



SHADES OF THE SAME COLOR

Ethnically diverse heritages give Texas A&M students unique perspective on trying to fit into a black and white society

By STEPHEN WELLS
Staff writer

Black, White, Red, Yellow, Brown, Other: For most people, the choice of which box to place a check mark in is reflexive. The world fits into a nice scheme of black and white, night and day, yin and yang. Some people fit comfortably in a pre-technicolor square hole for which they are the square peg.

However, as racial barriers slowly degrade and interracial relationships become more common, a new generation of multiracial children emerges and becomes sizable enough to defy the classification of "Other."

The number of interracial marriages and births of multiracial children increases every year. The magazine *Interrace* posted the following figures: From 1976 to 1996, the number of interracial marriages quadrupled.

According to the United States Census Bureau, there were 1.2 million interracial marriages in 1992, accounting for 2.2 percent of the total marriages for that year. The number of interracial births reflects these statistics. Interracial births are currently increasing 26 times faster than single ethnicity births.

Nadim Nabi, a Jordanian Mexican-American and a sophomore business administration major, said he only thinks about his racial identity if he is asked bluntly about it.

"I don't feel my color unless somebody points it out," Nabi said. Being raised in a multicultural environment can also

be beneficial, he said.

"I love having the different cultural backgrounds," Nabi said. "I get a lot out of it. I'm more informed about the world."

Just as in other families, the children of interracial relationships pick up different traits from their parents. Paul Klein, a Filipino Caucasian-American and a freshman chemical engineering major, said his family life is probably similar to most students.

"I think it's an even mix [of personality] as far as the family goes," Klein said. "I got a lot of my mother's traits and I got a lot of my dad's traits, too. A lot of my friends were from single ethnicity families. They had the same upbringing as me."

Klein said his parents have always stressed his success in school.

"My mom's side of the family all went to college and became successful and my dad is the only one from his family that graduated college," Klein said. "If I don't graduate from college, I think both of my parents might look down on me."

Sheri Schmidt, Coordinator of Diversity Education, said growing up in a multicultural environment can be beneficial to a child.

"There are a lot of benefits to being involved with people different from yourself," Schmidt said. "When you get the chance to be around a variety of people with different ways of thinking about things and doing things, it helps you to see the world more clearly."

Schmidt adds that being raised in a multi-ethnic environment can help eliminate stereotypes later in life.

"Stereotypes held about other groups do influence us, and that's probably one of the hardest things to do in our culture — to not believe stereotypes and not internalize them," Schmidt said. "Overall, it [being around other cultures] can be a very positive experience for that person. For a person whose parents are from different racial groups, it is a good thing because they can see firsthand through those differences and not base their thoughts on stereotypes."

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Nadim Nabi

Jordanian-Mexican American
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Attending Texas A&M may pose problems for multicultural students. As difficult as the transition is for all new students, multiracial students said they notice one additional detail.

"You go to U.T. and you see all kinds of races," Nabi said. "Here it's all the 'white male' type. I'm not dissing A&M, it's just that there's less diversity here than on some other campuses."

Texas A&M has diversity programs in place that other universities lack. Retreats like the University Center for Cultural Togetherness (U-ACT) provide where students gather to freely discuss their differences and MOSAIC, which teaches people to create an inclusive environment in the workplace, are two choices students have to learn about each other.

"We at Texas A&M have opportunities available for students to create this office (Diversity Education) and the programs, but there's still more we can do. However, I'm glad the administration supports our department and these programs."

As homogeneous as Texas A&M can seem, few students encounter racism than suspected.

"I've never faced racism," Nabi said. "I've never deal with racism because I grew up in an interracial school. As far as racism here at A&M, I've never been directed at me."

Klein said racism is expressed toward some combinations more than others.

"It depends on what the ethnicity is," Klein said. "As sad as it seems, some people don't think black and white people should mix, but people like my parents are okay. Some people just think that some things are socially taboo."

All of a sudden, checking in a box to describe an individual's past becomes something of a moot point. There are enough "others" to justify casting off the particular box to a bureaucratic afterlife and accepting that round pegs can fit in square holes.

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