The Forgotten Population: Adlerian Therapy in the Treatment of the
Biracial Population

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

_______________________

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

_______________________

Saresse Nelson

December, 2012
Abstract

This literature review discusses the history and most current findings on biracial identity development and using an Adlerian psychological method in treating this population. Research pertaining to the various models of development stemming from Erickson’s model on development to historical biracial models were examined. Deducing from these models, various themes were highlighted as contributing factors in biracial development. Conclusions include applying these findings to an Adlerian framework to treat biracial individuals in child rearing, school counseling and adult therapy. In addition, research discusses the increasing need for Adlerian based research considering the growth in this population within the United States. This review will create insight into the research on this population, giving clinicians an improved foundation to treat this population with an Adlerian framework.
# Table of Contents

1. The Biracial Plight in Society................................................................. 4

2. Social Marginality.................................................................................. 5

3. Erickson's Developmental Model......................................................... 6

4. Biracial Developmental Models............................................................ 8
   4.A. Problem Approach Identity Models.............................................. 9
   4.B. Equivalent Approach Identity Models.......................................... 10
   4.C. Variant Approach Identity Models............................................... 11

5. Adlerian Psychology............................................................................ 17
   5.A. Cognitive Schema and Lifestyle Formation................................. 17
   5.B. Belonging and Striving............................................................... 22
   5.C. Social Interest............................................................................ 23

6. Implications and Treatment................................................................. 24
   6.A. Child Rearing............................................................................... 24
   6.B. School Counseling................................................................. 27
   6.C. Counseling a Biracial Adult...................................................... 28

7. Conclusion.......................................................................................... 30

8. References.......................................................................................... 34
The Forgotten Population: Adlerian Therapy in the Treatment of the Biracial Population

**The Biracial Plight in Society**

The biracial community is a forgotten population when conceptualizing a therapeutic framework. This has mostly been the case throughout psychological research history. Being that the need for closely researching this population was not a scientific need, it has been grossly overlooked for some time. However, according to the 2010 United States census the amount of interracial couples increased 28% since the 2000 year census. To put this in to perspective, 19.1% of the United States population is in an interracial relationship. While only 12% of the United States population are African American. Therefore, it requires that the biracial population deserves more attention in terms of psychological research.

Most of the past research on identity development focuses on a monoracial population subset. There is a false assumption that these research findings will apply to the masses. In the 1960’s this may have been the case, considering that the consumption of the research closely resembled the masses. However, these masses have now shifted to a more multicultural population. Deters’ (1997) study points out the vast difference in the United States in terms of color and ethnic makeup. Deters (1997) explains that in 1960 one out of every ten people self-identified as being of color. While the 1990 census reported that one out of every four people reported of being of color. Lastly, Deters (1997) points out that in 1992, the United States census reported that the biracial birthrate was higher than the mono-racial birthrate.

With the reality that the US census presents, research has to start representing the population it serves. Erickson’s theory on development is still considered relevant in application today. Although it is greatly applied, Erickson, himself has stated that the development model does not take into effect other racial backgrounds. In addition, many models that have attempted
to outline a theory for biracial development have focused on being biracial as being a problem, thus addressing this population as a problem. Other models have addressed being biracial as marginal and thus the development model has focused on how to make biracial people feel the same. Then there are other research studies that have focused on being biracial as being separate from either parental race and created a new racial class. As if the new biracial class meant a designation of some kind of prestige.

Social Marginality

If the common person looks at what is mainstream in typical American life it will mostly be a painted picture of Caucasian representation. For instance, the media is predominantly Caucasian; so far television shows have a “token” African American cast member as the normal practice. This media influences the consuming population with the idea that this picture represents the population that it entertains. Therefore, the idea is that Caucasian is the norm leaving other ethnic populations to be marginal.

For biracial people, this media norm creates a conflict. Where do they fit in? Where do they stand when one half of their racial identity belongs in the mainstream population and the other half does not? By the popular social assignment of the “one drop rule” many biracial people reside in the minority race as a way to racially categorize themselves for societal preferences. However, more recently researchers are starting to realize that biracial people operate with a “dual reality”. They belong to both racial groups. Brown (1990) explains further:

In fact, this person will be a kind of dual personality possessing a dual social and psychological consciousness which exceeds the kind of “dual consciousness… This “dual reality” constitutes the essence of the social and psychological dilemma confronting biracial persons. Moreover, this social paradox creates a lifelong social purgatory in which biracial
person are forced to reside. (p. 320)

Such purgatory indicates a limbo that society must take responsibility for. It is, therefore, society’s responsibility to address this issue considering the racial changes of the United States.

This responsibility starts with the nuclear family to teach and nurture a healthy and solid racial identity of the children that reside in it. This responsibility extends to the teachers, counselors, therapists and the society surrounding the child. It is common for a teacher to communicate in accord with the development level of the students they serve. However, if a student is dealing with other development factors, it is the teacher’s responsibility to know and apply different techniques and knowledge pertaining to the child’s needs. This is the same case for school counselors and therapist. Lastly, society must be educated on the different developmental needs of its children and adolescents in order to better serve their needs. Once these factors are realized, society will realize that they are serving a population that will not be marginal for long. For, according to the United States Census (2010), biracial persons will be the majority in the United States very soon.

**Erickson’s Developmental Model**

Erickson's theory on psychosocial development, written in 1968, is still highly relevant and utilized to this day. The first stage, Infancy, covers the age of birth to eighteen months. The basic conflict in this stage is trust. Babies focus on and learn who they can and cannot trust. This relates to child's caregivers and the caregiver’s ability to provide affection and reliable care. A child's lack of reliable care and affection results in mistrust. The second stage, Early Childhood, references the ages of two to three years of life. The conflict in this stage is the development of autonomy, shame and doubt. Children focus on developing a sense of personal control and independence. A successful exploration of independence results in autonomy, while failure will
likely results in shame and doubt. The third stage, Preschool, focuses on ages three to five years of age. This is the stage of exploration. A child's conflict is finding and taking initiative and understanding the emotion of guilt. Children begin to assert their personal control and independence. They realize the power they have in their environment. Successes in this stage result in the child developing a sense of purpose. Over-utilization of this sense of power usually results in feelings of guilt.

The following stages in Erickson's psychosocial model start the outer-socially based stages. The fourth stage, School Age, refers to ages six to 11. Children develop social norms without their parents. Children start to understand academic pressures and demands. A sense of inferiority can develop from poor performance in school, while excellence results in a development of competence. Adolescence, stage five, of Erickson's theory focuses on ages 12 to 18. This is the stage where a sense of identity is developed through social relationships. The child finds their place in their social role. He or she can develop a sense of belonging. A lack of development could result in a confusion of the child's role in his or her own world. Stage six, Young Adulthood, deals with development of ages 19 to 40. This stage is fostered by relationships and the connection that a person makes with another person. The young adult must create intimate relationships. This typically results in marriage and having children. Success in this stage results in the development of strong relationships. Failure usually results in isolation. Middle Adulthood, stage seven in Erickson's psychosocial theory covers ages 40 to 65. People in this stage focus on work and mature parenthood. Success results in accomplishment and contribution to the world. The last stage is Maturity, which covers ages 65 to death. In this stage people reflect on their lives. Wisdom is developed and past on in this stage. Lack of the opposite of proper development in this stage typically results in despair and regret.
Although Erickson’s model is prominent it does not take into account other factors that can effect or alter the development process. Different psychosocial elements can change the development process. On the surface Erickson’s model sums up the stages of development. However, one must ask how would this apply to someone who is of different socioeconomic classes, genders, sexual orientations, races, or multiple races? Does the biracial population call for a unique development? Stage two of Erickson’s development model brings about the development of autonomy, shame and doubt. Biracial children have an unique identity factor going on during this stage and that includes realizations of being different. The child does not racially identify with their mother or father completely. With this being the case, the six following stages are impacted by this vast difference and its effects on the rest of life's development.

**Biracial Development Models**

Researchers have attempted to create identity models throughout the years to help define the plight and development of biracial individuals. However, the process in doing so has lead researchers down one of three paths. Researchers have created three approaches to researching the identity development of biracial children. These approaches consist of the “problem” approach, the equivalent”” approach and the “variant” approach (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The “problem” approach is representative of the earliest research on biracial identity that saw being biracial as a problem. These studies hypothesized the negative implications of having biracial heritage (Thornton, 1996). This “problem” approach created theories that focused on biracial identity producing a “marginal man”; a man who did not feel “whole” in their identity and, consequently, not “whole” in the community.

The second of the approaches attempts to explain biracial identity as equal to that of the
norm. However, in doing so, it strips biracial individuals from accepting both parts of themselves as equal, yet different and proud individuals. This approach is referred to as the “equivalent” approach and it marked a timed shift in history. Most of these studies took place after the civil rights movement and thus focused on equality. These studies were politically relevant. Instead of taking a stance that a person with biracial heritage must choose one racial identity, for the first time, research was staying more “optimistic, positive, and sensitive” (Shih & Sanchez, p. 571) to the realistic needs of biracial people at this time.

Lastly, the latest research studies toggled between the “problem” and “equivalent” approaches only to create a separate idea. The “variant” approach, as introduced by Thornton and Watson (1995) gave researchers a new avenue to understanding biracial identity and heritage. This approach viewed biracial heritage as its own entity, separate from mono-racial identities. For the first time biracial was seen as unique, powerful and desirable.

**Problem Approach Identity Models**

Horowitz (1939) conducted a study of twenty-four preschool children that were made of boys, girls, white and black children. The children were given a stick drawing of a white and black child and asked which one was them. This study illustrated the beginnings of race consciousness. During this study researchers noticed that white children were more confused than the black children about race identification. Race was something that was more understandable for the black children, given the state of the United States at the time. Knowing your race for African American children meant understanding your place in the community. Using “colored” bathrooms and bus seats was a dictated law of everyday life. Another significant finding was that more black boys identified themselves white in the portraits when asked to point to themselves. These findings were then categorized as wishful thinking by
researchers. This study marked the beginning of the sciences thinking how race could play a role in ego development.

As a person reads the Horowitz study these findings could be generated for other reasons. Race was more of a conscious awareness for the Black children because in the United States being black was immediately known. When in public, as a child, the Black child would notice the difference in themselves when going out to eat or even playing at a park. He or she had to use colored only drinking fountains and bathrooms. Being conscious of race at this time was a social norm for the Black child. It followed him or her in all social settings. In addition, due to the segregation at the time, television predominantly displayed pleasurable views of Caucasian people and the roles that were given to Black people were not desirable. Television and movie roles that displayed Blacks were typically in service roles such as, maids, drivers, etc. Asking a child which picture they identified with could be explained by the bias and prejudices of the media at that period in time.

**Equivalent Approach Identity Models**

Root (1990) looked at biracial identity with a phenomenological lens. Instead of being categorized as “marginal”, Root sought to remove the pathology from the biracial population. Root promoted that respect for difference needed to be a given. Above all, she ventured away from traditional models and projected a positive sense of identity to the population of biracial children. By doing so, she developed an “other” status when it came to race. Racial identification no longer meant having to choose one race or another; the children could now choose “other” to describe themselves.

For the first time being biracial was “cool” or “hip”. It was exalted; it was different, and good to be different; as if biracial people were better than their mono-racial counterparts. The
questions raised by this theory brings about striving issues. This can be seen as overcompensation or a blind confidence which may have not been necessary. It is not essential to mesh and be an equally relevant contributor to society, when a person is more exalted than everyone else in that society. Describing oneself as “other” does not do much to explain who one is or what one's place is in the world.

**Variant Approach Identity Models**

Given that the biracial population was starting to be seen as a population of its own, and separate from the African American and Caucasian American population, new racial identity models started to develop based a new premise. Poston (1990) presented the first actual staged development model for racial identity. This model consisted of five stages: personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation and integration.

The stage of personal identity referred to a child having no awareness of racial identity. Identity is “somewhat independent of his or her ethnic background” (Poston, p.153). Racial development is starting to become salient in this stage. During the choice of group categorization stage, individuals are forced to choose an identity. Typically this choice is having to choose only one race. The enmeshment/denial stage is derived of the individual feeling guilty for choosing one race. This one race may not fully express the individual’s ethnic background. Common feelings during this stage consist of “guilt, self-hatred, and lack of acceptance from one or more groups” (Poston, p. 154).

In the appreciation stage the individual started to appreciate their heritage. He or she would broaden their group orientation. However, he or she would still identify with one race. Lastly, the integration stage is where the individual would development an “experience of wholeness and integration” (Poston, p.154). He or she would recognize and value their complete
ethnic makeup. Unlike Poston's study that focuses on acceptance and integration of one's biracial identity, Jacobs added a different approach that focuses on the ambivalence experienced by biracial youth.

Jacobs (1992) created a developmental approach to address the growth of the biracial person. This study was a doll study in which young children were given dolls that were representative of themselves. Jacobs discovered that a few themes and factors emerged. Jacobs noticed that there were four factors that were steadily coming forth. These factors were: the constancy of color, the internalization of a biracial label, a sense of racial ambivalence, and distorted perceptions of the self and family's identification. In short, the child's relationship with their family and society affected their view of themselves in relation. Children with a family or societal pressure to be one race, identified with that one race, while children who had experienced some form of racial tension, rejected the doll that represented them. From this experience Jacobs developed a three stage model:

**Stage 1: pre-color constancy:** Children played with various race dolls, but identified dolls which represented his or her own color. If the child had experienced racial prejudice, the child might reject the like-skinned doll.

**Stage 2: post-color constancy:** This stage typically takes place around the age of four. The child is aware of racial prejudice and realizes that the prejudices are usually with people of color. Children may be mad about the color difference of his or her own skin and have rage about it. The child may distort his or her views of their own racial identification in order to fit the society in which they live.

**Stage 3: Biracial identity:** This stage takes place when the child is between the ages of eight and twelve. During this stage the child believes that racial identity is related to skin color.
The ambivalence during stage one and stage two is reconciled. The child attributes more positive characteristics to his or her own parentage.

Jacobs ended this study with a call to parents to incorporate proper and positive racial education that represents both or all heritages. This was intended to increase racial cognition and maturity. Such education and maturity would lead to a healthy biracial identity. In addition, it was essential to have an open forum for the child to discuss societal prejudice and injustice. Such a forum would allow the child to understand and cope with feelings of being inadequate. Lastly, Jacobs made a point that the child rearing of biracial children should also have a biracial focused overtone. This overtone must constantly explain the differences of the child's skin color whenever there is an ambiguous question from the child. Also, encouraging the child to ask questions whenever he or she is confused about their skin color is considered essential.

In keeping with the times, Kich (1992) presented a three stage model for biracial identity that took into account individual and societal effects on biracial identity. In addition, instead of promoting a mono-racial identity, Kich promoted a different biracial self-identity, contained below.

**Stage 1:** This stage occurs between ages three and ten. The child is noticing the differences between external perceptions of who and what they are and he or she is gaining self-awareness of his or her own racial identity.

**Stage 2:** This stage occurs between age eight and adulthood. The person is finding it difficult to fit in during this stage. There is an internal struggle for social acceptance and self-acceptance. There is a fight for who they are and who they want to be.

**Stage 3:** This stage occurs during adolescence and young adulthood. The person constructs a final acceptance and title of biracial. They have come to terms with who they are in
relation to themselves and society.

The stages overlap ages to allow for early development of identity. At this period of time in research, Kich offered another option for gaining a biracial identity, rather than “other” status. Although it is not as extensive as Poston or Root's studies, Kich offered a different angle to be considered. Kich did not extensively explain the foundation that these stages stem from. Poston and Root explain how self-hatred can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of not belonging to a societal whole. All of these considerations require developing stages which focus on these factors and its effect of identity development. Kich's attempt was to create a model which encourages the biracial child to identify as biracial, but does not address what being biracial means once this title is achieved.

Following Poston, Jacobs, and Kich, Wardle (1992) presented a new model that took into account the person's ecological stance. Upon doing so, Wardle was able to construct a two stage model for biracial identity based on five ecological components. These components were: “family, minority context, majority context, group antagonism and community” (p. 4). Stage one takes place from ages three to seven. Wardle's findings stated that the identity development of biracial children mirrored the typical findings of other mono-racial identity theories. However, towards the end of this stage the child is starting to explore other racial and ethnic differences. Like other children, biracial children are learning social norms, and certain plights of various racial groups (p. 6). Stage two mirrors Erickson's model for adolescent identity development. The child is determining his or her own self-identification. He or she is taking all of their concrete identity into accordance with their family, important social relationships and community. For instance, the child may understand their goals in life and will seek out situations in the family, social relationships and community to foster these goals. He or she is figuring out
how these aspects of social norms, the plight of various racial groups, and community relate to them and how this area of life defines their own identity.

Following Wardle’s study, Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) addressed the topic of biracial identity from a slightly different angle. This angle focused on the biracial child having an identity that was neither one race nor another. Kerwin and Ponterotto were the first to notice that the child may have an internal identity and a public identity. The Kerwin and Ponterotto stages follow an age progression similar to Kich and Erickson's identity models.

**Preschool stage:** The child may be gaining latent knowledge about the differences between races and can start to pick up his or her parent’s sensitivity to race issues.

**Entry-to-school stage:** The child may adopt a mono-racial self-identification around other children as a way to classify themselves. This mono-racial identity is identifying with only one race in their ethnic makeup. A biracial child may only see themselves as African American to avoid confusion.

**Pre-adolescence stage:** The child is picking up on how his or her society plays a role on their identity. By reading the cues of society, noticing the difference in skin color between their parents and themselves, and becoming more socially aware of statements made about their ethnic heritage. The child is increasingly aware of social labels, skin color, appearance and how he or she perceives these factors. As a result of having to acknowledge the differences in their skin color according to their family and friends.

**Adolescence stage:** The child is starting to perceive pressures to pick a mono-racial identity and the societal pressure to identify with the parent of color.

**College/youth adulthood stage:** The young adulthood tends to gravitate to mono-racial groups of people. He or she is aware of racial comments made by other people and start to
develop a concrete belief system regarding race.

*Adulthood stage:* The person explores different cultures and self-identities. He or she is resilient and adapts to different racial pressures.

Although this model sums up identity development in a multistage model, it does not seem to conclude that people come to an absolute racial identity. It does not say that the person adapts an identity that they can call his or her own. If during the Adulthood stage, the biracial is resilient and adapts to the racial pressures put upon them, this would constitute a societal identity being placed onto the adult. It is not a self-identified and concrete identity. There is still confusion surrounding racial identity. Adapting rather than choosing creates further identity ambiguity.

Rockquemore and Brunsma (1999) wanted to answer a simple question with their model on biracial identity. The question was how do biracial people identify themselves? When eliminating the avenue that the person uses to get to their self-identification, how do they identify themselves once development is somewhat complete? Thus, the researchers completed a qualitative study on this topic with biracial people, with the objective of how they labeled themselves regarding race. Their findings yielded:

*Singular Identity:* the person is not denying a part of his or her identity, but represents an only white or black identity. He or she identifies with the race that best describes them.

*Border Identity:* this person identifies with being exclusively biracial. He or she embraces being unique and “in between” races.

*Protean Identity:* this person goes with the flow of what works for the situation they are in. Sometimes he or she identifies with white, black or biracial. He or she may have a muted sense of identity.

*Transcendent Identity:* this person does not choose to have a distinguished racial identity.
The idea of racial identity is meaningless. Results indicated that there may be more than one way that people identify themselves. This study introduced a broader understanding of racial identity. It opens up the labeling box and gives more insight into identity development.

**Summary of Biracial Theories**

Historically, it has been assumed that biracial individuals seek a singular identify label. This has been the focus of research, assuming that a single race identity was the desired outcome. However, research reveals that there are many factors that go into racial identity development. These factors range from parent’s identities, traits, and coping skills all the way to socialization factors such as peers. Given the vast difference in biracial people, developing a singular racial identity is not an easy task. It is not as easy as looking into a mirror and saying, “I am African American” or “I am White”. This image in the mirror says, “I am more than just one race”. More insight was applied to understand the plight and uniqueness of this population. Even with advancements in psychology, there are still limitations when addressing the development of biracial individuals.

The biracial population is growing and adding different dynamics deserving consideration. For instance, having three or more races make up a family or blended racial families. All of the prior research, in addition to new developments in research can both explain the development of biracial children and also how to support and foster adequate education, support and treatment for such children.

**Adlerian Psychology**

**Cognitive Schema & Lifestyle Formation**

The cognitive schema is the “opinion of oneself and the world” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher,
ADLERIAN THERAPY & BIRACIAL DEVELOPMENT

1964, p. 181). Its function is to create a memory structure that acts as a template. Such template operates consciously and unconsciously to file away memories and gather knowledge. This knowledge systematically comes from a person's perceptions and when combined with interpretation and meaning helps creates their beliefs. These perceptions and beliefs are used to encode current stimuli to connect it with a particular memory template. According to Adlerians, “...one's style of life acquired in early childhood is a result of the process of adapting oneself to the evolving structure of one's immediate environment” (Slavik, p. 94).

The cognitive schema may go unrecognized when its functioning results involve healthy, appropriate and socially adaptive behavior. The cognitive schema is typically more evident when this person must make decisions that include the people in their society. The personally chosen cognitive schema becomes the foundation that ultimately creates the lifestyle of the person.

For the Biracial child, this may include a childhood of not belonging and feeling “whole” in their own households. Neither biracial parent completely represents the child. Thus the child is raised in a framework that states that he or she is different from everyone, starting with their parents. Even though theorists believe that children are great observers, but poor interpreters, these theorists have not said how a biracial component will affect the cognitive schema or lifestyle formation.

It is noted that culture has a great influence on this lifestyle development. Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer and Sperry note, “Culture provides a child with a particular way of looking at the world, thus emphasizing some tendencies in the development of the life style” (p.26). This conclusion sets the foundation for the cognitive schema in terms of race and belonging. Most personal decisions will be based on this. Decisions that will define our personal place in the world and define the world's place within us.
To understand this foundation one must think of the four distinct parts of lifestyle development and how it will drastically change for the biracial child. Each experience produces an action and a reaction, which may not always be a cognizant decision. Private convictions are be deeply rooted in the lifestyle and cognitive schema. Adlerians categorized the lifestyle into four sections. These sections represent the different populations that the individual creates an ideal image of how that population should behave, feel, think, and exist. The lifestyle contains questions of who that individual is, who that individual should be, how the world is and the impact of these beliefs on the formation of ethics within that individual. The questions that complete the lifestyle are:

1. Who am I? The answer to this question includes the overall cultures of the person and the influences within them. Cultures consist of age, race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, gender role, etc. The list can go on and on. This list changes depending on the evolution of the society that the individual lives in.

2. Who should I be? The answer to this question lies with the societal pressures that the individual feels. These societal pressures come from parents, friends, teachers, etc. It is how he or she may perceive what they must to be in order to fulfill their place in the world. This may also include the societal pressures of the society that he or she may want to be a part of. For example, if he or she wants to be a business person, they may believe that being highly intelligent is who they need to be in order to fit that society.

3. What is right and what is wrong; therefore the world is? The answer to this is twofold. There is the seemingly black and white that is imposed from their community at home, school and social networks. However, these may conflict with each other. For example, it may be wrong to swear at school, but in his or her social networks, this is acceptable. All
of these venues will be taken into account and will at initially inform the individual’s personal conviction model. Hence, this will be the basis for moral judgment. Being able to know what is right and what is wrong will govern the way one views the world.

4. What must I sacrifice to obtain or maintain my ideal? This answer is conditional and situational. If the situation and condition align with the individual’s ideal, then there is not a conflict. When either the situation or condition does not align with the individual's ideal, a choice has to be made. A creative choice to maintain what society wants and what is essentially important to the individual. This is the Adlerian choice.

Thus, these internal formations shape the individual's behavior and perceptions.

The start of identity development is governed by the question “Who am I?” Given that it has already been established that culture, combined with race, can have an impact on this defining question, we can to assume that the young biracial child may not have an easy time answering this question. In addition, this answer can change depending on the demands the society they live in places on them. For the biracial child, he or she does not have a direct answer to the question. Racially he or she does not look like either one of their parents. The conclusion from this is that he or she does not know how he or she is to answer the question.

Answering the question of “Who should I be?” is not a easy task. Unless the child was taught a strong and definitive stance on who he or she is, they may develop the thought of being like his or her friends within the community. If the biracial child is in a predominantly Caucasian society, he or she may be ashamed of who they are and choose to deny the African American part of themselves because they feel that they should be like everybody else in the society. By not incorporating the two significant parts of themselves in order to achieve the ideal of who they should be. The ideal is obscure.
With answering moral conviction of “What is right and what is wrong; therefore the world is?” a maladaptive foundation of real self-conviction and ideal self-conviction will effect this answer. Currently, if the self-ideal is being of an “American” mono-race, the answer to this question might be being African American is wrong and being Caucasian is right. What must a confused biracial child do to obtain or maintain the ideal in the current situation? Ignore and deny half of who they are? Doing this will, no doubt, result in maladaptive perceptions and behaviors in adolescence and adulthood.

In a study conducted by Kerwin, et al. (1995) a group of biracial children were interviewed to explain why biracial children tend to have lower self-esteem and difficulties with cultural demands. One 13 year old participant who feels pressured to choose one race over the other at school answered:

Like at school the kids section themselves. The Black kids stay together and the White kids stay together. Mixed kids, some of them go with Black kids. They act Black and go around with them all the time. Some of the mixed kids go with the White kids, I guess. There isn’t a mixed group. I guess they mostly pick one. (Kerwin, et al., p.226)

This study highlights the dilemma when trying to find a place in the world. When a person cannot find a place, he or she must forge a place. With biracial children, often forging a place, may mean giving up a part of who he or she is.

Answering the question “the world is?” is difficult for the biracial child. How would a biracial person answer this question? If a person does not fit in at home or in the community they reside in, he or she may conclude that the world is: scary, inconclusive, wrong, unjust, or a foreign entity that cannot be obtained. The world would be scary because the biracial child cannot relate. Human nature tells us to fear things we do not understand. The world will be
viewed are wrong or inconclusive because the biracial child does not necessarily fit into a single racial category; such as those laid out by the United States Census form. Given this, it is only understandable to conclude that the world is unjust and wrong because it does not include this biracial child. Lastly, in a world where, seemingly, there is no concrete place of belonging a biracial child could dismiss the idea of the “world” when completing the cognitive schema. If the idea of the world is dismissed, the behavior that results will not be socially interested.

**Belonging and Striving**

It is a well-known fact that Adlerians believe in the construct that we are all socially-embedded people who desire a place to belong in the world. Belonging is generally defined by finding a place in the world. This place appreciates the person and who he or she is as a person. Many Adlerians believe that finding a place of belonging is a lifelong goal and a motivating force for all behaviors.

For the biracial child, a sense of belonging may prove to be difficult, especially in the earlier years of life. A clear answer to “where do I belong?” is not easily answered when both parents do not represent the child solely and racially. There is not an initial point of reference for belonging. In an article by Bradshaw (1992) belonging is expressed, with concern, that lack of belonging is a key figure contributing to unhealthy self-esteem, he evidenced this by saying:

> The absence of external validation from lack of social acceptance and ambivalent acceptance; ... the invisibility or absence of a biracial role model; and the absence of biracial referents within the family from which to draw a secure sense of identification, belonging, and self-identity. (p. 82)

A child who does not feel a place of belonging will strive to find a place where he or she belongs. All striving comes from a place of feeling inferior. For this purpose, striving is referring
to Dreikurs' (1949) definition of belonging when it is stated, “Each individual tries to get himself accepted by the community. The desire to feel belonging to others is the fundamental motive in man” (p. 21). The difficulty found here is that, racially, not all biracial people find a place within their home or communities. With a maladaptive self-ideal, one could continue to strive for a goal that is false or useless. If the false goal is obtaining a mono-racial identity in order to belong, then this striving is useless. This striving is individually based and not socially interested. Striving in a vertical manner in order to belong is useless. This will not achieve the goal of belong, therefore it is self-defeating. Thus, creating a psychopathology and/or neurology that is not conducive to adulthood.

**Social Interest**

Social interest is an encompassing term that refers to a person’s contribution to the world based on a common principle. A principle that means to “see with the eyes of another, hear with the ears of another and to feel with the heart of another” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 135). All in all, social interest encompasses: social embeddedness, encouragement, behavior, belonging, community, and the courage to be imperfect (Kaplan, 1991). Social interest is a concept that illustrates the ideal function of a person’s mental health.

Social interest is simple and complex in its definition. It refers to the individual’s relationship with their community and the community’s relationship with that individual. It is a “mediating factor providing for the reconciliation of the individual’s internal, personal, subjective environment or frame of reference with the demands of the person’s external, common, objective environment or surroundings” (Milliren, Evans & Newbauer, p. 20) It is a relationship that feeds off the internal, personal and subjective environment in order to govern a person’s decisions and way of life. Being that social interest is innate; Adler believed it should be
as natural as breathing or walking. When one is not acting with this common sense of social interest, Adler believes this is what creates problems. These problems include mental health deficiencies (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964).

One question arises, how does the biracial child develop and interpret social interest in a community that does not completely embody him or her? The reality of being “different” creates a duality of social interest that illustrates two senses of society. The point of reference becomes “my society” and “your society”. “My society” describes the biracial child as slightly different, not completely represented at home, school or the community. Thus a racial sense of belonging is incomplete or unattained. “Your society” describes the child's ability to deny a part of who he or she is in order to fit into society. Neither place is complete accepting of who the biracial child is. Thus, a healthy sense of social interest will not be fully attained until a real sense of community belonging is achieved. This authentic sense of community belonging can be achieved when the community that represents the biracial child is aware and educated in the plight of this child.

**Implications and Treatment**

In order to apply treatment and imply directions to assist the biracial child with proper development, researchers can use an Adlerian theoretical stance. As stated above, the biracial child has a maladaptive development of the cognitive schema and lifestyle. As a result of growing up in an environment that does not collectively embody who he or she is. To assist the biracial child with developing a healthy schema and lifestyle, the parents of biracial children must be educated to provide proper child rearing techniques. In addition, parents, school counselors and therapist must be aware of techniques to properly resolve issues with belonging, striving and social interest.
Child Rearing

Identity has a foundation. For most children, this foundation starts at home. Therefore, aiding a biracial child in finding an identity must start at a young age. In order to do this the parents must be aware of the child's racial plight and bifurcated stance in the world. In a study by Kerwin, et al (1995) it is noted, when interviewing parents of biracial children that, “Another point of view expressed was that not having a label is the core problem in identity formation for biracial children” (p. 225). This statement further went on to say that parents typically avoid labeling because, “this would lead to questioning about which race is 'better'” (p. 225). It is understandable why parents would avoid this situation. However, with the mind of Adlerians, this would be a perfect place to insert some knowledge that will help form their place in the family and the society they reside in. The common link between an individual and the world is the family.

Although there is not any Adlerian research based on the biracial population, certain techniques and strategies that are Adlerian based, can assist parents in rearing their biracial child to be well adapted, adjusted, socially interested contributors to their society. The first would be establishing a sense of belonging. As soon as a child is able to ask who they are or inquire about the difference in skin color, parents can affirm their child by explaining that they belong in the family because he or she is the sum of both parents. This child is just like every other child in any other family. Families come in different shapes, colors, etc. This education will set the framework for a few important considerations. These considerations include: setting a cognitive schema that every child is made of both of their parents and thus belong in the family, every child is different externally in terms of color, shapes etc, and that, as in the family, everyone is equally worthy in society. If possible, the parents should hold play groups with multicultural
families to instill this message.

The child does not have to choose a race. They can be their complete self. Both parents are proud of who they are, and so should the child. Confusion is an uncomfortable state in which to reside. Parents must be prepared to answer this question of “what race am I?” to set a firm identity foundation. Knowing that everyone is, essentially, in the same biological and familiar place. No person is born better than another person helps. Everyone is equally worthy. This foundation sets an equal socially interested “playing field”. If the child knows that he or she is unique, a need to strive to belong will not be as present. In addition, this foundation for identity will be carried on throughout life. Identity and belonging are essential to the formation of social interest. *The Lexicon of Adlerian Psychology* states, “The capacity for identification, which alone makes us capable of friendship, LOVE of mankind, sympathy, occupation and LOVE, is this basis of social interest and can be practiced and exercised only in the conjunction with others” (p. 11).

Parents must think of their physical location and how it represents their family. For instance, parents in a predominantly mono-race society will have to be prepared for situations that their child will face. Situations include being asked about the racial heritage and why they look different. Consequently, the parents will have to prepare their child for the realities that he or she will face. If possible, allowing children to grow up in a community that represents them is best, however this is not always possible. In any case, parents must prepare their children for racial situations. Explaining that some people may have a problem or be confused with who the child is. This does not mean that the child must be confused with who he or she is. Reiteration of a solid, encompassing identity is necessary. The child is equally both races, together and should be proud to be exactly that, both.
In Adlerian theory, parents of biracial children can incorporate a few constructs when dealing with identity issues with a biracial child. Parents must operate with a standpoint of encouragement, creativity and community. Parents must encourage their children to be exactly who they are. Encourage them to be confident and grow. Parents can start by incorporating both races in the household. For instance, buying a child dolls of both races. Not, predominantly one race. In addition, encouraging the child to speak up and ask questions. Allow the child to explore different parts of their cultures, such as culture festivals, hair styles, and learning cultural histories. The child is both the artist and self-picture by their own choice. Parents can provide a platform for their children to express their racial ambiguities and declarations. Promote creativity in their children to be his or her own complete self-including and separate from their race. Lastly, opening up their home to the community that the child will reside in will greatly assist the child in finding their place.

**School Counseling**

Given that developing an unhealthy sense of identity can lead to self-esteem and behavior problems, school counselors must be prepared to consider improper biracial identity as a reason that students may seek guidance. Children who have spent their life's energy on obtaining a false mono-race identity may find themselves lost and confused. In Adlerian fashion, the purpose for the symptoms of the problem must be treated, not the behavior, for behavior is just a smokescreen for the real issue. The real issue must be explored in each child, but can stem from feelings of being inferior, not belonging or being different from people in their community. In addition, school counselors must be aware of their own beliefs and counter-transference. A study completed by Harris (2006) examined the views of school counselors regarding biracial students. The study revealed that 78% of school counselors believed that people from different races
should not mix, 69% believed that biracial children are more accepted by the minority race, and 61% stated that visually they identify biracial children with their minority parent. Not even teachers understand the plight and bifurcation experience of the biracial child.

Not understanding the plight and bifurcation of biracial children can alter the effectiveness of the treatment. School counselors must strive to have a clear, professional and inclusive position when treating biracial children. Without this foundation the school counselor can operate on preconceived notions that govern the helping process, known as counter-transference. Counselor's counter-transference of believing that different races should not mix, that biracial children are more accepted by their minority population, or biracial children identify with their minority parent can lead to assumptions and more confusion for a biracial child. School counseling should be a safe place for a child to be themselves. Nishimura-Winn and Priest (1993) agreed:

Prior to engaging the biracial child in counseling, it is crucial that the counselor be aware of his or her sentiments about biracial marriage and the children of such marriages. If, for example, a counselor has deep-seated negative feelings about the issue, there is a strong possibility that he or she will be ineffective in establishing a therapeutic relationship with the client (p. 33).

Being aware of these feelings will allow the counselor to identify them and address them before initiating services with a biracial child. Not doing so would not only prove ineffective, but also harmful to the progression of treatment. Additionally, counselors must not assume that all of the biracial student's issues stem from being biracial. School counselors can explore the child's feelings of belonging and assist them to finding a place to belong. Some examples assisting belonging are finding more multicultural friends and attending social activities. Some way of
finding uniqueness in biracial identity; these actions can further the child wanting and feeling equally connected. Providing a platform for a biracial child to explore their identity will promote a social belonging and productive striving in the child.

**Counseling a Biracial Adult**

It must be recognized that biracial adults may seek counseling to deal with many issues that affect the population. Typical issues include self-esteem, maladaptive social skills, and depression. Counselors and therapists must be prepared to understand and consider that a client's convictions about their biracial background may have greatly affected and shaped the client's current lifestyle. Therefore, counselors must be educated about the cultural differences that face the biracial population.

It is common to receive cultural training about various mono-race populations, however a counselor must strive to gain cultural awareness about this population within traditional curricula. This can be obtained by studying current research regarding this population. The Adlerian counselor will find it difficult to find specific Adlerian research considering the biracial population. Though this is true, Adlerian therapy can be applied to the biracial adult population.

Knowing that social interest is the bellwether of proper mental health, Adlerians must consider this in the treatment process. Being sensitive to the special circumstances that face this population will prove to be beneficial in treatment. A thorough lifestyle assessment will aid in finding cognitive schema that negatively affect proper societal placement. Uncovering false beliefs regarding the client's racial identity will assist in challenging governing factors that may develop into socially uninterested behavior. Examining early recollections will provide the counselor greater insight into the biracial lifestyle and provide an opportunity to provoke more insight and understanding in the client. This requires in depth knowledge and sensitivity within
Lastly, the counselor must be willing to provide avenues for the client to explore their racial identity in accord with the home, society and community the client resides in. First, the counselor helps create an identity label that the client feels completely describes who the client is racially. This label is created by the client, with encouragement from the counselor. Secondly, the counselor assists the client to explore significant personal interests that create social interest and independence within his or her biracial ancestry. The client's heritage is just as important as every other person's background. It is on this ground all people authentically connect. People, who are connected, grasp the larger meaning of belonging and life. Lastly, this assists the client to express culturally expected options for expressing their socially interested feelings. This expressed interest creates a confident client able to positively contribute at work, in their families and with friends and society.

Conclusion

Historically, researchers have assumed that development could be explained with a general model. In some cases, this is possible and it must be considered that identity is an important lifelong development. In the case of many biracial children, adolescents and adults, this identity has not been completely formed. Without a solid and proper foundation, maladaptive behavior will be formed, leading to maladaptive behavior. It is every person's right to have the best life possible. Hopefully, this paper will shed light on the needs of biracial children and open the minds of therapist and professional helpers to dig deeper into what their clients may be dealing with. It is a compounded issue that needs attention. Therapists may need to open their minds and consider that a lifelong struggle with racial identity could be contributing to maladaptive behavior and other unhealthy aspects of life. This will allow the therapist and the
client to go deeper. Thus, treating the cause and not just the symptoms of a illness. Knowing this, researchers have attempted to promote development and identity formation in the biracial child. These models have changed over time and have not completely explained a generalized identity model. With that said, researchers have gathered all of these models as a basis to obtain information to treat this population.

All of the studies have advantages and disadvantages. Erickson's study is mostly comprehensive and widely received. The advantage of this study is that it applies to a general sense of development. However, it does not take into account that there are certain circumstances that can change the course of development. These courses include socioeconomic classes, various different cultural aspects and different races. Erickson pointed this out in the study as well. He recognized that his study would leave out certain outliers.

Horowitz's study was the path-blazer in researchers realizing that race played a role in ego development. He was able to illustrate to researchers the need for further research with other races to understand their similarities and differences in development. However, his study did not touch on development of a person who belongs to more than one racial category. In the future, a re-creation of this study with biracial children could tell us a whole different story.

Root's study in 1990 went with the trend of the 90's. Root looked at biracial individuals as people seeking equal treatment. In this sense, it is true. In terms of equal treatment, but not in the sense of cultural awareness. Root's study allowed professionals to consider that we are all the same, but it ignores the differences that make up every racial group and the plight that will explain them and allow us to help them appropriately.

Jacobs' study in 1992 took a different approach by allowing biracial individuals the right to make a whole new identity separate from “white”, “black” or “other”. Jacobs was able to
identify common themes that emerged from interviewing biracial people and was able to lump them in one of the first multi-modal development models. It is one of the first times that this population is seem as a prominent racial category for advanced research. Jacobs was able to spark a change that resulted in more multi-modal development models for the biracial population.

**Further Research**

In true Alderian fashion, it must be introduced how Adlerian Psychology can assist this population in obtaining optimal mental health. Early recollections is a Adlerian technique that is client-centered and allows the therapist the opportunity to understand the client's lifestyle. In addition, it illustrates to the therapist and the client reemerging themes that affect the client's development. This is helpful when trying to narrow in on important factors that can be addressed and rectified. For instance, it would be interesting and informative to find out if the fact of being biracial was a factor to the cognitive schema from an early age. If so, the client and the therapist would know that this is an area for exploration.

Encouragement is a well-versed theme that comes up in Adlerian therapy. It is also a technique that would be helpful in navigating a biracial child in identity development and formation. One way is encouraging the client to explore what their racial identity means to them. Also, what does being biracial mean to them? Good and bad. Opening the channels to explore and create their conclusive racial identity. This encouragement will allow for a supportive base to be exactly who he or she is, without the world on their shoulders.

The Adlerian therapists will continue to find an obstacle in treating this population. The largest obstacle is a lack in research regarding this population within Adlerian therapy. None the less, it must be explored. Race is a social construct, Adlerians believe we are all socially
embedded; therefore more research is necessary to serve this population. Their role and place in our culture is possible, but first the lives of biracial people need to be recognized and appreciated. It must be recognized that this forgotten population is growing at an increasing rate in the United States and must be regarded. This is a most significant group in our nation.
References


