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Chloe Arianne Jhangiani
"What are you, anyway?"
How parents help their
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categories

ABSTRACT

The growing numbers and visibility of multiracial individuals in the United States necessitate that social workers, parents, and researchers understand the unique strengths and stressors multiracial individuals face. This study qualitative study explored the ways in which parents racially socialized their multiracial children. Fifty-three multiracial adults completed online surveys about their childhood experiences with racism, monoracism and racial socialization.

Participants wrote about how their parents handled racial socialization (or how they did not) in a variety of ways: by embracing racial stereotypes, denying the existence of race and racism, giving general pride but no discussion of race, teaching about racism, promoting racial pride, modeling racial diversity, and proactive support. Participants wrote that their own experiences with racism reflected back to their parents and their parents' own experiences with race and racism. Participants also expressed having unique knowledge and strength as a result of having multiracial heritage.

Study results indicate that multiracial individuals share similarities with both the monoracial minority and transracial adoptees in terms of parental racial socialization. This study adds new knowledge to our understanding of multiracial experiences and raises questions about the intergenerational transmission of race related trauma and coping strategies. This study also adds new information about how multiracial individuals find strength in their marginalized identities.

"WHAT ARE YOU, ANYWAY?" HOW PARENTS HELP THEIR MULTIRACIAL

CHILDREN LIVE IN AWORLD OF SINGULAR RACIAL CATEGORIES

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 1967 the United States Supreme Court struck down the last antimiscegenation law (Loving v. Virginia, 1967) making interracial marriage bans illegal in every state. Since that decision, the number of multiracial children and their visibility have grown rapidly. In 2000, multiracial individuals were counted for the first time in the United States Census. That year, 6.8 million people selected more than one racial category (United States Census Bureau, 2010b). In the 2010 Census, that number grew 32% to 9 million multiracial individuals (United States Census Bureau, 2010b). And, in 2008, Barak Obama was elected the first multiracial president of the United States.

Despite growing numbers and visibility, the experiences of multiracial individuals are still largely ignored. Barak Obama, for example, is quick to be categorized as one race. He is categorized as black. The media raise questions about Obama's racial authenticity: "Is he acting too white?" or in other moments, "Is he acting too black?" The reality is that he is both black *and* white—he is somewhere in-between: he is in the grey (tan and beige). Multiracial individuals face unique circumstances because they do not belong to only one racial category. The purpose of this study was to explore how parents helped their multiracial children cope with living with singular racial categories.

Examples from Barak Obama's life emphasize some of the stressors multiracial individuals go through on a daily basis. Multiracial individuals are questioned about their racial

authenticity because racial constructs in the United States are singular and static, never plural and fluid.

> We assume that individuals belong to one, and only one, biologically defined racial group. This assumption disallows the possibility of being "mixed-race" and has historically necessitated elaborate rules and regulations in order to classify what folks *really* are. The one-drop rule, a uniquely American norm that reflects our particular history of racial formation, dictates that people with any black ancestry whatsoever are black. (Rockquemore & Lazloffy, 2005, p.17)

This "investment in the notion of fixed racial groups, and attempt to maintain the imagined distinctions between races…maintain myths of white purity, and contaminated and contaminating non-whiteness" (Mills, 2008, p.7). In the United States racial categories are seen as singular and have requisite stereotypical behavior which accompany them.

Multiracial individuals occupy what Anzuldua (1999) has referred to as the "borderlands" (p. 12), or the places that are in-between singular, discrete racial categories. Occupying the interstitial spaces between racial categories raises social anxiety.

> People in the U.S. are quite ill-equipped and unwilling to deal with [racial] ambiguity, as expressed by the generalized anxiety with ambiguity we observe regarding multiracial individuals. Discursively this gets expressed in questions about ambiguity such as "What are you?"(Mills, 2008, p. 25)

Just as Barak Obama's racial identity is questioned and his multiracial identity is largely ignored, multiracial individuals experience racial questioning on a daily basis (Root, 2003). Multiracial individuals regularly face questions about which singular racial category (African American, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or white) they fit into by those who

have been conditioned to believe both in the importance of categorizing people based on skin tone and in their inherent "right" to know.

Occupying a liminal racial space comes with unique strengths and stressors. The purpose of this study was to understand these experiences and how parents supported or did not support their children living in a world of singular racial categories. I gathered the stories of 53 multiracial individuals from a diversity of racial, ethnic and geographic backgrounds. I asked adult multiracial individuals to explore their childhood experiences of race, racial categorization, racism, and the ways that their parents interacted with them in these realms.

Through this study I hope to give clinicians, parents, researchers, and educators insight into the multiracial experience. I hope to give readers a greater understanding of the ways racial dynamics manifest for multiracial individuals and families. I hope readers can learn from and gain strength from the stories of these insightful study participants and attentive, caring, parents. Lastly, I hope that this research helps readers gain a more nuanced understanding of how racism and monoracism (discrimination against people who are multiracial) work in the United States.

This thesis is divided into four additional sections. In chapter two, I review relevant multiracial/mixed studies and racial socialization literature. In chapter third three, I describe the methodology: study design, sample selection, demographic data and data analysis procedures. In chapter four, I present the findings. In chapter five, I discuss the data, compare it to previous literature, and explore the limitations and implications of this research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In beginning my research on multiracial individuals I found an abundance of literature on multiracial individuals. Much of the multiracial literature focused on identity development. Other topics of research on multiracial individuals were sparser.   I review three categories of multiracial literature that explore the uniqueness of the multiracial experience: multiracial stressors, protective processes for multiracial individuals, and multiracial identity theories. I also review a fourth category not explored in multiracial research: literature on racial socialization. Racial socialization literature is split into two categories. Monoracial minority racial socialization literature focuses mainly on African American families. Transracial adoption literature focuses on white parents who have adopted children of color. Though neither of these categories explores the experiences of multiracial individuals, this literature can help us understand the coping mechanisms parents employ to protect their children from the stressors of living in a racist society. The lack of research and literature on multiracial racial socialization motivated me to do this study.

Multiracial Stressors

Multiracial individuals struggle with unique challenges because of their multiracial heritages (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Multiracial individuals often face many of the same stressors that monoracial, or single race, people of color face. Specifics of discrimination vary depending on phenotype, but multiracial people face negative racial stereotypes and daily racial discrimination (e .g, getting called racial slurs, anti-immigrant sentiment, being stared at while shopping, and negative stereotypes) (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).   Additionally, multiracial people

face stressors that are specific to being multiracial. This experience is termed *monoracism*. Monoracism is a process "where individuals who do not fit into monoracial categories are oppressed in systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125).

Shih and Sanchez (2005) explored the unique stressors multiracial individuals face in their survey of 28 qualitative and 15 quantitative studies. They investigated seven categories—racial identity development and adjustment, conflict between public and private definitions, justifying choices, forced choice dilemmas, lack of role models, conflicting messages, and double rejection—that repeat throughout the literature.

Racial identity development and adjustment. Racial identity development is by far the most studied area of multiracial research and the results of studies differ greatly. Racial identity is one of the ways that people understand themselves as members of groups and in social contexts. A strong sense of racial or ethnic identification has been associated with protecting individuals of color from the psychological impacts of racism (Cross, 1971). Some research has suggested that developing a strong multiracial identity is more difficult for multiracial people than for monoracial people because multiracial people need to reconcile multiple and sometimes conflicting racial realities that exist within their own families (Jackson, Yoo, Gueverra & Harrington, 2012; Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Researchers differ on the psychological effects of having a multiracial identity. Campbell and Eggering-Boeck (2006) measured self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation in teenagers who identified as white, monoracial, and multiracial. In their large quantitative study (n=20,745 adolescents, 1,038 of whom identified as multiracial), they found that some multiracial adolescents, specifically Native American/white adolescents, have a harder time with

psychological adjustment than other multiracial or monoracial minority individuals did. No significant discussion was given to understand why Native American/white adolescents may have a particularly difficult time with psychological adjustment. In the end, however, Campbell and Eggering-Boeck concluded that while multiracial children often have a harder time with psychological adjustment than their white peers, there was "no consistent evidence, however, that multiracial adolescents as a group face more difficulty in adolescence than members of other racial and ethnic minority groups" (p. 147).

Other researchers have found contradicting results. In a quantitative study (n=2,082 with 454 multiracial individuals), Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, and Catalano (2006) concluded that multiracial youth were more at-risk then their monoracial counterparts for initiation in to substance use and violent behavior. Importantly, they noted that "there were fewer statistically significant differences between multiracial and African American youth" (Choi et al., 2006, p. 93). Therefore, being multiracial carried almost the same cultural costs as being African American. One strength of this study is that they looked at a non-clinical population and separated out multiracial ethnic groups to understand the nuances of each population. Their study was limited in that they looked at early adolescents before they may have developed ethnic or racial identities that can serve as a protective factors for many older adolescents and adults.

Shih and Sanchez (2005) reviewed research on multiracial identity and psychological well-being to understand the contradicting research on this topic. They looked at 28 qualitative studies and 15 quantitative studies to understand why some researchers concluded that identifying as multiracial was of detriment, while others concluded that no negative psychological effects were present. They found that in 19 of the 28 qualitative studies, researchers mentioned multiracial individuals feeling positive about their multiracial identity. In these studies participants "made

twice as many positive comments about their multiracial identity as negative comments,"

"believed that they were able to develop an integrated identity and did not have a fragmented

self," or "were generally positive and proud of their multiple heritages" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005,

p. 575). The study participants believed that being multiracial had a positive effect on their lives.

On the other hand, Shih and Sanchez (2005) found that in 14 of the quantitative studies

participants had negative experiences associated with developing a multiracial identity. The

participants in these studies mentioned having identity conflict, confusion, and identity crises

(Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 575). Researchers in these 14 studies looked at measures of

depression, behavioral problems, self-esteem, peer relations, and school performance.

Interestingly, all of the studies with negative outcomes chose participants from a clinical

population.

> Not surprisingly, studies that sampled clinical populations tended to find negative
>
> outcomes such as higher depression, problem behaviors, lower school performance,
>
> and lower self esteem. However, studies that sampled from nonclinical populations
>
> found more positive outcomes, such as periods of happiness and high self esteem. (Shih &
>
> Sanchez, 2005, p. 577)

 Possibly participants from clinical populations were depressed and attributed their depression to

being multiracial and that other, more psychologically healthy individuals, felt happy about their

multiracial identity. Shih and Sanchez (2005) found similar results when looking at 15

quantitative studies: clinical populations showed higher levels of negative outcomes than

nonclinical populations. Negative outcomes also varied greatly depending on the year of the

study (e.g., more recent studies showed fewer negative outcomes), suggesting a cultural shift in

acceptance of multiracial individuals.

Shih and Sanchez (2005) also found that multiracial individuals had higher levels of negative outcomes in some areas than monoracial white individuals. Multiracial individuals were on par with monoracial minorities in the areas of depression and school performance. Monoracial and multiracial individuals having similar outcomes could suggest that being a racial minority could take the most toll on multiracial individuals. Therefore, they suggest that separating out multiracial effect from minority effect would be useful in further studies.

The review of multiracial studies by Shih and Sanchez (2005) suggests that further studies need to be more nuanced in their data collection and analysis. Types of populations (clinical v. nonclinical), minority effect v. multiracial effect, and year of the study should all be into account. Additionally, taking racial difference and phenotype into account would be helpful. Asian/white multiracial individuals may have much different experiences in the world, and therefore different stressors, than black/Mexican multiracial individuals.

Conflict between public and private definitions. Another difficulty multiracial people face is a potential conflict between public and private definitions of self. Multiracial individuals often feel very differently internally then they are perceived externally. They often have conflicts between how society defines them and how they wish to be defined. This conflict often comes up when filling out race/ethnicity forms. One white/Asian woman stated, " I have trouble deciding whether to check the 'white' or the 'Asian' box, because I don't want to deny either side of my heritage. But I have even more conflict when I check the box marked 'other.' I am not an 'other' and have never been an 'other'" (Gaskins, 1999, p. 52). A black/white woman in another study reported feeling badly for the parent whose identity she did not identify with on the form (Buckley, Robert, & Carter, 2004). This dissonance between public and private definitions can cause anxiety and make forming a racial identity difficult (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Justifying choices. Not only do multiracial individuals have to justify their racial identities to themselves, but do so to others as well. Individuals are often asked to justify or prove their belonging to a certain race. A participant Buckley et al.'s (2004) study described "her racial self-definition as a "public" event, open to consensus and largely shaped by the sociocultural context, including other's reactions to them, race-related questions, and a desire to 'fit-in'" (p. 51). On the occasions when she chose to describe herself as biracial, people felt authorized to probe further into her family history. Monoracial individuals are rarely asked to authenticate or prove their access to a racial identity to others. Multiracial individuals, however, may be questioned in an invasive way to authenticate or justify their belonging to certain racial groups.

Dalmage (2003) wrote about the concept of *patrolling racial borders* when discussing this phenomenon. Border patrollers "believe the color line is static and immutable, and thus they think they can distinguish between 'us' and 'them'"(p. 20). Racial borders are patrolled by individuals of any race and racial bordering often comes in the form of stares, social exclusion, and questions such as "What are you?" Each race has its own unique borders related to that group's history in the United States. For example, borders of blackness are guarded by the one-drop-rule. If one has any black features at all, one is considered African American. On the other hand, in order to be considered Native American, one needs to prove a blood quantum (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Multiracial individuals are often asked to authenticate their racial identity choice to others in ways that monoracial individuals are not.

Forced choice dilemmas. Multiracial individuals often feel that they must choose one of their identities and ignore or suppress their other racial identities. This often occurs with social pressure around dating choices. Multiracial people can also be asked to deny their friends or family members. "Most multiracial children have been in conversations in which white people

9

are portrayed as universally evil…. multiracial children who appear white are assumed by whites

to be an insider and are often subjected to white racist conversation" (Dalmage, 2003, p. 22). A

participant in Buckley at al.'s (2004) study expressed her discomfort in identifying as

multiracial. By doing so she hoped to help "others to be comfortable rather than her[self]" (p.

50). This participant would choose one identity for school (monoracial black) and one for home

(multiracial). Inconsistencies of being accepted in some situations, by some racial and ethnic

groups, but not into others can confuse individuals and bring up questions of how and where

individuals fit into society. "Being welcomed in some instances and excluded in other instances

can lead individuals to become distrustful and insecure in their attachments and in their

identification with their ethnic communities" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Lack of role models. Multiracial individuals often struggle with finding role models who

represent them racially. Perhaps because of monoracial definitions of race in the United States,

multiracial individuals are made invisible in popular culture (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). For

example, famous multiracial individuals such as Barack Obama, Frederick Douglas, Tiger

Woods, and Etta James are often classified as monoracial.

Additionally, multiracial people struggle with finding racially similar peers to connect

with. One participant in Jackson's (2010) qualitative study traveled all over the world to find

community. Other participants described searching, yet not finding, multiracial community. In

lieu of a multiracial community, these participants found community with others who had

experienced oppression in various forms. These participants found friends who were not

multiracial but could understand being an outsider for other reasons.

Conflicting messages. Multiracial individuals are often at the center of a great deal of

racial conflict. Because race is so central to United States society, multiracial individuals or

multiracial families are sometimes the battlegrounds for racial conflict. Darker-skinned children are often the targets of racism by family members. In Buckley et al.'s (2004) study one black/white participant stated that she was raised to believe that being black was bad. She grew up "feeling 'fearful' of black people and unaware that her mother was black until she was six years old" (Buckley et al., 2004, p. 52). A participant in the Jackson, Wolven, and Aguilera's (2013) study recounted her mother's dislike of her dark skin:

> First real impacting negative self-image. I'm very excited to see my new baby brother, and I remember thinking how beautiful my mother (of Mexican ethnicity) looked holding this infant, almost like the Madonna and child, and as I tip-toed up to her, and I have to stand on my toes to look at my baby brother and I want to give him a kiss, and she pushes me away and tells me, "I hate you! You're so ugly! You're so dark and ugly! So first impact, BAMB! (p. 14)

Multiracial children are often the recipients of a white parent's racism or a parent of color's internalized racism.

If a multiracial family does live harmoniously, multiracial individuals can often be confused by differing messages from inside and outside the family. For example, a multiracial individual may see that people of different backgrounds can get along peacefully. In their broader communities, however, they may see tremendous racial tension. Multiracial individuals may also get conflicting messages influenced by the differing cultural norms of different parents. Early theorists (Park,1928; Stonequist, 1937) suggested that conflicting messages cause a fragmented sense of self. This fragmented sense of self can lead to behavioral problems, neurosis, and even psychosis. More recent researchers, however, have seen exposure to diverse messages and diverse cultures as a strength that can cause positive outcomes (Stephan &

Stephan, 1991).

Double rejection. Multiracial individuals are in the position of being rejected from both minority and majority groups (Root, 2003). For example, Amerasians, who are born of both white Asian parents, are not only rejected from white culture, but they are rejected from Asian culture as well. This discrimination and social isolation can effect self-esteem and peer group formation (Shih & Sanchez 2005).

The phenomenon of double rejection occurs because a "race as kinship" narrative exists in United States society. These "monocentric ideas of race facilitate the pathologizing of multiracial identities as contemporary forms of ''passing,'' and multiracial people as ''racial traitors''(Samuels, 2010, p. 33). These monocentric ideas emphasize the historical reality that despite multiracial heritage, one cannot claim membership within two racial groups. An environment of monoracism creates situations where multiracial individuals do not feel like they belong and where they are not welcomed into racial communities that their parents belong to. Individuals whose physical appearance is either racially difficult to classify or leads to misclassification may feel rejection from the racial groups they belong to as well as from members of other racial groups (Navarette & Jenkins, 2011).

Multiracial individuals are often assaulted by constant questions about their racial heritage. "What are you?" or statements such as "You must be confused" mark the mixed race experience. Such questions often made multiracial individuals feel strange, different or that there was nowhere for them to fit in (Root, 2003).

Protective Processes for Multiracial Individuals

The unique struggles multiracial individuals face has prompted research about potential protective factors that could mitigate multiracial stress. For monoracial people, a strong sense of

racial or ethnic identification has been associated with psychological well-being and healthy

social adjustment (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, &

Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Harris-Britt et al. (2007), and Neblett et al. (2012) explored how racial

socialization with African American youth can affect self-esteem and academic performance. As

discussed in the racial socialization section of the literature review, certain types of racial and

cultural socialization can mitigate the effects of racism. What are the equivalent protective

factors for multiracial people?

Jackson et al. (2012) examined the connections between levels of identity integration and

an individual's psychological health. They compared racial distance and racial conflict to

psychological stress in a quantitative 263 person study. "*Racial distance* refers to perceptions

that one's multiple racial identities are separate from one another" (p. 241). "*Racial conflict*

refers to a multiracial individual's perceptions of conflict between his or her multiple racial

identities, or whether or not the values and norms of each of his or her racial groups

fundamentally contradict one another" (p. 241). Participants' psychological health was then

measured on a depression, anxiety, and positive/negative affect scale.

Contrary to previous theorists (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937) who have asserted that

people with multiple racial identities would be confused and distressed, Jackson et al. (2012)

showed that having a strong sense of multiracial identity buffered against some of the negative

psychological factors (depression, anxiety, and general stress) associated with racism and

monoracism. They found that having low racial distance and low racial conflict, e.g., having an

integrated multiracial identity, gave multiracial individuals psychological strengths against

perceived racial discrimination. They found that an integrated identity buffers against depression

and anxiety but not against general stress.

Jackson et al. (2012) suggested that identity integration was correlated with lower depression and anxiety rates. They suggested that "people who can accommodate their multiple racial identities, values and norms with minimal tension and conflict, may have additional psychological resources (e.g., frame–switching) that can enhance their psychological adjustment and well being" (p. 245). Additionally, individuals with integrated identities may be able to pull social strengths and coping resources from multiple racial groups to deal with racism and discrimination. People with high identity integration have the ability to utilize multiple resources for psychological health.

Jackson et al.'s (2012) study is limited because it fails to take racial distinctions into account. Taking racial distinctions into account is important because differences between multiracial groups are often greater than differences between multiracial and monoracial groups (Phillips, 2004). Different multiracial populations have very different experiences of race in the United States.

Binning, Unzueta, Huo, and Molina (2009) researched how multiracial people choose to identify and how this choice affects their self-reported well-being. In a quantitative study of 182 high school students, they explored psychological well-being and social engagement. However, unlike Jackson et al. (2012), Binning et al. looked at racial difference between multiracial individuals. Binning et al. critiqued other studies "lump[ing] all multiracial individuals into a single category… [and therefore we] suspect the past research has been making unwarranted assumptions about the uniformity of multiracial identity" (p. 36). In order to avoid this pitfall, Binning et al. operationalized racial categories and divided them into three racial identity categories. They asked participants how they identified and then dividend them into the following categories: low-status identification (e.g., a person who is multiracial but identifies as

black or Latino), high-status identification (e.g., a person is multiracial but identifies as white or Asian) and identifying with multiple groups (e.g., half black/half white, multiracial, or Latino and Asian) (p. 37).

Using their three categories, Binning et al. (2009) looked at psychological well-being (self-esteem, positive affect, and stress) and level of social engagement (e.g., citizenship behaviors and group alienation and problem behaviors in school). They found that people who identified with multiple different identities reported greater positive affect, lower stress, higher citizenship behavior and lower school alienation. No significant differences were found when looking at self-esteem and problem behaviors.

Binning et al. (2009) offered *psychological resilience* as a possible explanation for their results. Instead of "passing as monoracial," people chose to "voice their multiracial status by openly embracing multiple group memberships" (p. 45). Or "perhaps the ability to stand one's ground and reject social pressure to identify with a single racial group and instead adopt a multiracial identity connotes a high level of resiliency among individuals who choose to identify with multiple racial groups" (p. 45). Identifying as multiracial could correlate with psychological well-being. They also suggested that multiracial people who identify as multiple races have the ability to navigate and pull strengths from multiple worlds. Rather than having to choose one world and hide all other aspects of their experience, people who identify as multiracial might have a broader sense of fitting in.

Binning et al. (2009) also explored the concept of *frame-switching* or switching racial identity when psychologically necessary. In frame-switching, individuals may be buffered against the negative consequences of feeling tokenized. For example, if an individual identifies as black and Latino, and hears racial slurs, this person may be able to distance him/herself from

the slurs because he/she may be able to think, "That is not me, I am also Latino." Thus, multiracial individuals can pull strength from knowing they also belong to another group, even if one group is targeted. More qualitative research needs to be completed in order to explore these explanations.

Binning et al.'s (2009) study is limited by the geographic location of its participants. Researchers conducted this study in the racially diverse area of Long Beach California. More research needs to be done to understand how geographic location affects individuals choosing a multiracial identity. This could be particularly pertinent with individuals who have a racially ambiguous phenotype. Choosing a multiracial identity and having an ambiguous phenotype could have different psychological outcomes in a more racially segregated area.

Multiracial Identity Theories

Perhaps because multiracial individuals challenge traditional American notions of race, multiracial individuals often struggle with social issues (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Therefore, much of the research and theory on multiracial individuals has focused largely on racial identification, analysis of psychological adjustment, and understanding the broader political consequences of multiracial identification (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). In the following paragraphs I will use Rockquemore et al.'s (2009) four categories to explore the evolution of multiracial theories over the past century.

Problem approach. The first set of theorists took the "problem" approach when looking at multiracial people (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 16). These theorists pathologized multiracial individuals and looked at their failures to form cohesive racial identities. This category is exemplified by Park's (1928) and Stonequist's (1937) marginal man theories. These authors wrote in the late Jim Crow era when black/white group membership was governed by the one-

drop rule. They suggested that multiracial people would internalize social marginality, resulting in psychological distress, dysfunction, or psychosis.

Equivalent approach. A second set of theories came out of the civil rights movement and echoed both psychologist Erikson's (1968) stages of adolescent development and Cross's (1971) nigresence model. Erickson believed a central task of adolescence was to form a stable identity. Cross adapted Erikson's stages to look at racial identity development. In his nigresence model, Cross posited that members of racial minorities go through several stages of racial identity development until they arrive at the final stage with a healthy identity. These stages start with a *preencounter* denial of racial identity (other then white identity), to *encounter,* in which a person faces the realities of race and racism. This trajectory continues until individuals appreciate their marginal racial or ethnic identity. The Cross model was intended for monoracial people and Cross assumed that multiracial people would pick their most marginalized identity as their own.

Variant approach. Cross's (1971) nigresence model was altered slightly by Poston (1990) to create the *biracial identity development model.* Cross's model was intended for monoracial individuals and Poston adapted it for a biracial identity development model. According to Poston, a multiracial person follows a trajectory of identity development until final integration of multiple heritages into one proud identity. A person is healthiest when he/she has integrated both (or more) identities. Poston believed that identity development is linear and identity is fixed.

Wijeyesinghe (2001) complicated Poston's (1990) biracial identity development model when she developed the Factor Model of Multiracial Identity or FFMI. Wijeyesinghe asserted that multiracial individuals are not all on a linear path of identity development. Rather, a

multiracial individual's identity choices are affected by a complexity of factors: racial ancestry, cultural attachment, early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, other social identities, social and historical context, and physical appearance. Wijeyesinghe emphasized identity choice and posited identity is fluid and affected by many factors.

In the 1980's-1990's Root broke from identity development models (Cross, 1971; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) and focused on conceptualizing multiracial individuals as separate from other monoracial minority groups. Multiracial individuals have unique stressors that are based on American notions of racial categorization. Multiracial people have problems but their struggles are "not are not located in the process of developing a multiracial identity" (Roquemore et al., 2009, p. 18). Rather, multiracial people have problems because racial categories are seen as separate and distinct in the United States and because one cannot claim membership within two racial groups at once (Samuels, 2010).

The ecological approach. Most recently, theorists have shifted focus to look at how multiracial individuals are affected by their environment. Instead of focusing on the individual, these ecological theorists looked at the context within which racial identity is formed. All people are shaped by factors in their environment and multiracial people are shaped (and hurt) by American ideas of racial categorization (Jackson, 2010).

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) completed an empirical study using an ecological lens. They researched factors effecting racial identity choice with 177 black/white participants. They found that participants chose singular (either black *or* white), border (neither black nor white, but a unique category that includes both), protean (sometimes black, sometimes white, sometimes biracial depending on social context), or transcendent (nothing—they are aware of

race and racism but claim to have no definable racial identity and believe race and racial categories are meaningless). Choice of identity category was affected by an individual's social networks, racial composition, negative treatment and/or closeness to blacks and whites, phenotype, age, gender, and parents' occupational prestige and education levels. In this study, 13.1% chose black identity, 3.6% chose white identity, 22.6% chose a validated border identity, 38.7% chose a unvalidated border identity, 4.8% switched identity depending on context, and 13.1% claimed they had no definable race. These data showed the variety of influences and ways multiracial individuals identify.

Rather than assuming all biracial individuals will identify in the same way, or that an individual with a multiracial identity is healthier than one with a white identity, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) complicated past studies viewed through a developmental lens. They asked what environmental circumstances effect biracial identity choices. More in depth studies with an ecological model should be undertaken.

Racial Socialization

Despite the upsurge of literature on multiracial individuals, few scholars have looked at the unique needs of multiracial individuals (Rockquemore et al., 2009). No exploration of racial socialization of multiracial individuals is present in the research literature. However, two areas could shed light on multiracial racial socialization: monoracial minority and transracial adoption racial socialization literatures. Monoracial minority literature applies because darker-skinned multiracial individuals face discrimination similar to that of monoracial minorities. Transracial adoption literature applies because if parents are monoracial, children are transracially raised. Multiracial individuals share aspects of both the monoracial and transracial adoption experiences.

Racial socialization with monoracial minorities. Racial socialization literature has focused mainly on African American monoracial families. Racial socialization is the "implicit, explicit, purposeful, and unintended ways that parents' beliefs and behaviors convey views about race to children….to assist children in coping with race related issues such as discrimination" (Harris-Britt et al., 2007, p. 671). Hughes and Deborah (2001) divided racial socialization practices into two categories: *proactive racial socialization*, messages that instilled racial and cultural pride, and *reactive racial socialization,* messages that brought awareness of racial bias and promotion of mistrust. Proactive racial socialization took the form of reading black history books, taking a child to black events, or celebrating black history. Reactive racial socialization prepared children for racial bias and took the form of talking children about racism, telling a child that white people may try to limit them, or talking about racial features. Reactive racial socialization also took the form of promoting distrust such as telling a child to keep a distance from whites (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Additionally, less overt forms of racial socialization are *egalitarianism,* and *silence about race*. Parents who engaged in egalitarianism encouraged children to value individual characteristics of a person. Other parents ignored, denied or stayed silent about the importance of race and racism (Hughes et al., 2006).

Harris-Britt et al. (2007) investigated racial socialization as a potential protective factor in 128 eighth grade African American students. In a quantitative study they looked at the connections between racial socialization (both racial pride and bias preparation), perceived racial discrimination and self-esteem. They found that both racial pride and bias preparation mitigate the effects of racism but the frequency of racial messages is important. Racial pride was directly related to self-esteem. "Adolescents who reported more frequent exposure to race pride messages did not seem to be negatively affected by perceived discrimination" (p. 678). On the

other hand, preparation for bias was not directly related to self-esteem (e.g., more messages preparing an individual for racial bias did not always relate to a higher self-esteem outcome). African American participants who had little to no understanding about race and racism showed lower self-esteem. Participants who had moderate levels of bias preparation had slightly higher self-esteem. Interestingly, with high levels of preparation for bias, self-esteem dropped again, suggesting that focusing too frequently on racism may be maladaptive. An over emphasis on bias "may lead adolescents to feel helpless and lacking control over their environment and consequently result in lower self-esteem" (p. 679). Frequency and type of racial socialization are important to understanding positive outcomes.

Neblett et al. (2012) completed a review of racial socialization studies. They found that racial socialization, racial identity, and cultural orientation all served as protective factors for youth of color. These protective factors all interacted in a bidirectional way with self-concept, attributions, cognitive appraisals, and coping of the youth. For example, upon hearing a racial slur an adolescent who was socialized to understand racism was more likely to understand that remark as racism rather than a personal derogation. Understanding this remark as racism continued to help the youth feel confident, capable, and competent, and helped the youth interact with the world in such a way that promoted more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., dealing with a stressor head on). Youth who did not understand concepts of racism felt more insecure and perceived the world as threatening. Racial socialization and a strong racial identity were found to build on themselves, making youth more able to cope with perceived discrimination. Unfortunately Neblett et al. only named racial socialization, racial identity, and cultural orientation as protective factors. They did not explore the mechanisms or processes by which these factors protected youth of color.

Calzada, Brotman, Huang, Bat-Chava, and Kingston (2009) took a deeper look at one aspect of racial socialization: cultural pride. In their 130 person quantitative study they explored the different roles cultural pride can play in racial socialization. This study is useful for understanding the nuances of race, culture, and ethnicity as protective factors.

Calzada et al., (2009) looked at four different aspects of cultural retention in recent immigrants and their first generation pre-school age children. They looked at acculturation, or adaption to mainstream culture, and also enculturation, or maintenance of culture of origin. They explored acculturation and enculturation as two distinct processes that occurred independently from one another. Immigrant families fell in one of four categories related to levels of acculturation and enculturation. The first group of families had a high rejection of culture of origin and high adaption to new culture (low enculturation and high acculturation). This process resulted in assimilation to American culture. The second group of families had a high rejection of new culture and a high maintenance of culture of origin (high enculturation and low acculturation). This resulted in separation from American culture. The third group of families had a rejected of both culture of origin and new culture (low enculturation and acculturation). This resulted in marginalization. The fourth group of families had a simultaneous maintenance of culture of origin and participation in new culture (high enculturation and acculturation). This resulted in integration or biculturalism.

Preschoolers with a bicultural family did better on behavioral assessments and had lower degrees of internalizing problems. Biculturalism was a protective factor and caused better mental health outcomes. This could have been true because children had access to the tools from multiple different cultures "creating an optimal fit between family and environment" (Calzada et al., 2009, p. 523).

Calzada et al.'s study gave important details to cultural pride as a protective factor. Cultural pride was not a universally protective factor. Other factors such as family assimilation to dominant culture also needed to be taken into account.

Racial socialization with transracial adoptees. Transracial adoption literature is also very applicable to multiracial individuals because multiracial individuals are almost always raised by parents who have different racial experiences than themselves unless a child is second or third generation multiracial. Much of the early transracial adoption literature focused on white parents who adopted black children. In a 30 person mixed methods study, McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson (1984) found that white parents of children of color reacted in one of three ways when engaging with race. The 18 parents making up the first category ignored racial differences and had a colorblind attitude towards race. These parents socialized their children mainly within white environments and rarely discussed race. The six parents in the second category provided their children with opportunities to develop relationships with people and lived in a more racially integrated environment. The six parents in the third category integrated black culture to a greater degree than other families. These families lived in integrated areas, discussed race frequently, and recognized their families as interracial. This third category of parents used techniques written about in monoracial racial socialization literature. These parents instilled racial pride and prepared their children for racial bias.

Crolley-Simic and Vonk, (2008) added to McRoy et al.'s (1984) study by adding a fourth category of parent. Crolley-Simic and Vonk completed an eight person qualitative study with Korean adoptees of white parents. They found that certain parents incorporated diversity to a large degree in their families. These parents were racial activists, talked about race frequently, and included a historical perspective to understand race relations. Though this study was limited

by its small sample size, it added important data about the potentials of racial socialization by white adoptive parents.

Next, I examined literature related to the questions: Are parents of color more likely than white parents to racially socialize their children? Are parents of color more likely than white parents to be attuned to the realities of race and racism in the United States because they have experienced it?

In a foundational study, Andujo (1988) compared Hispanic families that adopted Hispanic children (same race adoption) to white families that adopted Hispanic children (transracial adoption). She found that Hispanic children raised in Hispanic families had more ethnic pride and were less acculturated to mainstream Anglo-American white culture than transracially-adopted children. She also found that "no significant differences were found in the overall level of self-esteem" between same race adopted children and transracially adopted children (p. 533). Despite this, she concluded that transracial adoptees should be placed with families of color lest they have the "experience of up rootedness and lack of continuity in their lives" (p. 534). She also concluded that "the placement of a child with a family of similar ethnicity is desirable because such families are likely to provide the children with the necessary skills and strength to counter racism" (p. 534).

Similar to Andujo (1988), the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) wrote a statement in 1972 that followed a similar logic. They wrote that "Transracial adoption of an African American child should only be considered after documented evidence of unsuccessful same race placements has been reviewed and supported by appropriate representatives of the African American community" (National Association of Black Social Workers National Steering Committee, 2003). This statement was re-emphasized by the NABSW in 1994 as well.

Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, and Gunnar (2006) undertook a study about racial socialization and international adoptees that complicates ideas of racial socialization transracially. Lee et al. (2006) did a quantitative study with 761 families to find out how parents socialize their internationally adopted children to the children's cultures of origin. Unlike Anjudo's (1988) study they did not compare people of color to white adoptive parents. Instead they looked at a 98.5% white parent population who adopted 85.4% children of color (the other adoptees were from eastern Europe and Russia). Lee et al. explored both direct and indirect racialization beliefs and behaviors and direct and indirect enculturation beliefs and behaviors. Racialization beliefs and behaviors made children aware of racism and discrimination and helped them develop appropriate coping skills to manage these experiences. Enculturation beliefs and behaviors provided children with cultural opportunities, ethnic awareness, knowledge and pride, identity and behaviors.

Lee et al. (2006) found that parents with colorblind beliefs or parents who "deny or are unaware of the prevalence and deleterious effects of racism and discrimination in society" are less likely to engage their children in racialization or enculturation behaviors (p. 572). That said, "overall, parents had relatively low mean scores on color-blind racial attitudes and relatively high mean scores on enculturation and racialization parenting beliefs" (p. 578). For example, 83% of adoptive families reported that their children participated in a cultural event in the past year. Average participation in cultural events was three events a year. "This finding contrasts with earlier research from the 1980's that found white parents who adopted African American children tended to exhibit color-blind racial attitudes and were more ambivalent about enculturation and racialization" (p. 578). High enculturation and racialization parenting beliefs could mean that families are more attuned to the importance of cultural socialization and have

more resources and opportunities to them then do previous generations of adoptive families (p. 578).

Lee et al. (2006)'s study is particularly interesting because the researchers divided beliefs and actions. Parents can think racism is a problem but have little follow through when talking about race and racism.

Racial awareness (or a low color-blind racial attitude) in and of itself is not sufficient to ensure cultural socialization. Instead, parents must give conscious and specific thought to whether they want to engage in cultural socialization with their children. These socialization experiences, in turn, have been found to contribute to ethnic identity and well-being. (p. 578)

Though these findings are interesting, much of the Lee et al., (2006) study is difficult to translate to multiracial children. One thing that does translate, however, is the knowledge that white families are racially and culturally socializing their children at high rates. Despite having differing experiences of race, white parents do have the capability of helping their children develop a racial and cultural identity and manage racist attitudes. Another translatable finding from their study relates to the distinction between the cognitive process of believing racialization is important the actuality of following through with teaching children enculturation and racialization behaviors.

Lee and Quintana (2005) build on Anjudo's (1988) study and explored some of the missing links. Lee and Quintana looked at the benefits of cultural exposure and development of Korean perspective taking in Korean adoptees.   "Although widely assumed, little research has explicitly investigated the benefits of cultural exposure for TRA [transracial adoptees] children.

Consequently, the first purpose of [the] study was to examine some of the benefits of cultural exposure for TRA children" (p. 132).

Lee and Quintanta (2005) used the measure of *perspective taking ability* (PTA) in Korean adoptees with white parents. Perspective taking ability is a measure that looks at how an individual views him/herself through a racial, in this case Korean, lens. Levels of PTA range from 0, where a person can understand that there are different races based on different physical characteristics to 3, where a person sees that he or she is part of a Korean community and feels a racial allegiance to that group.

Not surprisingly, Lee and Quintana (2005) found that adoptees with higher cultural exposure to Korean culture had higher perspective taking ability. People who had been exposed to Korean food, culture, and language had a more complex idea of what it was to have a Korean racial identity. When compared to Koreans raised by Korean parents, transracial adoptees took longer to get a higher PTA. Lee and Quintana's argument seems circular: if one is exposed to more Korean culture, then one will have more exposure to Korean culture. These researchers failed to explore the links between high PTA and psychological well-being.

When looking more deeply at the measures upon which the PTA is based, one finds that this measure is based on racial stereotypes. For example, part of the PTA scale was based on cultural knowledge. A participant could score high in the PTA scale if they can answer six questions to index the degree of Korean cultural exposure. These questions, such as "Do you eat Kimchi?" or "Do you know Tae Kwan Do?" were seen as measures of culture. Lee and Quintana (2005) did not measure mental health outcomes, but instead look at fluency with Korean stereotypes.

Multiracial people do not have one culture they can essentialize and learn to identify with. Multiracial people have multiple cultures they grow up with. The question remains: How can multiracial people be protected from the effects of living in a society of strict racial categories?

Summary and Motivation for Research

This literature review explores the unique stressors and protective processes of multiracial individuals. Multiracial theories allow us to further conceptualize the multiracial experience. The evolution of the theories shows us the difficulties multiracial people have faced historically. Finally, racial socialization literature explains how parents can help their children cope with racial stressors. The dearth of literature on multiracial racial socialization is the motivator for this study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore what adult multiracial children say about how their parents prepared them, if they did, to live in a world of racism and racial categories. In this study, I enquired whether, and how, parents talked to their children about race, ethnicity and racism. Multiracial people experience unique stressors because they are not monoracial. Racial socialization by parents and caretakers can mitigate some of the stressors all people of color face. I explored how parents help their multiracial children cope with the stressors of being multiracial.

This study was a qualitative study with 53 individuals. I asked participants to fill out an online questionnaire exploring their experiences as multiracial children. This study was a qualitative study in order to capture the nuances of parental messages. This study was an online study in order to reach a diversity of participants in a variety of geographic locations. In this chapter I will look at study design, sample selection, demographic data and data analysis procedures.

Sample

The participants in this study were over the age of 18 and identified as multiracial. I defined multiracial as having two or more racial heritages (e. g., white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander). People who were *multiethnic*, or who identified with more than one ethnic group, were not

included in this study if they were from a singular racial heritage. Therefore, people of

German/Polish or Japanese/Chinese decent were not included in the study. I did, however,

include people who are of mixed Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino heritages (e. g.,

Latino/white and Mexican/Black). The United States Census considers Hispanic an ethnicity

and people who identify as Hispanic or Latino can be any race (United States Census Bureau,

2010a). Despite Hispanic/Latino being considered an ethnicity rather than a race,

Hispanic/Latino individuals are frequently included in multiracial research and literature

(Jackson et al., 2012) and these individuals often face similar discrimination and similar

processes of identity development as other multiracial individuals (Jiménez, 2004).

Recruitment Methods

A nonprobability, non-random method of sampling selection known as purposive

sampling was used. After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee

(Appendix A), I recruited participants from three advertising sources by: a) posting the survey to

a social networking site (Facebook), b) emailing the questionnaire to list serves (Smith Council

for Students of Color, the Smith LGBTQ Alliance, and the Bay Area Therapists of Color list

serve), and c) sending the survey link to mixed race studies professors and other colleagues.

The recruitment e-mail (see Appendix B) consisted of a brief synopsis of the

questionnaire, the eligibility requirements, and a link to the questionnaire. Potential participants

were directed to an online questionnaire, where two screening questions were asked (see

Appendix C). Participants had to identify as multiracial, mixed-race, or biracial and had to be

18 or older to participate.

Potential participants were informed they needed to fulfill the eligibility requirements in

order to continue on to the study. If they did not meet both of the eligibility requirements they

were thanked for their time. If they did and wanted to continue they were directed to the informed consent page (See Appendix D).

Data Collection Methods

For this study, participants were asked to take an anonymous online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and participants had the option to withdraw at any point before they submitted it at the end. The questionnaire consisted of two parts and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Before potential participants took the questionnaire, they were directed to an informed consent page. By clicking on a box that said, "I agree," at the bottom of the informed consent, they were able to continue on to the questionnaire.

The informed consent explained the nature of participation, the risks of participating in the study, and a list of referral sources. Participants could either agree to the informed consent and be directed to the questionnaire or they could choose to not participate. People were advised to print a copy of the informed consent for their records.

In the first part of the questionnaire, demographic data were collected from the participants. Participants answered questions about their race, age, parent's income, gender, and the community in which they were raised. Participants could choose to leave questions in this area blank. Although a participant could leave any questions blank, surveys with less than 75% of the demographic questions answered were not used.

In the second section, qualitative data were collected. These questions were open-ended and asked participants to describe experiences of race, racism, and monoracism, if they had such experiences (see Appendix E). Participants were then asked if and how their parents prepared them to deal with these experiences. Participants could choose to leave questions in this area blank. Survey responses that were less than 50% completed were not used.

A participant could skip any question, but once a survey was submitted, the data could not be withdrawn from the study due to the anonymous nature of the responses. My research advisor and I were the only people with access to the Fluidsurveys data.

The survey was set up such that all identifying information (email address, IP address, URL, username, and respondent location) were not collected and thus this survey was anonymous. Participants were advised not to type any information that revealed identifying information. When identifying information was found in the data, it was removed or disguised. All open-ended responses were reviewed and any names or place names that could potentially compromise the participant's identity were removed I allowed my research advisor to view the data.

The data were collected on www.fluidsurveys.com, a website that was firewalled, password-protected, and encrypted, until 54 responses were collected. The survey was online for 15 days and was closed once 54 completed surveys were collected. One completed survey was thrown out because the participant did not fully meet the participation criteria. After this point, data were downloaded onto a password-protected computer. After three years, data will be destroyed when no longer needed.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to explore qualitative data. Qualitative questions were coded for themes, keywords, and subthemes. Areas that did not fit themes were noted. Illustrative quotations were noted and included in the findings section. Typos in the quotations were fixed. Percentages were calculated for demographic data.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Major findings of this exploratory study fell in the categories of racial socialization practices, parental experiences and gifts of being multiracial. The category of racial socialization practices was divided into seven salient subthemes: embracing racial stereotypes, denying the existence of race and racism, teaching about racism, promoting racial pride, modeling racial diversity, proactive support and general pride but no discussion of race. This chapter will look at demographic data and explore themes and subthemes.

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, much more data were collected than fit the purpose of this study. The topics of racism, monoracism, geographic differences, and different experiences depending on phenotype have been explored in depth by other researchers or are beyond the scope of this thesis. At the end of the chapter, I have included a brief summary of what participants wrote on these topics.

Participant Demographics

Fifty-four participants fully completed the survey. Of these 54 participants, 53 met the survey criteria and filled out the requisite percentage of questions. Please refer to Table 1 below for participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Gender (n=53)

Female	n=45 (85%)
Male	n=4 (7.5%)
Transgendered (MtF or FtM)/ genderqueer/gender variant	n=4 (7.5%)

Age (n+53)

18-24 years old	n= 8 (15%)
25-34 years old	n= 30 (57%)
35-44 years old	n= 10 (19%)
45-54 years old	n= 5 (9%)

Race (n=53)

Asian/white	n=19 (36%)
Black/white	n=12 (23%)
Latino/white	n=9 (17%)
More than three races	n=6 (11%)
Asian/black	n=5 (9%)
Black/Latino	n=2 (4%)

Racial identity (n=53)

Mixed Race	n=24 (45%)
Black	n=6 (11%)
Other ("Amerimutt" or "Mulatto" etc.)	n=6 (11%)
Biracial	n=5 (9%)
Multiracial	n=5 (9%)
Hapa	n=3 (6%)
Depends on the situation	n=2 (4%)
No identification	n=1 (2%)
Questioned the categories of race	n=1 (2%)

How participants were perceived by others (n=53)

    Perceived to be a race other than that with which
    they identify (e.g., Latino, Indian)   n=34(64%)
    Perceived to be only white   n=12 (23%)
    Perceived as the race they identify with   n=7 (13%)

Participant setting (n=53)

    Suburban   n= 34 (64%)
    Urban   n= 12 (23%)
    Rural   n= 5 (9%)
    Declined to answer   n= 2 (4%)

Region during childhood (n=53)

    Western United States   n=20 (38%)
    North Eastern United States   n=11 (21%)
    Mid-Atlantic United States   n= 8 (15%)
    Midwestern United States   n= 5 (9%)
    South Eastern United States   n= 3 (6%)
    Europe   n= 3 (6%)
    South Western United States   n= 1 (2%)
    Pacific Islands   n= 1 (2%)
    Africa   n= 1 (2%)

Racial demographics of participant's childhood community (n=53)

    Mostly white   n= 28 (53%)
    Racially mixed   n= 19 (36%)
    People of color, one race   n= 4 (8%)
    People of color, many races   n= 3 (6%)

Parent's income (n=53)

$150,000 and above	n= 6 (11%)
$150,000-$100,000	n=3 (7%)
$75,000-$100,000	n=8 (15%)
$75,000-$50,000	n=7 (13%)
$50,000-$40,000	n=10 (19%)
$40,000-$30,000	n=7 (13%)
$30,000-$20,000	n=7 (13%)
$20,000 and under	n=4 (8%)
Declined to answer	n=1 (2%)

Highest level of education (n=53)

Graduated from high school	n= 1 (2%)
Completed some college	n= 4 (8%)
Graduated from college	n= 17 (32%)
Completed some graduate school	n= 14 (26%)
Completed graduate school	n= 17 (32%)

The participants of this study were racially diverse representing six different multiracial categories. The participants in this study were also very diverse in terms of geographic location: participants were raised in nine different regions of the United States and world. The participants in this study were not diverse in gender, age, and income. The majority of participants were middle class women between the ages of 25 and 34.

Findings on Racial Socialization Practices

Over half of participants stated that their parents did not transmit any useful strategies for coping with race and racism. Looking at their responses, however, it became clear that their parents did, in fact, impart understandings and strategies of coping with race and racism. Responses indicated that no matter how parents tried to prepare their children for race and racism, whatever they did was not enough.

Some parents approached race, racism, and multiracial heritage directly by talking to their children directly about racism and the strengths of their multiracial and multicultural heritage. Other parents approached these topics in a less direct way by surrounding their children with people and activities that represented their views on race, racism, and multiracial heritage. Racial socialization spanned the whole gamut from parent/family intolerance to parents' proactive advocacy on behalf of their children. Some participants wrote that their parents embraced and acted out racial stereotypes in their family. Other participants wrote of their parents' denials of racism by promoting the idea that skin color, race, and racism do not exist. I will refer to this idea as displaying a *colorblind* attitude. Yet other participants wrote of the racial acceptance and role modeling provided by the diverse friend communities of their parents. Finally, some participants wrote of the proactive support and advocacy their parents provided.

In addition, a category of parents who did not understand racism but raised their children with general pride existed. This category differed from parents who promoted a colorblind attitude. These participants noted that though their parents did not give them the vocabulary or understanding of racism they desired, their parents raised them with a general sense of wellbeing. This sense of wellbeing allowed these participants to face racism effectively.

Additionally, at first glance, it appeared that there were stark divisions between parents who talked about race, racism, and multiracial heritage and those who did not. This was true of some parents. When looking more closely, however, it became apparent that many parents displayed an eclectic mix of openness in some areas and lack of communication in others. A Peruvian and white participant was emblematic of some of the complexities that came across in

this study. Despite hearing frequent racial slurs from her parents as a child, she was raised with a rich community with people of all races.

> Unintentionally, what I learned in my household is what overt and covert racism look like, and prejudice between people of color look like. All racial slurs were said at one point or another in my home as were all stereotypes discussed of people being lazy, thieves, overly sexual or sexual predators, "sucking off the government," illegal immigrants etc. I never, as a white-skinned person, had to question whether or not racism existed and whether people were judged as a result of their skin color. It was in my face. The flip side of this, which made for some confusion, was that parents both had friends from all over the world. They had a tremendous diversity in their social circle and I grew up knowing the sounds of different languages and music and the tastes of different kinds of foods.

This participant's experiences expressed the complexity exhibited in many of the participant's responses.

Embracing racial stereotypes. A handful of participants wrote about their parents unconsciously socializing them according to societal stereotypes. These parents, or extended family, embraced racial stereotypes or racially informed ideas of what American-ness includes. One participant of Chinese and white heritage wrote of her families' subtle messages of assimilation: "My mother (broadly "white") was talking about 'Americans' eating something a certain way, and my Chinese aunts were offended by this because the 'American' way was not theirs." Another participant of Chinese, Malaysian and white heritage wrote of his families' assumptions about assimilation:

My maternal extended family mostly views my father's participation in American culture

as one necessitating acculturation/assimilation…I knew the family's impression of his

assimilation as necessary by talking about the "Americanization of [his name]" jokingly

or not in his presence suggesting he should be a Christian "by now, he's been here long

enough," registering all sorts of discourse on nationalism and hegemony….The

discourses in the family, esp. with my father being a silent type, were dominated by the

cultural formations of whiteness, contributing to my early conceptualization of myself as

"white."

This participant later wrote about the effects that had on his openness with his parents:

If I experienced micro-aggressions, I often did not report them to my parents… I think

by race/racism being a silenced/taboo topic to discuss about in my home (I recall few

conversations about it), this detracted from my ability to involve my family in coping

with my own experiences of encountering racism as a child.

These participants' parents had family cultures that did not explore their racial difference but

rather emphasized assimilation to whiteness.

Parents and extended families also embraced racial stereotypes. Often, family members

would direct these stereotypes towards other people of color, claiming that their slurs excluded

their own children. Sometimes racial stereotypes were directed towards participants. One

participant of black and white heritage wrote about the stereotypes directed towards her by her

immediate and extended family:

My family was totally clueless about race and regularly made ridiculous statements about

me and black people in general, in my presence. My grandmother was the worst, saying

things like…my skin was brown but the palms of my hands and soles of my feet were

white because god didn't have enough white skin to make my whole body. One time she

touched my hair (I was in the 6th grade) and she was shocked that it didn't feel bristly.

My mom regularly made comments that sexualized black men. When I made efforts to

identify more with black folks my stepmother called me militant. My father regularly

called white men Opie and black men buckwheat. It was embarrassing to be black when

the rest of my family, including my older sister, was white. My older sister regularly

made up stories when I was a child about why my skin was brown and hers was not,

usually related to how I was dirty.

A participant of Mexican and white heritage wrote about how his skin tone played out in family

dynamics:

I have a younger sister who is the same skin tone as my father, which is substantially

darker than my mother and quite a bit darker than myself…I was the golden child…the

"better-ness of whiteness" was somehow reinforced in this dynamic. My father was

constantly proclaiming about the biased nature of the way my mom, her parents and

family, and others treated my sister and myself. My mom's side of the family (aunts, her

cousins, etc.) liked to say, "You resemble our side of the family and your sister more

resembles your father's side of the family". Keep in mind that at least physically, this is

only true about skin and hair tones not facial or other characteristics as my sister and I

look quite alike in those ways.

This participant received messages from his parents that his light skin was better than his sister

and father's darker skin. These parents were not transmitting adaptive coping strategies to their

children but rather passing on stereotypical ideas about people of color to their children.

Denying the existence of race and racism. Four participants wrote of their parents'
inabilities to acknowledge the effects of skin tone in American society. These parents embraced
a colorblind attitude: they claimed that they did not see skin color and that race and racism did
not exist. Despite denying the existence of race and racism many of these participants wrote of
their parents' ability to promote ethnic or multiracial pride. One participant of Asian and White
heritage wrote about her mother's colorblind attitude:

> My parents instilled that being multiracial is the "best of both worlds". My mother has
> always said she doesn't see race and never thought of she and my father as being a
> biracial couple. I disagree that my mom doesn't see race but they definitely had the
> attitude that being biracial was not a big deal.

A participant of Black and white heritage wrote of her family's commitment to the idea of
colorblindness despite stories to the contrary:

> I grew up in a single parent household with a white mother. I was not the only mixed kid
> in my generation, and my white family often talked about how they didn't see color and
> how they weren't racist. Those comments were positioned next to stories about family
> members who were furious that my mother was going to have a black baby and wanted
> nothing to do with me until I was born and challenged their racism by loving them and
> wanting to be close to them.

This participant went on to write about how her family's colorblind attitude affected their views
on racism as well, "My parents really didn't talk about racism and acted as though it was
something made up by black people, even though my daily realities provided a constant
contradiction to that belief."

General pride but no discussion of race. Twelve participants expressed the sentiment that although their parents did not have the language, knowledge, or understanding about race to talk to them about it, parents passed on the pride and self-worth needed in order to deal with experiences of race and racism. Just over half of these parents were immigrant parents. These participants of mentioned their parents did not talk about racism, yet they felt prepared to face racism because they their parents had instilled general pride and self esteem in them. These responses differed from the participants whose parents promoted a colorblind attitude. Here are some of their statements:

- My parents were able to point out the positive aspects of being multiracial and encouraged me to be proud of my background. What they did not understand or talk about at all was the difficult parts of being mixed race. I think because they did not fully understand it, it never occurred to them to talk about it.

- My parents are extremely loving people, and their support was imperative to being able to deal with a lot of the racism I have experienced throughout my life, however, I think my identity realization came much later than for many other people of color because of their confusion/denial of my status as a person of color

- I do not feel that my parents prepared me to deal with racism in particular. They did instill self-worth in general and an understanding of our Japanese American culture and history.

- They did not teach me directly. My dad taught me to stick up for myself and never allow someone to hurt me, but this was not specific to racism.

- Honestly, I don't think that they did, other than being basically supportive and caring parents who raised me to have self-esteem and psychological resilience.

42

- While not specifically intended for resilience against racism, I do also feel that my parents gave me the tools to be a self-aware and confident person. My upbringing was in many ways alternative, diverse and liberal and did give me some of the tools to work through racism on my own, or at least to be comfortable not fitting into mainstream society.

- Having a strong, loving home helped me deal with challenges in general, not specifically related to race. My family also values humor and a healthy dose of self deprecation, which I think keeps me from feeling offended by what others might perceive as racial insensitivity.

- They raised me with a sense of confidence in myself, but I don't think this was particularly related to race.

All of these parents gave their children skills to deal with race and racism without talking directly about race and racism with their children.

Teaching about racism. Fifteen participants wrote that their parents spoke to them directly about racism and tried to teach them about the racial discrimination they would face. Some parents taught their children directly about racial oppression and others taught their children by sharing their own experiences with race and racism. This participant of Peruvian, Native, and white heritage was taught about how racism functions in society:

Basically they said race was either something you claim or something people put on you, and the two things don't always match. I was just told to ignore individual acts of racism as ignorance, but we talked a lot about institutional racism, mostly through the lens of class (my parents are Marxists).

Another participant understood her own struggle as a black and white individual through stories of her mother, who was also of black and white heritage.

> My mom shared a lot of stories about her own experiences of being alienated or discriminated against as a multiracial child in the 70s. She knew it was unfair and didn't excuse it, but wanted me to be aware that those same things could also happen to me.

Another participant of black and white heritage felt that her parents were naïve to her experiences; however, the openness to racial dialogue she described is striking.

> If I recall correctly, my parents talked about being biracial often when I was in grade school. It was made clear to me, by them (particularly my dad) that others would think that I wasn't white enough or black enough. People did stare at our family and they both would communicate to us why this would occur. …Dad also made it a point to always make sure that we identified as biracial (both black and white). He made it clear that denying our "white" side was denying my mom. I understand his view, but have some resentment because I feel that how I identify should be my decision. I felt a little forced into his view. Dad was always insistent that we should not identify solely as black just because society expected us to. I think it was in 3rd grade that I was first called a nigger. I was called this by a boy in my neighborhood. This incident ignited a lot of conversation in my family. I could not understand that if I was to identify as biracial, then why was I called this? Looking back, my family was really naïve to the social realities that we experienced.

Another participant of black and white heritage alluded to some of the effects on her of her parents frequent conversations about racism, "I think my parents made me hyperaware of racism,

and from a pretty young age I was able to see it in a lot of places my peers didn't, which made me a pretty angry kid."

Promoting racial pride. Seventeen parents promoted racial pride in either their children's multiracial heritage or in their individual constituent heritages. Here are parents' varying responses: "As a child, I know my parents told us that we has so many places of heritage. Our family was "like the U.N." and they used that as a strength"; "My mother is more liberal and tolerant in terms of racial attitudes but gave me the message growing up that being multiracial is "cool" and "trendy""; and "They both made me feel that I was BOTH races, that I had a special viewpoint." These parents promoted the idea that their children were stronger because they were multiracial.

Parents also encouraged their children to understand and celebrate the strengths of one or more of their children's heritages. Multiple participants of black and white heritage wrote about their parents meeting during the civil rights movement. Therefore, the history of the civil rights movement was central to teaching their children about black pride. This participant's parents raised him to understand the history of the civil rights movement: "We talked a lot about black history and pride and my mother's time as a supporter of the panthers in the sixties. And again, not so blatantly, but taught to be proud in general of who we were." This participant of Japanese and white heritage learned her father's language and the history of Japan:

> I was required to go to Japanese Language School…We did many Japanese things, however, it was more my mom (who is white) pushing it as opposed to   my dad…It was a conscious effort on their part to raise us thinking about our Japanese and American identities…Also, random side note, my mom required that on Memorial Day that I bring in the names of people in my family who had served in the army and died-- they were all

45

Japanese and fought for the Japanese side in WW2. Looking back, it seems like a good idea to challenge who we are memorializing, but I was absolutely mortified at the time. A participant of Filipino and Italian heritage was raised with cultural traditions and languages from both sides of her family. She was able to see her parents adopting languages and traditions from each other's culture.

My parents made being mixed really easy - by having rice and garlic bread at the dinner table, or when my dad [Italian] would speak Tagalog, or when my mom [Filipino] would tell me about how she first tried to make meatballs with soy sauce until my dad's sister gave her a family recipe. For me, my parents embodied (and still embody) the perfect mix of being white and Asian. They make an effort to meet in the middle all the time and it made it very easy for me to be comfortable in my own skin…Watching my own parents incorporating elements of each other's culture in their own identity, I felt very comfortable knowing that I was both white and Filipino. They raised me to think that I wouldn't be me unless I had both sides of my family. They never sat me down to talk about my culture, but they always encouraged me to explore it. My parents encouraged me to learn Tinikling - official dance of the Philippines. But they taught me how to make pasta from scratch.

A participant of Filipino and black heritage who was often seen as "only" black was encouraged to explore her less visible Filipino heritage by her parents, "they taught me to be proud and I visited the Philippines frequently and enjoyed Filipino food." Another participant of black and white heritage celebrated holidays from both sides of her family, "My dad raised me really proud to be black. Growing up we celebrated Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa. It was pretty

awesome." These parents promoted racial pride through direct messages or through celebrating the cultural strengths of their racial heritage.

Modeling racial diversity. Five participants had parents who did not talk about race, racism or cultural pride directly, but instead put their children, either intentionally or unintentionally in racially and culturally diverse environments. Seeing people who looked like them often added to these participants sense of belonging. One black and white participant's mother moved her from their small town in the Midwest to New York City so they would be around more diversity. Another participant of African American and Puerto Rican heritage wrote of her family's friends, "I think my family included and accepted all races so I feel I was immersed in multiculturalism from early on and never really realized it because no one spoke about it."

Proactive support. Three participants wrote of their parent's advocacy on their behalf in situations where they faced racial discrimination. Their parents also took active steps to make their children feel comfortable with their multiracial heritage and advocated for their children without their prompting. One participant of black and white heritage wrote of her mother's attempts to surround her with multiracial community and role models:

> I think my mom did a good job of making me feel normal. She bought me books about
> multicultural families, and we went to some events by a [group for multiracial people],
> which was centered around multiracial people and families. I think I liked those
> workshops, though I might have felt vaguely embarrassed by the concept (but then, I was
> embarrassed about almost everything).

47

Another participant of black and white heritage wrote about her mother's anticipation of potential discrimination. This parent was aware of, and drew attention to, racial dynamics that her daughter was not yet aware of:

> I'm sure we probably had conversations about these things - my mom's pretty wonderful at talking about awkward things with children. Likely there were subtle ways of approaching life that were just built into how we were taught to view our selves and the world around us from the beginning…I had to test into the advanced program I was in for middle school, and since I am the youngest and none of my older sisters had qualified for the program, my mom and I toured the new school to decide whether or not I'd enroll. I remember her pointing out to me that there were pretty much only white kids in the classes we peeked in on. I hadn't noticed - it wasn't the kind of thing I paid attention to when I was 10.

A third participant of black and white heritage wrote of her parent's advocacy when she had race related incident at a summer camp.

> As a teenager, I participated in a human relations camp run by [a national nonprofit]. There we broke into racial affinity groups, and there was no option for mixed-race people. We were just told to choose. My first year I went with the black group, but since I did not have a good experience, when I returned for Youth Leadership Training, I joined the white group. My experience there was even worse, and I was told I could not be a youth leader at the camp the following due to my "racial issues." At this point my parents stepped in and complained, and [this nonprofit organization] wound up introducing a multiracial group and was soon followed by [this nonprofit's] branches across the country.

These parents knew what their children needed and sought it out for them.

Parental Experiences

Eighteen participants expressed that their own experiences with racism reflected back to their parents and their parents' own experiences with race and racism. Monoracial minority, white, and multiracial parents all passed on their own conceptions of race and racism to their children. Immigrant parents imported race/racial conceptions from their home country that were drastically different than American conceptions of race and racism. American born parents, from the rural south, for example, transposed the racial experiences from their unique geographic location onto their children.

As one Chinese and white participant wrote, "I think my biggest struggles have been around my identity, and my parents did not prepare me to think about this. I'm not sure they are good with thinking about their own identity. How could they do for me what they could not do for themselves?"

Challenging identity choices. Ten participants wrote about the difficulty of choosing their own identities because their identity choices had consequences for their parents. One participant of black and white heritage wrote of her difficulty in choosing a mixed identity:

> I always felt like my parents, particularly my mom, were trying to emphasize my black heritage over my white heritage….I wish I had felt that asserting a mixed- race identity was OK as a child. I think I was thwarted by my mother's desire to prove herself as a competent parent of "black" children.

Another participant of black and white heritage was pushed by her parents to identify as black:

> I wish we had talked about [being multiracial], but I think generationally, they eschewed the "tragic mulatto" myth and instead raised us to identify as black and the

struggles that black identified people face. But they did often talk about what it was like

for them as multi-racial high school sweethearts in the sixties.

Parents were invested in their children having a monoracial black identity and were unable to

promote a mixed identity because of their own experiences of race and racism.

Other parents dissuaded participants against having a monoracial minority identity (e. g.,

Latina or black) because their parents saw people of color as inferior to white people. This

occurred with darker skinned participants, as well as, lighter skinned participants who could pass

as white. A black and white participant was dissuaded from having a black identity because her

parents believed their children were "rainbow babies [who] reflected the free-thinking, idealistic

values" of the 60's. She was raised to believe that "being black was a bad thing." This

participant had to leave her birth parents to go to Ohio to explore her black identity with her

paternal grandparents:

> While the time I spent with my paternal grandmother in Ohio was damaging to the
>
> relationship I had with my parents who were in California, …. the time there still helped
>
> to assure I had a place in the black community by giving me black experiences: I ate
>
> "black food", attended "black church", lived in a "black neighborhood." …I look back
>
> fondly on all of those experiences and believe that had I stayed in LA with my mother
>
> and father, I would not be the same person I am today: a powerful, intelligent,
>
> progressive-thinking, beautiful black woman--who's mama just so happens to be white.

A participant of Latina and white heritage wrote:

> My [white] mother in particular was very angry when I would speak of my
>
> Peruvian heritage and say it was "stupid" if I wanted to join a Latino organization or
>
> when I wrote poetry about my mixed heritage. She would ask me why I kept rejecting my

whiteness... Over time, my mother felt less like my embracing my mixed heritage was a

personal affront against her and came to celebrate it with me. But it definitely took some

time.

Later in her interview this participant wrote: "thank God for my stubbornness" because

embracing a Latina heritage turned out to have such a positive influence in her life.

Parents appeared invested in a certain ideas of what would keep their children safe and happy.

These ideas were based less on what children wanted and more on their own experiences with

race or racism.

Another participant of black and white heritage was asked to shun her black identity, she

believed, because of her black father's internalized racism and her mother's racism:

My father (who is black) suffered internalized racism and hated being black. He kept us

in white neighborhoods and schools and forbade us to have black boyfriends…I used to

deny that I was black… My parents added to my internalized racism and did not prepare

me for dealing with racism.

Based on her experience, this participant attempted to give her children something different than

she had gotten from her parents:

When I was 28 I took an African History class and was instantly transformed. I

switched my major from English to African American Studies and voraciously read

everything about our past. This gave me pride and self-respect. I adopted an Afrocentric

perspective, which ostracized me from my siblings and parents. I did not care. I racially

socialized my children to embrace their 1/4 black, 1/4 white, 1/2 Latino heritage.

Silence. Four parents did not talk to their children race or culture because of painful

experiences they had had around their racial heritage. One Korean and white participant wrote:

[my mother's] experiences of growing up in Korea were marred by the Korean War and the extreme difficulty of growing up in post-war Korea. She didn't talk much about her childhood there, happy memories or experiences. It was all a blank. I think moving to America was her way of cutting herself off from painful aspects of her own Korean heritage, which I think I picked up unconsciously, too...I learned from them, in an unconscious way, that the only way for me to deal with my mixed-race identity growing up during the time in America that I did, was to ignore it.

Because of her mother's silence about Korean culture this participant "shunned the Asian part of [her] identity (to the degree that [she] could)."

A Japanese and white participant wrote about her family's silence about her racial heritage and the effects it had on her identity development:

I think my identity realization came much later than for many other people of color because of their confusion/denial of my status as a person of color. I mean, how can you identify as a person of color if you're mom won't even acknowledge that you are a person of color?

This participant's father broke with his usual silence about race to share a story of his painful past:

After 9/11, I remember my dad pulling me aside and sitting me down for our one conversation about race. I remember him saying 'The last time the United States was attacked was by the Japanese in WW2, you need to be really careful and lay low for the next little while because people will be reminded of that time and be angry at you just to be angry at someone.

A multiracial mother (of black and white heritage) refrained from talking to her multiracial daughter (also of black and white heritage on both sides) because of her own painful experiences:

> [race] was not discussed as much as I think it should have been. I wasn't prepared for how the world would treat or face me, and i wonder if that was her form of protection for herself as well. My mother is even lighter than I am and so had many more assumptions made about her due to her skin color.

Despite sharing similar racial experiences, this parent could not talk to her child about race and racism.

Helpful parental experiences. Three participants wrote that their parents shared stories that added to their understandings of themselves. One black and white participant wrote about how her parents helped her think about race and racism.

> Because both of my parents were also multiracial I never had issues with my race around them. However my mother (who I was mostly raised by) was very open and honest about difficulties she had growing up as a "high yellow" and racist tendencies towards us by white neighbors. I think my mom just wanted me to recognize that I was different and prepare me for any hardships I may face because of that. If I ever felt effects of being multiracial (who to date, what music to listen to, etc.) she would be open to share her own similar stories. She didn't want me to feel like I had to choose (especially since both of my parents are multiracial) and she wanted me to feel comfortable no matter what. I do think though that she grew up feeling alienated by both races so she was happy to see I had friends from both races myself…Listening to my mother's own stories helped me recognize I wasn't alone.

Another participant of Chinese and white heritage who viewed herself as white grew from hearing a story of her father's past.

> My dad mentioned a story about how he was in a car accident in the 1970s and the man that hit him was trying to get the cops to say it was my dad's fault because he is Asian. I remember that story taking me back and actually making me feel a bit more close to my Chinese side.

In these cases, parental experiences helped children more deeply explore their multiracial identity.

Gifts of Being Multiracial

Fifteen participants expressed having unique knowledge and strength as a result of having multiracial heritage. Participants spoke of their abilities to perceive the mechanisms of oppression, understand divergent viewpoints, connect to a diversity of people and gain acceptance in many social spheres. Participants wrote that their multiracial heritage made them stronger.

Participants wrote that their multiracial heritage allowed them to sympathize with oppressed people. One participant of black and white heritage wrote:

> Honestly I think I'm just stubborn, and I refuse to be put into a box. I will not "act white" or "act black". Above all I will not pretend I am viewed any differently or better by racists - people who hate black people do not accept me because I am mixed - to them I am just as black. These experiences help me identify and sympathize even more with people who experience discrimination based on religion or sexuality.

Another participant of Japanese and white heritage wrote, "I feel as though I have experienced a wide range of racial and ethnic slurs and stereotypes, allowing me to be able to relate with a

variety of individuals." Participants were able to adapt their own experiences of being unfairly categorized or discriminated against to relate to other people.

Two participants wrote about how their multiracial heritage served as an asset in today's globalized world. Having ones' feet in multiple worlds provided a richness of opportunity, experience and cultural competence that monoracial people did not have access to. One participant of black and white heritage wrote: "What I realize now is that I am uniquely created; that in a diverse world my racial identity serves a purpose. It means that I have the ability to move across social lines that others would rarely be exposed to."

Another participant wrote specifically of her ability to hold multiple realities that were only open to her because of her multiracial heritage.

> I'm in the middle of white and black, genetically, in my family, and when I leave my home. I've been able to sit with anger people of color face, and understand the privilege and ignorance that exists among white people. This has been confusing in terms of my racial identify, but has given me a unique kind of knowledge. I am the both and.

Being multiracial allowed her to people to sit with multiple very different life points of view at once.

For some participants their multiracial heritage gave them an increased desire to seek out, understand, and connect with other cultures. A Filipino and white participant wrote: "I feel that being multiracial has allowed me to embrace both cultures and has enhanced my curiosity with learning other cultures. Being multicultural has allowed me to be flexible and adaptable with other cultures." In the case of another participant, her multiracial heritage caused her to travel to her father's birth country, Peru. This allowed her to understand how narrow the conceptions of race of people in the United States are.

In Peru race is more malleable, very much tied up with class and language as much if not more than how you look…I think I get frustrated when Americans have such limited views on race…I went out into the world and found so many people who thought of race as a visual, physical, complete identity…. people from the US think about race so narrowly, so the more different viewpoints I surround myself with the more I can understand the nuances. I don't struggle with my identity so much as struggle with others' perceptions of and questions about it.

This participant's broader perspective on United States racial relations helped her put the others' racial assumptions of her in a global context.

Many participants saw their multiracial heritage as allowing them to see untruths that others could not. These participants could see inequities that many people in the Unites States just accepted normal. One participant wrote:

I don't know why I was given the gift of sight at such an early age. It was not due to any direct instruction given by my parents. I don't know why at 9 and 10 I understood white privilege…….Honestly, I believe it is a gift from God, my ability to be compassionate, understanding, and less judgmental (I don't want to pretend I am free of judgment) and my ability to see truth through layers of lies.

Another participant wrote that being multiracial helped her understand how fictitious categories of race are.

I'm incredibly aware of how fluid racial identity is. I am also aware of socialized racial identity is and how it is not biologically real. My racial identity changes from person to person because so much of it is dependent on how the other person views me…So yes. I do feel as though I have developed a certain amount of resilience into my own identity.

Multiracial heritage helped these individuals understand oppression. In doing so these individuals could connect to a broader humanity. In many cases this understanding also helped participants depersonalize racial slurs and inaccurate racial categorization.

One participant described his keen awareness of racial categories at a young age. He described "acting race" rather than his race being a fixed category that was biologically determined. As a child, this participant tried on different racial stereotypes at different times in order to make friends.

> I learned to play the black card (giving fake angry black man speeches about indignities I was experiencing, teaching them how to dance, being teased for being a fast runner because of my people's fast twitch muscles, etc.) while with my white friends, but it was my secret way of reminding them what they would rather ignore.

Rather than taking racial stereotypes personally this participant was able to play with them, knowing that these stereotypes were more about the perceiver than the perceived.

Through out this study, many participants expressed joy about their multiracial status. Many saw their heritage and multiracial upbringing as making them into more accepting and compassionate people. One participant, however, described her multiracial heritage, and the gifts, confusion and marginalization that came with it, came with a price:

> I move through the world always as an outsider, always on the edge, never fitting into any group. I'm an outsider in thinking as well. I'm the one who always disagrees, who always sees things from a different point of view. It's this outsider status that gives me insight that allows me to see things about society that others can't see. I imagine that it would be nice to feel like I was part of a some kind of clear ethnic group, but I also value my outsider status. I have even noticed that I begin to feel nervous and uncomfortable if

I start to feel like I'm becoming part of a group. I don't trust groups. I don't trust

groupthink. I value my independence. I value the ability to have my own thoughts

separate from the group's thoughts. I tend to only trust people who I develop friendships

with one on one. Can this be called resilience? I'm not sure. I have found ways to use

this outsider status to my advantage, but it has come at a cost.

This participant seemed dubious whether insight about race, and having a different point of view

was truly worth it.

Other Findings

Most of the data collected, but not explored in depth in the findings section, regarded

experiences of racism and monoracism. Many participants wrote about their experiences of

racism. Participants wrote about being called the N word, being followed around in stores and

watched for shop lifting, being threatened after 9-11, being threatened physically by men, and

receiving substandard treatment in restaurants, hospitals, school situations, and with friends.

Similarly, participants commented on their experiences of monoracism. Participants

wrote of being excluded from social groups because they were multiracial, being called Oreo and

mutts, being accused of not being white, Asian, or black "enough." One participant wrote about

a particularly striking experience of monoracism with medical consequences. "My brother and I

were excluded from being tested for sickle cell anemia because we were not 'all black' we found

out years later that my brother was in fact a carrier of the trait." Other participants wrote about

being on the receiving end of both black and white people's anger. One participant wrote of an

extreme example of monoracist violence:

I also came very close to being raped when I was traveling through Jamaica during a

study abroad trip (I've never been happier to have my period!). I trusted a man I never

58

should have, and he held me by the neck all night even though he was grossed out I was

on my cycle. He made an issue of me being half-white; he even said something about

that's why I was evil.   I've had black folk's anger at white people surface toward me

sometimes, in that way.

These participants were the targets of stereotypes and discrimination specifically because they

were multiracial.

Another theme that wove in and out of participants' comments was how geographic

location affects race and racism. The participants of this study came from diverse backgrounds

and lived in many different regions of the United States and many different countries.

Participants wrote about differencing experiences of race in France, Asia, and also in the

southern United States. Multiple participants stated that being in large urban areas such as Los

Angeles, San Francisco or New York City added to their sense of normalcy because all of their

friends were multiracial. Others, who grew up in more rural areas or areas in the southern

United States, were the targets of more racial discrimination.

Similarly, participants' experiences varied greatly depending on their skin tone and

phenotype. There were 53 participants and these participants had drastically varying experiences

of race and racism due to their phenotype. Participants who were light skinned and could "pass"

as white often struggled with proving that they were not white. Other, darker-skinned

participants struggled with racism and racial stereotypes. These stereotypes depended on their

physical features and what race they were perceived by others as belonging to.

Understanding all the participants' comments is vital for understanding the multiracial

experience. However, because the focus of this study was on racial socialization, I will leave

racism, monoracism, and geographic and phenotypic differences to other researchers or for later

studies.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The intent of this qualitative study to explore how parents helped multiracial individuals cope, if they did, with the realities of racial categories and racism. Participants in this study described many aspects of their multiracial experience: racism, monoracism, racial socialization, and multiracial strength. In this discussion I will explore the data, compare it to previous literature, and point out areas for further research. I will then examine the limitations of the study. Lastly, I will look at implications for social workers, researchers, and parents.

Racial Socialization

Participants wrote about how their parents handled racial socialization (or how they did not) in a variety of ways: by embracing racial stereotypes, denying the existence of race and racism, teaching about racism, promoting racial pride, modeling racial diversity, proactive support and general pride but no discussion of race. These findings showed the similarities between the ways that monoracial, and multiracial parents handle racial socialization. This study confirmed monoracial racial socialization literature (Hughes & Deborah, 2001; Neblett et al., 2012). This study also supports findings in transracial adoption literature (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008). The multiracial participants in this study share both aspects of the monoracial and transracial adoption racial socialization experience.

This study differs from other studies in that there were subtle differences in the way participants wrote about parents who deny the existence of race and racism and parents who support their children with general pride but no discussion of race. The participants who wrote

about their parents' denials of race and racism implied that their parents negated their reality of the world as a racialized place. These participants talked to their parents about racism only to have their parents downplay and deny the centrality of race. On the other hand, the participants who wrote about their parents giving them general pride but no discussion of race implied that their parents were supportive yet lacked the language and understanding of racism. Many of these parents were immigrant parents who were new to the United States and potentially new to American conceptions of racial stratification. More research should be done to understand the differences between these two categories of parents to ascertain whether their differences construct a true distinction.

In this study parents of color and white parents appeared to racially socialize their children at equal rates. Transracial adoption literature has suggested that white parents are less equipped to proactively and reactively socialize their children than parents of color (Andujo, 1988; Lee & Quintana, 2005). In this study, parents of color had more experiences of racism and had a lived experience cultural difference, but this knowledge did not appear to translate to higher levels of proactive or reactive racial socialization. Often white parents led the family in advocating for their multiracial children. Do white multiracial parents differ from white transracial adoptee parents because their exposure to people of color and racism is higher? Parent race and racial socialization should be studied in more depth to see if and why white parents and parents of color really do socialize their children at similar rates or if this finding is merely a factor of small sample size.

Parental Experiences

Participants expressed that their own experiences with racism reflected back to their parents and their parents' experiences with race and racism. The parents of these participants

either consciously or unconsciously transmitted their personal histories of race and racism on to their children through their racial socialization practices. Some parents wanted to protect their children from the same pain they had faced by pushing them to make different choices than they had. Others parents could not talk about race and racism because they appeared to want to forget their own pain. Yet other parents found ways to use their personal histories with racism to educate and connect with their children.

Findings on parental experiences raise questions about the nature of racism. Is racism like any other trauma? Can racist trauma and coping strategies be transmitted from one generation to the next?

Parental experiences in racial socialization are not reflected in any of the multiracial studies or racial social literature. There is, however, literature that explores racism as cultural trauma. Gump (2010) researched how racial experiences are transmitted from one generation to the next. She explored how America's history of racism has affected the subjectivity of African American individuals. Specifically, Gump focused on intergenerational transmission of trauma due to African American enslavement. Slavery "evoked the core intra psychic experiences of helplessness, shame and rage" (p. 46) and these experiences were passed from one generation to the next of African American children.

> Though slavery was abolished, its effects endure through the intergenerational
> transmission of traumas it perpetrated, ad the organizing principles it bequeathed.
> Subjectivity was bequeathed, ultimately, by the subjectivity of those to whom we first
> relate, which is in turn was determined by those to whom they related, giving subjectivity
> an historical and cultural determinacy. But if we must go back to understand the present,

63

so too must we recognize that, without intervention, the past will assuredly be manifest in the future. (Gump, 2010, p. 52)

Lowe, Okubo, and Reilly (2012) focused on the effects everyday cultural racism has on its recipients and also on future generations. "Racism engenders responses that are similar to classical symptoms of trauma" (p. 194). They wrote that people who experience racism often exhibit symptoms

similar to trauma responses as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text rev.; DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) [such as]...psychological arousal, avoidance of the places or people related to the race-based injury, inability to recall aspects of the trauma, detachment, estrangement from others, restricted affect, anger and hypervigilance. (p. 195)

Other people experience "more severe trauma symptoms, such as depression, guilt, and flashbacks, whereas others experience avoidance symptoms" (p. 195). Both trauma responses from racist events and coping strategies can be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Gump (2010) and Lowe et al. (2012) have given us one explanation for understanding why the parents in this study passed on their experiences with race to their children. Perhaps racism is a form of collective trauma that people of color face and have trauma responses to. And perhaps, just like any other trauma, reactions to racism are passed down from one generation to the next.

Gifts of Being Multiracial

Participants expressed having unique knowledge and strength as a result of having multiracial heritage. Participants spoke of their abilities to perceive the mechanisms of oppression, understand divergent viewpoints, connect to a diversity of people and gain

acceptance in many social spheres. Participants wrote that their multiracial heritage made them stronger. These findings suggest that participants are aware that they are marginalized but can see the positive aspects this marginalization has given them. These individuals have enough resilience and can hold enough complexity to realize their strength despite difficulties. Strength in the face of marginality is not explored in the literature. More research should be completed in order to understand the how marginalized individuals find strength despite adversity.

Limitations

This study was limited by its methodology. Though an online qualitative method was helpful in gathering information from a large sample size of racial and geographic diversity, this methodology had its limitations. Because it was an online, anonymous questionnaire, this method did not provide me an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to get a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.

Additionally, this data were limited by whom, in terms of social relationship, I asked to participate in the study. Because I chose to study adult children, rather than parents, I chose to study only half of the story. This study is not representative of what a parent was actually thinking or what actually motivated them during the racial socialization process. This study only examined what adult children thought about their experiences with their parents. Further study including parents would be helpful to get fuller understanding about the forces at play with racial socialization.

Age, class, and gender diversity were not achieved in the findings. Lack of age and class diversity can be accounted for by the recruitment methods. This survey was circulated in majority educational settings that are attended by a wealthier cross-section of the population than average. In terms of age diversity, using Facebook and email as a primary mode of recruitment

ensured that younger, Facebook savvy participants were recruited. Additionally, the main recruitment sources were social workers, social worker affiliates, and multiracial activists. Therefore, study participants were likely people had more interest, language, and sensitivity to issues of race and racism than the general population.

Lack of gender diversity in my participants cannot be fully accounted for. Social workers are largely female and recruiting from social workers and allies could have influenced participants' genders. Additionally, other multiracial researchers have commented on the lack of gender diversity at mixed race theory conferences and in other multiracial spaces (J. Hubbard, personal communication, November, 2, 2012). It could be that the lack of gender diversity is a phenomenon that is larger than this study.

By choosing people who identify as multiracial, mixed, or biracial, people who have multiracial heritage but do not identify as multiracial, mixed race, or biracial were largely excluded. For example, a person of black/white heritage can choose to identify as black, white, or multiracial. Roquemore and Brunsma (2002) found that people of mixed black/white heritage choose to identify as follows: singular identity (black), 13.1%; singular identity (white), 3.6%; neither black nor white but both 61.3%; sometimes black, sometimes white, sometimes multiracial, 4.8%; no racial identity, 13.1% (p. 345). By looking only at people who identify as multiracial people who have multiracial heritage but choose a different racial identity were largely excluded.

. **Implications for Social Workers, Researchers and Parents**

This study provides several noteworthy implications for clinicians and parents of multiracial individuals. First, and most broadly, the participants of this study shared a diversity of stories that complicate notions of race. Racial categories are invented social categories and

66

multiracial individuals are proof that these categories are fluid and socially constructed. Hopefully clinicians, parents and researchers can take these stories to heart as they continue in their work, parenting and research.

Race may be socially constructed, but the effect race has on multiracial individuals is very real. Clinicians and parents should be aware of monoracism and its effects on multiracial individuals. American society has bounded, singular racial categories and people who do not fall clearly into one racial category are constantly pushed into one. These distinct racial categories all come with requisite stereotypes that individuals must adhere to. Clinicians and parents can start by letting multiracial individuals decide how they want to identify racially. Clinicians can counter monoracist narratives by having good racial etiquette and not asking a person, "What are you?" or pushing a client behave in a way that is more "typical" of their race. Every time these desires come up to categorize a person, one can ask, "Why do I need to categorize this person and what effect does it have on them?" As clinicians, parents and researchers, we can examine our need to place people in rigid racial categories.

Additionally, conceptualizing racism in a similar light as other traumas could be a helpful framework for clinicians and researchers to explore. Parents pass down their experiences with race and racism to their children. Some parents pass down denial or anger to their children. Other parents, of all races, have passed down powerful racial socialization strategies. Just as any other trauma, or coping strategy, reactions to racism appear to be intergenerational.

Additionally, awareness that there may be a difference between parents who deny the effects of racism and those who do not have the language for racism could be helpful. It could be especially helpful for clinicians doing family therapy. Understanding why a parent does not

talk about race could mean the difference between exploring a traumatic, race related event and teaching an immigrant family member about race and racism in the United States.

Lastly, this study provides for the possibility that parents of all races have the potential to provide racial socialization. This study shows that people of color can be affected by internalized racism in ways that prevent them from racially socializing their children in proactive ways. This study also shows that white parents can be fierce advocates for their children around issues of race and racism. Let these participants' stories guide what all white parents can provide for their multiracial children.

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Appendix A: Human Subjects Committee Approval Letter Approval Letter

![Smith College logo] SMITH COLLEGE

School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950   F (413) 585-7994

January 12, 2013

Chloe Jhangiani

Dear Chloe,

You have done a very nice and complete job in responding to all the Committee's concerns and requests. We thank you. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Happy New Year and good luck with your study!

Sincerely,

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mary Beth Averill, Research Advisor

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear (insert group here),

My name is Chloe Jhangiani and I am a second year master's social work student conducting research for my thesis at Smith College School for Social Work. I am recruiting *multiracial* adults with racial heritage from two or more racial groups to participate on a study about how their parents approached race and racism when they were children. Through this study, I hope to better understand how multiracial individuals are helped to cope with the stressors of being a multiracial individual. My hope is that this research can help inform parents, clinicians, and educators on the complexities of the multiracial experience.

The study takes approximately 20-30 minutes and involves answering a series of questions on a secure online survey site. Answers to the survey questions are anonymous. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time until you submit the survey. This study has been approved by the Smith College School for Social work Human Subjects Review Committee.

If you are interested please click on the link: [add it here]. Also, please feel free to share this link with other students or organizations you think might have interest in participating. Please email me at multiracialsurvey@gmail.com if you have any questions regarding participation or the survey itself.

Thank you for your interest and participation,

Chloe Jhangiani
Smith College School for Social Work Student

Appendix C: Screening Tools

You are being asked to about experiences of race as a child. In order to qualify for this study you

must meet two criteria.

1. Do you identify as multiracial, mixed-race, or biracial?

2. Are you older than 18 years of age?

If you meet these criteria and would like to participate, please proceed to the next page. If you

do not meet the criteria or do not want to participate, thank you for your time and interest.

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Chloe Jhangiani and I am a social work student from the Smith College School for Social Work. This study is a part of research I am conducting on the messages multiracial adults received from their parents about race as children. I am carrying out this research to greater understand racial socialization in multiracial families. This data will be used for my master's thesis, and possible presentation and publication.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify yourself as *multiracial* and are over the age of 18. To participate in this study you will complete a 20-30 minute online survey. In this survey I will ask you questions for personal information (e.g., race, age, gender) and also questions about your experiences with race as a child.

By participating in this study you will be able to share your unique experience as a multiracial adult. You will be able to explore how your parents did or did not prepare you for dealing with race and racism. By sharing, you will be contributing to the relatively unresearched field of multiracial parenting. These results may help clinicians, educators, and parents understand the struggles and strengths of multiracial people. There are minimal risks for participation in this study; however, some questions related to race, racism, and parenting may cause you emotional distress. Questions may bring up painful memories. If you wish to talk to a mental health provider or seek out resources for multiracial individuals, please see the list of resources provided at the end of this letter. There will be no financial compensation for this study.

For this study you will be filling out an anonymous questionnaire administered through Fluidsurveys. This survey software does not collect any names, e-mail addresses or IP addresses. Your answers will be connected to a code number. In this way anonymity will be a guaranteed. I will be unaware of the identity of anyone who participates. Please do not use your name or any other identifying information to answer any of the open-ended questions. If there is any identifying information included in the open-ended responses, I will remove names or place names that could potentially reveal your or anyone else's identity. The answers to your questions will be kept on www.fluidsurvey.com a website that is firewalled, password-protected, and encrypted until the survey is closed. After that point it will be kept on a password protected computer. When it is no longer needed, it will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw at any time during the study. You may skip any question, but once a survey is submitted, the data cannot be withdrawn from the study due to the anonymous nature of the study. In order for your answers to be used for my research you must complete all of the personal information and more than 50% of the open-ended questions. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or any other aspects of the study, please email me at multiracialresearch@gmail.com or the chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Chloe Jhangiani,
Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA
multiracialresearch@gmail.com

BY CHECKING "I AGREE" BELOW YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THS STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Please print a copy of this form for your records.

If you are experiencing distress as a result of this study, please refer to the following websites to find a therapist:

http://www.helppro.com/

http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/therapist_results.asp?c1=64137

http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/

If you wish to find multiracial resources and education please refer to the following websites:

http://www.mavinfoundation.org/new/

http://www.swirlinc.org/

Appendix E: Survey Instruments

Demographic Questions:

1. Age? (dropdown; 18-24 , 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 or above, prefer not to answer)

2. Gender? (dropdown: female, male, transgendered (MtF or FtM)/genderqueer/gender variant, prefer not to answer)

3. What is your parent's approximate yearly personal income? (dropdown: $0-$19,999, $20,000-$29,999, $30,000-$39,999, $40,000-$49,999, $50,000-$59,999, $60,000-$69,999, $70,000-$79,999, $80,000-$89,999, $90,000-$99,999, $100,000 and above)

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (dropdown: Did not attend school, elementary school, completed some High School, graduated from High School, completed some college, graduated from college, completed some graduate school, graduated from graduate school.)

5. How you identify racially? (For example: Black, Mixed, Desi, etc.) (open ended)

6. What race/s and nationality/s is your mother? (open ended)

7. What race/s and nationality/s is your father? (open ended)

8. Do other people generally think you are a race other than you identify as? If so what race or races? (open ended)

9. Where were you raised? (open ended)

10. What was the community of your childhood like? (multiple choice: rural, suburban and urban)

11. What was the community of your childhood like racially? (Please specify what race/races you grew up with.) (multiple choice: mostly white; mostly people of color, one race; mostly people of color, many races; racially mixed)

Survey Questions:

12. How were you treated by <u>friends, schoolmates and strangers</u> regarding your race while growing up?

Please write any examples of interactions with <u>friends, schoolmates or strangers</u> that made you think about your race in a particular way.   open ended)

13. How were you treated by <u>your family</u> regarding your race while growing up?

Please write any examples of incidents that occurred with <u>your family</u> that made you think about your race in a particular way. (open ended)

14. Have you ever experienced (or think you experienced) discrimination based on your multiracial heritage while growing up (e.g., being rejected from a racial group you belong to or being forced to choose one of your racial identities over another)?

Please write examples if you have. (open ended)

15. Have you ever experienced (or think you experienced) discrimination based on your race while growing up (e.g., getting called racial or anti-immigrant slurs, being stared at while shopping, or negative stereotypes.)?

Please write examples if you have.

(open ended)

16. How did your parents raise you to think about your multiracial heritage, if they did? If they did not, please mention this as well.

17. How did your parents prepare you do deal with any struggles particular to being a multiracial individual, if they did? If they did not, please mention this as well.

(open ended)

18. How did your parents prepare you to deal with experiences of race and racism, if they did? If

they did not, please mention this as well.

 (open ended)

19. How did your parents add or detract from your ability to deal with experiences of race/racism

and being multiracial? (open ended)

20. From where do you feel you have developed your resilience to race and racism?

((open ended)

Thank you for your participation in this study.