

ABSTRACT

JOHNSON, KATHERINE. *Multiracial Families and the Myth of a Post-racial U.S.: An Intersectional Examination of Racial Socialization Practices, Family Dynamics, and Interactions.* (Under the direction of Dr. Kim Ebert).

Due to the legalization of interracial marriage in 1967 and a 2000 Census change that allowed individuals to self-identify as more than one race for the first time, more people in the U.S. are entering interracial relationships and having children who identify as multiracial. In response, a growing body of sociological research examines the racial identity and racial socialization of multiracial individuals. Yet there is still much to learn about who identifies as multiracial and why. Existing studies are limited in that they focus largely on multiracial individuals who identify as Black-White and many do not examine the role of interracial parents in childhood racial socialization. This study fills these gaps by examining the role of not only Black-White parents, but also Asian-White and Black-Asian parents in the racial identity socialization of their children. This is important because although Asian-Whites are more likely to identify as multiracial, there is limited understanding of racial socialization practices that influence this identification. Furthermore, Black-Asian families continue to be understudied despite growing representation. Additionally, attention to these racial socialization practices may reveal how the U.S. racial order could change in the future, such as moving from a rigid Black-White binary, to potentially a shifting hierarchy due to increasing diversity and a multitude of racial identification choices.

Drawing upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 19 sets of interracial parents, or 38 individuals, this study examines their racial socialization practices, family dynamics, and external interactions that impact conversations on race. I utilize an intersectional framework, with a particular focus on race and gender, to understand how parents discuss race and racism

with each other and their children, negotiate and affirm various identities for children, and manage interactions that continue to relegate interracial couples and multiracial families to the margins. Given that families, specifically parents, serve as powerful agents of socialization, they are a fruitful site to connect macro-level processes, such as the racial order, to the micro-level of everyday experience.

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Multiracial Families and the Myth of a Post-racial U.S.: An Intersectional Examination of Racial Socialization Practices, Family Dynamics, and Interactions

by
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DEDICATION

“Dream, may your trials eventually end in full bloom.

Dream, though your beginnings may be humble may the end be prosperous.”

-Agust D

Dedicated to....

Past me: thank you for taking a risk. thank you for staying. thank you for quitting your job in marketing to pursue something more meaningful. thank you for persevering. thank you for changing your life.

Present me: future's gonna be okay.

Future me: I hope you remember that it is a privilege to do this work. I hope you still find meaning and fulfillment in it.

BIOGRAPHY

Katherine L. Johnson was born on November 4, 1992, in Honolulu, Hawaii to Dale and Christine Johnson. She grew up mostly in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Katherine earned her BS in 2014 from Virginia Commonwealth University and a MA in 2019 from George Mason University. She then attended North Carolina State University where she graduated with her PhD in Sociology in 2024. Katherine currently resides in Raleigh, North Carolina with her spouse and three fur children.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A Personal Reflection

This dissertation examines racial dynamics within multiracial families, including how interracial parents discuss race and racially socialize their children, what factors impact these socialization practices, and if/how the parents are encouraging the formation of a multiracial identity or following socialization practices traditionally found in monoracial families. In many ways, I view this research as a continuation of what I learned from interviewing multiracial White-Asian women for my master's thesis work. As a multiracial White-Asian woman myself, I was interested in questions related to racial identity formation and how the women came to embrace a multiracial identity. Throughout those interviews I noticed two similarities with almost every participant. First, they had an Asian mom and White dad. Second, they described a limited or complete lack of discussion of race growing up, including discussions of their own mixed-race background. This made me wonder about other multiracial families. How do they have conversations about race? Is this phenomenon of not discussing race limited to White-Asian families? Does the race and gender of each parent affect these conversations?

Although I am also White-Asian, I have a White mom and multiracial White-Asian dad and grew up in a working-class family. My dad was born in Hiroshima, Japan to a Japanese mother, but mostly raised by his White father when his parents separated. My dad has always identified as "Japanese," not "Asian." Even though he is multiracial, I do not see a White man when I look at him, whereas I believe I present as White despite receiving occasional questions or comments about my racial background. Growing up, he would often say *we* are Japanese, but I cannot recall any conversations about race or being multiracial with my parents. If anything,

my understanding of race and racism was limited to the country's history of enslavement, Black-White race relations, and the Civil Rights Movement.

But what does it mean to be Japanese when you lack a connection to the culture, language, and family members still in Japan? When you do not “look” Japanese? My Japanese grandmother died when I was still a baby, so I missed out on her potential influence on my racial and cultural socialization. I knew I was “both,” but struggled to fully embrace this until my early 20s when I took a Critical Race Theory course during my master's program and learned about the Black-White Binary and multiracialities. I think it took someone else saying it, validation from a scholarly source, to understand that being multiracial is a legitimate way to self-identify. I could not help but wonder how this may have been different if my parents talked to me about being multiracial growing up. If my dad had talked about his experiences as a multiracial person living in Japan, Germany, and the U.S., or if my parents ever discussed being in an interracial marriage. Regardless, this personal reflection is a round-about way to describe how I arrived at this project and my research questions. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the relevant literature, case background, research questions, and provide an overview for the dissertation.

Interracial Relationships in the U.S.

Despite the legalization of interracial marriages more than 50 years ago and growing public support for interracial marriages since then, intermarriage rates remain low, making up only 6.3% of U.S. marriages (Lee 2015; Livingston and Brown 2017; Curington et al. 2021). Looking at the most common intermarriage partnerships, Black women are least likely to date and marry outside of their racial group (Lin and Lundquist 2013). Black men, however, are twice as likely to marry someone of another race, as are Asian women compared to Asian men (Lee 2015; Livingston and Brown 2017; Curington et al. 2021). Scholars argue that these patterns

reflect hegemonic desirability standards and stereotypes associated with anti-Blackness, sexual racism, the hypermasculinity of Black men and women, and fetishization of Asian women and the emasculation of Asian men (Lee 2015; Buggs 2017; Silvestrini 2019; Curington et al. 2021).

However, although this low rate can be attributed to social distance between races and ongoing discrimination, marriage rates overall have been on the decline due to changing societal attitudes among younger generations (Buggs 2017; Geiger and Livingston 2019; Curington et al. 2021). Since 1990, the marriage rate has declined by 8% (Geiger and Livingston 2019). Those most likely to be in an interracial relationship are younger, educated, more mobile and urban, with less parental oversight in their dating choices (Livingston and Brown 2017; Buggs 2017). Because of declining marriage rates and changing societal attitudes surrounding marriage, interracial couples are more likely to cohabitate than marry (Buggs 2017; Curington et al. 2021).

Furthermore, when they do marry, interracial couples are more likely to divorce compared to same-race couples, oftentimes due to lack of social support from family and friends (Bratter and King 2008; Grether and Jones 2021). Indeed, interracial couples face many challenges that same-race couples do not. These challenges range from systemic racism and a lack of recognition for multiracial family structures (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009; Hernández 2018; DaCosta 2020) to everyday interactions in which interracial couples and their children are subjected to microaggressions and more overt forms of discrimination (Dalmage 2000; DaCosta 2007). Sadly, interracial couples can experience discrimination by their own family members and are sometimes disowned. Outside of their respective families, the couple must also contend with border patrolling, attempts by others to prevent interracial relationships by enforcing the color line and encouraging people to “stick with their own” and rebound racism, which impacts White or White-presenting individuals in these relationships and

family units (Dalmage 2000:43). This form of racism does not directly target the White person, but impacts them as it is directed at their loved one.

As such, previous research shows that almost 41% of interracial couples divorce within the first 10 years of marriage, compared with 31% of same-race couples (Grether and Jones 2021). Marriage dissolution also varies across race and gender, with marriage between Black men and White women being the least stable (Bratter and King 2008; Grether and Jones 2021). Interestingly, interracial marriages between White men and non-White women have about the same divorce rate as same-race white marriages (Bratter and King 2008; Grether and Jones 2021).

Capturing the Multiracial Population

Increases in interracial relationships have also led to an increasing “multiracial” population, with 10% of the U.S. population now identifying as two or more races (Schneider 2021). However, the government has not always captured multiracial, or mixed-race, identity. The multiracial movement of the 1990s, led most vocally by White middle-class moms in Black-White relationships, challenged the government on how they collect racial data and requested a multiracial category on the Census (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009; Williams 2017; DaCosta 2020). Sidestepping the racial redistributive politics of the 1960s and 1970s, these White mothers insisted that their “right to choose” on federal forms was central to expressing their children’s sense of identity and agency (DaCosta 2007; Curington 2016). As Curington (2016) has noted, these claims found support among conservative Republicans at the time, who reasoned that the multiracial category, and its attendant color-blind discourse, could strategically be utilized to challenge racial redistributive politics all together.

Although a stand-alone multiracial category was not created, the 2000 Census allowed people to select more than one race for the first time (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009; Williams 2017; DaCosta 2020). At the time, only a little more than 2% of the population, 6.8 million people, opted to select more than one race (Williams 2017). Since then, greater social recognition of multiraciality has increased alongside the self-identified multiracial population, which drastically surged by more than 270% between the 2010 and 2020 Census, making up 33.8 million individuals (Jones et al. 2021). Two of the largest subgroups in this population include the Black-White population at 21% and Asian-White population at 20% (DaCosta 2020; Horowitz and Budiman 2020). Only 2% of the population identifies as Black-Asian (Horowitz and Budiman 2020).

Although the multiracial population is increasing, notably for Black-White individuals, they are also most likely to identify only as Black, due to societal pressure, their physical appearance, upbringing, and other factors (Khanna 2010; DaCosta 2020; Horowitz and Budiman 2020; Tamir et al. 2021). This means that the population is likely larger than 21%. The number of Black-white individuals who identify as only Black may be influenced by the idea of linked fate, or feelings of shared experiences and a common destiny typically experienced among minority groups (Giamo et al. 2012; Ho et al. 2017; Cox 2019; Franco et al. 2019). Black Americans associate Black-White multiracials more so with their minority race, thus sharing a linked fate due to perceived experiences of discrimination (Ho et al. 2017; Franco et al. 2019). Feelings of linked fate are influenced by racial/ethnic group membership, education, and partisanship (Cox 2019). However, the familial context undoubtedly influences feelings of linked fate for mixed-race children via parental socialization practices.

What does Multiraciality Mean for the U.S. Racial Order?

Sociologists recognize race as a socially constructed category but with real-world implications for well-being and quality of life in a racial order (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Daniel 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Omi and Winant 2015; Stokes et al. 2021). In the U.S. racial order, Whites are at the top of the hierarchy, as they have historically dominated other racial groups to hoard opportunities and resources, leading to better life chances (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of White supremacy have placed Black people at the bottom of the racial order, with other non-White groups often contending for opportunities and resources somewhere in the middle (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Historically, states attempted to maintain this racial and social hierarchy for Whites through anti-miscegenation laws, in which sexual and marital unions between Whites and others, particularly White women and Black men, were prevented, often by violent means (Curington et al. 2021). This was one way for the state to prevent interracial couples and their offspring, but it also demonstrates how the state policed women's sexuality and the granting of citizenship, as mixed-race children of White women threatened the racial order, because they "could theoretically be born *free*" (Curington et al. 2021:27).

On the other hand, White men who enslaved and raped Black women to reproduce their labor force were "seldom problematized legally because they did not disrupt racialized forms of chattel slavery, property, and propriety" (Curington et al. 2021:26). After the abolition of slavery, the state continued to prevent interracial relations via the continuation of anti-miscegenation laws, immigration laws and quotas targeting Asians, and several laws that "redefined Whiteness to refer only to persons without mixed racial ancestry" (Curington et al. 2021:30). It is important to note that anti-miscegenation laws did not apply to European groups and immigrants (Curington et al. 2021). Indeed, the selective enforcement of the one-drop rule

determined one's status as free or enslaved, citizen or not, and also one's race (Davis 2001; Haney Lopez 2006; Curington et al. 2021).

This historical selectivity has led to scholars speculating how multiraciality factors into the contemporary U.S. racial order and the transformation of the color line (Davis 2001; Daniel 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Haney Lopez 2006; Omi and Winant 2015; Curington 2016; DaCosta 2020). As discussed previously, due to slavery, the Black-White color line has been most salient in the U.S. in demarcating status and life outcomes (Du Bois 1899; Lee and Bean 2004). Indeed, while the widespread social significance of multiraciality was diminished in the past due to a polarized racial order, the invalidation of miscegenation laws and changes in the immigration landscape mark a post-civil rights era where White multiraciality has received more social recognition. Thus, because of the changing U.S. population and immigration, scholars have examined shifts in the color line to account for White-Nonwhite, Black-Nonblack, and Tri-racial divides (Gans 1999; Yancey 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lee and Bean 2007; Lee 2008; Marrow 2009).

Though ignoring the intersectional role played by gender, Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that U.S. multiraciality may challenge the existing racial order, with White multiracials constituting a unique social position in a "tri-racial order" as so-called "honorary Whites." Other scholars, however, believe in a post-racial U.S., spearheaded by interracial couples and multiracial children, and take a colorblind approach to the continuing significance of race and racial categories (see discussion and review in Spencer 2004; DaCosta 2020). Still, others propose that the racial order is more rigid and continues to prioritize Whiteness, with some multiracials continuing to face racialized disadvantage and marginalization as members of racial and ethnic minority groups in a White supremacist society (see, for example, Hernandez 2002,

2006, 2019). For example, not everyone who is of more than one race identifies as multiracial, as the one-drop rule, anti-Blackness, and discrimination persist (Khanna 2010; DaCosta 2020).

Omi and Winant (2015), attempt to make sense of race and the role it plays in the U.S. with their racial formation theory. They define racial formation as a “sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 2015:109). They also introduce the role of racial projects, which “capture how racial formation processes occur through a linkage between structure and representation” (Omi and Winant 2015:13). Racial projects are “an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines” (Omi and Winant 2015:125). Racial projects operate in daily life, from noticing someone’s race to interpersonal interactions, from which we learn how to perform our race (Omi and Winant 2015). Additionally, racial schemas are used to racially categorize people (Omi and Winant 2015; Osuji 2019). As such, racial projects, like the multiracial movement, are “building blocks” in the racial formation process (Omi and Winant 2015:13). Indeed, as Curington (2016) states, multiraciality is not a “fixed and static social fact,” but rather an ongoing process of group formation experienced in everyday interactions (28). Therefore, this framework and understanding of race influences racial socialization in families, as parents take cues from the existing racial order. However, there is a “persistent gap between state definitions and individual/group forms of self-identification (Omi and Winant 2015:123). This means that if parents choose to challenge the racist structure and racial categories, such as parents of the multiracial movement, we could see how their actions reflect a shift – or restructuring – as America’s majority becomes non-White.

Although racial categories, and the racial order itself, are not fixed and can shift over time, it is important to note that the social identities of those at the bottom of the hierarchy “are both imposed from above by dominant social groups and/or state institutions, and constituted from below by the groups themselves as expressions of self-identification and resistance to dominant forms of categorization” (Omi and Winant 2015:106). The history of legal enforcement of hypodescent (the one-drop rule) as a mechanism of social control, illustrates how racial categories are created and enforced by the state, yet internalized and recreated among families and individuals. However, the multiracial movement is an example of a racial project that contested how race is categorized (Omi and Winant 2015; Curington 2016; DaCosta 2020). Although the multiracial movement was primarily led by White middle-class mothers, I broaden the discussion to account for how two parents and the familial context mediates racialization and socialization of children. This is important to understand, because racial categories provide context at the interactional level for how someone should look or act based on their race. We use racial categories to “provide clues about who a person is,” and accordingly, determine how to interact with them (Omi and Winant 2015:23).

Thus, understanding racial categories and the myriad of ways one can self-identify is important in understanding the U.S. racial order and whether we will see potential shifts of power. Indeed, the Census and a countless number of surveys can tell us how people self-identify their race. These quantitative measures have been extremely helpful in learning about the growing multiracial population. But how does one arrive at self-identifying as multiracial? The best way to uncover more about this process is through qualitative research, such as examining family dynamics and racial socialization practices within multiracial families themselves.

Racial Socialization: What We Currently Know

Familial racial socialization is a process through which family members teach children the social meanings and consequences of ethnicity and race, and is often based on the socialization parents received growing up and their understandings of race (Hughes et al. 2006; Brown et al. 2007; Waring and Bordoloi 2018). Families racially socialize their children for a variety of reasons. These reasons include 1) children are exposed to racial/ethnic diversity 2) some parents easily communicate with children, even regarding difficult topics and 3) in preparation for being a member of a racially marginalized group (Brown et al. 2007). Racial socialization is important to study because it is linked closely to a family's and individual's well-being (Stokes et al. 2021). For example, when racial socialization is successful, there are positive outcomes for children such as ethnic identity formation, self-esteem, skills to cope with prejudice and discrimination, improved academic performance, and favorable psychosocial outcomes (Hughes et al. 2006; Stokes et al. 2021).

Research has identified four common methods of racial socialization in monoracial families, including cultural socialization, preparation for bias, the promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism/silence on race (Hughes et al. 2006). Cultural socialization is essential in crafting a positive racial-ethnic identity. Parents may teach their children racial/ethnic history and heritage to promote customs and pride, including eating ethnic food, celebrating cultural holidays, or learning the language of their family's home country (Hughes et al. 2006; Juang et al. 2018). Along with instilling racial pride and knowledge, families of color must also prepare their children for potential bias and discrimination as part of their racial socialization. Awareness of and preparation for potential discrimination teaches children how to respond in such situations and how to cope with these experiences. For example, Black parents have a "police talk," with their children to teach them how to interact with authority figures, and, most importantly, return

home safely (Malone Gonzalez 2019). In a vastly different example, Asian parents may encourage their children to learn and retain native languages, both as a means of preserving their heritage and preparation for cultural differences/biases (Lan 2018; Juang et al. 2018). A third, less common practice is the promotion of mistrust, in which parents offer “no advice for coping with or managing discrimination” (Hughes et al. 2006:757). Instead, they encourage their children to exercise caution in interracial interactions with those from other racial groups (Hughes et al. 2006).

The final common racial socialization practice is egalitarianism/silence on race, also referred to as mainstream socialization. This approach might deemphasize race or be colorblind in nature and is common in White families (Hughes et al. 2006; Hagerman 2014; Vittrup 2018; Underhill 2019). In fact, research has found that “families with the most cultural and economic capital in the U.S. society (i.e., Whites) were least likely to socialize their children regarding ethnicity and race” (Brown et al. 2007:20). Indeed, White parents are three times less likely to discuss race than parents of color, resulting in the transfer of “White privilege, White-framed color blindness, superiority, and entitlement” (Chang 2016:125). Although some White parents emphasize the importance of diversity, this is typically limited to people of color that they consider “respectable” (Underhill 2019). In other words, the exposure to “diversity” is limited and on their terms. Since many Asian families have experienced upward mobility success, including educational attainment and wealth that is on par with that of Whites in the U.S., some Asian and Asian American parents also take a colorblind approach in racial socialization (Chang 2016; Young et al. 2020). In order for their children to become culturally assimilated, Asian immigrant parents “do not try to erase their culture of origin but attempt to narrow their social distance from the white majority” (Lan 2018:118).

Case Background: Racial Socialization in Multiracial Families

Although studies on monoracial families and their socialization practices are important, racial socialization in multiracial families differs in meaningful ways. Important points of racial socialization for interracial families might include things like affirming children's cultural and racial awareness, nurturing or supporting a biracial family identity and navigating that identity with society and various social networks (Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017). However, racial socialization is complicated in multiracial families because some "parents cannot rely on a shared racialized identity with their children" (Waring and Bordoloi 2018:152). Furthermore, the two parents oftentimes do not share the same racial identity or racial socialization experiences (Ortiz 2017). Indeed, parents face unique challenges if they choose to engage in multiracial socialization of their children. These socialization practices include open communication, pride about a dual racial status, and preparation for bias and privilege they may experience due to their multiracial identity (Stokes et al. 2021). Importantly, many parents practiced racial humility, giving multiracial "children the freedom to choose how they engage with either aspect of their racial identity" (Stokes et al. 2021:194).

Like monoracial families, the role of race, gender, and class have important implications on the racial socialization practices of interracial families. However, gender has only more recently been accounted for in literature on multiracial identity and socialization (see Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Gender differences in multiracial identity arise because "racial boundaries are less malleable for men" (Davenport 2016:61). Oftentimes, this results in different experiences for multiracial men and women, as men often identify as the minority race and women as multiracial (Davenport 2016). Multiracial women "have an easier time blurring and crossing racial boundaries" than multiracial men, which might influence

parental racial socialization and labeling decisions (Davenport 2016:62). As discussed earlier, colorism is central to the experiences of multiracial individuals, particularly women and girls. Multiracial children may also be treated differently by their parents and other family members based on their skin tone, with light skin privileged over dark skin (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005).

Socioeconomic status, such as parents' educational background, also influence racial socialization and labeling of multiracial children. Parents who are more highly educated are more likely to encourage their multiracial children to select a non-White label due to their awareness of racial inequality (Davenport 2016). Highly educated parents are also likely to embrace "multiracial" as a label to identify their children (Davenport 2016). Families that live in minority neighborhoods are more likely to identify their multiracial children as a single minority race (Davenport 2016). On the contrary, more affluent families that live in wealthier neighborhoods may "lighten identification" of multiracials, meaning parents are less likely to label their child as a minority (Davenport 2016; Brunsma 2005).

Black-White Families: Racial Socialization and Family Dynamics

Studies on intermarriage and multiracial people typically focus on Black-White identities because the greatest social divide in the U.S. is between Black and White people (Rosenfeld 2005; Curington et al. 2021). Additionally, a common interracial pairing is between Black men and White women, and Black-White multiracials are the largest multiracial subgroup (Rockquemore 2002; DaCosta 2020; Stokes et al. 2021). Thus, much of the existing research on racial socialization focuses on Black-White parents and their multiracial children (Stokes et al. 2021).

However, one limitation of existing studies is that both parents often are not included, limiting our knowledge of racial socialization practices to one person, typically a White mother. For example, Black-White children raised by White women in female-headed households receive different messages about race than children being raised by a Black parent (Rockquemore 2002). White mothers who have had negative experiences with Black male partners relate these experiences to their children, particularly daughters, through racial socialization (Rockquemore 2002). This could lead to White parents expressing explicit racism or racialized negativity toward Black men. Black-White daughters, but not sons, then internalize these messages and generalize the negative feelings they feel toward their father to all Black men later in life (Rockquemore 2002). However, some White mothers of Black-White children work to foster a positive racial identity, creating a comfortable family environment to discuss race, raising children with an understanding of both racial heritages, and expressing pride in being an interracial family (Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017). Because existing socialization studies highlight the perspectives of mothers, particularly White moms, I included both parents in my study to foster a fuller understanding of family dynamics and how each parent views and contributes to racial socialization practices.

Another challenge and common experience that has been identified in Black-White families is encountering public perceptions of multiracial families, which are still “considered anomalous in American society, despite ‘post-racial’ rhetoric” (Waring and Bordoloi 2018:154). These perceptions directly impact family dynamics and racial socialization. It is assumed that multiracial children are adopted if they do not resemble their parent(s), or also commonly, that Black mothers are paid caretakers or kidnappers (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Osuji 2019). Such external perceptions and microaggressions such as these

delegitimize multiracial families, causing stress, frustration, and physical and psychological issues (Waring and Bordoloi 2018). Additionally, these experiences demonstrate that Black women are understudied as parents of multiracial children. Black women's experiences of gendered racism influence their racial socialization practices with their multiracial children, which is an essential contribution of my study to the racial socialization and multiracialities literature.

Recent research on interracial families featuring both parents found that when racially identifying their multiracial children, U.S. couples claim an “additive identity,” understanding their children to be both Black and White (Osuji 2019:149). Because they identified their children as both races, parents created a new ethnoracial boundary in the form of the biracial and were “engaged in the everyday construction of this intermediate category” (Osuji 2019:149). Although some parents engage in monoracial Black socialization because their children are often perceived as only Black, this finding suggests that parents might be moving away from the one-drop rule and fostering a multiracial identity (Stokes et al. 2021). My study interrogates these findings more closely to demonstrate how parents together negotiate their children's identity and how to racially socialize them as a multiracial individual.

Asian-White Families: Racial Socialization and Family Dynamics

Asian Americans are most likely to intermarry with Whites, particularly White men partnering with Asian women, which has led to the growing White-Asian population heavily influencing the multiracial movement (Burton et al. 2010; Gullickson and Morning 2011; Lee 2015; Chang 2016). Studies show that those with part-Asian ancestry are more likely to identify as multiracial, likely due to assimilation and/or the relative recency of Asian immigration in which not enough time has passed for rigid racial-assignment rules to have formed (Gullickson

and Morning 2011; Lee 2015). However, survey data presents a limited understanding, rarely investigating familial racial socialization practices.

Qualitative studies show that many parents of multiracial Asian children believe that they are too young to understand the complexities of race (Chang 2016). However, children can recognize racial differences from a young age and develop racial biases/beliefs as early as three-years-old (Chang 2016). This means that if parents are not discussing race or actively racially socializing their children, they risk them learning these messages elsewhere. Multiracial Asian children pick up on racial comments whereby people attempt to classify them, as well as family comparisons of members who look racially different (Chang 2016). Oftentimes, these comments are unsolicited and have painful repercussions for parents and children, who are understanding their different identity (Chang 2016). Yet, parents continue to insulate their multiracial Asian children, failing to foster the “right climate needed to grow positive performative multiracial identities” (Chang 2016:91). At the intersection of being multiracial Asian children, these children experience compounded invisibility, a “daunting level of societal invisibility created by membership in three systemically ignored and converging groups” (Chang 2016:93). Furthermore, these children do not see their families reflected in the media they consume, toys or learning materials, neighborhoods they live in, and other social environments like daycares and schools, reinforcing their White racial frame (Chang 2016).

Research shows that Asian-Whites, like many other multiracial groups, struggle with “navigating two distinct ‘racial worlds,’” where they do not feel fully accepted by Whites or Asians (Strmic-Pawl 2016:39). Yet, unlike other multiracials, Asian-Whites have more limited experiences with racism (Strmic-Pawl 2016). If they do experience ethnic or racial discrimination or microaggressions, it is mostly during childhood and in the form of stereotypical

jokes about Asians (Strmic-Pawl 2016). However, many Asian-Whites claim to be unaffected by these experiences of racial stigma. Some even participate in the demeaning jokes themselves or take a colorblind approach to race (Chang 2016; Strmic-Pawl 2016). For example, an Asian father described his multiracial daughter as “half-breed,” a harmful term that potentially reveals his own internalized racism (Chang 2016). Regardless, this experience will become part of her “early vernacular and formative in early perceptions of herself” (Chang 2016:39).

Indeed, Asian-Whites are also less likely to perceive racism or discrimination. If they believe race is playing a role in their experiences, they either laugh it off, ignore it, and/or think they “would be overreacting if they said it was” discrimination (Strmic-Pawl 2016:64). In fact, Asians are the least likely to have “resistant race instruction” while growing up (Chang 2016:104). In turn, this influences Asian parents’ racial socialization practices of their multiracial children. Although they may be offended, Asian-Whites often are not motivated to take action against or confront experiences of racism (Strmic-Pawl 2016). Thus, Asian-Whites are not as tied to the non-White part of their identity as other multiracials are (Strmic-Pawl 2016).

Together, this potentially signals that interracial parents raise Asian-White children with an assimilationist or colorblind approach, developing White racial logics because they are “white enough” in the racial hierarchy (Chang 2016; Strmic-Pawl 2016). Asian parents in particular understand the “enormous pressure to prove their American-ness by conforming to White mainstream,” a message that is likely passed on to their multiracial children (Chang 2016:45). Likewise, White parents also perpetuate the White racial frame, by participating in oppressive and racist behaviors or simply ignoring race and their child’s multiracial identity (Chang 2016). By utilizing White racial logics, Asian-Whites participate in deracialization, which ultimately positions Whiteness as the norm and reaffirms Whites as the top of the racial hierarchy (Strmic-

Pawl 2016). Common experiences for Asian-Whites include feeling normal, or that race has not impacted their lives, self-segregating with Whites, and believing that we live in a post-racial society where meritocracy rules (Chang 2016; Strmic-Pawl 2016). This reliance on meritocracy draws parallels to the Model Minority Myth, a stereotype in which Asian Americans are deemed to be intelligent, successful, and well-behaved, in relation to other communities of color (Chang 2016). Through the use of White racial logics and occupying a “white enough” status, Asian-Whites attain many of the benefits of being White without being White. Despite these inferences on being raised to embrace colorblindness and meritocracy, there is little research that examines parental racial socialization practices of Asian-White children as opposed to research on the experiences and identities of Asian-White multiracial adults.

Black-Asian Families: Racial Socialization and Family Dynamics

Despite increased representation with very high-profile individuals, including athletes like Tiger Woods and Naomi Osaka and Vice President Kamala Harris, there is little research on Black-Asian individuals and families. This is because, as previously mentioned, much of the multiracial literature has been limited to examining Whiteness in relation to non-White minorities (Rondilla et al. 2017). However, “the White multiracial experience is much different from the dual-minority multiracial experience” (Ortiz 2017:89). Centering Whiteness in multiracial studies erases or minimizes the experiences of people with two non-White parents, such as Black-Asians. Thus, there is a limited body of research pertaining to the racial socialization of Black-Asian individuals.

Previous research shows that Black-Asian parents are likely to follow hypodescent norms, identifying their children as Black (Brunsma 2005; Chang 2016). Yet, this only examines labeling decisions, not racial socialization practices within the home. However, this could

suggest that parents of Black-Asian children choose to identify their children as “Black” due to the child’s observed race and/or not being fully accepted as a member of Asian culture due to anti-Blackness (Chang 2016; Houston 2017). It is important to note that when Black-Asians are perceived to be Black, they are racialized and oppressed by society in the same ways (Chang 2016). This leads to the feeling that “Mixed race people are The Other. Mixed race people of African Descent are The Other’s Other” (Houston 2017:23).

Regardless of how they identify their children on surveys and forms, the experiences of dual-minority families are unique within the multiracial literature. In fact, dual-minority families are more likely to racially socialize their children with strategies similar to monoracial minority families as opposed to interracial White families (Ortiz 2017). Although the parents share different racial backgrounds, they share common experiences of racism and discrimination as people of color in the U.S. (Ortiz 2017). Research on racial socialization in dual-minority families demonstrates that parents use a variety of strategies to inform their child’s racial identity, including using personal experiences to teach their children about their background, choosing not to teach their children about their background, and learning about the spouse/other parent’s background to teach their children about both (Ortiz 2017).

Perhaps, depending on the strategy, parents are challenging hypodescent norms and embracing racial socialization practices to be inclusive of both racial backgrounds, regardless of what prior survey research has found. For example, some parents encourage racial identity labels that combine both of a child’s backgrounds, like Blasian, Blindian, Blackapina, among others (Houston 2017; Ortiz 2017). In addition to decentering Whiteness, my study provides a better understanding of not only how parents identify their Black-Asian children, but how they racially socialize them based on that identity.

Research Questions

Based on the current literature, it is clear that there is a lack of understanding of how various multiracial families function and racially socialize their children. Furthermore, we must have a better understanding of how experiences and factors outside of the immediate family, such as interactions within their communities and society more broadly, impact its daily dynamics and socialization practices. Given that families, specifically parents, serve as agents of socialization, they are a fruitful site to connect macro-level processes, such as the racial order, to the micro-level. Thus, my dissertation and the following chapters address the following research questions:

1. How do interracial parents make sense of the racial identity choices for their children and how do they negotiate these choices?
2. How do the parents discuss race with each other and with their children?
3. What role does race and gender play in parents' socialization practices? What other factors influence racial socialization (i.e. skin tone, colorism, class, other family members)?
4. Do parents racially socialize their children in ways that are unique to their children's multiracial identity, or do they draw from socialization practices common in monoracial families?
5. Based on their racial socialization practices, what, if any, impact will there be more broadly on the U.S. racial order?

Chapter Overview

In chapter two, I detail my methods and data. The data in this study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 19 sets of interracial parents across the U.S. I discuss my research design, including my intersectional approach to purposive sampling. I also describe why

I chose to conduct dyadic interviews, or one interview with both parents simultaneously, and challenges related to collecting qualitative data during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

My empirical findings are presented in three articles, chapters three through five. In chapter three, my first empirical chapter, I argue that there are several stereotypes, raced and gendered in nature, surrounding multiracial individuals. These stereotypes include multiracials 1) being viewed as exotic and/or inherently attractive because of their mixed-race background, and therefore, 2) having a superiority complex, which reinforces racial hierarchies and creates division and tension within communities of color. This superiority complex is often rooted in colorism and proximity to White beauty standards, such as skin tone and hair texture. Parents of color are socializing their multiracial children to be aware of these stereotypes as a means of rejecting or dispelling them. Because of their own experiences with colorism, racism, and discrimination, parents of color do not want their children actively contributing to a racial hierarchy in which multiracials are often privileged.

The fourth chapter examines how multiracial families are subject to racial surveillance and voyeurism. Racial surveillance of multiracial families might include strangers questioning a parent's relation to their child or interactions with the state and authority figures in which families must prove biological relation or fear punitive treatment. These families are also subject to racial voyeurism, in which everyday interactions and outings draw attention, stares, and curiosity. I analyze these experiences of racial surveillance and voyeurism through theories on racial dissection, microaggressions, and rebound racism.

Chapter 5, the final empirical chapter, focuses on how multiracial families “perform” in their daily lives to make their legal and biological relationships more obvious because of the hypervisibility and invisibility they experience. Despite increasing representations in popular

culture, multiracial families experience the paradox of being both the “ideal” family in a post-racial society and an anomaly that challenges assumptions about our most intimate relationships. Utilizing classical sociologist Erving Goffman’s concept of dramaturgy, I describe the painstaking preparations multiracial families take to prove their legitimate relationships and how they adjust their behaviors in public settings, the front stage, to provide obvious cues they are a family. A version of this chapter focusing on Black-White families will be published in *Contexts* (forthcoming, Johnson 2024).

My conclusion, chapter 6, will address the empirical and theoretical contributions of my study as well as directions for future research.

A Note on Language

In the following chapters I typically use the term “multiracial” to describe someone who self-identifies with two or more races. However, due to the socially constructed nature of race and the importance of self-identification, not everyone who has parents of two different racial backgrounds identifies as multiracial. Thus, I will sometimes use “mixed-race background” to describe those who do not identify as multiracial. The interracial parents I interviewed also used different terminology to refer to their children, such as “biracial,” “mixed,” “Blasian,” and “Blindian,” for example. While “Blasian” and “Blindian” are more specific forms of self-identification, Black and Asian and Black and Indian respectively, I will interchangeably use the other descriptors all to describe someone who has ancestry from two different racial groups.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Research Design

The study draws on interview data collected between 2021 and 2022 with pairs of interracial parents across the U.S. I purposefully designed my study and methods to generate intersectional insights useful for understanding how socially constructed systems interact in shaping family experiences (McCall 2005; Misra et al. 2021). Researchers recognize several core tenets of intersectionality (Misra et al. 2021), many of which are incorporated into my research design, such as a focus on oppression, relationality, complexity, context, and comparison. Overall, an intersectional approach allows for comparison amongst sub-groups, both between and within. For example, I attempted to address power and inequality by interviewing both biological parents. This provided insight to power dynamics related to race and/or gender of parents (Szulc and King 2022; Cerchiaro 2023). Parents may experience privilege or disadvantage relative to their co-parent or even in comparison to other parents and families included in the study. For example, White, Black, and Asian motherhood are all judged differently.

This purposeful sampling method accounts for intercategorical and intracategorical complexity at the intersection of race and gender, which is essential in better understanding racial socialization practices of interracial parents (McCall 2005). Furthermore, most of the existing literature on racial socialization in multiracial families focuses specifically on Black and White parents (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Csizmadia et al. 2014; Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017; Osuji 2019). In order to expand the sample, yet also make comparisons within and between groups, I also opted to include Asian-White and Black-Asian families. Asian-Whites are one of the largest subgroups in the population selecting two or more races while

Black-Asians, who have gained more media attention with influential figures like Kamala Harris and Naomi Osaka, have unique experiences as dual minorities (Rondilla et al. 2017; DaCosta 2020; Horowitz and Budiman 2020).

Data Collection

I received IRB approval in summer 2021 and began to recruit and interview parents in August 2021. To be considered eligible, both biological parents were required to participate in the interviews and self-identify as either White, Black, or Asian. Individuals were also required to be 18+ years old, live in the U.S., and have biological children between the ages of 3 and 18. Participants were recruited via social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, and via snowball sampling. Recruitment flyers were posted to groups for interracial couples, multiracial families, and parenting groups. An example of my recruitment flyer can be found in Appendix A. Amongst those who expressed interest in my study and those who became participants, it was almost always the mom who initiated contact with me to learn more. Only one dad, an Asian man, initiated contact and organized an interview with his wife, a Black woman. When someone would reach out to learn more about participating, I would first check that they were eligible to participate. If a family was ineligible, it was usually because their child was under 3 years old, they did not live in the U.S., or their co-parent did not want to participate in the interview. Once a family was deemed eligible, I sent them electronic copies of the informed consent document (see Appendix B) to review and sign. At that point we scheduled a time for the Zoom interview.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the global pandemic and lasted approximately one to two hours (Howlett 2022). Before starting and recording the interview, I reviewed informed consent with the family and asked them if they had any questions related to that or the research in general. To show care and create a more balanced relationship between

myself and participants, I let them know we could skip any questions that made them uncomfortable (Reich 2021). With their consent I then started recording (audio and video) and went over demographic information first. I asked parents a range of questions based on my interview protocol, starting with their memories of childhood discussions of race or lack of discussions. I asked if/how these experiences affected how they wanted to talk to their children about race and what those conversations were generally like. Because I started collecting data in 2021, I asked them how things like the pandemic and increasing Asian hate crimes, the Trump administration, and Black Lives Matter movement impacted their discussions. I also asked about how they thought interracial couples and multiracial people were depicted in the media, the kinds of experiences they have had as a family in public settings, and if/how they faced discrimination. The interviews were semi-structured so conversation would flow naturally. If parents addressed a topic before it came up on the interview protocol, I would follow their lead and incorporate my questions as it made sense. At the end of the interview, I always asked the parents if there was anything they wanted to discuss in more detail or anything I did not address that they felt was important. After each interview I would review my protocol and adjust questions for future interviews if participants described experiences I had not heard before (Small 2009). The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

I interviewed parents together for two main reasons. First, the research is related to their family dynamics, parenting practices, and experiences as a multiracial family (Szulc and King 2022). Thus, it made sense to interview parents together and also provided a sense of comfort for the participants, particularly for those who would not have participated in the study alone (Szulc and King 2022; Cerchiaro 2023). In most cases, this was the dad. Second, I conducted my interviews during a global pandemic and time of political/social unrest. In addition to concerns

about COVID-19 and physical health, many experienced increased stress, anxiety, and depression in the midst of processing trauma stemming from mass death and racial injustice (Averett 2021; Howlett 2022). Quite simply, people were burnt out. Parents, particularly moms, also took on more unpaid labor within the home like childcare, housework, and supervising online schooling (Averett 2021). Therefore, it was often more convenient for the parents to schedule one interview when they were both available, typically in the evenings. I considered individual interviews with each parent as well, but was concerned this would be a burden to their time and that I would not be able to complete one-on-one interviews with every parent. Thus, I decided on one combined interview unless they requested otherwise.

The dyadic interviews also provided for interesting observations regarding how the couple understood race, oppression, and privilege both as individuals and together (Morgan et al. 2013; Szulc and King 2022; Cerchiaro 2023). At times, couples would question or correct each other, using the interview as an educational tool for one another (Szulc and King 2022). Some parents would also recall events that the other did not or expressed different interpretations and understandings of experiences of racism and microaggressions. As Morgan et al. (2013) state, “The crucial difference between individual and dyadic interviews consists of the interaction between participants in dyadic interviews, as the comments of one participant draw forth responses from the other” (1276). Dyadic interviews also illuminated their decision-making scripts as parents, in particular how they discuss race with their child(ren) and how/why they racially identify them a certain way, and revealed hidden scripts that may be related to family or couple conflict (Szulc and King 2022; Cerchiaro 2023). For example, during one of my interviews a Black mom expressed her hesitancy about their Black-White daughter having overnight stays with her White grandmother who does not know how to do her hair. As such, she

preferred to leave her daughter in her Black grandmother's care. This was new knowledge for the White dad who stated he wanted to discuss his wife's concerns more. Only one dyad, a divorced set of parents, requested separate interviews.

Regardless of the dyad's racial makeup, I heard similar narratives, experiences, and challenges from all of my participants. Because I had reached thematic saturation, or I was hearing similar things from participants with few or no surprises, I conducted my last interview in July 2022 (Small 2009). However, I continued targeted recruitment of Black-Asian families through February 2023. My original goal was to have equal representation among the three dyadic groups, both by race and gender of the parents. For example, a minimum of six Black-Asian families total in which three had Black moms and Asian dads and the other three had Black dads and Asian moms. I was able to accomplish this with two of my subgroups, Black-White and Asian-White, and conducted a few additional interviews. However, I was unable to recruit Black dads and Asian moms, resulting in four dyads of Black moms and Asian dads. I changed my recruitment materials to specifically reflect families in which the dad is Black and mom is Asian and attempted to recruit from social media groups dedicated to Black and Asian families. In an attempt to incentivize participation, I offered \$20 Amazon gift cards for each parent or one \$40 Amazon gift card for the family. A major hurdle to recruiting these dyads was one parent, usually an Asian mom, wanted to participate, but did not think her co-parent, a Black dad, would want to participate in the interview.

Participants

The data in this study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 19 pairs of interracial parents, or 38 individuals, including: eight Black and White dyads, seven Asian and White dyads, and four Black and Asian dyads. Within these dyads, the following couples were

represented: four pairs of Black moms and White dads, four pairs of Black dads and White moms, four pairs of Asian moms and White dads, three pairs of Asian dads and White moms, and four pairs of Black moms and Asian dads.

Although not an eligibility requirement, almost all participants were married. Only one set of parents was divorced and co-parenting. All participants identified as cisgender men or women and the sample was predominantly heterosexual, except for four women who identified as bisexual or queer/pansexual and one man identifying as bisexual. The couples were highly educated, with all completing at least some college education even if they did not earn a degree. Twenty-two of the 38 individuals had graduate or professional degrees. The approximate average household income was \$173,150. The participants represented multiple regions and states of the U.S., including North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Colorado, Arizona, Washington, and California. All participants were asked to select pseudonyms for themselves and their child(ren), which are used throughout the findings section. A full participant overview can be found in: Table 2.1 Black-Asian Families, Table 2.2 Asian-White Families, and Table 2.3 Black-White Families.

Positionality

I am a multiracial White-Asian woman of Japanese descent. I come from a working-class family with a White mom and multiracial White-Asian dad. I always shared my positionality as it related to race and gender when posting my recruitment materials, which allowed me access to some participants. My ability to connect with my participants on a personal level provided them a safe space to discuss their experiences as an interracial family, which helped build rapport and trust between myself and the participants (Reich 2021; Cerchiaro 2023). Participants often asked me about my background, what drew me to the research topic, and about my personal

experiences as a multiracial person throughout the interview. My social location and “closeness” to the topic certainly influenced my ability to recruit and connect with parents of multiracial children, but at the same time, I tried not to make assumptions or generalize experiences across the different sets of families (Reich 2021). However, I also experienced limitations based on my identity. As someone who is White presenting, some eligible participants were hesitant to trust me and questioned my intentions and understandings of race, racism, and specifically, my experiences as a multiracial person. This was particularly true for Black-Asian families who described prior experiences with White-Asian couples in which the Asian partner perpetuated anti-Black racism and believed they were of a higher status for “marrying up” by marrying a White person (Lee 2015).

Data Analysis

Following interviews, I would memo by jotting down notes to reflect on body language, emotions, general impressions, and to provide a general summary of the interview. As I was simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, I used these reflections to inform subsequent interviews and adjusted my interview protocol (Charmaz 2006; Small 2009). Because I recorded interviews using Zoom, a rough version of automated transcripts was provided for each interview. An undergraduate research assistant cleaned up and finalized the Zoom interview transcripts, which I then coded with NVivo.

I analyzed the participant narratives using both inductive and deductive coding. Using a grounded theory approach, I first read and coded each interview line-by-line to have a fuller understanding of the data, eliminate preconceived notions, and to identify potentially surprising or unique responses (Charmaz 2006; Rubin 2021). I also engaged in deductive coding based on my prior knowledge of the literature. For example, some of the questions included in my

interview protocol were based on findings from research on racial socialization practices of parents with mixed-race children. Thus, deductive codes helped me make connections to previously published research, identify how my participants' experiences and responses departed from these findings, and consider potential themes (Deterding and Waters 2021). Codes were descriptive in nature, such as hair, skintone, and clothing, and also identified processes, such as filling out forms, interacting with authority, and parenting differently from one's upbringing.

Since coding is a very subjective process, I wanted to get different reads and perspectives on the data (Rubin 2021). Colleagues from a writing group also coded and analyzed excerpts of several de-identified transcripts. Over the course of three different meetings, two people would read excerpts of my transcripts and code them by inserting comments with lists of codes on the original provided documents. These excerpts were approximately 5-8 pages. One reader/coder was always a graduate student while the other was a senior race scholar. This was particularly helpful in assessing my initial interpretations of the data and participants and ensuring I did not overlook potential findings and themes.

From these sets of codes, I was able to identify patterns in the data and thematic findings. Because I was originally focused on racial socialization of children, I first identified themes like "discussing race as a family," "representation through media and toys," and "not forcing children to pick sides" in relation to how they racially identify. Based on parents' discussions of racial identification and labeling choices for their children, it became clear that physical appearance was important. For example, I identified themes related to multiracial beauty standards and expectations, especially as it related to their daughters. I also identified themes more closely related to family dynamics and everyday interactions. My themes related to racial surveillance, voyeurism, and hypervisibility/invisibility emerged from codes like family outings, travel, and

reactions to interracial relationships. I will discuss these themes in more detail in the following empirical chapters.

Table 2.1: Black-Asian Families

Parents (Age)	Race and Gender	Children (Age)	Education	Household Income	State
Noor (37) and Raj (40)	Black woman/ Asian (Indian) man	Anju (girl, 8)	Bachelor's/ Bachelor's	\$140,000	NC
Issa (43) and Dev (42)	Black woman/ Asian (Indian) man	Morningstar (girl, 10) Sekou (boy, 6)	Master's/ Master's	\$120,000	IL
Samantha (41) and James (42)	Black woman/ Asian (Filipino) man	Paul (boy, 7) Pauline (girl, 4)	Master's/ Master's	\$240,000	PA
*Rochelle (38) and Vinh (41)	Black woman/ Asian (Vietnamese) man	Hai (boy, 9) Lien (boy, 6)	Master's/ Master's	\$110,000/ \$200,000	WA

*Rochelle and Vinh are the only set of divorced parents.

Table 2.2: Asian-White Families

Parents (Age)	Race and Gender	Children (Age)	Education	Household Income	State
Melody (30) and Jason (33)	Asian (Filipina) woman/ White man	Claire (girl, 7) Lucy (girl, 4)	Bachelor's/ Bachelor's	\$68,000	CA
Sonya (37) and Alan (34)	Asian (Chinese and Taiwanese) woman/ White man	Ariel (girl, 3)	Bachelor's/ Some college	\$145,000	NC
Michelle (48) and Tom (48)	Asian (Japanese) woman/ White man	Dan (boy, 15) Zoe (girl, 15)	Master's/ Bachelor's	\$400,000	CA
Eleanor (35) and Logan (35)	Asian (Chinese) woman/ White man	Desmonda (girl, 16)	PhD/ Master's	\$150,000	NC
Tad (47) and Kathy (43)	Asian (Japanese) man/ White woman	James (boy, 6) Anne (girl, 4) Christopher (boy, 4)	Bachelor's/ Master's	\$400,000	OH
David (46) and Tara (45)	Asian (Filipino) man/ White woman	Tamsen (girl, 3)	Bachelor's/ Master's	\$120,000	NC
Brian (38) and Christine (38)	Asian (Vietnamese) man/ White woman	Kit (girl, 3)	JD/ Master's	\$250,000	AZ

Table 2.3: Black-White Families

Parents (Age)	Race and Gender	Children (Age)	Education	Household Income	State
Shavonne (36) and Blake (39)	Black woman/ White man	Simone (girl, 3) Robert (boy, 7mos)	Bachelor's/ Bachelor's	\$200,000	NC
Angela (34) and Chris (35)	Black woman/ White man	Amir (boy, 13) Alexia (girl, 10)	Master's/ some college	\$80,000	NC
Dee (36) and Mark (38)	Black woman/ White man	Jade (girl, 3)	Master's/ PhD	\$60,000	PA
Brittany (32) and Dominic (32)	Black woman/ White man	Rose (girl, 12) Jay (boy, 3)	PhD/ Master's	\$200,000	CO
Ellison (49) and Leigh (45)	Black man/ White woman	Madden (girl, 20) Aspen (girl, 17) Aaron (boy, 16)	PhD/ Bachelor's	\$210,000	FL
Miles (46) and Fiona (42)	Black man/ White woman	Maya (girl, 7) Nia (girl, 5)	Master's/ Master's	\$200,000	NC
Josh (52) and Laura (49)	Black man/ White woman	Jalen (boy, 8)	Bachelor's/ Bachelor's	\$80,000	MI
Earl (36) and Sun (40)	Black man/ White woman	Kathleen (girl, 13) Johara (girl, 10) Iona (girl, 4)	Associate's/ Master's	\$90,000	NC

CHAPTER 3: REJECTING MULTIRACIAL STEREOTYPES: PARENTAL SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER

Abstract

Stereotypes surrounding multiracial individuals include being 1) viewed as inherently attractive because of their mixed-race background, and therefore, 2) having a superiority complex, which reinforces racial hierarchies and creates division and tension within communities of color. This superiority complex is often rooted in colorism and proximity to White beauty standards. In this chapter, I examine parents' awareness and perceptions of these stereotypes at the intersection of race and gender. In particular, parents understand that their Black multiracial boys must contend with both multiracial stereotypes and controlling images of Black men and boys. I argue that parents' understanding of both multiracial stereotypes, like the Biracial Beauty Stereotype, and controlling images of Black boys and men inform their racial socialization practices as they help their child(ren) build a positive racial identity and prepare for discrimination. Two contributions of this chapter are 1) including the perspectives and socialization practices of moms and dads of color, which reveal their discontent with multiracial notions of superiority, like the Biracial Beauty Stereotype, and 2) including Black-Asian families whose experiences depart from multiracial families in which one parent is White, which elucidates how parents who believe their children are racialized as Black prepare them to contend with anti-Blackness.

Introduction

The fastest growing population in the U.S. is made up of those who self-identify with two or more races, with the United States Census Bureau estimating that it will triple in size by 2060 (Patten 2015; Curington 2016). Some members of this population also self-identify as mixed-

race or multiracial. Although this population has always existed, due to the socially constructed nature of race itself, its growth since the late 1960s can be attributed to two major factors: the legalization of interracial marriage in 1967 and a 2000 Census change that allowed respondents to claim more than one race for the first time (Townsend et al. 2012; Curington 2016; Davenport 2016; Strmic-Pawl 2016). Since the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case legalizing interracial marriage in all states in 1967, interracial marriages have increased in the U.S. from 3% in 1967 to 17% in 2015 (Livingston and Brown 2017). Increases in interracial relationships, marriage or not, correlate with the growth of the so-called multiracial population and has been referred to as the “biracial baby boom” (Waring and Bordoloi 2018:95).

For the first time, 6.8 million Americans were able to claim two or more races on the 2000 Census. As of the 2020 Census, 10% of the population now identifies with two or more races, meaning that the multiracial population has tripled in size to 33.8 million since the 2010 Census (Schneider 2021). Two of the largest subgroups in this population include the Black-White population at 21% and Asian-White population at 20% (DaCosta 2020; Horowitz and Budiman 2020). Only 2% of the population identifies as Black-Asian (Horowitz and Budiman 2020). However, it is very likely that the multiracial population for each of these sub-groups is larger than what the Census captured. This is due to the fluidity of multiracial self-identification, societal pressure, one’s physical appearance and how they are racialized, their upbringing, and other factors (Brunsmas 2005; Khanna 2010; DaCosta 2020; Horowitz and Budiman 2020; Tamir et al. 2021; Castillo 2022; Gonlin 2022).

An increase in interracial relationships and the multiracial population has contributed to the false belief that the U.S. is a post-racial society, perpetuating colorblind ideology (Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Curington 2020; Jones and Rogers 2022). Interracial couples and families are

often fetishized and depicted as trendy in media representations (Gardner and Hughey 2017; Curington 2020; Trent 2022). These depictions contribute to stereotypes, raced and gendered in nature, surrounding multiracial individuals, including 1) being viewed as exotic and/or inherently attractive because of their mixed-race background, and therefore, 2) having a racial superiority complex, which creates division and tension within communities of color. This superiority complex is often rooted in colorism and proximity to White beauty standards, such as lighter skin tone and straighter or less textured hair (Sims 2012; Hordge-Freeman 2015). Of course, these ideas of what multiracial people are or how they look are informed by the idea that all mixed-race people are partially White (Strmic-Pawl 2014; Rondilla et al. 2017). While many do experience White-mixed superiority (Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022), it is important to reemphasize that despite one's racial background, people are phenotypically different (Strmic-Pawl 2014). For example, someone might be mixed-race Black-White, but this does not guarantee they have lighter skin. In fact, they could be perceived and/or self-identify as monoracial Black (Harris and Sim 2002; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Gonlin 2022). This in itself highlights the complex, yet socially constructed nature of race.

Utilizing an intersectional analysis, my study examines parents' understandings of multiracial stereotypes and the resulting socialization messages they send their children. Based on my interviews with 19 sets of interracial parents across the U.S., I argue that their understanding of multiracial stereotypes is heavily influenced by the race and gender of their child(ren), and in turn, inform their racial socialization practices around building a positive racial identity and preparing their child(ren) for discrimination. Parents identified different experiences and concerns for their sons, Black multiracials, specifically. This means that parents must also

racially socialize their Black multiracial boys to prioritize their personal safety through their understanding of controlling images of Black men and boys.

As such, my findings contribute to a growing body of literature that examines 1) racial socialization within multiracial families, 2) experiences of non-White multiracial families and 3) shared experiences of multiracials, including microaggressions, stereotypes, and how some are denied claims to a multiracial identity altogether (Joseph 2012; Sims 2012; Waring 2013; Chang 2016; Gardner and Hughey 2017; Rondilla et al. 2017; Osuji 2019; Curington 2020; Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022; Gonlin 2022; Heilman 2022; Jones and Rogers 2022). After a review of the literature on racial socialization and multiracial stereotypes, I describe my original research project examining the racial socialization practices of interracial parents. I then present a discussion of findings and conclude the article with implications for future research.

Familial Racial Socialization

Familial racial socialization is a process through which family members teach children the social meanings and consequences of ethnicity and race and is often based on the socialization parents received growing up and their understandings of race (Hughes et al. 2006; Brown et al. 2007; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Waring and Bordoloi 2018). Families racially socialize their children for a variety of reasons, which include exposing them to racial/ethnic diversity, instilling racial/ethnic pride, and preparing them for discrimination as a member of a historically marginalized group (Brown et al. 2007). Racial socialization is important to study because it is linked closely to a family's and individual's well-being (Stokes et al. 2021). For example, when familial racial socialization practices are effective, there are positive outcomes for children such as ethnic identity formation, self-esteem, skills to cope with prejudice and discrimination, improved academic performance, and favorable psychosocial outcomes (Hughes et al. 2006;

Stokes et al. 2021). Common methods of racial socialization include cultural socialization, preparation for bias, the promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism/silence on race (Hughes et al. 2006). In this paper, I mainly focus on how parents instill a positive racial identity via cultural socialization, while at the same time, preparing their child for experiences of discrimination based on their race and gender.

Cultural socialization is a practice through which parents teach their children racial/ethnic history and heritage to promote customs and pride (Hughes et al. 2006). This might include eating ethnic food, celebrating cultural holidays, learning the language of their family's home country, or generally working to develop a positive racial identity for their child. Along with instilling racial pride and knowledge, families of color must also prepare for their children for potential bias and discrimination as part of their racial socialization. Hughes et al. (2006) refer to this socialization method as preparation for bias, which is an effort to promote awareness of potential discrimination so children are better able to cope with it. For example, when raising their children, Black parents must work to instill pride surrounding their racial identity and self-image while also being honest with their children about the challenges they will face because of their race (Kasinitz et al. 2008). These challenges include discrimination, interactions with authority figures that must be carefully managed, gendered racism, and racial profiling based on controlling images (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Dow 2016, 2019; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Turner 2020; Manning 2021).

Racial Socialization in Multiracial Families

Previous racial socialization studies largely focus on monoracial families of color, yet racial socialization in multiracial families differs in meaningful ways. First, this practice is complicated in multiracial families because some “parents cannot rely on a shared racialized

identity with their children" (Waring and Bordoloi 2018:152). Furthermore, the two parents oftentimes do not share the same racial identity or racial socialization experiences, and their mixed children might have differing experiences and racial identifications based on their physical appearance and interactions with peers (Brunnsma 2005; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Nadal et al. 2013; Ortiz 2017; Castillo 2022; Gonlin 2022).

Indeed, parents face unique challenges if they choose to engage in multiracial socialization of their children. Examples of these socialization practices include open communication, pride about a dual racial/cultural status, nurturing or supporting a biracial family identity and learning how to navigate that identity with society and various social networks, and preparation for bias and privilege they may experience due to their multiracial identity (Chang 2016; Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017; Stokes et al. 2021). Importantly, many parents practice racial humility, giving multiracial "children the freedom to choose how they engage with either aspect of their racial identity" (Stokes et al. 2021:194).

Like monoracial families, the role of race and gender have important implications on the racial socialization practices of multiracial families. An intersectional lens emphasizing the role of race and gender is needed to understand this phenomenon. Intersectionality is a theoretical and methodological tool to understand how one's various identities and social standing as it relates to power interact to shape their lived experiences (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Collins 2002). This is true for both the parents and children. However, "gender factors remain conceptually underdeveloped" in literature on multiracial identity and socialization (Rockquemore 2002:486). Past studies on racial socialization practices of parents have predominantly featured the perspectives of White moms with multiracial children (Twine 2004; Rollins and Hunter 2013; Csizmadia et al. 2014; Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017), while most studies focusing on

multiracials themselves overwhelmingly include samples that are comprised of girls and women (Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Research has shown that gender differences in multiracial identity arise because “racial boundaries are less malleable for men” (Davenport 2016:61). Oftentimes, this results in different experiences for multiracial men and women, as men often identify as the minority race and women as multiracial (Strmic-Pawl 2014; Davenport 2016; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Multiracial women “have an easier time blurring and crossing racial boundaries” than multiracial men, which might influence parental racial socialization and labeling decisions (Davenport 2016:62). Gender differences in racialization also contribute to stereotypes surrounding people of mixed-race backgrounds.

Multiracial Stereotypes

The criminalization and taboo nature of interracial relationships had several negative consequences for people of mixed-race heritage, including numerous stereotypes (Nadal et al. 2011; Nadal et al. 2013; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Curington 2020; Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022). For example, one such stereotype is that of the “tragic mulatto” (Joseph 2012; Curington 2016; Gardner and Hughey 2017; Mills 2019). The “tragic mulatto” is often portrayed as a mixed-race Black-White woman who is exotic and sexually desirable to men, but lost, self-destructive, and an outsider in need of saving because of her mixed-race identity crisis (Curington 2016; Gardner and Hughey 2017; Mills 2019). This mental distress and lack of belonging, described by Stonequist’s (1935) racist theory of the marginal man, posits that mixed-race people experience numerous contradictions and “a pull and pressure” from both racial groups (6).

These explicitly negative stereotypes are in stark contrast to many seemingly positive portrayals of interracial couples and multiracial people today, which are often depicted in media as post-racial and trendy (Strmic-Pawl 2014; Gardner and Hughey 2017; Curington 2020; Trent

2022). Some interracial couples and families are also influencers in the realm of social media, with each follow, view, and like perhaps rooted in our country's "not-always-healthy fascination" with mixed-race families (Trent 2022). Oftentimes, these portrayals further contribute to the curiosity and fetishization surrounding multiracial families. Furthermore, multiracial individuals are often viewed as the country's post-racial future and a sign of improving race relations, while simultaneously being fetishized and exoticized for their mixed-race background (Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Waring 2013; Chang 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Curington 2020; Jones and Rogers 2022). Sims (2012) refers to this as the Biracial Beauty Stereotype, with several studies on physical attractiveness finding that "mixed race aesthetics are now *atop* the hierarchy" of beauty" (64). Chang (2016) aptly elaborates on this stereotype by stating:

Of course parents want to believe their children are the most beautiful and that seems completely natural. What is deeply problematic, however, is when this desire becomes racialized by society and children become 'higher' for their race (albeit a mixed one). Note the remarks are not simply that mixed race children will be cute and beautiful, but that they will be *the* cutest and *the most* beautiful, because, by insinuation, their racial makeup is *better* than the non-mixed racial makeup of others. (169)

As such, individuals of mixed-race backgrounds may internalize and embrace this stereotype of inherent beauty based on their racial makeup (Sims 2012; Waring 2013; Chang 2016). While some monoracial parents also buy into these depictions of multiracials, more are recognizing the harm they cause within families, where mixed siblings have different skin tones, features and hair textures, but also within communities of color more broadly (Strmic-Pawl 2014; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Chang 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2018).

Parents identify that their multiracial daughters must navigate these stereotypes in ways that their sons do not. Multiracial girls and women are fetishized based on their mixed-race background, viewed as exotic, and often privileged based on proximity to White beauty standards (Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Waring 2013). Black multiracial boys and men also experience privilege and stereotypes based on skin tone, such as the controlling image of the “light-skin ‘softie,’” and perceptions that they are more attractive, and thus more desirable to potential romantic partners (Rockquemore 2002; Joseph-Salisbury 2018). In this case, lighter-skinned Black multiracial men are “seen as less masculine than their darker skinned mono-racial Black peers” (Joseph-Salisbury 2018:77). However, depending on their age and physical appearance, this stereotype is not as relevant for Black multiracial boys (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Parents worry that their multiracial sons, who are racialized as Black, will “outgrow” being perceived as cute and eventually be viewed as a threat (Collins 2002, 2004; Dow 2016; Malone Gonzalez 2019). It must be stressed that overwhelmingly, Black multiracial men must contend with the same controlling images as Black men, such as the “criminal, deviant, and hypersexual Black monster” (Joseph-Salisbury 2018:67; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019).

These differing perceptions and experiences for multiracial boys and girls lends itself to the following research questions:

1. How do parents make sense of multiracial stereotypes? How does this understanding and awareness inform their racial socialization practices?
2. For both parents and children, how do socialization practices differ at the intersection of race and gender?

Findings

I identified three main themes: 1) parents' awareness and understanding of multiracial beauty stereotypes, particularly as it relates to their daughters, 2) socializing children to reject racial hierarchies that privilege multiracial people as a means of building a positive racial identity and community, and 3) preparing Black-multiracial sons for discrimination based on an understanding of controlling images surrounding Black men and boys. I first demonstrate parents' awareness and understanding of multiracial stereotypes, like the Biracial Beauty Stereotype. This then informs how they racially socialize their children around racial hierarchies and Eurocentric beauty standards. Because of their own experiences and understandings of colorism, racism, and discrimination in a White supremacist society, parents do not want their children contributing to a racial hierarchy in which multiracials are often privileged (Thompson and Keith 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014). Furthermore, parents do not want their children to experience distancing, othering, or tensions within their own communities because of stereotypes and perceptions surrounding multiracial people (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Lastly, I describe how parents socialize their Black multiracial boys to prepare them for discrimination and emphasize their personal safety. These concerns and resulting socialization practices are due to parents' understanding of controlling images surrounding Black men and boys (Collins 2002, 2004) and experiences of police brutality (Malone Gonzalez 2019).

“Put on a Pedestal”: Multiracial Beauty Stereotypes

Prior to their child's birth, my participants experienced curiosity and comments about their child-to-be's physical appearance. Inquiring family, friends, and strangers comment on the child's expected skin tone, hair type, and features. Parents themselves even form expectations about their child's physical appearance and express desires for certain features or traits (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Chang 2016; Osuji 2019). Thus, even before their birth, multiracial children are

subjected to tokenization and fetishization. Indeed, parents are very much aware of these stereotypes.

When asked if she had expectations of her daughter's physical appearance before birth, Sonya, 37, Chinese and Taiwanese, said, "I was hoping she would look like Maggie Q [actress], but I don't know. Most Asian-White mixes I've seen are attractive or good looking in the standard definition of it, I guess. I don't know."

Later in the interview, both Sonya and her husband, Alan, a 34-year-old White man, reaffirm the stereotype of multiracial people being inherently attractive simply because they are multiracial.

Sonya: I have some friends who have, who are...they're female and Asian with a male Black person and their mixed baby is super awesome.

Alan: Best looking baby ever.

Sonya: ...and they have really good-looking babies. I mean everyone does, but they're special.

Melody, 30, is Filipina American and the mother of two White-Asian daughters, aged seven and four. She also acknowledged this stereotype when she said, "There's a little bit of that trope of like 'oh mixed babies they're like, you know, really beautiful.' So we're just like, 'oh I bet she's gonna be really pretty.'"

Melody elaborated that because of her experience with colorism, she understands that her daughters will have privilege based on their skin tone and proximity to Whiteness. Growing up, Melody described being racialized as Mexican rather than Filipina because of her darker skin. Her mother also made negative comments about her skin tone. She said:

I think, in that sense, you know the girls will kind of be put on a pedestal a little bit from time to time...The way they exoticize skin color and like being mixed race. I think that

that's very much present in society and in the way that we engage or perceive other people..

Parents of color have a clear and complex understanding of the racial hierarchy, and therefore, the preconceived superiority complex surrounding multiracial individuals. Some White parents in multiracial families share awareness of these stereotypes and hierarchies, while others are still learning about race and privilege from their partners. For example, Blake, a 39-year-old White man, described outings with his three-year-old Black-White daughter, Simone, in their neighborhood in which older Black women would joke around with him and ask how he could be out with a girl so cute. Blake said:

Again, I want to be clear, like I've seen the mixed, biracial fetishism, so that exists, but also, they're objectively beautiful...so that's where it gets confusing to me. Are they saying they're beautiful because they're, you know, mixed or biracial? Or are they saying they're beautiful because they're beautiful? And they would say it to a White baby or a Black baby. So that's where it is tough, and I think there's more things at play here.

In contrast, Blake's wife, Shavonne, 36, views the comments more critically. Shavonne, a Black woman, described comments about her daughter's skin color as "gross" and questioned Blake as to if he ever got comments on his hair or skin when he was a baby. She said:

It's almost to a point where I know my kids are cute. I think that they're cute. They are very cute, but like everywhere we go it's like everybody's commenting on how cute they are...Or Simone specifically can also be out with my other nieces who are like 100% Black and Simone's getting the compliments and it feels gross to me because I've been on the other side as like a darker skinned woman...

Indeed, Black mothers like Shavonne share experiences of gendered racism and colorism, which inform how they racially socialize their multiracial children and navigate beauty politics and standards (Thompson and Keith 2001).

Relatedly, because of the fetishization and hyper-sexualization multiracial girls and women experience, parents expressed concerns that their daughters would experience sexual racism, hyper-sexualization, and harassment (Waring 2013; Silvestrini 2019; Curington 2020; Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022; Jones and Rogers 2022).

Miles, 46, is a Black father of two Black-White daughters, aged 7 and 5. As they get older, he admits he is “worried about a lot of things.” He went on to say:

I don't want my fair skin daughters to be seen as a fetish or you know...just exoticize them in some way. Because they're just people, you know what I mean? They don't think of themselves as some kind of exotic thing, right, so like yeah, those are things that I'm definitely concerned about.

Jason, a 33-year-old White dad, was also concerned about his two White-Asian daughters being fetishized. He said, “I already worry somewhat about, you know, the situations they'll get into where they may...potentially be taken advantage of sexually or those kinds of things, I guess.”

Miles and Jason's shared concerns about hyper-sexualization, and potentially sexual harassment, demonstrate the negative and dangerous side of multiracial stereotypes, particularly as their daughters get older.

‘None of us are better than anyone else’: Racial Hierarchies and Rejecting Multiracial Stereotypes of Superiority

Due to their awareness of multiracial and beauty stereotypes, parents of multiracial children socialize them to reject these stereotypes and attached meanings to (1) develop racial/ethnic pride and (2) prevent experiences of discrimination and bias within communities of color. Parents of color do not want their children to be proponents of colorism or a racial hierarchy that privileges physical features more closely associated with White beauty standards (Thompson and Keith 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014). Parents of color described these negative associations and experiences with how “mixed” people are perceived in communities of color.

Angela, a 34-year-old Black woman is the mom of a Black-White son, 13, and daughter, 10. Angela said, “...A lot of times more fair skinned, straight haired folks are put on a different level than darker skinned folks.” Indeed, beauty politics can lead to tensions and division within communities of color, particularly between girls and women (Rockquemore 2002; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Harris 2016).

Issa, 43, is a Black woman with two Black and Indian kids. Issa does not like to identify her children as “mixed” because “it’s had a negative connotation for me...the tone that was used when people use it...just has a bad memory in my mind.” Issa goes on to say, “There’s so much pride I have in who I am, and I know like within my community, when we do have someone who is multiracial, or they look like they’re passing for something, and they say ‘I’m Black’ it comes off sometimes as a form of convenience, depending on the situation.”

Here Issa describes consequential impacts of multiracial stereotypes and the racial hierarchy. As a result, people of a mixed-race background might experience policing of racial boundaries from others or even choose to distance themselves from one of their racial

backgrounds if they do not feel accepted (Rockquemore 2002; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Noor, a 37-year-old Black woman, recalled these experiences from her own childhood as a lighter-skinned Black woman. She said:

I remember these young Black girls coming up to me, pulling on my hair, saying ‘Are you mixed or something? You think you’re good, you think you’re this? Why are you talking like you’re White? We think you’re mixed?’ Just that language for me at a very early age...like the word “blended” does not bother me, so I know it’s just from that experience. But “mixed” kind of brings this kind of ‘mixed up’...I don't know what it is, but I'm not liking it since I was a little girl...

Because of her own experiences, Noor directly addresses colorism with her 8-year-old Blindian (Black and Indian) daughter, Anju. She described these conversations as a delicate balance between not being too “prideful,” but also building her self-esteem. Noor said:

I don't want my daughter to think that she is somehow superior in appearance because of her skin tone. We don't want to not celebrate her, she's beautiful. But we also want her not to think that she's beautiful because her skin is a certain tone, you know, and that trying to emphasize that her beauty comes from her creator...We need to like make sure that you're not too prideful, but we need to kind of make sure that your self-esteem isn't too low, because of how society may be. So I think it was just two different challenges and they're not necessarily the same.

Noor has attempted to remedy these challenges by praising and affirming various skin tones, hair types, and curl patterns. Noor’s practice not only builds her daughter’s self-esteem

and that of her friends but teaches her daughter that there is not one dominant perception of beauty. She said:

One of the things I've done is I always affirm those beautiful physical attributes that she has, but let's say we go to a playdate with a friend who has very tight, kinky, curly hair. I always say 'Oh, did you see so and so's hair? Her coils were popping today.' Like I make it a point to make it a thing because anywhere we go, people make it a thing about her hair. And so, then I'll say to her 'Oh, her coils were popping, your waves were swirling today' or 'your braids are so cute.' So, it's not that I affirm the others above hers, but that I make sure she always hears me affirm the hair that's been discriminated against or stigmatized or whatever.

Shavonne, a 36-year-old Black woman, has had similar experiences with her Black-White daughter and Black nieces. She stressed the importance of teaching her daughter, 3, to "stand up for all shades of Brown." Shavonne said, "I don't want them [nieces] ever to feel less than because of Simone, or because of how other people have perceived Simone. I also want to protect their confidence, that they are also beautiful as dark-skinned girls in a world that tells them that they aren't."

For example, Shavonne's nieces questioned why they could not get their hair wet in the shower as Simone does based on their different hair textures. One of her nieces even described Simone's hair texture and curls as "princess hair." Shavonne said this experience broke her heart and she told her niece that "all hair is princess hair."

Parents must be prepared to address these differences not only with children's friends and extended family members, but also between siblings themselves. Rochelle is a 38-year-old Black woman and the mother of two Black-Vietnamese sons, Hai, 9, and Lien, 6. She does not want

there to be tension between the brothers based on their different skin colors and the value attached to lighter skin in a White supremacist society (Thompson and Keith 2001; Hordge-Freeman 2015). Rochelle said:

I'm waiting and I'm trying not to be anxious or hypervigilant about value statements based on the color of their skin. They have different...they're aware of their color. I fear that as they start to become aware of how society values their color that...Well, I don't really know what will come up, but I fear that something will and then I'll have to be ready to respond to that. Because I had that fear before they expressed it, they noticed it, but now I know that they notice it.

Concerns about colorism and preferential treatment between siblings transcends racial lines and is also experienced by White-Asian parents (Hordge-Freeman 2015). Despite both daughters being multiracial White-Asian and having privilege in that sense, Melody (Filipina) and her husband Jason (White) described their younger daughter, Lucy, as having a lighter complexion compared to her sister, Claire. While many moms socialize their daughters about beauty standards, positive and negative, in this case it was the White dad who expressed concerns about colorism and its negative implications. "You know, I have a vague worry about prejudice, especially the more that Claire would encounter just because of her appearance. You know, her hair is...looks almost black and her skin's a bit darker whereas, you know, Lucy, like she really passes, I mean," Jason said.

Melody and Jason know the girls recognize differences in their skin tones and have had conversations as a family in an attempt to normalize these differences and not show preference for lighter skin. Melody said:

I don't think Claire's ever said anything about how she doesn't want to be darker or that she wants to be lighter...Lucy just hasn't said anything really. If she sees Claire and me talking about skin tones, then she'll interject and be like, 'oh I'm really light and dad's really light too.' And we talked about how you (Jason) can't tan, you just burn.

Issa, 43, and Dev, 42, also acknowledged the racial hierarchy and value attached to lighter skin, and in particular, being mixed-race (Thompson and Keith 2001). Dev, an Indian man, emphasized that he wants their children to specifically be proud of their Black racial background. He said:

For me, I feel like I would be much happier if they felt kind of proud about being Black...Yeah, I want them to be proud of being Blindian, but like you know...I don't have any desire for them to be like Blindian nationalists or have the sense that being Blindian is the best thing. Because in the system of White supremacy, right, there's a hierarchy there, and I don't want them to think that because they're mixed with India, that somehow, they're different or better than, you know, quote unquote 'plain old Black people' or whatever.

Indeed, Dev does not want his children to think they are better than others simply because of their mixed-race background. Dev and his wife Issa both understand how this mindset could create tensions between their children and other Black people (Rockquemore 2002; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Harris 2016). They aim to prevent this distancing and othering by teaching their kids to reject the multiracial stereotype. Issa said:

It makes me hyper aware of making sure that my children don't feel like they are somewhat better because of skin tone or their hair texture or even their privilege with their socioeconomic level. I know that definitely is a thing for me to make sure that they,

both of us, that they stay humble, and they realize how blessed they are rather than ‘oh I’m privileged, I’m better,’ you know. None of us are better than anyone else.

Issa’s commitment to keeping her kids “humble” is undoubtedly informed by her own experiences of gendered racism as a Black woman and the perceptions she had about mixed-race people growing up. She also recognizes that her children’s experiences of privilege will not be limited to their physical appearance, such as lighter skin tones, but also their class status. The middle-class family lives in Chicago and both parents have graduate-level educations. Issa understands that the family’s SES will provide opportunities to her kids, from the schools they attend to extracurriculars they participate in, that are not a reality for many children of color living in racially segregated or poverty-stricken areas of the city.

Clearly, parents’ acknowledgement of multiracial stereotypes, including the Biracial Beauty Stereotype, concerns for fetishization, and superiority complexes largely center around their daughters (Sims 2012). Meanwhile, concerns for their sons focus on racial profiling, police brutality, and safely navigating encounters with authority figures, indicating a unique departure at the intersection of race and gender (Dow 2016; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Turner 2020; Mitchell 2022). In the next section, I will describe how parents socialize their multiracial sons, particularly multiracial Black sons, to navigate controlling images rooted in anti-Blackness.

‘He’s cute now, but when’s he gonna look dangerous?’: Black Multiracial Boys, Stereotypes, and Controlling Images

Across the interviews with parents of Black multiracial boys, 8 sons total, all described fearing for their son’s safety based on controlling images that portray Black and brown men as angry, dangerous, criminal, and threatening (Collins 2002, 2004; Dow 2016; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Turner 2020). Regardless of their child’s age or skin tone, parents were concerned for how

their sons would be perceived and treated by authority figures, like teachers or the police. These concerns ranged from their sons experiencing adultification in the classroom and so-called “behavioral issues” to fashion and hairstyle preferences that are too “hood or hip” (Dow 2016; Turner 2020; Owens 2022).

Indeed, these concerns depart from those parents hold for their daughters in unique ways, because parents believe that their multiracial boys are often perceived as monoracial and have more difficulty navigating racial boundaries (Davenport 2016; Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Mitchell 2022). In other words, multiracial boys typically do not experience the same privileges based on proximity to Whiteness as multiracial girls might (Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Mitchell 2022). As such, parents default to the one-drop rule when socializing their Black multiracial sons because they think their sons will eventually be perceived as only Black (Khanna 2010; Gonlin 2022). Parents are socializing their multiracial Black sons to understand these controlling images to prepare them for discrimination and bias they will experience when navigating White spaces. This socialization practice serves to emphasize their personal safety.

Josh, 52, is a Black father raising his 8-year-old son with his White wife, Laura, 49. Josh primarily identifies his son, Jalen, as Black, because society “views [him] as a Black boy or as a Black man, so he needs to kind of get used to what that entails and what that means to the world and to him and know how to react.” He said, “The average person driving down the street or walking down the street will see a Black kid, so he needs to be more aware of his surroundings than the White kids. I'm sorry I don't mean...I'm not racist. It's just different.”

Josh and Laura described Jalen as a “hands-on kind of kid,” which sometimes led to disciplinary issues at school that Josh and Laura viewed as petty and a result of “learned biases.”

Josh said:

Well, I thought it was a little petty and I actually got a little pissed off last year because they were calling me like every other day for like ‘I’ve got to give him a demerit and it’ll go on his permanent record’ because you know some kid threw a snowball at him and he threw a snowball back. I don’t know...The other kid’s not getting in trouble for it but Jalen was...that’s when I sort of, you know, made up my mind that I think we just need to move...I mean she (the teacher) had me ready to sell the house.

Many parents of multiracial Black sons cited safety concerns, such as interacting with police, despite their child’s skin tone. Even if their sons might be considered racially ambiguous or light-skinned, “still it’s not White,” as Issa, 43, a Black mom of two Black kids said. She described these fears when talking about her six-year-old son. Issa said:

Then with our son, the worry of like he’s cute now, but when’s he gonna look dangerous? When’s he going to be perceived as a threat? Sure he might be a little lighter than the stereotypical threat is, a very dark skin boy or man, but his level of Brown, it’s on a spectrum, but still it’s not White. Is he going to be safe? Do I still have to worry about him... if his hairstyle’s too ethnic, if his style of dress is a little too ‘hood or hip,’ you know? Even if he was to be nerdy into Legos and other things, is that going to protect him?

Essentially, Issa fears that there is an age-limit of when her son will no longer appear cute and approachable, but instead a threat. Issa’s fear highlights the unique experiences for

multiracial boys and men, who despite their skin tone, are often racialized as hypermasculine and violent (Strmic-Pawl 2014).

Similarly, to Issa's style concerns, Angela, a 34-year-old Black mom, explained what her 13-year-old Black-White son cannot wear. Although her son is often racialized as Hispanic, Angela understands that he is not perceived as White. "I wouldn't let him go in a hoodie. You can either wear a jacket or, what, I don't know. I would not let him wear a hoodie, because of the negative connotations that come along with a male of color in that type of attire... We wouldn't let him go out wearing a wife beater either," she said.

Angela's fears about her son wearing a hoodie emerged after the murder of Trayvon Martin. Parents, like James, a 42-year-old Filipino man, also described teaching their sons that "police aren't necessarily always the heroes," thus socializing them to prepare for discrimination and bias in these interactions. When talking about his Black-Asian son, Paul, 7, James said:

I didn't grow up here, like I'm from the Philippines, but just how Black America perceives police... At least for myself, also talking to Paul about how police aren't necessarily always the heroes in our community. You have to look at it in a different lens, from a Black lens... They'll look at you differently. They might look at you as a criminal first and then a citizen second.

Research finds that some Asians and Asian Americans feel safe during interactions with police and protected by their Asian-ness, or traits associated with the Model Minority Stereotype (Baluran 2022). However, James makes it clear that this protection will not apply to his multiracial Black-Asian son because he is racialized as Black. In other words, he will never experience White-mixed superiority or present as White (Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022).

Dominic, a 32-year-old White man, and Brittany, a 32-year-old Black woman, socialize their 3-year-old son in a similar way. The parents pay careful attention to how police are portrayed inside their household. Dominic said:

The concept of a police officer is put into the same category as a firefighter, a lawyer, a doctor. It's a good figure that you can confide in and that you can trust, and it will always be there for your best interest. I think Brittany does a good job of making sure from kids' toys, his videos, his language, his experiences outside of the house, inside of the house, and stuff like that, have really steered away from the concept that this beautiful, White smiling guy is not your friend. And so, making sure he very much understands, because he loves cars... There's one type of car that we have really made sure that he doesn't love. It's a police car. He knows what it is, but he doesn't ask for it. He asked for fire trucks, he asked for garbage trucks, he asked for things like that. He doesn't ask for police cars. And so I think we've done a decent job of steering him away from that idea that they're naturally there for your best interest, because they're definitely not. So, that's one way that I think we've really helped to prepare him, which sucks. It's terrible, but at least he's not going to get just a societally constructed slap in the face when he has his first actual interaction with police officers when we're not there.

Dominic described intentionally not giving their son toy police cars. The parents hope this teaches him that police should not be idolized, or trusted, thus preparing him for future experiences and interactions with police officers.

Despite having Black multiracial daughters, parents in this study largely centered their sons in discussions of police violence. Indeed, previous research by Malone Gonzalez (2019) found this to be common, as Black moms catered the police talk toward their sons and viewed

their daughters more so as bystanders or collateral damage of police violence. If they did mention police interactions with their daughters, this largely focused on concerns about sexual harassment rather than physical or lethal violence.

Leigh, a 45-year-old White mom, expressed concerns for her Black-White teenage son that she did not have for her daughters. For example, she has concerns about her son jogging in the neighborhood and for when he eventually starts driving. “I’ve never had to have those conversations with my girls,” Leigh said of her 20 and 17-year-old daughters.

Only one mom, who was White, described having a police talk with her daughters. Sun is a 40-year-old White woman married to Earl, a 36-year-old Black man from Jamaica. They have three daughters together, with the oldest being 13. Sun described how her eldest daughter Kathleen is very tall for her age and is perceived to be older than 13 by other parents at sporting events. When talking to her daughter about being stopped by police, Sun said, “be respectful and maybe just to start recording before the police officer even gets there so you have evidence of what kind of happened.”

From their socialization practices, it is evident that parents of multiracial Black boys understand that their sons will never be perceived or treated as if they are White, even if they are lighter skinned. Other studies show similar findings with multiracial Black boys (Khanna 2010; Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Mitchell 2022). According to these parents, multiraciality does not act as a shield for anti-Black violence for multiracial Black boys. This compels parents to socialize their Black multiracial sons to understand they will not be met with privilege when interacting with authority figures who racialize them as Black, thus necessitating a rejection of the multiracial stereotype and instead an understanding of controlling images surrounding Black men and boys.

Discussion

The parents in this study exemplify the nuanced socialization practices involved in raising mixed-race children. Furthermore, they demonstrate a firm understanding of how their children may experience both privilege and oppression, because of or despite of, their mixed background. To have these important conversations, parents must first acknowledge the stereotypes surrounding multiracial people. Namely, multiracial individuals are viewed as exotic or inherently attractive solely because of their mixed-race background (Sims 2012; Waring 2013; Chang 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Curington 2020; Jones and Rogers 2022). This so-called Biracial Beauty Stereotype is then used to assert that multiracial individuals are better than other people of color (Sims 2012). However, parents of color recognize that this mindset is harmful and leads to tensions within communities of color (Kasinitz et al. 2008). This is particularly true for girls and women, who are most impacted by beauty politics and standards (Thompson and Keith 2001; Rockquemore 2002; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005). Therefore, they are socializing their children to reject this multiracial stereotype.

In terms of this study, parents socializing and teaching their mixed-race children to refute the multiracial stereotype could be examples of both cultural socialization and preparation for bias within communities of color (Hughes et al. 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2008). Teaching children to embrace their Black and/or Asian racial background is an example of cultural socialization and contributes to racial/ethnic pride in two main ways. First, parents help their child develop a secure racial identity by openly discussing race and racial differences, and in particular, displaying pride in being Black or Asian. These socialization practices, such as praising a range of skin tones, hair textures, and curl patterns, helps to combat colorism and White beauty standards that dominate our understanding of physical attractiveness. Secondly, building a

connection and having exposure to various communities and groups of color via socialization agents such as a parent, other family members, and friends will help mixed-race children further develop this pride and understanding (Dow 2019). Indeed, monoracial parents of mixed-race children openly talking about issues of race, racism, and colorism ultimately help multiracial children navigate these historical tensions in communities of color without reproducing them. However, socializing children to refute the multiracial stereotype can also be a form of preparation for bias. Parents of color understand how this stereotype can lead to distancing, othering, stereotyping, and tensions within communities of color (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Furthermore, Black multiracial boys must learn to reject this stereotype because they are often racialized as Black in society and do not receive privileges associated with racial ambiguity or proximity to Whiteness (Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Mitchell 2022). They are more likely to experience adultification and be perceived as criminal and threatening, which is particularly dangerous in encounters with police (Collins 2002, 2004; Dow 2016; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Turner 2020). Thus, these findings demonstrate the gendered limitations of the multiracial stereotype for Black multiracial boys, particularly as they grow older. Socializing their children to reject the multiracial stereotype is a means of preparing for, and potentially preventing, bias and discrimination at the intersection of race and gender.

Broadly, this study makes several contributions to the multiracialities literature. First, many existing studies on racial socialization primarily focus on Black-White families, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of White mothers raising mixed children. I address this limitation by including both biological parents in my study, including mothers and fathers of color, and expanding the scope to also include White-Asian and Black-Asian families. The inclusion of both parents provides more understanding of how each parent, at the intersection of

their own race and gender identities, make sense of their child's race and resulting racial socialization practices. Importantly, this study aims to decenter Whiteness in research on multiracial families with the inclusion of Black-Asian parents. These parents and children make up a small number of interracial relationships and multiracial individuals, but the current literature has overwhelmingly highlighted the role of Whiteness in multiracial families (Rondilla et al. 2017). It is clear that families with two parents of color have unique experiences from families with one White parent, which meaningfully impacts how they personally understand race and racism, discuss race as a family, and raise their children.

Notably, findings related to personal safety and interactions with police largely focused on the experiences of Black-White and Black-Asian families. Future research on familial racial socialization should continue to investigate the dynamics of White-Asian families and interrogate the White-leaning thesis surrounding White-Asian multiracial individuals (Chong and Song 2022). Although several White and Asian parents in my study acknowledged the biracial beauty stereotype and experiences of colorism, they did not express the same safety concerns for their mixed-race sons as parents of Black multiracial boys. Many of the White-Asian children of parents in my study were younger, and there was only one teenage boy. However, these differences in concerns and racial socialization practices within White-Asian families cannot be attributed to a child's age. This is clear from parents' socialization efforts and fear for their Black multiracial sons from a very young age, such as 3-year-old Jay who is not allowed toy police cars.

There are several possible explanations for these differences in White-Asian families, such as the Model Minority Stereotype, an immigrant parent's desire to assimilate, or parents understanding that their child will be perceived/racialized as White (Wing 2007; Kasinitz et al.

2008; Chao et al. 2013; Kiang et al. 2017; Baluran 2022; Chong and Song 2022). However, with a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes and xenophobia during Trump's presidency and the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a relevant direction for future research (Brown et al. 2022; Chong and Song 2022).

CHAPTER 4: THE MULTIRACIAL FAMILY AS AN ANOMALY: EXPERIENCES OF RACIAL SURVEILLANCE AND VOYEURISM

Abstract

Despite increasing representations of mixed-race families in different mediums such as shows, movies, and advertisements, studies find that many people in the U.S. assume that family members should not only phenotypically resemble each other, but they should also represent one obvious racial category. Interracial partners and multiracial families experience the paradox of being both the “ideal” family in a post-racial U.S. society, but also an anomalous family that challenges assumptions about the color line, racial categories, and our most intimate interpersonal relationships. I argue that multiracial families are positioned as “other” within society and analyze these experiences through theories on racial dissection, microaggressions, and border racism. I find that multiracial families experience racial surveillance through authoritative questioning of their familial relationships, which are often based on assumptions that families are monoracial. At the same time, they experience racial voyeurism, a seemingly unnatural fascination with multiracial families and children because of their mixed-race status. Thus, experiences of racial surveillance and voyeurism serve to delegitimize multiracial families and question our understandings of post-raciality.

Introduction

“...I don't know what the person said. I know enough of what they said because I had to text a friend about it...the sentiment was ‘How long do you watch her?’ or ‘Oh, she's really cute. Are you her nanny?’ It was something that threw me off, and I'm like, ‘No, I'm her mom.’”

-Noor, 37-year-old Black mom of a Blindian (Black and Indian) child

The multiracial population, made up of individuals who identify with more than one racial group, is the fastest growing racial group in the United States, with the United States Census Bureau estimating that it will triple in size by 2060 (Patten 2015; Curington 2016).

Although the multiracial population has always existed, due to the socially constructed nature of race itself, its growth since the late 1960s can be attributed to two major factors: the legalization of interracial marriage in 1967 and a 2000 Census change that allowed respondents to claim more than one race for the first time (Townsend et al. 2012; Curington 2016; Davenport 2016). Since the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case legalizing interracial marriage in 1967, interracial marriages have increased in the U.S. from 3% in 1967 to 17% in 2015 (Livingston and Brown 2017).

Despite increasing representations of mixed-race families in different mediums such as television shows, movies, social media, and advertisements, studies find that many people in the U.S. assume that family members should not only phenotypically resemble each other, but they should also represent one obvious racial category (DaCosta 2011; Treitler 2013; Omi and Winant 2015; Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Osuji 2019; Moss and Roberts 2020; strmic-pawl 2023). Interracial partners and multiracial families experience the paradox of being both the “ideal” family in a post-racial U.S. society and an anomaly that challenges assumptions about the color line, racial categories, and our most intimate interpersonal relationships (Haritaworn 2009; DaCosta 2011; Omi and Winant 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2018; Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Osuji 2019; Curington 2020; strmic-pawl 2023).

Drawing upon interviews with 19 sets of U.S. interracial parents, or 38 individuals, I argue that multiracial families experience forms of racial surveillance and voyeurism that serve to delegitimize and “other” these families. I describe racial surveillance as a tool of the White gaze to monitor people of color, particularly Black people, making them hypervisible and vulnerable to discrimination and violence based on controlling images (Yancy 2017; Selod 2019; Ross 2020; Okello 2022). Racial surveillance of multiracial families might include strangers

questioning a parent's relation to their child or interactions with the state and authority figures in which families must prove biological relation or fear punitive treatment.

I borrow and further develop Moss and Roberts' (2020) understanding of racial voyeurism to guide my analysis. Moss and Roberts (2020) refer to racial voyeurism as another form of racial surveillance, describing it as a "display of racialized bodies, especially black bodies...race is treated as a spectacle, often at the expense of black agency" (134). However, I conceptualize racial voyeurism and racial surveillance as two separate but interrelated concepts. I refer to racial voyeurism as everyday interactions and family outings that draw attention, stares, and curiosity, oftentimes passive in nature, rather than direct confrontations with authority figures as a result of racial surveillance. I analyze these experiences of racial surveillance and voyeurism through theories on racial dissection, microaggressions, and rebound racism (Dalmage 2000; Haritaworn 2009; Johnston and Nadal 2010; Curington 2021; Gay, Farinu, and Jackson 2022; strmic-pawl 2023).

Challenging Stereotypical Views of Family

Prior to the legalization of interracial marriages in 1967, the state enforced anti-miscegenation laws to maintain the White family structure and the White supremacist virtue of racial purity. Because one's race was tied directly to citizenship and freedom, the state mandated so-called racial purity so as to not grant citizenship to those of a mixed-race background, thus maintaining the racial hierarchy (Omi and Winant 2015). Interracial couples were ostracized, viewed as deviant, and met with state-sanctioned violence, particularly in the case of relationships between Black men and White women (DaCosta 2011). These long enforced laws have impacted society's views of what is considered a family, typically a heteronormative single-

race family, so much so that multiracial families today are still met with curiosity and hostility (Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Osuji 2019; strmic-pawl 2023).

I utilize the concept of racial dissection to describe why multiracial families are othered and their experiences of racial surveillance and voyeurism (Haritaworn 2009). Researchers have found that multiracial individuals are subjected to this form of racial dissection in which they are questioned and racialized as other, exotic, or ambiguous (Waring 2013; Curington 2021; Heilman 2022). Racial dissection can be described as when people “gaze at, dissect and evaluate others’ bodies,” such as their skin tone, hair, and facial features (Haritaworn 2009:75). I argue that this concept can be extended to multiracial family units, as their identities are “constructed in relation to the externalized gaze of the White dominant group” (Curington 2021:271). They are subjected to racialization and dissection as others attempt to “make sense” of their relationship (Haritaworn 2009; Waring and Bordoloi 2018).

Although representations of multiracial people and families are growing, which arguably has positive aspects, the commercialization and commodification of these representations themselves encourage the dissection of multiracial families via racial surveillance and voyeurism under the White gaze (DaCosta 2011; Curington 2021). Indeed, many of these media representations specifically target viewers “with an idea or image that challenges prevailing social norms and/or which they are unaccustomed to seeing” (DaCosta 2011:232). Multiracial families continue to be framed as different, new, stylish and trendy, transcending television screens to everyday experiences of stares and curiosity (Haritaworn 2009; DaCosta 2011; strmic-pawl 2023).

Crossing the Color Line: Microaggressions and Rebound Racism

When families are dissected under racial surveillance and voyeurism, they are also subjected to microaggressions and rebound racism. Nadal et al. (2011) describe microaggressions as “subtle statements or behaviors, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile or denigrating messages towards people of color” (36). Microaggressions may be more covert in nature, but nonetheless, are still painful sources of “othering” for marginalized individuals (Johnston and Nadal 2010; Nadal et al. 2011). These microaggressions may target the interracial parents, multiracial children, or the family as a unit. Researchers have identified specific multiracial microaggressions including experiences of exclusion and isolation, exoticization and objectification, mistaken identity, and pathologizing of identity and experiences (Johnston and Nadal 2010; Gay, Farinu and Jackson 2022).

All of the cited examples can also delegitimize multiracial families. For example, being excluded and isolated by other family members, being exoticized and racially dissected in terms of which parent’s features children have (or do not have), assuming that children are not biologically related to their parents, and messaging that multiracial families are not the “norm” (Johnston and Nadal 2010; Nadal et al. 2011). These (micro)aggressions clearly target interracial parents as well, particularly when they are assumed to be their child’s caretaker or romantic partner and are disowned by relatives for crossing the color line.

Despite claims of a post-racial society and growing approval for interracial marriage, couples who cross the color line may experience border patrolling and rebound racism (Dalmage 2000; Adeyinka-Skold and Roberts 2019; strmic-pawl 2023). Dalmage (2000) describes border patrolling as an essentialist belief that “people ought to stick with their own” (43). A couple may experience border patrolling from both Whites and people of color, but usually for very different reasons. For Whites, border patrolling is a means of protecting Whiteness and preserving a racial

order in which Whites are privileged (Dalmage 2000). Communities of color may border patrol those in interracial relationships with Whites as a means of urging caution and protecting. However, border patrolling in communities of color may result in someone feeling like they have lost part of their identity and culture (Dalmage 2000).

A second common experience for interracial couples is rebound racism, in which the White partner likely has their very first experiences with racism. Dalmage (2000) found that rebound racism primarily targets the Black partner, but also has implications for the White partner. When interracially partnered, White people have described feeling as if they have lost their White privilege (Dalmage 2000; Adeyinka-Skold and Roberts 2019). Dalmage (2000) describes this phenomena in terms of Black and White interracial couples, but I argue that rebound racism also affects other interracial couples, like White-Asian and Black-Asian, but in different ways. In terms of dual minority couples, the Asian partner may experience rebound racism at the expense of their Model Minority and Honorary White status (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lee 2015; Kiang et al. 2017).

Rebound racism may be financial, emotional, or physical, and typically negatively impacts the whole family (Dalmage 2000). Take, for example, a multiracial family being pulled over by the police. There are emotional implications in the form of experiencing racial profiling and discrimination, and the driver and family fearing for their safety. Financial implications of the stop may include a ticket or hiring a lawyer if the family decides to dispute the alleged offense in court. In the worst circumstances, someone may experience physical harm in the form of police brutality or even be killed at the hands of police. Because of the high stakes and implications for personal safety, parents may use this experience to discuss with their children how they should interact with police officers in preparation for discrimination and bias (Malone

Gonzalez 2019). Throughout my findings I will describe how microaggressions and rebound racism serve as tools of racial surveillance and voyeurism for multiracial families.

Findings

Four main themes emerged from the interviews. These themes support my argument that multiracial families experience forms of racial surveillance and voyeurism that serve to delegitimize and “other” these families. In turn, these experiences of racial surveillance and voyeurism influence how multiracial families “do” or perform family in their everyday lives that are different from monoracial families, in particular, White monoracial families. The three themes related to racial surveillance include: strangers questioning familial and biological relationships, White partners experiencing rebound racism and developing a form of “double consciousness,” originally conceptualized by Du Bois to explain the Black experience, and people assuming monoracial parents are in inappropriate romantic relationships with their multiracial child. The fourth theme highlights how multiracial families experience racial voyeurism during everyday outings, from staring to strangers heralding them as the “ideal” families of the future in a post-racial society. Indeed, these experiences of racial voyeurism may seem benign if viewed in isolation, but their cumulative impact makes multiracial families hypervisible and feel as if they are still an anomaly. Together, experiences of racial surveillance and racial voyeurism impact how multiracial families “do” or perform family and demonstrate their familial bonds.

Questioning Familial Relationships: ‘Our society only believes that only homogenous racial families exist’

During their interviews, interracial parents described situations in which people questioned not only their romantic relationship, but their biological relation to their children as

well (Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Osuji 2019; strmic-pawl 2023). These experiences of racial surveillance are embarrassing, but also serve to delegitimize multiracial families (Waring and Bordoloi 2018).

Shavonne, a 36-year-old Black mom, described one such experience when traveling with her 3-year-old Black-White daughter. she said:

Once I flew alone with Simone, it was Simone and I, and I had to provide so much documentation, even though I had called the airline to see what I needed for her, like to bring with me, and they told me nothing because she was going to be sitting on my lap. But that was not the case and then they were asking for a lot of like documentation that I hadn't brought with me, so then I was left like proving that this was my child, which wasn't a great feeling.

Shavonne's experience of racial surveillance was stressful and inconvenient, but there can be serious negative consequences when an authority figure, like a police officer or TSA agent, does not believe a parent is biologically related to their child.

Brittany, a 32-year-old Black mom, described the precautions she and her White husband, Dominic, take when traveling with their children, such as all wearing the same color shirt to signal that they are one family unit. Brittany has a 12-year-old Black daughter from a previous relationship and a 3-year-old son, Jay, whom she shares with Dominic. Brittany said:

I will say, it's still a lot of anxiety going through the airport with TSA, because then it's like my name doesn't match, we don't match as a family, our daughter has a different last name...Even though it's not in line of any type of like human trafficking practices, like that's not what you look out for, but it gets, you know, worrisome because then I can hear the news stories of biracial or multiracial families...with their Black daughters and then

they're like, assuming something nefarious was going on because our society only believes that only homogenous racial families exist. And so that can be very stressful.

Indeed, Brittany's first concern is that traveling as a family will be deemed "nefarious" and potentially raise questions about human trafficking, simply because they are a multiracial family. This fear is made real not only because of outdated views on how family members should all racially resemble one another, but also the heteronormative practice of women taking their husband's last name, which Brittany did not do. The family represents a range of skin tones and names, which continues to challenge stereotypical ideas of family.

Because interracial parents have these experiences so frequently, they often come prepared with documentation to prove biological and family relations, such as their child's birth certificate. Samantha, a 41-year-old Black mom, is married to James, a 42-year-old Filipino dad. They share two children together, Paul (7) and Pauline (4). Samantha described preparing her sister to travel with their son, Paul, demonstrating that these fears are not limited to the parents, but also extended family members. She said:

I will say like when my sister...how race shows up is like in the adult experience, like my sister Jules wants to take Paul on a train ride back to her house. She did, but I gave her his birth certificate because she looks nothing like him, and if he started to cry, that could have easily turned into a whole different type of event for her. So there are things that we carry having, you know, multiracial children that you know other folks may not.

Because of her experiences with racial surveillance, Samantha wanted to mitigate the risk of her sister having a negative experience with authority figures. Samantha knows that as a Black woman, these encounters can be especially troubling, and "turned into a whole different type of event for her." She also recognizes that carrying birth certificates to prove familial relationships

is not something every family has to worry about, further highlighting both the racial surveillance and voyeurism that multiracial families experience.

On Alert: White Partners' Experiences of Rebound Racism

White parents in multiracial families are not exempt from feeling othered and experiencing rebound racism. This is particularly true for White women partnered with Black men. Sun, 40, is White and married to her husband Earl, 36, a Black man from Jamaica. They share three Black-White daughters together, aged 13, 10, and 4. Sun described the family being pulled over by police and the anger and concern this experience caused. She said:

Sometimes we go back to Virginia and I'm more hyper alert about our surroundings. Like he's been pulled over one time for no reason and then the police officer looked in the car and it was like our whole family, and I was pregnant and I had this little dog and he said like, 'Oh, I think your light might be out.' But he didn't see all of us, he just saw Earl. So that kind of stuff is what worries me at times for him. I was pissed, but I didn't think I could say anything about being pissed because I didn't want anything else to happen. I didn't want to go call the guy out, like you just pulled us over because you were racial profiling.

Indeed, Sun wanted to use her White privilege to speak up and call the officer out for racially profiling her husband, but at the same time, she recognized that this could make the situation worse. She worries about Earl's safety, and that of the family, because she understands the long history of police violence against Black communities. Sun weighed the consequences and decided it was best to not speak up and safely leave the situation (Malone Gonzalez 2019).

Although the police are a primary source of concern in experiences of racial surveillance, multiracial families are also targeted by others in positions of authority and even strangers. Tara,

a 45-year-old White mom, and David, a 46-year-old Filipino dad, described one such experience of rebound racism after their 3-year-old daughter Tamsen's birth.

Tara: I'm just thinking of the time in the hospital with the nurse who took you aside. Like she very much didn't think that we were married. And so, this was when I was like...after I was post C-section in the hospital and a nurse took him out into the corridor like asking, I forgot exactly what it was...

David: [She] said if we were married, I needed to provide some ID or something like that, because we don't have the same last name. But I mean...she definitely bothered me...I was taken aback to be taken outside, but then I was like, 'oh, we're doing this okay.' I mean I wasn't necessarily surprised, but like I was definitely taken aback.

Again, David and Tara challenge the stereotypical view of monoracial families and the expectation that every family member should have the same last name. David was left having to prove his relation to his wife and newborn daughter, but as he said, these experiences are not surprising for multiracial families. What should have been a joyful day for the family served as another reminder of how they are perceived in society.

The recent political climate has further impacted multiracial families and their experiences of racial surveillance. Stemming from the racism and xenophobia exhibited by the Trump administration, anti-Asian sentiment has increased since the start of COVID-19 (Wu, Qian and Wilkes 2021; Lim, Lee and Kim 2023). Many of the Asian parents expressed being more mindful about their safety, and their White partners share these concerns.

One such couple is Alan, 34, and Sonya, 37. The couple is originally from the Bay Area, where they found interracial couples to be more common than in their new home of North Carolina. Alan is White and Sonya is Chinese and Taiwanese American. During the interview,

Alan expressed his concern for the family's safety, specifically Sonya's, due to increased anti-Asian sentiment post-Trump and the pandemic.

Alan: You probably notice it more, but since we moved here, I've kind of like I don't know, there's like a little trigger thing that's...like if we go out to a store or something like I kind of, you know, check around and make sure like people aren't staring or I don't know like...

Sonya: Self-conscious?

Alan: No, no, to see if they're like discriminating against you or something. It's not for my self-consciousness. It's because, you know, someone gives you some snide look or says something, some comment. You know I've seen things on the news about there's been some hate crimes against Asian Americans because of Coronavirus and it's like...To me that's completely ridiculous, but I know it's a possibility. This area is very politically mixed and it seems like there's some definitely extreme political people here. That's kind of where I'm going with that, like if we're out and I'm kind of wary and just on alert in case something like that happens.

Sonya perceived Alan's nervousness in public settings as him being self-conscious about their relationship. She was not aware of his concerns for her safety and the need to be "on alert." If someone accosted Sonya in public for being Asian, this discriminatory experience would of course have rebound racism effects on Alan and their 3-year-old Ariel, if present.

As a White man, Alan did not have to think about experiences and repercussions of racism prior to his relationship with Sonya. Through their relationship he developed more racial awareness in that he understands because she is racialized as Asian, people may discriminate against her because of her race, particularly during COVID-19. Indeed, people of color have this

sense of awareness ingrained in them from a young age. Du Bois ([1903] 1994) originally theorized this as double consciousness as how Black people learn to see themselves “through the eyes of others,” namely, White Americans (9). Thus, double consciousness informs how Black people live and navigate White spaces, such as code-switching and modifying behavior so they are not perceived as aggressive or threatening.

Scholars have described how other groups, like Chicanas/Latinas in the borderlands, also form a sense of double consciousness based on their positionalities (Sandoval 2000; Falcon 2008; Baca Zinn and Zambrana 2019). Although Alan is a White man with resulting privileges, he has developed racial awareness in his intimate, daily life with Sonya and their daughter. This racial awareness is different from double consciousness as originally theorized by Du Bois, but a consciousness that Alan developed from the “borders” as he perceives threats and fears for his family because of their race.

Assumptions of Inappropriate Relationships: ‘What’s that Black man doing with those two young White girls?’

Because biological relationships are questioned so frequently in multiracial families, it is not uncommon for strangers to perceive a romantic relationship between a parent and their child (Waring and Bordoloi 2018). For many strangers, an interracial romantic relationship between two people with a significant age gap seems more of a possibility than a blended and multiracial family. For example, Josh is a 52-year-old Black dad married to Laura, a 49-year-old White mom. They share their 8-year-old son, Jalen, and Laura has two young adult White daughters from a previous relationship. Josh said:

I used to get looks when I would go with the girls somewhere without Laura. Like, ‘What's that Black man doing with those two young White girls?’ So, but it's, you know, no one ever approached me and no one ever approached them.

Josh was likely hypervisible in this situation because he was a Black man with White women. Historically, Black men have been criminalized for sexual and romantic relationships with White women. This criminalization is largely based on the one-drop rule and anti-miscegenation laws to prevent “race-mixing.” Due to controlling images of Black men, these views continue today and result in border policing and experiences of rebound racism for interracial couples (Dalmage 2000).

Similarly, Dominic, a 32-year-old White dad, has a Black 12-year-old step-daughter, Rose. When out with Rose and his 3-year-old Black-White son, Jay, he is aware of the attention they draw. He said:

If there's a Black woman around, they'll ask her if she's lost, or if she's okay, or if she needs help. Now that she's getting older, I can tell that people give me weird looks, like ‘are they together... what's going on there?’ So one of the actions or attitudes I've just kind of subconsciously adopted is enforcing, visually enforcing, the fact that she's my daughter, with words or with how I treat her in public, like right away. So, like when we enter a public space, I'll raise my voice and talk about things that a parent would talk about so that people understand, like “hey hold on to your brother blah blah blah” or ‘hey, you and your brother go play over there so I can talk to your mom,’ or I'll reference her mom or something like that. So, I guess because I just want to avoid the stupidity of those assumptions, I enforce kind of verbally and/or visually that concept when I enter a

public space in order to interrupt or disrupt or prevent any of that stupid stuff from happening or those assumptions from happening.

As a member of a blended family, Dominic makes clear that Rose is his step-daughter to prevent experiences of racial surveillance from escalating. Because Rose is getting older, Dominic has a heightened sense of concern with avoiding “the stupidity of those assumptions,” namely an inappropriate relationship with a young girl.

Ellison, a 49-year-old Black dad with children aged 20, 17, and 16, had a similar experience with his eldest daughter. Although his children self-identify as Black, his two Black-White daughters are not racialized as Black and may present as White in some situations. Ellison described this strange encounter with his 20-year-old daughter, Madden. He said:

I can only recall one. One case where we were at the airport and the woman flight attendant said something along the lines of, ‘Oh, it was so nice that your friend came with you.’ She told my daughter that. It was like they had no clue whatsoever that she was related to me at all.

Ellison was admittedly confused about this encounter. He thought the comment was more about their age difference, not an insinuation that the two were in a romantic relationship. Indeed, it is probably not the first thought a father would have when traveling with his daughter. It is unclear how his daughter interpreted the situation, but previous research shows it is not uncommon for strangers to assume a romantic relationship between a parent and their multiracial child (Waring and Bordoloi 2018).

Logan, White, and Eleanor, Chinese American, are both 35 and have a teenage daughter together. Because they are younger parents, they frequently described being mistaken as a

polyamorous couple or “throuple” when with their 16-year-old, Desmonda. One such occasion was at a wedding. Eleanor said:

We’re all gonna be at a wedding and then going to the liquor store after some kind of festivity, I think the rehearsal dinner, and Desmonda said ‘I’m gonna stay back at the hotel ’cause I know you’re gonna get carded and if they try to card me, I have no ID, so I’ll just hang back.’ The friend of the couple was like, ‘Wait, carded, what?’ Then we had to explain, ‘Yeah, our daughter’s a minor.’ ‘She’s your daughter?!’ Everyone thought we were a throuple at the whole wedding.

Like Ellison, Logan and Eleanor did not believe this interaction was due to race, but rather age. However, when considering race, gender, and age, strangers at the wedding drew on stereotypes when they perceived the family as a “throuple.” This is likely due to hypersexualization and stereotypes surrounding White men partnered with Asian women.

Stop and Stare: ‘I watch a lot of people be really happy from it, almost like we’re this weird movie’

Although they may not always be explicitly judged as inappropriate or outright asked for identification, multiracial families often experience uncomfortable stares and attention in their daily routines, simply because they are a multiracial family. While these encounters are not necessarily threatening to the family’s safety, like experiences of racial surveillance are, they continue to signify that they are an “abnormal” family unit. These experiences continue despite the belief that we are a post-racial society and the fact that we see increased representations of such families.

Issa, a 43-year-old Black mom of two Blinidian (Black and Indian) children, described experiences of racial voyeurism during everyday outings as “annoying.” She said:

The staring has been annoying and uncomfortable at first, but now I just stare back or I'll smile and wave like 'Are you looking at us? Hi.' I'll introduce myself sometimes to just, you know, to make them realize you're being rude, so I'm going to try to help you to be nice.

Issa described looking back and challenging the voyeuristic behavior and White gaze, which bell hooks (2009) calls the oppositional gaze. Historically, Black people, who are made hypervisible, were punished for looking back at Whites due to unequal power relations rooted in White supremacy (hooks 2009). The oppositional gaze is a site of agency for Black women, because "there is power in looking" (hooks 2009:253). In this scenario, Issa's oppositional gaze is challenging the dominant assumptions of what constitutes a family.

Rochelle is a 38-year-old Black mom of two Black-Vietnamese sons. She co-parents with their dad, Vinh, 41. Despite being divorced, they still have frequent outings as a family. In contrast to rude stares, multiracial families also experience racial voyeurism fueled by the desire for a post-racial society. Rochelle said:

Oh, I will say, though rarely, but a couple times, people will see us as a mixed family and get excited and actually come up to us, and have something to say that's almost congratulatory or praising, like thank you for being a thing that we can know. So that's happening.

Indeed, multiracial families seem to satisfy society's post-racial dreams. Vinh described traveling as a family unit and experiencing people in Vietnam asking to take pictures of the kids. Other times, people do not ask for consent and simply take pictures like the family is an exhibit on display. Vinh said:

We were in Canada and they were just playing in the street and just people...like this one random Asian lady tourist was just taking pictures of them, and I was like, ‘What the hell is she doing? Why’s she taking pictures of our kids?’

Thus, Vinh and his family had a very literal experience of racial voyeurism in which a stranger took pictures of the kids without consent. Although the woman may not have had ill intent, these experiences reify the idea that multiracial families are exotic, unique, and/or uncommon.

Another participant, Dominic addressed the post-racial positioning of multiracial families directly. He recognizes that these reactions, even if seemingly positive, do not signify racial progress and describes them as fake. He said:

When Brittany exits the building and then Jay, my two-year- old, leaves the playground to meet her, it's almost like a movie...It’s almost like... this perfect futuristic ideal of this family coming together. Like mom coming out, and beautiful child running to mom, and dad behind, and then everyone embracing...I watch a lot of people be really happy from it, almost like we're this weird movie. Like it’s this healthy experience of what the future could be and we're it. It’s weird and I know I don't take pleasure in it at all, because it's almost fake.

For strangers, this kind of racial surveillance romanticizes U.S. race relations and perhaps paints a Utopian picture of “what the future could be.” However, the families under surveillance have quite different understandings of these experiences, which continue to reinforce the message that multiracial families are a new, unique trend.

Discussion

The experiences of my participants demonstrate how multiracial families are made to feel abnormal and hypervisible going through their everyday lives and routines. This abnormality and hypervisibility is reinforced through racial surveillance and racial voyeurism. Throughout my findings, I describe experiences of racial surveillance as those in which multiracial families have people questioning their biological/familial relationships, White partners experiencing rebound racism and developing a form of “double consciousness,” and people assuming monoracial parents are in inappropriate romantic relationships with their multiracial child. Because of these recurring experiences, multiracial families have learned to mitigate risk, including potential legal trouble, by being hyper-alert to racial discrimination and modifying their behavior, such as carrying birth certificates, dressing in matching shirts to signify a family unit, and verbally stating their relationship so it is clear to others.

There is a clear threat associated with racial surveillance for multiracial families. However, they also experience racial voyeurism in which they are hypervisible for very different reasons. Experiences of racial voyeurism may be indirect or direct. Indirect forms include strangers staring or taking pictures. More direct forms include strangers making remarks to the multiracial family about how they represent the future of a post-racial society. People engaging in these behaviors may view them as harmless, or even good-natured, but they further serve to delegitimize multiracial families through racial dissection and positioning them outside of what society considers to be the norm: monoracial families in which all members resemble one another (Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Curington 2021).

Furthermore, racial surveillance and voyeurism directly impacts how multiracial families navigate public spaces. It is evident that these families are prepared, and perhaps expected, to modify their behavior and performances of “family” in ways that monoracial families do not.

Perhaps more specifically, in ways that monoracial White families do not even have to consider. This also exemplifies how the U.S. is not a post-racial society, despite increasing representations of multiracial families and people that situate them as the new “normal.”

Much like multiracial individuals prepare an elevator speech for strangers inquiring about their racial background, multiracial families also develop a succinct elevator speech about their biological relationships and develop a plan for family outings (Heilman 2022). These prepared speeches, identification forms, and even matching shirts become a performance in themselves and serve as strategies to mitigate experiences of racial surveillance with authority figures who question their familial relationship. The shared experiences of my participants imply that multiracial families face extra preparation, and even spend money, in anticipation of these encounters, from questioning TSA agents, hospital staff, and strangers.

Racial surveillance and voyeurism may not be new experiences for parents of color in these families or even their multiracial children. However, my findings indicate that these experiences were new for White parents in multiracial families and they had to adapt their behaviors accordingly. Many of the White participants in my study did not talk about race with their families growing up, or if they did, their parents often took a colorblind approach (Bonilla-Silva 2018). This often entailed discussions of meritocracy and treating others as you wish to be treated while ignoring systemic racism and inequalities. For many White parents, they did not regularly discuss race, develop racial awareness, or acknowledge their White privilege until they were in an interracial relationship. Based on their personal experiences of rebound racism and/or understanding of racism and discrimination, some White parents have developed a form of “double consciousness” to understand the experiences of their partners, children, and the world around them.

CHAPTER 5: PERFORMING (MIXED-RACE) FAMILY: NAVIGATING HYPERVISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY

Abstract

Despite increasing representations in popular culture and media, multiracial families continue to paradoxically experience hypervisibility, via racial surveillance, and invisibility, via racial erasure. These experiences are a result of how our society continues to conceptualize nuclear families as monoracial, heterosexual, and middle-class. Utilizing Goffman's dramaturgical theory, I examine how they "perform" family when facing hypervisibility *and* invisibility to prove and legitimize their relationships in public settings. I find that some couples and families attempt to make their family performances more obvious, through displays of affection or pre-planned matching outfits. Others question if and how they should adjust their behaviors and "perform" family when they experience behavior that serves to delegitimize their family structure. My findings indicate that there is a cyclical relationship between invisibility and hypervisibility highlighted in the experiences of these families. These findings demonstrate that multiracial families must take on the burden of impression management. They also indicate how more broadly, how understandings of family are still informed by White supremacy and patriarchal norms.

Introduction

"People are intentionally missing very obvious cues that we are a family."
-Brittany, 32-year-old Black mom

Huddled together around a fish tank at a pet store, Brittany, Dominic, and their two children waited for assistance in picking out a new addition to the family. What should have been a typical, fun family outing quickly became an uncomfortable encounter with a staff person

who assumed that Dominic, a White man, was not with Brittany and their 3-year-old multiracial Black-White son, Jay, and his 12-year-old stepdaughter, Rose.

The White staff member said, “I see that he was first in line and then we’ll get to you in a second. Let me just get some more help.” Rose asked her mom why the person assumed they were not together.

As a multiracial and blended family, Brittany cited this as just one example of erasure and how people miss “very obvious cues that we are a family.” For many interracial couples and multiracial families, these experiences are unfortunately all too common. Because our understanding of family is heavily influenced by a “traditional” middle-class model rooted in Whiteness and heteronormativity, like a White monoracial nuclear family with mom, dad, and children, multiracial families often have their biological and familial relationships questioned, especially when the parents and children do not resemble one another (DaCosta 2007; Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009; Haskin 2018; Waring and Bordoloi 2018).

Despite claims that we are now a post-racial society, multiracial families paradoxically experience both hypervisibility, often through racial surveillance (Yancy 2017; Selod 2019; Ross 2020; Okello 2022), and invisibility, or erasure of their family structure (Childs 2009; Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009). Indeed, it is evident that my participants have experienced both. I use the term *racial surveillance* to describe direct encounters with authority-type figures, like TSA, who might question a parent’s biological relation to their multiracial child when traveling. These encounters can be not only threatening, but may also lead to legal repercussions if the family is not prepared to “perform” family or prove their relations. I use the term *racial erasure* to refer to everyday interactions that make multiracial families feel as if they

are uncommon, abnormal, or even invisible, such as Dominic and Brittany's experience at the pet store.

In some scenarios, it seems that the invisibility of diverse family structures even contributes to hypervisibility. This phenomenon is perhaps best described by DaCosta (2007), who states, "Such families are highly visible because they violate racial norms of what families are supposed to look like. Their visibility today is due to the fact that attempts to make them *invisible* in the past were so successful" (88).

Many navigate this paradox and "perform" family in ways that make their romantic, biological, and/or legal relationships more obvious, or authentic, to those around them (DaCosta 2007). They are aware of the painstaking preparations they take to avoid unnecessary questions and encounters with authority figures due to hypervisibility and racial surveillance. Others question if and how they should adjust their behaviors and "perform" family when they experience behavior that serves to delegitimize their family structure. Utilizing classical sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy, I explain how multiracial families perform family in the front stage, or public settings, to prove and legitimize their relationships.

Conceptualizing Family

Today, family sociologists would likely agree that there is no one correct way to define family (Trost 1988; Haskin 2018). Family relations may be biological or legal or neither as more have "chosen" family members (Naples 2001). However, many continue to default to stereotypical thinking when it comes to what constitutes family and rely on popular images of a nuclear family with a married mom and dad and children (Naples 2001; DaCosta 2007; Haskin 2018). Furthermore, we continue to conceptualize that a nuclear "normative family is still monoracial" (DaCosta 2007:175). This idea harkens back to the "family forms and values of the

1950s” (Coontz 1997:32). Even in discussing America’s changing families, including single-parent households, divorced co-parents, and same-sex couples, scholars like Coontz (1997) neglect to account for interracial couples and multiracial families.

Thus, it is clear that throughout U.S. history heterosexual, monoracial families, in particular White families, have experienced privileges that other families have not (DaCosta 2007). Not only are their families legitimized through the law, they are also deemed moral and natural (Naples 2001; DaCosta 2007). For example, White heterosexual couples have never had limited marriage or adoption rights and are fully represented as a valid family structure in various forms of media (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009). Families that fall outside of the “norm,” like multiracial families, often face erasure and are not recognized as a legitimate family structure. This can, in at least some regards, be attributed to the history surrounding interracial romance.

Origins of Multiracial Families

Although people are typically more open to dating and marrying outside of their race today, we must remember that this is still recent history in the U.S. Interracial marriages were only legalized in all states in 1967 with the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court ruling. Regardless of the ruling, interracial couples have historically been ostracized, viewed as deviant, and met with violence (Foeman and Nance 1999; Childs 2009). This is especially true for interracial relationships between White women and men of color, particularly Black men (Childs 2009).

Furthermore, it was not until the 2000 Census that multiracial people could claim two or more races. Clearly multiracial people have existed for more than the last 20+ years. However, this recent change is indicative of the country’s violent history of chattel slavery and White

men's sexual violence and assaults of Black enslaved women (Foeman and Nance 1999; Childs 2009). Under chattel slavery, the children Black women gave birth to were considered property, and because of the one-drop rule, these children were considered Black regardless of their biological father's race (Foeman and Nance 1999). The "one-drop rule" is scientific racism, which enforced the belief that even "one-drop" of "Black blood," or one Black ancestor, classified someone as Black.

There is of course a different sociohistorical context for Asians, Asian Americans, and Asian multiracial families, such as experiences of imperialism, colonialism, and immigration (Curington 2016). For example, Asian immigrant men were exploited for their labor in the U.S. while being forced to leave their wives and families abroad due to immigration laws (Luibhéid 2002; Childs 2009). Asian women were hypersexualized and racist immigration laws targeted Chinese women deemed to be prostitutes (Luibhéid 2002; Childs 2009; Curington 2016; Hwang and Parreñas 2021). However, the state also feared interracial relationships between Asian men and White women, thus banning these marriages and the possibility of an "impure" race (Childs 2009; Curington 2016). Despite a long history of racist immigration laws targeting Asians, and that at one point banned Chinese immigration altogether, laws were later amended to let military men bring their Asian "war brides" to the U.S. (Curington 2016).

This long, violent history and more recent taboo nature surrounding consensual interracial relationships has contributed to the hypervisibility and invisibility that couples and their children experience today (DaCosta 2007; Childs 2009; Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009).

Representations vs. Realities

DaCosta (2007) states that “the multiracial family is positioned as an object to be gazed at” (88). Despite increasing representations, positive or negative, of multiracial families and children in shows, movies, and advertisements, multiracial family structures are clearly a site of interest, but have yet to become normalized in our society (DaCosta 2006; DaCosta 2007; Childs 2009). Many depictions of multiracial families “deny racism while promoting color blindness,” promoting the idea that interracial relationships indicate a post-racial society (Childs 2009:34). At their worst, they perpetuate controlling images and stereotypes (Larson 2002; Childs 2009). Storylines involving interracial couples are often underdeveloped, as are multiracial families, which are depicted in “surprising, comical, or negative ways” (Childs 2009:40).

However, shows and movies have attempted to keep up with changing demographics in the U.S. and have entered a stage of “ambiguity and hybridity...an effort to reach as many segments of the audience as possible with one economical image” (Valdivia 2008:272). Indeed, multiracials are considered trendy and are being marketed to and used as a branding tool (DaCosta 2006; DaCosta 2007; Gardner and Hughey 2017; Trent 2022). For example, Disney Channel featured multiracial characters in various TV shows and movies, but these portrayals typically depict racial harmony through a blending of races and cultures (DaCosta 2006; DaCosta 2007; Valdivia 2008). Although usually well-received for their emphasis on a post-racial society, ads with multiracial families have been met with backlash, including those by Old Navy and Cheerios (DaCosta 2006; Elliott 2013; Pérez-Peña 2016). This backlash, mostly denouncing race “mixture,” is an indicator of how White supremacist logic still informs views of interracial relationships and multiracial families.

Although media representations of multiracial families often ignore or downplay race and racism, real-life family experiences prove otherwise. Many couples and families face

interpersonal discrimination and daily microaggressions, and some are even disowned by their families for crossing the color line (Dalmage 2000; DaCosta 2007). However, they also experience systemic racism and discrimination (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009; Hernández 2018; DaCosta 2020). Even though heterosexual families may have heterosexual privilege, “their interraciality as a couple tends to complicate their ability to ‘enjoy’ the full range” of these advantages (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009:238).

Because our society and laws assume that families are monoracial, for example, interracial couples experience disadvantages in the housing market and in making a discrimination case at the intersection of race and family (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009). Rather, it is hypothetically easier for a monoracial couple of color to prove housing discrimination because there is no protected category for interracial couples, thus “implicitly erasing the existence of their family” (Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi 2009:250). Multiracial people also challenge conventional understandings of antidiscrimination law and Civil Rights “because they were developed with a strictly binary foundation of blackness and whiteness” (Hernández 2018:4). Like interracial couples, multiracial people also have difficulty proving discrimination in realms such as housing, education, and employment (Hernández 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Performing Family

Multiracial families have learned to “perform” family by modifying their public behaviors in response to experiences of hypervisibility and invisibility. Using Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory, I analyze and explain situations in which families alter their front stage performances. According to Goffman (1959), social interactions are a kind of performance. People are actors who perform various roles in the front stage, where their audience is, as a form

of impression management (Goffman 1959; Collett and Childs 2009). Front stage performances are controlled and tailored to leave the audience with a certain perception of an individual. The backstage, where an individual is without an audience to influence, may be likened to their everyday or true self (Goffman 1959; Collett and Childs 2009).

Collett and Childs (2009) argue that a dramaturgical perspective is particularly useful in studying families, which consist of relationships and interactions that we actively “do” or perform. Similarly to the idea of West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “doing” gender, we also “do” family, which “must be achieved and constructed on a daily basis” (Naples 2001:33). For example, there are certain expectations of moms, dad, and even the oldest siblings in families and they often adhere to standard scripts (Naples 2001; Collett and Childs 2009). Regardless, “current research on the sociology of family largely overlooks the interactive, performative, nature of family” (Collett and Childs 2009:693). Two areas of family research that have employed dramaturgy include research on “doing” family and the socially constructed nature of mothering (Naples 2001; Collett and Childs 2009). The authors suggest step and blended families as a fruitful site for future research because “performance guidelines,” like roles and scripts, are less clear in these families (Collett and Childs 2009:699). Similarly, this can be extended to include LGBTQ families or multiracial families, which are the focus of this study.

In the case of multiracial families, for example, they may choose to perform or “play up” their familial bonds in public, the front stage, by talking loudly about family things or wearing the same color shirt at the airport to signal that they are a family unit. Whereas in the backstage, the comfort of their own home, you would not find all family members matching and wearing the same vacation shirt (Collett and Childs 2009). In other situations, if couples and families feel uncomfortable or unsafe, they may alter their performances to minimize or downplay their

familial bonds to others. Likewise, in backstage private settings, the same couples and families would feel more comfortable displaying their love and affection for one another. Indeed, these are very real experiences for multiracial families who alter their performances and presentations of self in public.

Findings

From my data analysis, I identified two main themes when it came to multiracial families doing, or performing, family in public settings. These included experiences of hypervisibility, usually prompted by racial surveillance or profiling, and experiences of invisibility, in which multiracial families faced erasure simply because of their multiracial status. In other words, because families are conventionally understood to be monoracial, multiracial families felt invalidated and abnormal when their family structures were not readily recognized (DaCosta 2007). Regardless, multiracial families came to expect varying degrees of hypervisibility and invisibility and adjusted their public performances of family accordingly. Furthermore, the following stories and examples highlight how relative invisibility, both in media representations and actual family make-ups, actually contributes to the hypervisibility families experience.

Experiences of Hypervisibility

Dominic, a White dad, and Brittany, a Black mom, introduced at the beginning of this chapter were perhaps the most cognizant of my participants when it came to changing their behavior in public settings. For Dominic, this was particularly true when he was out with his Black preteen stepdaughter, Rose. Strangers sometimes assumed an inappropriate relationship between the two, based on their race and age differences. To prevent those assumptions, Dominic raised his voice when speaking to Rose to signify that they are family. He said:

So, like when we enter a public space, I'll raise my voice and talk about things that a parent would talk about...or I'll reference her mom or something like that...I just want to avoid the stupidity of those assumptions, enforce kind of verbally and/or visually that concept when I enter a public space in order to interrupt or disrupt or prevent any of that stupid stuff from happening or those assumptions from happening.

In fact, these interactions as a result of false assumptions are not uncommon for multiracial families. Waring and Bordoloi (2018) found that instead of assuming a parent/child relationship, multiracial children were often mistaken as the romantic partner of their monoracial parent, despite the age gap. Furthermore, social scripts and performances are more ambiguous in blended families (Collett and Childs 2009). In his role as step-dad, Dominic focuses on performing in such a way that "observers expect the role to be enacted," like referencing Rose's mom or younger brother in his script to signal that they are indeed family (Collett and Childs 2009:700).

Brittany elaborated on how the family adjusted their behavior in public when traveling by wearing the same mustard yellow-colored shirts. In Brittany's case, she did not want airport staff to make assumptions of child trafficking. "We've had situations before where someone thought our son was lost, and they tried to help him. Dom had to be like, 'no, that's my son.' I don't know if it's helpful or not, but...we'll just wear the same color because maybe you'll see us as a family."

Thus for Brittany and her family, traveling is a highly scripted performance. The family's matching yellow shirts could be considered their costumes. Their matching appearance, based on dress, is an important part of "cultivating an identity or impression," like that of family (Collett and Childs 2009:692).

Like Brittany and Dominic, not being recognized as one family unit is a source of anxiety when traveling for many multiracial families. Some may experience racial surveillance and profiling by TSA agents and airline staff. In fact, multiracial families are asked to provide additional forms of identification to prove biological and legal relationships, simply because they do not all resemble one another (DaCosta 2007; Waring and Bordoloi 2018). This was the case for Shavonne, a 36-year-old Black woman traveling alone with her 3-year-old Black-White daughter, Simone.

Shavonne described calling the airline ahead of time to ask about any required documentation for her daughter, who would be sitting on her lap. She was told there was none but was questioned upon arriving at the airport with her daughter. Because Shavonne and Simone do not have the same skin tone, they were hypervisible to staff who questioned their relationship as mother and daughter. Shavonne said it was not a great feeling to have to prove that Simone was in fact her daughter. Interestingly, Shavonne described a very different experience when traveling with Blake, her 39-year-old White husband and Simone's father. She said:

Blake went up to the counter and I was just standing in the back with our bags, and he went up there with Simone and they never asked him any questions about Simone. Like, 'Is this child with you? Do you have her birth certificate?' They didn't have any of those questions. It was just assumed that here's a responsible father with his child and those experiences are very different.

The difference in their treatment demonstrates Blake's White male privilege, like the assumption that he is a responsible father. Although performing a basic task, he might even be admired for being an active caregiver based on gendered expectations of parental roles.

Shavonne's experience is an example of gendered racism. Because society has certain expectations of mothers and how they should perform motherhood, Shavonne's audience may have seen her as a "bad" mom for not being prepared to travel with her child (Collett and Childs 2009). Indeed, she was treated as an incompetent mother for not having documentation, and perhaps even criminal if staff truly questioned Simone's biological relation to her.

Fiona, a White mom, is married to Miles, a Black dad. They are parents to two multiracial Black-White daughters. Fiona did not recall explicit experiences when strangers questioned the family but did take preemptive actions herself to avoid this. She said:

One of my thought processes when I decided to change my [last] name was that when we were traveling with our passports that we could hand them over and say, 'We are all Carpenters,' and not have to have that discussion.

In this case, Fiona is performing family by sharing the same last name as her spouse and children. Historically, the tradition of women adopting their husband's last name after marriage is rooted in patriarchal norms (Naples 2001; England 2010). This tradition is a form of performative labor that women are disproportionately tasked with to indicate the formation of a new family (Collett and Childs 2009; England 2010). As a woman and member of a multiracial family, Fiona likely felt added pressure to change her last name so there was no question of her relationship to her spouse and children.

In most of these examples, multiracial families play up their legal and biological relationships when facing hypervisibility. They want to avoid questions and trouble by making it clear they are a family, even coming prepared with props to serve as proof or costumes to play the part, like matching outfits. However, some couples changed their behavior in an attempt to not draw attention to themselves as an interracial couple. Brian, a 38-year-old Vietnamese

American man, and his White wife Christine, also 38, recalled such an experience. Christine said:

There are definitely times we traveled where we were holding hands, walking or something, and then realized that we were uncomfortable with the people around us watching. Yes, so we changed our...what we were doing.

Christine and Brian were “performing” family by holding hands, but changed their performance once they noticed people were staring at them. It is normal for couples to hold hands, and even acceptable in terms of public displays of affection, so it is reasonable to assume that people were staring because Christine and Brian are an interracial couple. Their confusion or fascination with seeing a White woman and Asian man romantically involved may be informed by stereotypes surrounding Asian men. Because Asian men are often portrayed as more feminine than other men, they are considered less desirable partners, especially in terms of interracial dating and marriage (Lee 2015; Lundquist and Lin 2015). Furthermore, Asian men are less likely to intermarry than Asian women, meaning relationships between Asian men and White women are rendered invisible (Lee 2015; Lundquist and Lin 2015). Brian and Christine’s experience is the perfect example of how invisibility and lack of representation feed hypervisibility in public settings.

Experiences of Invisibility

Although multiracial families frequently experience racial surveillance because of their racial differences, which make them hypervisible, they also paradoxically experience erasure, in which their romantic and familial relationships are made to feel invisible and unusual. In response, some “play up” their relationships while some are still learning how to “perform” in

response to what are typically very public, sometimes embarrassing, displays and departures from social scripts.

Angela, a 34-year-old Black woman, is married to Chris, a 35-year-old White man. The couple share two biological Black-White children, ages 13 and 10, and have an adult White daughter who they describe as “unofficially adopted.” Angela knows that the group draws attention in public. “When we're all four together, I don't know what they have going on in their heads, because they're just probably like this is a hodgepodge type of situation...I know we just have their minds all up in a bunch,” she said. Here Angela acknowledges that it is very common for her family structure to be perceived as “hodgepodge,” not only because they are multiracial but because of their chosen family member, the adoptive White daughter.

Despite being an affectionate couple, some do not recognize that Angela and Chris are married. Angela said:

I will say to this day, we can be holding hands, kissy face in a restaurant and they will still ask us if we're together or if it's one check or two or whatever. And I'm like rings, kissy face, like I don't...We've been coming here for 15 years, right? Like you would think that they would assume we were together...

These experiences are clearly frustrating for the couple, as they believe they are providing obvious cues that they are a couple, like wearing wedding rings and displaying affection (Collett and Childs 2009). Because they are regulars, the questions and actions of restaurant staff could in fact be microaggressions or outright racial hostility. Their experiences could also be compounded by living in the South, where Whites frequently inflicted violence upon interracial couples and even murdered Black boys and men.

Issa, a 43-year-old Black woman, is married to Dev, a 42-year-old Indian man. Issa said, “We don't look like we belong together to outside people.” In this regard, Issa and Dev’s relationship is invisible because it is automatically assumed they are not romantically involved. This assumption is likely based on controlling images surrounding Black women and Asian men, which both contribute to their lower intermarriage rates (Childs 2005; Lee 2015; Lundquist and Lin 2015). However, as soon as Issa and Dev “get a little more personal” in public, whether it be hugging or holding hands, they immediately become hypervisible and “can instinctively feel someone staring.”

Rochelle, a 38-year-old Black woman, recalled similar experiences with her ex-husband, Vinh, a 41-year-old Vietnamese American man. She said:

Before kids, Vinh and I together definitely had plenty of times where people just didn't even...It wasn't just they assumed that we weren't together. It was like it didn't even cross their mind the possibility that we were together. Like we might be in line next to each other and they would just think that we were two different people that happened to be too close.”

Their relationship was so invisible that people thought there was no possible way Rochelle and Vinh were romantically linked. Although standing in line together does not guarantee two people are a couple, it is a reasonable assumption many would have made if presented with a man and woman of the same race in the same age range. Instead, Rochelle and Vinh would have had to “play up” their relationship to make it visible, or perhaps hypervisible, in public. Like Issa and Dev or Angela and Chris, this performance may have included hand holding, hugging, or kissing.

Members of multiracial families also commonly experience surprise or shock from others, like colleagues, when sharing family photos. Because many conceptualize families as monoracial, “surprising” the audience with photos of a multiracial family could be considered “deviating from the expected script,” leading to awkwardness and embarrassment (Collett and Childs 2009:692). Thus, my participants often do not know how to react or “perform” family based on these audience reactions.

Shavonne, introduced earlier, is part of a group for Black moms with multiracial children and finds comfort in learning how others navigate this shared experience. Family pictures may be the quintessential prop in performing family (Collett and Childs 2009). However, Shavonne clearly notices how people react with surprise to pictures of her kids without knowing her husband is White. She is still figuring out how or if to respond to assumptions of what constitutes a family.

Leigh, a 45-year-old White woman, is married to Ellison, a 49-year-old Black man. They have three teenagers together. She frequently tells people she has two daughters and a son but does not specify that her husband is Black. Because of the expectations surrounding families and race, people probably assume Leigh is married to a White man. Leigh said:

When I show pictures of my family to people that don't know me, they're always very surprised...I always wait for it. It's just they have no idea...am I supposed to act a certain way or dress a certain way or am I supposed to, you know, announce it to everybody that I have a biracial family? So that's different because I don't think that families that are not interracial, they don't have that. There's not the whole shock value to showing pictures or anything like that.

Even though Leigh has come to expect this reaction from people unfamiliar with her family, she is still fazed in a sense and does not know if she should adjust her behaviors to accommodate others. She is questioning her own performance, specifically as wife and mother in a multiracial family, by wondering if she should perform or dress a certain way. For example, does “performing” family mean explicitly stating her family’s racial makeup in her script to avoid awkward encounters? Or is “performing” family going about her everyday life and ignoring actions that serve to “other” multiracial families? As Leigh states, this form of erasure is likely not experienced by monoracial, heterosexual families.

Discussion

Due to their in(visible) status and resulting experiences of racial surveillance and erasure, multiracial families change their behaviors and mannerisms in public settings. Some play up their family dynamics for audiences to ensure that they are viewed as a family unit, while others question how they should perform in scenarios where their family structures are made to seem abnormal. Regardless, this change in public family dynamics signals two things: 1) interracial couples and multiracial families are still considered an anomaly, and 2) we are certainly not in a post-racial era. There are still very stereotypical assumptions, influenced by heteronormativity and the color line, of what constitutes a family (Naples 2001; DaCosta 2006; DaCosta 2007; Childs 2009).

Furthermore, there is a cyclical relationship between invisibility and hypervisibility highlighted in the experiences of these families. As I discussed earlier, DaCosta (2007) aptly stated that multiracial families’ “visibility today is due to the fact that attempts to make them *invisible* in the past were so successful” (88). Thus, experiences of erasure and invisibility, past and present, only fuel the hypervisibility that multiracial families experience now. Because our

conceptualization of families is narrow and representation of multiracial families is limited, the invisible become hypervisible when going about their daily lives. It may seem contradictory, but both experiences of invisibility and hypervisibility are tools of White supremacy to delegitimize and other multiracial families. For example, this contradictory nature is readily apparent in the controlling images surrounding Black women (Collins 2002). Two common controlling images include the mammy and jezebel. The mammy is depicted as an “asexual woman” who is a dedicated and loved domestic worker to White families (Collins 2002:74). The jezebel controlling image portrays Black women as hypersexual and deviant (Collins 2002). These controlling images are the complete opposite of one another, but both serve to “justify U.S. Black women’s oppression” (Collins 2002:69).

In much the same way, we see these contradictions surrounding multiracial families. They are used as barometers for race relations and racial harmony and frequently used to advance the narrative that we are a post-racial society. Yet at the same time, their experiences in public settings say otherwise. Multiracial families and their respective members still experience racial discrimination, microaggressions, and erasure in their daily lives. Hypervisibility via racial surveillance and invisibility via erasure are both a result of White supremacy and patriarchy in that they have both contributed to dominant understandings of what constitutes a family.

Importantly, the experiences of these families perhaps tell us even more about the audience they are performing for rather than the actors themselves. In this case, any public setting is a stage even if the families are not directly interacting with others. Multiracial families and people of color are constantly tasked with impression management to receive a less racially hostile reception from White audiences (Goffman 1959; Collett and Childs 2009; Jackson and Harvey Wingfield 2013). Because these families did not experience explicit racism per se, such

as in the form of racial slurs, it is easy for those who believe race no longer matters in our society to minimize their experiences. However, all these interactions were racially charged and influenced public performances and behavior. Perhaps it is the audience dictating these performances.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Going into this project, I expected to focus exclusively on how interracial parents claimed to be racially socializing their children through actions and specific messages about race. While discussions about these practices and conversations came out in my interviews, I also realized to what extent parents must contend with external factors and messages about race that not only their children hear, but that they experience themselves as a couple or family. In short, the stereotypes, preconceived notions, and interactions during family outings that I described in my empirical chapters and their impact on socialization and understandings of race cannot be ignored. Throughout the process of conducting this research, I was consistently amazed at the myriad of contradictions that the parents described in their everyday lives and experiences. One day they are the prime example of a post-racial America and improving race relations, and the next, they must prove their familial bonds through official documentation. In short, their experiences are both/and, not either/or.

Again, I wondered if my family had more experiences like these then I remembered or recognized at the time. I cannot recall from my younger years, but I recognize having some of the very same experiences as my participants during adulthood. For example, a few years ago a family member's then partner was looking through my wedding album. When she got to the formal portraits of my spouse and I with my parents, she exclaimed, "Your dad's Asian?!" I was surprised by her reaction. I was surprised by how it made me feel and how I still remember that small moment with someone who is now a stranger. Her words reminded me that clearly my dad is Asian, and I am not. Interactions like these that only span a few seconds serve as reminders that our families and identities go largely misunderstood and unrecognized.

Contributions

In this dissertation, I contribute to existing bodies of literature on racial socialization, interracial relationships, and multiracialities. I have also combined these bodies of research to present a fuller understanding of how interracial parents choose to racially socialize their children. This contribution is significant in a few ways and addresses 1) a declining number of Sociological studies on socialization 2) varied experiences outside of Black-White families that are commonly studied, and 3) how Whiteness is typically centered within the multiracialities literature.

To address the first point, there is a declining number of Sociological studies that examine socialization (Guhin et al. 2021). This is largely due to its origins in structural functionalism and critiques that socialization studies failed to acknowledge the role of agency and tended to reinforce stereotypes of already marginalized groups (Guhin et al. 2021). As it pertains to this body of work, racial socialization within multiracial families is important to study and understand because it elucidates how and why parents are or are not socializing a multiracial identity for their children. The family institution orients offspring to the world by teaching youth how to navigate often contradictory messages about race and what it means to be racialized in a society steeped in racial hierarchy (Hughes et al. 2006; Brown et al. 2007; Hagerman 2014; Allen 2016; Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017; Dow 2019; Malone Gonzalez 2019; Underhill 2019; Turner 2020; Manning 2021). Thus, the family's role in mediating socialization - the process of internalizing the norms and ideologies of society - constitutes a central element in racialization and the racial project more broadly.

Studies such as this reveal the processes and message behind findings of quantitative research related to multiracialities, such as racial labeling decisions of parents and how people of a mixed-race background choose to self-identify. Although socialization has been pushed aside

by mainstream sociology, we still need to understand how people “receive, resist, negotiate, reject, and creatively make use of the messages they encounter in society” (Guhin et al. 2021:114). Thus, the concept continues to be useful for understanding social reproduction, particularly via racial socialization (Guhin et al. 2021). My findings demonstrate how interracial parents understand both broader, societal racial ideologies, but also, the complexities and validity of multiracial identities, which often face erasure (Harris 2016; Atkin and Jackson 2021). Because they understood how their multiracial children are racialized, they can socialize them in ways that promote a positive self-identity and prepare them for discrimination. For example, parents were realistic with their children about potentially being racialized as monoracial Black in public settings, while at the same time socializing them to be proud of both racial backgrounds and cultures and not forcing them to self-identify one way or the other. This was particularly true of Black-Asian families.

Furthermore, this study addresses limitations present within the smaller body of research on racial socialization in multiracial families through the inclusion of Black-White, Asian-White, and Black-Asian families. Thus, I was able to utilize an intersectional lens to examine power relations and hierarchies within society and draw comparisons within and between families that are not typically included in studies (Collins 2000, 2019; Misra et al. 2021). My intersectional analysis of race and gender was perhaps the most revealing as it demonstrated heterogeneity in the racial socialization practices of families, such as parental concerns surrounding the police in Black multiracial families versus a lack of discussion of policing within Asian-White families. Because I decentered Whiteness with the inclusion of Black-Asian families, I also found that their socialization practices more closely resemble that of Black-White families than Asian-White families.

Theoretically, my dissertation contributes to conversations surrounding the U.S. racial order, Critical Multiracial Theory (MultiCrit), and notions of a post-racial society. While it will be interesting to see how hierarchies and race relations may shift in the future as America's majority becomes non-White, my findings suggest that the racial order remains rigid and rooted in a monoracial paradigm, a tenet of MultiCrit theory in which race is understood as a single, static category (Harris 2016; Johnston-Guerrero et al. 2020; Atkin and Jackson 2021). MultiCrit has its origins in Critical Race Theory (CRT) but was introduced as a framework for understanding how multiracial people are racialized and experience racism (Daniel et al. 2014; Harris 2016). MultiCrit incorporates four original tenets of CRT while also introducing four new tenets that can be better applied to studies of multiracialities (Harris 2016). The applicable CRT tenets include: understanding modern racial inequalities through a historical framework, interest convergence, centering voices of people of color as experts on their experiences, and challenging dominant racial ideologies (Delgado and Stefancic 2012). The other four tenets, which are unique to MultiCrit, include: a monoracial paradigm of race, encounters with racism, monoracism, and colorism, differential micro-racialization, and intersections of multiple racial identities (Harris 2016).

As a society, we still very much operate under a monoracial paradigm in our understanding of family (Harris 2016). This is evident by how multiracial families in my study were othered and experienced monoracism, or systemic oppression that “targets individuals who do not fit into monoracial categories, groups, or phenomena” (Johnston-Guerrero et al. 2020:18). Monoracism has typically been studied from the perspective of multiracial people as they challenge ideas of racial binaries and have their identities invalidated (Johnston and Nadal 2010; Nadal et al. 2011; Johnston-Guerrero et al. 2020; Atkin and Jackson 2021; Cardwell 2021; Gay

et al. 2022). Even though existing studies focus on multiracial individuals, we cannot deny the importance and salience of family in their experiences (Waring and Bordoloi 2018; Cardwell 2021). As such, my study contributes to and expands MultiCrit Theory by highlighting how multiracial families experience monoracism as a unit. The findings indicate that more research is needed in this area to fully understand if and how other tenets of MultiCrit are useful in analyzing experiences of multiracial families.

Like others, I argue that the rigidity in our racial order is because hierarchies are put in place based on how individuals and groups are racialized (Omi and Winant 2015). Multiracial families and people challenge our traditional understandings of race, and although parents may socialize their children to embrace a multiracial identity or at least not pressure them to pick a side, the parents in my study very much understood that how their child self-identifies may be very different from how they are racialized. Thus, the need to socialize them and prepare them for experiences of racism was just as important as socializing them to have pride in who they are as a multiracial person.

Bonilla-Silva (2004) posited the emergence of a tri-racial U.S. order with an honorary Whites category, but recent events have demonstrated how fragile this middle-ground category is and how its acceptance is dependent upon that of the dominant group, Whites. Although this effect could be short-lived, this may be most obvious from experiences of Asian Americans, whose Model Minority status was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting increases in anti-Asian hate crimes. Thus, it seems honorary Whiteness only extends to those who may present as White versus racial groups that are seemingly accepted by Whites. This demonstrates the prevailing notion of race as a biological and phenotypical measurement, which has clear implications for multiracial individuals who do not appear White.

Similarly, the experiences of the families in this study demonstrate the disconnect many have between our racial reality and notions of a post-racial society. This may be due to the adoption of colorblind racism post-Civil Rights Movement in which many Whites cannot identify discrimination and racism unless it is overt, such as in the form of racial slurs (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Although interracial couples and multiracial people have been used to signify families of the future in media and advertisements, their actual experiences demonstrate otherwise as they still experience discrimination and/or fetishization as a different family structure. As scholars and everyday individuals have already expressed, interracial couples and multiracial people will not and cannot repair race relations of a country rooted in White supremacy.

Directions for Future Research

As discussed in chapter 2, I was unable to recruit Asian women and Black men with children. This was disappointing in that I could not draw comparisons between this specific dyad and 1) Black women and Asian men with children and 2) dyads from the Black-White and Asian-White families. Interviews with Asian moms and Black dads would provide a better understanding of the intersectional influences of race and gender within Black-Asian families. As previous studies show, moms are primarily tasked with not only the socialization of children, but gendered work related to how the family functions. How then would Asian moms' understanding of race and racism impact their socialization practices? Comparisons between Black moms and Asian moms within multiracial families would contribute to the growing body of literature on mothers of color and how motherhood differs for White women and women of color.

Future research should also include and consider the role of diverse family structures. Although not a requirement for participation, all the parents in my study were married with the exception of one dyad. As such, my sample lacked cohabitating, separated, and/or divorced parents. Diverse family structures and custody arrangements potentially add nuance (or conflict) to how the family discusses race and socializes their children. For example, as Rockquemore (2002) found, White moms separated from their child's fathers often spoke disparagingly of Black men, which impacted how their Black-White daughters viewed potential relationships with Black men. In contrast, the divorced couple in my study, Rochelle and Vinh, made it clear in their separate interviews that co-parenting was paramount for both of them. They claimed that regardless of their relationship, they would never speak poorly about one another in front of their kids. This agreement seemingly contributed to consistent racial socialization practices and understandings of race and racism across the separate interviews. Only future research can reveal if these dynamics distinguish separated parents of color from separated couples in which one is White.

Furthermore, new partners, such as a step-parent, step-siblings, or half-siblings could also influence family dynamics, such as how race is (or is not) discussed. Two families included in my study did consist of new partners and half-siblings. One such family was Josh, a Black man, and Laura, a White woman. Laura had two White daughters from a previous marriage, but one was already college-aged and living outside the home while the other was an independent highschooler with her own social life, meaning the influence of parents was minimized as they became young adults. The influence of family dynamics and racial socialization was much more clear in a blended family with younger children. One such family, Brittany, a Black woman, and Dominic, a White man, spoke at length about being a blended family and how this impacted

Brittany's 12-year-old daughter, Rose, from a previous relationship. For example, Rose was questioned by her peers about her White dad and impacted by assumptions about what a family should be. Furthermore, "performing" family becomes more complicated in blended families as parents and children negotiate new roles and relationships (Collett and Childs 2009). Future studies with blended multiracial families would better elucidate the role of a child's age in experiences of racial socialization and how families negotiate and resolve conflicting messages about race.

Relatedly, the limitations imposed by a lack of diverse family structures also extends to my predominantly heterosexual, cisgender sample. Although some participants identified as bisexual or queer/pansexual, I would like to examine the intersection of race/gender/sexual orientation in racial socialization practices. For example, research on bisexual biracials shows many have "positive experiences from existing in a space beyond boundaries" (Williams et al. 2022:2251). Perhaps, in a similar fashion to bisexual biracials, parents who are members of the LGBTQ+ community are more open to socializing a multiracial identity, not ascribing to dichotomies and "queering" the color line, and allowing for fluidity in how their children self-identify, racially or otherwise (Paz Galupo, Taylor, and Cole 2019; Williams et al. 2022). I believe that addressing these limitations will broaden our understanding of families and continue to decenter nuclear, heterosexual families, which are often viewed as the default.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



Interracial Parenting

Seeking interracial parents to participate in an interview study about their parenting and socialization practices.

Pairs of interracial parents should self-identify as monoracial:

- Black and White
- Asian and White
- Black and Asian

Contact Katherine Johnson for more information at KLJohn23@ncsu.edu.

North Carolina State University IRB 24156

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Aged 18+
- Live in the U.S.
- Biological parent of child(ren) aged 3 to 18
- Both parents consent to participation
- Parents can be married, living together, and/or co-parenting

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Study Participation

Adult Consent Form

Title of Study: Interracial Parents and Racial Socialization of Multiracial Children (eIRB # 24156)

Principal Investigator(s): Katherine Johnson, kljohn23@ncsu.edu, 757-470-8716

Funding Source: None

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how interracial parents racially socialize their multiracial (mixed) children. We will do this through semi-structured interviews lasting between 1.5 and 2.5 hours with parents of multiracial children.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because it will give you an opportunity to share your experiences as the parent of a mixed-race (multiracial) child and member of an interracial family. You may not want to participate in this research because it will entail discussions of race and your family life.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to examine how interracial parents (of two or more different races) racially socialize their children. I will examine how parents discuss race with their children and how families navigate issues of race and racial identity as a multiracial family. The study will take an intersectional approach by considering the role of race, gender, class, etc. in racial socialization practices of parents.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

There will be approximately 36 participants in this study or 18 pairs of parents.

I will include at least six pairs of white/Asian parents, six pairs of Black/white parents, and six pairs of Black/Asian parents. Within these pairings, I aim to have:

- 3 white women/Asian men
- 3 Asian women/white men
- 3 white women/Black men

- 3 Black women/white men
- 3 Black men/Asian women
- 3 Black women/Asian men

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Aged 18+
- Live in the United States
- Have a biological child or children of two or more races (Asian, Black, and/or white) aged 3 to 18
- Both biological parents must be willing to participate

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

1. Complete an interview with the researcher online via Zoom
2. Provide your name and email address to receive an e-gift card once the interview is complete

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 1.5 to 2.5 hours.

Recording and images

If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to be audio and/or video recorded. If you do not agree to be audio and/or video recorded, you cannot participate in this research.

Risks and benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of this research include potential psychological/emotional distress after reporting or thinking about past or ongoing experiences of racism, prejudice, microaggressions, etc. targeted toward you or family members, such as your children. You may skip any questions if you are uncomfortable answering.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are advancing sociological research in the areas of racial socialization, interracial families, and multiracial identity and having an opportunity to share your personal experiences as they relate to race and family dynamics.

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please contact Katherine Johnson at kljohn23@ncsu.edu or 757-470-8716 or faculty advisor, Dr. Kim Ebert, at klebert@ncsu.edu. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your data

from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified.

De-identified. De-identified data is information that at one time could directly identify you, but I have recorded this data so that your identity is separated from the data. I will have a master list with your code and real name that I can use to link to your data. When the research concludes, there will be no way your real identity will be linked to the data I publish.

Future use of your research data

To help maximize the benefits of your participation in this project, by further contributing to science and our community, your de-identified information will be stored for future research.

Compensation

Upon completion of the interview, you will receive an Amazon e-gift card. Individuals will receive a \$20 gift card, or couples may combine their compensation to receive one \$40 gift card. You must provide your name and email address to receive the e-gift card.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Katherine Johnson at kljohn23@ncsu.edu or 757-470-8716. The faculty advisor, Dr. Kim Ebert, can be contacted at klebert@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have

any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

Consent To Participate

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Please check yes or no below. If you consent to participate, fill in your name and today's date.

Yes, I consent to participating in this research study.

Name _____

Today's Date _____

No, I do not consent to participating in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Pre-interview demographic questions for both parents

1. Name
 - a. To respect your privacy and keep your information confidential, participants can select a different name/pseudonym of their choice. Please select the names you would prefer to be referred to as in this study. If you do not select your own pseudonym, the researcher will assign one.
 - b. Age
 - c. Race
 - d. Gender and sexual orientation
2. What pronouns do you use?
3. What is the current relationship between the two parents participating in the study? (i.e. married, cohabitating, separated/co-parenting, divorced/co-parenting)
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
5. Who lives in your household? (Ex. both parents, child, grandparent, etc)
6. What is your approximate annual household income and/or income of both parents if you don't reside together?

Interview guide

1. How did your parents discuss race with you when you were a child?
 - a. How, if at all, were experiences of prejudice or discrimination based on race handled in your family?
2. Do you think your upbringing influences the way you parent and the things you want to teach your children?
3. Has your experience of having a partner and child of another race changed the way you think about or discuss race?
 - a. How so? What has changed?
 - b. What have you learned?
4. Prior to becoming parents, did you discuss how you would talk to your child(ren) about race? What did you agree on as parents? Disagree on?
5. How do you think interracial couples are viewed in the US now? Multiracial children?

- a. Have you noticed increased representation of multiracial families in the media? If so, do you think these representations are accurate?
 - b. How do you feel about that?
6. Did you have expectations of what your child(ren) would look like? Were they correct? Why/why not?
7. How would you describe your child(ren)'s race?
 - a. Do other people see them that way? How does that make you feel?
 - b. Can you share a story of when your child(ren)'s race was misidentified? How did that make you feel? How did it make your child(ren) feel?
8. Do you consider your child(ren) to be multiracial, or more one race than another? Why?
 - a. What labels do you use to discuss your child(ren)'s identity? (i.e. biracial, mixed, mixed race, multiracial, hapa, Black and white, one race, etc.)
 - b. Do you prefer/dislike any of these labels and why?
9. How do you identify your child(ren)'s race on forms asking for racial classification?
 - a. Is this identification consistent regardless of the form or does it change depending on who/what it's for? Why/why not?
10. Can you tell me about a time when you encountered any discrimination or stereotypes as an interracial family? Please explain.
 - a. Have these experiences influenced how you talk with your child(ren) about their identity?
11. What struggles or conflicts have you experienced in raising a mixed child (i.e. as a couple, with other family members, public assumptions, etc.)?
 - a. Can you tell me about a time when you've experienced family conflict regarding your partner and/or children because of their race?
 - b. How did that make you feel? How do you handle these situations?
12. What has been most rewarding about being part of a multiracial family and raising your child(ren)?

13. What do you think is important for your child(ren) to know about their racial/ethnic background (culture, language, history, etc.)? How do you share this with them?
 - a. Who does your child(ren) interact with the most outside of your immediate family (Grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, friends and peers)? How have/Have these individuals influenced their racial identity?
 - b. Do you feel that they are more comfortable spending time with or forming friendships with people of a certain race?

14. How would you describe your neighborhood? Your child(ren)'s daycare and/or school?
 - a. How racially diverse are they?
 - b. Was diversity an important factor when considering where to live or send your children to school? Why/why not?

15. How would you describe your child(ren)'s friends?
 - a. Are they racially diverse? Did you encourage your child(ren) to make friends with other children of color/multiracial children?
 - b. How do these friendship networks influence your child(ren)'s racial identity?
 - c. What groups/activities is your child(ren) involved with? (ex. Sports, extracurricular activities, volunteering)

16. Can you share a story about your child(ren) asking about their racial identity? What experience(s) prompted these questions?

17. Do you prepare your child(ren) for potential bias based on their racial identity? If so, how?
 - a. Are there specific situations that you prepare them for? (i.e. interacting with police)

18. How have conversations about race and racial identity changed as your child(ren) got older? Did they have more questions about their racial identity?