must work harder to prove themselves to their colleagues, particularly in areas of service, mentoring, and teaching responsibilities. This pressure and mindset can be seen as a subtle form of discrimination (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Furthermore, all of these additional services performed by faculty of color are frequently devalued or not acknowledged at all within the college or university community (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Stanley, 2006).

With much of the research on faculty of color reporting higher levels of stress and increased responsibilities, some may wonder why faculty of color continue to take on as much as they do. Stanley (2006) found that many believe that if they do not commit themselves to multiple projects and get involved in some way, the diversity voice may not be well represented. Unfortunately, faculty of color tend to find themselves only being sought after when there is a specific call for diversity. It is rare they are sought after to serve on committees with much larger, and possibly more prestigious goals, such as those focusing on policy, finance, and curriculum (Stanley, 2006). Universities need to be more conscious of the amount of work faculty of color take on and value those experiences when promotion and tenure is discussed.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of multiracial faculty in academia and how they feel advantaged or disadvantaged in the workplace. With this in mind, the literature review was informed by three topics: (a) multiracial identity; (b) isolation and support; and (c) faculty role and responsibility. Each construct was reviewed in detail to

demonstrate the research previously conducted about this topic. Noticeably, there is very little research on multiracial faculty, and this study seeks to add to the literature in this area. In the next chapter, research design and methods are discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD**

In this section, I describe the research design, methods, and specific procedures used to collect and analyze data in order to better understand the experiences of multiracial faculty members. First, a rationale for choosing to conduct a phenomenological study through a social constructivist lens is discussed. Next, the details of the research process are provided. This includes method of data collection, the data analysis process, trustworthiness, and role of the researcher. As previously stated, the guiding research questions are:

1. How does full time multiracial faculty make meaning of their experiences at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States?
2. What components do multiracial faculty identify as challenges and supports within academia?

### **Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research is the collection of nonnumerical data, with the main objective being to explore or discover new knowledge (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Qualitative researchers view human behavior as dynamic and changing, in hopes of creating a narrative report with rich description, as opposed to one with many statistics or numbers. In this research study, I strived to give my participants an open, honest space to talk about their perspectives and experiences as multiracial faculty members. I sought understanding without judgment by showing openness, sensitivity, and respect towards my participants (Patton, 2002).

According to Patton (2002), some of the major characteristics of qualitative research are to practice voice, perspective, and reflexivity. Complete objectivity is impossible, but as a

qualitative researcher, I tried to find balance between understanding an individual's story while also staying reflexive in consciousness. Qualitative researchers work inductively, trying to generate new ideas and theories. Most qualitative studies consider how people interact and make meaning of their world. Words are the most common form of data (Merriam, 2009), and through semi-structured interviews was able to gain a more in-depth, personal perspective on multiracial faculty members.

Phenomenology is considered an umbrella term that encompasses both a philosophical movement and wide range of research approaches. Philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) identified four qualities or characteristics common to different schools of phenomenology: description, reduction, essences, and intentionality. The aim of this particular research method is description of a phenomena. Reduction is a process that involves suspending or bracketing the phenomena, while an essence refers to the core meaning of an individual's experience. Finally, intentionality refers to consciousness since individuals are always conscious to something. These four characteristics allowed for me, the researcher, to better understand this methodology and how it can be related to the study and experience of multiracial faculty members.

Phenomenological qualitative inquiry was chosen as the method of inquiry because of the researcher's specific intent to understand a group of multiracial faculty members' thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). A phenomenological study strives to find common meaning and understand the essence of an experience of a person or persons (Creswell, 2014). Using phenomenology, I assumed that there is some form of commonality in the human experience and my goal was to understand that commonality. The commonality of experience is called an essence which is an essential characteristic of an experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Ethnographic inquiry considers a group's culture and seeks to interpret that

culture, which does not align with the research questions of this study. Phenomenology inquiry provided the best fit for understanding the lived experiences of this group of individuals.

### **Social Constructivist Paradigm**

Social constructivists assume individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences and meanings towards certain things (Creswell, 2014). For this study, a constructivist paradigm was selected because of its focus on making sense of individuals' experiences within a particular context, which in this case is higher education and through interactions with others. Interaction with others, or the social aspect of constructionism, create meaning and these meanings cannot be fully captured as they change with context and relationships (Abes et al., 2007). According to Creswell (2014), relying as much as possible on the participants' views is important within social constructivism.

Social constructivists hope to develop a theory or pattern of meaning among participants. Crotty (1998) cites three assumptions included in the discussion of constructivism. First, human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world and others. As the qualitative researcher, I used open-ended questions so the participants do not feel confined in their responses. Second, humans engage with their world and surroundings based on their historical and social perspectives. An individual's culture influences his or her world of meaning. I sought to understand the context and setting of the participants through the gathering of personal information. Finally, meaning is always social, arising out of human connection and community. Qualitative research is largely inductive, and my goal was to gain a better understand the culture and experience of my participants.



## **Study Site**

This research took place in a large, public research institution located in the Southeast region of the United States. The area in which the institution is located is considered diverse. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), 24% of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino and 23% identify as Black or African American. Only 3% identify as two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Cultures such as Cuban, Greek, and Italian are represented and host a variety of festivals and events. With over 30,000 students, the institutional campus is considered to have an extremely diverse student population, with 41% of students identify as African American, Black, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American, or multiracial, and over 145 different countries represented. Students who identify as two or more races account for 3.8% of the total population (“Facts and Statistics”, 2017). As a research institution, it is dedicated to producing knowledge through the research and specialty areas of its professors (“Six Key Differences”, 2017). The student-to-faculty ratio is about 21:1, with the average class size being about thirty-three students. Faculty and staff make up a total of 15,378 individuals (“Facts and Statistics”, 2017). It was not until the year 2016 that this institution allowed employees to self-identify as more than one race (Michel Ferrell, personal communication, December 11, 2017). These demographics help to better understand the type of institution in which this research study took place.

## **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit six, full-time multiracial faculty members. Participants had to meet the following criteria: identify as multiracial and be full-time faculty members who spend the majority of their time teaching. I chose to include only two criteria for selecting participants because with such minimal research previously conducted on multiracial

faculty, I did not want include multiple participant selection criteria that could possibly result in a small group of participants. After IRB approval, I requested an email be sent out to faculty members through the campus faculty senate and various college faculty affairs administrations. Additionally, I contacted my two pilot study participants to see if they would want to participate and/or if they may know of any other potential participants. My pilot study was conducted in the summer of 2017 and was for educational purposes only. It allowed me to practice conducting interviews and the types of questions to ask. Findings were never published from this study. My final method of participant recruitment was asking my colleagues if they were willing to send out the recruitment letter to their contacts. Through these efforts, I received six responses to my initial request. Two out of six participants participated in my initial pilot study. Those individuals were then sent a follow up email, which included the general purpose of the study, additional details, and an informed consent form (Appendix C). I continued the study with those who signed and sent back the completed form. I also informed participants that there was no pressure to sign the form and only to do so if they felt comfortable.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

Participants who signed and sent back the informed consent form were then asked to fill out a standard demographic questionnaire in order to establish some general information (Appendix B). Once the demographic questionnaire had been sent back, I asked the participant for his or her availability to conduct the interview. One in person, semi-structured interview was conducted with each faculty member, ranging from 50-60 minutes in length. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were asked in order to provide participants with the freedom to discuss their experiences without feeling constrained by specific questions. I avoided asking leading questions and did not share personal impressions with my study participants. A follow-

up interview was conducted via email for three out of the six study participants in order to obtain further clarification needed for the study. In qualitative research, participants are seen as collaborators to the research study (Creswell, 2014). Interview questions were created based on the literature review and research questions (Appendix A). All first interviews were conducted in person and all six participants chose to conduct the interviews in their offices.

Phenomenological interviews can be structured in different ways. Bevan (2014) cites three main domains of phenomenological interviewing: contextualization (natural attitude and lifeworld), apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing, natural attitude), and clarifying the phenomenon (imaginative variation and meaning). This method allows the researcher to examine the full essence of a person's experience while also demonstrating consistency, dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness, all things that are essential for the quality of research. As the researcher, I strived to follow this interviewing method to better understand the lived experience of multiracial faculty members.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected in the spring and summer of 2018. A common data analysis practice in phenomenological research is searching for significant statements. Johnson and Christensen (2017) defined significant statements as "statements that have particular relevance to the phenomenon being studied" (p.448). Moustakas (1994) suggested horizontalizing the data, or treating each statement equally. I compiled a list of each statement I found in a separate Word document. Between three and four significant statements were found per participant. When a statement fit into multiple themes, I listened to the interview transcriptions to determine where it should be placed based on the context of the interview. These statements were then grouped into larger units of information, or themes. Themes were created when multiple participants shared

the similar experiences or feelings. Once I established significant themes, I developed a textual description of the experiences followed by a structural description. Textual descriptions refer to what participants experienced and structural descriptions refer to how they experienced it (Creswell, 2014). These two descriptions conveyed an overall essence of the experience of being a multiracial faculty member.

### **Trustworthiness**

There are many strategies used to promote qualitative research validity, as validity and reliability are addressed differently than in quantitative research. After my analysis of the data, I asked a qualitative peer reviewer to go over my results and provide feedback. According to Johnson and Christensen (2017), this peer should be skeptical and challenge the researcher to provide solid evidence for any commonalities or conclusions found. This process allowed a nonbiased person to read and interpret my data for the first time and determine whether or not my analysis was correct. The peer reviewer and I discussed any disagreements we found through our interpretations. From this detailed data analysis process, I was able to gain a better understanding of findings and what is significant to this study.

In addition to peer review, bracketing was utilized throughout the data analysis process to suspend any preconceptions or learned feelings I had as the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Additionally, I shared my interpretation of the results with my study participants for verification, insight, and deeper understanding (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Any discrepancies were changed or removed, based on the feedback of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The subjects gave rich descriptions of their experiences in order to better assist other multiracial faculty members.

## **Role of the Researcher**

As a higher education professional, I hope to obtain a position more involved with improving the faculty experience. I believe that the student experience can only be successful if faculty members feel supported in their roles. My professional goals led me to conduct this study to better understand the multiracial faculty experience. In qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher attempts to understand how people experience a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Creswell (2014) discussed how important it is for a qualitative researcher to reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and be sensitive to any preconceived biases. I made sure to stay attentive to my positionality of being in an interracial relationship and any preconceived thoughts I had about being multiracial. Throughout analysis of each interview transcript, I took notes of my personal thoughts and initial reactions. These notes were part of a journal in which I referred back to as needed (Creswell, 2014).

In phenomenology, it is important for the researcher to be conscious of his or her personal biases (Creswell, 2014). As a potential future parent of a multiracial child, I have concerns about how a child of mine may be viewed by their outside social environment. I had a preconceived belief it would be a challenge for multiracial individuals to navigate who they are in the world, and so it was important for me to allow my study participants to speak about both positive and negative experiences. Additionally, I have aspirations to work within the faculty development realm and wanted to conduct research on their experiences within academia. I see this study contributing to my knowledge of faculty development and how to improve the faculty experience. I had preconceived notions about faculty of color and how challenging their experiences can be within academia. With the multiracial population growing quickly, more and more multiracial individuals may pursue the faculty route and so more information is needed to

better understand the multiracial faculty experience. Although I made every effort to ensure objectivity, it is important to acknowledge these biases exist. I minimized potential researcher bias through bracketing my thoughts when transcribing the interviews.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research design and methods used for this study. Specifically, phenomenology and social constructivism were discussed as lenses for my research, along with justification for both. Descriptions of participants, data collection, sampling procedures, data analysis, and the role of the researcher were also presented in detail. The following section will discuss the results of this study and implications for future research, policy, and practice.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of multiracial faculty at a public, four-year university in the United States. This study also sought to investigate the challenges and supports that may affect their roles and responsibilities within academia. An email was sent out to faculty members through the faculty senate and various college faculty affairs administrations. Additionally, I contacted my pilot study participants to see if they would still be willing to participate and if they would send the recruitment letter to any potential participants. As a current staff member of this university, I also asked my colleagues if they would be willing to send out the recruitment letter to their contacts. The results sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does multiracial faculty make meaning of their experiences at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States?
2. What components do multiracial faculty identify as challenges and supports within academia?

### **Participant Profiles**

Through recruiting methods, six multiracial faculty members from a large, public institution in the Southeast region of the United States agreed to participate in this study. Four out of the six participants identified as female and two identified as male. The participant with the longest teaching career started in 1969, while the participant who began teaching most recently began in 2014. Racial and ethnic demographics varied for each individual, including Hispanic, Black, White, and Cuban. Participants stemmed from various departments around

campus and no participants came from the same department as another. Pseudonyms were created by the participants in order to protect their identities. Below is a brief profile of each participant in alphabetical order by pseudonym.

### **Alfred**

Growing up in Newton, Massachusetts, Alfred described the demographics of this area as, “Ninety percent Jewish with a smattering of Irish and Italian.” His mother’s side of the family came from England and his father was from Ecuador. Alfred described his multiracial identity as being Hispanic or Hispanic American. As a child, his family was the only Hispanic family on the block. His father, fearing discrimination, did not want Alfred and his brother to learn Spanish and would not let them take Spanish language classes in school. Alfred stated, “A lot of our behavior was Hispanic, but I didn’t know it and there was no Hispanics around for me to realize that I was like them.” Even though Alfred saw himself as being different and never quite fitting in with any particular group, he felt he got along with everyone.

Alfred began his teaching career at a university in California back in 1969. His current department falls within the social sciences where he has taught since 2002. Generally speaking, Alfred described his current departmental climate as positive. He feels supported and encouraged in his work related to minority issues, partly because the chair of his department is also a minority. One of his challenges was not knowing more about the tenure process or how to get ahead in academia:

One of the things which may speak to the issue of being a minority is that I never had any idea about what it, for what a professor was. My parents were high school educators so they, in fact my dad, wanted me to take over his business. He thought I was really foolish to want to do anything stressful, like, like being a professor or something. (Alfred)



Alfred shared that having mentors to advise him along his faculty journey were extremely helpful and he continues to do the same for students he currently mentors. Alfred's research interests were related to the minority experience and focused on minority students.

### **Alisa**

Raised in Chicago, Illinois, Alisa discussed the racial diversity of her neighborhood and how racially diverse her classmates were in school. Alisa described her multiracial identity as African American and Mexican American and at a young age, she was given the opportunity to learn Spanish. She recalled a time as a child when she had to explain her identity to other classmates in school. "They were like, 'Well, what else? No, you're not Black. What else?'" There was always this probing." As she got older and went to college, Alisa began to realize that many of her closest friends were biracial, yet it was not something they often talked about. Her decision to pursue a PhD stemmed from witnessing one of her biracial friends pursue an advanced degree.

Currently, Alisa teaches within the field of education. She has been teaching since 2003 and has been in her current position since 2009. She discussed facing some initial backlash when she first began as an assistant professor. Alisa believed this was in part due to her decision to challenge racial injustices and social class, or more generally because she had a more critical perspective on certain issues. She sees herself as an advocate for marginalized groups in society and marginalized groups within higher education. Despite this early tension, Alisa currently views her current departmental climate as positive.

### **Deanne**

Deanne was born on the West Coast and spent most of her childhood in California, which she remembers as extremely diverse. She identifies as White and Black mixed race. Although her

mother faced some pushback because of her decision to marry a Black man, Deanne described her as someone who was always cognizant of the importance of diversity and racial equality. Deanne stated, “She was adamant about making sure that we were always in diverse communities, that we always went to diverse schools.” Deanne shared that her mother never portrayed people of different races as “less than” or with any sort of negative connotation. It was not until Deanne grew into an adult that she began to understand the tension associated with conversations about race and diversity.

Initially, Deanne thought she wanted to go into the field of psychiatry so that she could help individuals with mental health problems. She always had a passion for health and mental health disparities and she currently teaches within the health field. Her research interests focus on minority health disparities. She has been in her current role since 2013 and will be up for tenure review within the next year. While she views her current department as being positive, Deanne expressed her disappointment with the lack of diversity and minority representation.

### **Denver**

Due to his father’s military obligations of being in the Air Force, Denver and his family moved around a lot, both nationally and internationally. He recalled mainly splitting up his time between Ohio and the Washington, D.C. area. While Ohio was very rural and less racially and ethnically diverse, Washington, D.C. was the exact opposite and included people from a variety of backgrounds. Denver described his multiracial identity as Black, White, Irish, and Native American. Because he was home schooled for most of his childhood, he did not recall a time when he had to explain his identity to other children or friends. Questions of race arose more as he grew up and went to college.

Not initially intending to teach, Denver got his PhD in Physics and began his career as a professor in 2014. Currently, he teaches students in interdisciplinary sciences with the inclusion of a community service component. Denver finds his current department extremely diverse and supportive. “I could probably make a solid argument it’s one of the most diverse and inclusive, um, faculty departments on campus. In terms of ethnic and racial diversity, we’re just as diverse as it gets.” There have been a few instances throughout his faculty career when he was questioned about his identity or experienced indirect discrimination. During his interview, Denver emphasized his passion for mentoring and watching students grow throughout their academic careers.

### **Gagoule**

As an adult, Gagoule describes her multiracial identity as being a mix of Haitian, West African, Palestinian, Ethiopian, Native American, and Irish. Born in Haiti, Gagoule described her neighborhood as mostly Black. When her family moved to the United States, they lived in an area where there was more of a mix of different races and ethnicities, including White, Black, and Asian. Even though she was around a lot of diversity, she recalled being treated differently because she did not know how to speak English. It was not until she moved to Florida that she began volunteering to assist Haitian immigrants who had recently moved to the United States, sparking her interest to pursue an advanced degree. Her research interests are also centered around the minority experience.

As a faculty member, Gagoule teaches students within the field of psychology. She began as an adjunct instructor in the year 2000 and has been full-time in her current department since 2011. She described her department as positive, “as long as you know what’s going on and you don’t let it suck you in emotionally, spiritually, um, and you speak up when it’s necessary.” She

recalled a few instances when she was treated differently because of her identity and how people assume she identifies a certain way because of her physical appearance. When these instances do occur, Gagoule makes a conscious effort to not react in anger. Instead, she strives to stay calm so that those types of comments do not make her feel worse.

### **Maria**

Originally from Miami, Maria describes her multiracial identity as Cuban American. The racial and ethnic demographics of Miami were extremely diverse, including Hispanic, Haitian, and African American, and so she never felt out of place. As a child she did not learn English until she went to kindergarten and actually had to repeat kindergarten because of the language barrier. Maria stated, “I was always in the majority. Not until I got to college did someone tell me I was Hispanic and I’m like, ‘Who? I’m a what? Hispanic? What is that?’” She credits her bilingualism as the reason why she has had so many research and grant opportunities. While she enjoys the research aspect of her career, Maria discovered her passion for teaching as a volunteer for a Hispanic community organization and her research interests focus on the Hispanic community.

Since 2013, Maria has been teaching within the social sciences field of higher education. When she first began teaching in her current department, it was not very diverse and included only a few Hispanic faculty. Currently, Maria sees the climate in her department as supportive and not too competitive. Maria shared, “People (sic) for the most part are very willing to help and support.” Having supportive leadership and a department chair who is supportive of junior faculty has made a significant difference in Maria’s experience. She shared that if she did not feel supported or if she felt it was overwhelming in any way, she would have left her position a long time ago.

## **Overview of Subsequent Section**

The subsequent section highlights major themes found from analyzing the data. After transcribing my interviews with each faculty member, I then searched for significant statements. Johnson and Christensen (2017) defined significant statements as “statements that have particular relevance to the phenomenon being studied” (p.448). These statements were then grouped into larger units of information, or themes. I used my conceptual framework as a reference when creating my themes. All three concepts of multiracial identity, faculty socialization, and climate came through in my research. Once I established significant themes, I was able to separate specific experiences into textual or structural descriptions. Common themes that emerged from data analysis are discussed in this section. These themes include mentorship, multiracial identity, not quite fitting in, departmental climate and culture, challenges, and support systems. These themes relate to the proposed research questions in order to better understand the overall experiences of multiracial faculty members, including some of the challenges and supports they face.

## **Mentorship**

Data related to the theme of mentorship will be described in this section. All six participants emphasized the importance being mentored and mentoring other students. Research has shown that mentorship helps faculty members feel more included and secure within their environment (Waddell et al., 2016). One participant described how she views mentorship and how without strong mentors, she would not be in the position she is in today.

I have been the product, I am the product, of really good mentorship. Um, I mean just having that support and knowing that somebody's got your back I think is helpful or like I'm not really sure what to do. And sometimes in academia, we're supposed to be this--

we're not "all knowing", so I, you know. And it's good to be able to say, 'Hey, I don't know what to do, what can I do?' here without the fear of being judged and, 'She has a PhD, she can't figure this out?' Like it's nice to be an environment where you're not stressed about that. And I think having mentors alleviates that. (Maria)

Most faculty members mentioned relying on mentors from other institutions to assist them in how to navigate the faculty role and responsibilities. Connecting with another professional in a similar field began in graduate school and applying for PhD programs. One faculty member stated:

I have had mentors prior to entering academia but my first was a friend who was applying to a doctorate program. Upon entering a doc program I was assigned to a professor while my main professor was on sabbatical. This professor provided me employment, publishing opportunities and general counsel. He served as my interim advisor but we worked together co-teaching a seminar for six years. I think of him as my mentor professor rather than my advisor. (Alisa)

A participant shared a story about two mentors. One mentor urged him to continue his education beyond a bachelors and the other mentored him throughout his time in graduate school.

She (the professor) urged me to go into developmental psych and she had been at the University of Chicago and she wrote letters and basically, you know, and I applied there and got in. Um, so that, so she was very influential in me going to graduate school. And then my, my mentor there, uh, was also very knowledgeable about stuff in a way I wasn't, like I didn't, you know, I was a graduate student. (Alfred)

Another participant recalled a time when he was told about the importance of mentorship, and how that motivated him to seek out people he wanted as a mentor.

Uh, early on in my career I, um, I don't know where the advice came from. It could have been from a number of sources, but I learned early on in my career that it's really important to have mentors and they don't find you, you find them. And so I made it a point to identify individuals that could mentor me, and in multiple levels, right. (Denver)

Although all participants described being mentored as an important component to their faculty experience, a few study participants described lack of mentorship in their current department. Deanne stated, "Mentorship is also really important. I would say I don't really have great mentorship here at (this institution), which is really sad. But I still have my mentors from Pittsburg who have been amazing." Another participant described a similar situation in her current department and how she has to rely on outside mentorship for support.

Within the department I've never had a mentor. My colleague that I do most of my work with, she's from India and long ago neither one of us was getting mentored and other people were getting excessive support and resources, and it felt like, "Okay and you should be able to accept this." There was no explanation for it. (Gagoule)

Gagoule discussed the additional challenge of witnessing other individuals finding support while her and her colleague continued to struggle. This unfairness led to Gagoule seeking support in other areas outside of her department.

While participants had different mentoring experiences, the importance and enjoyment of mentoring students was always discussed as positive. All faculty members discussed how much they have enjoy mentoring students and some of the reasons why it is so rewarding. A few faculty members discussed personal reasons as to why mentoring other students was so important to them.

I was very sensitive to what it's like to be different and um, and I think it sensitized me in terms of students that I teach and my colleagues. Um, and because of my experiences throughout my early career particularly, you know I'm more, I'm very concerned about mentoring. (Alfred)

Gagoule shared a similar reason for being so invested in mentoring others. She stated, "I love mentoring. I've gotten mentoring awards as a matter of fact. I love doing those because I've never been really, truly mentored. Within the department I've never had a mentor." She also shared that because of the amazing mentors she has had in other aspects of her professional career, she wants to provide that same kind of support to the students she currently serves.

Many of the participants discussed how being a mentor is one of the best parts of their job because they get to see students grow throughout their college experience. Denver discussed his mentoring relationships with students and emphasized this point. "We can talk through things together and identify opportunities for them because I really, really, really want to see them grow and be successful." Alisa also talked about her commitment to student success stating "(I have) a stronger interest and sort of commitment that I feel toward mentoring other, you know, incoming students toward faculty positions and being, I think being there, showing up, is important." Despite having to balance many responsibilities as a faculty member, mentoring young professionals was never discussed as a hardship.

Having a mentor/mentee relationship with students of color was another area of mentorship that was brought up during conversations. Research shows that multiracial students feel more connected to a mentor who is multiracial (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Jayakumar et al., 2009). When asked if she finds she gets approached by students asking for guidance, Maria stated "Yes, yes, a lot, a lot. And especially the minority students and especially the Hispanic



students, which is great.” Because of his lack of knowledge regarding the tenure process, Alfred said, “I’ve won awards as a mentor because I try to teach my students and junior colleagues what you need to look for. And I have a lot of minority colleagues and students.” One of the female study participants shared her experience as a mentor to young Black girls who identify with her because of how she looks physically.

I will tell you what I do get literally all at the time, are young Black girls that come to me after class and just want to talk to me, want to come have lunch with me, want to know how I got to where I got (sic). (Deanne)

These statements illustrate that students felt a stronger connection to their professor because they identified in the same way. According to Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in college report more positive academic attitudes and values, in addition to more satisfaction with college. Having diverse faculty can create a more positive learning environment for minority students.

## **Multiracial Identity**

### **Growing Up**

The next theme relates to being multiracial and how participants began to understand their own identities. All six study participants discussed growing up in multiracial households and how their identities were perceived by others. A few faculty members discussed how they were often misidentified as young children. Maria shared, “People look at me and they don’t think diversity. I look more European. I’ve had people tell me I look like I’m from northern Spain or southern France or the south of France, that I look more European.” Alfred shared a similar experience and said, “People thought we were like, Polish Jewish or Russian Jewish or something rather, because it was a Jewish town.” Physical appearance and making assumptions

based on community demographics were two reasons for misidentification. The majority of study participants expressed being questioned about their identities as young children.

The fear of being treated differently and being discriminated against was mentioned by three study participants. One participant shared how his father attempted to hide his family's racial and ethnical background to avoid discrimination:

The food we ate was Hispanic but I'd never really realized it because my father, basically didn't want us to know Spanish (and he) wouldn't let me take Spanish. A lot of our behavior was Hispanic, but I didn't know it and there was (sic) no Hispanics around for me to realize that I was like them. (Alfred)

Gagoule shared how she was unable to speak English when she first came to the United States. Because she did not know the English language, she was treated differently by other children in school. She shared, "I was bullied a lot because people, the kids, the poor Black kids in the school, um, used to say to me, 'You think you're cute?' And I was like, no, I'm not actually, I think I'm quite ugly." Other school children teased Gagoule and thought she considered herself better than everyone else because she spoke a language that no one else could. A few study participants discussed hearing offensive comments based on how they looked and not quite understanding the rationale behind these comments or why they were being directed towards them specifically. One participant shared her story:

I remember the earliest time that I think it became an issue was somewhere in, maybe third, fourth grade. It was a friend who lived in the same sort of building, called out the window when we were walking out (sic) said, 'Wetback'. And I didn't know what that meant. (Alisa)

These types of comments made Alisa feel uncomfortable and was the first time she began to question her identity and how she was perceived by others.

The majority of study participants shared feeling isolated and confused about their identities as young children. One faculty member shared her upbringing and having a White mother and an African American father. She felt conflicted as a child trying to understand her identity and her physical appearance:

There were times where I just really felt out of place growing up. Um, I think when I was really young, I just wanted, you know, you kind of have a mom, you sort of expect to look like your mother. I didn't understand why I didn't look like her. (Deanne)

Deanne emphasized how her mother would go out of her way to make sure she was surrounded by people and things, such as children's books, that portrayed diversity. She began feeling out of place when she went to school, sharing:

Then when I started school I was sort of too light for the Black girls, too Black for the White girls kind of thing. So there wasn't like a whole lot of shades in between. So there was really no other area for me to sort of fit into. And there were, you know, colorism is real, I mean, even in the Black community. (Deanne)

Alisa also discussed being questioned by other children in school. Alisa explained, "Well, in elementary school people would ask me all the time, 'What are you?' and for a while they were like, 'Well, what else? No, you're not Black. What else?'" There was always this probing." This probing caused Alisa to feel insecure and unsure of herself. Feeling out of place and different from everyone else was a common theme among study participants.

Growing up in a Hispanic household, Maria realized she was different once she went to college. Maria explained, "So I was always in the majority. Not until I got to college did

someone tell me I was Hispanic and I'm like, 'Who? I'm a what? Hispanic, what is that?' I wasn't a minority until I got to college." Being in college created a different conversation around the concept of identity. Alisa shared, "I remember in college looking more out, not just at me and what I am, but at other people and trying to understand them in that way." Participants discussed an increased awareness of identity and what that meant for themselves and others. Another study participant shared how being biracial made her feel she had to prove herself to those around her. She shared:

And then as I got into college, perhaps I felt I was overcompensating. I was, like, the president of the Black Action Society, the president of Black dance workshop. Like, anything that had to do with identity, I was all the way in it. And sometimes I wonder if I felt the need to pursue those experiences because I was trying to sort of justify my identity in a way that maybe someone who didn't have a White parent wouldn't feel the need to, sort of go that extra step, to do so. (Deanne)

These experiences demonstrate the ways in which participants understood their multiracial identities as young children growing into adulthood.

### **Colleague perceptions**

The majority of the study participants shared how they have had to explain how they identify to other colleagues. One participant discussed correcting individuals who assumed she was a certain race based on physical appearance:

People look at me and they don't think diversity. I look more European. I've had people tell me I look like I'm from Northern Spain, or Southern, or in Southern France or the South of France...that I look more European, Northern European. (Maria)

Denver shared a similar experience of being mistaken as a certain race based on how he looks. Denver explained, “Due to the color of the lightness of my skin color, I don't quite fit in, in, you know, people mistake me for Middle Eastern, Italian, South American, Spanish.” These assumptions prompted additional conversations with colleagues about race and how they identify.

While the majority of participants experienced direct questioning about their identity, two participants discussed having to respond to indirect inquiries within their respective departments. This included being labeled as a certain race and that information be recorded as part of departmental statistics. Gagoule discussed a situation in which she was incorrectly referred to as one of two African Americans within her department. Below is her recollection of the conversation she had with her supervisor when she realized the department statistics were not correct:

I typically say Haitian American. So I'm like, ‘Where did you get two African Americans from?’ And she goes, ‘Well, yeah, you’. Like, oh, okay. So, I started to laugh, but she thought I was being sarcastic or that I was being picky. (Gagoule)

Alisa shared a similar experience when she discovered that the racial demographics of the faculty in her department were inaccurate. She was confused, saying “So I don't know how, (sic) why it was different or what they had, um, and I don't know how that information gets in.” After noticing this inconsistency, Alisa corrected the situation to reflect how she truly identifies. Similar to Alisa, another participant shared why it was so important for her to say something directly to her supervisor:

But I think many people that I know and that I've encountered typically have a certain pride and there's certain, um, claim to their various ethnicities that composed who they

are, you know? And so it's not a kickback or a resistance to being labeled as Black, African American. It's just an acknowledgement and a desire to include all of who we are because it's what makes us who we are. (Gagoule)

While these stories exhibit indirect examples of incorrect identity labeling, faculty members addressed the situation in a direct way. Study participants wanted to be treated the same as everyone else and be recognized by how they truly identify.

A couple participants shared specific memories about times when they have experienced racism because of how their physical appearance. One participant reflected on a time when he was mistaken for another African American faculty member while attending a new faculty orientation event:

It wasn't direct, but it was a time where I had to explain my identity because I was seen, just as a color or a word, just like someone else that is, there was no distinction between me and the other person because that's what I was. (Denver)

Another participant shared a particular instance where she heard racist remarks from another faculty member:

There was a lizard that had died in the hall or something. Yeah. And he's like, very loud, 'Oh my gosh, you, have you been doing voodoo in here? Oh hey, everybody.' And students are walking, '(Gagoule)'s been doing voodoo in here!' (Gagoule)

Gagoule believed this comment was made based on common stereotypes of Haitian people. While it was a difficult situation, she felt it was important to discuss it directly with the faculty member so that it would never happen again. Making assumptions based on race was also experienced by another study participant. Deanne shared her experience with her identity and being labeled as the "token minority." She recalled, "I often get people that will come to me to

ask me questions as if I can speak for the whole Black or the whole biracial community because I'm the one that's here.” These instances address the types of comments faculty members received from colleagues and how they were sometimes expected to conform to stereotypes.

### **Student perceptions**

The majority of study participants discussed how they were approached by students asking about their identities, in both a positive and negative way. One study participant mentioned how he has had conversations with non-minority students trying to understand what it means to be in the majority. He shared:

I've had some students that have come and said that they feel bad about their identity because they feel privileged and they have other students who aren't. I said, 'No, don't feel bad about that. You should feel happy about where you are and do everything you can to make certain that everyone else has that opportunity'. (Denver)

Participants shared that some students asked about their identities because they were looking to make a more personal connection. Minority students expressed feeling more comfortable approaching a faculty member who looks similar to them. Gagoule shared, “They will ask me how I identify sometimes as a precursor to them seeing if it's safe to identify as who they are.” This demonstrates the importance of having diverse faculty representation so that students of color feel comfortable approaching their professors. Another participant shared an instance when he was approached by a minority student:

I've had one student who, they said to me that they normally wouldn't have come to talk with a faculty member because it just didn't feel comfortable and they knew where they were with their grade, but they said 'There's not many people like you, that look like me.' (Denver)

Both of these instances further emphasize the benefits of having diverse faculty representation within an institution. The multiracial student experience may improve if there are more multiracial faculty for students to identify with.

Alisa also shared her experience explaining her identity to students. She believed that many of her students asked her because they were curious. Alisa recalled one instance, however, when a group of White, female students in her class questioned her identity in a negative way. Alisa shared how students used stereotypes to judge her based on how she looks. “They walked out of class questioning, you know, my hair, (saying) ‘Is she Black? Look at her hair and does she wear a ring on her finger? She said she had a baby, like is she married?’ Alisa believed these comments came from a place of ignorance and that many of these young women never had a professor who looked like her. Gagoule also mentioned having to speak about her identity in the courses she taught. She stated, “I teach diversity and social justice and there are times we discuss micro-aggressions and we discuss, um, self-identity.” Questions of identity were brought up both in and outside of the classroom.

A few study participants shared how their multiracial identity provides them with an advantage when working with students and other individuals. They are able to relate to people of different backgrounds because of how they identify. One participant described:

It's funny because in some respects we being multiracial have an added privilege of sort of being able to intermix within different crowds of people. I also am privileged in the sense that because of the way that I look, some people are going to feel more comfortable with me than they are going to with one of my darker friends, colleagues. Um, so it's like we straddle multiple worlds simultaneously. (Deanne)



Deanne also shared how she has used her special privilege to speak out against injustices and for those who may not be able to speak up themselves. She stated:

And so I have tried to stay true to who I am in my identity, but to use the special privileges that I have to better the people that I care about and the communities that I'm interested in, and to not lose sight of the privileges I have had, um, but to use them to fight for rights of the people. (Deanne)

Additionally, Denver expressed how his identity and special privileges have been used to inspire the students he works with. He shared a past conversation he has had with students: “How do you make social change? And so from my standpoint, I said, okay, if you want to talk about making social change, we’ll go out and do something about it.” Participants shared a strong commitment to helping others and improving the lives of people in the community.

### **Not quite fitting in**

Data related to feeling out of place or not quite fitting in are discussed in this next section. Four out of the six study participants discussed feelings of isolation and never truly belonging to one particular racial or ethnic group. Study participants Denver and Deanne share similar multiracial identities. How they were perceived by other individuals in academia determined whether or not they would be accepted. One participant shared his experience interacting with other African Americans:

Whenever I've had interactions with African Americans that are darker, uh, they also, sometimes they'll question my identity more directly, than say if they're not African American. But the questions, (sic) because the questions are coming up, for me it's like, ‘Oh, you don't fit here either’. So I'm, I'm too dark to fit, too light to fit. (Denver)

Denver stated that the challenge of not quite fitting in can also be seen as a benefit because he can interact easily with many different groups of people. Another participant shared similar feelings about his identity as a multiracial faculty member. While sometimes difficult, his personal experiences have helped in him in his work with students and other colleagues:

I don't fit in with any particular group. I get along with everybody, um, and partly I think it's because I was very sensitive to what it's like to be different. I think it sensitized me in terms of students that I teach and my colleagues. (Alfred)

Similarly, Maria described how her multiracial identity and being able to interact between different cultures can be viewed positively. As an active volunteer for various Hispanic community organizations, Maria shared, "I would say again, it's that whole dual thing. Like I'm Hispanic and I'm Cuban, but I'm American, I'm more American than Cuban for some things and more Cuban than American for others I guess. It's a nice blend." Participants described how their multiracial identities intertwine with being faculty members and how they are able to interact with different groups of people.

The concept of having a dual identity was discussed by multiple study participants. One participant shared her experience in academia and described feelings of constantly having to prove herself and that she deserves to be in her role. Feeling like she always has to be 'on' and that she cannot be her true, authentic self were shared in the following way:

When I leave here, I'm a completely different person. I can't bring (Deanne) to this position. I'm (Deanne) here, but that's not who I am. And there are very select few people in my department who know (Deanne), because I can't be me here. People here would probably wonder how I could have ever gotten to be here if they saw me outside of here.

So that can be sometimes challenging because sometimes you just want to be able to feel like you can be yourself. (Deanne)

Research shows that minority faculty members may experience stress trying maintain their personal identity while also trying to navigate the dominate White culture (Martinez and Welton, 2015). Deanne felt challenged in her role not only because of her multiracial identity, but also because she is one of the youngest people in the department. Deanne's identity encompassed many different aspects, including her race, age, and gender.

### **Departmental climate and culture**

Data related to the theme of departmental climate will be discussed in this section. While much of the literature review focused on the effects of campus climate, climate in this study was discussed on a smaller scale. The majority of participants stated that their departmental climates have generally been positive and supportive for a variety of reasons. Having supportive leadership was one indicator for a positive, working environment. Participants mentioned that having departmental leaders that focused on diversity and inclusion created a more supportive departmental culture. Fries-Britt et al. (2011) found valuing diversity within an institution was one way to create a more positive campus climate. Alfred discussed his current departmental chair and this individual being a positive influence in his faculty career. Alfred said, "The chair of my department is a Cuban, Cuban American and um, and he and I do similar research. So, I've got incredible encouragement and support here. Um, which I think has been the most supportive environment I've had." Maria also shared similar sentiments about the dean of her college: "Our dean especially is very cognizant of um, you know racism and discrimination and she's a woman. So, I think that sort of, um you know, I mean that's to say she's very open." Reflecting on past leadership, Alisa shared how her previous department chair was a Black man committed to

creating a diverse student body. This allowed for a more pleasant environment for her as a faculty member. She shared her thoughts on the connection between the two:

And I think, my theory is that the people who were, the students who are uncomfortable having a Black man who could sort of run intellectual circles around them in either they felt like that was fine and they appreciated that or they didn't. And if they didn't, they didn't come. They left, they went somewhere else. But if they came and that was fine with them and he was fine, that experience they liked that, then they were going to do well with me. (Alisa)

Leaders who cared about diversity and were focused on diversity efforts indicated whether or not these participants considered their departmental climate to be positive. An emphasis on diversity and inclusion was another determinant for a positive, departmental climate and culture. One participant shared that his environment was one of the most diverse departments within the institution, stating:

I could probably make a solid argument it's one of the most diverse and inclusive, um, of faculty departments on campus. We have one, two, three, four, five female faculty and former faculty. Uh, and in terms of ethnic and racial diversity, we're just, diverse as it gets. (Denver)

While being part of a diverse department indicated more support for multiracial faculty members, lack of diversity caused participants to feel less supported and created a more challenging environment. Deanne shared mixed feelings about her environment stating, “So this department is, it’s a great department, but I’m one of two faculty of color in the entire department and that can be challenging.” As mentioned previously, Deanne has found herself having to represent the entire Black or biracial community because of the limited number of

faculty of color in her area. Gagoule shared similar concerns about her department and mentioned always being conscious of her reactions. She discussed sharing her opinion when it was necessary but only in a way “that doesn’t make you seem like the Black, angry female, angry Black female.” Rethinking her opinions stemmed from fear of being perceived as a certain stereotype. In a positive, departmental climate with more diversity, Gagoule may not have felt she needed to censure herself in certain situations. Lack of diversity within departments indicated an unpleasant work environment for multiple study participants.

Study participants also expressed experiencing unfairness and lack of professionalism within their departments, creating a negative climate for them to work in. One participant recalled a time when she won an award for having the highest teaching evaluation in the department. Gagoule shared her thoughts on what happened: “I got the highest evaluation. That's what I was excited about. I said, ‘That's wonderful and that's great’. But yeah, and I walked out and I was like, what just happened, you know, that didn't make any sense really.” Instead of being given the full monetary award, the dean decided to split up the amount between her and two other faculty members within the department. This kind of intentional, unfair action can create a negative and hostile work environment for multiracial faculty to work in. Another study participant shared her example of what constitutes a negative environment. Alisa discussed a time when she had to confront her colleague when she took credit for an idea that Alisa had shared with her privately. She shared:

There were a couple of times where I felt like someone would say things that I said before, but rather than saying that that was my idea, say it like it wasn't. And there was once or twice, I had to make a correction. (Alisa)

Alisa described how this instance created a negative work environment for her to work in. These examples demonstrate how these types of instances made it challenging for multiracial faculty members to feel supported and valued. In the subsequent section, the challenges of being multiracial in academia are discussed.

## **Challenges**

### **Balance of time**

All six participants mentioned not having enough time and learning how to balance time as a challenge in their current roles as faculty. Participants discussed that while they enjoyed assisting other colleagues and students with their goals, it can be stressful and time consuming. Time and effort spent helping others is time taken away from other personal and professional responsibilities. Alfred shared his struggle with trying to do everything saying, “I always feel torn between wanting to do my own thing and helping others, especially racial/ethnic minorities, cope with academic careers.” Similar to Alfred, Alisa shared her greatest challenge is, “Just the balancing and making sure that I'm reminding myself that I'm just not here to help other people with their research or to review. Or help them edit their publication and get published.” Making sure to set aside time for personal and professional goals can be challenging for multiracial faculty members.

Participants discussed feeling pressured to say yes when asked to do something or be part of a new committee or diversity initiative, even though the balance of everything can be difficult. One participant shared:

I've been asked to do more things that have caused me (sic) and because there may be a part of me that's, that's a little bit afraid to say no, you know? That kind of that people

pleaser, wanting to be helpful, wanting the department to want me. So when people asked me to do something I'm a lot more prone to say, 'Okay, I'll do it.'(Deanne)

Trying to please everyone and not saying no enough was mentioned by study participants. When asked what he finds challenging in his role as a faculty member Denver stated, "That I don't say no enough. I know that's a one word answer but it really is the truth. People are now saying no on my behalf." Gagoule also shared, "The hardest part of it is not knowing when to stop, um, because it's exciting." Maria discussed the pressure she feels in her role and her desire to be successful in everything she commits to. She said, "I don't know how I can be great at everything. Something's got to give. And it's finding that balance. So it's finding that balance when you have to be outstanding in everything." Research indicates that stress caused by interpersonal conflict and role conflict are often experienced by faculty of color and multiracial faculty (Eagen & Garvey, 2015). Study participants shared how stressful it can be trying to find balance between everything.

### **Serving on multiple committees**

Being one of few faculty members of color in a department can lead to being asked to serve on multiple committee groups. The majority of participants discussed having to participate on committees and be part of various academic groups related to diversity. While sometimes frustrating, participants shared it was something they have come to expect. Denver shared his experience and said, "I'm asked to be on lots of committees. That's a pretty standard thing that you get asked when you're underrepresented." While it may be expected it does not make it any less challenging for multiracial faculty members. One faculty member shared her experience being part of multiple committee groups because she is only one of two faculty of color in her department:

You need to have diversity on these committees, well, there's only two of us. So that means that he and I, even though we're both the only two people actively seeking tenure still in our department, we're the junior faculty in our department. We're constantly being thrown into surface roles that we really shouldn't have to be thrown into. (Deanne)

Another participant shared similar feelings when asked to serve on committees so that there is diverse faculty representation:

I know that you got put on more committees and stuff because you need to, I get it, (sic) diversity and you got to have minority representation, which I get it and I support, but when there's not very many, you do get put on all the committees. (Maria)

Not only in his current role, one study participant expressed being asked to participate on multiple committees as an ongoing challenge throughout his career:

My main professional challenge is that, as a minority faculty member, I am expected to be involved in a lot of cultural/diversity issues. These clash with the time I need for research, etc. It is, however, a problem I have faced during my entire career. (Alfred)

Faculty members felt obligated to serve on committees and be part of diversity efforts because of limited minority representation. Research has shown that minority faculty feel that if they do not participate, the minority voice will not be well represented (Stanley, 2006). Study participants implied that the lack of diversity within their departments meant being asked to participate on more committees in order to represent the minority voice. This can cause additional stress and responsibilities.



## **Support Systems**

### **Collegial support**

This next theme describes how study participants found support in their roles. More than half of the study participants shared that their colleagues and supervisors were an important part of their success. Three participants expressed how they found support in colleagues who were experiencing similar frustrations. One participant spoke very highly of one colleague in particular and how grateful she is for this individual's support:

My colleague that I do most of my work with. She's from India and long ago, neither one of us was getting mentored and other people were getting excessive support and resources. We share this common area, so we actually cook our little things together. She has been the most supportive, we've become like sisters. I could cry thinking about her.

(Gagoule)

Through this difficult experience, Gagoule and her colleague were able to find support in one another and look for mentorship and opportunities outside of their immediate department. Additionally, Gagoule discussed how she and her colleague were able to combine research interests and travel to different parts of the world. This friendship was discussed in length as being extremely important to Gagoule's success as a faculty member.

Being able to form relationships with other faculty members in similar fields was also mentioned by study participants. Having the comfort and support of another individual going through a similar situation was discussed. Deanne stated, "There's nothing that makes it easier except having colleagues and friends who are going through the exact same thing (sic), to commiserate with and to let you know that you're not going through this by yourself." Maria expressed a similar response when asked who supports her as a faculty member. She shared,

“Having other folks that understand what your job is and your challenges, that you can vent to and talk to them and have that release and understanding.” The impact of having positive, supportive relationships with other colleagues was important to the success of multiracial faculty members.

Support was also discussed in terms of research and having colleagues who share similar research interests. Alfred shared, “I kind of developed the sense about how people think in a different language. And I now do a lot of research with Koreans, Korean colleagues here, the United States and in Korea.” Alfred’s relationship with his colleagues allowed him to further develop his research agenda. Another participant spoke about how grateful she is for the support of her colleague and friend in the department. Due to their strong friendship, this study participant and her colleague were able to combine research interests and efforts:

(We said) how can we pool our resources together to strengthen each other's work? And that's how we developed our research agenda together. Me with my HIV focus, her with her violence focus. And so now we'll look at the intersection of sexual violence and HIV risk among women. (Gagoule)

Opportunities to conduct research and explore different avenues of a research topic stemmed from the relationships participants had with other colleagues. Having friendships and support systems from other faculty members were important to the success of study participants.

### **Relationships with students**

Participants also viewed success as it relates to their work with students. The students they interacted with and mentored were extremely important to their success as faculty members. The majority of study participants talked about how much they enjoy mentoring young adults

and creating meaningful relationships with students outside of the classroom. One participant expressed what success means to him:

For me, success is the interactions that I have with students. If it weren't for the students, I would not be doing what I do. I just don't want to. Um, but for me, it is the students and the opportunity I have to work with them, to be a part of watching them grow from being developing adults into adulthood. (Denver)

When asked why mentoring young adults was so important, one participant shared it was because of his own experience as a college student. He stated:

It comes from my own undergraduate experience. It was pretty terrible. Uh, nevertheless, I don't want any student to have to go through that, in as much as I can create an environment for them where they can be as successful as they possibly can. (Denver)

Similarly, Alfred described how his early career experiences influenced him to want help others interested in becoming faculty members. He shared, "I'm very concerned about mentoring, not only tenure line but non tenure line faculty, make (sic) sure they understand what they're getting into, what they need to do to have a successful career." Faculty members felt a sense of commitment to the students they worked with and assisting them in their goals. When students felt successful, study participants experienced a heightened sense of success and pride in their own careers as well.

Multiple study participants shared how important students are to their success as a faculty member. One participant mentioned how strongly she values mentoring probably more than she does teaching. She described her thoughts by saying:

I think I've enjoyed more of the relationships with students more than I would say what I think of as the teaching. So, I also enjoyed probably mentoring more than I would enjoy

teaching. Working more with doctoral students gives me the opportunity to have more of a relationship, more of a mentoring relationship and ongoing lifelong relationship beyond once they're done. (Alisa)

The majority of study participants mentioned assisting students with their professional development. Being a faculty member not only encompasses teaching, but also providing mentorship and supporting students throughout their academic careers.

Additionally, study participants shared how grateful they were to have students help them with their research and academic projects. Having student assistants allowed faculty members to achieve their professional goals and complete projects in a timely manner. One participant shared how much she appreciated having students help her with her professional endeavors:

Without research assistance, like students to help and work with me, I wouldn't be able to do what I do because there's no way that I could, you know, advise and I have a very high number of students, both at the doctoral/master's level that I work with, which is great.

(Maria)

In another conversation, Gagoule shared how appreciative she is of a young woman who is currently working for her on various projects. She shared, "She writes well, she helps me edit stuff. She can multitask like I do. She has a great sense of humor. So, what makes it really less challenging is collaboration or having a really good staff." Even though the faculty/student relationship was described differently by each multiracial faculty member, it was always described positively. Faculty members being supportive of students and students showing support for faculty was discussed throughout the interviews.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the common themes found from six interviews with study participants. Participants generally described being questioned about their identities growing up and throughout their careers as faculty members. Mentorship and having supportive colleagues and students were important to the success of multiracial faculty members. Balancing time between responsibilities and serving on multiple committees were discussed as challenges. Positive, supportive leadership and diversity led to a more positive departmental culture, while lack of diversity and support created a tense work environment. Implications for these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary of the study**

#### **Problem statement**

Within societal context, the option to identify as multiracial has not always been a choice for individuals. It was not until the year 2000 that the U.S. Census offered an option for respondents to identify in more than one racial category (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). This could provide some insight regarding why higher education professionals have conducted very little research on this population. Student affairs professionals have seen an increasing number of students from two or more races (Renn, 2008). As more students identify as multiracial, they may seek support from faculty members who identify the same way. There is very limited research on the experiences of multiracial faculty members within academia.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of full time, multiracial faculty members at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States. This study adds to the body of literature on people of color in higher education and fills a critical gap concerning the experiences of multiracial individuals within this context. There has been previous research pertaining to the student experience, however research on multiracial faculty is scant. This research study addressed the need to have more scholarship on the experiences of multiracial faculty members.

#### **Research questions**

The following questions guided this phenomenological study

1. How does full time, multiracial faculty make meaning of their experiences at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States?
2. What components do multiracial faculty identify as challenges and supports within academia?

### **Method**

Data were collected through one in person, semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 50-60 minutes in length. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were asked in order to provide participants with the freedom to discuss their experiences without feeling constrained by specific questions. A follow-up interview was conducted via phone or email if there were further questions or clarification was needed. Three out of the six participants conducted follow-up interviews via email and phone. Six faculty members who identified as multiracial and full time agreed to participate in this study. The data were analyzed and statements were divided into textual descriptions and structural descriptions. Several common themes emerged. After which, a qualitative peer reviewer analyzed the researcher's final themes and provided feedback.

### **Common themes**

Participants were asked to discuss their experiences as multiracial faculty members, including their challenges and supports. While each experience was unique, several common themes emerged.

Providing mentorship to students and the importance of being mentored was discussed by all six participants. A few participants expressed that they received mentoring within their current departments but the majority stated they have had to seek mentorship outside of their current environment. Participants also discussed mentoring and how valuable the mentor/mentee

relationship can be for both the student and the faculty member, even more than the teacher/student relationship.

The concept of identity was another topic mentioned by study participants. Having to explain one's identity since childhood was discussed by all faculty members. Some participants shared they had been questioned about their identities due to others being curious about how they identified. A few faculty members, however, mentioned being discriminated against because of their multiracial identity. Additionally, study participants shared how their identities played a critical role in their work with students. Students who shared a similar identity to that particular faculty member felt more comfortable approaching him or her for advice and guidance.

The majority of participants discussed feeling isolated and never quite fitting in with one particular racial or ethnic group. Study participants shared their experiences of being questioned by other racial groups based on how they were perceived. The challenge of not quite fitting in, however, was also discussed as a benefit because it made it easier for faculty members to interact with various groups of people.

Departmental climate and culture were discussed as both positive and negative. Having supportive leadership and diversity within a department indicated a more positive environment. Lack of supportive leadership and limited diversity led to a stressful departmental climate and culture. Participants shared stories of how their multiracial identities have been questioned, causing them to feel uncomfortable at work.

Participants discussed some of the challenges they have faced as multiracial faculty members. Balancing time between responsibilities and having to serve on multiple committees were discussed as two of the main challenges. Even though participants expected to have to participate in various diversity initiatives and committee groups, it was still a source of



frustration and stress. Although faculty members enjoying their work with monoracial and multiracial students, it was often challenging because of the time commitment involved. Study participants discussed feeling torn between wanting to help others and making time for their own professional goals.

Finally, finding support from colleagues and the students was discussed as being important to the success of study participants. First, having supportive colleagues within the department to share experiences with and relate to on a more professional level was instrumental in study participants' overall success. Second, study participants also discussed how much they enjoyed mentoring and teaching students and the sense of fulfillment they get when their students reach their goals. Faculty members value the interactions they have with students and the impact they can make in their students' lives. Students who work as graduate assistants under the supervision of faculty members were also discussed as being important to the success of study participants.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

While the findings from this study can inform policy and practice within institutions looking to improve the multiracial faculty experience, there is no evidence that these experiences are unique to multiracial faculty members. Studies focusing on the experiences of faculty members in general may result in similar findings. Regardless, the results of this study are beneficial for educators and administrators looking to improve the multiracial faculty experience and increase a sense of support and community within departments and on campus. In this section, implications for policy related to how to best support multiracial faculty will be discussed. Some policy changes could potentially influence the minority and multiracial student experience as well.

Participants agreed that support or lack of support within their department influenced their overall experience. The information gathered from this research study could potentially encourage department chairs to revise how they currently support minority faculty and if changes can be made to make them feel more supported in their roles. This includes being knowledgeable of faculty research interests and providing faculty with straightforward guidelines so they understand what is expected of them in order to advance. Additionally, department chairs could provide multiracial faculty members with opportunities that will enhance their faculty careers based on their research and professional development interests.

Research found from this study demonstrated the importance of mentorship and having a mentor. Institutions may want to consider implementing a formal mentoring program in which multiracial faculty are paired with senior, multiracial faculty members. Having a formal program may result in faculty members feeling a stronger connection to the institution, which could possibly influence retention rates among multiracial faculty. At a minimum, institutions should create more opportunities for multiracial faculty members to interact and find support from one another. Informal interactions through various events or initiatives on campus can be just as beneficial for faculty members as more formal mentor/mentee relationships.

Furthermore, study participants discussed how much they value and enjoy mentoring multiracial and minority students. Students shared that they felt more comfortable approaching a faculty member who looked like them. Research from this study demonstrates the importance of having diverse faculty representation because students from similar backgrounds feel a greater sense of support within their institution (Renn, 2008). Institutions should recognize how valuable it is to have diverse faculty representation and continue to hire individuals from various

backgrounds. This could potentially enhance the student experience and influence graduation rates as well.

Additionally, this study could provide multiracial graduate students who aspire to become faculty members an honest picture of what working in higher education looks like. Higher education administrators may wish to create more formal mentor/mentee programs between students and faculty members. Multiracial students may seek guidance from multiracial faculty members regarding what they can expect as potential future faculty members in academia, including the various responsibilities. Since study participants considered mentoring such a valuable aspect of their job, providing guidance and informal mentorship to aspiring faculty members their overall experience as faculty members as well.

Study participants discussed the challenge of having to serve on multiple committees in addition to their other responsibilities. Research has shown that faculty of color take on greater teaching and mentoring responsibilities than do White faculty (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Allen et al., 2000; Fries-Britt et al., 2011). Findings from this study suggest that department chairs should have a greater sense of awareness of how many committee groups multiracial faculty members serve on and reward faculty members for their additional involvement. While participants discussed enjoying their work with students, they emphasized how time consuming it can be in addition to their other responsibilities in research and service. Department chairs may seek to formally recognize multiracial faculty for the additional responsibilities they tend to take on when faculty members are being considered for tenure or it is time for their annual review.

## **Recommendations for future research**

This study described the overall experiences of multiracial faculty at a four year, public institution within the Southeast region of the United States. Future research may include the following:

- A similar study to include multiracial faculty from multiple four-year, public institutions across the U.S. This study may yield different results based on the locations of the institutions and provide greater insight on the broader, multiracial faculty experience.
- A comparison study focusing on the similarities and differences between the experiences of multiracial faculty and those of monoracial or White faculty members. Similarly, a qualitative study comparing the experiences of multiracial faculty to faculty of color may also provide valuable insight into the uniqueness of each faculty experience.
- Further, a study to understand the experiences of multiracial faculty members who work within the same college or academic department. Results may provide greater awareness to institutions regarding the faculty experience in specific academic areas.
- Similarly, a qualitative study conducted at a private institution or community college. This may provide valuable insight into the experiences of multiracial faculty members who do not teach at four year, public institutions.
- A study focusing on the experiences of multiracial faculty that share the same mixed-race identity. This may provide interesting insight into the experiences of a specific mixed-race identity and discover ways to best support those individuals.
- A qualitative study that includes the experiences of multiracial staff members and administrators. The multiracial staff and administrator experience may differ greatly from the faculty experience and add to the scant research conducted on this population.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study was conducted to better understand the overall experiences of multiracial faculty and what they perceive to be challenges and supports in their role. Previous studies described the experiences of multiracial students and faculty of color, however there is limited research about the multiracial faculty experience. This study sought to add to the scant research on the multiracial faculty experience.

In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six, multiracial faculty members. Study participants shared how their multiracial identity influenced their overall experience as faculty members. This study also provided information on the types of challenges and supports multiracial faculty members face in their positions.

Study results may be useful for department chairs looking to improve the faculty experience and create a more supportive and inclusive environment for faculty of color. Additionally, findings from this study may persuade administrators to create a more formal mentoring program for faculty of color and multiracial faculty. Finally, results may be of use to policymakers looking to review and update their policies to improve the faculty experience and reward multiracial faculty for the multiple roles and responsibilities they tend to take on.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Guiding Research Questions:

1. How does multiracial faculty make meaning of their experiences at a large, public, research institution in the Southeast region of the United States?
2. What components do multiracial faculty identify as challenges and supports within academia?

### Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself and your upbringing.
  - Where did you grow up? What were the racial/ethnic demographics of that area?
- Tell me about how you came to be a faculty member.
- Since you have been a faculty member, has there ever been a specific time when you had to explain your identity? Please explain.
  - Did you find yourself having to do that growing up? Please explain.
- How would you describe your current departmental climate?
- What or who do you feel is important to your success as a faculty member?
- What are some of the obstacles you have encountered throughout your faculty career?
- Tell me about the types of responsibilities you have as a faculty member. Please discuss in terms of research, teaching, and service.
  - What has been difficult about engaging in those activities? What has made those activities less challenging?

### Interview Probes:

- Say more about that.
- Explain that to me.
- Why is that important to you?
- Tell me what happened.
- Can you give me an example of that?
- What was that like for you?
- Why did that matter to you?
- What made you think of that just now?
- What led up to that?
- What happened next?

### Concluding questions:

- Would you like to add anything that I did not ask you, but feel is important to this study?
- Do you know of anyone else who may be willing to participate in this study?
- Do you have any questions for me?



## Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Study on the Experiences of Multiracial Faculty

Created by: Gianna Nicholas, M.Ed.

The information that you provide below will be kept strictly confidential. You reserve the right to refrain from answering any question(s) that you do not wish to answer. Where appropriate, feel free to elaborate in your answering of the questions below.

1. To protect your identity, please provide a pseudonym in place of your full legal name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your preferred gender? (Circle One)                      MALE                      FEMALE

3. How do you identify racially and/or ethnically?

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4. What have been the demographics of past institutions you have worked in?

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5. In what *year* did you begin teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

6. In what *year* did you begin teaching at this institution? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What *department* do you currently teach in? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Comments or questions about this survey, upcoming interviews, or this dissertation study? Please express them here.

THANK YOU

## Appendix C: Informed Consent

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

IRB Study # Pro00034513

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

#### **The Experiences of Multiracial Faculty in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Inquiry**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Gianna Nicholas. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Tom Miller.

The research will be conducted either in person or Skype. In person interviews will take place in the location that is most convenient to the participant.

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#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences and perceptions of full time, multiracial faculty members at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. This study seeks to add to the scant literature previously conducted on this population.

#### **Why are you being asked to take part?**

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have self-identified as a full-time, multiracial faculty member currently working at the University of South Florida Tampa campus.

#### **Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a demographic information sheet which will take approximately one minute to complete. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in a one, semi-structured interview. If necessary, a second follow-up interview will be scheduled. This interview will take place either in person, Skype, or email, depending on the preference of the participant.
- Questions that will be asked in the interview include the following: Tell me about yourself and your upbringing. Where did you grow up? What were the racial/ethnic

demographics of that area? Tell me about how you came to be a faculty member. Since you have been a faculty member, has there ever been a specific time when you had to explain your identity? Please explain. Did you find yourself having to do that growing up? Please explain. How would you describe your current departmental climate? What or who do you feel is important to your success as a faculty member? What are some of the obstacles you have encountered throughout your faculty career? Tell me about the types of responsibilities you have as a faculty member. Please discuss in terms of research, teaching, and service. What has been difficult about engaging in those activities? What has made those activities less challenging?

- The initial interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes in length. The interview will include questions about your experiences as a multiracial faculty member. This interview will take place either in person or Skype. A potential second interview will take place either in person, Skype, or email, depending on the preference of the participant. It will be approximately 20-30 minutes in length.
- The interviews will take place in the spring and summer of 2018. The location of the interviews will be determined by the participant based on convenience.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential, including the use of a pseudonym. Your interview data will be stored in a computer that is password protected, only accessible by the Principal Investigator. All interview materials will be destroyed and deleted within five years after the Final Report is submitted to the IRB.

### **Total Number of Participants**

About five to ten participants will participate in this study at USF.

### **Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

### **Benefits**

The benefit to the participant will be to add to the limited research on a growing population. The participant may find comfort in talking about their experience within academia.

### **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

## **Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

## **Costs**

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, major professor, and committee members.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## **You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Gianna Nicholas.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at [RSCH-IRB@usf.edu](mailto:RSCH-IRB@usf.edu).

## **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

## **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from

their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

---

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

---

Date

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

## **Appendix D: Letter to Recruit Participants**

To the Faculty:

Hello! I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in higher education administration under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Miller. This phenomenological study is intended to investigate the experiences of full-time, multiracial faculty members and the components that are identified as challenges and supports within academia. In order to participate, study participants must meet both of the following criteria:

- Identify as being part of two or more racial heritages, or multiracial
- Be considered full-time faculty members, meaning the majority of time is spent teaching.

Adjunct instructors will not be included.

You will be asked about your general experiences with teaching, research, and services, how your identity plays into those experience(s), and any challenges and supports you encounter. Participating in this research project will give you a chance to add to the limited research on this growing population.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It will involve a one hour, semi-structured interview that will take place in a mutually agreed upon location. If necessary, a second follow-up interview will be scheduled. This interview will last between 20-30 minutes in length, and may be conducted via email. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic information sheet that will take one minute or less. You may decline to answer any of the demographic and/or interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. With your permission,

the interview(s) will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. You will create a pseudonym for yourself to ensure your identity is protected. All audio recordings will be destroyed with five years of the study's conclusion. There are no known or anticipated risks if you decided to participate in this study.

This study has been approved by the Internal Review Board (PRO #00034513). If you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participating in this study, or have any questions, please contact me directly.

I understand the great number of demands on your time and thank you in advance for your assistance. It is very much appreciated. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Gianna Nicholas, M.Ed.

Doctoral Candidate in the Curriculum and Instruction, emphasis in Higher Education program

## Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

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RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

March 23, 2018

Gianna Nicholas  
Teaching and Learning  
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review  
IRB#: Pro00034513  
Title: Understanding the Experiences of Multiracial Faculty Members: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Study Approval Period: 3/22/2018 to 3/22/2019

Dear Ms. Nicholas:

On 3/22/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**  
**Protocol Document(s):**  
[Version #1 3/21/2018](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**  
[Informed Consent IRB.docx.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:



(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Salomon", followed by a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board