

LESSONS TO MY CHILD: HOW BLACK/WHITE INTERRACIAL
PARENTS PERCEIVE AND SHAPE RACIAL IDENTITY IN THEIR
BIRACIAL CHILDREN

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AYANNA S. BOYD
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APPROVED: _____
Shalonda Kelly, Ph.D.

Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D.

DEAN: _____
Stanley Messer, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, interracial marriages have continued to increase with 8.4 million people in mixed marriages in 2005. With the increasing number of interracial marriages, there has been a surge of multiracial children who do not fit neatly into our society's longstanding classification system. As research has consistently validated the realm of racial choices that are now available to biracial children, the parent's role becomes more important to consider (Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002). This exploratory study was designed to understand how Black/White interracial parents perceive their children's identity and how they negotiate identity with their children. Furthermore, the goal of this study is to uncover some of the strategies and lessons they transmit to their biracial children in order to shape their racial identity. This study involved 8 White/Black interracial couples raising biracial children. The children's ages range from 4 to 24. Each couple was interviewed using an audio recorder, and their information was analyzed qualitatively using the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study revealed major themes connected to interracial couples and their racial perceptions and strategies for their biracial children. These themes included 1) the importance of humanity over race, 2) supportive families, 3) purposeful and deliberate racial strategies (both proactive and reactive) including open dialogue, dolls, books, events and experiences, 4) society's Hispanic view of their children, and 5) hair issues with biracial girls. Limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Respondent: "I'm not a racist. I do ceremonies for black couples right here in my house. My main concern is for the children." (CNN correspondent, 2009).

The excerpt above is the defense of the former Louisiana justice of peace who refused to marry a Black/White interracial couple in 2009. He expressed in an interview that he is not racist, but that he is “concerned for the children that might be born of the relationship...” In addition, he expressed that interracial marriages do not last due to the social challenges of their union. He later resigned whilst maintaining his longstanding disapproval of interracial marriages.

This case is not unique. In fact, this is the sentiment that a lot of people possess even in 21st century America that perpetuate the myth that interracial unions are doomed and that their children are destined to a life of unhappiness and confusion due to their dual heritage. However, through this study, I embark on a journey into the lives of some of these unique and ever-increasing unions that uncover the real-life highs and lows in shaping a healthy racial identity of their biracial children.

Race in America

Race in America is socially constructed (Montagu, 1974; Omi & Winant, 1994; Root, 1992). Racial identity is not purely based upon physical characteristics. Rather

racial categories are created in ways that usually support majority group members (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Ignatiev, 1995; Yancey, 2003). Thus, racial identity can change as societal racial definitions are transformed. For example, before the end of the Civil War, a One-Drop Rule insured that individuals in southern states with any African heritage were limited to slavery status. Today African-Americans live in an age of colorism (Hunter, 2005; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Thompson & Keith, 2004), wherein African-Americans with lighter skin color enjoy more social status than darker skin African-Americans, due to White racism (Hill, 2002; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 2005).

The idea that race is a social construct can be more easily understood when we consider the way in which we classify individuals of mixed heritage. Despite the term "mulatto," American society continues to categorize those who are half Black and half White as Black. As mentioned earlier, this practice reflects the influence of the One-Drop rule - a relic from the Jim Crow era where one drop of Black blood made you "Black." Harvard Professor, Stephan Thernstrom (1973), addressed social constructs when he said, "The United States is the only country in the world in which a White mother can have a Black child but a Black mother cannot have a White child." Although this sentiment was expressed nearly 40 years old, it continues to hold truth today.

Many people, however, continue to believe that race is a biological or real entity. Although I do not assert that race has a biological basis, I do assert that race has a societal basis and is real in the minds of many people in our society. When looking at the nature of my research question, it becomes evident the impact race has in American society and how race can play a huge role in the way people live, think and influence others. With the

understanding that race is socially constructed, I have considered the impact it has on the racial classification of my study's participants. Since this is a study of interracial relationships with parents of African American and European American heritage, I chose to identify the racial categories as Black and White. I acknowledge that one should be cautious when classifying groups and that race is not a real entity; hence labeling my participants based on race was taken with precaution. [For definitions of terms, refer to Appendix D).

Being Bi-racial

“What are you?” This is not an uncommon question for biracial individuals to be asked due to their unique physical appearance. However, when conveyed, these few words can have a long-lasting and negative impact on a child. These words almost suggest that one is not human, but rather a creature subject to inspection. One Black father explains his views on the common question “What are you” in reference to his biracial son:

[My son] was a beautiful baby. People would come up to me and ask, ‘What is he?’ What! I can pull off his diaper so you can see for yourself. [laughter] It’s just the ridiculousness of the question and the presumptuousness that at this day in time, people would ask that question. I used to think about it in the way that people ask about the pedigree of a dog. And it was everybody comparing your kid the same way they would any other pet. And I thought it was absolutely, and still do, ridiculous.

Although often perceived as intrusive and offensive, this question may be a simple case of curiosity and intrigue prompted by the uniquely defined features transmitted by both parents. Currently, it is not uncommon to refer to one whose parents are of different racial groups as “biracial” or “mixed.” This label although, not specific, is an accurate

depiction of a biracial child due to the fact that they are the product of the blending or mixing of both parents who share a different racial heritage.

Being from two different racial backgrounds may have its pitfalls, but it also introduces some advantages. For one, what makes biracial individuals unique is their liberty to choose or identify with one or more races. It has often been assumed that few identity choices exist for biracial individuals; and to some extent, what made it possible for the One-Drop Rule to develop was the fact that race has long been defined in America as exclusive (Haney Lopez, 1996) – a person could only have one race. But this liberty to subscribe to any one race did not come so easily for biracial individuals in the past. In the early twentieth century for example, Americans of different racial groups were neatly packaged into easily identifiable categories where all one had to do was check the appropriate box that signified their racial affiliation (Root, 1992). Within this perceived simplicity, one assumed he or she could understand the social, emotional, and cultural characteristics of members within the neatly prescribed racial categories. However in today's society, issues that used to be easy and socially accepted are now being questioned by society. The increase in multicultural and multiracial families has forced our society to re-evaluate diversity and reject racial myths and stereotypes (Ferguson, 2001).

Unlike earlier eras in which the numbers of biracial children were shrouded in secrecy, demographers have now been paying attention to the growth of this group. Increased attention to such phenomena has led to the "check all that apply" modification to the 2000 Census - an official recognition of an historical reality not before reflected on the United States' Census (Brunnsma, 2006). As a result, the 2000 Census reports there

were about 7 million people who labeled themselves as multiracial in America, with millions of them being biracial (Cohn & Fears, 2001). It is also estimated that approximately 4.2% of Americans under the age of 18 were listed as multi-racial. This is a number that translates into millions of multi-racial children (Cohn & Fears, 2001). Even more astounding, the 2010 Census reports there was a 32% rise in multiracial and biracial Americans, compared to a 5.7% rise in White Americans and a 12.3% rise in Black Americans (Census, 2010). This translates to about 2 million more self-identified biracial and multiracial individuals from 2000 to 2010.

Additionally, we live in an era where there are a lot more biracial children than biracial adults. This is evident in the percentage of children in the 2000 Census that consider themselves biracial compared to the percentage of parents. Of all the children listed in the census, 4.2% of children consider themselves multiracial in relation to 1.2% of all the adults (Cohn & Fears, 2001). While revealing, the statistics reflect more than mere number growth. In addition, differences in ‘racial’ reporting allude to the reality that older biracial/multiracial people, many born in the pre-civil rights era, still subscribe to the One Drop Rule ideology; thus labeling themselves according to only one racial group, which can account for some of the disproportionate numbers (Ferguson, 2001). In contrast, recent census reports suggest that many multiracial people today — particularly those who are part Black — shun a “multi” label in favor of identifying as a single race. By some estimates, two-thirds of those who checked the single box of “Black” on the census form are actually biracial or multiracial, including President Barack Obama, who identified himself as Black in the 2010 census even though his mother was White (Census, 2010).

Speaking of the new faces of America, it seems appropriate to highlight President Barack Obama as he embodies a biracial heritage. Being the product of a White American mother and a Black African father, Obama is arguably the most visible personification of the complex issues surrounding race in society today. The paradox of his presidency is that, as the first Black president in a country founded on slavery, he has struggled to downplay the racial undertone his presidency has incited. Although he acknowledges that race is important, he also acknowledges that it is socially constructed and can turn destructive if it becomes the only important thing (Obama, 2004). But unlike figures like Tiger Woods who self-proclaim a multi-racial or “Cablinasian” heritage (Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian), Barack Obama acknowledges the perception and subsequent treatment of him as a “Black man” from society, and so identifies himself as such.

Interracial Relationships and Marriages

So what is an interracial relationship? These individuals have been identified as coming from two different races to form an intimate relationship with each other. The range can be anywhere from White mother and Black father to Asian mother and a White father. Due to the plethora of combinations possible within the racial groups, and the possible resulting confounding variables of race and culture, this dissertation will focus on Black/White couples, in order to explore the union of two races that have been historically at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of color, culture and oppression. Additionally, it has been found that while interracial unions are becoming increasingly prevalent, White/Black combinations have consistently been found to be one of the least

common unions, which may be the residual effects of the long history of hostility, stigma, separation and legal penalties (Roth, 2005).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, interracial marriages have continued to increase with 8.4 million people in mixed marriages in 2005. Also, a 2006 Pew Research Center survey found that one in five adults have close relatives in a mixed-race marriage. This is a long way from the 1960s when 22 states banned interracial marriages until the Supreme Court struck down those laws in 1967. Demographics data indicates that 69% of married Black/White couples are comprised of a Black man and a White woman, and 84% of cohabiting Black/White couples are comprised of a Black man and a White woman (Census, 2000), revealing the gendered nature of most of these relationships. According to recent census reports, there have been higher rates in educational attainment among Blacks, a more racially integrated military and a rising Black middle class (Census, 2010), which provide more interaction with other races and more opportunities to form interracial relationships.

The prevalence of interracial parents is a fairly new phenomenon. Historically, interracial relationships were widely frowned upon, if not condemned by most. In efforts to sustain slavery and keep blood lines pure, it was necessary to keep Whites and Blacks from producing biracial children. The earliest anti-miscegenation statutes were passed by southern white legislators as early as the 1600's (Davis, 1991). These statutes also served to perpetuate the belief that Blacks were inferior, and therefore, it was immoral to copulate and procreate with them. As a result of such upheaval about the mixing of races, interracial relationships for the most part were limited to situations of scandal and

infidelity, such as the diabolical sexual imposition on the slave girl by the White slave master (Hall, 2000).

Biracial Children and their Families

To many, 2010 is the baby boom for biracial children. However, the children of these relationships do not fit neatly into any of the prescribed racial categories in American culture. Classification and identity issues have surrounded issues associated with rearing biracial children (Lewis & Yancey, 2008). As such, interracial parents have a unique opportunity to shape their children's racial identity in a much bigger way than that of parents of mono-racial children (Ferguson, 2001). While this presents many opportunities for parents, it can also present many challenges. Like many other parents, interracial parents set out to provide a safe and warm environment that promotes positive emotional and psychological well-being. But with the added issues of racial and cultural difference, these couples have the potential challenges of racism, ambivalence and the balancing of two cultures surrounding their children's lives. For two parents this would be quite a task, for single parents, the situation may be more complicated (Ferguson, 2001). Besides the general emotions and challenges that come with parental separation, many scholars have argued that divorce or separation in an interracial relationship can have negative ramifications concerning the transmission of cultural heritage (Huffman, 1995; Gibbs & Hines, 1994).

Biracial children do not come to a conclusion about their racial identity by themselves; rather there are agents of socialization that affect these conclusions. Parents have a special role to play in the transmission of ideas about race and culture. Research

has consistently validated the realm of racial choices that are now available to biracial children, which makes the parent's role more important to consider (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002.) With such choices at their disposal, it is imperative to examine the agents of socialization who are the most important influences for such a choice.

Throughout this study, the focus of inquiry will not be on biracial children themselves, but rather on their primary caretakers: their parents. Interracial couples have the potential to instill a certain racial identity into their children by choosing a place to live, a school, and a culture in which to raise their children. Racial messages and activities in this form transmitted by parents provide a solid foundation that shapes the future identities of their children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Relevance of Interracial Relationships and Biracial Children

Historically, Black/White intimacy and marriage in the United States were strongly forbidden through formal and informal sanctions. The taboo against interracial marriage and intimacy served ideological functions that perpetuated notions of Black inferiority and White supremacy and has been fundamental in the construction of race and racial ideology in the United States (Moran, 2001; Porterfield, 1982; Wallenstein, 2002). Anti miscegenation laws and the ideology they helped enforce, solidified the color line between Blacks and Whites and reinforced White supremacy. Even though marriages and intimate relationships were strongly forbidden, they did occur—interracial relationships and multiracial people have long been part of the American landscape (Moran, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Spickard, 1989). However, views of Black/White interracial relationships and biracial/multiracial people have changed over historical periods.

In the antebellum period, sexual interracial relationships were tolerated as long as they did not challenge the racial or gender hierarchy. The White male hierarchy accepted sexual relationships between White men and Black and multiracial slaves, but relationships between White women and Black men were much less likely to be tolerated

since most White men viewed them as threatening (Moran, 2001; Collins, 2000). As such, the sexual exploitation of Black women was common. For instance, on the plantation, the White slave master, being all-powerful, would demand sexual intercourse from any slave woman whom he desired, regardless of her consent (Beigel, 1966). Any subsequent offspring from this relationship was viewed as a new addition to the slave trade. But while the White slave master was able to navigate his way through any sexual conquest, the Black man did not possess such freedom and accessibility. Fueled by racial hatred, many Black men were tortured and killed for even a rumor of a sexual encounter with White women (Ferguson, 2001).

Two ideas that have had a dramatic impact on how biracial people were viewed were also developed during the antebellum period. These ideas were the rule of hypo-descent and the “tragic mulatto” image. Hypo-descent involved a set of laws and rules that defined anyone with as little as “one drop of black blood” to be Black; thus, the children of interracial unions were almost exclusively defined as Black (Wright, 1994; Dalmage, 2000; Moran, 2001). The rule of hypo-descent functioned to create a “natural increase” in slave populations, and it reinforced the notion of White racial purity (Wright, 1994; Taylor, 1997). During this time the notion of the “tragic mulatto” also emerged. The cultural ethos of the period viewed Black/White biracial people as poor, lost souls caught in between two worlds and accepted by no group. According to this ideology, their mere existence was tragic, and they were destined to lead a life of sorrow because of their social ambiguity (Spickard, 1989). While the rule of hypo-descent applied to most biracial or multiracial people, there were cases where people “passed.” In these cases,

biracial people who were very light lived their lives as Whites and hid their African ancestry (Wright, 1994).

After the Civil War and the subsequent Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves, Whites feared that racial mixing would result in dire consequences. Films such as *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted free Blacks murdering, stealing and raping White women, fueled the fears of what would happen if Blacks were allowed to intermingle with White women. At the time, these fears were grounded in the notion that race, being a real entity, could become tainted. Early rulings such as *Plessy vs. Fergusson* (1896), which called for the separation of races, further asserted feelings of a “Black threat” upon Whites (Wardle & Janzen, 2004).

It is important to note that, although anti-miscegenation laws forbade racial intermarriage, these relationships continued to exist throughout the early twentieth century (Beigel, 1966; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). For example, in 1910, records show that 73% of interracial married couples lived in states that forbade such unions (Rosenblatt et al, 1995). Consider, for example, the words of a Black woman living with a White man in a Mississippi town of the 1930s:

A few words of marriage ceremony, what do they mean? I feel I'm living a great deal more decently with a union based on love than some who are married before the law. And I don't feel that I've heaped any disgrace on Jim [her son]. He's got a dad and a good one who is doing everything possible to be a good dad to him. And we live in our little shack, happily, and according to my standards, decently. (cited by Gullickson, 2006)

Many of the early twentieth century interracial marriages were possible because of the social class disparity between the Black husband and White wife (Beigel, 1966). Specifically, most early interracial marriages consisted of a relatively higher class Black

man to a lower class White woman. Presumably, it was much easier for a Black man to gain a White bride if the union was to provide a chance of “upward mobility” for the White woman (Beigel, 1966). Despite the success of such unions, they were not immune to public resistance, racism and discrimination because of their relationship during this time. Studies during this time showed that as many as 88% (97% in the South) of Whites were opposed to interracial marriage (Beigel, 1966). While resistance to interracial marriage may have stifled many interracial relationships, it did not extinguish the growth of interracial couples completely.

The most significant shift in views on Black/White interracial relationships and biracial people came in the period after World War II. The legal prohibitions against interracial marriage relationships established during slavery were dismantled when the Supreme Court issued the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision. However, this did not mark a dramatic change in the number or rate of interracial marriages between Blacks and Whites. Although the Civil Rights movement challenged the Jim Crow ideology, the topic of interracial marriage and sexual relationships was not a central aspect of the discussion, since most people of any racial group had no great desire to end marital segregation (Romano, 2003). Opposition to intermarriage was voiced on both sides of the racial divide even though the reasons for Black opposition and White opposition were structured differently. While Whites emphasized many of the old stereotypes, their opposition did seem to wane, and a new era that emphasized individualism and personal freedom in decision making led to a small decrease in disapproval from Whites (Romano, 2003). On the other hand, opposition to interracial marriage became an important feature of the emerging Black power movement of the 1960s and beyond. African Americans

involved in interracial relationships were often seen as defying racial solidarity and were thought of as disloyal to the cause (Kennedy, 2003).

Today, interracial relationships are slightly more common, having doubled each decade since the 1960s (Root, 2001); yet, these unions are still not accepted by all. Even though racism has persisted in the post Civil Rights era, denials of the prevalence and force of racism are common place (Bonilla Silva 2001; Bobo et.al. 1997); thus, biracial people and interracial couples face less open discrimination, and the discrimination they face is often minimized.

Interracial Marriage Studies

Much of the older research into interracial relationships has concentrated upon the motivations of those who enter into such relationships (Porterfield, 1978), the degree and type of racism such couples face (Washington, 1970), or a historical overview of interracial relationships (Spickard, 1989; Washington, 1970). More recent research furthered these lines of inquiry and also focused upon the demographics of these relationships (Joyner & Kao, 2005), differences between contrasting types of interracial relationships (Yancey, 2002), interpersonal dynamics of the formation of interracial relationships (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Yancey, 2002), and maintenance/stability of interracial relationships (Heaton, 2002; Ho & Johnson, 1990; Kreider, 2000; Root, 2001).

Many scholars posed the notion that due to the increased ability for interracial relationships to occur within this country, there would be a drastic surge of curiosity and interest by members of opposite races to date and marry (Wardle & Janzen, 2004). These

findings have been linked to the prevalence of interracial relationship. Others point to the desire for minorities to push their way up the social caste system. To examine the potential motivation for dating outside of one's race, Lewis et al (1994) surveyed a large sample of mixed married couples to identify key factors in their interest in being in an interracial relationship. Lewis found that factors outside of race were the most important factors generally for people to marry outside their race. For example, "ease of ability to talk to" was seen as an important factor in desirability. Common interests, entertainment interests and personal attractiveness were also found to be the most decisive factors. These findings suggest that choosing to date outside their race are not necessarily due to a fad or some motivation to break race or caste ranks. In a similar study, Lewis and Yancey (2005) also found that socioeconomic status plays a unique role in spouse selection. Interracial couples, he asserts, tend to be comprised of individuals who, as a group, exhibit slightly higher socioeconomic status (educational attainment and personal income) in comparison to the overall population.

Many past studies point to the hardships endured by individuals who are involved in interracial marriages. According to Lewis et al (1994) families are not as supportive of interracial marriages as they are of same race marriages. Rosenblatt (1995) describes life in interracial relationships as one that is mired in experiences of racism, skepticism, and rejection. To be in such a relationship, a person must "navigate an environment where racist opposition is always possible (Rosenblatt, 1995)." Unfortunately, this negative sentiment about the reality of living in interracial relationships is repeated throughout the literature. Couples who find themselves subjected to the greatest amount of racial

scrutiny are Black/White relationships. Spickard (1989) suggests that this intense opposition exists across both groups.

It is essential to note that not all interracial families face similar levels of resistance. Just as there is evidence that Black people may face more racial stigma than other racial minorities (Loury, 2002; Yancey, 2003), it is plausible to argue that interracial marriages containing Black people may suffer more in our racialized society than interracial marriages without Black people. Research indicates that sanctions directed at marriages between Whites and Blacks are more powerful than sanctions directed at marriages between Whites and non-Black racial minorities (Gallagher, 2004; Moran, 2001). Because of the higher level of hostility, Whites married to Blacks may have different experiences than Whites married to other racial minorities. These differential realities can reflect the potential racism Black/White couples have historically faced and continue to experience. In her qualitative study of 11 White mothers who were married to Black men and raising biracial children, O'Donoghue (2004) concluded that raising biracial children forced them as parents to recognize and confront many harsh realities. The mothers were introduced to the effects of racism because of their interracial relationship including: facing ostracism from friends and family, facing hostility and exclusion from societal institutions, and perhaps most prevalently, being challenged about their legitimacy as parents. In her study of 10 interracial couples, Killian (2002) found that 9 out of 10 Black partners stated their White partners were less sensitive to negative reactions in public situations, and most White partners agreed.

This portrait of the challenges faced by individuals involved in interracial relationships further begs the question: what effect do their experiences have on how they

raise their biracial children? Also, how does the context in which the extended families accept the couple's relationship influence the couple's perception of their biracial child's race?

Biracial Identity Development

Experts recognize that biracial identity development is different from that of white and minority children (Tatum, 1997; Wardle, 1992). Multiple factors should be considered when racial identity is developing, including individual personalities, familial relationships and racial identities, and geographical locations and local communities (Root, 1996; Tatum, 1997). Root (1996) recognizes five possible options for biracial identity: 1) accept the racial identity given by society; 2) identify with the minority race; 3) identify as white, if the individual physical features allow; 4) identify as "biracial" (no individual race identified); and 5) identify with more than one race. Root (1996) states that any of these choices can be positive if the individual makes that choice, and if that individual doesn't feel compromised or marginalized by his/her choice.

Studies on identity development in multiracial youth have yielded mixed results. Earlier studies found that biracial children were confused about their identity due to their lack of ability to connect completely to either of their heritages (Brandell, 1988; Gibbs, 1987; Herring, 1992). Based upon recent studies, researchers theorize that unresolved identity issues remain for biracial children because their unique heritages are not acknowledged by schools or society in general (Tatum, 1997; Wardle, 1992). For example, Wardle (2007), when analyzing current child development textbooks, found that only two of 12 books addressed multiracial children at all. Wardle suggests that

biracial children are not included within the diversity of academia because multicultural and diversity experts view America as a "salad bowl" with separate racial/ethnic contributions, view diversity from a narrow-minded American viewpoint, and rely on one critical theory--the ownership of power--that requires each race/ethnic group to be completely separate in a hierarchically oppressed system.

In spite of this resistance from society, biracial citizens have demonstrated a sense of achievement, positive self-awareness, and emotional well-being (Tatum, 1997; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). Binning, Inzueta, Huo, and Molina (2009) compare the psychological health of multiracial adolescents who choose to identify with their mono-racial or multiracial identities. They found that multiracial adolescents who adopt multiracial identities tend to report higher well-being than those who adopt their mono-racial identities. Cheng and Lee (2009) draw from the work on bi-cultural identity and introduce the Multiracial Identity Integration Scale, which measures the individual differences in the ways in which multiracial individuals may manage their multiple racial identities. They found that multiracial identity integration consists of two subscales: (a) racial conflict (i.e., feelings of tension among racial identity components), and (b) racial distance (i.e., perceptions of how separate the racial identity components are). They found that lower racial distance and racial conflict was related to more multiracial pride and positive multiracial experiences.

Previous work suggests that multiracial people have more flexible understandings of race and race relations. For example, multiracial people have malleable racial identities that often change in the social context (Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006). Moreover, multiracial people, on average, tend to challenge the validity of race

itself and tend to view race as a social construction more than those of mono-racial descent (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). Viewing race as a social construction tends to put biracial and multiracial people at an advantage because racial stereotypes lose their meaning and fail to affect biracial and multiracial people's performance. In addition, viewing race as a social construction also appears to affect their interpersonal and social relationships. Because multiracial people tend not to give race the same meaning and weight as other groups, multiracial people tend to show greater comfort with interracial social interactions than other racial minorities (Bonam & Shih, 2009).

One previously neglected area of multiracial studies has been community perceptions of multiracial people (Bonam & Shih, 2009). Little empirical research has examined how communities respond to multiracial identity or how racial bias may influence multiracial people. Thornton (2009) examined White and Black newspaper responses to the "new" multiracial identity and movement, and what these representations reflect and perpetuate in these communities. In his coding of newspaper articles, he found that White newspapers view the multiracial movement as evidence that color has lost its meaning in society, thus, reinforcing a color-blind ideology. Analysis of Black newspapers suggests that the multiracial movement among Black mixed-race people reflects the desire to deny or distance from Blackness, which will politically unravel the power of Black communities. Given that White newspapers tended to view the development of multiracial identity as a positive step toward a color-blind society and Black newspapers viewed the development of multiracial identity as an attempt to escape from Blackness, or escape being publicly devalued and discriminated against, it is ironic that Sanchez and Bonam (2009) found that people tended to discriminate the most against

those who identify as multiracial. In two experiments, Sanchez and Bonam (2009) found that people who identified with their multiracial identity were viewed as less warm and sometimes less competent than if they had identified as mono-racial, which, in turn, affected whether or not they were seen as appropriate for race-based scholarships.

Theories on Biracial Identity Development

Stonequist

Models that specifically delineate the ways in which biracial individuals form their racial identities are crucial to understanding how members of this group not only develop their individual racial identities, but how the increasing size of this group in turn affects the formation of new categories that challenge the racial binary in the United States. Everett Stonequist (1937) was one of the first theorists to discuss the particular developmental processes or state of the biracial individual. Stonequist offers a perspective of the social and psychological traits of biracial individuals that describes them as amalgamations, and as marginal men. He describes their fate as “condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic, cultures” (Stonequist, 1937). According to Stonequist, the individual’s personality achieves its form through that individual’s conception of him/herself, and that this conception is a social product. He argues that his theory, like any other theory, cannot be applied to an entire group, and that no two individuals have the same experience. This significant contribution by Stonequist enabled others to see the unique, and at times troubling, experience of individuals with parents of two races. However, his work was limited by

the fact that he did not address the possibility of a biracial individual adopting a healthy racial identity, likely due to the era in which he developed his theory.

Poston

W.S. Carlos Poston (1990) noticed problems with how racial identity formation for biracial individuals has been conceptualized in the past. Poston created a life span focus model that highlights the uniqueness of biracial identity and addresses the phases of racial identity development that biracial individuals experience. In Poston's five-stage model, the first stage, *personal identity* is the stage where young children are forming a sense of self. They have not yet developed attitudes about their racial identity, therefore, their identity stems from constructs such as self-worth and self-esteem formed through interactions with family and friends. The second stage, *choice of group categorization*, is the point where biracial individuals are faced with making a choice about their racial identity. At this stage, biracial individuals typically have two choices. The child can either choose a biracial identity that acknowledges the identity of both parents, or the child can choose one parent's racial identity over the other. Hall (1980) found that the factors that influenced this choice were status factors, support factors, and personal factors. Status factors include factors such as the group status of the ethnic or racial group within the racial hierarchy, or the demographics of the home neighborhood. Social support factors include parental style and influence, acceptance and participation in various cultures, as well as parental and familial acceptance. Personal factors include physical appearance, cultural knowledge, age, political environment, and individual personality differences.

The third stage, *enmeshment/denial*, can be identified by the biracial individual's feelings of confusion, guilt, self-hatred, and lack of acceptance. These feelings stem from individuals having to choose one group over the other, and not being able to fully express themselves. The child may feel as if he/she is not being loyal to one parent, or may attempt to conceal one side of his/her racial background. The fourth stage, *appreciation*, is the stage where biracial individuals begin to learn about their multiple cultures despite their identification with one group in particular. The fifth and final stage, *integration*, is the stage where individuals experience wholeness. The biracial individual recognizes and values all of his/her ethnic identities. In this five stage model, Poston addresses many important issues. However, one limitation in Poston's theory suggests that all biracial individuals go through a stage in which they are confused about their identity. This may not be the case. It is possible for a biracial individual to develop a healthy racial identity without feelings of denial, shame, or tension.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) present a multidimensional model of biracial identity. This model presents four racial identity options for biracial individuals. The first option available to biracial individuals is a *singular identity*. A singular identity is described as the individual choosing either a black or white racial identity. Rockquemore and Brunnsma discuss the paucity of research on the singular white identity for this group, but present it as a conceptual typology. This limited research is attributed to a few factors, one being that a black identity is perceived as that individual accepting their socially designated racial assignment. The second option is the *border identity*. The

concept of the border identity is used to describe the identity of biracial individuals who form racial identities that acknowledge both black and white racial backgrounds, and therefore identify as biracial. The third option available to biracial individuals is referred to as a *protean identity*. This identity describes biracial individuals that change their identity to adapt to different environments, adopting either a Black, White, or Biracial identity depending on the situation. The last option available to biracial individuals according to Rockquemore and Brunnsma is a *transcendent identity*. These individuals decline to recognize themselves as a member of any racial category. Here, they are said to “transcend” racial designations; and if asked their race, they may respond that they belong to “the human race”. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) also discuss the significance of appearance (skin color, hair texture, etc.) and social networks as important influences on the choices of identity made by biracial individuals. In a more recent study by Brunnsma (2006), he explores how ‘identity and identification’ are different phenomena, and he illuminates the multifaceted relationship between public categorization & private racial identification in which biracial people understand themselves in a multitude of ways—ways that are rooted in their private social worlds.

Parents as Racial Socialization Agents

For this study, the child’s specific racial identity choice is not the factor under consideration, [i.e. a Black or White or Biracial choice], but rather this research focuses on the parents’ view of their own journey to bring their children to that conclusion. This study examines parents’ purposeful participation in the development of their children’s racial identity. Hughes (2003) defines racial socialization as the “transmission of parents’

world views about race and ethnicity to children by way of subtle, overt, deliberate and unintended mechanisms.” The process of racial socialization has become increasingly recognized as a primary mechanism through which youth develop a positive racial identity and become prepared to successfully cope with societal discrimination (Hughes, 2003).

Earlier research done in the area of biracial identity formation suggests that parents “negotiate race” with their children (Huffman, 1996; Gibbs & Hines, 1994). Huffman defines negotiated identity as “the process by which biracial children, in conjunction with their parents, derive a self-defined biracial identity (Huffman, 1996). Although it is assumed that parents normally do not force their children to be Black, White or Biracial, they do suggest and offer positive ideas about certain racial choices and attitudes. In addition, the parents themselves have their own views of their child’s racial make-up. The negotiation occurs when the parent’s perceptions and their children’s ideas about race culminate in a healthy racial decision for the child.

Most of the research to date on racial socialization has focused on the content of the racial socialization messages of African American parents (Hughes, 2003). As such, a number of authors have developed specific typologies representing different messages that African American parents transmit to their children about race (cited by Hughes, 2003). The following themes emerged: 1) racial pride- conveying messages that promote pride in the history and culture of their race, 2) racial barriers- teaching the child that barriers such as racial discrimination exist to impede the success and well-being of African Americans, 3) egalitarian- conveying the message that all people are equal regardless of their race, and 4) self-worth- promoting feelings of individual worth within

the broader context of the child's race. In addition, parents were also shown to engage in race-related activities such as buying African American literature and art.

Most qualitative studies show that biracial and other multiracial identification processes are affected by their interactions with different social environments at various stages of their development (Brown, 2001; Funderburg, 1994; Hall, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Terry, 2001). The nuclear family is the first and, in many ways, the most important of these environments, for the way parents and other relatives in the household socialize their children to think about race has the potential to shape how they interpret all future interactions (Funderburg, 1994). In a study by Alaggia & Crawford (2008), researchers sought to identify the influences that have shaped the racial identity of young biracial adults. Participants identified issues related to parental awareness of mixed heritage issues, family structure, and communication about race issues- all of which have important implications for racial identity development in youth. The youth cited *lack of parental awareness and understanding* of their mixed race experiences as problematic, which is not surprising given that the parents were not of mixed heritage and may not be able to relate to their unique experiences. Consequently, the youth described through a number of examples that their experiences in terms of race are not validated by their parents and family members in satisfactory ways. Nevertheless, many of the parents were described as being responsive and sensitive to their children's experiences. Secondly, *choice in racial identification* was reported by the participants to be an important element of identity development. For these youth, it appeared to be less about whether they ultimately choose to identify White, Black or Biracial/Mixed but, rather, that they have a choice by being exposed to the racial backgrounds of significant people

in their lives. Lastly, the participants stated a *need for validation* of being of mixed race heritage; and that good and negative experiences come with this. Lack of validation may be the product of ‘color-blind’ notions that have prevailed in American society for decades, emphasizing a disregard of one’s skin color and equal treatment for all (Root, 1992). However, the flaw in this approach is that one’s differences are not valued and minimizes the fact that racism is still very much a reality.

In a study by Kilson and Ladd (2008), White and Black mothers were interviewed about their experiences raising their biracial children. The following themes emerged: 1) Irrespective of whether a mother considers that cultivating racial awareness is significant in parenting, her children were racially ambiguous in the world outside the home, 2) The mothers stressed the importance of providing children with multicultural experiences and relationships, 3) White mothers, whether mothers of young or adult children, discussed the opposition of their natal families to their interracial marriages more often than black women, 4) Mothers of older children recalled that as young parents, there was a dearth of information about biracial identity and issues available to new parents and fewer institutional supports for families like theirs than there are today.

Brown (2001) emphasized the importance of parents’ messages about race, indicated in the racial labels parents give their children, for the development of the individual’s racial identity. Research suggests that families understand and socialize their children in ways similar to the racial model (*singular, border, protean, transcendent identities*) presented by Rockquemore and Brunisma (2002). While some parents see their children as Black and view their role as teaching them how to form a positive Black identity, others see their role as teaching life skills that transcend racial lines, “focusing

instead on human values and socializing race-neutral children” (Thornton, 1997). Such approaches are consistent with the Black singular and transcendent identities, respectively. Brown (2001) describes how some families with Black and White parents viewed their children as having a White singular identity, and encouraged them to cross racial boundaries into the White world. Some may say this is the same sentiment for fair-skinned Blacks or Biracial people “passing” for White during slavery times in efforts to gain better opportunities and access to resources. Some respondents in qualitative studies describe how parents told them as children that they were “mixed” or a member of both worlds” (Terry, 2001) - viewing their children as having a border identity, and thereby allowing them to recognize both parents’ heritage. Thus, the identity models identified by Rockquemore and Brunnsma also represent options for families’ views of their children’s races.

In a study by Roth (2005), there were many theories evaluated about the processes that lead parents to embrace or reject a Black identity for their children. First, it was found that higher parental education leads to a rejection of norms or racial classification, and an acceptance of a biracial identity as a viable option. That is, parents with higher education rejected the one-drop rule ideology and accepted their child as being “mixed.” Second, it was found that the age of the child affects labeling by the child and their parents, which may be due to validating or rejecting feedback from peers and other members of society. This process is mostly seen in adolescence when the child is highly influenced by other socializations agents besides his/her parents, (i.e., peers and media), and considers other aspects of his/her identity. Third, it was found that the racial identity of the child is strongly influenced by the race of the household head, regardless of which

parent is Black. One interpretation of the findings is that household heads are likely to complete the Census and other family forms, and give preference to their own race when they label their child (Roth, 2005).

Parent-child dynamics change as a child matures, and children who are old enough to have their own ideas about their identity may actually influence their parents' labeling decisions in a bi-directional fashion (Brown, 2001; Funderburg, 1994; Xie & Goyette, 1997). Developmental research shows that multiracial children's identities change as they age, being influenced by a number of factors. Renn (2004) used an ecological approach to examine factors that influence multi-racial college students' identities. She cited three themes in the literature that emerged including *physical appearance*, *cultural knowledge* and *peer culture*. Confirming Rockquemore and Brunma's (2002) proposition that physical appearance impacts racial identity, multiracial students' identity choices may be constrained by how others interpret their appearance. They must also negotiate the campus racial landscape with an appearance that is not always recognizable to others, unwittingly provoking some discomfort until that can answer the What [race] are you? questions that they report as commonplace (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2004).

Depending on knowledge learned from parents and family, a biracial college student may arrive on campus with extensive cultural knowledge or no knowledge at all. Renn (2004) found that biracial students who had not learned about various aspects of their heritage before coming to college sometimes took courses, studied abroad or participated in curricular activities aimed at learning more about their background. Armed with this knowledge, they might feel more confident to identify themselves with

previously unexplored aspects of their identity. The context of peer culture was also cited as a critical aspect of a multiracial college students' identity development. Renn (2004) cited the availability of a community of other biracial and multiracial students as important supports. Resistance from mono-racial students of color and racism among White students were additional aspects of peer culture that influenced their identity. Additional factors that have been linked to multiracial identity development in college students include gender, social class, family and family status, age, spirituality, social awareness, and geographical region (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore and Brunson, 2002; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck, 2007).

Limitations on the Current Body of Research

Undoubtedly, the role of the family in racial identity development with biracial children is an understudied area. Beyond issues on the experience of being biracial or being in an interracial relationship, there is little literature addressing the values, needs or experiences of these unique couples as they shape racial identity in their children. When studying the concept of Black/White interracial marriages, the current body of scholarly literature almost exclusively refers to experiencing racism, coping with racism and how to raise biracial children and prepare them for a racist society. There is an overall dearth of research regarding how these couples, as a unit, perceive their children's dual heritage and how their experiences shape their parenting methods and activities. Given the ever-increasing rise in multi-racial families in the U.S., much is needed to re-examine the current trends in raising biracial children.

This study proposes to answer the following questions: How Black/White interracial couples perceive their children's racial identity, and how they participate in shaping a healthy racial identity in their biracial children. It will also examine the factors that the couples believe to be important when raising biracial children in America. It is assumed that these couples may face resistance as well as support during their journeys as parents and as an interracial married couple. It is also assumed that these couples transmit messages and other lessons to their children with the goal of developing a positive identity formation. Lastly, it is believed that some of the conclusions drawn from parental responses may be helpful in further understanding how biracial people decide on their racial identity.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

A convenience sample of 8 self-identified Black/White interracial couples was obtained for this study. Parents' ages ranged from 35 to 60. Three couples composed of Black women with White men and five couples of Black men with White women participated. These couples were limited to married, heterosexual couples who have Black/White biracial children at least 4 years of age. At this age, children have the cognitive capacity to communicate effectively with their parents, they begin to recognize race and racial differences as social realities (Van-Ausdale & Feagin, 2002), and parental socialization influences this process (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). In addition, Black parents who were born abroad (i.e., Caribbean-descent) but spent the majority of their lives in the United States were allowed to participate. All of these couples were recruited through networking in the local community, and snowball sampling.

Table 1
Demographics: Couple Profiles (names changed to protect couples' identities)

Name	Race	Age	Education	Yrs. Married	Number & Age of Kids
Cal	Black	40-45	High School	13	4 (3 - 10 yrs old)
Christina	White	40-45	Graduate degree		
Peter	White	45-50	Graduate degree	20	2 (8 - 9yrs old)
Beatrice	Black	40-45	Graduate degree		
Cliff	Black	60-65	Bachelors degree	19	2 (13-17yrs old)
Judy	White	55-60	Graduate degree		
Gregory	White	55-60	Graduate degree	26	2 (22 - 24 yrs old)
Donna	Black	45-50	High School		
Charles	Black	40-45	Bachelors degree	16	1 (5 yrs old)
Laura	White	45-50	Graduate degree		
Jonathan	White	35-40	High School	6	3 (1 - 4yrs old)
Lisa	Black	35-40	Bachelors degree		
Jermaine	Black	40-45	High School	11	2 (5 - 7yrs old)
Dee	White	35-40	Associate degree		
Adam	Black	40-45	Graduate degree	6	3 (1mo - 12yrs)
Mindy	White	35-40	High School		

Black Mother N=3
 Black Father N=5
 White Mother N=5
 White Father N=3
 Mean Parent Age=44.6
 Mean Yrs Married=14.6
 Mean Age of Kids=10.3

Measures

Demographics Sheet (see Appendix B): This questionnaire requested information on the participants' demographics, such as age, race, level of education and occupation.

Participants were also asked how long they have been married, how many children they have, and where they currently reside.

Semi-Structured Interview (see Appendix C): This interview was developed by the researcher for this study, and it is comprised of open and close-ended queries regarding the couples' experiences, thoughts, and opinions about being in an interracial

relationship, raising biracial children, and the attitudes and opinions expressed by family members and other members of society.

Procedure

Participating couples were recruited through a networking sample. Participants first signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A) that is kept in a locked file that is separate from the interview data collected in order to maintain confidentiality. Second, participating couples completed the demographics page (see Appendix B), and each partner was interviewed together.

The principal researcher conducted all interviews in environments that were comfortable, private, and convenient for the interviewees. Due to the importance of nonverbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions, the interviews were limited to in-person communication; therefore phone interviews did not suffice. Before the interview began, each member of the couple was asked to sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form was given to the participants for their records. Participating couples were assigned a case number which will be the only identification used on response materials. No identifying information will be attached to the transcriptions or audiotapes. The interviews took approximately forty-five minutes to two and a half hours, depending on depth of responses. Interviews were audio taped with two separate devices to serve as a back-up system for proper transmission of voice recordings and to contribute to the accuracy of the study. The principal researcher transcribed each interview. Any tape recordings, transcripts of interviews, or other data collected from the participants will be maintained in confidence by the researcher in a locked file cabinet for three years

after the completion of the study. After three years, the principle investigator will destroy all research material.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis is to identify themes common among the couples interviewed. The data collected will be qualitative, content rich interviews describing these experiences of interracial married couples as related to shaping racial identity in their biracial children. The purpose of the analysis will be to “determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent’s view of the world in general and the topic in particular” (McCracken, 1988).

After the data is collected, it will be analyzed using grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Three phases of data analysis are included in grounded theory. They are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). In the first stage, open coding, the data are examined and categorized by similarities and differences. Each line of each transcript is examined to understand the micro level themes. In addition, the transcript as a whole is analyzed to extract the major themes. The goal of the first stage is to extract general categories for smaller subsets of data. Data is collapsed into these general categories. Multiple categories can also be grouped, so that they become sub-categories for a larger group, or placed on a continuum.

The second step of grounded theory is Axial Coding (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). In this stage, the relationships between the categories and subcategories are identified. The key part of this phase is to understand the causal relationships, main phenomenon, condition, and consequences of the various categories. Identifying these relationships

will result in understanding patterns that exist in a given model (Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

The last step of grounded theory is Selective Coding (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Categories that were already identified are further collapsed under the main categories to form the core categories of the model. Categories are connected through a paradigm model that forms the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). The connection between the categories are refined and validated (Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the findings that were derived from the areas of inquiry developed in the research design. Specifically, the findings came from interviews with respondents where three different types of questions were posed: interracial parent background questions, parental racial perception questions, and racial identity questions about their children. A summary of the themes that were developed from the data will be offered. To offer context, I have provided abbreviations to indicate race of each parent: WH (White Husband), WW (White Wife), BH (Black Husband), and BW (Black Wife). Pseudonyms have also been used to protect the couples' identities.

Parental Upbringing

One important concept that was found in this study is that for most of the couples, the perceptions and strategies that parents have adopted while raising their biracial children stem from their experiences growing up. Our participants were asked to describe their upbringing and explain how it has impacted their decision to date and marry someone of the opposite race. Five of the eight (62.5%) couples had at least one person in the marriage who reported some influence from their childhood upbringing that has influenced their decision to marry someone of the opposite race. Peter (WH) explained

that growing up in a predominantly Black community led to his connection to the Black culture and has impacted his decision to date and marry a Black woman.

I was used to being the minority in an all Black community...My father served an all Black church... My sister married an African American...I'd listen to Treacherous Three and the Sugar Hill Gang. So I felt culturally Black.

Judy (WW) candidly describes her initial reason to date outside of her race.

Being very honest, part of my decision to date outside my race and religion was to escape who I was. I think that was the initial reason for doing that...being rebellious. But then I think over time...like by the time I met Cliff (BH), I had dated all kinds of people. It was more about who Cliff was, and it just felt right.

Adam (BH) explains that he never really fit in with the Black students in his high school, which led to his decision to date and marry someone of the opposite race.

Growing up in high school, I never really had Black girls who would approach me and talk to me. I was considered a chocolate covered White boy in high school. I wore penny loafers. I wore button down collared shirts. My sneakers were tied. You know what I mean? I got the message that basically you're not one of us. You're one of them.

Lisa (BW) describes how her father influenced her to be open-minded and accept others. She recounts an incident when she was a girl that had a lasting effect on her outlook on life.

I remember a White father telling my dad, 'come on [Mr. Johnson], and show us a dunk.' And my father said, 'you assume since I'm Black that I know how to play basketball and dunk? No, I'll pass.' So he was very diplomatic, cool and calm about how he handled those racist and prejudicial things. And still there was no animosity when I brought someone home who wasn't Black. I think that really influenced me. There's always going to be drama. There's always going to be racism and prejudice. But it's a matter of how you as he says, 'when people throw you the ball, you don't have to catch it.' So I think it did influence me to be open-minded.

Although most of the couples expressed experiences that shaped their decision to court someone of the opposite race, some couples (37.5%) expressed a mere attraction to someone who happened to be of a different race. Charles (BH) and Laura (WW) are a good example of an interracial couple that early on, was not guided by a color consciousness when they chose to date. They built a friendship initially over the phone during a college work study program, having never laid eyes on each other. Laura explains how she and Charles eventually began their courtship.

Yea, it was 4 years that we just had a phone relationship. When I broke up with my boyfriend, I would invite him [Charles] out. And then one night we went out and we were inseparable...literally.

Family Response to Relationship

Five of the eight (62.5%) couples reported that their parents had a generally supportive attitude about their interracial relationship. This is important because of the supportive roles that extended families often play in all families. Generally these couples reported that their families were happy as long as they were happy. Beatrice (BW) recalls how easy it was for her husband, Peter (WH) to join the family by connecting with her Caribbean culture.

The people who I was close to, my brother and my aunt, they loved him. The only test he had to pass was that he had to eat our food. We're from the West Indies, and whatever they prepared, it was flattering to them if he ate and asked for more...without prompting. [laughter]...Rice and peas, plantains, curry goat... And he would go to West Indian parties. So everything was fine.

Three of the eight couples (37.5%) reported some form of disapproval or lack of support from family members due to racial differences. While two of these three couples reported a gradual acceptance, one of these couples maintains that there is still

disapproval. Lisa (BW) describes how her in-laws still do not accept her, despite her good qualities.

I'm nice. I'm sweet. I'm smart. I'm giving. I'll take care of your son. And then the man that I married...his parents won't even talk to me. It's always some sort of battle. And I've given you a granddaughter. I've given you a grandson who will carry on your name and I gave you another granddaughter. It's like, whatever... Let them live their lives in their state of unhappiness and bitterness and racism.

Although Lisa exudes a sense of resilience in the face of an unfortunate situation with her in-laws, she expresses the negative impact it has on her as a wife and a mother.

It's sad, coming from the perspective that I don't have in-laws. I think they are the ones who miss out...So they're missing out on having a relationship with me. All the things that I would have done for them, they don't get. And then the kids miss out. I'd be more willing and open to saying, 'oh let's invite them over...but I'm like, no. I'm not putting myself in an uncomfortable position. We don't do holidays with each other. I think it'll be more interesting as the kids get older because I'm not going to go down there. If [my husband] chooses to go down, he can go down. But it is what it is.

Charles (BH) and Laura (WW) reported some initial tension regarding their relationship from family. They note that the initial disapproval from his side of the family stemmed not from the fact that Laura was White, but that she was not Caribbean - being that culture plays a huge role in his family life. Charles and Laura report that since then, his family has gradually gotten to know Laura and have accepted her in the family despite their cultural differences. They report that there is virtually no resistance, and both sides have accepted their union.

Couple Challenges and Coping

Couples were asked to recall any experiences that have challenged their relationship in order to uncover the nature of the challenges and how each couple deals

with the challenges. It was found that three of the eight couples (37.5%) reported no incidences that have been a challenge in their relationship. Besides occasional stares from the public, these couples have found that their interracial relationship has been met with virtually no resistance. Cal (BH) describes his experience with his wife, Christina (WW): “I’ve never personally experienced anything directed toward me... We’ve been blessed that way. I don’t think we ever needed to develop coping skills due to our race.”

Donna (BW) and Gregory (WH), who share a similar positive experience as Cal and Christina, shared a clever tactic they use to counteract uncomfortable stares when they dine out as a family.

When we’d eat out for dinner, we’d experience some looks...I’m sure out of curiosity. I don’t know if they knew that they were staring, but they would be staring...and for too long I think... And we developed what we call the “Nelson Stare”. So we count to three and all of us would look at the table. They were aware that they were staring once we looked at them. And they would shake themselves and go back to what they were doing.

Donna (BM) also shares an experience in a grocery store and adds that she tries to find a teachable moment in every encounter she has with the public.

I guess these are things that we kind of got used to, didn’t really take too negatively. I was in the store and a White couple came up and said, ‘Aw, you’re babysitting.’ And I said, ‘Yes, for the rest of my life because they’re mine.’ And they just kind of looked shocked. Then I’ve had another incident when a young teenager came up and said, ‘Aw, her daddy must be White or Spanish!’ And I said, ‘Yes her father’s White. She’s mixed.’ But aren’t we all in a way? It wasn’t nasty or anything but we get comments like that. If I can have a teachable moment with someone, I’ll go there...

The challenging experiences recalled by each couple were all very different: from piercing stares to a sense of being disowned by family members. However, when asked how it has impacted their lives, the couples responded that no matter what they have faced, it did not cause them to question their decision to be with their spouse. In fact, all

of the couples in the study, each having been married more than 10 years with the exception of two, reported that the amount of racial challenges in their relationship were so few and far between that they found them difficult to recall during the interviews.

Five of the eight couples (62.5%) reported incidences beyond occasional stares that have challenged their relationship. Cliff (BH) recounts his devastating experience in New York while Judy (WW) was pregnant with their first child.

She was pregnant with [our son] and this was during the time Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* was out....the guys yelling out on the boulevard, 'Oh, that's disgusting!' And these were White guys driving by. And the Black guys [were] yelling out, 'Jungle Fever!' Being in a restaurant and having patrons in the restaurant visibly indicating their dissatisfaction with us being together... I had never felt the same kind of personal repudiation and dismissiveness as I did then.

Overall, all the couples in this study expressed the importance of communicating with each other their emotions and feelings through discussion as a way to cope. Most couples (62.5%) found that they could agree on ways to deal with challenges. Typically, they found that their spouse was able to understand and empathize with their experience. One couple, after recalling an incident of housing discrimination, reports how they coped with the situation by first acknowledging through discussion and then addressing it with legal counsel. They informed a lawyer friend about their situation who contacted the housing representative to inform them of the legal consequences of their discriminatory practices. Although they did not get the home they wanted, they felt satisfaction that they addressed the situation instead of ignoring it.

Mindy (WW) recounts how her father did not come to her wedding and did not speak to her for three years due to her interracial marriage. When asked how they coped with it, they simply replied that it was his [her father's] problem, not theirs. Her husband,

Adam (BH) adds how he responded to the situation and how he's proud that his wife did not let her father dictate who she marries.

I have the upmost respect for him because he said that's how he felt and he held true to how he felt, and whether or not he came around was up to him. He didn't lie to me. He felt the way he felt. Who knows if that's how he still feels, but he comes over and he treats me with respect... I don't like fake people. So again, her father stayed true to his word... Her father can feel whatever it is that he feels. That's not going to affect the way I feel unless you let it affect us. And I'm referring to her [my wife].

An interesting finding was that in 50% of couples, the White parent expressed that they were ignorant to the negative connotations that are attached to interracial relationships, and have subsequently been educated by their Black spouse who have more knowledge and first-hand experience of race relations in America. Laura (WW) shares here that she was not aware of the stigma of marrying a Black man.

Racially speaking, I would describe myself as naïve... My family never talked about race. I didn't even understand that there was supposed to be a problem. To me, people were just people. If you treat them well...I didn't understand that, really, until he and I got together that there were racial issues...

Her husband, Charles (BH) explains how he tries to educate her about the stigma regarding interracial relationships between Whites and Blacks:

And I would always tell her to keep an eye on this stuff because people have always had a problem with Black and White relationships. And I would tell her, 'look at people looking at you.'

Laura (WW) responds with, "So my whole thing is, how do I know that's the reason why they're watching...like I don't just come to that conclusion."

Three out of the eight couples (37.5%) tend to have differing views in the way they interpret challenges that have caused a strain in the relationship. Cliff (BH) explains

how he and his wife have heated debates about how he reacts to perceived racial attacks, and how he sometimes feels misunderstood in his relationship.

The impact it had, we talked about it. With Judy, it was that I was overly sensitive. We had some fairly heated debates about it. I won't say arguments because it's something that we continue to talk about. But that's not true. The articulation of it or the demonstration of it was exactly the message they wanted to send. I'm not over reacting to anything. I'm reacting to a challenge to me!

Family Response to Biracial Children

A curious finding in this study is that most of the extended families in this study were supportive of the birth of children, even with couples that faced some initial resistance from family. Six of the eight couples (75%) reported their families were happy when they started having children. Such support is important as we consider the role the extended families play in the rearing of the biracial children. Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) both report having very supportive families during their marriage and the birth of their children. Cal explains how increasingly loving his parents became with the birth of his children.

I've seen a whole other side of my folks, especially my mother, which I never knew existed. I was brought up with tough love. But watching my folks with their grandkids, they're tickled pink. My brother has a son. He's not biracial. And they make no distinction between them.

Peter (WH) even highlighted how important his children's births were to improving the dynamics of his family.

The dynamics in my family...the child who got the most attention in my family was my handicapped brother. It was the problem that got the most attention, not the success. I say our kids are little miracles. They totally changed the dynamics of the family. Suddenly they had the attention. My sister, who had her problems... she was just the best aunt a kid can ask for...so thoughtful with the gifts. So if you ask what their reactions were, they just transformed family gatherings.

Two of the eight couples (25%) reported negative feedback from family surrounding their having children. Lisa (BW), who has limited contact with her in-laws due to racial tension, reports that the only reason her husband's parents were happy was because their first born resembled a White baby. She believes that they were happy for the wrong reasons, further validating her belief in her in-laws' discriminatory and prejudicial ways.

Lisa: They were happy when they saw her.

Jonathan: Yea, it was my mom and dad's first grandchild.

Lisa: No, I'm talking about the color.

Jonathan: Oh. [Our daughter] came out really light.

Lisa: She was a little White baby.

Mindy (WW) reported that her father, who doesn't approve of interracial relationships, believes that having biracial children complicates the child's life and simply doesn't understand what a biracial child would consider themselves racially. Mindy states: "He wanted to know, if our kids had to mark off on a job application...if they're not Black and they're not White, what are they?"

Children's Physical Appearance

Physical appearance questions were fairly direct in nature, asking parents to explicitly describe the physical features of their children. In this study, the parents were very descriptive about their children's appearance. An important finding that transcended across seven of the eight couples (87.5%) was that their children were perceived as Hispanic due to, according to Adam (BH), "the caramel skin and curly hair." 60% of White mothers also reported that the public perceived them as Hispanic based on their children's perceived Hispanic appearance. Christina (WW) explains how her children

(ranging in age from 3 to 10) are perceived as Spanish, and at times, question their racial background.

It's funny they know they're biracial but they look more Spanish... Our kids have said, especially our girls, some people think we're Spanish... As a matter of fact, because I can speak fluent Spanish, they think we're half Spanish. And I'm like, 'we're not Spanish!' No matter how many times we tell them, they say 'why does everyone think we're Spanish?'

Donna (BW) reports how her 24-year-old daughter, Shelly, reacts to societal perceptions that she is Hispanic.

She's been at a store and people just come up to her speaking Spanish. She knows Spanish, but she says that she's not Spanish so she's not going to talk to them in Spanish. And I ask, 'well could you have helped them out?' And she says 'it depends on how I feel.'

Parents identified two main physical characteristics: fair or light brown skin and curly hair. Among these characteristics emerged important themes. One important issue that emerged was the issue of hair regarding their daughters. Six of the eight couples had daughters. Of those six families, four of them (66%) expressed that their daughters felt insecure about their curly hair texture. Not only was it important to uncover the specific concerns they had, but it was also vital to uncover ways in which the parents responded to these concerns and how they help their daughters cope. For example, Dee (WW) describes the concerns her 5-year-old daughter has with her kinky hair.

But she has really rough hair... She says a lot that she wished her hair was like mine... straight hair. I just tell her she has a different type of hair. Well we did get it relaxed and it straightened it for a little bit. And she liked it. But her main problem is she hates to have it combed. I just tell her we all have different hair and we have to work with what we got.

Beatrice (BW) explains how beautiful her 9-year-old daughters' hair is, and how she wants them to embrace their unique qualities.

[Gina] may say why do all my friends have straight hair and I have curly hair. And we just emphasized how beautiful she was. 'I would love to have your thick healthy, shiny, curly hair.' So whenever I comb her hair, I'd say 'oh, can I have your hair?' And try to turn it into something positive.

Most interesting was the story of how Judy (WW) allowed let her 13-year-old daughter to make the decision to straighten her hair, but soon found out that her daughter began to embrace her beautiful curls.

For the longest she kept saying she wanted to get it [hair] straightened. And we flat ironed it once as an experiment. And it was absolutely gorgeous. So then we talked about getting the Keratin treatment to straighten her hair. And she actually made an appointment for it. And then leading up to it, she came to understand that if she did that that was it. It would not be an easy thing to go back to the curls. And she decided not to do it. But she loves her hair and thinks it's the most distinguishing thing about her, especially when she looks at all her friends with the straight, straight hair...And everybody loves her hair! So I was glad that she came to accept it and likes who she is.

I also asked the parents to describe their children's skin color. Most of the parents reported their children ranged in complexion from fair skin to light brown skin. Notably, Black mothers in this study expressed an initial surprise that their children are much lighter than they are. Donna, a brown-skinned Black woman, describes how fair-skinned her 22-year-old son is, and when she gave birth to him, the nurse didn't believe she was his biological mother.

...in the hospital when the nurse wheeled him into my room, she looked at me and she looked at him and said, 'I need to see your bracelet.' Making sure the names matched. And I said, 'yes, he's mine.' And then she looked at the bracelet for a long time. For me, I was like 'wow' because I expected him to be more like his sister...darker hair. She was light-skinned so she wasn't dark, but my son looked like a White baby that belonged to a White woman...with blonde hair.

Another Black mother, Lisa, expressed a similar experience:

I had an emergency C-Section. They brought her over after being drugged up and I remember thinking, 'oh Lord, look at my little bald, white baby.' [laughter] And I remember saying, let me look at her hands. Because you always hear babies get

switched at birth. And when I looked, she had my hands. I was like, ‘yup, that’s mine!’

Another interesting finding in this study was that many of the parents reported that their children have used skin colors to compare family members, using color labels to identify themselves rather than racial labels. For example, Beatrice (BW) reports that her daughters (ages 8 and 9) would say that they were tan. And her daughter, Jennifer, would say ‘Daddy’s pink... And I’m brown.’ Lisa (BW) shares a similar experience:

My daughter says that ‘Mommy’s brown, and you’re [Daddy] yellow. Because his dad does the fake tan, he is red. In her pictures now, she draws people and their faces are brown. So she’s becoming more aware. She’s 4.5. She’s definitely getting it now. And when I ask her ‘what are you,’ she’s kind of not sure... She colors herself brown sometimes.

Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) describe their children’s way of classifying their parents using colors rather than racial terms.

Christina: They classify. I’m brown, she’s vanilla. [laughter]

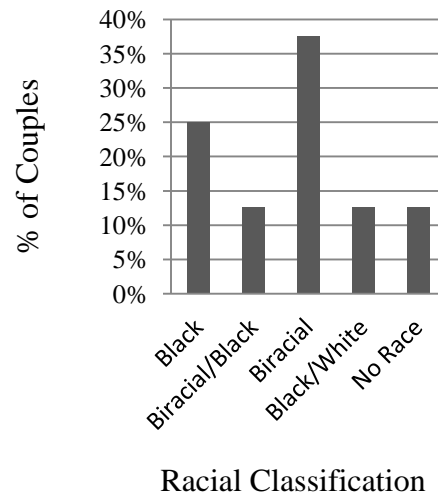
Cal: They’ve had their own sorting process.

Christina: For a long time, I was pink and he was chocolate.

Parent’s Racial Classification of their Children

Parents of biracial children who were interviewed in this study have different ways of identifying their children racially. When asked how they classify their children racially, 25% classified their children as Black. One couple (12.5%) had differing views on classification in which the Black mother considered the children Black while the White father considered them mixed or Biracial. Another couple (12.5%) had differing views in which the Black mother considered the children Black while the White father considered them White. 37.5% considered their children biracial or mixed while 12.5% considered their children to be of the human race, with no racial classification.

Figure 1 Percent of Couple's Racial Classification of Their Children



The One-Drop Rule

Many of these parents (75%) made reference to the one-drop rule. Dee (WW) explains how she feels about this ideology.

Like I've heard people say that if you have one drop of Black blood, then they're Black. But I'm like, 'no...they're half Black half White to me.' [The one drop rule]... Well there goes another stereotype about biracial children.

Her husband, Jermaine (BH) shares a similar perspective:

I believe it's half Black, half White also. So that's what I would write on an application also. I'm not going to lie on it and check something that they're not. I'm not going to check just White or just Black because they're both.

Beatrice (BW) explains why she considers her daughters (ages 8 and 9) Black, despite her husband's Peter (WH) view of a Biracial or mixed classification.

Beatrice: I tell them they're Black.

Peter: That's not fair. [chuckle]

Beatrice: I told them about the one-drop-rule. I explained to them that in this country if you had one drop of Black blood in you, then you were Black. In society, they're considered Black.

Peter: I would just say mixed.

Beatrice soon explains “I don’t think the category is as important to us. We just want them to be confident and secure in who they are. If they want to check off biracial, that’s fine.” However, Beatrice makes a note to explain her opposition about her children classifying themselves as White. “I might have a problem if they chose White as a category...only because I don’t want them to have a rude awakening from society. Like them saying ‘Oh, I’m White.’ And someone saying, ‘no you’re not.’”

Lisa (BW) also referenced the one drop rule and explains that although her children are mixed, society will consider them Black. She goes on to explain how she tries to educate her police officer husband, Jonathan (WH), about society’s non-White view of their young children.

Lisa: I remember conversations that, I don’t want to say got heated, but I was trying to educate [him] to certain things within Black culture and our perception of things. Explaining that no matter what our children come out as, realizing that society views them as being Black because it’s the one drop of Black blood. And with him being a cop, he’s like ‘no, it’s how the law views them.’ And I’m like ‘it’s not about the law.’.... And he’s like, no they look White.

Jonathan: Basically we classify one’s race based on how they look... And I still have not grasped the concept that my wife explained about one drop of Black blood and you’re Black. I have yet to understand...

While Lisa has contended that her three young children are of mixed heritage, she also exposes a separate “social consciousness” that she has for her children. While she considers her children personally biracial, she sees them in a larger sense as “Black.” She describes her perception when she states, “I consider our children mixed, but they’re Black. It’s like they’re mixed, slash Black.” Adam (BH) illustrates a similar separate “social consciousness.”

I try to explain that especially to my oldest. Going back to the time when if you had a certain amount of Black in you, then you’re considered Black. I tell him that people are going to see you as Black because you have a Black dad. It doesn’t matter how light you are. If they find out you have a Black dad, people are going

to consider you Black. Biracial...if that's what you want to call it, but understand that people are going to see you, at least the majority of people, as Black.

Stereotypes about Biracial Children

Each couple was asked if they held or were aware of any stereotypes or myths regarding biracial children. While one couple did not disclose any stereotypes, responding "Children are children, you don't want to have any perceptions about them," the remaining 7 couples shared their thoughts. Four stereotypes were revealed during their candid reports including 1) biracial children are beautiful, 2) biracial children have identity issues, 3) biracial children have 'good hair', and 4) White mothers lack knowledge on Biracial/Black hair care. The majority of couples (71%) believed in the stereotype that biracial children are beautiful. 42.8% expressed concerns that biracial children have identity issues. 28.5% mentioned, but did not perpetuate, the stereotype that biracial children have 'good hair.' Lastly, one Black mother (14.2%) believed that White mothers tend to lack knowledge on dealing with Biracial/Black hair, which negatively impacts their daughters' self concept.

Christina (WW) explains that having biracial children "seems to bring out the best of both worlds- that those kids are lucky because they have a natural advantage in a lot of different ways." Her husband, Cal (BH), describes his view that many biracial children seem to struggle with their identity especially when there is a White mother raising a biracial child without the father present.

I do see sometimes biracial kids. And they don't appear happy to me. I almost feel like they might be having those, 'who I am' issues. When I see them and I see ours kids, I get the impression that they might be struggling. And it upsets me. Not our kids. The whole identity thing... But then I look, and a lot of times it would be the White mom's taking care of the kid, and no dad.

Christina (WW) also explains how she dislikes the stereotype that biracial people have ‘good hair.’

So as far as biracial, I think some people just wait for them to come just to say, ‘You got good hair.’ Thank God no one in his family says that either. It’s insinuating that having Black hair is bad....I just didn’t want our children thinking: you’re mixed so you got the good hair. I don’t like that.

Peter (WH) and Beatrice (BW) believe in the stereotype that biracial or mixed race children are beautiful. Beatrice says:

I just always think they’re very beautiful. I’m not just talking about Black and White. But any kind of mix, to me, the person has a uniqueness about them. It’s nice to see that. There is such a variety in human beings and we try to appreciate people for who they are.

Peter (WH) mentions public figures that support the ‘biracial beauty’ image: “I was just thinking about the famous biracial celebrities like Halle Berry and Alicia Keys. But people like that come to mind. And again, they seem to have a uniqueness about them.”

Donna (BW), who raised her young adult children as Black, believes that White mothers have issues managing their daughter’s curly hair texture, and feels that if they gain more knowledge on Black hair care, they can build their daughters’ self esteem.

...when I know a White female parent is raising a biracial child, there’s usually a hair issue. I do know that much. Like I’ll look at the child and think, ‘Oh Lord, she doesn’t know what to do with that child’s hair, because maybe she hasn’t dealt with the curly issue. Curls can go from silky curls to really nappy curls. So if she doesn’t have a clue, then she needs to embrace the African-American side and say ‘Where can I get her hair done.’ Like, ‘You need to do that child’s hair better so she feels a little better about herself.’

Lisa (BM) describes stereotypes surrounding physical appearance and ‘biracial beauty’ based on her experience growing up with biracial peers.

I had some friends growing up who were mixed. And it was the guys who were considered the pretty boys, you know those stereotypical things....with the wavy hair. I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh, I have one of those now.’ The girls were the pretty girls, the light-skinned girls with the pretty hair. And I have two of them.

Does Race Matter?

Laura (WW) explains that ever since she was a little girl, she never saw the importance of classifying oneself into a racial category. Now that her 5-year old son has started school, she's reminded of just how irrelevant it is to classify her son into a racial category.

Even when I was in school, I always had this passion about when you fill out demographics. And I remember in 7th grade, I wondered why we had to choose who we are. Why do we have to pick one thing? And that always made me crazy, even before I knew I was going to be in an interracial relationship. And then there was a period of time that if you were mixed and had even an iota of African American in you, then that's what you had to choose. That's who you were, and that would make me crazy. And now, you pick as many as you want. I appreciated that they weren't identifying White or Black, but it's interesting why it's so important. And I think personally you should know who you are and where you come from, but for school, I don't know if the relevance is there.

Although most of the couples (87.5%) racially classified their children, 75% of couples stressed the irrelevance of racially classifying of their children. These parents view their children in terms of their characters, their cultures and their accomplishments. When asked how they classify their children, Judy (WW) and Cliff (BH) make it clear that they have completely abandoned the racial classification system. While they were cognizant of the reality of the imposition of race on our society, they have chosen not to view their children in such terms. In fact, they were adamant about expressing their non-racial ideology during the interview.

Interviewer: So you don't consider them any racial classification?

Cliff: No, I don't.

Judy: No. It hurts me that it comes up. They're fantastic children.

Cliff: When the issue came up as half Black/half White, I was thinking well which half of you is White and which half of you is Black? You're a whole person. You're not half anything. And if someone asks you, tell them you're a human being...period...end of story.

Cliff goes on to explain the importance of cultural values rather than racial values.

I think it is crap. The cultural combination is much more relevant...I think it's important to let the kids know the absolute beauty of their culture so that they know where they come from. Not what race they are, but that you come from your parents, your grandparents. And that rich tapestry that it represents for you as a global citizen.

Although Judy (WW) and Cliff (BH) do not consider their children racially, Judy goes on to reluctantly express her belief that her teenage son and daughter consider themselves White. Judy explains how her children have embraced the White cultural experience in their predominantly White, affluent community.

Honestly... I think [they] think of themselves as predominantly White...if you look at their friends...even though there are other African-Americans in this community, that's not who they're friends with. But the majority of friends are White. I wonder if we had moved to... a mixed environment, how things would be different. I don't know how things may change as they get older...But if you ask them how they view themselves, I think they'll say they're more White.

While the cultural recognition is consistent across many of the couples, other parents adopt simpler alternatives to a racial perception. Many of the parents look at their children simply as good kids with good characteristics and traits. For these parents, such traits supercede any racial ideology that they may feel compelled to impose on their children. All of the parents talked about their children in a general positive light. Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) illustrate the good characteristics of their four children (ages 3, 6, 8 and 10).

Interviewer: How would you describe your children?

Cal: They're all blessings.

Christina: They're very smart.

Cal: Outgoing... they're good kids... Yea, with their personalities, they have that confidence where people just want to be around you. They stand out. Our boys, they have dynamic personalities. [Our son] doesn't realize it yet, but he attracts- he draws people to him. And I can see that happening with [my other son]. Not fearless, but almost. They can go up to a crowd of new boys they'd never met and

fit right in. And start running it! Fit right in and start taking over things. Our girls are pretty shy, but very strong. But that's their personalities. Our oldest is very popular, even with the boys. They're not afraid to take the next step... We're blessed to have kids like these.

Judy (WW) emphasizes the special qualities of their 17-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter.

We're proud parents. They're very special in that they haven't gotten caught up in material things. We've done a good job with that. They're very reasonable in what they ask for and what they expect. And they're good people and they're happy. And they're so well rounded. And they're so talented. I don't know if it is genes, but they're standouts. Our son is a standout athlete, always the star. And our daughter, the same way with dance.

Laura (WW) and Charles (BH) take great pride in their 5-year old son and feel good about the positive feedback they get from the general public about what a great kid he is. Laura states:

WW: [He] has a certain charm that he doesn't know he has. It invites people to him. And we just laugh. He's painfully shy at daycare, but somehow he has the entire daycare wrapped around his finger. He's so handsome, well mannered. He has a big heart. He's very calm, caring and nurturing.

Beatrice (BW) also takes pride in the beautiful qualities of her family and feels she is blessed:

... try to celebrate your relationship and your culture. We look at culture more than race. I don't look at [my husband] and just see a White man. I see him, but that's not the defining thing about him. I think about the qualities he possesses. And with our kids, I see they are beautiful, talented, they're fearless. And we're so fortunate...with our families...and we know this is not the case for everyone. Everybody is just really great. It's a blessing. And we don't take it for granted. We definitely enjoy it.

Children's Experiences of Racism or Discrimination and Coping

When asked if their children had faced challenging experiences surrounding their race, 5 of the 8 couples (62.5%) reported their children (ranging in ages 8-24) faced some

form of discrimination or racism from their peers. Cal (BH) explains how his 10-year old daughter, Christy, dealt with an incident when one of her peers made a negative comment about Black people.

When Obama was running...this was a big issue because it was the first time it was presented to us like this. [Christy's] friend told her that her parents weren't voting for Obama because he was Black...So I asked, 'how'd you feel?' And she was like, 'well I'm not her friend anymore.' And I was ok with that. Because if the girl's parents are teaching those kinds of ideals, she's probably someone we don't want her hanging around with. For a kid to be able to shake off that kind of teaching and make their own choice, I think is good. So even when [Christy] made up with the girl, the girl can see like, 'ok wow, I really like [Christy] and she's half Black. Maybe my parents didn't understand.' So hopefully this girl benefitted from [my daughter] being the bigger person.

Beatrice (BW) shares a similar experience of a time her 8 and 9-year old daughters dealt with a negative statement by a little girl about Black people.

And there was this little White girl. And our kids wanted to play. So they went up to her... And the little girl told them, 'I don't play with brown people or Black people,' something like that. My feathers got ruffled and I sat there thinking I'm just going to see what they say. So then [my daughter] says 'why?' And in the end, it turned out that this girl has a Black girl at school who put grease in her hair, and she would rub her hair on this girl's friend's shirt. And the shirt would get greasy. So the little girl said, 'because you put grease in your hair.' So through questioning, because every time this girl said something [my daughter] would say, 'well why...' she was able to break things down. And by the end of the summer, this girl invited them to her birthday party. They were thick as thieves by the end of summer. I was proud of them the way they handled it. They just kept asking questions until it made sense. They didn't just walk away believing the girl didn't like them.

Cliff (BH) shares an incident surrounding his 13-year old daughter, Mary, who attends a predominantly White public school.

The principal called us about [Mary] crying. They reported that a boy had told our daughter that she would never have a boyfriend because she was Black. There was more conversation to be had with her and more helping her to be ok with who she is.

Mindy (WW) explains how she tackled a situation when her 12-year-old son reported being teased for being biracial.

...he's told me that some kids teased him about his mom being White and his dad being Black... When he did, I told him he has a mom who loves him and a dad who loves him. There are people who will say things about you, but you keep pushing on and don't let it bother you.

All of the parents in the study highlighted the importance of instilling a positive ideology towards race for their children, despite the harsh realities of society or their racial perceptions of their children. Cal (BH) shares his philosophy on race and hopes that by sharing them with his children, they will be better equipped to deal with adversity.

Just letting them know they're loved, brushing things off that are out of your control. You can't control how people think. You can't control your skin color. You can control how people perceive you by your actions, but you can't make people like you. So there are things that are out of your control that you shouldn't waste your time worrying about.

Parent's Hopes for their Children

All of the couples in this interview have hopes for their children, and many of these hopes have more to do with their characters rather than their racial choice. For example, Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) state:

I don't want my children to have to choose. I want them to be exposed to everything and not be limited...they have the best of both worlds. You have all my goods. You have all her goods... We think that if someone isn't going to like them because they're Black and White, then they don't need that person. I just think there are so many people in this world. We have a lot of advantage just because both of us have good jobs. I want my kids to help others no matter what their race.

Cal goes on to share his thoughts about fostering confidence in his children, while also keeping them sensitive to other people's differences.

Yea, I want my kids to have confidence. But confidence is different than conceit. I have no tolerance for it. Thinking you're something you're not...thinking you're

better...They have to be respectful. They have to treat people fairly and kind. They have to be good citizens...If you're going to be around somebody, you have to find good in them. Everybody has something good in them. I want you to be competent. I don't want you to be afraid to speak up for yourself. I want you to think outside the box, to try something new...to jump out of airplane. [chuckle] You need to be willing to do all these things and understand where your strength comes from...If you got it then you were blessed. You're fortunate to have it. Use it in the right way.

Peter (WH) and Beatrice (BW) share their thoughts on how they want their daughters to appreciate the things they didn't have when they were growing up. Beatrice states:

I tell them they are very lucky, because growing up, I didn't have these things. Like I don't remember having toys like children have today. So yea, we keep an open dialogue about that.

Peter adds a similar thought:

I want our children to have a sense of appreciation for what they have here. I brought our kids 'back to the hood [where I'm from].' And the kids got a chance to walk through my old house...it was a beautiful 1903 4-bedroom house. And when we turned the corner, you can see this cloud of litter going across the street. And the kids were like, 'Daddy we like the house, but we don't like the neighborhood.' You can tell that it was nothing like around here. But it was just to get them to appreciate what they have now. Because some parents say their kids feel entitled to certain things. And we want our kids to have a sense of gratitude....

Cliff (BH) shares a similar view regarding his hopes that his teenage children stay grounded and appreciate the things they have.

But I think our biggest challenge is having them stay grounded...that this is not the way the majority of people live. But to try to keep them fixed on that all of this is stuff. The real important thing is how you are as a person and the choice you make about who you align yourself with. Be clear on what your values are and don't compromise for someone else.

Charles (BH) and Laura (WW) discuss the issue surrounding the praise their 5-year old son gets for his attractive appearance. Although they acknowledge their son is a cute boy, they hope his character stands out more than his looks.

Charles: He is a good looking kid but I don't get involved in repeatedly telling him that. Everybody outside always tells him that. And biracial children tend to be good looking kids. Don't know why. But sometimes it works out that way. And because of that, I don't want his ego to get out of control. That will be a problem for us... I hope he stays humble.

Laura: So we focus on things like praising good manners. We're targeting things that we feel are important. First with safety and then came manners. And it's worked.

Charles: Yea, we try to work from the inside out. We just want him to be happy.

Impact of Religiosity and Church Affiliation

Many of the parents expressed where they gain the strength to deal with adversity. 37.5% of couples reported a deep connection to God, and how their spirituality serves as a source of courage through adversity and also, as a source of identity for their kids. Cal (BH) and Christina (WW), whose children attend a Christian school through their church, describe how religion is an integral part of their roles as parents.

We try to be fair with them and keep them grounded. I see other kids, that aren't biracial, and they have to belong here, and they have to be a part of this, and this person doesn't like me. And it just shatters their existence. I don't want them to have to rely on that. As long as they know God is out there and is always looking out for them, then they're going to be ok.... For a kid to not feel like they belong, that's the worst thing. That's why we teach that first and foremost, you belong to God.

Cal (BH) goes on to emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance when he states "you need that foundation of a loving home, good parents, and having faith. That will help you get through a lot of stuff."

Donna (BW) and Gregory (WH), who classify their children as Black, share how the Black church has been instrumental in fostering a positive racial identity in their young adult children.

The religious part is probably what grounded them. We go to church a lot. I come from a family of ministers. Being a part of an African-American church gives you a strong sense of who you are...If people don't go to church, you have to find some common denominator for your children to identify with...or they're going to be confused and looking for who they are always...I think that was important, us being from a strong faith and the values we have.

Peter (WH) describes his personal spiritual journey and how it has been instrumental in his own identity formation as a White man who felt culturally Black.

It was strange because I felt like my only identity was a child of God. I didn't fit in with the White people. I couldn't relate to them at all. They didn't have any ghetto slang. They seemed strange. And the Black people sounded like the White people...So culturally, it was strange. I felt all over the place. I sought out African American parties like the Paul Robeson Club. But it still felt weird because they still saw me as White. They didn't see me culturally. I think what resolved it for me culturally was when [a professor] told me to check out a Baptist church. It was Nirvana for me. I felt that spiritual bond. I finally felt whole again...It was that spiritual life and cultural life coming together.

Peter's wife, Beatrice (BW) describes how his spirituality attracted her to him and helped her develop her own relationship with God.

I liked that he was very spiritual and it helped me develop my faith some more. He was just a good person with a kind heart...He was a good person and he helped me get connected to God.

Cliff (BH), who does not racially classify his teenage son and daughter, describes his regret for not introducing religion in his children's lives, believing that religion can be a vital part of a child's personal and spiritual growth and identity development.

While you think about it, I think we should have been more decisive around religion. When I look back on it, I think we took the position based on the right reason, but it changed over time, and we did not. But I think they will find and chart their own path in regard to that. I don't think we've given them enough ammunition of experience to really frame their decision. I don't want them to look

at us and say why didn't they spend more time doing this, or why didn't we go to church on Sundays. It's never come up to a great extent, but I know growing up in a Baptist church with Sunday school, the choir...the whole nine yards, it would be a compliment to what's going on in the schools and their community. It's a very enriching experience for everybody involved; and even people who flat out repudiate religion, they can still talk about their experience growing up in the church with fondness a sense of community and connectedness. In hindsight, I think we should have made that choice. Would it have made a difference? I don't know. But I think it may have.

Community and School Choice

All of the parents reported proactive strategies when they decided on the types of communities to live in and schools to enroll their children in. Making a choice of where to live often took a lot of consideration and discussion between the parents. Since they had biracial children, many parents had high expectations about the environment their children lived in. The following themes emerged when discussing reasons why they chose a specific location: diversity, safety, education and uniqueness of house. Peter (WH) describes his tough decision to compromise on diversity in order to provide his daughters with a high quality education system in a safe community.

So that was another choice: great school district, no crime because my kids are not going to deal with that... If you choose a public school system, the best school for your child, pretty much on average in New Jersey, you're looking at an all White neighborhood. So you're choosing if your children will have to experience a cultural adjustment for the sake of their education. We grappled with that for a long time and I remember having that conversation. When you're White, you don't have to think about that, but if you're mixed, you do. When we would look at places, it was a real challenge. I work in education. I don't want good. I want excellence....Do you do this, and their culture potentially suffers? Or do you decide on a nice mix, but in the back of your mind you're settling. So this was a very challenging choice and we had a lot of conversation about it.

Donna (BW) and Gregory (WH) reported their emphasis on the level of diversity in their community and school district when deciding on where to raise their family.

Yes, even before we got married. We discussed the possible challenges...racial. I think that was one of the reasons we decided to move [here] because it was a more racially-mixed community. One of the reasons was for the school system. And we chose this school system over something a little further out that was mostly White because we thought it would be a more positive experience being with a mix of children, including other biracial children within their classroom. So I recall discussing that.

Cliff (BH) reported simply falling in love with his current home, reminiscent of his early days growing up in the country, which is located in a White affluent community. With the move soon to a town with according to Cliff has a “highly desirable zip code” came experiences that elicited feelings of alienation and a sense that he did not belong. However, for his son, he realizes this is the type of lifestyle he is accustomed to and may not assimilate too well in predominantly Black settings.

It may be a cultural shock if he was around a lot of Blacks. I mean he enjoys it...the novelty of it. He likes to hang out with his cousins a lot. But he is most comfortable dealing with what's familiar, and this is it.

Cliff emphasizes how he also compromised on diversity and how he proactively manages any resistance from the public.

When we moved here, this reminded me so much of where I grew up because it was like home. I didn't care who was around. For the sake of [my son and daughter], I needed to care. And I made it my business to let people know that you don't need to worry about me, unless you indicate that I need to worry about you. When it comes to my kids, the mortgage, we got stuff to take care of...you don't matter. On a certain level, you're not even remotely a consideration. And that's the way I approached people early on. It's amazing to me how different people's response is when you're the first one to indicate that you don't matter. I don't care about you. You don't matter. I'm here for that little girl and boy.

Biracial Children in School

All of the parents expressed positive feelings towards the type of school experience their children have. While parents reported some incidents of racism and/or discrimination towards their children, they felt that school personnel were generally

supportive of their multi-racial background and demonstrated cultural awareness. Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) describe how their daughter's school staff had a general positive regard for her, and describe the comfort they felt knowing their daughter's [White] school principal was married to a Black woman.

Christina: The principal...he was a wonderful man. He told me he had been married to a Black woman, so he was aware and very open-minded.

Cal: But yea, there were never any concessions made. All we got from them [school personnel] was that she was a super student. We got accolades on her as a person and her personality.

Christina: Yea, and it was a small enough school that if there were any issues dealing with race, it would be nipped in the bud. I know that, because the principal told me that he had a difficult time, himself. And he wanted all the kids to be tolerant of each other.

Beatrice (BW) and Peter (WH) describe the collaborative relationship they have with their daughter's school personnel and how important it is to be a visible presence in the school.

Beatrice: We've been very fortunate with that. So far, the teachers have been wonderful, energetic, and enthusiastic.

Peter: I make a purpose of going to every single school meeting. I have to be out of state to not be there. I always want the teachers to see me, and I always show up like I'm ready for a meeting, in my suit. Working in education, I feel like it would be totally hypocritical if I wasn't there. I'd move my schedule around to make sure I make it to a teacher's conference or a PTA meeting so they see both of us, not just one of us.

Beatrice: We don't just send our kids out for a whole day with people we don't know. We try to maintain a partnership with them. We've met with the nurses... We communicate with the bus drivers to keep them abreast of all our needs. The principals, vice principal, school counselors...everyone we've met with so we're all on the same page. We don't see the school as an adversary. And they're very good about trying to meet parents' needs.

Peter: We're fortunate, the school principal... I think she's mixed... But she looks more like they could be her children. [chuckle]

Beatrice: Uh huh

Peter: When she sees us, she's smiling!

Judy (WW) describes how impressed she is with the efforts of her teenage son and daughter's school to promote cultural awareness in the curriculum, considering the lack of diversity within the school.

But I've been impressed with the school system in general, especially compared to when I was in school. [Our daughter] especially is very, very moved about movies they see in school like with Martin Luther King. I was impressed that the school took that time and that history is taught a little more realistically than it was before. [And]...the teachers absolutely love our kids.

Mindy (WW), who enjoys the high level of diversity in her town, also expresses a sense of comfort in knowing her son's teacher promotes cultural awareness within the classroom.

As a matter of fact, one of the teachers told me that they ask for race in the class because they want to put the kids with someone of the same race. And in fact, there is another biracial kid in my child's class...so that they don't feel like they're the only one. Which I think is really nice. It's so common that you can link them together, and there are six in a class. So that's another reason why we stayed here. We blend in here.

Racial Messages and Strategies

Questions concerning the type of messages transmitted to their children in order to shape their racial identity were asked. During the study, each couple consistently reported that their main strategies for forming a healthy racial identity with their children were through open dialogue and engaging in certain activities.

One type of discussion that parents were likely to engage in is conversations about the children's heritage. Generally, these conversations were about the children

acknowledging that they are different, the clarification of any questions they may have about their heritage, and the instillation of good feelings about where they came from. Ultimately, questions surrounding the observance of who they are as people were identified as necessary for the parents to establish a sense of belonging in the children. Beatrice (BW) is an example of a parent who strives to teach her children about their roots by exposing them to hers.

And I think part of our goal is to make them feel more like a citizen of the world...not so much as biracial kids. The majority of people in the world are not White. We really value learning about different cultures. It's just important for them to know that it's a big world out there. And what helped is that we took them back to Grenada and went to the village where I grew up. We took them to Dominica where I had relatives... They ask how it was to grow up in Grenada. I try to be honest with them about that.

Beatrice (BW) goes on to explain her hopes to one day take a family trip to expose her kids to her husband's Swedish roots.

I'd like to take them to Sweden one day. Three of his grandparents were Swedish and one of them was Danish. And we'd like to go and show them that part. And we talk about our heritage. They like hearing stories about what it was like when Daddy was growing up.

Mindy (WW) and Adam (BH) discuss a similar desire to keep their 12-year old son, Alex, connected to both sides of his family: "They have exposure to both sides of the family. And they love spending time with cousins on both sides.

When asked about other messages they transmit to their children, many couples reported warning their children about potential challenges that may result based on their race. This was generally expressed by parents with children at least 10 years old, which was 50% of couples. Adam (BH), who had difficulties maintaining relationships with his past White girlfriends due to their parents shock and disapproval of his race, discusses the

type of messages he passes down to his 12-year old son who has started showing interest in the girls in his class.

[Alex] was mentioning that he had a couple of girls that liked him. And I asked him if they were White. And he said they were. And I asked him do their parents know you're Black. And he said I think they do. And I said make sure they know that you're Black because there can be issues later on. He understood why I said it.

Beatrice (BW) and Peter (WH) made a point to highlight physical aspect of the children's heritage. Peter (WH) explains how beautiful his daughters are when they wear their hair in braids, and he wants his daughters to celebrate their heritage through this form of expression.

[My daughter] may say why do all my friends have straight hair and I have curly hair. And we just emphasized how beautiful she was... Braids are the answer. It makes their hair look longer and they look absolutely gorgeous with braids. And then all their friends admire them, and now they're unique. We try to highlight their uniqueness.

Engaging in discussions with their children was not the only strategy that parent in this reported that they utilized to foster a healthy racial identity in their children. The parents identified the following items that they have introduced to their children to shape racial identity: dolls, books, food, and television.

Toys/Dolls

Parents were asked how they have incorporated identity development through the toys their children play with. It was found that parents engaged in a variety of practices. While most parents reported picking dolls of different racial groups in order to expose their daughters to a "balanced" racial view, one father reported picking dolls that only

resembled their children. Peter (WH) recalls his method of choosing dolls for his daughters when they were younger.

I remember specifically making a conscious effort to buy dolls that look like them. And I heard that it was important, and I would point out like, 'see they're beautiful just like you.' In society, I know how important it is for women, so I wanted to make it clear that they felt comfortable about themselves.

Dee (WW) and Jermaine (BH) report a "color blinded" preference their 5 year-old daughter exhibits when playing with dolls.

With dolls, she has a mix of Black and White dolls. She doesn't have any comments really. Yea, she doesn't choose the White doll over the Black doll or vice versa. She just wants a doll.

Books and television

It was also found that books and television programs have been used by parents as a healthy way to foster positive racial identity development. The books were introduced to their children to provide both an exposure to different cultures and races and factual information about their children's mixed heritage. Laura (WW) recalls buying her 5-year old son the children's version of Barack Obama's book that has prompted inquisitive questions about his skin color.

We brought the children's version of Obama's book, and in it, he referred to his parents as my mother was as white as whipped cream and my daddy black as ink. And there was a picture of it in the book with Obama being a mixture of the two parents. And at 2, [our son] would start calling us that and asked why he was beige...like he chose the color beige... definitely trying to identify with something. With the Obama book, he asks questions like do I look like this?

Laura (WW) goes on to discuss the purposeful decision to buy books about embracing human differences:

I bought this book called 'The Skin you're In' that talks about differences and how differences are good. So we try to feed him the positive stuff so that he's a little grounded when someone tells him that he looks or acts different.

Some parents also reported using television as a tool to develop healthy ideas about race. Specifically, parents chose particular programs that they thought would benefit their children with respect to their mixed heritage. These television programs typically portray diversity and messages of acceptance. Charles (BH) and Laura (WW) describe their 5-year old son's affinity for programs that exhibit cultural and linguistic diversity.

I don't know if it's because of Dora the Explorer that he likes Spanish, but we enrolled him in Spanish class. And he's doing really well. And he told me he wants to learn Dutch. And he said that before he was 3! And I think it's the Noggin shows. So the shows he watches are very diverse...And Yo Gabba Gabba. He loves that show!

Food

Some parents reported that they used food to negotiate a healthy racial identity with their children. Parents reported that by serving them foods that were part of both their family's cultures, they were able to give them a glimpse of both their Black and White heritages. Beatrice (BW) describes how she integrates her West Indian culture in the foods she prepares: "I cook West Indian food. [My daughter] requests things like soup, fishcakes and macaroni and cheese from their granny."

Mindy (WW) describes the importance of creating a balance between cultures in the foods she prepares for her children and highlighting the contributions from each side of his heritage.

I try to make the types of food that are common to his family as well as those from my Italian heritage. [Alex's] favorite thing for me to cook is collard greens so we definitely make sure they have contributions from both sides.

Other methods

Some parents reported simple exposure to the world as their way of instilling the idea of diversity and acceptance of human difference. Cal (BH) explains simple methods of promoting racial identity development in his kids.

Interviewer: What messages or ideas do you instill or promote in your children regarding their race?

Cal: I would say openness, tolerance, inclusion. Public places, games, sporting event, movies, theme parks, public events. Not just going to a Spanish block party- which is predominantly one way. Usually wherever we go, it's a public place. We don't do a lot of race exclusive events, except family reunions.

Lisa (BW) reports that although her children are mainly exposed to Black culture when they attend school, they practice a more open cultural experience in the home.

I think it leans towards [Black culture.] The school they go to is a predominantly Black, Christian school. So they get that slant on education. At home, it's kind of everything and anything. Their nanny is Peruvian so she'll speak Spanish to them. And they pick up on it, which is pretty funny.

Parents such as Dee (WW) and Jermaine (BH) reported they do not focus on race when introducing activities or other strategies to their children. Instead, they've adopted a non-racial approach:

Interviewer: What messages or strategies do you instill in your children regarding their biracial background?

Jermaine: Treat others like you'd like to be treated.

Dee: Nothing specific about their actual race. We do teach them to be respectful of other people.

Mindy (WW) and Adam (BH) report an approach that focuses on celebrating Black history and the recognition of African-American contributions.

Mindy: We don't have things that are specifically geared to biracial children, but they know about Martin Luther King and Black history.

Adam: Yea and I let them know that every month is Black history month. Not just one month out of the year.

Couple Advice

Towards the end of every interview, each couple was asked to offer any advice they had for other interracial couples who were starting a family. This was important to uncover any lessons the couples had learned during their journey that they felt made an impact in their lives. Furthermore, it was a way to inform other young couples of the potential obstacles that they may face, while also highlighting the strengths and proud moments of their experiences as a multi-racial family.

Cal and Christina

Cal (BH) and Christina (WW) share their views on what have been essential factors in the success of their relationship. Cal explains that interracial couples should not assume people's looks and/or stares are derived from animosity or disapproval, but simply out of curiosity.

Cal: My wife and I are an example of how we view ourselves determines how we are perceived. I think people are naturally curious. If someone gives you a look, well how you respond to that look will determine how they respond back. So you have to look at yourself first. I'm ok with people looking. It's fine; I go about my business. But I don't assume someone who looks doesn't like us, they just might want to see how interracial couples do things. It's a curiosity.

Christina goes on to add the importance of allowing children to be their own person and discouraging them to restrict themselves to a Black or White racial identity.

“Yea, I don't want my children to have to choose. I want them to be exposed to everything and not be limited.”

Beatrice and Peter

Beatrice (BW) explains the importance of maintaining open dialogue within the relationship while her husband, Peter (WH) highlights the importance of spending quality time with your children.

Beatrice: I think it's important for the couple to talk about what they value...not what society tells you to value...to find what makes them feel happy and at peace in order that they raise happy, healthy, well-adjusted kids. And always keep that dialogue open so you can address issues in a constructive way. We don't always argue constructively but we try to be respectful of each other.

Peter: Parents who give their children everything, but don't spend that quality time with them. Again, that time is what's important...not the superficial things. You have your kids with you for a slice of their life. And those years go fast. The kids grow up and the parents don't even know them. Those parents totally missed the boat. What kids want is that positive interaction. It's those relationships and engaging in activities with their children that parents should focus on.

Peter goes on to explain how people should not let society dictate how they live and who they are when he adds: "Live your ideals. Be yourself... Being accepted versus being happy - there's a big distinction. And again, that's letting society define who you are."

Cliff and Judy

Cliff (BH) and Judy (WW) shared their thoughts on how interracial couples should approach race with their children. Judy emphasizes the importance of culture, rather than race:

I think to not focus on the racial piece. I think it's important for your children to know where they came from and there should be open communication...education. I think it's important for every child to have a wide knowledge of culture all over the world. And certainly when you're bringing together different cultures...it should be shared. Children should be aware of where they come from

Judy shares a lesson she learned based on an experience she had with her teenage daughter who was having issues with her hair:

And I think it's important for any couple, not to harp on how different they are but how special they are. Keeping the communication open and letting them know it's ok to talk about any confusion they may be having or any concerns they may have. But not blowing it out of proportion or making a big deal about it.

Cliff discusses his view on raising children with a non-racial approach, asserting that race is neither a useful characteristic of a person nor is race real.

And for anybody who's in a relationship and talking about children and it's a racial thing for you, I think you have issues. I really do. I love [my wife] because she makes me feel good. I don't care what color she is because it doesn't matter. It only matters with your interactions with other people. How you celebrate what you bring to the table culturally is a whole lot more important than how you show up as somebody who had no choice on how you showed up as a person - color of your skin... We didn't choose how our kids were going to look like. But the racial thing... I don't think it's useful and I don't think it's true. It's the cultural dissimilarities and how you embrace that that helps your children be more grounded in who they are and not feel like they have to explain who they are, or to shrink into the shadows of who people say they are.

Charles and Laura

Charles (BH) and Laura (WW) sum their thoughts up when they say: "I don't think it has anything to do with race, but that you're bringing a new life in the world and you know you and your partner are together for the right reasons and will love that child."

Gregory and Donna

Gregory (WH) and Donna (BW) highlight the benefit of "Exposing kids to both cultures, whether it's through church or their community... Art, dance or theater - just exposing them to life. Exposing them to life, they'll find diversity everywhere." Donna

goes on to explain how her exposure to different cultures growing up allowed her to be more open-minded and marry outside of her race, based on love rather than color or social expectations.

I just think that people shouldn't limit themselves. I know there are cultures that you must marry within your race. But growing up in China Town, I learned a lot about Asian culture and the importance of them staying in their race and how important male children were...I think that people need to be open-minded and love may not be in your race. You have to be open to where love is coming from. If you can find someone in your race, it's a beautiful thing. I don't knock it. The most powerful men and the men I loved the most have been African-American men. So to not have found someone in my race, it was like, 'Ok, well it's not going to come that way.' I wasn't looking for this way, but it came this way. So you keep your mind and your heart open and if you find a good person that you connect with and love, then that's a good basis for a marriage.

Jonathan and Lisa

Lisa (BW) reflects on advice from her own parents regarding raising children. In particular she shares the importance of keeping traditions in the family, while creating new ones unique to your children.

...it's a learning process. There's no manual. You have to listen to your mind and follow your heart with how you're raising your children. I mean, children are children. I think it's kind of funny that you can say, in a Black family, this is how a mother is. Well in an Italian family, that's how a mother is. In an Irish family, that's how a mother is. In an Egyptian family, that's how a mother is. Parents are parents, kids are kids. It's just whatever influences you have in your life that have shaped you, shapes you as a parent. The traditions you have, you either keep them or you start your own. My parents say that to me. Like, 'you have your own family now. Keep whatever traditions you had with us, but start your own traditions. And your kids will take them and pass those down and make their own. That would be my only advice.

Jonathan (WH) shares his thoughts on the importance of conserving a marriage in the midst of opposition. He also advises couples to not let anyone interference with your family and marriage, including disapproving parents, such as his own.

Be unique. Don't just follow...I mean, keep the traditions if you choose. You have your own family now. My parents still don't understand that this is MY family now. You have no say in what [Lisa] and I choose to do. Don't let anybody come in between your marriage. My advice is stick to your guns. Don't let anybody interfere.

Jermaine and Dee

Dee (WW) encourages interracial couples to have children despite the negative stereotypes about interracial couples and biracial children. Ultimately, she advises couples to prepare their children for the harsh realities of the world, while teaching them ways to counteract ignorance and showing them that they are loved.

I would advise them to not let anyone tell you not to have a kid because it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard for any kid. If someone wants to pick on a kid, they're going to find something to pick on them... race, weight, whatever. Just don't let anyone tell you what to do and make sure your kids know that they're loved. And that's what is important. And I would also say that you should make sure the kids know the different races, history and what happened. And hope that it doesn't repeat itself. They're still young but I'll remind [my son] that they are ignorant people in the world who don't approve of certain things....so just avoid those people. That's it.

Jermaine (BH) adds a similar view that even though society may impose certain expectations, it's important not to let society dictate how you live.

She pretty much said it all. We don't teach them negativity. We try to teach them to be positive people. And for the couples, do what you like. Don't let society tell you how to live. It's your life, not there's. That's pretty much it for me. I'll never let anyone tell me how to live.

Adam and Mindy

Mindy (WW) advises interracial parents to live in diverse communities. She feels it will benefit biracial children because it will expose them to others like themselves and make them feel part of the group, rather than different.

Do your children a favor and try to live in a community where the kids won't stand out or feel like they're different. A lot of our experience is based on the fact that we live in a very diverse community where this is the norm.

Adam (BH) mentions the importance of preserving the relationship no matter how much opposition is experienced from the outside. He also advises interracial couples to have strong dedication to the relationship, staying mindful of their crucial roles to love and nurture their children.

And also, don't let anyone interfere with your relationship... You must do it for love. You can't have any other agenda behind this. Just as long as you love each other and your kids know that they're loved, is all you need.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study proposed to answer the following questions: How Black/White interracial couples perceive their children's racial identity, and how they participate in shaping a healthy racial identity in their biracial children. It also examined the factors that the couples believe to be important when raising biracial children in America. It is assumed that these couples may face resistance as well as support during their journeys as parents and as an interracial married couple. It is also assumed that these couples transmit messages and other lessons to their children with the goal of developing a positive identity formation. Lastly, it is believed that some of the conclusions drawn from parental responses may be helpful in further understanding how biracial people decide on their racial identity.

As predicted, interracial parents communicate racial messages to their children, which include open dialogue, exposure to certain dolls, television programs and books. Parents also expressed the importance of embracing their children's dual heritages through cultural foods and exposing their children to both sides of their family. The results of the study also corroborate findings in the literature that suggest the choice of school and community is important cultural and environmental factors for interracial parents to consider. Parents did not, however, always choose diversity over other factors,

but instead considered other important factors such as safety and quality of education when choosing a school or community to live in.

Current literature is also consistent with findings that Black/White interracial couples experience many hardships during their relationship. Rosenblatt (1995) describes life in interracial relationships as one that is mired in experiences of racism, skepticism, and rejection. To be in such a relationship, a person must “navigate an environment where racist opposition is always possible (Rosenblatt, 1995).” Notably, many White parents tended to be ignorant of the racial bias and perceptions against Black interracial relationships and were educated by their Black partners, highlighting the importance of educating oneself on the historical significance of race in America. However, through various coping strategies such as open dialogue between spouses, it was found that these couples have thrived through a wide array of challenges that have made their relationships stronger. Religion and church affiliation was also found to play an influential role in their lives, as many parents relied on their faith in God as a source of support for their families.

Previous studies suggest the One-Drop Rule is no longer commonplace and parents are less likely to subscribe to a Black mono-racial identity. This is consistent with current findings in which most parents perceive their children as bi-racial or mixed. Nevertheless, the current study portrays parents who continue to instill a Black mono-racial identity based on the One-Drop Rule. These parents recognize that despite their children’s biracial background, society will view them based on their minority race.

In conclusion, despite the notion that racial choice is inconsequential and arbitrary, a specific racial choice can have real ramifications for a person. It is widely

accepted that America has many different “life chances” depending on what race you are born. For example, it can be argued that what race you are can determine your educational paths, career opportunities, dating choices, prospective housing, and attaining other forms of resource. As two couples mentioned, checking off a Black identity on a college application may gain their children access to college scholarships and grants. Therefore, with such opportunities at stake, race becomes a topic that is not inconsequential and arbitrary, but important and meaningful in our American society.

Major Themes

Humanity over Race

A major theme that emerged across all couples was the emphasis on humanity rather than race. 75% of couples stressed the irrelevance of racially classifying of their children. No matter their racial perception of their children, the parents expressed that race was imposed by society and was, therefore, not the most important characteristic of their children. They perceived themselves and their children as “human beings” first, emphasizing cultural rather than racial characteristics.

Parents generally expressed a desire for their children to be kind, fair, appreciative of the things they have and to have an open-mind to novel things. Parents wanted their children to choose friends and relationships on a basis that is devoid of racial classification. The emphasis on their character rather than their race speaks to the level of importance the parents put on one’s personal attributes rather than their race. This largely differs from Lewis’s (1994) findings that asserted that race does not play much of a role in their interracial choices when, in fact, most of the parents’ choices to form an

interracial relationship seemed to be related to the degree of acceptance of and comfort with each racial group that they experienced growing up. So although parents' socialization messages to their children emphasized non-racial character traits, most of the parents' interracial choices stemmed from their positive or negative sentiments they felt or those around them expressed about each racial group.

Supportive Families

According to Lewis et al (1994) families are not as supportive of interracial marriages as they are of same race marriages. With the exception of two families who continue to face tension and disapproval from family members, the majority of couples in the present study faced virtually no resistance or resistance that faded with time. Any negative feelings that family members may have had mostly subsided after the birth of the children. Having children in some cases in this study improved relationships with in-laws. After all, people generally like being grandparents and having grandchildren.

Notably, White partners tended to be unprepared for the level of resistance or disapproval they've faced as parents and as a married couple. This corroborates O'Donoghue's (2004) and Kilson and Ladd's (2008) findings that raising biracial children forced White mothers to recognize the effects of racism including facing ostracism from family and friends, facing hostility and exclusion from societal institutions, and being challenged about their legitimacy as parents. Many White parents reported being naïve to the negative attitudes surrounding Black and White relationships, and some even reported being educated by their Black spouse. However, it also was found that some Black spouses did not feel supported or understood when dealing with

racial discrimination, being perceived by their White spouse as over-reacting or being too sensitive. This is consistent with Killian's (2002) findings in which 9 out of 10 Black partners stated their White partners were less sensitive to negative reactions in public situations.

Purposeful and Deliberative Racial Strategies

Another major theme found was that most parents in the study engaged in racial socialization efforts that promoted a healthy racial identity. The process of racial socialization has become increasingly recognized as a primary mechanism through which youth develop a positive racial identity and become prepared to successfully cope with societal discrimination (Hughes, 2003). Strategies included school and community choice, open dialogue, introduction of books, toys, cultural foods, and the exposure to both sides of their family as well as other cultures.

Open dialogue was the most common strategy used by parents. One type of discussion that parents were likely to engage in is conversations about the children's heritage. Generally, these conversations were about the children acknowledging that they are different, the clarification of any questions they may have about their heritage, and the instillation of good feelings about where they came from. Parents expressed that their discussions through open dialogue were both proactive and/or reactive, at times, being triggered by race-related incidents. Notably, while the majority of the couples experienced discrimination, they seemed to dismiss it and focus on each other, such that most of these same couples initially had a hard time recalling discrimination. However, when their kids experienced racial challenges, parents tended to discuss its meaning and

instill a positive or helpful understanding of it, though some parents warned their kids about what to expect. This was mainly seen with parents with children at least 9 years of age. Due to the fact that many of the parents had young children, the content of the discussions were carefully delivered in a way that was age-appropriate. This was important considering parents did not want to instill fear or dislike for the opposite race.

Physical Appearance

It was found that physical appearance had little impact on parent's racial perception of their children. With the exception of one case, only one [White] father perceived his children as White based on his children's light skin and blond, curly locks. This is in contrast to another couple, in which both parents describe their adult son in the same manner, but perceive him and have instilled in him a Black identity, teaching him not to let anyone question his Blackness, despite his White features.

Another interesting finding was that all of parents reported their children have been mistaken or perceived as Hispanic at one point in their lives. When asked if they agreed, the parents admitted that their children can "pass" for Hispanic, but have not let the public's view of their children interfere with their own racial perception of them. Interestingly enough, 50% of the parents reported their children having a strong Spanish presence in their lives. For example, some reported that their children either had a Spanish nanny who speaks Spanish to them, took Spanish classes in school, were exposed to close Spanish-speaking friends, or regularly watched Spanish television programs like "Dora the Explorer." Notably, 60% of White mothers also reported that the public perceived them as Hispanic based on their children's perceived Hispanic

appearance. Although the above findings have not had a dominant presence in the literature, the literature does support the idea that biracial individual's physical appearance tends to be ambiguous, leaving the public guessing based on their unique physical features (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2004).

Biracial Hair Issues

Another major theme that emerged in this study was the issue of hair with daughters. 6 out of 8 of the couples in the study had daughters, and 4 of those 6 couples reported that their daughters reported some form of distress surrounding their hair. Parents reported the difficult experiences that they have with trying to instill a positive attitude about their daughters' curly locks. Major concerns were that their hair was unmanageable and/or their hair was different from their [non-Black] peers. Daughters typically expressed a desire to have straight hair, especially when their mothers were White and/or they attended a predominantly White school.

Many of the mothers found temporary remedies to dealing with their children's unique hair issues, whether it was blow drying, flat ironing, braiding or using chemical relaxers. White mothers, in general, appeared to be less knowledgeable about dealing with kinky textures, which is no surprise considering they had straight hair textures. This highlighted the importance of White mothers educating themselves and their daughters on Black/biracial hair care either by visiting local hair salons that specialize in ethnic hair, researching ethnic hair care options and solutions via online resources, or asking other parents of Black/biracial children on their experiences dealing with hair. Black mothers tended to be more knowledgeable about how to care for kinky hair and were

aware of more resources and hair techniques. This is no surprise since Black mothers have also dealt with their own hair issues, and were therefore better able to relate to their daughter's ethnic hair issues and offer more hair care options.

Limitations of Study

As in the case with any research project, this study was restricted by factors including time, money and sample characteristics. This set certain boundaries on the amount of information the researcher was able to obtain during the data collection phase of the study. Due to the small sample (8 couples) of convenience, this study was limited in power and homogeneity. Due to the nature of this exploratory study, the ability to generalize larger populations is extremely limited. For example, there were more interracial couples that were comprised of Black men married to White women who participated in this study, which provided limited perspective from couples comprised of Black women with White men. Finding Black women married to White men proved to be a more challenging task, but this was no surprise considering Black men/White women couples are more prevalent than Black women/White men couples (Census, 2000).

Due to the age range of the parents and their children (4-24), it was difficult to generalize parent and children outcome results because of developmental differences that vary across the age span. Additionally, outcome measures used were based upon parents' perceptions and attitudes, which are subjective in nature. Also, without the children's perspectives on the topic, it is difficult to ascertain their own feelings, attitudes and perceptions of themselves racially and if it confirms their parents' views. Nevertheless, the research findings derived from this study have contributed to the body of research and

have opened the door to more ground-breaking explorations of interracial couples and their biracial children.

Recommendations for Future Research

Single Parents

This study contained intact interracial couples. In many ways, intact couples have a very different experience than single-parent families relating to certain factors such as income, time and support which are minimized with the absence of a second parent. While focusing on intact families was beneficial to the purpose of the study, it would still be helpful to see how single parents approach the issue of race when dealing with biracial children, and most importantly if the parent is able to provide his or her children with adequate exposure to both sides of their heritage. Previous research has suggested that single parents may tend to “over-compensate” for the missing parent’s heritage and culture (Ferguson, 2001). Also, many studies focus on the maternal influence when dealing with parenthood and child-rearing. However, it would be very interesting to talk with single fathers and gain their perspective in the situation about how they perceive and shape racial identity in their biracial children.

Parents w/ Older Children

Many of the parents in the study had children that ranged in age from 4 to 24. However, there was a predominance of parents with children on the lower end of the age range. In fact, many of the parents had children who were under age 6, with only one couple with children in their early twenties. Due to the young age of the children, the

parents in this study may not have been comfortable in their role and responsibilities as parents, and may have had limited experience. However, the newness of their experience allowed us to see how the parents started their journey and their initial thoughts and strategies.

Older parents may be more comfortable with their perceptions of their children than those in our samples, and older parents may have modified their strategies that make their families work. It may be that older parents' perceptions, attitudes and strategies have transformed over the years perhaps due to their children's maturity level, peer influences, the media and their neighborhood characteristics. Because parents begin to have a decreasing impact on their children's lives as they reach adulthood, it is unknown what race, if any, their adult children will choose to identify as, and what factors contributed to their decisions. Conducting a longitudinal study with parents would give us a better understanding of the impact parents have on their children when they're young, and if their influences made a lasting impression into their adulthood years.

Geographic location

This study included families in the northeast region of the United States. This is important to mention considering the long-standing tension between Whites and Blacks in the southern states and the perception that the North is, in fact, more progressive in terms of race relations in America. However, research on segregation has revealed that despite a less formalized racial state, de facto racism in the non-South was similar once Blacks migrated out of the South and were a large enough demographic group for Whites to take notice (Gullickson, 2006). The smaller relative size of the black population and a

less rigid caste system in the non-South may have contributed to the more favorable perception of the North (Gullickson, 2006).

Although some of the couples in the study perceived their children as Black based on the One-Drop Rule, it is unknown if adhering to this notion is harder to overcome in the South, considering its origins during slavery times. By conducting a comparative study on the topic, we may get a better understanding of how race is perceived and dealt with from the perspective of parents from both non-southern and southern regions; and if it is, in fact, better to be an interracial couple with children in the North rather than in the South.

Conclusion

Results of the current study corroborate findings in the literature that interracial parents communicate racial messages to their children, which include community and school choice, open dialogue, and exposure to certain dolls, television programs and books. Parents also expressed the importance of embracing their children's dual heritages through cultural foods, helping their children embrace their unique qualities such as kinky hair, and exposing their children to both sides of their family. Results also corroborate findings that these couples face experiences that challenge their relationships. However, through coping strategies such as open dialogue and other supportive networks, these interracial couples have thrived through adversity. Furthermore, not only were families (grandparents, etc.) found to be major supports to interracial families, but church affiliation and community choice were found as strong cultural and environmental supports for fostering positive identity.

Regarding racial perceptions of their children, there was great variety in racial classifications given by these parents but many reported classifications as irrelevant, suggesting that the parents emphasized humanity over race. In some cases, racial classification was not agreed upon between partners, further demonstrating the complexities surrounding race and its influence on parents' perceptions.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Ayanna Boyd who is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine how Black/White interracial parents perceive and shape racial identity in their biracial children. This study will focus specifically on interracial married couples with one Black parent and one White parent and their half Black/half White biracial children over the age of 4. It is anticipated that 7-10 couples will participate in this study.

You have been determined eligible for inclusion in this study by your own volition or by referral from someone who identified that you are an interracial married couple who has children that fit the above criteria. Your participation will consist of a tape recorded interview. The interview may last approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on depth of responses.

It is anticipated that the interview will be a positive experience for you. However, you may find that some of the questions may deal with challenging issues such as racial perceptions, racial discrimination, and personal views regarding race. If you feel upset, you may discuss your concerns with Ms. Boyd or her faculty advisor, Dr. Shalonda Kelly, and/or there may be a referral made to the counseling services at Rutgers University. Overall, participation in this study will give the scientific community and others a better understanding of the various ways in which race is dealt with in a family with biracial children. The benefits of taking part in this study may include having the opportunity to express pride in your family and sharing your unique experiences in a non-judgmental environment. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about you, and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and your responses in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes name, age, and educational level. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants) at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for at least three years.

I understand that I may contact the investigator or the investigator's faculty advisor at any time at the addresses, telephone numbers or emails listed below if I have any questions, concerns or comments regarding my participation in this study.

Ayanna Boyd (Principal Investigator)
Rutgers University

Shalonda Kelly, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor)
Rutgers University

GSAPP
152 Frelinghuysen Rd
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
Telephone: 908.246.6214
Email: ayanna.s.boyd@gmail.com

GSAPP
152 Frelinghuysen
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
Telephone: 732.445.2000
Email: skelly@rci.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

I have read the above information, had my questions answered, and will participate in this study.

Name (Print) _____

Name _____

Signature _____

Signature _____

Date _____

AUDIOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study that explores how Black/White interracial parents perceive and shape racial identity in their biracial children conducted by Ayanna Boyd. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (make a sound recording) as part of that research study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by Ms. Boyd.

The recording(s) will be distinguished from one another by an identifying case number, not your name.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet by an identifying number, not by name or other information that might disclose your identity. The tapes will be retained until the project is completed and the dissertation has been successfully defended. It is expected that the tape will be destroyed within three years after your interview.

Your signature on this form grants the researcher permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The researcher will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

Demographic Information

Mother's Info

Name:

Age:

Race: White

Black

Birth Place:

Occupation

of Children:

Age(s) of Child(ren):

Father's Info

Name:

Age:

Race: White

Black

Birth Place:

Occupation

of Children:

Age(s) of Child(ren):

Highest Level of Education Completed:

Mother

___ High School

___ Associate Degree

___ Bachelors Degree

___ Graduate Degree; please specify: _____

Father

___ High School

___ Associate Degree

___ Bachelors Degree

___ Graduate Degree; please specify: _____

How long have you been married? _____

Current City and State of Residence _____

APPENDIX C

Interview

This interview is designed to capture the perceptions, feelings and experiences of Black/White interracial couples raising biracial children. There are no right or wrong responses. Your responses will provide deeper understanding from which others can learn. Please respond as truthfully as possible. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Couple History

1. How did the two of you meet? What attracted you to each other?
2. What was your family's response to your interracial relationship?
3. Where did you grow up? How was your family life? How has your upbringing influenced your decision to choose a partner from another race?
4. What experiences have you faced that challenged your relationship? How have you coped with these challenges?

Relationship and Children

5. How would you describe your child/ren? What do you love about them?
6. What were your thoughts and dialogue as a couple as you started having kids? Were there times you disagreed on certain things?
7. What was your families' response to you having biracial children?
8. Are you aware of any myths and stereotypes regarding Black/White interracial couples and biracial children? What are they?
9. What, if any, perceptions do you have about biracial children's experiences and their feelings about their own identity?
10. What feedback (both positive and negative) have you received from the general public regarding your multiracial family? How did it affect you?

Community and School

11. Currently, what kind of community do you live in? What factors contributed to your decision to live there? Did you consider the level of openness to biracial children and multiracial families?
12. Did your child's biracial background impact the type of school (public, private) you enrolled him/her in? What factors contributed to your decision?
13. Do/did you find that your child's teachers and other school personnel are/were sensitive to your child's racial/cultural background? Do/did they promote multicultural awareness?
14. Has your child reported any incidents of racism or discrimination from peers? How did they cope? How did each of you respond?

Racial Perception and Physical Appearance

15. What race do you consider your child(ren)?
16. How would you describe your child's physical appearance (skin color, hair texture, etc)?

17. Do you feel appearance impacts your racial perception of him/her? Other's perception?
18. Do you feel that your child identifies more with one race? What could explain this?

Messages to your Child(ren)

19. What messages or ideas do you instill in your child(ren) about race?
20. Has your child asked any questions concerning race or expressed distress about their dual heritage? How did you respond?
21. What strategies or activities, if any, do you engage with your child concerning race?

Final Comments

22. What advice do you have for other interracial couples who are starting a family?
23. Are there any other points you would like to make that I have not asked about?

APPENDIX D

Glossary

Anti-miscegenation laws: U.S. laws that forbade sexual relations or marriage between people of different races, esp. between Blacks and Whites. This law was declared unconstitutional in 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*)

Bi-racial: An individual who belongs to two different racial groups. For example, the individual has a Black mother and White father.

Culture: An organized set of thoughts, beliefs, and norms. Variables that influence an individual's culture include race, ethnicity, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, educational attainment and level of acculturation.

Heritage: ancestral and cultural background of a person.

Identity: Can be defined as "who" one considers themselves to be. Racial identity refers to who one considers themselves racially. For example, one can be biracial (born from one Black and one White parent), but identify themselves as Black.

Interracial Couple: Two individuals from different racial groups who are in an intimate, committed relationship.

Mono-racial: An individual who belongs to one racial group. For example, the individual has a White mother and a White father.

Negotiation: Referred to as the parent's purposeful participation in the development of their children's racial identity.

One-Drop Rule: This rule was created during the time of slavery in the U.S. stating that a person with as little as one drop of black blood in their heritage was to be considered Black

Race: categorization of humans in a population based on heritable traits. These traits are usually salient, physical qualities such as skin color, facial features and hair texture.

Racism: hatred or intolerance of another race