ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	TETHERED TENSIONS, COVERT BONDS: NAVIGATING RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AND ANTIBLACKNESS IN MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES
	Angelica Loblack,
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This dissertation examines how Black-white multiracial families navigate the complex terrain of racial socialization and antiBlackness, revealing how different approaches—some centering Black pride, others celebrating mixedness, and many negotiating both—shape how children understand race, selfhood, and power. Drawing on over sixteen months of intensive family observations and 92 semi-structured interviews with ten multiracial families, this study interrogates how racial messages—rooted in Black pride, mixedness, and whiteness—are transmitted, internalized, and negotiated within multiracial households. It argues that racial

socialization in these families is marked by both resistance to and complicity in the reproduction of racial inequality.

While Black-centered strategies often foster resilience and a politicized attachment to Blackness, they remain constrained by the continued dominance of whiteness—even within the family. Black mothers, in particular, bear the disproportionate burden of racial socialization, tasked with preparing their children for a racialized world while navigating their proximity to whiteness and racial ambiguity. In contrast, mixedness-centered approaches tend to emphasize individuality, pride in dual heritage, and racial harmony, but often fall into color-evasive frameworks that depoliticize race and obscure structural inequality.

This dissertation argues that whiteness operates not as a neutral backdrop but as an active and pervasive force within multiracial families—shaping whose labor counts, whose experiences are centered, and how racial meaning is constructed and internalized. It reveals how gender, phenotype, and family power dynamics further shape racial identity development—especially the unequal distribution of racial socialization labor, typically shouldered by Black parents.

Ultimately, this study challenges dominant narratives that frame multiracial identity as inherently transcendent or post-racial. Instead, it argues for an intersectional and structural approach to multiracial identity that foregrounds the enduring power of whiteness and anti-Blackness. By centering the operations of whiteness within family life, this dissertation moves beyond celebratory narratives of diversity to underscore the urgent need for racial socialization practices that resist, rather than reinforce, the hierarchies that continue to shape identity, belonging, and politics in a deeply unequal, racialized world.

TETHERED TENSIONS, COVERT BONDS: NAVIGATING RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AND ANTIBLACKNESS IN MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES

by

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Dedication

To my mother and grandmother—your fierce, unwavering love has been my foundation, my compass, my sky. You raised me to believe that no dream was too vast, no version of myself too bold. You offered me both roots and wings, and in every quiet act of care, you showed me what it means to love radically and live purposefully. This work is stitched together with the wisdom you passed down—some spoken, much of it felt, all of it enduring.

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As bell hooks writes: "We cannot effectively resist domination if our efforts to create meaningful, lasting personal and social change are not grounded in a love ethic…. To give ourselves to love, to love Blackness, is to restore the true meaning of freedom, hope, and possibility in all our lives." May this work be a small act of that love—a love that dares to name injustice, that makes room for healing, and that never stops believing in our collective liberation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

The evening in the Chase household seemed like any other: the siblings gathered around, teasing each other with a familiarity that only years of shared history could cultivate. But beneath the playful banter, there was an unspoken tension—a subtle discord that had long existed in the family dynamic. It centered on Josiah, the second oldest sibling, whose expressed attachment to mixedness often clashed with his family's staunch embrace of Blackness. Layla, the eldest daughter, quipped, "You're the white boy in the family," her words lighthearted yet carrying an underlying sting. Despite Josiah's dark skin, tightly coiled hair, and undeniably Black features, his family often labeled him the "white sheep" of the family, accusing him of "wasting his Blackness." To them, Blackness was not just a racial identity; it was a communal, political act shaped by resistance to the forces of anti-Blackness (Sims 2012; Joseph-Salisbury 2018). Josiah's rejection of this framework was seen not as a personal choice, but as a dismissal of the shared history and collective struggle that Blackness represented for the family.

Yet, this seemingly straightforward critique also revealed something more complex: the family's belief that Blackness was a form of resistance, an identity forged through the history of colonialism, slavery, and systemic racism (Johnson 2024). For Josiah's siblings—many of whom, like Layla, had more racially ambiguous features—Blackness symbolized resilience in the face of oppression. But for Josiah, his Blackness was not defined by others' expectations or the collective politics of race. His struggle to express his identity on his own terms points to a broader ideological divide: one that pits Blackness as a collective identity tied to resistance, against an emerging vision of racial identity as individual and self-determined (Roth 2013).

Josiah's frustration underscored the tension between these two views. His rejection of his siblings' insistence that Blackness must be performed in specific ways challenged the conventional understanding of racial identity as tied to political allegiance or cultural practices. In his eyes, Blackness was not a commodity that could be "wasted"; it was an intrinsic part of who he was, irrespective of how it fit into his family's expectations or broader racial narratives (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). This family dynamic—between the collective affirmation of Blackness and Josiah's insistence on individualized expression—serves as a poignant entry point into the broader discussion of how multiracial individuals navigate their racialization (Joseph-Salisbury 2018).

As the United States' multiracial population continues to grow, driven by increasing interracial marriages and changing immigration patterns, the societal narrative around multiracial individuals has shifted. These individuals, particularly Black-white multiracial youth, are often hailed as symbols of racial transcendence, embodying an ideal of racial harmony and progress (Pew 2015). Yet, this dissertation challenges such simplistic narratives, arguing that the experiences of Black-white multiracial youth reveal far more complexity. Through the lens of racial socialization, I examine how these youth both confront and internalize the conflicting messages they receive about race, Blackness, and mixedness within their families (DaCosta 2021).

Drawing on over sixteen months of intensive family observations (Lareau and Rao 2022) collected between 2022-2024 and 92 semi-structured interviews with ten Black-white multiracial families, this dissertation explores how these families navigate racial, gender, and class hierarchies. It critically examines the processes of racial socialization within multiracial households, investigating how messages about race are communicated and internalized, and how

these processes affect how multiracial children understand and position themselves within the racial hierarchy. I ask: How do Black-white multiracial families transmit racial messages? What role do family dynamics, including gendered expectations, play in shaping multiracial youth's racial identities? And, ultimately, what are the consequences of these socialization practices on how multiracial children navigate their identities in a world structured by racial inequality?

This dissertation argues that racial socialization in Black-white multiracial families is both resistant and complicit in the reproduction of racial inequality. While families may resist racial hierarchies through their practices, they are also deeply shaped by the pervasive influence of whiteness (Hordge-Freeman and Loblack 2021). Even acts of resistance, such as fostering Black pride or celebrating mixedness, are often constrained by the dominant racial structures that continue to shape these children's experiences. In this way, this work complicates conventional understandings of multiracial identity, revealing how Black-white multiracial youth are not just shaped by, but also struggle to negotiate, the racialized expectations imposed on them (Roth 2013).

Through this dissertation, I aim to shed light on the contradictions and challenges inherent in multiracial identity formation. By situating multiracial socialization within the context of racial, historical, and societal structures, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how multiracial youth, like Josiah, both resist and internalize the racial messages they receive. This work challenges the idealization of mixedness as a transcendent, race-neutral space, and instead highlights the complex ways in which racial identity is shaped, constrained, and lived within multiracial families.

Global Race Mixing

The global histories of race mixing are intricately shaped by colonial legacies, the pursuit of "whitening" populations, and the entrenched nature of anti-Blackness within national imaginaries. In Latin America, for example, the concept of *mestizaje* (miscegenation), or interracial marriage, was promoted as an ideal for national unity, particularly in countries like Mexico and Brazil, where racial mixing was celebrated as a symbol of progress and harmony. However, this celebratory narrative of racial blending obscured the reality that *mestizaje* often served colonial agendas aimed at whitening populations—erasing Indigenous and African cultural legacies in favor of an idealized European heritage. This process reinforced racial hierarchies, marginalizing Black and Indigenous communities in the process (Jung and Costa Vargas 2021). While *mestizaje* was framed as a tool for national cohesion, it simultaneously suppressed the identities of non-European groups and positioned racial mixing as a path to achieving a "more civilized" society.

In contrast, the United States employed a very different approach, criminalizing interracial mixing to preserve the idea of white racial purity. The U.S. legal system's legacy of *hypodescent* dictated that children of interracial unions were classified as Black, regardless of their parentage, perpetuating the racial hierarchy. The doctrine of *Partus sequitur ventrem* ("offspring follows the belly") further reinforced this system by determining the status of children based on the mother's condition, meaning children born to enslaved mothers inherited their enslaved status, thus preserving slavery and white dominance. Unlike the *mestizaje* promoted in Latin America, which encouraged racial integration to "whiten" the population, the U.S. sought to prevent such mixing, viewing it as a threat to racial order (DaCosta 2007; Telles 2004).

Contemporary discourse in the U.S. often points to the idea that the nation is headed toward racial harmony, drawing on theories of the Latin Americanization of the U.S., which suggest that race relations in the U.S. will evolve similarly to those in Brazil (Bonilla Silva and Dietrich 2008). Proponents of this theory argue that racial mixing in the U.S. will eventually lead to greater racial harmony, much like the narrative in Brazil that mixing races promotes societal cohesion. However, this idealized view of race mixing overlooks the deep-seated legacies of anti-Blackness and the history of legal and social structures designed to enforce rigid racial boundaries in the U.S. Unlike Brazil's narrative of racial harmony through mixing, the U.S. has historically framed interracial unions as a challenge to white supremacy, with legal frameworks like *hypodescent* and *Partus sequitur ventrem* designed to preserve white dominance rather than foster integration (Hordge-Freeman 2015).

While Latin American *whitening* projects celebrated racial mixing as a means to "whiten" the population, the U.S. criminalized it as a method to maintain racial boundaries and ensure the continued subordination of Black people. These contrasting approaches reflect different national projects: Latin America's attempt at racial integration through whitening, versus the U.S. effort to rigidly define and control racial categories to sustain white supremacy (Omi and Winant 2015).

The unique history of race mixing in the U.S. offers a distinct lens for understanding multiracial familial socialization. Legal frameworks like *hypodescent* and *Partus sequitur ventrem* institutionalized racial boundaries by ensuring that Blackness was passed down through generations, deeply shaping the social and economic status of mixed-race individuals. While the *Loving v. Virginia* case (1967) struck down anti-miscegenation laws, the enduring legacy of anti-Blackness continues to influence societal attitudes and the lived experiences of mixed-race

families. This ongoing tension between racial integration and persistent racialized power structures offers insight into how global racial projects have influenced family formation and socialization practices, revealing the intersections of race, intimacy, and family life in distinct ways across different national contexts.

Epistemological Evolution of Research on Multiraciality

Scholarly research on multiraciality has evolved through at least two major epistemological frameworks: the era of pathology, in which scholarly attention centered on essentialist logics of racial purity, genetics, miscegenation, and moral degeneracy; and the era of celebration, characterized by myths of racial progress, neoliberal multiculturalism, and identity politics (Ifekwunigwe 2004; Mahtani 2014). We can trace the first paradigm–that of pathology–back to the eugenicist, race science dominant throughout the nineteenth century, which relied upon evolutionary anthropology to show that discourses on moral degeneration were employed to illustrate the supposed dangers of racial mixing. Here, mixed race people were classed as genetically inferior and deviant examples of hybrid degeneracy (Alcoff 2006). These ideas were not only pervasive but were deeply embedded in the racial order that privileged whiteness and demonized Blackness.

The pathologization of mixed-race people continued well into the twentieth century, with stereotypes such as the "marginal man" and "tragic mulatto," a figure caught between conflicting identities, often depicted as mentally distressed or even suicidal due to racial confusion–dominating both public perception and scholarly discourse (Nakashima 1992). These representations reflected a deep-seated anxiety about the threat posed by racial mixing to established hierarchies, especially in societies deeply shaped by the legacies of slavery and

colonialism. Consequently, this approach resulted in a discourse that was racist in both the treatment and the definition of its subjects.

In contrast, Ifekwunigwe (2004) labels the second iteration of multiracial scholarship as marking an era of celebration, or what Spencer (2011) calls the period of cheerleading (see also Sexton 2008; McNeil 2010). This shift was characterized by a rejection of the tragic mulatto trope in favor of highlighting the fluidity and flexibility of mixed-race identities. Scholars like Maria Root (1995) argued that distress related to mixed-race identity was often a result of navigating an environment steeped in racist ideologies, rather than an inherent aspect of mixedness. Root's work emphasized the importance of familial and social contexts in shaping the identities of multiracial individuals. Thus, scholarly attention was diverted away from the supposed identity struggles of mixed race children and instead directed towards disentangling the intersections of social, familial, and environmental factors that inform processes of multiracial identity formation.

This epistemological shift also reflected a broader trend in cultural studies, influenced by scholars such as Stuart Hall, who critiqued essentialist notions of fixed identity and instead argued that identity is a social-historical-political construction, always in process (Mahtani 2014). Root's "Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People" (1996) encapsulated this celebratory vision, advocating for the right of mixed-race individuals to define their identities freely and without constraint. Although widely celebrated, especially among multiracial advocacy groups, primarily led by mothers of mixed race children, the bill also received criticism for offering racially mixed people "misplaced comfort" to sidestep or wholly ignore the structural and material realities of racism (Sexton 2008: 76). These critiques elucidate the varied ways race is often problematically portrayed as an issue of individual free will, both in popular media and

scholarly discourse (Elam 2011). Through their emphasis on the agency of racially mixed people, the multiracial subject was refashioned as racially transcendent and progressive via their "liberation from, as opposed to their confinement by, the oppressive hierarchy of racial categories" (Mahtani 2014: 38).

Multiracial activism in the 1990s, led primarily by white mothers of multiracial children effectively mobilized both of these paradigms–pathology and celebration–by rearticulating notions of racial equality away from collective advancement to individual rights of self-identification. In this vein, multiracial advocacy centered on claims that multiracials need self-identification because they are troubled by exclusive monoracial categories (pathology) and are also a unique and special people who deserve recognition (celebration). Amidst ongoing U.S. cultural wars, multiracial activism attracted the support of conservative politicians who sought to advance a colorblind, neoliberal agenda by pointing to multiracial families and children as progressive symbols of racial transcendence.

Yet, this advocacy also prompted public debate over whether the option to check multiple racial boxes would provide official recognition of an already existing identity group (argued by activists) or would itself produce such an identity?" (DaCosta 2021: 340). Regardless, increased public recognition of multiraciality helped legitimate multiracial visibility and create an imagined politicized community. Despite the ways they filter through micro-level processes of identity construction and the navigation of one’s racialized experience, neither the trope of the tragic mulatto nor the "best of both worlds" ideology do anything to trouble antiBlack racial logics that fuel the existing white-settler power structure.

In fact, Minelle Mahtani (2014: 45) argues that the expanded agency via self-identification afforded to mixed race individuals in the contemporary era of celebration is "mired in neoliberal optimism and does nothing to challenge ongoing patterns of systemic and institutionalized racism for *all* racialized people- not just those who possess the privilege to identify as mixed race." Through interviews with multiracial Canadian women, Mahtani disentangles the historical linkages between neoliberal diversity, multiculturalism, and multiracialism to demonstrate how romanticized, apolitical, ahistorical portrayals of multiraciality have come to dominate both public perceptions and personal accounts of the mixed race experience. Specifically, Mahtani argues that identifying as multiracial provides some mixed race people the opportunity to be seen and see themselves as *racial trailblazers*- racially unique and innately apt voices of racial tolerance, diversity, and inclusion- without having to adopt the necessary antiracist, anticolonial political stance that would entail. While the agency of racialized groups is traditionally imbued with liberatory qualities, Mahtani's research suggests that the expanded agency of some racialized groups can also be used to uphold and extend the existing racial structure. Indeed, several scholars insist that scholarship and discourse on multiraciality has been marred by a reluctance, if not a refusal, to engage with Blackness. Instead, contemporary portrayals of the multiracial experience are defined by the racist notion that Blackness is a deficit to be overcome, transcended, and/or erased.

In examining multiraciality, it is crucial to consider how both intimate and familial structures—where racial boundaries are often negotiated—play a pivotal role in shaping the lived experiences of mixed-race individuals. white mothers in interracial relationships, through their advocacy, continue to play a critical part in shaping the way multiracial identities are understood

and experienced. The intersection of family, race, and intimacy remains a key site for understanding how contemporary mixedness is constructed, experienced, and politicized.

Why Black and white?

Building on previous work on the implications of familial socialization on multiracial identities and political engagement (Loblack 2024; Hordge-Freeman and Loblack 2021), my dissertation examines how Black-white multiracial families collectively navigate racial, gender, and class hierarchies, with particular focus on the processes of racial socialization and racialization enacted within those contexts. Coinciding with the substantial rise in US immigration over the last two decades, rates of racial and ethnic intermarriage have skyrocketed and produced a sizable, rapidly growing multiracial population (Lee and Bean 2004). As the US multiracial population grows three times faster than the national average (Pew 2015), so too does societal optimism around multiracial people's potential impact on US race relations (Bonilla-Silva 2007; DaCosta 2021). With parents occupying both extremes of the racial hierarchy, Black-white multiracial youth remain at the center of this optimism and also comprise the largest, most frequently selected, and fastest growing multiracial subgroup (DaCosta 2021; Pew Research Center 2015; U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Thus, this project employs critical race, intersectional, and feminist theoretical perspectives to analyze how racial politics are produced, engaged with, and play a role within Black-white multiracial family structures.

To date, most studies have focused on white parents' socialization practices within multiracial families, centering personal rather than political processes and outcomes among Black multiracial emerging adults (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Hordge-Freeman 2010). Despite the rapidly increasing number of multiracial individuals, however, little is known

about how they learn to understand race and their position in racialized U.S. society, or navigate unique racialized risk factors (Yoo, Jackson, Guevarra, Miller, and Harrington 2016). Extensive scholarship has linked the consciousness-raising practices enacted within Black families to the racial socialization, well-being, and identity development of monoracial Black children. Yet, research on Black-white multiracial families still remains predicated on the roles and experiences of white parents, overwhelmingly white mothers. Consequently, there is a dearth of research related to non-white agents of socialization and an incomplete picture of the content and processes of racial socialization within multiracial families. Thus, analyses focused on how multiracial families construct meaning of racial socialization, multiracial identity, and racialization, and subsequently translate these meanings into practices, are urgently needed. My research is designed to expand existing knowledge related to both white and nonwhite agents of socialization in the lives of Black-white multiracial children and consider the implications of the distinct processes of gendered racial socialization enacted within Black-white multiracial families on US racial politics.

This project explores the processes of racial socialization enacted within Black-white multiracial families (e.g., households in which one biological parent is Black and the other biological parent is white), in specific, for four primary reasons. *First*, current census data reveals that Black-white multiracial youth are the largest, fastest growing, and most frequently selected multiracial subgroup in the US; yet, Black and white people remain the least likely of all major racial or ethnic groups to marry someone of a different race or ethnicity (DaCosta 2021; Davenport 2018; Pew 2017). *Second*, Black and white racial groups occupy two extremes along the existing racial hierarchy and remain extremely socially and politically distant. Consequently, studies find that Black-white multiracial families receive the least amount of support from

extended kin and social networks and encounter persistent intrafamilial racial microaggressions (Bratter 2018). *Third*, contemporary studies find that Black-white multiracial adolescents report a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and substance use than both their monoracial and multiracial counterparts (Green, Charity-Parker, and Hope 2021; Pew 2015). Processes of racial socialization constitute one major mechanism through which racially marginalized youth construct healthy racial identities, develop positive self-esteem, and learn to navigate negative racialized experiences (Reyna 2022). *Lastly*, I focus on Black-white multiracial families as opposed to individual caregivers to emphasize the bidirectionality and fluidity of racial socialization in multiracial families.

Organization of the Dissertation

My dissertation is organized to provide a clear, comparative exploration of multiracial identity construction and racial socialization within Black-white multiracial families. In Chapter 2, I overview the key theoretical frameworks and literature that guide this research. This includes an examination of racial socialization in both monoracial and multiracial families, racialization processes, and the complexities of multiracial identity construction. I also outline my conceptual framework, integrating critical feminist approaches, intersectionality, and comprehensive racial learning frameworks, which inform both the analysis and interpretation of the data.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the methodological approach used in this study, detailing the data sources, sample, and my positionality as a researcher. It reflects on how my identity and perspective influenced the design, data collection, and analysis processes. This chapter also explains the ethical considerations and challenges encountered throughout the research.

The empirical chapters are organized to highlight and compare the diverse approaches to multiracial socialization and identity development across families. Chapter 4, "Prioritizing Black Racial Pride," examines how multiracial families communicate messages that emphasize Black pride, particularly in households where Black mothers take the lead in racial socialization. In Chapter 5, "Internalizing Black First, Biracial Second," the focus shifts to how multiracial children internalize these racial socialization messages, developing strong attachments to Blackness while navigating the complexities of their mixed-race identities. Chapter 6, "Fostering Racial Wholeness and Pride in Both," explores families who adopt an approach that affirms both sides of their children's racial heritage, emphasizing multiracial pride and identity formation. Finally, Chapter 7, "Enacting Multiracial Agency," discusses how multiracial youth internalize these messages of pride in both their racial backgrounds and the potential implications for their understanding of race, privilege, and belonging in a racially stratified society.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, synthesizes the key findings from the empirical chapters and critically reflects on the implications of these findings for both multiracial identity theory and racial socialization practices. It offers insights into how multiracial families navigate the complexities of racial hierarchies, privilege, and identity formation, and concludes with a discussion of the broader societal and structural implications of these dynamics.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations

Overview

My dissertation makes theoretical and empirical contributions to the sociological literature on families, racial socialization and racialization, and multiracial identity construction and politics. *First,* I advance sociological insights regarding race and the family that have historically been concerned with the protective role of families while overlooking their more complex and contradictory functions in the everyday socialization experiences of emerging adults by explicitly considering families to be critical sites of race-making, racial contestation, and racial negotiation, following Hordge-Freeman (2015). As such, my project extends research on racial socialization by foregrounding the ways multiracial families engage in practices that simultaneously resist and reproduce racial inequality. *Second,* I bring together critical race theory, intersectionality, and feminist approaches to the study of families to capture the ways gendered and classed racialization processes shape family dynamics in the United States, especially families in which parents and children do not share the same racialized background or experiences. To do so, I recruited families with variable racial and gender family configurations (e.g., white father, Black mother, Black mother, white father, siblings vs. only children, multiracial sons vs. daughters) to interrogate the ways gender interacts with race in the racial socialization of multiracial youth. Moreover, I explore the ways each family's classed backgrounds differentially inform their engagement in racial and gender socialization processes.

Third, I challenge the dominant tendency to analyze racial socialization across rather than within families and move beyond between-family comparisons (multiracial vs. monoracial, multiracial subgroup vs multiracial subgroup). In doing so, I reject assumptions that people

inherently have race and belong to a family unit of that race, and instead conceptualize race as a product of ongoing racialization processes (Omi and Winant 2015). *Fourth,* my project expands sociological understanding of racial socialization in Black-white multiracial families to include both white and non-white agents of socialization. Moreover, I move beyond an exclusive focus on mothers as primary socialization agents to observe how fathers, siblings, and extended kin networks work in tandem with mothers to inform multiracial socialization. *Lastly,* I employ a longitudinal multi-site ethnographic study design to better capture the ways in which socialization messages vary across time and context in addition to how those messages may be internalized differently by individual family members.

Racial Socialization in Monoracial Families

Within the context of families, racial socialization refers to the varied ways that parents transmit messages about race and ethnicity to children. Specifically, racial socialization encompasses ‘‘a set of overt and covert behaviors parents use, over and above those responsibilities shared by all parents to psychologically prepare children for success in a racially stratified American society’’ (Peters 1985: 562). Oftentimes, the racial socialization practices employed by parents reflect their own classed, gendered, and racialized backgrounds, exposure to racism, and the racial socialization they received in adolescence (Hughes and Chen 1997; Reyna 2022; Thornton 1990; Thomas and Speight, 1999). For instance, studies highlight how Black mothers often prioritize the development of their children’s racial comfort, racial pride, and ability to navigate racialized spaces and interactions when parenting (Collins 1993; Dow 2011; Edwards and Few-Demo 2016). For racially marginalized youth, these forms of racial socialization are known to promote positive self-esteem and identity construction, strengthen

academic performance and motivation, reduce depressive symptoms, and even bolster interpersonal relationships (Stokes 2021).

The bulk of literature on racial socialization, however, has primarily focused on the socialization practices enacted within monoracial Black families, especially those of mothers, to promote racial pride, teach about racial history, and prepare children for potential instances of racial discrimination (Reyna 2022). This literature largely overlooks the ways whiteness is also always socialized. Increasingly, scholars have explored the ways white parents engage in racial socialization practices, either implicitly or explicitly. For instance, Jill Hamm (2001) contends that, white parents are more likely to engage in racial socialization by answering questions and teaching equality, whereas Black parents are more likely to emphasize awareness of racial differences and preparation for bias. Additionally, Hagerman (2017) found that despite "progressive" middle-class fathers' desires to raise antiracist children, the racial socialization practices they employ often reinforce hegemonic whiteness. Similarly, Underhill (2018) argued that despite white parents' increased awareness of racial inequality following the murder of George Floyd, they remained generally unconcerned about their children's propensity to experience or afflict racial biases. Still, some white parents conveyed intentions to socialize their white children to actively push against racism; however, the strategies they enacted were primarily centered on the promotion of colorblindness (Sullivan, Eberhardt, and Roberts 2021). These studies demonstrate how factors beyond parents' personal backgrounds and ideologies, including political and neighborhood context, may also factor into how family's approach and engage in racial socialization.

Racial Socialization in Black-white Multiracial Families

To date, there has only been one theoretical conceptualization of racial socialization processes enacted within Black-white multiracial families (Orbe 1999). Specifically, Orbe identified four primary processes of racial socialization employed by parents of Black-white multiracial youth: 1) Embracing the Black Experience, 2) Assuming a Context-Specific Approach, 3) Advocating for a Color-Evasive Society, and 4) Affirming the Multiracial Experience. Parents who adopt an *embracing the Black experience* approach intentionally communicate messages related to the Black experience due to beliefs that their children will be racialized as Black, and thus must be prepared to navigate the world as such. For some mothers of multiracial youth, this approach involves engaging in explicit conversations about racial inequality, whereas for others it necessitates an intentional immersion in racially diverse, or predominantly Black social spaces (Atkin and Yoo 2019). Some scholars even argue that white members of multiracial families develop racial literacy- learning to reconceptualize meanings of race, racism, and themselves as white people to socialize their children to effectively recognize, respond, and resist racism (Twine and Steinbugler 2006). However, racial socialization practices that prioritize preparing multiracial youth for racial bias remain highly gendered, with parents of Black-white multiracial sons, as opposed to daughters, more likely to express concerns about potential police encounters and antiBlack racialized experiences (Hughes et. al 2006; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). While processes of socialization that center embracing the Black experience are observed to be beneficial to Black-white multiracial youths' racial pride and navigation of racialized spaces, the bulk of this research is almost exclusively informed by the experiences and perceptions of white mothers, with much less attention given to the Black members and fathers of multiracial families.

The tendency to overlook or minimize the role of Black partners and fathers in multiracial socialization processes not only leaves an incomplete picture of what racial socialization looks like in multiracial families, but it also perpetuates harmful narratives of Black men as consistently absent fathers. In one of few studies that examines fathers of multiracial children, Childs and Dalmage (2009) highlight the ways gendered dynamics influence how Black fathers racially socialize their multiracial children. Although Black fathers in their study expressed immense difficulty in combating racist images of Black masculinity in the socialization of their sons, they discussed facing more challenges with regard to their daughters due to desires to raise strong Black women. As research reveals high levels of instability and marital dissolution in Black-white multiracial relationships, more research analyzing the ways race is experienced and negotiated from both partners is increasingly necessary (Batson, Qian and Litcher 2006; Livingston and Brown 2017). Consequently, Black fathers developed heightened frustrations with their white partners inability to understand and accept their socialization goals and increasingly relied on Black relatives and friends to help racially socialize their multiracial children. By bringing into focus the experiences and voices of Black parents, fathers, and external socialization agents, I aim to provide a more holistic and nuanced approach to socialization in multiracial families, which decenters white mothers and whiteness.

In contrast, assuming a *context-specific* approach reflects a more flexible engagement in racial socialization that shifts based on the salience of race in particular contexts or settings. Inherently reactive in nature, a context-specific approach to racial socialization interacts with a wide range of socio-ecological factors, for instance a child's phenotype and physical appearance or their proximity to and interactions with monoracial social networks or environments. For example, scholars find that social interactions in racially homogeneous spaces such as

neighborhoods, schools and peer groups hold significant weight in the racial socialization of multiracial children (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Wilton, Sanchez, and Garcia 2012). These studies find that in largely minority social contexts multiracial youth are more likely to embrace their minority identity, whereas in majority white social contexts, they are likely to assert a multiracial identity (Brunsma 2005). Despite its increasing prevalence, however, context-specific approaches to racial socialization have received the least attention in the literature. This gap is largely a consequence of the non-longitudinal designs of traditional socialization research, which privilege the independent content of specific socialization messages as interpreted by individual members of multiracial families, rather than the ways these messages may vary across context and time and may be internalized differently across family members (Neblett 2008). By employing multi-site ethnographic research methods over the course of one year, I am better able to capture the holistic, multi-faceted, and contextual nature of multiracial socialization and identity construction.

Perhaps the biggest critique of the context-specific approach is that parents will often disengage conversations about race unless otherwise prompted by their children or external factors. Various studies reveal how Black-white multiracial college students recount a lack of any explicit guidance related to antiBlack racialization and discrimination throughout their upbringing, leaving them largely unprepared to navigate the highly racialized climate of college campuses (Loblack 2020; Clayton 2020). Importantly, these outcomes may not always be confined to context-specific approaches to socialization and are likely as much, if not more, a product of socialization practices that privilege *advocating for a color-evasive society*.

An *advocating for a color-evasive society* approach to socialization can take two distinct, yet related forms: self-development and egalitarianism. While both forms promote messages that

de-emphasize the significance of race and racial difference, they differ in parents' willingness to address racial or cultural diversity (Atkin and Yoo 2019). For instance, parents who engage in self-development socialization are more likely to reject racial labels or categories altogether and instead foreground individual qualities and accomplishments (Rollins and Hunter 2013). In contrast, egalitarian socialization messages may introduce children to racial phenomena and difference to teach equality and acceptance of all social groups, but ultimately still reinforce colorblind notions that we are all the same regardless of race (Hughes et al. 2006; Rollins and Hunter 2013). This egalitarian approach is a major concern for identity scholars and clinicians because, when delivered alone, these colorblind messages can invalidate multiracial youth and their experiences while simultaneously leaving them underprepared to cope with instances of racial discrimination (Crawford and Alaggia 2008; Kim, Reichwald, and Lee 2013). In contrast, other scholars theorize that egalitarian and self-development socialization can de-essentialize race, which may instead aid Black-white multiracial youth in the navigation and acceptance of their dual racial heritage (Rollins and Hunter 2013; Villegas-Gold and Tran 2018).

The final process of racial socialization in Black-white multiracial families identified by Orbe (1999) involves *affirming the Multiracial experience*, whereby parents actively celebrate all facets of their children's multiracial heritage. Similar to *embracing the Black experience*, parents who employ this approach strive to prepare their children to cope with instances of racism; however, this approach necessitates an expanded scope of racial discrimination that includes experiences of monoracism or monoracial discrimination (e.g., identity rejection, accusations of racial inauthenticity, exoticization; Johnston and Nadal 2010; Johnston-Guerrero et al. 2020; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005). Despite being recognized as the "healthiest" approach to racial socialization, *affirming the Multiracial experience* has received very little explicit

engagement in literature. One explanation as to why this gap exists is that monoracial parents are often unaware of the ways multiracial forms of discrimination prop up in their children's day-to-day interactions and thus less likely to discuss them (Johnston and Nadal 2010).

Comprehensive (Multi)Racial Learning

Scholars argue that multiracial individuals are continually engaging in an ongoing process of "doing race" (Khanna and Johnson 2010), whereby, one's racial identity can shift over the life course, due to specific life events (Song 2018), and in different situational contexts (Wilton, Sanchez, and Garcia 2013). While this research extends previous understandings of multiracial identity and identification, it remains largely predicated on experiences of racialization or processes of racial socialization. Thus, the bulk of literature examining multiracial identities focuses on the influence of and racial messages conveyed by socializing agents or institutions rather than the diverse ways multiracial people interpret and negotiate those messages. To fill this gap, I center what Erin Winkler introduces as comprehensive racial learning–"the process through which children negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of the various and conflicting messages they receive about race, ultimately forming their own understanding of how race works in society and their lives" (2012: 7). In doing so, I recognize Black multiracial students as active, central participants in their own process of racial identity construction.

Employing a comprehensive racial learning framework, Hagerman (2020) explored how affluent white children learn about, and often perpetuate racism and white supremacy. In contrast to research that locates families as the primary influence on children's racial world views, Hagerman found that affluent white children's understandings of race and racial identity were

shaped by a variety of factors, both internal and external to families. Thus, children received conflicting messages about race that sometimes ran counter to those conveyed within familial contexts, leading a few to push back against their parents' racial ideologies. Building on this work, I introduce the concept of *reflective resistance* to account for the ways that Black multiracial students involved in BSOs learn to dismantle, confront, and often resist the beliefs and practices of non-Black family members. *Reflective resistance* involves the negotiations and interventions Black multiracial respondents employ to combat and confront family members' colorblind and/or anti-black racism and racial socialization practices.

In Twine's (2004) foundational ethnography of British interracial families, she demonstrates how white mothers of Black biracial children develop what she terms racial literacy, enabling them to recognize and understand how racism shapes society as well as manifests within their children's lives. While Twine (2010) argues that white parents of Black multiracial children employ *racial literacy* to socialize their children in ways that prepare them for negative racialized encounters, my findings suggest that Black parents are disproportionately burdened by the responsibility of racially socializing their children while also helping cultivate their white partners racial literacy. This posits one mechanism through which white parents develop racial literacy, through the emotional and ideological labor of their Black partners and family members.

Multiracial Experiences and Identities

In this project, I primarily focus on processes of racial socialization and racialization enacted within multiracial family contexts. However, I would be remiss to overlook the varied ways multiracial socialization traverses the family. With regard to processes of racialization,

scholars argue that phenotypic characteristics, such as skin tone, hair texture, racial passing features and racial ambiguity play a major role in influencing multiracial socialization (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Khanna and Johnson 2010; Perkins 2014; Waring and Bordoloi 2019). In fact, multiracial identities remain heavily influenced by the (mis)perceptions others hold regarding their racial identity, as many multiracial people report negative racialized experiences characterized by questions such as, "What are you?" or, "Are you adopted?" (McKinney 2016; Waring and Bordoloi 2019). As such, racially ambiguous multiracial individuals are 'consistently inconsistently' racialized by others, often causing them to question their own racial identity, and even actively resist monoracial categorization (Sims 2016: 580). Through continued observations and interview questions designed to assess the ways multiracial youth, their parents, and their extended kin interpret and respond to specific racialized experiences, the proposed study accounts for how phenotype and appearance may differentially influence multiracial socialization practices and experiences.

Yet, these processes of racialization have also been shown to inform the gendered nature of multiracial identity construction. For instance, several studies reveal how Black multiracial women regularly push against adopting a monoracial Black identity due to expressed feelings of racial invalidation, narrowly centered around their exoticized physical appearance and perceived attractiveness (Rockquemore 2002; Waring 2013). In contrast, multiracial men's mixedness is often construed "as compatible with, not a sexualized threat to, heteronormative masculine identities as constituted by racialized peer groups" (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019: 52). This observed compatibility, however, relies entirely on performances of masculinity, rather than cultural competencies, which subscribe to historic conflations of Blackness and hypermasculinity (Newman 2019). As such, cis-hetero multiracial men, more so than women, report high levels of

Black peer acceptance and racial validation and often develop exclusively Black racial identities (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Newman 2019). In this project, I examine the socialization experiences of multiracial sons and daughters to account for the ways gender interacts with processes of racialization to inform the distinct racial socialization practices enacted within multiracial family contexts.

Social Power of whiteness in Multiracial Families

The role of whiteness in multiracial families has been a key focus in both multiracial research and activism, especially when it comes to understanding how racial dynamics and family structures either support or challenge existing racial hierarchies (Roth 2013). A significant point of discussion in this body of work is the overrepresentation of white mothers in studies of multiracial families, often framing them as central figures in the upbringing of multiracial children. These white mothers are frequently cast as mediators between the cultures of whiteness and non-whiteness, and while their involvement is often celebrated in multiracial activism and scholarship, it can unintentionally reinforce the power dynamics of whiteness (Buggs 2017). This tendency to position white mothers as key figures in multiracial socialization raises important questions about the ways in which whiteness is maintained and normalized through family structures.

One way to think about this dynamic is through Shantel Buggs' concept of "white racial obligation," which explores how whiteness operates within interracial families. Buggs (2017) argues that white parents—particularly white mothers—are often tasked with the responsibility of educating their multiracial children about race, but this education typically reflects the social expectations that come with being white. This is a subtle but powerful process, as it shapes how

multiracial children understand their racial identities and navigate their social worlds. Buggs' work suggests that white family members, in their role as agents of multiracial socialization, uphold a system that often fails to challenge the racial status quo. In this way, the "white racial obligation" becomes a crucial mechanism for the continuation of racial hierarchies, even within the seemingly intimate sphere of family life.

Chandra Waring's notion of "white privilege by proxy" builds on this by focusing on how white relatives—whether parents, grandparents, or extended family members—benefit from their proximity to whiteness and pass those privileges down, albeit often unconsciously, to their multiracial children. Waring (2016) challenges the idea that white privilege is simply something that white people experience in isolation. Instead, she shows how the advantages associated with being white can ripple out, shaping the experiences of multiracial children in ways that reinforce their subordinate racial status. These privileges, though largely invisible to those who hold them, profoundly influence how multiracial individuals navigate a society that continues to uphold the dominant narrative of whiteness.

Wendy Roth's research on ancestry testing adds another layer to this conversation by examining how whiteness operates within multiracial families, especially in the context of genetic testing. Roth (2013) critiques the way genetic testing commodifies racial identity, particularly when white individuals try to claim non-white ancestry as a way of complicating or obscuring their own racial privilege. Her work demonstrates how ancestry testing can shift the focus away from the social and political realities of race, particularly the power structures that reinforce whiteness. Instead of providing clarity about racial identity, ancestry testing often leads individuals to construct racial narratives that obscure the ongoing significance of whiteness.

This, Roth (2013) argues, is a form of racial erasure that does not take into account the deep, systemic ways that race operates in society.

Coupled with these frameworks is the broader conversation about "white fragility,"—the defensiveness many white individuals display when confronted with issues of race. In the context of interracial families, white fragility can be a significant barrier to meaningful dialogue about racial inequality and privilege. DiAngelo (2016) defines white fragility as the emotional responses, such as guilt or anger, that many white people exhibit when discussions about race or racial inequality arise. In multiracial families, white fragility can prevent meaningful dialogue about how whiteness operates within the family unit, thus hindering efforts to confront the complexities of race and power. This defensiveness often prevents deeper discussions about the power dynamics at play within multiracial households, where whiteness is both a privilege and a burden. For example, white family members may resist conversations about the ways their privilege shapes their children's racial experiences, inadvertently perpetuating the same structures of inequality they may claim to oppose.

The interplay between whiteness and multiracial families is multifaceted, as it reveals the subtle ways in which racial power is negotiated within family dynamics. From the way white mothers are central to racial socialization practices to the unnoticed transmission of white privilege by proxy, these studies highlight the ongoing role of whiteness in shaping multiracial identity (Buggs 2017; Waring 2016). As multiracial individuals navigate their complex racial positions, they often do so within the constraints of a society that privileges whiteness while simultaneously relegating them to the margins. These dynamics are further complicated by the role of white fragility, which impedes meaningful engagement with racial power structures (DiAngelo 2016). Together, these concepts deepen our understanding of how whiteness operates

within multiracial families—not as an isolated or passive force, but as one that shapes, challenges, and sometimes reinforces the racialized systems in which these families live.

Critical Feminist Approach to Families Research

In this dissertation project, I bridge critical race and feminist theoretical perspectives, and intentionally engage an intersectional approach to analyze the distinct ways that gender, class, racialization, racial identity, and colorism (expanded to include phenotype and skin color) shape the practices Black-white multiracial families employ in the context of racial socialization (Few-Demo et al. 2014; Hordge-Freeman 2015). Central to this framing, I situate my analysis of multiracial socialization processes in their historical and contemporary contexts (Atkin and Yoo 2019; Harris 2016; Solórzano and Yosso 2001). Thus, I explore the implications of multiracial identity construction through a critical lens that takes seriously the eugenics and imperialist roots of U.S. racial stratification (Reyna 2022). Specifically, I consider the ways processes of racialization remain fueled by the legacy of the historic one-drop rule, wherein anyone with Black ancestry, multiracial or otherwise, was perceived as Black and legally ascribed the accompanying inferior status so as to maintain false notions of white racial purity. For instance, several studies find that Black-white multiracial youth feel more constrained in their identity options than other multiracial subgroups and regularly encounter instances of monoracism due to others ascribing them a monoracial Black identity (Khana 2010).

While laws such as the one-drop-rule worked to maintain white racial purity and antiBlackness, they also unintentionally prompted coalitions between Black multiracial people and monoracial Black communities (Joseph 2013). Through this coalition-building, Blackness was converted from a marker of inferiority to one of pride and empowerment for monoracial and

multiracial Black people alike (Smith 2014). In fact, burgeoning studies highlight the ways some Black-white multiracial people adopt highly politicized Black identities alongside their multiracial identities, due to a strong sense of linked fate and diasporic consciousness with monoracial Black people, who must similarly navigate an antiBlack sociopolitical landscape (Hordge-Freeman and Loblack 2020; Smith 2014). As such, I analyze whether, and in what contexts, Blackness becomes salient in the lives of multiracial families, paying specific attention to influences like spatial proximity to Black people and sociopolitical contexts (e.g., neighborhood and school demographics, racial uprisings and social movements, etc.).

In popular media, multiracial families are often exploited to bolster colorblind political agendas and appeal to diverse audiences (Atkin and Yoo 2019; Chang 2016). In this study, I examine how contemporary representations of multiracial families as symbols of a post-racial, neoliberal society filter into their everyday lives, behaviors, and experiences. Given that the Multiracial movement of the 1990s was primarily led by white mothers who wanted their whiteness recognized in the identification of their multiracial children (Spickard 2015; Joseph 2013), I also remain critically attentive to how the social power of whiteness is simultaneously maintained, resisted, and reproduced in multiracial family dynamics.

In accordance with critical race and feminist theoretical perspectives' emphasis on centering the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups, I respond to calls for research that centers the experiences of multiracial adolescents before their transitions to adulthood, so they are better able to describe their socialization experiences as opposed to simply reflecting on those most memorable. Moreover, by incorporating the perceptions of multiple caregivers, socialization agents, and multiracial youth, I also respond to calls for research on multiracial family dynamics to better measure the bidirectionality of multiracial socialization and capture

any discrepancies between caregiver and youth reports (Atkin and Yoo 2019; Stone and Dolbin-MacNab 2017; Rollins and Hunter 2013). Moreover, this approach aligns with feminist perspectives by challenging assumptions that mothers are solely responsible for their child's well-being and intergenerational transmissions of cultural practices and beliefs. Despite my focus on Black-white multiracial families, I intentionally recruit families with variable racial and gender family configurations (e.g., white father, Black mother, Black mother, white father, siblings vs. only children, multiracial sons vs. daughters) to better understand how race, gender, and familial structure influence socialization in multiracial families through an intersectionality framework, which recognizes how individuals within the same family navigate multiple systems of oppression in similar, but also contradictory ways (Atkin and Yoo 2019; Harris 2016; Loblack 2024).

Intersectionality

In this dissertation project, I adopt recommendations for research on multiracial families to be more grounded in Intersectionality Theory (Green, Charity-Parker, and Hope 2021). As first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality served as a metaphor for understanding how racialized, gendered, and classed power relations intersect to marginalize the subjective experiences of Black women. For Crenshaw, intersectionality provided a theoretical means through which to address the distinct social inequalities faced by Black women along axes of racism *and* sexism, as opposed to experiences of racism *or* sexism. At its core, intersectionality constitutes a complex worldview that acknowledges and takes seriously the interlocking, interconnected, and mutually constitutive nature of systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, capitalism, and heteronormativity) (Collins and Blige 2020). More recently, scholars have applied intersectionality to the study of racial

socialization in families to emphasize the ways this process remains uniquely shaped by the gender of both parents and youth. However, little is known about how these gendered dynamics manifest in multiracial families (Stokes 2021). Thus, I employ intersectionality to unpack the relationship between the gendered racial identity of parents and the racial socialization of Multiracial boys and girls (i.e., how do the experiences of multiracial boys with monoracial Black and white fathers compare?).

Importantly, my employment of intersectionality is not confined to gender and instead considers how the intersections of other systems of power (i.e., proximity to whiteness) and oppression (i.e., classism) impact racial socialization in multiracial families. For instance, in one of few studies that highlights the relationship between class and multiracial socialization, Csizmadia and colleagues (2014) observed that upper-class Black-white multiracial families were more frequently engaged in racial socialization than their working-class counterparts. In addition to recruiting families of variable racial and gender family configurations. I also recruited families who hold different socioeconomic statuses and household incomes. In doing so, I assessed the ways class, along with race, gender, and phenotype, shapes racial socialization in multiracial families. Ultimately, my adoption of intersectionality taken together with my ethnographic approach elicits a more complete picture of racial socialization in multiracial families, elucidating contributing factors at the micro (i.e., phenotype, negative racialized experience), meso (i.e., relationships with extended kin, neighborhood and school racial climate), and macro levels (i.e., broad based cultural attitudes including classism and racism).

Chapter 3: Data and Methods

Overview

This research is grounded in over sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork data collected between 2022-2024, including 160 hours of *intensive family observations* (Lareau and Rao 2022). I conducted 92 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 62 individuals from ten core Black-white multiracial families residing in the Mid-Atlantic and South. Interviews took place in both formal and informal contexts as well as in both physical (e.g., in their homes, at social outings/events) and virtual environments (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime). The average formal interview time ranged between one to two hours. Informal interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours. Of these interviews, 77 involved repeated, one-on-one interviews with immediate family members including focal adolescents (ages 10-19), adult siblings (ages 19-25), and parents. The remaining fifteen interviews took place with members of each family's local and geographically distant extended kin networks, including grandparents, aunts/uncles, godparents, peers, etc.

After conducting one-one-one interviews, I facilitated fourteen joint parent interviews and seven sibling focus groups throughout my fieldwork. Both the joint parent interviews and sibling focus groups ranged from 90 minutes to three hours. Initial sibling focus groups included all siblings within a given core family. As fieldwork continued, however, these sibling focus groups morphed, sometimes separating sisters from brothers and other times younger siblings from adult siblings so as to assess differences across children's racial socialization experiences with regard to gender and age. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English, digitally recorded, and transcribed using Otter.ai. Throughout the data collection process, I

analyzed the data manually using memos, close readings, organizing and coding data throughout the data collection process.

In addition to in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I engaged in over 160 hours of *intensive family observations* (Lareau and Rao 2022) in the homes and social environments of each core family over the span of sixteen months. As a methodological extension of ethnographic fieldwork that centers research in families, *intensive family observations* allowed me to observe families in their natural settings for a bounded period of time, without having to fully embed myself within the family structure. In doing so, I entered families as a "quasi-stranger" after initial interviews, joining them for occasional family dinners and game nights while also accompanying them to different school functions, religious services, and holiday gatherings.

Families were targeted using non-probabilistic ("purposive sampling"), focusing on two-parent multiracial households with at least one child aged 10-19 residing in the home. Sample criteria was confined to two-parent households, in which one parent identifies as Black or African American, one parent identifies as white, and at least one child (10-19 years old) resides in the household. While I do not intend to reify or reproduce notions that cis-hetero nuclear family structures are or should be the norm; given the emphasis on biological ties to parents in multiracial identity claims and in research on Black/white multiracial families, sample criteria were confined to two-parent households in which the primary focal adolescent(s) had biological ties to both parents.

I intentionally recruited families with varied racial, gender, and class family configurations (e.g., white father-Black mother or vice versa, multiracial sons vs. daughters, working vs. upper-middle class) to interrogate the ways gender and class interact with race in the

socialization of multiracial children. In total, five Black mom-white dad families and five white mom-Black dad families were enrolled in the study.

Families were primarily recruited through widespread circulation of the study's recruitment flyer via parent-teacher-student associations and public library listservs across the DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) metropolitan area, which in the last decade was ranked amongst the most racially and ethnically diverse places in the country, with the multiracial population in these areas more than doubling (Austermuhle and Bonessi 2021). Calls for recruitment featured a QR code and embedded link, which directed interested families to a brief demographic questionnaire meant to assess their eligibility and interest in prolonged research participation. Once families were identified as eligible, I made contact via email or phone and scheduled a ten-to-fifteen minute briefing call, in which I overviewed the study design and purpose as well as outlined expectations for participation and compensation. Families were compensated $100 for every month they maintained participation in the study, regardless of how many family members participated. If deemed eligible, written and verbal consent was then obtained and families were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire that included topics about income, parents' education, zip code, religion, and household size. Snowball sampling is particularly useful within the context of families research because families tend to occupy spaces and engage with other families who resemble a structure similar to their own (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Jackson and Ray 2018).

Importantly, this fieldwork took place amid a highly charged sociopolitical context, shaped by the aftermath of Donald Trump's presidency, the nationwide backlash against critical race theory, and ongoing debates about race and identity in schools and public life. Events such as the murder of George Floyd, the 2020 BLM uprisings and summer of racial reckoning, and the

overturning of Roe v. Wade shaped participants' perspectives on justice, inequality, and bodily autonomy. These broader political currents deeply informed the narratives families shared, especially in relation to fears around racial violence, gendered vulnerability, and the urgency of preparing children for a society increasingly hostile to discussions of race, gender, and power.

Analytic Approach

Following similar ground-breaking qualitative studies on families such as Hordge-Freeman's *Color of Love* (2015), Jackson and Ray's *How Families Matter* (2018), and Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* (2004), I situate the family as a major social institution through which cultural values and capital are not only transmitted but acquired. This dissertation employs a comprehensive methodological approach to analyzing multiracial family dynamics, drawing on two primary sources of qualitative data: 1) transcribed audio fieldnotes from intensive family observations (Lareau and Rao 2022) and 2) transcribed audio recordings and fieldnotes from semi-structured interviews. I utilized intensive family observations to collect the first data source, capturing families' everyday behaviors, interactions, and experiences in their natural contexts (Lareau and Rao 2022). These observations included short bursts of family interactions within households and attendance at significant events such as religious services, extracurricular activities, school functions, and family celebrations (e.g., birthdays and holidays).

Following the principles of "thick description" (Ponteretto 2006; Emerson et al. 2011), my fieldnotes were carefully detailed and context-specific, focusing on racial socialization practices within Black-white multiracial families. I adhered to the Corsaro (1996) model for ethnographic field note compilation, recording not only ethnographic observations but also methodological adjustments, theoretical reflections, and personal impressions. To ensure rigor,

all field notes were transcribed within 24 hours of leaving the research site, allowing for timely analysis. Employing a constant comparative approach (Glaser and Strauss 1998), I triangulated these ethnographic field notes with data from semi-structured interviews, which provided further insight into how family members narrate and interpret their racial socialization practices, enriching the overall analysis of the data.

The use of the constant comparative method facilitated the identification of similarities and differences between the data from ethnographic observations and interviews, offering a deeper understanding of how family members engage with racial socialization both in their narratives and in their everyday interactions. This iterative process of comparing data from different sources enriched the study's analysis and enhanced its credibility. As prolonged engagement with each family facilitated trust and rapport, this triangulation of data sources allowed for a nuanced understanding of the convergence and divergence between what family members say about their experiences and how these experiences are enacted in daily life.

Data analysis followed best practices for qualitative research (Deterding and Waters 2021; Maietta et al. 2021), beginning with open coding of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes. A data inventory identified significant segments of the data—quotations, interactions, and emotional displays—that offered rich insights or challenged existing assumptions in the literature. I then constructed thematic memos to explain the relevance of these segments, tracing connections across interviews and families. These memos, along with the ethnographic fieldnotes and interview transcripts, were analyzed further through NVivo software, which aided in developing codes and identifying underlying themes. This process ensured analytic transparency, allowing for future auditing of the analysis to strengthen dependability.

These intensive family observations provided invaluable data that deepened my analysis of multiracial socialization and family dynamics. Observations revealed micro-interactional strategies of daily life, such as subtle nonverbal cues and brief exchanges, which are rarely captured in sociological studies. In particular, they illuminated intimate moments often overlooked in interview-based data, where social desirability may skew participants' accounts of family dynamics, especially regarding sensitive topics like racialized intimacy, co-parenting, and discipline (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). These moments of intimacy—captured in the "backstage" of family life (Goffman 1949)—offered profound insights into the lived experiences of multiracial family members as they navigated mundane tasks, made decisions about which social and familial spaces to occupy, and negotiated shifting familial bonds (e.g., when siblings graduated and moved out, extended family members moved in, and/or parents encountered health-, marital-, and career-related crises).

While interviews provide valuable perspectives, they cannot fully capture the depth and texture of family life that is observed in real-time interactions. The data from family observations revealed the subtle yet powerful emotional and relational processes that are central to multiracial families' daily existence. These fleeting, intimate moments, often unspoken or taken for granted by participants, were essential in understanding the complexities of racial socialization within the family. Moreover, by combining interviews with field observations, I was able to construct a richer and more accurate portrayal of family life, one that acknowledges the interplay between spoken narratives and embodied actions.

In sum, the integration of intensive family observations into this study has been crucial for revealing interactional processes that could not have been fully captured by self-reports alone. These observations have not only enriched the data but have also provided a nuanced

understanding of multiracial family dynamics—especially the fleeting moments of connection that are foundational to family life. Through this methodological approach, I offer a deeper, more textured account of the ways in which race, intimacy, and family life intersect in the lived experiences of multiracial families.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As I sat across from Jeremiah Chase, a 20-year-old Black-white multiracial son, and his Black-white biracial girlfriend, Sadie, during a recent interview, Jeremiah made an astute observation: he could immediately tell that I had been socialized by a white mom. His reasoning? My "bubbly, outgoing, and open" demeanor, traits he associated with multiracial socialization practices enacted by white mothers. He contrasted this with the more reserved, sometimes assertive demeanor of other multiracial individuals, those, like himself, who were raised by Black mothers. This observation struck me on a deeply personal level, as it forced me to confront how my own socialization as a multiracial person, raised by a white mom, was imprinted on the way I engaged with the world.

This moment became a pivotal entry point into my research, raising several important questions: Is presenting as "bubbly" or overly friendly a characteristic unique to those raised by white mothers? How does my own performance of this "bubbly" persona influence how I navigate interactions with participants? And perhaps most critically, do these traits signal expanded multiracial agency or, rather, reflect ingrained expectations tied to gendered and racialized norms? Jeremiah's observation not only challenged me to reflect on how I "take up space" as a multiracial researcher but also underscored the complexity of how race, socialization, and identity are negotiated within families, particularly multiracial ones.

As an Afro-Caribbean-white multiracial woman, my positionality is inseparable from the research process. Growing up, I experienced a colorblind racial socialization, one in which my white mother consciously celebrated my mixedness to promote positive self-esteem, yet sheltered me from confronting the harsh realities of race and racism. This approach to racial socialization left me ill-prepared to recognize and confront the anti-Black racism I would later encounter. The implicit messages I received about Blackness often led me to internalize and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. It was not until I stepped outside the confines of my colorblind upbringing and immersed myself in Black activist spaces that I began to unlearn these socialization messages. This ongoing process of unlearning informs my research, particularly in exploring how multiracial families navigate racial socialization and how parents' own racialized experiences—often unspoken or overlooked—shape their children's perceptions of race and identity.

While conducting this research, I remained highly aware of my dual role as both an insider and outsider in relation to my participants. As a multiracial person, I shared some common experiences with the families I studied, especially with multiracial children raised by white mothers. This shared experience often fostered trust and comfort in our interactions. However, my outsider status—particularly as an unmarried scholar without children who also sits in the generation between these parents and children—created a different dynamic with parents, who may have felt some initial apprehension about sharing intimate details of their marital relationship and parenting practices. Given the sensitive nature of my research, which focuses on racial socialization and the often uncomfortable realities of navigating race in family dynamics, I was also aware that parents might perform certain behaviors or provide "ideal" responses in response to perceived judgment.

To mitigate these tensions, I conducted longitudinal interviews, built rapport over time, and engaged with extended family members to gain a more nuanced understanding of racial socialization practices enacted in multiracial family contexts. I also integrated reflective questions into my interviews to assess how my identity influenced participants' responses. For example, I asked whether they felt they would have answered questions differently if I had been a different race or gender, or how they felt having a "stranger" in their home discussing sensitive issues like race and identity. These reflective questions became crucial for ensuring that my research remained sensitive to the dynamics of racialized power and trust between me and my participants.

Throughout my fieldwork, I found myself positioned not only as a researcher but also as a mentor or older sibling figure, particularly in families where the mothers were white. white mothers often viewed me as someone who could offer distinct guidance on multiracial identity development, often assuming that I had reached a "healthy" or "ideal" point in my identity construction. This assumption led to frequent inquiries about my own familial relationships and how my experiences could help shape their children's racial self-acceptance and identity development. I was often asked to compare their family's approach to racial socialization with others in my study, with questions like, "How do we compare to the others?" or "What are other families doing that you think works well?" This created an expectation that I could offer not just sociological insights but practical advice about raising multiracial children in a way that ensured healthy racial development.

This assumption that I possessed the "right" answers was particularly evident in how parents, despite knowing I was a sociologist, often conflated my role with that of a counselor or family therapist. Many parents shared intimate details about marital struggles, challenges with

school bullying, or tensions surrounding "empty nest" syndrome, hoping I might provide therapeutic guidance based on my experiences as a multiracial individual. This posed a significant ethical dilemma, as I had to navigate the line between being a researcher and a therapeutic figure, deciding where to set boundaries in these intimate interactions.

As I developed rapport with the children in these families, they increasingly confided in me about secret matters they did not wish to share with their parents—secret social media accounts, burner phones, romantic relationships, or sexual exploration. These disclosures presented another layer of complexity to my role. The ethical tension between maintaining trust with young participants while deciding whether to share sensitive, private information with parents was challenging. I frequently wrestled with whether withholding or sharing certain details would breach trust or represent responsible intervention, especially when the secrets had implications for their safety or well-being.

Throughout this process, I maintained a continuous reflexive stance, tracking how my own lived experiences as a multiracial woman influenced my interactions with participants and the interpretation of my data. My audio field journal became an essential tool for reflecting on moments when families revealed secrets or expressed vulnerability. These moments often occurred in discussions about disciplinary practices or the use of physical punishment—topics fraught with racialized expectations and often influenced by fears of judgment. By analyzing these moments, I gained insight into how racialized dynamics shaped parenting practices within multiracial families, particularly in relation to how families negotiate issues of race, behavior, and identity.

My role as both a researcher and a mentor figure created a complex web of ethical, personal, and professional challenges. My multiracial identity provided me with empathy and understanding that helped build trust with families, but it also shaped the way I was perceived and interacted with. Reflecting on these dynamics, I acknowledge the tension between my insider status as a multiracial individual and my outsider role as a researcher. This tension was both a source of insight and a challenge, as it required continuous attention to the ways my identity influenced my data collection and analysis. By remaining reflexive about how my positionality shaped the research process, I was able to navigate these complexities and gain a deeper understanding of how race, identity, and family dynamics intersect in multiracial households.

Sample: Meet the Families

This study involved ten Black-white multiracial families in the United States, each consisting of one parent who identified as white and the other as Black or African American. Although thirteen families were enrolled at throughout fieldwork, I only draw on data collected from the ten families who maintained consistent participation over the course of sixteen months. All participating households had at least one child under the age of 18, with the children's ages ranging from 10 to 22 years old, though the majority were between 13 and 16 years old. The families were primarily recruited from the Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) metropolitan area, with four families residing in Virginia, two in Maryland, one in Washington, D.C., and the remaining three families living in North Carolina.

The study captured a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The average reported household income ranged from $120,000 to $170,000, though three families reported slightly

lower incomes between $80,000 and $100,000. With the exception of two mothers, all parents were employed full-time at the time of the study, with many holding positions in the education sector, including roles as teachers, administrators, and other related positions. Most parents had completed at least a Bachelor's degree, and a significant number held advanced degrees, including seven Master of Education degrees, four law degrees, and three other Master's degrees.

The families in the study included a variety of family structures, including blended families. For example, in the McCoy family, Nancy, the white mother, had two children, Warren and Sydny, from a previous marriage to a Black man. These children were later adopted by Nancy's current husband, Ken, who is Black. Together, Nancy and Ken had two additional biracial children, Jocelyn and Cade. Similarly, in the Coleman family, Joelle, a Black mother, had two sons from a prior relationship, and Kyle, a white father, had biracial twins from a previous relationship. Together, they had a biracial daughter, Ava.

Throughout the study, I engaged in intensive family observations and conducted both formal and informal interviews with parents, children, and extended family members. Formal, one-on-one interviews were conducted with extended family members in all but two families (the Millers and the Bryants). These extended family members played an important role in shaping the children's experiences of identity, race, and family. Additionally, interviews were also conducted with adult siblings and their romantic partners or roommates in some families, often at the children's request, as they were eager to expand the scope of discussions beyond the immediate family. These observations and interviews were especially insightful during family events, where I had the privilege of attending important milestones, such as graduations. Five adult siblings were enrolled in college at the time of the study, and two additional children were set to graduate from high school during the research period.

The families in the study represented a broad cross-section of experiences, with varying family structures, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds. By examining both the immediate family and extended family dynamics, the study offers a deeper understanding of how multiracial children navigate their identities within their families and broader social contexts. Below, I list the selected pseudonyms and ages (at time of interview) of immediate family members for each of the ten families enrolled in the study:

The Coleman Family: Joelle (Black mother), Kyle (white father), Devan (22), Ant (16), Jillian (16), Ava (10).

The Jacobs Family: Monica (Black mother), Jason (white father), Celeste (17), Cyrah (15), Christian (11).

The Chase Family: Sheree (Black mother), Seth (white father), Jeremiah (20), Josiah (19), Jaylen (17), Jade (15), Layla (13).

The Miller Family: Kyra (Black mother), Aaron (white father), AJ (14), Ari (14), Ace (10).

The Lindsay Family: Alicia (Black mother), Justin (white father), Jalia (11), Jacob (10).

The McCoy Family: Nancy (white mother), Ken (Black father), Sydney (20), Warren (18), Cade (14), Jocelyn (12).

The Bryant Family: Pam (white mother), David (Black father), Cassie (17), Monet (15), Amira (14), Khalid (12).

The Logan Family: Miranda (white mother), Julian (Black father), Cody (16).

The Williams Family: Amanda (white mother), Cam (Black father), Nate (16), Miles (13).

The Shaw Family: Rachel (white mother), Marcus (Black father), Kayla (15), Sasha (13), Theo (11).

Chapter 4: Prioritizing Black Racial Pride

Introduction

> I'll be damned if they grow up and not know what it means to be Black… And I don't mean just knowing how to survive an anti-Black world, although that's important too, but I mean they need to understand what it means to be Black and proud, how it feels to belong to such a rich and beautiful community. If there's anything I get right with this whole parenting thing, I hope it's that! (Joelle Coleman, Black Mom)

This chapter explores how multiracial families, particularly those with Black mothers, prioritize instilling Black pride and identity in their children. Joelle Coleman's words emphasize the commitment of Black parents to raise their children not merely to survive but to thrive with a strong sense of Blackness and belonging. For families who center Black racial pride, socialization goes beyond preparing children for racial adversity—it's about affirming and celebrating Blackness as an integral part of their identity.

This chapter examines how Black mothers navigate this intricate task, balancing the affirmation of Black pride with the realities of their children's mixed racial backgrounds and proximity to whiteness. Drawing on existing literature on racial socialization within Black monoracial families (e.g., Hill 2009), it highlights the crucial role Black mothers play in shaping their children's racial consciousness.

However, an intersectional lens reveals gendered distinctions in socialization. Black multiracial boys face similar racial stereotypes to monoracial Black men, such as the "criminal," "deviant," or "hypersexual" figures (Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). Consequently, Black mothers often focus on preparing their sons for racial bias, particularly in interactions with police and authority figures. At the same time, they subtly encourage their sons

to date monoracial Black girls, reinforcing both racial pride and a rejection of certain stereotypes. These messages, though intended for boys, also indirectly shape the experiences of multiracial girls.

Black mothers face a different set of concerns for their multiracial daughters, who navigate the "Biracial Beauty Stereotype"—the fetishization of their mixed-race features, often tied to proximity to white beauty standards (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Waring 2013). Mothers actively combat these stereotypes, fearing their daughters might internalize these beauty ideals, which complicates the mothers' own experiences with anti-Black beauty norms (Chang 2016; Sims 2012; Waring 2013).

Despite these gendered nuances, Black mothers universally assume the primary responsibility for their children's racial socialization. They often express mistrust of their white partners' ability to fully grasp or address their children's racial experiences. This leads to an unequal division of socialization labor, with Black mothers bearing the emotional and practical burden of preparing their children for a racialized world. While previous research suggests that white parents of Black multiracial children develop "racial literacy" (Twine 2010), this chapter finds that such literacy is largely acquired through the labor of Black partners, thus reproducing the social power of whiteness within multiracial families. Even so, this acquired semblance of racial literacy was not observed to translate into the socialization practices or labor of white parents, more broadly.

The families featured in this chapter include four Black mom-white dad households: the Colemans, Chases, Jacobs, and Lindsays. In addition, I include reflections from two white mom-Black dad families: the Williams and McCoys. These families offer insight into the diverse,

sometimes contradictory, approaches to multiracial socialization, which range from embracing Blackness to affirming their children's mixed-race identities.

Curated Homes, Immersed Community

In this section, I explore how families curate their homes and immerse themselves in Black communal spaces to foster a sense of Black racial pride and belonging in their children. These practices of cultural and social reproduction are often imbued with ideas about respectability, where families navigate the tension between embracing unapologetic Blackness and conforming to social expectations about what it means to be "respectably Black."

One crucial aspect of this process is the intentionality behind how Blackness is represented within family homes. Families' home decor and cultural displays serve as both personal and political expressions, helping to negotiate broader societal narratives of race and identity. The Chase family, for instance, offers a vivid example of how Black cultural artifacts are not simply aesthetic choices but powerful symbols of resistance, pride, and historical continuity. Upon entering the Chase family home, I was immediately struck by the large replica of Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*, which depicts Ruby Bridges, the first African American child to integrate a previously all-white school in the South. This painting, strategically placed above a smaller photograph of the Chase children with Ruby Bridges, signals not just an engagement with Black history, but a celebration of Black historical resistance and achievement. The image is placed in a prominent space—welcoming visitors in the entryway—which transforms it from a passive historical reminder into a dynamic symbol of familial identity.

This commemoration of Ruby Bridges was augmented by an integration of other Black historical figures, art, and literature. This curated home environment acts as a form of symbolic cultural capital that conveys messages about Black racial pride and belonging. However, it also reflects a nuanced negotiation of respectability politics. In almost every family home I visited for this study, there were several visual celebrations of former president Barack Obama and/or the Obama family. While figures like the Obamas are often embraced for their mainstream, "respectable" representation of Blackness, the framing of Blackness within these families is far from monolithic. The Obamas, as a collective symbol, represent an image of Black upward mobility, familial unity, and cultural achievement, which has resonance for many Black families. After responding to Christian Jacobs' inquiry into my supposed "fascination" with the large portrait of the Obama family from the 2008 Democratic National Convention that adorned the primary wall of the Jacobs family living room, a particularly insightful conversation transpired:

> **Christian:** My dad always says the Obamas are like the newer, better version of the Cosbys.
> **Jelly:** Oh wow, I'm surprised you know who the Cosbys are!
> **Christian:** I only know that they were like the original Obamas, but like in a time when there weren't many other successful Black families, kinda like the first family other Black families could look up to.
> **Jelly:** I see. Have you ever watched The Cosby Show?
> **Christian:** No. I think my sisters might have though. But now my parents say the dad is "cancelled," so I can't watch it. I don't really care because it's not my type of show anyways.
> **Jelly:** Well at least you don't feel like you're missing out. Did they tell you why he got "cancelled?"
> **Christian:** No, but I never really asked.

Christian Jacobs's comparison of the Obamas to the Cosbys is particularly striking, as it reveals the generational shift in how respectability politics are framed. The Cosby Show, once heralded as a groundbreaking portrayal of an upwardly mobile Black family, has since been critically re-examined due to Bill Cosby's criminal actions, which complicates the legacy of this iconic

representation. Christian's remarks highlight the ways representations of Black families are not static—they evolve in response to new sociopolitical contexts, including the rise of more critical conversations about racial justice, misogyny, and respectability. This evolution underscores a deeper tension within the Black community between embracing "respectable" forms of Blackness (Ferguson 2004; Kelley 2002). Still, it is telling that, in homes like the Jacobs family, the focus on the Obamas as a Black family supersedes the more complex reality of Barack Obama's own multiracial background, a point I return back to in Chapter 6.

This idealization of the Black family extends beyond the celebration of historical figures to the subtle messages communicated by Black parents to engineer the intimate and romantic interests of their multiracial children. Black mothers, such as Joelle Coleman and Monica Jacobs, illustrate this through their active attempts at shaping their biracial sons' romantic choices as a means to foster a stronger attachment to Blackness and encourage Black family formation. These mothers recognize the power of romantic partnerships in defining familial and cultural ties, especially in a world where whiteness and lighter skin often hold societal privilege. Monica Jacobs, who has three biracial children, including a son, offers a candid reflection on this dynamic:

> "It's not like I wouldn't accept whoever he loves as a part of our family, but I can't lie and say I don't hope he ends up with a Black woman like his mom."

This statement reflects the underlying tension in navigating a racially complex world—an acceptance of choice, but a deep-seated desire for her son to embrace a Black romantic partner. Taken together, the combination of celebrating Black families like the Obamas via the careful curation of home imagery alongside Black mothers' subtle promotion of an envisioned future of Black family formation for their multiracial children inherently positions these families as in alignment with Black families despite occupying interracial family contexts.

Similarly, Joelle Coleman expresses her relief when her son Anthony, or Ant, attended prom with a dark-skinned Black girl, a positive reflection of her own subtle, consistent efforts to guide him toward dating Black girls, especially those with darker skin. When I returned from chaperoning Anthony and his date Simone to the prom, Joelle shared:

> I'm so relieved that he's dating a Black girl, and a chocolate one at that. I used to always drop subtle hints to try and push him that direction and away from white girls. Everytime I would see a cute, little chocolate girl dropping him off somewhere, I'd be like who is that? She is so cute? You ever talk to her?

Joelle's guidance reflects a desire to shield her son from the pressures of white cultural norms, encouraging him to embrace a version of Blackness that valorizes darker skin as an emblem of heritage and resistance. By subtly steering Ant away from white girls and toward Black girls, particularly those with darker complexions, Joelle is engaging in a form of color-conscious parenting that aims to fortify his sense of Black identity. Joelle's approach subverts traditional narratives of racial uplift that have often sought to assimilate or "whiten" families in order to secure social mobility or safety. Instead, by encouraging romantic interest in Black individuals, particularly those who reflect a deeper connection to the Black community, she is affirming the value of Blackness in its fullness, including its darker skin, as a potent form of resistance against the dominance of whiteness. This act of encouraging Black romantic interest is not simply a personal choice but a reflection of the ways Black mothers actively negotiate their children's relationship to history, identity, and cultural preservation, ensuring that their sons' connections are rooted in a legacy of empowerment and resistance.

However, these mothers' attempts to guide their sons toward Black romantic partners, despite their own interracial marriages, invite a more critical analysis of the contradictions within their choices. On one hand, their efforts to encourage Black romantic interests are part of a broader cultural project aimed at reclaiming Black familial ties and resisting the legacy of

whitening that has historically been used to secure social mobility. On the other hand, their own interracial marriages complicate this narrative, raising questions about the tension between personal identity and familial aspiration.

Beyond the curation of homes and investment in Black family formation, some multiracial families like the Chase family also exemplified a commitment to engaging with Black community spaces. During my visit to the Chase household in North Carolina, the family shared with me a collection of home videos that vividly captured the depth of their commitment to engaging with Black communal spaces. One of the most striking moments was when the children excitedly played a video of Jade, the eldest daughter, performing at their predominantly Black church. At just eight years old, Jade had memorized and passionately recited Sojourner Truth's iconic "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. The reverence with which she delivered the words was not only impressive for her age but also emblematic of the family's intention to instill pride in Black history and culture from a very young age. In this way, immersion in Black communal spaces acts as a necessary tool for facilitating and empowering multiracial children's attachments to Blackness.

The Chase children, as they reflected on these videos, pointed out the overlapping influence of their small, Black Southern Baptist church in North Carolina and the meaningful relationships their church attendance facilitates, such as with Felicia, their church choir and Bible study teacher. Felicia, a 68-year-old Black woman from rural North Carolina, had played a central role in shaping their understanding of Black racial history. For the Chase family, Felicia was more than just a teacher—she was a guide who, through both spiritual and cultural lessons, helped nurture the children's connection to Blackness. Her influence extended beyond the church walls, becoming a vital part of the children's everyday lives and perspectives. The family's

shared experiences in these Black communal spaces, particularly the church, were fundamental to their socialization. It was there, in the warmth of religious fellowship and cultural affirmation, that their sense of Black identity was nurtured.

For many of the parents intentional about cultivating strong attachments to Blackness for their multiracial children, actively immersing their children in Black spaces was seen as an essential aspect of protecting their Blackness from the alienating effects of predominantly white educational and social environments. Barbara Smith, Black godmother to Sydney McCoy and college bestie to Sydney's white mother Nancy McCoy, emphasized the importance of ensuring that Sydney and her siblings felt a sense of belonging in Black spaces, explaining:

> I feel like my role has really been to ensure they never feel like outsiders in Black spaces. I told Nancy and Ken that it was extremely important that they felt comfort and belonging with other Black people. Especially since their school is predominately white, I mean it's more diverse than most but still white, so I'll try taking them to my family's cookouts and the hair shop, stuff like that. When they were younger I took them to the National Museum of African American History too …

Barbara Smith's words reveal the powerful role that external Black figures play in helping multiracial children navigate their racial identities. For Barbara, ensuring that Sydney and her siblings feel at home in Black spaces isn't just a matter of cultural enrichment—it's a protective measure against the isolating effects of predominantly white environments. By taking them to family cookouts, the hair salon, and even the National Museum of African American History, Barbara is giving them more than just experiences—she's giving them a sense of belonging, a place where their Blackness is affirmed and celebrated. In this way, external agents of socialization like Barbara and Felicia provide an essential counterbalance to the whiteness that dominates many of their day-to-day environments. They offer a kind of cultural anchoring,

helping these children feel rooted in their Black identity even when the wider world may try to push them away from it.

Sheree Chase discussed at length her rationale for immersing her children in elite, Black programs like Jack and Jill, as well as Black churches:

> They had Jack and Jill, they had church, a Black church, so they had opportunities, it was important for us. Because we lived in predominantly white spaces, I wanted them to have what I call "non-minority moments" where they could be immersed in a shared community and they didn't have to worry about who was watching.

For Sheree, these spaces were not just about cultural pride but about creating "non-minority moments"—spaces where her children could exist outside of the racial surveillance often placed on Black and multiracial individuals in predominantly white contexts. Sheree's comments reflect the ways in which higher socioeconomic status enables certain Black families to curate experiences that shield their children from racialized scrutiny or surveillance, offering them a refuge in which they can experience Blackness in a more affirming way. Similarly, Black father Ken McCoy shared the importance of exposing his multiracial boys to the rich history and culture of Black Greek life at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):

> Bringing my older son to the HBCU homecoming wasn't just about showing him the legacy of our people or the pride in our culture—though that's part of it. It's about him seeing real, living examples of Black masculinity, the kind that's strong, complex, and full of depth. I want him to know that being a Black man isn't about fitting into a box or living up to stereotypes; it's about finding your own way, standing tall with your own pride, and embracing all that you are. For my biracial son, this is just as important. I need him to see that Blackness isn't just one thing, and I hope that through these moments, he'll grow up understanding his place in that legacy, unshaken by what others might say or expect.

Ken's experience of taking his son to an HBCU homecoming highlights the importance of exposing his children to examples of Black masculinity that are both complex and multifaceted. Through these experiences, Ken aims to teach his children that Black identity is not monolithic

and that their Blackness is both multifaceted and valuable in its complexity. In this way, immersion in Black spaces also functions to combat hegemonic, monolithic stereotypes about Blackness. These moments of cultural immersion also tie into broader conversations around the politics of respectability—particularly the need to balance cultural pride with the realities of navigating a racially stratified society.

This theme of immersion also extends to the political realm, where some families see political activism as an essential part of their children's racial education. For instance, the Jacobs family, recognizing the increased visibility of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the wake of George Floyd's death, chose to participate in protests as a family. As shared by white father Jason:

> ...once the pandemic hit and all the BLM stuff was in their face 24/7, we realized we hadn't done enough. The kids knew they were Black but I don't think they fully comprehended what that meant for how they'd experience life. So, we decided to participate in some protests as a family.

This investment in pro-Black political causes was especially prominent for families at the onset of the pandemic, where, as Jason puts it "all the BLM stuff was in your face 24/7." For the Jacobs family, the heightened sociopolitical context ushered in by the pandemic, increased their investment and participation in pro-Black political causes as they collectively "decided to participate in protests as a family" in hopes that it may increase their children's understanding of what it means to be Black and navigate the world as such. In this case, engagement in political activism becomes a crucial part of raising children who are not only aware of their Blackness but are also prepared to challenge the systemic inequalities that shape their lives (Ferguson 2017).

However, the question of how to engage children in political action is not always straightforward. The Lindsays, for example, had a contentious discussion about whether or not to take their children to a BLM protest amidst the racial reckoning of 2020. The conflict between

the white father, Justin, who worried about the safety risks posed by the protests, and Black mother Alicia, who felt it was important for their children to witness racial politics firsthand, reveals the challenges that arise when navigating race and activism in multiracial families. Their eventual compromise—creating a summer curriculum focused on racial injustice—underscores the ways in which families try to balance safety concerns with the desire to instill a sense of Black solidarity and resistance.

In conclusion, the racial socialization practices employed by these families reveal a nuanced balance of explicit and implicit efforts to nurture a robust connection to Blackness in their biracial children. By curating home environments, immersing their children in Black communal spaces, and promoting Black familial and romantic ties, these parents work intentionally to construct a Black identity steeped in both historical pride and contemporary cultural narratives. However, these practices also reflect the tension between respectability politics and cultural pride, as parents navigate the desire for upward mobility while resisting assimilation. The influence of space and external Black agents of socialization, such as Felicia and Barbara, further enhances the children's understanding of Blackness, providing them with a multifaceted framework that resists reduction to a singular racial identity. While these efforts largely seek to empower their children with a resilient connection to Black heritage, they also expose the contradictions inherent in navigating mixedness, where the influence of white and Black family dynamics, along with evolving cultural and political contexts, shape both the parents' strategies and the children's sense of self. Ultimately, these practices reveal a profound commitment to preserving and cultivating a sense of Blackness that transcends societal constraints and fosters a strong, collective identity grounded in resistance, pride, and community.

At the same time, these strategies reveal the complexities of raising biracial children, where the dynamics of both Black and white family influences, along with shifting cultural and political contexts, shape the evolving sense of self. These contradictions, particularly in relation to mixedness and racial identity, set the stage for the following discussion on the biracial beauty stereotype and its intersection with Black masculinity. Understanding the ways in which racial socialization shapes identity development provides valuable insight into how multiracial families confront the external and internal pressures of racialized expectations, particularly with regard to stereotypes that target their children across gender, albeit in vastly different ways.

The Biracial Beauty Stereotype and Black Masculine Threat

> We aren't ignorant to the world, we know that our children will be seen as Black in every space they enter and they'll also be treated as such. It's important that they know how to navigate the world as Black people. (Alicia Lindsay, Black mom)

In addition to creating carefully curated home environments and intentionally immersing their children in Black social and political spaces, multiracial families were also observed to provide explicit messages aimed at preparing their children for the realities of anti-Black bias and discrimination. As illustrated in Alicia Lindsay's words, these messages reflect parents' understanding that their multiracial children will be racialized as Black across various social contexts. Consequently, these children must be equipped to navigate the discrimination that accompanies this racialization. For these parents, racial socialization not only involves acknowledging the existence of anti-Black bias but actively confronting and disrupting the potential adoption or internalization of an epistemology of ignorance. In doing so, Black parents like Alicia effectively prepare their biracial children to confront the anti-Black processes of

racialization and the controlling images that emerge from them—images these parents are intimately familiar with due to their own racialized experiences.

However, scholars of multiraciality may argue that these preparatory racial messages unintentionally marginalize multiracial children by reinforcing a monoracial paradigm, which compels them to prioritize one side of their multiracial identity over another (Johnson 2024). Despite these concerns, parents in these families felt that these racial socialization messages were necessary for their children's survival in an anti-Black world, even as their racial identity constructions may or may not align with how they are racialized in society at large.

For families focused on fostering strong connections to Blackness, discussions centered on preparing children for anti-Black bias were framed as urgent and vital defenses against a world that targets Black bodies from the moment of birth. For instance, Monica Jacobs, a Black mother with a traumatic history related to reproductive health, explained:

> ...and we'll talk to them about different things going on. We don't believe in sheltering them from the realities of the world, I mean they're Black. It's not possible to shelter them from a world that starts attacking them literally in the womb, literally.

Given the disproportionate rates of infant mortality among Black infants and alarming reproductive health disparities for Black women, Monica's point resonates deeply. If Black bodies are not protected from the effects of systemic and structural violence from infancy, then Black children cannot and should not be shielded from the realities of anti-Black violence. Monica emphasizes that it is, quite literally, impossible to "shelter [her kids] from the realities of the world," regardless of any parental desire to preserve their children's supposed innocence. This stark contrast in parental strategies—preserving innocence for white children while confronting the realities of anti-Black racism for Black children—highlights a fundamental truth about racialization: for Black families, the need to prepare children for these harsh realities is

inescapable. Both Alicia and Monica implicitly position their biracial children within a Black collective identity (e.g., "navigate the world as Black people" and "I mean, they're Black") due to the inevitability of anti-Black racialization.

However, not all parents of biracial children felt comfortable directly confronting anti-Black racism. Instead, some opted to expose their children to relevant discourse and media, hoping to provide both education and space for their children to engage in these discussions on their own terms. This approach emerged more organically, guided by the child's needs and questions. Julian Logan, a Black father, exemplifies this strategy:

> We definitely don't shy away from having conversations about race, they are beyond important when raising a Black child, but we also don't want to force those talks down her throat. So, we take more of an "ask and you shall be answered" approach. We'd rather invite a dialogue than give a lecture…

Like Alicia and Monica, Julian also positions his daughter, Cody, within a Black collective identity, describing her as a "Black child" in the context of their approach to race and racism. Yet, Julian expresses concern about overwhelming Cody with unsolicited, lecture-style discussions about race. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of cultivating Cody's curiosity and providing a space for her to ask questions. Julian elaborates:

> We stand by it! Cody is her own individual and for us, it was necessary that we stimulate her curiosity and just help her be able to ask the uncomfortable questions and feel empowered to do so…and to not only ask questions but remain critical of the answers. We saw that as a more effective approach rather than just drowning her with our own critiques and traumas. Part of it is just introducing her to the right books, the right films, the things we think will usher in those questions and help prepare her for the world and to navigate racism, especially with her going to university next year.

Here, Julian discusses his and wife Miranda's goals of encouraging their biracial daughter Cody to not only feel empowered to ask the "uncomfortable questions" about race but also to have the required toolkit to "remain critical of the answers." In this way, the Logans center a *context-*

specific approach to multiracial socialization predicated on their cultivation of Cody's ontological curiosity. Julian's strategy involves encouraging Cody's intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, equipping her with the tools to engage with racism. The Logan family approach, while placing the responsibility on Cody to initiate these conversations, subtly nurtures her understanding of race and racism through carefully selected media and literature. Thus, even with a more context-specific approach to multiracial socialization, the Logans remain committed to preparing Cody for the realities of anti-Black bias and affirming her Black identity.

Parents across racial lines expressed concerns about how to prepare their biracial children for anti-Black racism, and these preparatory messages were notably gendered. The controlling images most frequently referenced by multiracial families often centered on the exoticization of biracial women and the stereotypes associated with Black masculinity, particularly regarding skin tone. These controlling images—racist representations that normalize and justify oppression—intersect with race, gender, and class (Bailey-Hall and Estrada 2022; Collins 2002; Collins 2004). Black men and women encounter distinct controlling images: Black men are often depicted as criminal, threatening, and violent, while Black women are portrayed as aggressive, hypersexual, and/or welfare-dependent.

For multiracial boys, parents frequently communicated messages aimed at navigating the hypermasculinity associated with Black boys, especially in interactions with authority figures. Some parents discuss having to introduce this type of dialogue much earlier than expected due to a combination of their child's phenotypic features. For instance, white father Jason Jacobs speaks about these concerns with regard to his 11 year-old son Christian:

> I didn't think I'd have to have "the talk" with him until he started driving, but he's not only a Black boy, he's also a big boy. So, I make sure to talk to him about the fact that

> many people will perceive him as threatening just for existing... and when it comes to other men, especially ones with power, there's ways to at least minimize the risk of harm.

Here, Jason reflects on the urgency of preparing his son for anti-Black racialization much earlier than he had anticipated, driven by Christian's size and perceived masculinity. While Jason initially thought "the talk" would be confined to discussions about driving while Black, his son's physical attributes intensified the perceived threat he posed. This early intervention underscores the significant impact of racialized perceptions on Black boys' safety, particularly as they grow older.

In contrast, Black mothers raising multiracial daughters are acutely aware of the hypersexualized and exoticized portrayals of mixed-race women, often fetishized in the media. These portrayals contribute to the creation of a "Biracial Beauty Stereotype"—a racialized and gendered idealization of mixedness (Johnson 2024; Sims 2012). Multiracial individuals are used as indicators of the country's post-racial future and a sign of improving race relations, while simultaneously being fetishized and exoticized for their mixed-race background (Chang 2016; Curington 2020; Jones and Rogers 2022; Newman 2019; Sims 2012; Strmic-Pawl 2014; Waring 2013; Waring and Bordoloi 2019). Jennifer Patrice Sims (2012: 64) 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". As such, individuals of mixed-race backgrounds may internalize and embrace this stereotype of inherent beauty based on their racial makeup (Chang 2016; Sims 2012; Waring 2013). This superiority complex is often rooted in colorism and proximity to white beauty standards, such as lighter skin tone and straighter hair (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Sims 2012). These depictions, while ostensibly celebratory, contribute to the reinforcement of racial hierarchies—often through the lens of colorism, where proximity

to whiteness, represented by lighter skin tones and straighter hair, becomes a source of social and aesthetic value (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Sims 2012).

This idealization of mixedness, however, does not go unnoticed by Black mothers who see the danger in their daughters internalizing a sense of superiority due to their light skin or mixed-race status. Alicia, for instance, poignantly voices her concern:

> I fear that she might internalize all that and start thinking she's better than other Black girls just cause she's biracial.... I don't want her to think she's superior because her daddy's white, I can't have that.... So I don't really tell her she's pretty... I just try to emphasize the other things, not her appearance.

Alicia's words reveal the conflict Black mothers face in balancing the desire to shield their children from racialized beauty standards, while simultaneously fostering a sense of self-worth that is not tethered to physical appearance, but to intellect and inner qualities. This tension speaks to a larger struggle within Black motherhood, where the potential harm of aesthetic validation rooted in colorism and anti-Blackness challenges the construction of a healthy racial identity in biracial children. Scholars such as hooks (1992) and Collins (2004) have long argued that beauty standards in Western societies often align with whiteness, positioning Blackness as "ugly" or inferior. Within this framework, biracial children with lighter skin or Eurocentric features may inadvertently become sites of racialized superiority, complicating the process of nurturing a positive self-concept.

Yet, Alicia's efforts to de-emphasize her daughter's physical beauty in favor of promoting inner qualities such as intelligence and kindness are not without complexity. As the very act of de-emphasizing beauty becomes fraught with tensions, Alicia's attempt to protect her daughter from internalizing the Biracial Beauty Stereotype reflects the challenge of navigating multiple layers of racial identity and the weight of societal expectations. These tensions resonate

with the work of Waring and Bordoloi (2019), who examine the ways in which multiracial children may grapple with societal expectations of beauty and belonging, as well as the impact of their physical appearance on family dynamics and identity formation.

Importantly, Alicia's anxieties around her daughter's internalization of the Biracial Beauty Stereotype first emerged while still in the hospital after giving birth to her first-born, Jalia. In this pivotal moment, Alicia recalls the overwhelming amount of aesthetic praise being heaped upon her daughter by hospital staff and extended family, while Alicia internally processed feelings of grief and disappointment at the lack of initial kinship resemblance, explaining:

> It was hard for me. To look at this little girl and to not see any parts of myself reflected in her. And to be internally struggling and just thinking that's really what everyone was complimenting… There's this thing Black moms do, culturally, where they look at the palms of their babies hands and the bottoms of their feet to see what skin tone they'll grow into. When I looked at her palm, I just saw white. I knew she'd be light but I never considered that she might not look Black at all. It honestly hurt and I wasn't sure how exactly to process it, especially when everywhere we'd go, people would just be like "she's the cutest baby I've ever seen," and she was cute, she is beautiful, but it just always felt like they were praising her looks because she didn't look Black, at least not as a baby

This reflection on racial resemblance introduces a critical emotional tension that Black mothers face when their biracial children's physical appearance is celebrated in ways that reflect colorist and anti-Black logics. This is an experience of grief rooted not only in a severed connection between mother and child, but also in the emotional labor of navigating societal beauty hierarchies that prioritize whiteness. The praise Alicia receives for Jalia's physical beauty becomes entangled with a painful recognition that her daughter's features mark her as different from the Black mother who hoped for visible kinship. As such, these interactions expose the

limitations of beauty standards rooted in whiteness, and the complex emotional processes Black mothers must undergo to protect their children from the harm of colorist praise.

Alicia's reflection on the lack of physical resemblance speaks to a broader and less explored dynamic in the literature on multiracial family dynamics (Samuels 2009; Waring and Bordoloi 2019). These studies tend to center the experiences of biracial adults, often focusing on their own reflections about racial resemblance to white parents and the racialized assumptions of belonging within a multiracial family. However, Alicia's account foregrounds the experiences of Black parents, particularly mothers, whose sense of loss and grief is shaped by the absence of racial resemblance in their biracial children. For these mothers, the emotional labor associated with seeing their children praised for features that do not reflect their Black heritage exposes a rupture in the racial connection between mother and child, one that is laden with complicated feelings of estrangement and displacement.

Alicia's grief over the lack of resemblance highlights how deeply Black mothers are impacted by societal beauty standards, as these standards often function within a racialized hierarchy that devalues Blackness. As noted by scholars like Hill (2002), Black beauty is often constructed through resistance to white standards of beauty, yet for Black mothers of biracial children, this resistance is complicated by their children's physical departure from racial markers associated with Blackness. The severed racial resemblance in Alicia's case leads to cognitive struggles when receiving or responding to praise for her daughter's appearance. She feels torn between embracing her daughter's beauty and recognizing that this praise is imbued with a racial logic that diminishes her own identity.

Thus, Alicia's experience reflects a poignant example of the intersection between Black motherhood, colorism, and the complex dynamics of racial resemblance. It expands on existing scholarship by placing Black mothers at the center of the conversation about multiracial identity, racialized beauty standards, and the emotional labor of raising children in a world that privileges whiteness.

These tensions regarding the aesthetic praise afforded to biracial girls was a prominent challenge experienced by Black mothers in multiracial families. Whereas Alicia engaged in an intentional act of avoidance, opting out of participation in the aesthetic praise of Jalia, other moms made active attempts to disrupt and subvert this affective praise. This delicate negotiation becomes particularly clear when we examine the interaction at Layla Chase's 13th birthday party, where Layla's mother, Sheree, tries to disrupt the aesthetic praise of her daughter's appearance. As Layla's friends compliment her hair, Sheree interjects:

> Y'all are so sweet but look at your hair? I know Layla wishes she had that type of body and just LIFE to her hair

Sheree's intervention underscores the discomfort she feels about her daughter receiving attention based on physical traits that are often associated with proximity to whiteness or a certain racialized beauty standard. However, Sheree's attempted redirection is swiftly challenged by her own mother, Cheryl, who sharply rebukes her from across the yard:

> Now Sheree, why you always gotta take away the girl's compliments? It's her birthday! She can't feel good about herself? You know good and well that you wished you had hair like hers your whole life, so cut it out.

This exchange reveals a deeper layer of intergenerational tension, particularly in how racialized beauty standards are transmitted and contested within families. Cheryl's retort is not just about the current moment but reflects the painful racialized experiences that shaped Sheree's own

identity growing up. Cheryl's words highlight the way Sheree's discomfort stems from a history of colorism and exclusion, where her lighter-skinned sister was repeatedly praised for embodying "exoticized" beauty traits that approximated Eurocentric ideals, while Sheree felt rejected or devalued for her darker complexion. According to Grammy Cheryl, Sheree's attempted intervention has less to do with upending antiBlack aesthetic hierarchies that position mixedness as more desirable or palatable than Blackness, and everything to do with the fact that Sheree grew up desiring the phenotypic features her daughters receive so much praise for in the present.

This interaction also serves as an illustration of affective capital, a concept developed by Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman (2015), which refers to the emotional and social value assigned to individuals based on their perceived ability to fulfill certain roles or display traits associated with racialized beauty. In this case, Sheree's discomfort with the praise directed at her daughter reflects her own history of being denied affective capital due to her skin tone and features. Cheryl's reminder, that Sheree once longed for the same features that now give her daughter social value, reveals how affective capital is intricately tied to the material and emotional consequences of colorism within families and communities. Cheryl, by encouraging Layla to accept compliments, reinforces the value of those features and, perhaps unconsciously, affirms the emotional labor Sheree had to perform in negotiating her own relationship to these same ideals.

Affective capital also helps us understand the way Sheree's intervention is not just an emotional response but a conscious effort to protect her daughters from internalizing colorist notions of beauty that would position them above other Black girls. In refusing to accept praise based on aesthetic traits, Sheree actively contests the racialized logic that links lighter skin and

mixed features to superior desirability. Her refusal to allow the praise to stand is an attempt to interrupt the flow of affective capital that would otherwise reinforce the notion that her daughter's worth lies in her proximity to white beauty standards, a lesson Sheree never wants her daughter to internalize.

However, Cheryl's actions point to a different kind of affective capital, one tied to the trauma and longing of a previous generation. Cheryl, who had likely internalized the racialized beauty standards of her time, encourages her granddaughter to accept the compliments, perhaps because, for her, these physical attributes carry significant social value—a value that Sheree had been denied in her own youth. The generational tension plays out through these differing conceptions of affective capital: where Cheryl sees a chance for Layla to claim and enjoy the praise and emotional validation her features afford, Sheree sees the potential for harmful consequences that might lead her daughter to believe that her worth is inherently tied to these external, racialized judgments.

In one-on-one interviews with Sheree, I learned about her fraught relationship with her sister, Auntie Carol, whose lighter skin and features were frequently celebrated by family members for approximating white beauty standards. This dynamic, which often positioned Sheree as inferior, helps us understand Sheree's discomfort with the aesthetic praise directed at her daughters. The affective capital her sister received was not just social value; it was emotional currency, validating her in ways Sheree felt denied. Thus, Sheree's refusal to let her daughters bask in the same affective capital—based on light skin and Eurocentric beauty ideals—becomes an act of resistance against the emotional and social hierarchies that once marginalized her.

Through this lens, Sheree's interventions are not merely maternal protectiveness; they are an emotional response shaped by generations of racialized trauma and social devaluation. Her actions reflect the intricate dance between generational desires for affective capital, and the ways in which mothers—armed with the painful knowledge of how racialized beauty norms have shaped their lives—strive to protect their daughters from internalizing a hierarchy that would position them as superior at the expense of others, particularly monoracial Black girls.

While Black mothers like Alicia and Sheree highlighted personal experiences navigating severed racial kinship resemblance and confronting colorism during their own adolescence, these mothers also articulated a rationale for withholding or disrupting the aesthetic praise directed toward their biracial daughters. However, other mothers expressed overlapping yet distinguishable justifications. For example, Joelle's rejection of aesthetic praise for her biracial daughter is framed not as a consequence of her own experiences with colorism, but rather through her observations of her 16-year-old Black-white biracial stepdaughter, Jillian. As Joelle explains:

> I've always known about colorism and like how light skin girls are praised by everyone in society, but I didn't fully consider how light skin mixed girls internalize those ideas…I've been witness to Jillian talking about herself as just the hottest thing since sliced bread, is that the saying?...She'll make comments about how the Black girls at school hate on her because all the guys want her and she has all these followers and yada yada. I'm sorry but I just don't want that for Ava. I don't want her to derive value from how she looks and all this attention and start thinking she's all that and a bag of chips, especially compared to Black women. I want her to see herself as a Black woman first and foremost.

While Sheree's actions stem from her own racialized experiences and personal understanding of the psychological toll of colorism, Joelle's actions are largely shaped by the visible consequences of colorism she observes in stepdaughter Jillian. This distinction between lived and observed

experience in colorism offers valuable insight into how Black mothers might navigate the socialization of their biracial children differently, based on their unique familial contexts.

Joelle's rejection of praise for her daughter's appearance reflects an understanding of the ways in which societal colorism constructs value around light skin, often reinforcing harmful racial hierarchies. Scholars such as Hunter (2007) and Gravlee (2009) have explored how light skin privilege operates within both broader society and Black communities, granting lighter-skinned individuals advantages in terms of access to resources, romantic attention, and social acceptance. In Joelle's case, her concern is not just the aesthetic praise Ava might receive, but the potential for Ava to internalize a sense of superiority due to her closer proximity to whiteness. This concern is informed by Joelle's observations of Jillian, whose experiences with colorism and the reinforcement of light-skinned, mixed race beauty led to a sense of entitlement and an inflated self-perception that worked to distance her from monoracial Black women (e.g., Black girls hating on her). Joelle's discomfort with Jillian's self-perception, framed through her mixedness and associated privileges, directly informs her desire to prevent Ava from similarly internalizing those values.

Joelle's narrative also reflects the broader context of family dynamics in multiracial households. As one of two blended multiracial families in the study, Joelle's experiences offer a unique lens through which to examine how biracial children navigate not only the external racialized pressures of colorism and mixed race exceptionalism, but also the tensions within their family structures. Research on multiracial families has highlighted the complexities of racial identity formation, particularly in families where members may hold divergent racial identities (Samuels 2009; Waring and Bordoloi 2019). Joelle's reflections echo the findings of Waring and Bordoloi, who suggest that multiracial children often have to negotiate competing narratives

about race and identity within their families, especially when different racial backgrounds are in tension.

For Joelle, Ava's racial identity formation is critical, and she is determined to help Ava understand her place as a Black woman, first and foremost, regardless of her biracial background. This focus on Black identity is significant in light of historical and contemporary struggles to assert Blackness against the pressures of colorism and whiteness. According to scholars like Collins (2004), Black women's identity and self-worth have often been defined by how they resist societal standards that elevate Eurocentric beauty ideals. By wanting Ava to "see herself as a Black woman first," Joelle is, in part, attempting to protect her daughter from the devaluation of Blackness that is often perpetuated by colorist ideologies. This desire for racial pride and the affirmation of Black identity resonates with critical race theorists who argue that Black identity formation requires both the rejection of white beauty standards and an embrace of one's heritage and history (Brown 2010).

Moreover, Joelle's concerns about her daughter's potential internalization of colorism and beauty standards are grounded in a larger discourse about how the racialized beauty hierarchy operates within multiracial families. Studies on multiracial identity (Root 1995) have discussed the ways biracial individuals may experience conflicting pressures about their phenotypic appearance and identity. In particular, these individuals may struggle with balancing the validation they receive for their lighter skin with the desire to align themselves with Blackness, often resulting in a sense of dissonance or alienation. Joelle's concerns about Ava reflect an effort to prevent her from succumbing to the internalized colorist logic that might undermine her connection to Blackness, even as society might reward her for her proximity to whiteness.

In this sense, Joelle's actions are not merely about rejecting aesthetic praise; they represent a broader protective strategy aimed at fostering a resilient, affirming sense of Black identity in her biracial daughter. Her decision to prioritize Ava's identification as a Black woman can be seen as an effort to guard her from the dangers of colorism—both in how others perceive her and how she might come to perceive herself.

In conclusion, the racial socialization practices observed in these multiracial families highlight the complex dynamics of preparing Black biracial children for the realities of anti-Black bias and racialization. Black parents, particularly mothers, engage in deeply emotional and strategic efforts to both educate, and sometimes shield, their children from the harms of colorism and antiBlack aesthetic hierarchies, while also navigating the difficult task of fostering strong connections to Blackness. These parents grapple with the imposition of controlling images—both the criminalization of Black boys and the fetishization of biracial women—by actively resisting the internalization of these stereotypes. Simultaneously, the generational tensions within families, such as those seen in Sheree's interactions with her daughter and mother, reveal the emotional labor of navigating colorism, affective capital, and the desire to protect children from the internalization of harmful racialized hierarchies. Ultimately, the strategies employed by these families reflect an ongoing negotiation between identity, survival, and the emotional complexities of raising Black biracial children to effectively navigate an antiBlack world. Despite their intentional focus on affirming Blackness, however, these families often find themselves grappling with the complexities of racial identity that involve both recognizing and navigating whiteness.

Crouton whites, Honorary Blacks

Even as families adopted racial socialization strategies centered on affirming Blackness, this did not necessarily mean the complete negation of their child's mixedness or avoidance of discussions about whiteness. In fact, messages about mixedness in these families were often framed as an attempt to reckon with the child's proximity to whiteness and the associated privileges. Monica Jacobs' account of how she encourages her children to racially identify illustrates this idea clearly:

> I tell them they are Black first because Blackness is cultural, it's political, it's survival—it's what I want them to feel proud to be a part of. But biracial is more of a recognition; a recognition of privilege... of them saying, 'Yeah, I'm Black, but I've got this proximity to whiteness that means something for how I navigate or how I'm read in the world…'

Monica's distinction between Blackness and biraciality emphasizes the multiplicity of racial identities and how they can be shaped not only by personal experience but also by broader structural hierarchies. She describes Blackness as essential to her children's survival, cultural pride, and political awareness. This resonates with the scholarship of racial socialization, which suggests that Black identity must be nurtured to help children navigate the societal challenges associated with anti-Blackness (Hughes et al. 2006). At the same time, biraciality is framed not simply as a racial identity but as a recognition of privilege—acknowledging how proximity to whiteness influences one's social positioning and perception in society. This duality suggests that racial identity, in its most personal form, is inevitably shaped by social power dynamics and that multiracial identities are necessarily entwined with racial privilege.

Waring's concept of "white privilege by proxy" further illuminates this point. According to Waring (2023; 2025), multiracial individuals with white caregivers often gain access to a subtle, hard-to-detect form of privilege. Here, Monica's framing of Blackness as central to her

children's identity while also recognizing the privileges that come with their biracial status speaks to how individuals with mixed racial identities must navigate not only personal and familial experiences of race but also structural inequalities.

In contrast to Blackness, whiteness is described as largely devoid of cultural content, viewed instead as a marker of privilege. This aligns with how whiteness has been theorized in critical race theory as a socio-political construct: an identity that operates primarily to maintain systemic racial inequalities (Dyer 1997). The framing of whiteness as an inherent privilege—often unnoticed or unacknowledged unless it is explicitly linked to power—is mirrored in the experiences of white parents in interracial families. Seth's reflections on his approach to raising biracial children demonstrate this discomfort with engaging whiteness in meaningful ways:

> I can honestly say I have never had a desire to promote any type of pride in whiteness for my kids... What does white pride even mean?

Seth's indifference toward fostering pride in whiteness is intertwined with his family's distancing of him from whiteness. He is often described by his family as not fully white. For example, comments like "Our dad isn't white, white" or "He might as well be Black at this point" illustrate how his racial ambiguity and immersion in Black culture complicate his relationship to whiteness. This distancing is not just a familial dynamic; it is a cultural phenomenon. Seth's immersion in predominantly Black communities and schools has shaped his identity in ways that make him feel disconnected from the racial privileges typically associated with whiteness.

One particularly revealing moment occurred during a high school graduation ceremony, where Seth, acting as principal, referenced Black cultural icons like Michael Jordan and Tupac, signaling his engagement with iconic Black figures. Later, his wife Sheree attempted to initiate the "electric slide," a staple of Black social events, and her mother teasingly remarked, "Since

when do you electric slide, Sheree—Seth probably taught you, huh? We all know he's really the Black one out of you two…"

This comment underscores how Seth's connection to Black culture blurs racial boundaries within his family, creating an environment where his whiteness feels secondary or even irrelevant. Yet, this distancing from whiteness remains complex. As evidenced in Seth's case, white identity is still present, albeit indirectly, and continues to shape his interactions and his role in the racial socialization of his children. His cultural affinity for Blackness does not absolve him of his embeddedness in white structures of privilege. This paradox speaks to the ways in which whiteness can be downplayed or resisted in everyday familial dynamics but still underpins power relations that impact the lives of biracial children.

In a similar vein, Cam Williams' metaphorical framing of his wife Amanda as an "honorary Black" illustrates this dynamic within multiracial families. When discussing co-parenting dynamics, Cam remarked:

> It's funny, 'cause I don't think anyone in my family even sees Amanda as white. We all joke that she's an honorary Black—she basically is Black, besides how she looks, of course…

This playful but insightful comment reflects a tendency within multiracial families to downplay the significance of whiteness by attributing honorary Blackness to the white parent. Such metaphors—whether calling a white parent "honorary Black" or "crouton white" (as Nate would later put it)—reflect an attempt to diminish the racialized significance of whiteness. This dynamic appears to function as a coping mechanism within multiracial families, distancing whiteness while still maintaining its structural privileges. However, this metaphorical reframing does not negate the racial and social advantages associated with whiteness. Rather, it reveals the

complexities of negotiating race within multiracial families, where cultural immersion can offer a means of bridging racial divides while still maintaining access to racial privilege.

Sixteen-year-old Nate's description of Amanda reinforces this sentiment, claiming:

> I've always said my mom is not your average whiiite [emphasis added]. She's not no Karen. It's like she's not a cracka, but a crouton. Yeah. She's not like the Saltine kinda white, she's more like crouton white, she's got some flavor, got some seasoning.

Throughout our interactions it was clear that both Cam and Nate attributed this distancing of their white spouse/mother Amanda from whiteness to her familiarity with Black music and media, as well as her perceived comfort in predominantly Black spaces. These metaphorical distinctions—calling a white parent "honorary Black" or a "crouton"—are part of a broader tendency to downplay the cultural and structural significance of whiteness in the context of their multiracial family dynamics. Still, Nate's description of his white mother Amanda illustrates a more nuanced, if playful, way that mixed-race children grapple with racial identity. Nate's use of the term "crouton white" captures his effort to emphasize his mother's affinity with Black culture—yet, the metaphor still centers on her whiteness as a baseline that requires alteration to be understood as palatable or even "flavored" by Blackness. This metaphor encapsulates the tension in multiracial families between embracing cultural affinity with Blackness and the inherent social privilege of whiteness.

This rhetorical distancing from whiteness also highlights the structural invisibility of whiteness in multiracial family dynamics. As much as the family may attempt to "honor" the white parent's connection to Black culture, this does not fully acknowledge the deeper social realities of racialization that shape the experiences of multiracial families. In this sense, while the white parent's immersion in Black culture is recognized and celebrated, the enduring structural

realities of whiteness are often downplayed or sidelined in favor of more palatable, metaphorical representations of racial belonging.

As we transition to Sheree Chase's reflections on the racial socialization of her children, we see how the invisibility of whiteness in these familial dynamics paradoxically reasserts itself in subtle yet significant ways. Reflecting on whether co-parenting would be different if she were married to a Black partner rather than her white partner, Seth, Sheree shared a poignant insight:

> Yes, I think it would be different. Because I'd have a partner who would understand and could also contribute with their perspective. With Seth, it's not that he's deficient, but he can't know what he doesn't know. Like I'm a girl, I don't know shit about peeing standing up, that doesn't mean that I'm not a good mom. It just means that's an experience that I have absolutely no point of reference on right? He's observed, but at the end of the day, it's not a personal experience. Nobody's ever called him 'nigger. And it's hard and I don't think anybody talks about this, as you know, as a member of an interracial relationship, that you are responsible for that piece of their upbringing and that your partner, as much as they want to contribute, that there are parts of it that they cannot contribute to, because they don't have any point of reference.

Sheree's reflection reveals a deep and often unspoken tension in interracial partnerships, especially for Black mothers raising biracial children. While Seth's observation of anti-Black racism is certainly valuable, Sheree underscores that his ability to empathize with and understand the emotional and psychological toll of these experiences is fundamentally limited by his lack of direct experience with racialized violence. This inability to fully grasp the depth of Black racial consciousness—the way racism and microaggressions accumulate over time and shape one's worldview—is a core issue Sheree grapples with. She likens it to her own inability to understand the experience of a male child, using a metaphor about not knowing what it's like to "pee standing up." This analogy frames racial experiences as deeply personal, lived realities that cannot be simply observed or intellectualized. For Sheree, this means that she bears the weight of imparting a Black racial consciousness to her children largely on her own. Sheree goes on to say:

> … if you have somebody who, who has had that experience, then you're both, you have that extra reservoir of understanding and empathy and a strategy and I don't have that. And that's a burden. I don't think I've described it as that before, but it is a burden and it's a heavy, HEAVY one, one I didn't fully anticipate…..

In this powerful admission, Sheree frames the labor of racial socialization as an emotional burden that is inescapable for Black parents in multiracial families. The idea that this labor is not only unanticipated but also heavy speaks to the broader emotional toll it takes on Black parents. This is especially true for mothers like Sheree, who feel the weight of preparing their children for the realities of racial discrimination in a world where whiteness continues to function as the dominant racial structure. Sheree's "burden" is not simply about educating her children about race; it is about the emotional and psychological work required to impart a survival mechanism—something no white parent can directly provide, no matter how observant or well-meaning they may be.

This "burden," as Sheree describes it, is a critical element that emerged for many Black parents in this study. It profoundly influenced not only their interactions with their children, especially as they grew into adolescence, but also their mental health and co-parenting dynamics. The structural invisibility of whiteness means that while white parents may be supportive in many ways, they remain distant from the emotional labor required to navigate the complexities of racialization. As Sheree and other Black parents expressed, this labor is often left to the Black parent, creating a significant and often unspoken power dynamic in the family.

This imbalance in racial socialization labor is not unique to Sheree's experience; it was observed across the study. It reveals a broader pattern of co-parenting dynamics within multiracial families, where Black parents often take on the responsibility of preparing their children for the racial realities of the world. white parents, though well-meaning, may adopt a

"hands-off" approach, either by deferring to their Black partner or avoiding racial conversations altogether, recognizing their lack of personal experience. This dynamic points to an unequal distribution of racial socialization labor within multiracial families—a pattern that subtly reinforces the structural invisibility of whiteness.

For example, the Lindsay family's casual dinner conversation, during which family members eagerly looked to Alicia for quick responses to Black-related questions, exemplifies this subtle yet telling divide. Alicia's joking remark, "I always get the Black questions," underscores the way racial expertise is often unintentionally delegated to the Black parent in multiracial families, while whiteness remains largely unexamined. This dynamic may not be overt, but it reveals how the role of the Black parent is disproportionately laden with the responsibility of imparting racial consciousness.

Similarly, in the Coleman family, Kyle Coleman's reflection on his co-parenting dynamic with Joelle demonstrates a more direct approach to recognizing these limitations:

> I always defer to Joelle when the kids have some issue with race pop up so as to not overstep or pretend to 'speak on an experience [I] have never had.

Kyle's deliberate deferral illustrates an awareness of the racialized dynamics at play in multiracial families. While Kyle acknowledges the importance of deferring to Joelle's lived experience, his statement also highlights the tension inherent in these families: the white parent recognizes that, despite the desire to be involved and supportive, there are fundamental aspects of racial socialization that remain outside their purview. This speaks to the structural limitations of whiteness, which, as a privileged position, is often shielded from the emotional and psychological labor associated with understanding racial oppression.

Whether through the joking interactions or the intentional avoidance of discussions about race, the interplay between white parents' perceived neutrality and the emotional work of Black parents is striking. The very fact that these dynamics are often not discussed directly adds another layer of complexity to understanding the ways in which whiteness functions within multiracial families—not as an overt barrier, but as an implicit force that subtly governs how racial socialization occurs and who bears the emotional labor. The subtleties of this unequal distribution of racial socialization labor further emerge in more direct examples, such as the experiences shared by Miranda Logan, white mother of biracial only child Cody.

Miranda acknowledges that Cody tends to turn to her Black father, Julian, when addressing race-related issues, while she herself manages more non-racial matters like interpersonal and romantic relationships. This division of labor aligns with broader patterns in multiracial families where Black parents often assume the role of primary racial authority (Guzmán and Cordero 2020). white parents, even when well-meaning, may defer to their Black partners for matters of racial identity, inadvertently leaving them to shoulder the emotional labor involved.

Miranda's self-awareness of her limitations in discussing race underscores this imbalance. She admits that while she feels comfortable discussing negative racialized experiences with Cody, she often leans on Julian to ensure she does not make mistakes rooted in her white privilege:

> I have a reasonably high comfort [talking with Cody about negative racial experiences], but I also lean on Julian to sort of check me and make sure that I'm not, I'm not assuming or making some kind of misstep, because I'm not seeing it, how she's seeing it, or how he might see it.

In this dynamic, Miranda's reliance on Julian to "check" her perspective places the burden of racial education squarely on his shoulders. This resonates with what some scholars refer to as "emotional outsourcing" (Kaufman 2018), where white parents, despite recognizing their privilege, delegate the responsibility of navigating race to their Black partners. As a result, Black parents often shoulder both the intellectual and emotional labor required to educate their children about racism, all while also managing their own racialized experiences. This imbalance highlights the systemic nature of racial inequality, where the emotional labor of racial socialization is disproportionately placed on the shoulders of Black parents.

Adding another layer to this dynamic, Miranda's admission that her initial instinct is often to question Cody's racialized experiences, an inclination rooted in white skepticism and the minimization of racism. She notes:

> I'm probably the parent whose first inclination is like, did that happen the way you thought it happened? And I've learned to not say that, because that does not go over well. So I think Julian has taught me to be more affirming that, like, yep, what you thought happened happened. It wasn't just a coincidence.

While this acknowledgment represents a significant step toward self-awareness, it also illustrates how deeply ingrained patterns of white privilege and skepticism can shape a white parent's approach to racial socialization. white parents, socialized to minimize or overlook racism, often find it difficult to fully validate their children's experiences of racial discrimination (Sue et al. 2007). Miranda's process of learning to be more affirming in her response to Cody's experiences reflects one mechanism through which white parents of biracial children gain what Twine (2004) refers to as "racial literacy," highlighting how the acquisition of racial literacy is far from a passive process wherein white parents develop an increased racial consciousness simply by virtue of their membership in interracial families. Instead, Miranda demonstrates how racial

literacy is extracted out of the racial socialization labor of Black partners. This dynamic reinforces the emotional burden placed on the Black partner to continually validate the child's experiences and guide their white partner through the process of accumulating racial literacy.

Furthermore, Miranda acknowledges that raising Cody as a single white mother would have been "a very different story," suggesting that without Julian's support, Cody would likely feel "less supported." This framing subtly reinforces the idea that white parents, particularly mothers, are ill-equipped to raise children of color without the involvement of Black parents. It places even more pressure on the Black partner to be the primary authority on racial identity, further perpetuating the unequal distribution of emotional labor in multiracial families.

In sum, the stories of multiracial families presented here illuminate the complexities of navigating race within families where Blackness and whiteness coexist. While parents may strive to affirm Blackness and distance themselves from whiteness, structural inequalities remain deeply embedded in the racial socialization process, creating an unequal distribution of labor and emotional responsibility that disproportionately falls on Black parents. These patterns of racial socialization reflect not only the interpersonal dynamics of multiracial families but also the broader social structures that shape racial identities and experiences in contemporary society.

Concluding Remarks

The findings from this chapter underscore the intricate and multifaceted nature of racial socialization within Black multiracial families, particularly those attempting to cultivate an embrace of Blackness. Parents, especially Black mothers, engage in a complex balancing act as they strive to affirm their children's Blackness while also ensuring they do not reproduce the antiBlack, colorist biases that privilege them. These efforts, which involve both explicit and

implicit forms of socialization, aim to nurture a sense of pride in Blackness, while simultaneously confronting the challenges posed by internal and external pressures. From fostering connections to Black cultural spaces to resisting harmful racialized stereotypes, these families work tirelessly to counteract the limiting effects of controlling images and to equip their children with the emotional resilience to navigate an anti-Black world.

However, these practices also reveal tensions inherent in the racial socialization process, particularly when negotiating the intersection of Black and white familial influences. Multiracial families must contend with the complexities of both Blackness and whiteness, negotiating the emotional labor and generational tensions that arise from these dynamics. Black parents, often bearing the brunt of the responsibility, must not only foster Black identities but also contend with the structural inequalities embedded within the racial socialization process, which disproportionately places the burden on them. This tension reflects broader societal patterns, where racial identity formation is influenced by both family dynamics and external societal structures, ultimately shaping how children experience race and identity.

The chapter also highlights the impact of gendered racial stereotypes on identity development, particularly in relation to Black masculinity and the fetishization of biracial women. These gendered expectations further complicate the emotional labor of raising biracial children, as parents must navigate the intersectionality of race and gender in a way that ensures their children are equipped to resist and confront societal biases. Ultimately, this chapter offers a deeper understanding of the complexities multiracial families face in cultivating Black identities while managing the emotional, cultural, and societal forces that shape their children's racial experiences.

Chapter 5: Internalizing Black First, Biracial Second

Introduction

Building on the insights explored in Chapter 4, this chapter delves deeper into how racial socialization messages are internalized by Black multiracial children and subsequently shape their identities and lived experiences. While Chapter 4 focused on how Black parents prioritize cultivating Black racial pride in their multiracial children, this chapter shifts focus to examine how those messages influence children's attachment to Blackness, their perceptions of mixedness, and their navigation of racialized spaces.

The racial socialization processes discussed in Chapter 4 emphasize the importance of fostering Black racial pride. Yet, this chapter extends the conversation by exploring how these socialization practices play a critical role in the formation of Black multiracial children's racial identities. While much of the multiracial scholarship has traditionally focused on the challenges these children face—such as grappling with monoracism, navigating questions of racial authenticity, and struggling with a sense of racialized belonging—this chapter reveals a more nuanced understanding. Specifically, it demonstrates how a strong attachment to Blackness, cultivated through racial socialization, can empower multiracial children to develop heightened racial consciousness and a politicized commitment to the collective Black plight.

Central to this chapter is the children's recognition of anti-Black racialization processes. For many of them, understanding what it means to be Black is not only a matter of how they are perceived in day-to-day interactions but also how they may experience privilege or marginalization based on their mixed-race background. This chapter addresses a gap in existing

literature by highlighting how such attachments to Blackness reshape their perceptions of mixedness, pushing them to reject traditional narratives surrounding the mixed-race experience. Rather than internalizing stereotypical ideas about being biracial or mixed, these children increasingly see their racialized experiences as part of a broader, anti-Black social order that seeks to distance them from Blackness due to their perceived proximity to whiteness.

This rejection of mixedness often manifests in several ways. One significant expression of this rejection is the children's growing investment in Black family formation. For many, a strong desire to align themselves with a Black identity leads to an implicit—and sometimes explicit—rejection of interracial intimacy, as they express a preference for Black partners and families that reflect their commitment to Blackness. In this way, multiracial children socialized to embrace Blackness, challenge societal notions of racial mixing and promote an alternative vision of racial identity that affirms Blackness rather than mixedness.

Interestingly, while this attachment to Blackness can have subversive power at the structural level—such as resisting the "whitening" of families and desiring Black phenotypic legibility in a society that devalues these features—it may also carry unintended consequences at the micro-level. Some children express internal tensions between their pride in Blackness and the societal devaluation of Black physical traits. This internalized struggle can impact self-esteem, particularly for those whose physical appearance challenges stereotypical notions of Blackness, resulting in complicated feelings about their racial identity and belonging.

Thus, this chapter not only deepens our understanding of how multiracial children internalize racial messages but also explores the implications of their growing attachment to Blackness. By rejecting the concept of mixedness as an identity that distances them from

Blackness, these children forge a path that is both politically and personally charged, complicating the broader narrative of multiracial identity and its relationship to race, privilege, and power.

Through the lens of these children's lived experiences, this chapter builds upon the foundation laid in Chapter 4, where the racial socialization practices of Black mothers were central. In particular, it draws attention to how these practices equip multiracial children to navigate a racially complex world while also challenging the limitations placed on their identities by societal norms. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the internalization of Blackness as the primary racial identity offers a powerful, if complicated, framework for understanding multiracial identity formation—one that highlights the intersections of race, privilege, and resistance within the broader context of anti-Blackness.

Black Because, Black in Spite

For the majority, though not all, of the multiracial children in families where parents emphasized embracing Blackness as a core element of racial socialization, Blackness was not merely a peripheral part of their identity but a central, foundational aspect of who they understood themselves to be. This suggests that parental socialization, especially when framed within a commitment to cultivating Black pride, can substantially shape the racialized attachments and identity constructions of multiracial children. Kayleigh's narrative encapsulates this:

> For me, it's never really been a question or a struggle really. Like I'm Black! I've always thought of myself as Black too, both in the ways people see me and the community I feel most connected to.

Kayleigh explicitly identifies herself as Black, squarely positioning herself within a Black collective community. This embrace of Blackness is expressed as a stable and uncontested mode of racial identification. Kayleigh's assertion of her Blackness is rooted in both how she is racialized by others and her own sense of belonging to a Black community. This simple, unambiguous identification challenges the stereotype that multiracial children inevitably struggle with their racial identity. Rather, Kayleigh's story suggests that socialization—especially when it focuses on Black racial pride and collective belonging—can help multiracial children embrace their Blackness as both a personal and collective identity, irrespective of their white parentage.

While Kayleigh connects the saliency of her Black racial identity to the ways in which she is racialized in social interactions and her investment in Black communal spaces, not all multiracial children experienced the same ease in asserting their Black racial identity, as evidenced by Sydney's experiences. Sydney's narrative complicates the idea that Black identity can simply be embraced with ease, even when it is the central focus of one's familial socialization. Sydney, who was raised within an Afro-Caribbean and Black American familial context, reflected on the racialized contests she faced, even within peer groups who questioned her right to claim Blackness:

> Even when the little Dominican girls would bully me for how I looked, I was still always like, I'm Black, I was raised Black, and actually really Black because I was raised with Caribbean and African American influences, which is a whole nother story…But, I've always identified as Black, like I don't lay any claim to whiteness, except for my complexion for the most part. And because I was never raised white in any form.

Sydney's narrative underscores a critical point in the socialization process: while she was socialized to embrace Blackness, her racial identity was still challenged by the outside world. Specifically, Sydney detailed several instances throughout her upbringing in which her perceived

racial ambiguity elicited unwanted challenges to her attachments to Blackness. In the case above, Sydney recalled experiences in elementary school where she was bullied for "pretending she was Black" by a popular group of Dominican girls.

In contrast to Kayleigh, the centrality of Blackness for Sydney's racial identity assertion persists even despite being regularly contested across her racialized interactions, demonstrating its overall saliency. For Sydney, to identify as Black is to be raised and socialized as such, regardless of phenotype or complexion. Interestingly, Sydney implies that she is more Black or at least can more authentically lay claim to Blackness due to the various Black diasporic influences she was exposed to throughout her upbringing. Important to note about Sydney is that she is the first born in one of the only two blended families in the study. Throughout her early adolescence, Sydney was raised by her white mother and Jamaican paternal grandmother alongside her younger brother Warren, until both were adopted by their Black American step-father at the age of 10. In asserting her Black racial identity, Sydney relies on both of these Black influences to further underscore why Blackness should be made central to her understanding of self and identity. Moreover, Sydney's disavowal of whiteness, despite her lighter complexion, demonstrates the power of familial and cultural socialization but also reveals how processes of racialization can impede multiracial deployments of Black racial identity.

Sydney's reflection effectively disrupts assumptions that racial identity is a straightforward process and instead demonstrates the relational, contingent nature of identity (Omi and Winant 2015). Her assertion that she is more authentically Black due to the diversity of Black diasporic influences prominent throughout her upbringing speaks to the complex ways in which identity is negotiated and redefined in response to both internal family influences and

external social expectations. This becomes even clearer in her experiences abroad, where her Black identity was contested in both the UK and Morocco. She shares:

> It's like wherever I go, people refuse to accept my Blackness. When I was in London, I was Arab. And like even though we can make strong connections between Blackness and the Arab world, I was just always like No, I'm Black. Same thing when we moved to Morocco, there I was Moroccan, unless I wore braids, then I was sub-Saharan. I mean Sub-Saharan is essentially the same as Black but I shouldn't have to wear my hair different just for my Blackness to be understood, but that's often the case…

Sydney's experience of Blackness being contested and contextual—both in the U.S. and abroad in the UK and Morocco—further underscores the difficult negotiation of one's embrace of Blackness with their perceived racial ambiguity in racialized interactions. Her frustration with being racially misidentified in both the UK and Morocco speaks to a broader theoretical issue raised by scholars such as Hall (1996), who argue that Blackness is not fixed but varies depending on the socio-historical context. This fluidity aligns with the concept of "racial liminality" (Goffman 1963), where individuals with multiracial identities experience ongoing negotiation of their racial categories based on external perceptions.

By contrast, Sydney's brother, Warren, did not experience such contestation and instead embraced his Blackness without question. Warren's racial identity was shaped by how others saw him, influenced heavily by his physical attributes. He recalls:

> I mean I'm 6'8 with an afro, do I really have a choice!? There's never been a space I've entered where I wasn't seen as Black. And I mean I don't see that as a negative, so like why would I say anything different? It's definitely more difficult for my sisters, I think, cause it's just different for girls. But like if you're a Black boy, you're a Black boy and my parents were always clear on that.

Warren's experience reinforces how racialized physical traits (height and afro-textured hair) can shape one's identity without necessitating any internal debate or contestation. His unambiguous

Black racial identity exemplifies what we might call "racial socialization through visibility" (Ferguson 2000). Unlike Sydney, who contended with both external and internal challenges to her Blackness, Warren's embodiment of Blackness became a defining and unproblematic element of his identity. However, Warren does acknowledge the gendered dimension of racialization, recognizing that his sisters' experiences as Black girls are often different from his own. This highlights the complex intersection of race, gender, and phenotype in shaping racial identity, as explored in scholarship on multiracial families and gendered racialization. This echoes empirical scholarship which details gendered divisions in the multiracial experience. Warren's assertion that his parents always made clear his embeddedness within Blackness reflects a consistent pattern in families that engage deeply with racial identity formation—Blackness was not something to question but something to embrace.

Jaylen's narrative echoes Warren's sense of ease but is more explicitly connected to the messages of Black pride imparted by his mother. Jaylen's recollection highlights the importance of parental influence in constructing racial identity and multiracial attachments to Blackness:

> My mom was also the person that really instilled in me that like, I am a Black, I am a Black man and that I should be proud of that and my Blackness…. I grew up, with her voice always in my head, reminding me that I am a Black man first and foremost…

Jaylen's reflection speaks to the critical role that Black mothers (or Black maternal figures) play in not only affirming Black identity but also in fostering racial pride in multiracial children. Jaylen's assertion that he is "a Black man first and foremost" mirrors the profound influence of Black maternal socialization practices that emphasize racial pride and collective belonging. This observation resonates with the theoretical work of Patricia Hill Collins (2000), who emphasizes the role of Black women in transmitting cultural and racial knowledge to multiracial children, often in defiance of the dominant white gaze. In this sense, Black mothers serve as agents of

resistance, actively counteracting societal messages of racial inferiority and teaching their biracial children to assert their Black identity proudly.

Warren's and Jaylen's stories also resonate with the broader significance of Black masculine identity in multiracial families. For both, racial socialization focused on Black pride is directly linked to their understanding of masculinity. Their identities were framed not only through their racial experiences but also through how Blackness and masculinity intersected in their lives. This aligns with the scholarship on Black masculinity (e.g., hooks 2004), which contends that Black men often experience a unique racialization that is tightly connected to public perceptions of their physicality, behavior, and social roles.

Like Jaylen, many of the biracial children in my study anchored their racial identities firmly in Blackness, using it as both a source of pride and as a foundation for their sense of collective belonging. For 16-year-old Cody, this sense of Black pride was woven through the very fabric of her family's history—rooted in the five generations of Black women who shaped her life. I'll never forget the afternoon I spent at Cody's great-grandmother's home in rural Virginia. It was Easter, and the house was alive with the buzz of preparations for the annual family feast. As we gathered, I could feel the deep currents of tradition and love that flowed between the generations, each woman contributing her own touch to what would soon become one of the most memorable meals I had ever had the privilege of sharing.

On the couch beside me, Cody spoke quietly, her voice steady with the confidence of someone who had been raised amidst strength and resilience. In the kitchen, her great-grandmother, 92-year-old Gigi, her 71-year-old Meemaw, and her aunts—who spanned their 40s and 50s—worked together like a well-oiled machine, ensuring that every dish was just right. The

smell of collard greens, fried chicken, and cornbread filled the air, mingling with the sound of the women's voices, full of laughter, stories, and wisdom passed down through decades.

It was in the midst of this generational ritual that Cody's 13-year-old, monoracial Black cousin approached me, full of curiosity. After a few questions about who I was and why I was there, she asked, almost out of nowhere, "What kind of mixed person do you consider yourself to be?" The question caught me off guard. I hesitated, unsure of where it was coming from, and probed further. "What do you mean? What makes you think I'm mixed?" I asked gently. Her response became clear after a few moments: it was not about my specific racial identity but rather a deeper question—was I, like her, proud of my Blackness, or was there some shame hidden underneath? Cody's cousin, like so many others in their tight-knit community, was not simply asking about racial categories; she was asking if I claimed my Blackness with the same unapologetic pride that she, and Cody, did.

Before I could offer an answer, Cody herself turned to respond with a kind of knowing confidence that only comes from being deeply embedded in a legacy of Blackness:

> Oh, I'm very proudly Black, that's no question... How could I not be? Look at who I'm surrounded by, who helped raise me! We're talking five generations of Black women in the kitchen as we speak. My mom may be white, but she always made sure I had strong relationships with the Black women in my family. I mean, sh*t, she even picked a Black woman to be my godmother.

Cody's words rang with conviction, layered with the history of the women who had nurtured her into the person she was becoming. Her Black identity was not just something she carried—it was alive, pulsing through every interaction she had with the women around her, from the oldest to the youngest, all shaping her understanding of herself in ways that transcended mere genetics or outward appearances. In that moment, it was clear that Cody's connection to Blackness was not

just a reflection of her ancestry, but a living, breathing force—embodied in the kitchen where the women of her family passed down more than recipes; they passed down their strength, their resilience, and a profound sense of pride that would continue to shape her own identity for years to come.

This interaction with Cody underscores the importance of the multigenerational transmission of Black cultural pride within families. Cody's narrative also aligns with Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) concept of "Black womanhood as a site of resistance," as the influence of Black women in Cody's life serves as both an anchor and a form of resistance to the dominant racial narratives that may otherwise marginalize her. Importantly, Cody's mother's efforts to ensure strong relationships with Black women, despite her own whiteness, reflect a strategy to provide her daughter with the racial capital often deemed necessary for navigating a racially stratified society. Cody's connection to her heritage is illustrative of how multiracial children with white mothers often rely on Black family members to provide cultural grounding, further reproducing the unequal distribution of racial socialization labor such that reliance falls on the labor of not only Black parents, but also Black extended family members and mentors.

These fostered relationships with Black women very clearly helped cultivate a strong sense of Black racial pride for Cody and appeared to be an attempt on behalf of her white mother to remedy what she perceived as a deficit of her whiteness in the socialization of her multiracial daughter. This practice is somewhat unsurprising when one recalls our discussion of Miranda in the previous chapter. Although her attempts to cultivate an embrace of Blackness for her daughter appear successful in the ways Cody racially identifies and connects to Blackness, Miranda's consistent reliance on Black family members and friends to do this socialization work may implicitly reproduce inequality in the family.

However, as seen in other cases within the study, not all multiracial children who were socialized to embrace Blackness internalized these messages in the same way. Even siblings within the same family often developed different racial identities, as evidenced by discrepancies in how racial messages were received and acted upon. This variation points to the complexities of identity formation and the ways in which even well-intentioned socialization practices can yield divergent outcomes. The case of Cody's family highlights this tension, where the mother's reliance on Black family members to "remedy" her own perceived racial deficit might inadvertently reproduce certain forms of inequality, particularly in terms of power dynamics within families.

In conclusion, these diverse experiences—Kayleigh's clear assertion of Blackness, Sydney's contested identity, Warren's unambiguous Blackness, and Cody's multigenerational connection to Black pride—underscore the complex and relational nature of racial identity formation in multiracial families. The case of Cody, in particular, highlights the ways in which parental strategies for cultivating racial pride can have unintended consequences, particularly when families rely on Black family members and community figures to do much of the socialization work. These narratives collectively illustrate that racial identity is not simply a matter of socialization or genetics, but a dynamic process shaped by family, community, and the external world's perceptions and expectations.

Tragedy Averted, Mixedness Rejected

The question posed by Cody's cousin—whether I felt pride or shame in my Black racial identity—resonates deeply as a broader concern shared by many multiracial individuals socialized to embrace Blackness. Specifically, those who prioritize Blackness as central to their

identity often find themselves distancing from mainstream portrayals of mixed-race identities. This distancing is not only a personal assertion of Blackness but also a critique of the racialized narratives that dominate discussions around mixedness. As I will demonstrate, this rejection of "mixedness" is complex, rooted in both a rejection of victimhood and a recalibration of identity that foregrounds Blackness over the often-sentimentalized idea of monoracism.

Jeremiah Chase's reflection on his identity offers a pointed example of this pushback, explaining:

> ...I'll always be Black first. I'm not like all these mixed people you see on TikTok who are like "oh woe is me, I don't belong anywhere, nobody gets me blah blah blah." that's all just attention seeking bullshit in my opinion. Like no! I'm Black, always been Black, I got Black friends, Black family, I mean shit, my dad not even "white white" ya know?

Jeremiah's declaration, "I'll always be Black first," is a direct positioning of Blackness as central to his identity, one that supersedes any complexity or ambiguity introduced by his mixed-race background. His statement reflects a sense of solidarity with Blackness, asserting it as the anchor of his racial identity. In declaring Blackness as "first," he makes an overt claim of belonging to a racial community whose history and culture he views as essential to his identity. This positioning signals a resistance to the popular, often media-driven narrative of mixed-race people as caught between two worlds. As Jeremiah critiques the portrayal of mixed-race individuals, particularly those who express a sense of displacement or isolation due to their identity, he dismisses such experiences as "attention seeking bullshit," suggesting that such portrayals are exaggerated or performative.

Jeremiah's critique can be understood as part of a broader resistance to the victimhood often associated with mixed-race identity in mainstream discourses. Mixed-race individuals are frequently depicted in academic and popular media as experiencing a form of liminality, an inability to fully belong to any one group. Yet, Jeremiah rejects this narrative, instead positioning

himself as firmly and unambiguously Black. This rejection not only involves a dismissal of victimhood but also a distancing from a broader cultural narrative of mixedness. By dismissing his white father's racial identity as not "white white," Jeremiah minimizes the significance of his father's whiteness in shaping his own racial experience, choosing instead to foreground his Black familial connections. This notion of Blackness as solidified and unambiguous echoes a desire to affirm a fixed and cohesive racial identity in the face of a more complex, fragmented racial landscape.

The critique of the "tragic mulatto" trope — a historical narrative that positions mixed-race individuals as emotionally and socially conflicted — was echoed by other multiracial children in this study. Kayleigh provides a compelling example:

> It’s just like, how long are we gonna let the tragic mulatto exist? Like, you don’t struggle, not really. There are light skin Black people with 2 Black parents who people assume are mixed and you don’t hear them complaining about their "identity struggles"…

Kayleigh’s critique is an insightful interrogation of the continued dominance of racialized tropes, particularly the tragic mulatto stereotype that paints mixed-race individuals as tragically caught between two worlds. She challenges this by demonstrating a keen awareness of the historical origins of this trope in colonial and racialized discourses. By rejecting the premise that mixed-race identity struggles are inherently unique or distinct from broader anti-Black racialization, Kayleigh reframes the conversation. Mixed-race identity struggles, in her view, are inextricably linked to the more systemic processes of racial marginalization and misracialization that affect Black communities. Rather than seeing mixedness as a separate, isolated issue, Kayleigh emphasizes the interconnections between mixed-race identity and Blackness, suggesting that the

real struggle lies not in ambiguous racial identity but in the continued oppression of Black people.

After attending dinner with the Williams family, during which a commercial for Netflix's *Ginny and Georgia* aired, 16-year-old Nate echoed similar frustrations with the recent surge of mixed-race narratives in popular media:

> It might just be me, but it feels like mixed people have taken over as of late. Like every commercial, new movie, and show is based on the "trauma" of navigating life mixed and I can't stand it. Like I'm Black, I was raised to be proud of that, I never felt a "struggle" to belong or to identify so maybe y'all should talk to your parents about why they led you astray for real, cause like Black people have real struggles and real like systemic things we're fighting for, more than "oh, nobody understands my experience or identity."

Nate's critique represents a particularly sharp critique of what he perceives as an overrepresentation of mixed-race struggles in contemporary media. He suggests that mainstream portrayals of mixedness — particularly those that focus on trauma, identity crises, and a sense of non-belonging — are misaligned with his own experience of Blackness. Nate's declaration that he has never felt a struggle to belong or identify underscores his firmly grounded identification with Blackness, a racial identity that he suggests has been forged through pride and a deep connection to Black cultural and political life. By pointing to the role of parenting in shaping racial identity, Nate underscores the significance of how one is raised in shaping one's racial consciousness. His remark, "maybe y'all should talk to your parents about why they led you astray," implies that the dislocation some mixed-race individuals feel is not an inevitable aspect of their racial identity but rather a product of how they were socialized, particularly with regard to their relationship to Blackness.

Both Jeremiah's and Nate's critiques of the dominant narratives of mixed-race identity are also notable for how they emphasize a disconnection from the racialized experiences of other

mixed-race people. They critique the individualistic nature of mainstream portrayals of mixedness, which often center on personal identity struggles, by foregrounding collective struggles for racial justice. Nate's concern about the media's focus on individual narratives of mixed-race trauma is linked to a larger critique of how such narratives divert attention away from the pressing, systemic struggles facing Black communities. Through their critiques, both Nate and Jeremiah emphasize a politicized understanding of Blackness that rejects the fragmentation of identity in favor of a unified, collective racial and cultural struggle.

These reflections from Jeremiah, Kayleigh, and Nate point to a broader critique of the popular, individualistic portrayals of mixed-race identity struggles that emphasize a liminal, fractured subjectivity. Their rejection of such representations underscores a desire for narratives that are more aligned with their lived experiences, which center Blackness as an essential and defining feature of their racial identity. The pervasive media representations of mixedness, focusing on trauma and non-belonging, fail to resonate with those who have been socialized to embrace Blackness, creating feelings of disconnection from the very media that seeks to represent them.

The rejection of such portrayals is further reinforced by Jade Chase's strong disavowal of media that depicts mixed-race people:

> Absolutely not! Like why would I watch something like that? I used to love the show Black-ish too but I basically cancelled it once I saw they came out with Mixed-ish cause I just ended up losing respect for the franchise as a whole… Like why was mixed-ish needed?

Jade's comment about rejecting *Mixed-ish* after enjoying *Black-ish* captures a significant shift in how some multiracial individuals respond to portrayals of their identities in media. Her statement, "why was *Mixed-ish* needed?" reflects a deep frustration with how mixed-race identity

is simplified and reduced to a struggle for recognition. Her symbolic act of "canceling" the show represents an active refusal to engage with a narrative she perceives as oversimplifying the complexity of mixed-race identities. This reflects broader feelings among multiracial individuals, especially those socialized to embrace Blackness, that certain representations are not only reductive but, in their focus on struggle, ultimately perpetuate damaging stereotypes about mixed-race experiences.

This critique is not isolated to Jade and instead suggests that others share similar sentiments, which may lead them to disengage from media that presents this type of portrayal. The fact that these reflections come from people who have firsthand experience with mixed-race identity lends weight to their critique. It implies that the dominant portrayals often fail to reflect the ways in which multiracial children may develop strong attachments to Blackness rather than mixedness. Instead, popular media depictions tend to promote a one-dimensional, struggle-oriented narrative that clearly does not resonate with everyone in the multiracial community.

This critique extends to how multiracial identity, particularly mixedness within the context of Blackness, is framed by familial structures. Jaylen and Sadie's conversation about the ways in which they perceive mixed people raised by white versus Black mothers offers a compelling window into the cultural dynamics at play. My conversation with Jaylen, the eldest son of the Chase children and his year-long girlfriend Sadie (who is also Black-white multiracial) about the ways in which they perceive mixed people raised by white versus Black mothers offers a compelling window into the cultural dynamics at play:

> **Jaylen:** I was really surprised when I found out she had a white mom to be honest cause she didn't give me that vibe whatsoever when we first met.
> **Sadie:** *laughing* He always says that and I'm like duh, cause I grew up almost exclusively with Black people besides my mom
> **Jelly**: Wait, back up for me… what sort of vibe would a mixed person with a white mom give off?

Jaylen and Sadie: Oh you can tell! *laughing*
Jaylen: I don't know how to explain it but like me and my siblings always joke that you can just tell a mixed person who was raised by a white mom versus a Black mom just off first impressions
Sadie: I'm not sure I agree that you can tell off first impressions but there are definitely big differences between mixed people who were raised by white vs Black moms just like politically, culturally, what type of music they listen to, their friend groups, those kinda things.
Jaylen: Mixed people with white moms always take up space, like they're almost always more bubbly, like overly friendly to the point where they just take up space. Then you talk to them and being mixed is like this novelty item to them. They tell you they're mixed almost immediately cause they think it makes them soooooo special…
Sadie: So, you thought I took up space when we first met?! Interesting. That's news to me.
Jaylen: No, stop it! You're like the exception to the white mom rule. All my siblings were even surprised that you had a white mom too, you just don't give off the white mom kinda mixed

Here, we see how multiracial children socialized to embrace Blackness, especially those with Black mothers, not only distance themselves from stereotypical narratives about mixedness but also distance themselves from mixed people who they perceive as perpetuating or embodying those narratives. Interestingly, Jaylen and Sadie's discussion reveals the underlying assumption that some multiracial children have about what, or more so who, informs those narratives. In this joint interview, Jaylen and Sadie collectively draw a firm contrast between mixed people raised by white versus Black moms. This comment reveals how Jaylen, socialized to embrace Blackness, sees the presentation of mixed-race identity as filtered through the racialized dynamics of upbringing. He associates mixed-race people raised by white mothers with a particular kind of outward, almost performative racial identity, where their mixedness becomes a novelty. Sadie, however, counters this stereotype by emphasizing the lived reality that cultural and political differences between those raised by white versus Black mothers are shaped by community ties, political awareness, and cultural practices. Her pushback against the overgeneralization reflects a more nuanced understanding of how mixed-race identity is

cultivated not only in the home but also in the wider racial context in which one is socialized. Ultimately, Jaylen's categorizations and Sadie's counterpoints reveal the deeply ingrained biases that shape how multiracial individuals, particularly those raised to center Blackness, view and engage with one another.

What is particularly striking in these reflections is the way in which biracial identity is often understood through the lens of Blackness. Jaylen's initial surprise at Sadie's mixed background, and his tendency to categorize her as an "exception," reveals the strong biases that shape how mixed-race individuals understand each other. There is an almost prescriptive sense of who belongs to Black spaces and who does not, framed by an assumption that Black mothers, by virtue of their racial identity, impart a more authentic Black socialization experience. These assumptions often act as a way to police the boundaries of Blackness, leaving little room for the complexities of mixed-race experiences.

Further elaborating on this divide, several multiracial children raised by Black moms echoed similar sentiments:

> "If I had a white mom, I'd probably get away with a lot more like I'd have way more freedoms but then absolutely no connection to Black folks…" (Cyrah, 15 years old)
>
> I feel like it's kinda well established that mixed people with Black moms are proudly Black whereas ones with white moms are just mixed, whatever that really means. *laughs* (Ant, 15 years old)

These statements reveal how strongly racial identity and parentage shape the way multiracial individuals view themselves and others within the mixed-race community. The assertion that "mixed people with Black moms are proudly Black" speaks to a common belief that Black mothers instill a sense of racial pride and connection that supersedes any mixedness or ambiguity. The idea of mixed people raised by white mothers as merely "mixed" reflects a

devaluation of their racial identity within the Black community, suggesting that Blackness requires an unambiguous commitment to its social, cultural, and political dimensions—one that is ostensibly more easily accessed by those raised by Black mothers.

Ultimately, these reflections illuminate the ways in which racialized assumptions about Blackness and mixedness are constructed and maintained. These assumptions not only shape how mixed-race individuals navigate their identities, but also influence how they relate to one another within multiracial communities. While many multiracial children socialized to embrace Blackness actively distance themselves from stereotypical and often superficial narratives about the mixed experience, the framing of mixedness—through the lens of parental influence—plays a pivotal role in determining who is seen as authentically connected to Blackness. These dynamics demonstrate how internalized notions of race are influenced by familial structures, but also how these same structures shape individuals' understanding of racial identity within broader social contexts, informing how they position themselves in the racial hierarchy.

As much as multiracial children socialized to embrace Blackness resist popular portrayals of the mixed experience, they also actively reject the notion of perpetuating the interracial family dynamics they were raised in. This resistance is not just about distancing themselves from prevailing stereotypes but also about constructing a vision of the future that aligns with their understanding of Blackness. In many instances, this meant envisioning intimate relationships and family structures that reflect their deep investment in Black cultural and political identity. For them, embracing Blackness often manifests in overt displays of this commitment within the intimate sphere.

Take Jade Chase's statement, for instance:

> To be honest, I don’t even find white boys attractive really. When I think about my future, it's me and my Black husband with some Blackity Black kids…

Jade’s focus on a "Blackity Black" future illustrates the strong desire to see her family reflect the idealized vision of Blackness she holds. By specifically choosing to focus on a Black husband and children who clearly embody Blackness, Jade is signaling her rejection of interracial dynamics and her commitment to producing a family that is racially unambiguous. This vision is reflective of a broader cultural and historical understanding of Black identity that resists the further assimilation or whitening of her family, signaling a deeper concern with preserving Black cultural and racial continuity.

Similarly, Sydney McCoy’s comments illustrate a palpable fear of a future in which her children "don’t look Black":

> I think my biggest fear is having kids that don’t look Black. I mean I barely looked Black at first, I know you saw my baby pics. Like I don’t even know if I could marry another biracial person just cause what if our kids turn out looking white? YIKES! Can you imagine?

Sydney’s fear is not just about physical appearance but the potential loss of cultural identity. Her anxiety about her children not "looking Black" reflects concerns about the dilution of Blackness within her family and community. This sentiment can be understood in the context of the broader desire to affirm racial solidarity and collective identity. Sydney’s rejection of marrying another biracial person speaks to a fear of reproducing a family structure that risks weakening the perceived purity or visibility of Blackness. For her, Blackness is not just a personal identity; it is a political and cultural commitment that she fears might be "washed out" through the mixing of her racial lineage.

Moreover, Ant Coleman also reflects a similar belief system:

> I know this sounds bad but like culturally, politically, I can't see myself with anyone who isn't Black. Not that I'm against other races, like I have friends who aren't Black but I don't think I could ever date someone who wasn't racially aligned with myself.

Anthony's statement underscores a deliberate cultural and political positioning. His rejection of dating outside the Black community is not born out of racial animus but rather out of a deep commitment to maintaining solidarity within the Black racial community. This mindset reflects the broader socialization practices observed in Black families, particularly in families that celebrate and prioritize Black respectability (Barnes 2015; Dow 2019). His comments further illustrate a desire to remain connected to Black cultural and political movements, aligning with a vision of a collective Black future that is unambiguously tied to racial identity.

This desire to avoid interracial relationships and raise "Blackity Black" children can be interpreted through the lens of Black parental influences discussed in the previous chapter, particularly the visual celebration of Black families that have achieved a degree of success, such as the Obamas. These families represent a model of "respectable" Blackness, one that emphasizes racial pride, political engagement, and a cohesive family structure that is intentionally Black. The Obama family, as a prominent example, epitomizes the idea of a Black family that succeeds within the framework of American respectability politics, thus reinforcing the importance of Black family unity and racial solidarity.

In fact, many Black mothers, as observed in the previous chapter, encourage their children to date and marry Black individuals to preserve the integrity of the family lineage and to counter the historical legacies of global race mixing, which have often been framed as a form of racial dilution. These mothers, while not explicitly rejecting interracial relationships, subtly impart the importance of choosing Black partners as a means of asserting control over the future of Black identity. This is part of a broader cultural strategy aimed at counteracting the historical

and global dynamics of whitening the family lineage — a concern that has been deeply tied to the legacies of colonialism and slavery, where mixed-race children were often considered a symbol of the "degradation" of Black and white bloodlines.

The connection to global race mixing histories is critical here. Just as the mixing of races during the colonial era and through slavery resulted in complex racial categories, multiracial children socialized to embrace Blackness may view the potential for "whitening" the family line as a form of erasure. As racial boundaries continue to be contested, both locally and globally, these children actively engage in shaping a vision of the future where Blackness is a definitive, visible, and unassailable presence within their family and community. The rejection of interracial dating can thus be seen as an effort to fortify Black identity against the backdrop of a global history that has often viewed mixed-race children as "in-between" or lacking clear racial affiliation.

In this context, the desire for "Blackity Black" children and partners is not merely an expression of personal preference but a political statement. It is a rejection of the narratives of racial fluidity that have been tied to histories of global race mixing. The embrace of a Black-centered future reflects a conscious effort to resist the fluidity of racial identity, which is often seen as a threat to Black cultural and political power.

The observed rejection of mixedness by multiracial individuals socialized to embrace Blackness is not only a personal assertion of identity but a broader critique of dominant racial narratives. Through their distancing from mainstream portrayals of mixed-race identity, these individuals challenge the "tragic mulatto" stereotype, emphasizing instead a unified vision of Blackness that foregrounds racial solidarity and cultural pride. Their desire for "Blackity Black"

children and relationships—free from the potential dilution of Blackness—reflects a deep-seated political commitment to the preservation and continuity of Black cultural, political, and social life. This rejection of interracial relationships is also tied to a broader historical and global context, where the fear of "whitening" the family lineage is connected to legacies of colonialism, slavery, and race mixing. Multiracial individuals like Jade, Sydney, and Anthony, by asserting their firm commitment to Blackness and rejecting the ambiguity of mixed-race identities, challenge the notion of racial fluidity and the victimhood often associated with mixedness. Their resistance is both a personal and collective act, reaffirming their place within Black communities while actively rejecting racial ambiguity and reinforcing a vision of the future where Blackness remains visible, unequivocal, and central to their identities.

AntiBlack Affections, Racialized Aspirations

Although many children socialized to embrace Blackness actively distanced themselves from mixed identity claims, others grappled with the complexities of asserting an exclusively Black identity across racialized interactions. Notably, some of these children who were raised with an emphasis on Black racial pride and collective belonging deployed a distinctly "Black biracial" identity assertion in different contexts. The act of claiming a biracial or mixed identity was not a simple rejection of Blackness, however, but often arose from the need to navigate two distinct, yet overlapping, racialized dynamics: 1) managing racial ambiguity and warding off intrusive racial interrogations, and 2) negotiating perceived privilege and proximity to whiteness within the context of Black spaces.

In the first instance, racialized interrogations often reflected others' discomfort with the perceived racial ambiguity of some biracial children. 15-year-old Jade Chase explained how she regularly faces skepticism when asserting her Black identity. She noted:

> I identify as Black, but then usually people ask if that's all?.. which is annoying cause it really just feels like they ask me that kind of stuff just so they can distance me from Blackness cause like its almost always after they compliment me on something like "oh jade, your hair is so pretty, are you mixed?

Rather than interpreting racialized interrogations into her mixedness as positive racialized experiences, in which her biraciality is both assumed and affirmed, Jade instead processes these experiences as inherently antiBlack. Jade's frustration reflects a critical tension in the racialization of Black biracial children, wherein the questioning of her racial identity is not interpreted as an affirmation of her mixedness, but as an effort to dissociate her from Blackness, often by affectively associating her more positively-evaluated physical features with "whiteness" or "mixedness." Her experiences suggest an internalized notion that Blackness is to be questioned or erased when it does not fit normative expectations. This fits within a broader racial framework where mixedness animates as racial transcendent and is positioned as a "softened" or more palatable version of Blackness (Joseph 2015). These external inquiries are not perceived as neutral curiosity but as microaggressions rooted in anti-Black sentiments that attempt to displace Jade's strong attachment and embrace of Blackness.

Cody Logan, a 17-year-old only child, echoed similar frustrations:

> I don't know, it's just like every time someone asks me if I'm mixed, I get annoyed. My mom always said things are mixed, people are not and I just really feel that way. If I could, I would just say I'm Black but people always ask and what else…? It just always feels like they're trying to make sense of why my Blackness works for them ya know?

Cody's reflections deepen the critique of racialized interrogations by framing them as attempts to redefine Blackness in ways that are more digestible or manageable for others. The recurring

question of "what else?" reveals how the racialized body, particularly the mixed-race body, is often subject to scrutiny in an attempt to fit it into a rigid racial framework that privileges whiteness. Moreover, Cody's reflection on the racial messages communicated by her white mother Miranda that "things are mixed, people are not"—suggests that she has internalized a view that mixedness should not overshadow Blackness, rejecting other racial positionings that do not center Blackness.

Several of the multiracial girls socialized to embrace Blackness shared these sentiments around racial interrogations into one's mixedness equating to antiBlackness. Even so, some felt that asserting an exclusively Black racial identity without acknowledgment of their mixedness might allow antiBlack logics to flourish. In this way, asserting an embrace of Blackness in their racial identity assertions were expressed as disingenuous, and even harmful, without a clear acknowledgement of the racial privileges their mixedness affords them. Celeste, a 17-year-old, expressed this tension when explaining her rationale for shifting from an exclusively Black identity assertion to Black biracial:

> …It's somewhat of a difficult balance ya know? If I say I'm Black, am I appropriating an experience I haven't fully had? Am I ignoring my privilege in that? Or am I proclaiming my investment in the Black community?

Celeste's internal conflict suggests a deeper struggle faced by Black biracial children who feel torn between embracing Blackness and confronting their privileged position within racialized systems of domination. This sense of privilege often leads to a form of racial introspection, where asserting a Black identity without acknowledging the societal advantages afforded by lighter skin and a white parent risks erasing the complexity of their lived experiences, especially with regard to power and privilege.

Sydney McCoy, also 17 years old, expressed a similar sense of responsibility when navigating predominantly Black social spaces:

> Sometimes I get worried about taking up too much space in community with Black folks cause it's like history tells us that I'm the palatable Black right? So, when I'm in Black spaces, I always acknowledge my mixedness, because at the end of the day, having a white parent and being this light with this hair means something in society and it always has, whether I like it or not. So, when I'm moving about in Black spaces I try to not take up space because I know I'm the privileged party..

Sydney's reflection elucidates an internalized tension between her attachments to Blackness and her proximity to whiteness. She understands that Blackness, especially within the context of Black communal spaces, is historically tied to resistance against white supremacy. Sydney recognizes that, despite identifying as Black, her racially ambiguous phenotype and white racial parentage allow her to occupy a privileged position in the existing racial hierarchy. However, this increased consciousness held implications for the ways she navigates belonging in Black communal spaces, always careful not to dominate or take up space reserved for those considered more racially marginalized. Sydney's anxieties seemingly depict an internalization of Jaylen Chase's earlier comments about mixed people raised by white moms always "taking up space" via their centering of mixedness in social spaces. Rather than reflecting any strong attachment to mixedness, however, Sydney's acknowledgment of her mixedness serves as a conscious effort to account for the assumed differences in her racialized experience as a racially ambiguous, lighter skin Black woman.

Cody, in another reflection, deepens this awareness by calling for a more critical engagement with Black biraciality:

> I strongly believe that Black biracials should enter Black spaces fully accounting for their own proximity to whiteness, for their role in Black oppression. I mean I know about Blue vein societies and the politics of passing, it's almost like we're in the community but also

> shouldn’t speak for the community and maybe more so act as allies…maybe we have our own white guilt to reconcile before we can proudly profess our Blackness..

Cody’s reflection connects biracial identity to a deeper political awareness of privilege, oppression, and the ongoing need to disrupt racial hierarchies. Her reference to "Blue vein societies" and the "politics of passing" highlights the historical tensions between multiraciality and Blackness, especially with regard to coalition-building and political mobilization, where lighter-skinned individuals have often been privileged while simultaneously distancing themselves from the full experiences of Blackness (Harris 1993). Cody’s insistence on reckoning with internalized white guilt by proxy underscores the internalization of racialized systems of privilege and her recognition that biracial individuals have unique responsibilities within the context of Black community and struggle.

While some multiracial children felt it would be disingenuous to assert an exclusively Black racial identity due to its potential of diluting their recognition of privilege and proximity to whiteness, others felt they could not assert an exclusively Black racial identity due their perceived racial ambiguity. This tension was mostly observed with children at the younger end of the age spectrum with regard to the overall sample. Even so, Blackness was still made central in their deployment of biracial identity. 13-year-old Layla of the Chase family provides a very pointed example of this dynamic, claiming:

> I just say I’m Black biracial because I know if I just say Black they’ll ask questions cause they’ll be confused about how I look the way I do, and then I’ll get annoyed, but I also refuse for them to not know I’m Black. It honestly sucks because I feel like my siblings don’t really have to struggle with that how I do…sometimes I just wish I looked more Black so I could just say I’m Black and there be no follow up

Importantly, Layla identifies as "Black biracial" primarily in social interactions as a way to shield against unwanted and uncomfortable racialized interactions predicated on questioning her

racial identity in relation to her appearance. Regardless, Layla shared that despite this she "also refuses for people to not know she's Black," as this remains central to how she understands herself and her subjective positioning.

As the youngest of five, Layla proceeds to detail her struggles with this particular racialized navigation, explaining that her siblings do not really have to struggle with this the way she does. Layla's frustration highlights a recurring pattern in the experiences of multiracial children: the desire to be immediately recognized as Black without the need for clarification or explanation. Her longing for greater phenotypic legibility, or the ability to "look more Black," speaks to a broader desire for unambiguous racial recognition and the ease of navigating a world that often demands clear, visible markers of racial identity.

This desire for increased Black racial legibility was also echoed by 13-year-old Miles, who wanted to be more visibly similar to his older brother, Nate, who he felt embodied a more recognizable form of Blackness:

> I always say I'm Black biracial because my dad told me that lets people know I'm Black and white and not some other mixture or like Mexican like they usually think...Nate has always identified as Black cause he looks Black...I just want people to be able to tell we're both Black cause we're brothers ya know? So, once I got to middle school I stopped letting my mom do my hair and stopped getting it cut. Now, I almost always stay with braids so people know I'm Black too, just like Nate.

Here, Miles not only discloses wanting to more closely resemble his brother but he also details the embodied racial practices he engages in to increase racial resemblance and Black phenotypic legibility. Miles' actions demonstrate how multiracial children actively perform their racial identity through appearance. By wearing braids, Miles takes on a visual marker of Blackness to ensure that others recognize him as part of the Black community. This strategy of racial performance shows how children negotiate their identity in ways that align with social

expectations of Blackness, seeking to both embody and be recognized by the racial categories they feel most connected to.

This yearning for greater Black legibility manifested in various ways, especially amongst younger children in the sample. Eleven-year-old Jalia, for instance, subtly hints at this phenotypic yearning when asked to describe what qualities bring her the most confidence and insecurity. She shared:

> I think the fact that I can read so well and so fast for my age, brings me the most confidence for sure. I've read the most books of anyone at my elementary school…I guess I'd say I'm most insecure about my hair. But I know one day it won't be like this cause I'll start looking more and more like mom as I get older

When I asked for clarification as to what she meant by looking more like her mom as she ages, Jalia elaborated:

> Well, you know, girls always grow up to look like their moms. I won't always be this light and my hair won't always be this dull. I honestly can't wait to start looking more like my mommy, you know with more chocolatey skin and like actual curls..

Jalia's comments illustrate a desire for a more legible association to Blackness, though her aspiration to resemble her mother highlights a different dynamic than the one observed with Miles. For Jalia, this longing to more closely resemble her Black mother Alicia represents a desire for increased Black racial and phenotypic recognition, but it also points to the cultural weight placed on certain Black phenotypic traits, such as kinky curly hair and darker skin. On one hand, this desire subverts dominant beauty standards that often marginalize Black features. On the other hand, it reflects an aspiration that is inevitably unattainable for Jalia. This discrepancy could have negative implications for Jalia's development of a positive self-esteem, as she may never be able to embody who she heralds as the epitome of beauty– her mother Alicia.

Although the majority of multiracial children socialized in households aimed at cultivating an embrace of Blackness fell into these two camps with regard to their rationale for asserting a Black biracial identity construction, there were exceptions. In fact, even within the same family children were observed to internalize racial messages differently and not always depict a uniform, collective approach to multiracial identity construction. This exception was observed most with 19-year-old Josiah of the Chase family. As mentioned in the introduction, Josiah identified himself as the "white sheep" of the family in one of initial sibling focus groups. In this particular interaction, I listened closely as each of Josiah's siblings griped about their brother's "wasted Blackness" as each described Josiah as the most phenotypically Black presenting of the family, and yet the only one who "leans into mixedness" and "acts the most white." For his siblings, identifying as Black is not only a choice but more of an option for Josiah given his racialized appearance, which they describe as "passes as just Black, not Black and something else."

Despite Josiah's siblings feeling as though he presents as the most phenotypically Black in the family, they all characterized him as the white boy in the family due to his predominately white friend group, music interests, and romantic history with white women, which Josiah himself links to the predominately white social context of his high school. These characterizations very clearly disturbed and annoyed Josiah as he began airing out his frustrations:

> It's frustrating that everyone in our family is so "Black this, Black that" cause we are BIRACIAL. Me identifying as biracial doesn't mean I'm any less Black than them…just because I have more white friends than them doesn't mean I'm ashamed of being Black. I have white friends because that was the only option at my school.

Even so, Josiah was challenged by his siblings in this focus group as they quickly chimed in saying:

> Just cause we went to quote unquote diverse schools, doesn't mean we were in predominantly Black spaces…My school was mostly Hispanics and even then, Layla was in all Honors and AP courses at her school and they were mostly white. You can go to a diverse school and still not be in a Black space…

You see, for Josiah, identifying as multiracial does not equate to a distancing from or shame in one's Blackness. Josiah's frustration speaks to how internalized racial messages regarding Blackness can shape multiracial identities differently across individuals, even within the same family. His siblings' critique reflects how multiracial identity is often viewed as a luxury or "option," rather than a lived experience, which in turn can lead to the internalization of guilt and disconnection from one's racial community. Josiah's rejection of these racial expectations challenges the rigidity of racial categorization and the ways in which Blackness is often treated as an identity to be defended or performed.

The reflections of Black biracial children featured throughout this section reveal the complexities of navigating racial identity within Black social contexts. The tensions between asserting an exclusively Black identity and acknowledging mixed-race privileges underscore the layered nature of their racialized experiences. Many biracial children grappled with external racialized interrogations that challenged their Blackness and forced them to confront the complex interplay between Black pride and the recognition of privilege tied to their proximity to whiteness. These racialized interactions often elicited frustration, as children felt their identities were being reduced to their physical appearance or interpreted through the lens of anti-Blackness. Moreover, these children demonstrated a keen awareness of the nuanced ways in which their racial identity impacted their place within Black spaces, with some actively acknowledging their mixedness in an effort to avoid taking up space that could be more appropriately occupied by those with a more traditionally Black experience.

Theoretical implications of these findings challenge conventional understandings of Blackness and multiracial identity, particularly in the context of the ongoing politics of race and belonging. The children's reflections point to an emerging consciousness of racial privilege within the Black community, with some acknowledging the need to reconcile their lighter skin and white heritage with their commitment to Black solidarity. This tension between proximity to whiteness and attachment to Blackness calls for a more nuanced exploration of how mixed-race individuals navigate power dynamics within racial communities. Furthermore, their struggles to assert an identity that is both authentic and politically accountable complicate traditional narratives about racial identity as either fixed or static. Ultimately, these findings suggest that Black biracial identity is a fluid, context-dependent construct that is shaped by both individual experiences and the broader racialized structures of society.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter builds on the insights presented in Chapter 4, which highlighted the multifaceted nature of racial socialization in multiracial families, particularly those working to foster an embrace of Blackness in their children. While Chapter 4 explored the explicit and implicit messages parents communicate about race, inequality, and identity, Chapter 5 extends these discussions by examining how these messages get internalized and made manifest in Black multiracial children's attachments to Blackness, perceptions of mixedness, and racially accountable navigation of racialized spaces.

In Section 1, we saw that the racial identity trajectories of individuals like Kayleigh, Sydney, Warren, and Cody are shaped by a complex interplay of family, community, and societal influences. These experiences highlight that racial identity is not a fixed, innate

characteristic but a dynamic, relational process. The case of Cody, in particular, underscores the unintended consequences of relying on Black family and community figures to instill racial pride, challenging assumptions that racial identity can be neatly cultivated through socialization alone.

Section 2 extended this discussion by examining how multiracial individuals who have been socialized to embrace Blackness may reject the ambiguity of mixed-race identities as part of a broader critique of dominant racial narratives. By distancing themselves from the "tragic mulatto" stereotype and advocating for an unequivocal, unified vision of Blackness, individuals like Jade, Sydney, and Anthony assert their political commitment to the preservation of Black cultural and social life. This rejection of mixedness is deeply tied to historical and global concerns surrounding the dilution of Blackness, especially in the wake of colonialism, slavery, and race mixing. Their resistance not only challenges racial fluidity but also reaffirms their place within Black communities and a vision of a future where Blackness remains central and visible.

Finally, Section 3 revealed the complexities faced by Black biracial children in navigating their racial identity within Black social spaces. These individuals often grappled with the tension between embracing an exclusively Black identity and acknowledging the privileges associated with their mixed background. Racialized interrogations from others challenged their place within the Black community, leading some to negotiate their identity by actively acknowledging their mixedness to avoid taking up space they felt should be reserved for those with a more traditionally Black experience. These reflections underscore the nuanced and layered nature of racialized experiences, illustrating how Black biracial children contend with both pride in their Blackness and an awareness of the privilege afforded by their proximity to whiteness.

Chapter 6: Fostering Racial Wholeness and Pride in Both

Introduction

Building upon the exploration of Black racial pride and identity development in Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter shifts focus to examine families who adopt an affirming mixedness approach to multiracial socialization. While Chapters 4 and 5 centered on the cultivation of a strong Black racial identity and attachment to Blackness, this chapter looks at how families who prioritize fostering an acceptance of mixedness emphasize a sense of "wholeness" and "pride in both" sides of their children's racial backgrounds. These families celebrate the dual racial background of their children, offering a more integrative approach to racial identity that contrasts with the singular focus on Blackness explored in earlier chapters.

In contrast to families who engage directly with the Black experience, these parents tend to frame mixedness as a celebration of both sides of their children's racial parentage. Although fewer families in the study explicitly adopted this mixedness-centered approach, the messages they communicated reveal important insights into the ways they interpret racial identity, racialized histories, and the broader racial hierarchy. These families emphasize the importance of recognizing and embracing both racial backgrounds, seeing mixedness not as a source of racial conflict but as an opportunity for a more nuanced, holistic understanding of identity.

This chapter distinguishes between two distinct types of racial messages commonly communicated by families who adopt an affirming mixedness approach: (1) those that frame racial identity as an individualized right to self-expression, separate from racialized histories and systems of domination, and (2) those that focus on instilling pride in both sides of the child's family background. While these approaches aim to affirm the multiracial child's sense of self,

they do so in ways that often distance the child from the more complex realities of race and racial inequality.

While multiracial scholarship frequently differentiates between affirming multiracial socialization and color-evasive approaches, this chapter complicates that distinction by examining how both "color-evasive" strategies—specifically self-development and egalitarian approaches—contribute to the socialization of multiracial children. These strategies are often linked to the racial socialization practices of white parents, who tend to avoid engaging directly with issues of racial difference. In these families, whiteness is frequently unnamed or avoided: white parents either distance themselves from whiteness by claiming ancestry test results or adopt ethnic or national labels rather than racial ones. Despite their efforts to affirm their children's multiracial identity, these parents often fail to address the structural realities of racial inequality, opting instead for a more depoliticized, individualized conception of identity that centers on personal expression and pride in mixedness.

At its core, the color-evasive approach to multiracial socialization often mirrors neoliberal logics of multiculturalism and colorblind diversity. Parents who embrace this approach generally seek to immerse their children in "diverse" or "multiracial" spaces to reinforce their children’s sense of belonging and avoid exclusion. However, these spaces—despite their claims to inclusivity—often lack genuine engagement with Blackness, thus undermining the broader racial context that shapes their children’s identities. The absence of Blackness in these "diverse" spaces can perpetuate a view of racial identity as something separate from the structures of racial inequality, reinforcing an idealized, sanitized notion of multiculturalism that overlooks the lived realities of racial discrimination.

In this chapter, I focus on three families that illustrate this approach: two white mom-Black dad households, the Shaws and the Bryants, and one Black mom-white dad household, the Millers. These families, though each with their own approach to racial socialization, share a commitment to fostering a positive sense of mixedness. I also draw on pointed excerpts from my conversations with white mothers Miranda Logan and Nancy McCoy, who provide further insight into the ways in which parents engage with mixedness and racial identity in their multiracial children. Through these examples, this chapter will explore the nuances of affirming mixedness as an approach to multiracial socialization, and the ways it contrasts with more politicized, race-conscious methods of Black racial pride emphasized in previous chapters.

In examining these families and their approaches to racial socialization, this chapter reveals the limitations of an affirming mixedness approach that lacks engagement with racialized histories and structures of power. While these families' intentions are to foster pride in both sides of their children's racial backgrounds, this chapter argues that such approaches, if not critically engaged with, may inadvertently depoliticize multiracial identity, reducing it to an individualized form of self-expression rather than a reflection of broader social dynamics.

Healthy Humans, Compassionate Ignorance

While seemingly benign, the perspectives shared by some parents of multiracial children underscore a more insidious and complex negotiation between individual identity and racial consciousness, one that often inadvertently sustains essentialist logics, colorblind ideologies, and the depoliticization of multiracial identities. On the surface, many of these parents articulate a desire to prioritize their children's individual well-being, often framing this in terms of cultivating moral and emotional virtues rather than explicit racial attachments. For example,

during an interview with Rachel and Marcus Shaw, a white mother and Black father, their response to questions about biracial identity seemed to sidestep race entirely. Marcus stated, "At the end of the day, all any parent wants is to raise good, healthy humans," to which Rachel added, "Yeah, as long as they're good people, who treat others with compassion, and ultimately just enjoy their lives, that's all we can ask for, identity aside."

On the surface, this sentiment appears universal, reflecting a common parental desire to raise well-adjusted children. However, their explicit avoidance of racial identity—despite the interview questions focusing on racial identification—speaks volumes about their position. The choice to prioritize "good people" over any mention of race functions as a subtle disavowal of the complexities inherent in multiracial identity formation. This positioning, which disregards race in favor of universal virtues like kindness and personal happiness, reflects a common color-evasive approach to racial socialization. While the colorblind ideology may be rooted in a well-meaning belief in treating all individuals equally, it effectively obfuscates the lived realities of racial difference and the systemic inequalities that persist along racial lines. In doing so, Marcus and Rachel's responses subtly signal a disconnection from race, suggesting that other qualities—like kindness and personal happiness—take precedence over racial considerations in their approach to socializing their children.

Further examination of Marcus and Rachel's familial backgrounds reveals how these approaches to multiracial socialization may be shaped by their own racial upbringings. In conversation with Rachel's father, Leer Perkins, at dinner one evening following 14-year-old Amira's volleyball game in Southern Maryland, he proudly professed:

> We were intentional about teaching them [Rachel and her brother] to live by the golden rule and treat everyone the way they would want to be treated, no matter what they look like or who they love.

Marcus's mother, Charlene McCoy, echoed a similar sentiment, noting that Marcus' military upbringing, surrounded by diverse communities, led him to see race as something to be transcended:

> It's not surprising that Marcus ended up forming his own mixed family given his background. I mean we were a military family that moved around often and lived all over the world, so he was always around people from all kinds of backgrounds. And I always emphasized that you know, you have to see everyone as the same, as equal, no matter your differences, those differences should be embraced and shared.

These familial messages underscore a broader tendency to minimize the significance of race in approach to racial socialization, reducing racial identity to a matter of personal preference or individual choice rather than something shaped by historical, political, and social forces. Marcus' desire for his children to choose their own racial identity is framed as a form of parental respect for their autonomy, but it also serves to deflect attention from the larger racial realities that shape the world they live in. Marcus further elaborates:

> As their father, I want my kids to know that how they choose to identify is entirely up to them. I'll never try to define them, because who they are should come from within, not from me or anyone else. What matters most to me is that they're happy, healthy, and comfortable in their own skin.

Here, his emphasis on individual comfort over collective racial belonging suggests that racial identity is a personal, individualized experience, something to be navigated privately rather than in relation to broader social or political structures. This individualistic, autonomy-centered approach echoes a neoliberal conception of identity—one that prioritizes personal agency over collective social responsibility.

Similarly, other parents in the study, such as Aron Miller, emphasized the importance of familial connection and pride in one's heritage rather than engaging with racial identity in any politically or socially meaningful way. As Aron put it:

> We never want to push them any route when it comes to how they identify. For us, it was more important that they felt proud of who they come from, that they felt connected and loved by all of their family. That's why we split holidays up between the grandparents' homes.

While this may seem like an innocent desire to encourage pride in one's background, it inadvertently situates identity within the confines of familial bonds, rather than in the broader sociopolitical realities of race. By equating racial identity with familial connections, these parents obscure the ways in which multiracial individuals are often socially categorized and treated by others, outside the comforting walls of family. This dynamic can be understood through the lens of Shantel Buggs' (2017) concept of white racial obligation, specifically her discussion of how white parents implicitly attempt to police the performance of their child's mixed-race identity. As Buggs explains, in some cases, white parents may push their multiracial children to "perform" their identities in ways that demonstrate loyalty to their parent's whiteness and to dominant social norms. This type of socialization requires mixed-race children to enact a version of racial identity that aligns with the parental investment in whiteness, which can subtly reinforce whiteness as a standard against which all other identities are measured.

Buggs extends this notion into what she calls "a performance of white racial obligation," where multiracial children are socially and emotionally pressured to align with the discourses and resources that reinforce systemic white power. In this context, when Aron Miller and other parents prioritize family heritage over broader social engagement with race, they may inadvertently reinforce a narrow, depoliticized understanding of racial identity. This promotion

of white familial obligation places multiracial children in a position where they are expected to adhere to a performance of whiteness, one that requires them to deny or suppress aspects of their racialized selves that deviate from a white-centric norm.

By centering the family as the primary site for identity formation, these parents may inadvertently place their children in a bubble of racial ignorance, detaching them from the reality of external racial categorization and its attendant privileges and disadvantages. This can be particularly problematic for multiracial children, who are often categorized by others based on their visible features or social affiliations rather than their personal or familial understandings of identity. Aron's focus on pride in family heritage over engagement with broader racial dynamics may then protect an epistemology of ignorance, one in which race is treated as a personal, private matter, divorced from the broader social and political structures of racism and inequality. Buggs' (2017) analysis underscores how this racial avoidance, particularly among white parents, reinforces a protected zone of racial obliviousness—one that denies the structural forces that determine how racial identity is socially constructed and experienced.

This tendency to frame multiraciality as a familial rather than a communal or political experience is further evident in the comments of Kyra Miller, who romanticizes multiracial identity as a "beautiful blend of cultures." Kyra's assertion that:

> I think there really is an identity of being multiracial. And it's good to be around people who are multiracial, when you're multiracial. And then I think there are special things about being multiracial, that, you know, like it's its own identity. It's not just two separate things that got blended together. It's like its own thing, also.

Kyra's framing of multiraciality as a singular, distinct identity exemplifies how multiracial experiences and identities often get homogenized into monolithic narratives of racial progress and transcendence. This idealization risks oversimplifying the nuanced experiences of mixed-race individuals by framing their identity as something unique and exceptional rather than

something constantly shaped by social and political forces. This form of multiracial exceptionalism, which positions multiracial identity as a harmonious blending of cultures, can erase the complex and often contradictory realities of racial mixing and antiBlack racialization. Further, by presenting mixedness as something inherently "good" or transcendent, Kyra perpetuates a form of racial purity through hybridity—one that disregards the way racial mixing has historically been weaponized within settler-colonial discourses as a means of asserting white racial dominance, erasing Blackness via global whitening projects, and justifying exploitation. This monolithic framing of multiraciality ignores the differing realities faced by individuals depending on their specific racial mixes, which obscures how various multiracial identities are racialized and politicized in distinct ways. For example, the experience of a Black-white biracial individual can differ greatly from that of a biracial person of Asian and Latinx parentage, yet both may be subsumed under the same, undifferentiated label of "multiracial."

The problematic nature of these essentialist and colorblind narratives is particularly evident in the comments of Miranda, a white mother, who compares her child's multiracial experience to the increased popularity of genetic ancestry testing. Reflecting on her ancestry test results, Miranda shared:

> It made me think about how, in a way, everyone with a mix of cultures and ethnicities in their genetic makeup is essentially mixed, there's a lot we can learn from kids like mine…Now that we have such wide access to ancestry DNA testing, more and more people are realizing how mixed up a society we truly are. In the next decade, I'm sure we'll see double the amount of people identifying as multiracial in some way.

Miranda's assertion reduces multiracial identity to a biological or genetic phenomenon, rather than a lived, politicized experience. Her framing of multiraciality as "mixed up" reflects an essentialist understanding of mixedness that is deeply connected to colonial ideologies of racial blending. In this view, racial mixing becomes an inherently positive, progressive force that

erases the political realities of racial struggle. By equating genetic diversity with social progress, Miranda's comments gloss over the ways in which multiracial identity can be politicized and racialized differently depending on the specific racial mix—whether Black-white, Latinx-Asian, or otherwise. The assumption that all multiracial people share a common identity ignores the ways in which specific racial mixes, such as Black-white or Latinx-Asian, can invoke different forms of racialized experiences, subjectivities, and societal treatment.

Across these families, multiracial identity is often framed as a transcendent or "unique" experience—an exceptional and harmonious blending of cultures that avoids confronting the entrenched histories and realities of racialization. This depoliticized idealization of mixedness, while superficially celebrating diversity, risks reifying essentialist logics that naturalize racial categories and homogenize multiracial experiences. Moreover, by focusing on individual autonomy, familial bonds, and the aesthetic qualities of mixedness, these parents inadvertently protect an epistemology of ignorance—one that shields their children from the reality of racial politics, historical oppression, and the continuing legacies of colonialism.

Although these parents express a desire to raise well-adjusted children in a loving and inclusive environment, their approaches to multiracial socialization often inadvertently reproduce the racial status quo. Through their emphasis on colorblindness, individual autonomy, and an essentialist understanding of mixedness, they contribute to a depoliticized, ahistorical conception of multiracial identity. By failing to engage critically with the social, political, and historical dimensions of race, these families risk perpetuating the very structures of racial inequality they claim to oppose. As such, their approaches to multiracial socialization, though well-intentioned, often fall short of addressing the complexities and challenges of mixedness in a racially stratified society.

Equal Parts Whole

Through further examination of parental approaches multiracial socialization that do not center on cultivating an embrace of Blackness, it becomes evident that the language parents use often reflects deeper assumptions about race and inequality. One striking example of this is found in the reflections of Pam Bryant, a white mother, on how she discusses race with her children. When asked about her approach to these conversations, Pam shared:

> So we've had some serious discussions about this... And I consider them to be mixed race, right? They're halfway there. Half of me, they're half Black, whatever, they're half of David. Like, that seems to be kind of the definition of that…

Pam's repeated use of the term "half"—as in "half of me," "half Black," and "half of David"—reflects a common biological discourse that reduces racial identity to clear, quantifiable categories. This language suggests that racial identity can be understood as a fixed combination of genetic "parts," reinforcing an outdated and scientifically discredited idea that race is biologically determined. The phrase "halfway there" invokes the image of racial identity as something incomplete, further reproducing notions of racial purity and implying that multiracial individuals are racially divided between two distinct groups.

However, what stands out in Pam's account is the absence of any direct engagement with her own racial identity as a white mother. While she positions her children's identity as a blend of two parts, she does not explicitly mention whiteness or how her own racial background contributes to their multiracial identity. The term "half" is used to describe her children's racial composition, but Pam never acknowledges that the "half" of her children that comes from her is *white*. In this way, whiteness is unnamed and unmarked, remaining invisible in her narrative.

This omission is significant because it reflects a broader societal tendency to treat whiteness as neutral, unremarkable, or even invisible, while Blackness and other racial identities are framed as distinct and identifiable. By not naming her own whiteness, Pam contributes to the racial structure that allows whiteness to remain unexamined and unchallenged. This subtle erasure of whiteness upholds the racial hierarchy in which white identity is normalized, and the experiences of people of color are made more visible and distinct.

Moreover, Pam's use of "half of me" links her own identity to her children's racial identity, yet in a way that reinforces the biological understanding of race. This framing implies that race is passed down through biological inheritance, rather than acknowledging that racial identity is also shaped by social, cultural, and historical forces. In focusing on the "half" of her children that is "Black" and the "half" that is "of David," Pam's language limits the potential for her children to understand their racial identities as more than just the sum of their parents' racial backgrounds. She reinforces the idea of race as something defined by biological markers rather than something lived and constructed through racialized interactions.

This language of "half and half" is common across families, often reflecting an active attempt by parents to socialize their children to embrace both sides of their racial background. For instance, Black father Marcus Shaw, explained:

> It's not easy raising biracial kids, let alone biracial girls, but I think we've done a really good job as parents, so far at least, helping the girls cultivate pride in both sides of their heritage.

Marcus speaks to the challenge of raising biracial children, underscoring the importance of fostering pride in both sides of their heritage. His statement, while well-intentioned, highlights a broader societal ascription of multiracial identity to notions of cultural heritage—as though each

side of a child's racial identity is a separate and distinct component. In doing so, it inadvertently reinforces a view of racial identity as something compartmentalized or fixed, which risks ignoring the fluidity and complexity of the multiracial experience.

This notion of heritage as a defining feature of racial identity becomes clearer in the reflections of Nancy McCoy, a white mother who articulates her efforts to educate her children about both sides of their racial backgrounds:

> Oh, I make sure my kids are educated on both fronts of their racial backgrounds. They know Nina Simone just as much as they know the Beatles. They watched Disney and they watched BET.

Nancy positions herself as a politically conscious white mother who prides herself on teaching her children about the cultural and racial diversity of their background. Nancy's attempt to balance cultural exposure across racial lines reflects a broader, often superficial approach to multiracial socialization. The focus on media—on the consumption of both Black and white cultural products—provides an entry point into discussions of racial diversity but also reveals the limitations of this approach. It is one thing to expose children to different cultural figures or media content, but this emphasis on cultural exposure without deeper engagement with the structural, social, and historical realities of race leaves a gap in the understanding of how race operates in society. As argued by Buggs (2017), white parents who prioritize cultural consumption risk divorcing their children's understanding of race from its political and systemic realities, which only furthers the depoliticization of multiracial identity.

This depoliticization is further explored through the socialization of beauty norms. As noted in the first empirical chapter, Black mothers often avoid complimenting their biracial daughters' physical features to prevent reinforcing colorist beauty logics. These logics can

exoticize multiracial women, positioning them as superior to monoracial Black women. By contrast, white mothers, like Pam Bryant, focus on affirming their biracial daughters' more Afrocentric features, aiming to counteract anti-Black beauty standards. Pam states:

> One of the biggest ways we teach Monet and Amira to love her Black side is words of affirmation. Too many girls of color develop low self-esteem, so it's really important that we actively compliment and affirm their more Black features, you know? Like we want them to see beauty in her kinky hair, tan skin, her full lips…

Pam's efforts to affirm her daughters' Black features are framed as a proactive effort to combat anti-Black beauty standards, yet they also illustrate a tension between physical features and deeper cultural engagement. This strategy can be seen as a form of cultural socialization, via instilling pride in racialized features, and also as preparation for bias, via teaching their biracial girls Monet and Amira to reject the societal devaluation of Black beauty. Regardless, her focus on phenotype—emphasizing features commonly associated with Blackness—ultimately risks oversimplifying Black identity and reinforcing a focus on external characteristics rather than deeper engagement with the cultural and historical contexts that shape Blackness.

Pam's focus on Monet and Amira's physical features becomes even more significant when considering her decision to seek out "curly cut" salons, specialized spaces for styling natural, curly hair:

> We didn't have much of a relationship with David's [Black husband] sister and his mother had passed away years before, so I was always concerned about the girls' exposure to other Black women, who could teach them how to care for and love their natural hair. As a white woman, I can only do so much, right? I certainly tried, but I can admit I always felt like I was failing them. How could they love their hair when their mother struggled so much to do it, ya know?

Pam's concern reflects a genuine desire to ensure her daughters' hair is cared for and loved, but it also highlights her discomfort with engaging in Black cultural practices related to hair care.

Her reluctance to take her girls Monet and Amira to Black salons reveals a hesitance to embrace certain aspects of Black beauty culture, opting instead for a more sanitized, white-friendly approach. This decision illustrates the limitations of Pam's socialization efforts, which focus primarily on the physical aspects of Black identity—such as hair texture—while neglecting the cultural and historical contexts that shape Blackness. When asked why she had not taken the girls to a Black salon before discovering curly cuts, Pam explained:

> I just didn't trust them to not manipulate her hair. The few we went to before always seemed to promote flat ironing, chemicals, or adding fake hair through weaves or braids. And I really wanted Monet and Amira to love her natural hair, just the way it is.

While Pam's concern for preserving her daughters' natural hair is sincere, her avoidance of Black salons reveals an underlying discomfort with Black cultural practices that go beyond beauty standards. By prioritizing physical appearance while avoiding engagement with Black cultural practices, Pam inadvertently limits Monet and Amira's ability to connect with the broader cultural meanings of Blackness.

By affirming the beauty of Black features in isolation—without addressing the broader sociopolitical dynamics of anti-Blackness or the lived realities of Black cultural practices—white parents like Pam may inadvertently reinforce a racially hierarchical structure that privileges whiteness. Even so, a quick dive through Monet and Amira's social media accounts, which together boast over 40,000 followers, reveals that they interpret their hair as a product of mixedness rather than tied to Blackness as evidenced by numerous TikToks in which they offer "tips and tricks to styling mixed hair." Pam's efforts to affirm her biracial daughters' Blackness are well-intentioned, but they also highlight the limits of an approach that focuses on superficial features rather than engaging with the complex social forces shaping Black identity.

Although Pam’s efforts to affirm both daughters’ natural hair have positively impacted their self-esteem and confidence with regard to their natural hair, this emphasis on phenotype fails to fully address the complexities of Black identity. While both Monet and Amira have grown to embrace their natural curls, their connection to Blackness remains strained and largely superficial. The focus on physical features neglects the cultural and historical context that shapes Black identity, and as such, Monet and Amira’s understanding of their racial identities are limited to what can be seen rather than what is experienced.

Similarly, Rachel Shaws' concern for her daughter, Claire, reflects a similar emphasis on physical features and phenotypic affirmation. She expresses:

> ...with Claire, it’s like I’m just worried that she’s gonna going to like not like herself. I mean all girls struggle with insecurities and stuff as a teen but I’m scared she’s, since she’s gonna be going to high school this year and most of her friends are, well not many look like her, and because of that she’s gonna want to like look different. I mean she already tried quitting soccer, a sport she is amazing at, like they already offered her a varsity positon like that’s how good she is, and she’s asking me to play indoor only because she doesn’t like how dark she gets in the sun. that broke my heart, that’s that was more or beyond just puberty insecurities…Now I just always compliment her skin like "I wish my skin had that melanin, I sit in the sun and just get red, you get golden, bronzed."

Pam's concern, like Amanda's, centers on the physical and external aspects of race, particularly around skin tone. This focus on the physical aspects of racial identity—whether through affirmations of beauty or concerns about self-esteem—reflects a broader tendency among white parents to avoid engaging with the structural realities of racism and how they might shape their children's experiences. By avoiding a deeper discussion of race as a political, social, and historical construct, these parents inadvertently reinforce the racial status quo, failing to prepare their children for the racial dynamics they will inevitably face in a society shaped by white supremacy.

Perhaps most significantly, however, is the tendency among white parents to avoid directly naming their whiteness in conversations about their children's racial socialization. This avoidance of naming whiteness in these conversations, as exemplified by Michael, a white father, reinforces the neutrality and unmarked status of whiteness within the racial hierarchy. When asked how he discusses his own racial background, Michael shared:

> I do try and talk to them about our Irish lineage, but even that I'm still learning... I guess it's less about teaching them about my culture and more about teaching them about their lineage, or their family, ancestors...

In this response, Michael distances himself from an engagement with whiteness as a racial identity, opting instead to focus on ethnic lineage. This avoidance of discussing whiteness allows the racial structure that privileges whiteness to remain unchallenged. By not naming or critically engaging with their own racial identity, white parents ensure that the racial system, which places whiteness at the top, remains intact and unexamined. This subtle yet powerful omission prevents children from fully understanding the ways in which racial privilege operates and perpetuates inequality, ensuring that the white supremacist racial order remains unchallenged.

In summary, while many parents of biracial children strive to cultivate pride in both sides of their children's background, the language they use often oversimplifies racial identity and reinforces problematic assumptions about Blackness, mixedness, and more implicitly whiteness. The failure to engage with or name whiteness, alongside an emphasis on external characteristics, inadvertently maintains the racial hierarchy and prevents a deeper understanding of race and racism from taking root in their children's socialization. This dynamic reinforces a colorblind racial ideology that depoliticizes multiracial identity and sustains a white supremacist racial order that privileges whiteness as the normative standard.

Multicultural Prophets, Ambassadors of Diversity

Throughout my intensive family observations, I noticed a recurring pattern—one that not only celebrated multiracial pride but also actively engaged with historical and political milestones. This was especially evident in how families showcased images of influential figures, with their choice of heroes revealing deeper insights into how they understood and lived their multiracial experiences.

As with families who prioritized cultivating their multiracial children's embrace of Blackness, families who centered an embrace of multiraciality or mixedness similarly displayed visible nods to key historical figures and moments. Rather than a celebration of Black historical figures, however, these families commemorated multiracial icons and legacies. In at least three households, I found some kind of tribute to Mildred and Richard Loving, whose landmark Supreme Court case decriminalized interracial marriage. Their image served not only as a tribute to their personal courage but also as a symbol of the legal and social struggles that have shaped multiracial families.

Yet, the Lovings were far from the only multiracial icons these families celebrated. The figure of Barack Obama emerged in many households as a central emblem of pride—not just as the first Black president, but as the first Black-white biracial president of the United States. Interestingly, while families who embrace the Black experience often displayed photos of the Obamas as a family unit, these households were more likely to feature images of Obama alone. His image, unaccompanied by Michelle or their daughters, spoke volumes. It was not just his role as the first Black president that they highlighted; it was his identity as the first biracial president—someone whose background resonated deeply with Black-white multiracial children.

Obama was not only seen as a political figure in this context but as a symbol of multiracial pride and possibility. For multiracial children, particularly those socialized to embrace their multiracial backgrounds, Obama represented a figure they could relate to—a bridge between two worlds. This was a nuanced distinction, emphasizing his biracial identity over his Blackness, which resonated more directly with the families I observed. Unlike the families in my first chapter, who celebrated the Obamas as a unified Black family unit—a symbol of Black respectability and upward mobility—these households embraced Obama as a representation of multiracial achievement and identity, separate from the more collective notion of Black family and community.

The Shaw family household, however, offered an intriguing shift. It was not just Obama's multiracial identity that they celebrated. They also prominently displayed Kamala Harris, the first woman and the first person of South Asian and African descent to become Vice President of the United States. What set their portrayal of Harris apart, however, was the way she was depicted—proudly waving alongside her white husband, Doug Emhoff. This representation was laden with significance. When I inquired about the importance of Harris's image in their home, the Shaws spoke with pride about her status as a multiracial icon. But they emphasized something more: her embrace of interracial intimacy. Harris's marriage was not just a personal choice—it was, for the Shaws, a living testament to multiracial pride and possibility. It was a visible affirmation of the values they held dear, representing not just political achievement but the continued crossing of racial boundaries in both public and private spheres.

The Shaws' display of Harris illustrated a broader theme that emerged across my research, wherein interracial intimacy was understood as more than just a personal or political statement—it was an embodiment of multiracial pride. Harris's image was a powerful reminder

that multiracial identity was not merely a matter of background but a lived experience, expressed in familial bonds that transcended racial boundaries. In their eyes, Harris was a hero who embodied both personal and societal progress, a figure whose life and legacy embodied the vision of multiracial families striving for visibility and acceptance in a society often reluctant to fully embrace such diversity.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I highlighted how families that prioritized an embrace of Blackness over an affirmation of mixedness were observed to subtly encourage their biracial children to aspire towards Black family formation. For many of these families, biracial children dating monoracial Black individuals implicitly signified an achievement in cultivating their children's Black racial pride—a direct challenge to the historical legacies that have often relegated Blackness to secondary, inferior status to be overcome or transcended through racial mixing. Yet, for parents committed to fostering their children's understanding and celebration of both facets of their biracial children's racial parentage, this vision of Black family formation was viewed differently. These parents held a radically different conception of racial mixing, one that was tied not only to their children's identity but also embedded in a broader racial project: the diversification and celebration of multiculturalism. For them, racial mixing was not just a matter of embracing multiracial pride—it was seen as an essential component of neoliberal multiculturalism that promotes diversity as a form of racial progress.

David Shaw's reflections on how he would feel if his children dated someone outside their race illuminate this tension. While many families, including David's, viewed interracial dating as involving someone who was either Black, white, or both, they also placed value on the diversification of society. David's perspective reveals a clear affinity for the concept of "diversity" as something inherently "beautiful" and worthy of pursuit. His words reflect an ethos

of neoliberal multiculturalism that emphasizes the aesthetic and moral value of mixing across racial lines, aligning with global ideals of diversity that have emerged in postcolonial, globalized contexts. In his own words:

> In fact, I will, I would welcome that. I just see, I just feel like while I love the Black college, I feel like God gave us so much diversity. And, don't get me wrong, Black is beautiful and I love it, I embrace it. But I also see the beautifulness when there is diversity and efforts to continue diversity, when you know you have Black, white or Black, Asian, all these blends. Whatever it is. I see that being a beautiful thing too.

David's perspective exemplifies the potential pitfalls of this idealized vision of diversity—one that risks glossing over the enduring legacies of racial inequality and white supremacy. His celebratory language about "blends" and the beauty of mixing racial lines, while well-intentioned, fails to acknowledge the material realities of racial domination that continue to shape lives. In embracing diversity as an unquestioned good, David's worldview inadvertently sidesteps the very histories of exclusion and inequality that multiracial families, particularly Black families, are still grappling with today.

What David Shaw's comment highlights is the deep tension between two racial imaginaries: the neoliberal celebration of diversity as inherently positive and progressive, and the critical need to address historical legacies of racial domination. The notion of racial diversity as an unmitigated good—one that overlooks structural inequalities—aligns with the neoliberal multicultural ethos, which often depoliticizes racial identities and reduces them to aesthetic or moral value. The way families navigate these competing visions reflects the globalized struggles over the meaning of race, identity, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected world—where the neoliberal celebration of diversity often collides with the enduring legacies of colonialism and white racial domination. In this context, the act of encouraging multiracial

relationships in their children's intimate and romantic lives, while seeming to promote diversity, may sometimes obscure the ongoing work of undoing histories of racial marginalization.

The ethnographic context of the Miller family sheds light on this dynamic. Aaron Miller proudly explains his commitment to exposing his biracial children to "diverse spaces," believing this will foster inclusivity and cultural engagement. He says:

> I think we've done a really good job just making sure the girls are regularly in diverse spaces with people from all different walks of life, but also exposing them to both sides of their family and telling them to be proud in that, in the fact that they are the future.

Aaron's pride in his family's efforts to expose his children to diversity paints a picture of progressive parenting—one that seeks to immerse his children in a broad spectrum of experiences and identities. His focus on immersing his children in diverse environments mirrors what scholars have identified as an aspirational view of diversity—one that sees it as a moral good. However, the reality of these "diverse spaces" is not as straightforward as Aaron's narrative suggests. During a visit to the Miller family's church, I observed that, while the congregation was diverse in many respects, it lacked a significant Black presence. This discrepancy between the idealized visions of diversity and the racialized reality of these spaces raises critical questions about how "diversity" is constructed, often as devoid of Blackness. In many cases, these "diverse" spaces serve as sites for performative inclusivity—places where different races are symbolically represented, but where systemic inequalities and racial power dynamics remain largely unaddressed.

This discrepancy highlights a crucial distinction between the idealized concept of diversity and its practical limitations. Scholars like Goldberg (2009) argue that neoliberal multiculturalism often reduces diversity to a "feel-good" value, obscuring the complexities of

racial inequality. Aaron's vision of his children as the "future" reflects the myth of the "multiracial utopia"—the idea that multiracial individuals symbolize a post-racial future where racial conflict is resolved and racial identities are no longer defined by historical divisions. However, this utopian narrative risks oversimplifying the ongoing challenges that biracial children may face as they navigate a world still shaped by racial stratification and the legacies of white supremacy.

This ideal of multiracial harmony can obscure the realities of racial inequality, as noted by scholars such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014), who emphasize that multiracial individuals are not immune to the structures of racial domination. By framing his children's identity as something inherently aspirational, Aaron may overlook the challenges they may encounter due to their multiracial identity in a world still marked by racial inequalities.

In contrast to the Millers, the perspective of some white parents raising biracial children introduces a different set of dynamics. Miranda's response to the question of how her parenting approach might change if she were married to a white versus a Black partner provides insight into how race and privilege are navigated within the family structure. She responds:

> I don't think I'd do anything any differently if I was married to a white man. Yeah, I don't think so…I'd still want them to embrace diversity, especially in terms of like their friends and the types of activities they engage in.

On the surface, Miranda's response might appear to reflect an open, race-neutral approach to parenting. Her desire for her children to embrace diversity, particularly in terms of their social circles and extracurricular activities, aligns with the widely accepted ideals of inclusivity and cultural engagement that characterize much of contemporary multicultural discourse. This kind of thinking, which emphasizes the importance of fostering diverse environments and

relationships, mirrors the neoliberal understanding of multiculturalism as a benign, aspirational goal—something that benefits everyone without delving too deeply into the structural inequalities that underlie such diversity.

However, Miranda's perspective also offers a crucial point for analysis. By suggesting that her approach to parenting would remain unchanged regardless of her partner's racial background, Miranda unintentionally sidelines the racial complexities that shape her children's racialized experiences. In doing so, she frames diversity not as a conversation rooted in racialized experiences and the historical power dynamics of whiteness, but rather as a choice—one among many—geared toward personal enrichment and the celebration of difference. This framing posits an understanding of diversity as an inherently positive value, untethered from the material realities of racial inequality and white privilege.

Rather than immersing their children in "diverse" spaces in the hope that such environments would organically foster a sense of belonging, some parents felt the need to cultivate their own community—one explicitly focused on the shared experience of raising multiracial children. Pam's involvement in this effort provides a particularly poignant illustration of this trend. Our encounter at her daughter Claire's high school soccer practice one spring evening offers deep insight into how multiracial families navigate the complexities of identity and belonging, and how they forge their own spaces in response to broader social dynamics.

When I arrived at the school, it was immediately apparent that wealth and privilege were evident in the surroundings. The soccer field, track, and stadium had clearly undergone recent and substantial renovations. The shiny, new facilities resembled something out of a college football mega-stadium, with pristine bleachers and state-of-the-art amenities. It was the kind of

place that, in its polished grandeur, spoke volumes about the socioeconomic status of the community. The setting felt like a fitting backdrop to the conversation I was about to have, one that would unpack both the privileges and challenges of navigating multiracial identities within a predominantly white, affluent environment.

This was only my second encounter with Pam and her family, but we had already built a significant rapport during our initial, lengthy interview at her home in suburban Maryland. That conversation had lasted over two and a half hours, revealing layers of Pam's complex relationship with race, identity, and her daughter's experiences as a Black-white biracial child. The warmth of that initial interaction set the stage for this encounter, where I was once again welcomed into Pam's world, this time on the bleachers of a soccer field that seemed to reflect her life's contradictions—an environment where privilege, race, and community intersected in ways that were both subtle and stark.

Pam waved eagerly from high up in the stands, where she was seated with two other mothers, each of whom, like her, presented as phenotypically white. As I made my way up to join them, it was clear that Pam was not merely a participant in this study—she was deeply invested in it. She introduced me with a certain pride, presenting me not as just a researcher but as someone examining the evolving dynamics of interracial family life. In that introduction, there was an unspoken assertion that Pam's family was part of a larger societal shift—a shift that she saw as not only important but worthy of attention and study.

Settling in, I was soon introduced to the other two mothers, each of whom also had children of mixed racial backgrounds. Pam's daughter, Claire, was the only one with Black parentage; the other two mothers were married to Latinx and Asian partners, respectively. As I

listened to their interactions, I realized that these women had developed a close-knit community—one that they fondly referred to as the "mixie moms clique." This term was both a badge of identity and a reflection of the shared challenges they navigated in raising multiracial children in a world where such families were still not the norm.

The mothers spoke candidly about how the clique had become a source of strength and solidarity. They described how they had intentionally cultivated this group not only for mutual support but also as a means of actively creating a sense of belonging for their children. One of the mothers remarked, "We make sure the girls spend time together, even when they don't always want to. They need to understand that they share something unique—a mixed race experience that no one else can fully understand." The deliberate nature of this interaction was striking—these mothers weren't simply creating social opportunities for their children; they were consciously crafting a sense of collective identity. It was not enough to let their children passively interact with other kids in racially diverse spaces. For these mothers, cultivating relationships with other multiracial families was a proactive effort to ensure that their children could see themselves in a community that understood their lived experiences.

This community-building was not just about providing a social network. It was, for these mothers, an act of resistance against the social forces that often marginalize or oversimplify multiracial identities. By forming the "mixie moms clique," they were, in a sense, carving out a space where their children could thrive within the complexities of their multiracial backgrounds. They understood that the world at large often sees racial identity as monolithic—either Black or white, Asian or Latinx—and that multiracial children often have to navigate a fragmented, often disorienting sense of self. By forming this close-knit group, these mothers ensured that their

children could forge connections with others who shared this fragmented identity, giving them a sense of validation and solidarity that the broader world might not provide.

However, what struck me most was the apparent ease with which these mothers centered their multiracial identity as a unifying force, even as they downplayed the complexities of their children's racial mixtures. Pam's daughter Claire was the only one with Black parentage, yet the women did not seem to dwell on the specific racial makeup of each child. To them, the "mixed race experience" was something distinct and universal, transcending the nuances of Claire's Black heritage or the Latinx and Asian backgrounds of the other children. One mother, in particular, reflected, "It doesn't really matter if my daughter's half Mexican and yours is half Black; they both have this shared experience of being 'othered' and not fully fitting in anywhere." While this comment encapsulated a certain sense of solidarity, it also glossed over the very real, very different racial challenges faced by each child. For example, Claire's experience as a Black-white biracial child was likely shaped by a different set of societal dynamics than those faced by the Latinx and Asian children. Blackness in America carries a weight—historically, politically, and socially—that is not interchangeable with other racial identities, even within the umbrella of multiracialism.

In focusing on the mixed race experience as a singular category, the mothers in the "mixie moms clique" appeared to flatten the diversity of their children's racial identities, overlooking the deep complexities of race in America—particularly the way Blackness intersects with white privilege, or how Latinx and Asian identities are racialized differently in various social contexts. Yet, this simplification was not born of malice; rather, it reflected a desire to create a sense of unity and empowerment for their children in a world that often demands rigid racial categories.

Ultimately, this section reveals how families who embrace neoliberal multiculturalism often navigate their children's multiracial identities through a lens of progressive diversity. However, the idealization of racial mixing as a symbol of social advancement often obscures the structural inequalities and racialized power dynamics that continue to shape their multiracial children' lived experiences. These families—by celebrating icons like the Lovings, Obama, and Harris/Emhoffs—engage with the politics of race and identity, but often without fully confronting the historical legacies of racial inequality that persist beneath the surface. Through their practices and discourses, these families both reproduce and challenge the broader neoliberal narratives of diversity and inclusion that shape contemporary racial politics.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter highlights the complex and often contradictory ways in which parents of biracial children attempt to foster their children's pride and embrace of mixedness rather than Blackness. Section 1 emphasizes how well-intentioned efforts to create inclusive, colorblind environments inadvertently perpetuate the racial status quo by failing to engage critically with the social, political, and historical dimensions of race. By prioritizing individual autonomy and an essentialist view of mixedness, these parents overlook the ongoing impact of racial inequality, thereby undermining their attempts to foster truly equitable and inclusive experiences for their children. Section 2 further demonstrates the limitations of this approach, revealing how an oversimplified understanding of racial identity—combined with an avoidance of conversations about whiteness—reinforces a colorblind ideology that inadvertently sustains the racial hierarchy and privileges whiteness as the normative standard.

In Section 3, we see that families who embrace neoliberal multiculturalism often celebrate the ideals of diversity and racial mixing as symbols of racial progress and transcendence. However, their focus on racial harmony, exemplified through the admiration of figures like the Lovings, Obama, and Harris/Emhoffs, risks glossing over the structural inequalities and racialized power dynamics that continue to shape their children's lived experiences. These families engage with the politics of race in a way that both challenges and reinforces neoliberal narratives of inclusion and diversity, ultimately foreclosing on potential efforts to critically address the historical legacies of antiBlackness. Collectively, these sections illustrate how, despite their progressive intentions, these families often fall short of confronting the deeper complexities of multiracial identity and the pervasive systems of racial domination that continue to shape contemporary racial politics.

Chapter 7: Enacting Multiracial Agency

Introduction

Building on the discussions in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, this chapter delves deeper into the complex ways that multiracial children internalize racial socialization messages that emphasize the embrace of mixedness and the right to individual self-expression. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Black racial pride and the cultivation of a strong attachment to Blackness are central themes for some families' racial socialization practices. In contrast, other families, as explored in Chapter 6, focus on fostering a balanced pride in both sides of their children's multiracial background, with an emphasis on celebrating their mixed heritage. This chapter moves beyond these foundational approaches to explore how such messages, particularly those centered on the notion of "pride in both" and the embrace of mixedness, are internalized by multiracial youth and shape their identities, understanding of racial history, and navigation of racialized spaces.

Just as the racial socialization practices in previous chapters were deeply influenced by neoliberal multicultural discourse, the multiracial identity assertions made by the youth discussed in this chapter similarly reflect this framework. For these children, the messages of pride in both racial heritages often translate into a form of multiracial agency that emphasizes personal autonomy and racial transcendence. However, this emphasis on pride in mixedness is not without its complexities. While it fosters positive self-esteem and an enhanced sense of individual identity, it also encourages a belief in the possibility of transcending racial categories altogether. Multiracial children internalize notions of racial utopia—of being part of the future of racial harmony—where their mixed identities supposedly provide a bridge between racial divides.

This belief in racial transcendence aligns with Mahtani's (2014) concept of multiracial youth as "racial trailblazers"—individuals who view themselves as naturally predisposed to racial tolerance and diversity. These children see their mixedness as liberating them from the oppressive racial hierarchies that dominate society, positioning themselves as symbols of progress and racial inclusivity. In this worldview, multiracial youth often conceptualize their identities as being beyond racial categories, celebrating their mixedness as a tool for dismantling rather than confronting the existing racial structures.

While this attachment to mixedness may enhance their self-esteem and provide a sense of empowerment, it can also be harmful in its implications for addressing broader societal racial issues. Specifically, multiracial children who hold these ideals often struggle to confront the realities of anti-Blackness and white supremacy that continue to permeate their daily experiences. Despite their pride in both sides of their heritage, they frequently view any negative racialized experiences involving the Black side of their identity as the result of "monoracism"—a form of racial exclusion stemming from ignorance about their mixedness—rather than as products of anti-Black racialization. This misinterpretation prevents them from recognizing the ways in which they are racialized within the context of a broader system of white supremacy and limits their ability to engage with the necessary antiracist, anticolonial politics required to address these structures.

The assertion of a "pride in both" identity, while fostering autonomy and personal agency, inadvertently reinforces racial hierarchies. In this chapter, I explore how the focus on multiracial pride can unintentionally reproduce anti-Black sentiment, even when the intention is to celebrate diversity and inclusivity. The subsequent sections unpack the tensions that arise when multiracial youth, bolstered by their pride in their dual racial heritages, navigate a society

that continues to prioritize monoracial categories. These tensions highlight the contradictions between personal identity formation and the structural realities of racialization, where societal categorizations and racial histories still shape how multiracial individuals are perceived and treated.

Ultimately, this chapter draws attention to the difficult balance multiracial youth must strike between asserting a personal identity rooted in pride in both racial sides and confronting the racialized experiences that challenge this idealized identity. As we explore the experiences of multiracial youth in this chapter, it becomes clear that while their attachment to mixedness can empower them to assert their agency, it also complicates their understanding of and ability to confront the structural forces of anti-Blackness and racial inequality. This chapter thus extends the analysis from earlier chapters, critically engaging with the limits of multiracial pride in a racialized society, and considering how the internalization of these messages ultimately shapes multiracial individuals' interactions with both their personal identities and the racial hierarchies they must navigate.

Best of Both Worlds

The narratives of Black-white biracial children in this study reveal how their internalization of racial socialization messages reflects broader socio-political and ideological shifts in the construction of multiraciality. While multiracial identities are often framed as transcending racial binaries or offering a "best of both worlds" perspective, the personal stories shared here reveal how such constructions are both shaped by and implicated in dominant racial ideologies. These children, socialized to embrace their multiracial identities, do not merely experience a transcendent, harmonious sense of self; rather, they navigate an identity landscape

defined by competing discourses—some that seek to erase Blackness, and others that are shaped by neoliberal aspirations of individual autonomy and racial fluidity. This is particularly evident in the language these children use to describe their multiracial identities. For instance, fifteen-year-old Monet Bryant described her evolving relationship with her identity:

> I used to say I'm biracial but recently I've started leaning more into saying I'm mixed or mixed-race. I don't know, biracial just feels like I'm saying there's two distinct parts of me when really I am a mix of so many things. Mixed race feels like it captures who I am as like a full person.

This transition from "biracial" to "mixed race" aligns with Curington's (2016) assertion that multiracial individuals are not only subject to macro-level processes like the state, media, and education but are also impacted by ideological frameworks that privilege autonomy and individualism. Monet's choice to embrace "mixed race" embodies a desire to define her own identity—one that challenges the divisive, binary logic of race. The language of "wholeness" and "fullness" reflects a desire for a more integrated self, one that resists the fractured narratives imposed by racial categorization.

However, this desire for fluidity and integration is not entirely free from the weight of historical racial ideologies. For example, eighteen-year-old Amira Bryant's reflection on her multiracial identity encapsulates the tension between asserting pride in one's mixedness and adhering to the constraints of racial binaries. Eighteen-year-old Amira Bryant states:

> Growing up mixed meant I never really felt like I fully fit in anywhere, but that's made me more understanding. Now, I'm proud of how both sides shape who I am.

While Amira expresses pride in her mixedness, the language of "both sides" continues to reinforce the very racial dichotomy she seeks to transcend. As Curington (2016) notes, multiracial identity is often shaped by both macro-level ideologies (such as neoliberal

multiculturalism) and micro-level processes of identity construction. Here, Amira's sense of pride is shaped by her desire for a unified identity, but the "both sides" framework inadvertently upholds the notion that Blackness and whiteness are separate, essentialized entities.

For Sasha Shaw, this duality becomes a critical part of her refusal to adhere to monoracial norms of identification. She explains:

> I was taught to never sacrifice parts of me just to be accepted. I am just as Black as I am white, the best of both worlds, truly. And if you expect me to choose one over the other, then what you're really asking me is to not be myself and that's just something I'm not willing to do.

Sasha's insistence on not having to choose between Black and white challenges monoracial identity categories and asserts her right to an undivided identity. Yet, the framing of "best of both worlds" reinforces a dualistic understanding of identity—Black and white—that parallels the ideological framework of racial purity.

Sasha's commitment to her multiracial identity is also rooted in a deep sense of familial loyalty, particularly to her white mother Miranda. Specifically, Sasha draws an analogy to illustrate her performance of white racial obligation (Buggs 2017) and resistance to identifying solely as Black:

> I feel like my mom played the biggest role in raising me to be confident and proud of who I am and to identify as only Black would be like a slap in the face to the efforts she took to raise me ya know? It's like would you call a PBandJ a jelly sandwich just cause the jelly is what you first see oozing out the sides?

This metaphor of the PBandJ sandwich provides an evocative illustration of how Sasha's refusal to exclusively identify as Black speaks to her desire for her white heritage to be equally acknowledged in her racial identity assertion. The PBandJ analogy underscores the complexity of her identity—just as a PBandJ cannot be reduced to merely "jelly," her mixed racial identity

cannot be boiled down to her Blackness alone and how the phenotypic visibility of Blackness informs her experiences or racialization. This metaphor speaks not only to Sasha's rejection of a singular racial identity but also to the emotional weight of her performance of white racial obligation. Identifying solely as Black, Sasha argues, would undermine the socialization efforts of her mother, which were central to Sasha's sense of self. However, in emphasizing the distinctness of her white parentage, Sasha's narrative highlights the ways in which multiracial individuals may also be complicit in reifying the racialized structures that they seek to challenge.

By rejecting anti-Blackness while also asserting the value of her familial ties to whiteness, Sasha inadvertently re-entrenches the racial dichotomies that Curington (2016) and other scholars critique in their analyses of multiraciality. Sasha's refusal to relinquish attachments to whiteness serves as a direct challenge to the pressures of racial purity that underlie monoracial classifications, yet they also reinforce essentialist notions of whiteness as biologically inherited.

Sasha's stance also reflects broader cultural narratives about multiracial identity that tie individual self-worth to the rejection of racial boundaries. Her pride in her mixedness reproduces the growing myth of multiracial transcendence—the idea that multiracial people represent a bridge to a racially harmonious future, offering a unique perspective on identity that transcends the divisive nature of race. Moreover, Sasha's narrative also reflects the broader cultural investment in neoliberal individualism. Neoliberal discourse often positions multiracial individuals as exceptional because they purportedly possess a unique ability to navigate and transcend racial categories. Sasha's self-assertion, therefore, is not just an individual statement of resistance; it is enmeshed in the cultural myth of multiracial exceptionalism, which conflates the rejection of racial boundaries with individual empowerment. However, as scholars such as

Mahtani (2014) and Curington (2016) argue, this individualization of multiraciality often obscures the broader structural inequalities and racial logics that continue to shape the experiences of multiracial individuals, particularly those who navigate the realities of anti-Blackness.

These multiracial myths continually resurfaced through biracial children's reflections on the specific traits that bring them the most confidence. For some children, an embrace of mixedness inevitably correlates with their ability to connect with diverse social groups:

> I can vibe with people from both sides of my family. I'm not just one thing, I'm both, and once I fully started embracing that I could feel myself better able to connect with different groups of people. (Khalid Bryant, twelve-years-old)

For Khalid, an increased pride in mixedness manifests as a form of embodied racial capital—one that confers special insight into the racialized world and greater social integration. This framing of mixedness as an embodied resource illustrates how multiracial identity is often framed as exceptional or unique, aligning with the notion that mixed individuals are better equipped to navigate racial diversity. Similarly, children like ten-year-old Theo Shaw identify the utility of heir mixedness as offering a new, especially unique lens through which to interpret and navigate a highly racialized world:

> I love being mixed. I get to enjoy both of my cultures, and it gives me a different way of looking at the world. It's like having a superpower! (Theo Shaw, ten years-old)

While Theo's "superpower" metaphor reflects the individualistic celebration of multiracial identity, it also risks masking the structural and institutional forces that subject all multiracial people to processes of antiBlack racialization and discrimination, particularly those with visible Black parentage. This metaphor is not simply a celebration of cultural diversity; it is embedded in a neoliberal framework that suggests racial complexity can be reduced to a personal strength

or advantage. As Mahtani (2014) critically points out, such portrayals fail to address the systemic racism that continues to permeate the multiracial experience. This expanded emphasis on multiracial children's attachments to mixedness and right self-identify provided multiracial children like Khalid Cole and Theo Shaw the opportunity to be seen and see themselves as what Mahtani (2014) refers to as *racial trailblazers*- racially unique and innately apt voices of racial tolerance, diversity, and inclusion- without having to adopt the necessary antiracist, anticolonial political stance that would entail. While the agency of racialized groups is traditionally imbued with liberatory qualities, this trend suggests that the expanded agency of some racialized groups can also be used to uphold and extend the existing racial structure.

The embrace of multiracial pride and the language of fluidity, integration, and transcendence, therefore, presents a paradox. On the one hand, these discourses allow for a sense of personal autonomy and resistance to monoracial identity constraints. On the other hand, they inadvertently uphold the very racial structures they seek to challenge. As Curington (2016) argues, multiracial identities are shaped not just by individual experiences, but also by macro-level political, economic, and ideological processes. Thus, while these children's pride in their mixedness offers a sense of empowerment and self-expression, it also reflects broader narratives of neoliberal multiculturalism and colorblindness, which fail to address the racial inequalities that persist in society.

Other children's embrace of mixedness manifested as full-fledged endorsement of myths of multiracial utopia. For instance, fifteen-year-old Ari Miller expressed a belief in the future-oriented potential of their mixed identities, claiming "We are the future, people will have to accept us one day because years from now…"

The narratives of Black-white biracial children, as reflected in this section, provide a window into the ways in which multiracial identity is produced within specific socio-political contexts. Their embrace of a "pride in both" identity can be seen as both an assertion of autonomy and a reflection of the broader ideological and racial structures that shape multiracial experiences. These narratives are emblematic of the tension between the celebratory discourse of multiraciality and the ongoing realities of racial oppression, particularly anti-Blackness. As such, they demonstrate the ways in which multiracial identities are not only about individual self-expression but are also shaped by—and in some cases, reinforce—broader racial logics that continue to govern racialized lives.

These sentiments reflect the common trope of multiracial exceptionalism—the idea that mixed-race individuals occupy a unique, almost transcendent space that allows them to bridge cultural and racial divides. This pride in both identities, framed as a superpower or an advantage, often echoes neoliberal myths of individual exceptionalism, where multiracial people are seen as more adaptable, more diverse, and thus more valuable in a globalized society.

Asserting Multiracial Pride, Enacting Multiracial Agency

For many multiracial children, the discomfort that arises from racialized interactions often transforms into an internalized rejection of their multiracial identities. This phenomenon is described by scholars as "monoracism"—the societal and individual tendency to reduce multiracial identities to a single, typically monoracial, label. This process holds particular weight for multiracial children, who frequently find themselves forced to reassert and reaffirm their biracial identities in response to everyday encounters. Kayla Shaw, a 15-year-old, highlights this dynamic when she opens up about her frustrations with what she perceives as a widespread

ignorance of multiracial histories and identities, particularly in educational spaces where Black history is taught. In her own words:

> I'm proud of who I am and being mixed. That's something I really appreciate that my parents instilled in me. I just wish more people were aware that like mixed people are here, we exist...You don't know how many times I've had to correct people who just assume I'm only Black, especially in classes or like whenever we talk about Black History Month stuff. It gets annoying sometimes cause it feels like they're denying half of what makes me me.

Kayla's words reflect a profound attachment to and pride in her multiracial identity, an appreciation fostered by her parents. However, she also expresses frustration with how racialized interactions often erase or oversimplify her identity by assuming she is solely Black. For Kayla, this persistent misidentification points to a deeper societal ignorance about the lived realities of racially mixed people. What sets Kayla's experience apart from others, particularly those socialized to embrace Blackness, is her desire for explicit acknowledgment of her mixed identity within these interactions. For her, the issue is not just about being recognized as Black but about asserting her multiracial identity, which too often gets overshadowed in spaces focused on Black history and culture.

While Kayla's desire for acknowledgment of her full identity is understandable, her response implicitly overlooks the complex and historically charged relationship between racial mixing and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. These laws, which once enforced the separation of Black and white racial categories, are not just historical remnants—they are foundational to the very racialization that Kayla's identity exists within.

While Kayla clearly expresses a longing for recognition of her multiracial identity, her desire for validation within racialized spaces such as Black History Month inadvertently frames her mixedness as separate from the larger racial history that has shaped the U.S. concept of race.

The very racial mixing she claims pride in has historically been entangled with the logic of anti-miscegenation laws, which were designed to prevent the intermingling of Black and white groups. In other words, the racialized boundaries between Black and white, as well as the social and legal constructs surrounding racial mixing, have historically been inseparable. The legacy of such laws, which reinforced a strict division between Blackness and whiteness, cannot be easily separated from the ways in which multiracial identities are understood today.

Kayla's frustration with being reduced to Blackness speaks to the perceived erasure or dismissal of mixed identities, but it also sidesteps the reality that racial mixing in the U.S. has been historically framed in opposition to Blackness. Her insistence on a multiracial pride that stands independent of anti-Black racialization processes overlooks the ways in which the very categorization of race has been shaped by the fear of racial impurity and the preservation of a white racial purity that historically excluded Black people, particularly in the context of slavery and segregation.

In positioning her multiracial identity as something distinct from the dominant narratives of anti-Blackness, Kayla risks unintentionally distancing her mixedness from the very history of racialized violence and segregation that created the boundaries between Blackness and whiteness. This is not to undermine her claim to pride in her mixedness, but rather to critique how her desire for recognition may unintentionally smooth over the deeply interwoven histories of racial mixing and anti-miscegenation in the U.S. Kayla's call for recognition is valid, but it also underscores the tension between her multiracial identity and the history of racial division that still shapes how mixed identities are perceived and understood. In seeking acknowledgment of her mixedness as separate from the struggles of Black identity, Kayla's stance risks

disconnecting her multiracial pride from the historical forces that have always intertwined mixed race identities with the legacy of anti-Blackness.

This critique becomes clearer when considering the broader context in which multiracial individuals, like Kayla, navigate their identities in a society that continues to reinforce monoracial paradigms. Other biracial children I spoke with similarly expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of awareness or consideration given to mixed-race identities, framing their experiences as an ongoing effort to explain and validate their complex racial backgrounds. For instance, fourteen-year-old Ari Miller, expressed these sentiments when detailing her engagement in what Heilman (2022) refer to as "racial elevator speeches." Racial elevator speeches are relatively consistent scripts that convey explicit attachments racial and ethnic identity, are employed by multiracial persons with goals intended to mitigate microaggressive inquiries into their racial identity and racialized appearance:

> It can be exhausting! I can't just identify as mixed, I have to also make that identity make sense to other people, who let's face it, just won't get it. Luckily, things are slowly changing. There's way more representation of mixed people and like our experiences now with like the stuff with Meghan Markle and Kamala, just more attention to the fact that not everyone fits so neatly in a box nor should they have to.

Ari's words resonate with a common experience among multiracial children: the emotional and cognitive labor required to justify and explain one's identity to others. The frustration of constantly having to make one's multiraciality "make sense" underscores the persistence of monoracial frameworks that fail to account for the intricacies of biracial and multiracial lived experiences. Yet, Ari also expresses some optimism, noting that increased visibility and representation of multiracial people—especially through public figures like Meghan Markle and Kamala Harris—offers hope that these interactions may become less burdensome over time.

However, Ari's inclusion of public figures like Meghan Markle and Kamala Harris complicates the narrative. Both women have openly discussed their experiences with anti-Blackness despite their multiracial backgrounds. Ari's inclusion of these figures suggests a complex form of identification—one that both aligns with and critiques the dominant narrative of mixedness, where racialized experiences are often filtered through the lens of proximity to whiteness.

The increasing visibility of mixed identities in popular media was a recurring theme throughout my fieldwork and was observed as having a tangible impact on how biracial children understand and express their identities. Sasha Shaw speaks about the impact of seeing herself and her family reflected in contemporary media:

> I feel like I definitely see myself and my family being reflected more in movies and like different shows and stuff like that. There's definitely more representation now than when I was younger, which just kind of affirms my experience. I can feel myself being less concerned about whether my identity will be accepted or not, which is nice cause I used to be more selective about when I talked about me being mixed to people.

For Sasha, growing media representation of multiracial individuals represents not only a positive social shift but also a form of validation that affirms her identity. This shift has allowed her to feel more confident in asserting her mixed identity, moving from a place of hesitancy to one of pride. The growing presence of multiracial characters and stories in media has created a cultural space where Sasha—and others like her—can feel less pressured to prove their legitimacy, which is particularly significant in a society that often demands such proof for non-monoracial identities.

Yet, the media's growing embrace of multiracial representation does not simply provide comfort—it also opens opportunities for multiracial youth to express their identities in new ways. This is particularly evident in the case of Monet and Amira Bryant, two sisters who use their

online platforms to explore and assert their mixed identities. Both incorporate the term "mixedchick" into their Instagram and TikTok usernames and bios, signaling that their multiracial identities are central to how they present themselves both online and offline. Through their TikTok videos, they share personal stories of growing up biracial, using their platforms not just for self-expression, but to engage in a broader digital narrative surrounding their attachments to and navigation of mixedness. Cumulatively, Monet and Amira have a substantial online following with over forty thousand followers across their Instagram accounts alone. Thus, these social media platforms enable them to challenge dominant racial discourses, positioning multiraciality as both a personal experience and a social phenomenon.

In addition to asserting their mixed identities through social media, Monet and Amira also take proactive steps to ensure that multiracial history is recognized and celebrated in their communities. Monet, for example, expressed frustration over her school's lack of recognition for multiracial individuals in the context of Black History Month, a glaring omission given her family's pride in their own continuance of interracial intimacy. Motivated by this frustration, Monet worked with her white mother Nancy to advocate for the celebration of Loving Day, which commemorates the Supreme Court case that legalized interracial marriage in the U.S. Monet's efforts culminated in a school event where she organized an in-school screening of the film *Loving* and decorated the school hall with portraits of "multiracial heroes." Her goal was to not only celebrate a romanticized history of racial mixing in the US but to teach her peers about the historical significance of multiracial experiences.

Yet, Monet's initiative also exposes the deep-seated discomfort many communities experience when mixedness is superficially recognized within the context of racial history, yet abstracted from its embeddedness in colonialism and white racial domination. Specifically,

Monet's initiative encountered resistance, mostly from monoracial Black parents, who raised concerns about Monet's "theft" of "Black heroes and firsts," specifically President Barack Obama and Booker T. Washington. These parents felt that Monet's efforts were distorting the accomplishments of Black-identified leaders through the celebration of their mixedness rather than their contributions to Black history. For many of these Black parents, Monet's recognition of multiracial figures within the broader Black historical narrative can be seen as a dilution of their hard-fought achievements within racial landscapes defined by rules of hypodescent and an appropriation of Black historical narratives for the sake of inclusion. This resistance underscores a pervasive tension between mixedness and the existing antiBlack racial structure it spurs from, which continue to dominate how racial history is remembered and taught.

Despite this resistance, Monet's initiative represents a powerful form of mixed identity assertion and cultural reclamation. By asserting the importance of multiracial identities in a public-school setting, she challenged the erasure of multiracial experiences and confronted the assumption that mixed race individuals are secondary or less significant in the larger racial narrative. Monet's actions embody a broader sentiment shared by several members of multiracial families that centered an embrace of mixedness, wherein multiracial identities are considered the "most overlooked," caught in a racial paradigm that fails to fully acknowledge their history, contributions, and lived experiences. Such pushback reveals an underlying tension in the ways that race, identity, and history are conceptualized and celebrated within communities, especially when considering the complexities of multiracial identity.

This effort to assert multiracial identity and history is not limited to public spaces but extends to personal and academic decisions as well. For example, Cassie Bryant's experience applying to college demonstrates the significant role multiracial identity plays in key life

decisions. Despite receiving advice to center her Black identity in her application essays—an approach informed by the perception that it may offer strategic advantages due to Affirmative Action—Cassie remained resolute in prioritizing her mixed-race background. In her college essays, she chose to highlight the challenges and beauty of growing up with a multiracial identity, refusing to reduce herself to a single racial category even when such a move might have been seen as advantageous.

Cassie's decision underscores the broader shift in how multiracial identities are increasingly being recognized and valued, both in social and academic contexts. The growing number of multiracial students in higher education challenges traditional racial assumptions and paves the way for a more nuanced understanding of race in institutions. By choosing to present her mixed-race heritage authentically, Cassie rejected the simplification of her identity for external validation, reflecting a broader commitment to self-determination and the refusal to conform to monoracial expectations. This move also speaks to the evolving landscape of college admissions, where the increasing recognition of multiracial identities is reshaping the conversation around race, identity, and opportunity.

In conclusion, this section has explored the complexities and challenges multiracial individuals face as they assert their identities in a society that continues to favor monoracial categorizations. The experiences of young multiracial people, such as Kayla, Ari, and Monet, reveal both the emotional and intellectual labor required to navigate a world that often oversimplifies or erases their multifaceted identities. While these individuals express pride in their mixed heritage, their efforts to seek recognition—whether in educational spaces, media, or community events—also expose the deep-seated tensions between multiracial identities and the racial structures they emerge from. Monet's initiatives, for example, highlight the resistance that

mixed identities face when they are perceived as challenging or appropriating monoracial histories, particularly in contexts like Black History Month. At the same time, the growing visibility and representation of multiracial individuals in media and academia offer hope for a more inclusive understanding of race. Yet, these efforts to assert multiracial pride and agency must contend with the historical and ongoing impacts of racial division and anti-miscegenation laws. Ultimately, the section illustrates that while multiracial identity is increasingly recognized and valued, it remains entangled in broader racial dynamics that continue to shape how these identities are understood and celebrated.

(Mis)Racialized Discomfort and Monoracism

The emphasis placed on individual self-expression and pride in mixedness within multiracial families, while undeniably empowering, can have unintended consequences for multiracial youth when it comes to confronting the realities of racialization in a society that remains deeply entrenched in anti-Blackness and white racial domination. While families may celebrate their children's multiracial identities as an expression of pride and uniqueness, this emphasis often centers the idea of mixedness as an individual, self-determined identity that exists largely in opposition to a singular racial categorization. This focus on individual pride and the right to define one's identity can inadvertently leave multiracial youth inadequately prepared for the harsh social and institutional realities of racialized experiences, particularly those rooted in anti-Black processes of racialization.

At Theo Shaw's 11th birthday party in his white grandmother's home in Northern Virginia, something subtle but significant caught my attention. As he unwrapped his gifts— a Black Panther figurine and a children's book about Henry Box Brown—his face shifted from

polite gratitude to visible discomfort. These weren't odd presents for an eleven-year-old, yet Theo seemed uneasy.

Later, when I asked him about his reaction, Theo explained, "It's like they always give me stuff like that—stuff that's about being Black. What's the point of me making a wishlist if they're gonna ignore it?" His discomfort was not about the gifts themselves but about how his white family members seemed to center only one half of his multiracial identity. The figurine and book, while culturally significant, centered an attachment to Blackness that Theo didn't feel fully aligned with nor desire to express.

Theo's frustration revealed the racialized discomfort that arises when one side of their racial parentage is overemphasized while the other remains underacknowledged. In this case, his discomfort with his white family members' gifting of Black Panther figurines and African American-historical books speaks to how the narrative of mixedness, celebrated in his family, does not align with the racialized experiences he faces in broader society. Despite his parents' efforts to instill pride in his mixed identity, Theo is confronted with an exclusionary racial reality where his Blackness is foregrounded with white familial contexts in ways that seem to reduce him to one side of his identity, severing his ties to whiteness. Theo's experience reflects the broader tension in multiracial families where pride in mixedness becomes a celebratory stance that overlooks the societal forces—especially anti-Blackness—that shape racial identity in ways multiracial youth may not yet be fully prepared to navigate.

Ari shared similar frustrations while reflecting on the ways her family typically celebrates the winter holidays. In her reflection, Ari explained that she and her immediate family typically bounce from one side of their extended family to the other on Christmas– celebrating Christmas

brunch with her white family members and Christmas dinner with her Black family members. As she reflected on some of her more memorable holiday celebrations, Ari began complaining about the typical gifts she receives from white family members, her grandparents specifically:

> It’s honestly annoying to go over there sometimes because every year, it feels like they try to show us more and more that they like acknowledge that we’re Black as well as white. But it's like overkill to where it's awkward. Like why am I getting kente cloth curtains and Black barbies? Last I checked, my dad isn’t African, like he’s not from an African tribe, he’s African American but not African. And also I don't even look like these dolls, they’re like full Black, are you trying to tell me that’s what you see when you look at me?! I literally tense up every time my meemaw says "I got you something special" on like any holiday occasion.

Ari's frustration with the gifts she receives from her white relatives, such as Black dolls and kente cloth curtains, similarly reveals a disconnect between familial pride in mixedness and the structural realities of racialization in broader society. Ari's insistence on rejecting these gifts as "overkill" and misrepresentative of her Black identity suggests that while her family emphasizes her right to embrace both sides of her heritage, they do so in ways that are disconnected from the lived complexities of Blackness. Her critique highlights an ongoing tension: while multiracial youth are encouraged to cultivate pride in their mixedness, this pride is often detached from the historical and political significance of Blackness as a racial category that has long been subject to marginalization, violence, and systemic oppression. In this sense, the embrace of mixedness can sometimes overshadow the need for multiracial youth to develop meaningful connections to Blackness, leading to an incomplete understanding of how anti-Black racialization and white racial domination work in shaping their racialized experiences.

Moreover, this dynamic becomes even more complicated when multiracial youth are confronted with negative racialized experiences, as seen in ten-year-old Ace Miller’s reaction to being bullied at school. His peers repeatedly teased him about his "nappy" hair and threw

inappropriate items into it, an act that clearly carried racialized aggression. When the school administration began labeling the incident as "racist," Ace expressed profound frustration:

> It was just frustrating," he explained, "The focus should be on the fact that he's a bully, not that he's white. Now it's become this 'he's racist' thing, and it's annoying. Cause, for one, I'm half-white, so it's not really a racism thing—it's a bullying thing.

Here, we observe how Ace's mixedness becomes a lens through which he interprets and processes negative racialize interactions. While his frustration with the school's focus on racism, and his insistence on seeing the incident as a matter of bullying rather than racialized aggression, reflects a nuanced understanding of his mixed identity, it also underscores the limitations of an individualistic, pride-based narrative of mixedness. Ace's attempt to distance himself from the label of "racism" reveals an underlying discomfort with being pigeonholed into a Black identity, but it also illustrates the ways in which multiracial youth internalize the belief that their mixedness should exist independently of the racialized frameworks that have historically subjugated Black bodies.

In denying the anti-Blackness that shaped his bullying experience, Ace is not simply rejecting a simplistic racial narrative; he is also distancing himself from the profound historical forces that position Blackness as a site of racialized violence and exclusion. Moreover, his connections to whiteness are perceived as providing Ace a shield against antiBlack racialization others attempt to impose on him. His response reflects a broader discomfort with the racialized histories that interlock within his mixed identity, particularly the challenge of reconciling the pride in mixedness with the lived reality of being racialized as Black in society.

Ultimately, the messages about individual self-expression and pride in mixedness, while valuable in providing multiracial youth with a sense of agency, may not adequately equip them

to navigate the socio-political realities of anti-Blackness and white racial domination. By centering mixedness as a personal, celebratory identity that resists monoracial categories, these messages risk overlooking the structural and historical forces that continue to shape how multiracial youth are racialized. Moreover, the embrace of mixedness, while empowering, can sometimes detract from the critical need for multiracial youth to establish meaningful, sustained connections to Blackness and other racial identities, especially as they navigate the racial hierarchies that continue to dominate U.S. society. This tension underscores a critical gap in the current discourse surrounding multiracial identity—one that must more fully address the intersection of pride in mixedness with the realities of navigating complex racial and historical landscapes.

The discomfort multiracial children feel when their racial identity is emphasized—particularly the Black side of their parentage—was observed to extend beyond families that explicitly promote a "pride in both" approach to racial socialization into those who opt into cultivating an embrace of Blackness. This was especially evident throughout my interactions with nineteen-year-old Josiah Chase, who, though raised in a family that proudly embraces Blackness, finds himself alienated by the expectation to center his Blackness in social interactions, a sentiment that illustrates the tension between familial pride and the lived realities of multiracial children as they attempt to navigate their racial identities outside of the family unit. Josiah's experience sheds light on how multiracial children—especially those with visible Black heritage—struggle with the pressure to navigate or perform race in ways that feel misaligned with their personal experiences, as they face the often-contradictory expectations placed upon them by both their families and the broader racialized society.

As the self-identified "white sheep" of the Chase family, Josiah provides a compelling example of how multiracial children who actively embrace their mixedness similarly struggle with the pressure to perform race in ways that feel restrictive and misaligned with their personal experiences. In one of my first one-on-one conversations with Josiah, he shared how his dating choices and predominantly white social circles made him feel marginalized within his family. He expressed frustration at what he perceived as a lack of support from his parents, particularly his Black mother, whom he felt judged by for not fully embracing or asserting strong attachments to Blackness. He shared that his parents would often skip his band concerts, citing their general disinterest in "white people music" as the reason. For Josiah, this felt like a rejection of his identity—he was being framed as someone who was distancing himself from Black culture, which led to an emotional rift with his family.

However, this narrative was complicated when I spoke with Josiah's parents, Sheree and Seth, in a joint interview. Unprompted, Sheree explained the real reason they had stopped attending Josiah's concerts:

> "It's been a struggle with all the kids going to different schools. We have to be very intentional about which things we allocate time to for each kid…That's ultimately part of the reason we stopped going to Josiah's band concerts, well, that and his band director is racist."

This conversation took an unexpected turn as Sheree and Seth detailed their experiences with Josiah's band director. According to them, Josiah was the most skilled musician in the band but was consistently passed over for leadership positions in favor of white students. They recalled instances where the director would praise Josiah's "rhythm" as if it were an innate, racial characteristic, rather than recognizing the technical skill Josiah had cultivated. Josiah, feeling uncomfortable with his parents' confrontations with the director, eventually asked them not to attend his concerts if they couldn't refrain from making race a central issue.

Josiah's frustration with his family's pressure to assert his Blackness is apparent in his relationship with his Black mother, Sheree. Despite being raised in a home that strongly embraces Black culture, Josiah felt marginalized within the family, especially due to his choice of dating predominantly white individuals and his social circles, which he felt were judged by his parents. His mother's criticism of Josiah's interests, such as his preference for "white people music," frames Josiah's choices as a rejection of Blackness, even though he saw them as an expression of his individuality. When Sheree and Seth, Josiah's parents, later explained that their absence from his band concerts was due to practical and racialized reasons (such as the racist behavior of Josiah's band director), Josiah's experience became even more complicated. Although his parents were deeply attuned to racial dynamics, Josiah resisted this framing of his life through a Black racial lens, particularly when he felt that race was not central to the situation at hand. His irritation at his mother's tendency to make everything a "race issue" underscores the ways an embrace of mixedness impedes some multiracial children's ability or willingness to confront negative racialized interactions rooted in antiBlackness.

The ultimatum Josiah gives to his parents—to either ignore the perceived racism of his band director or stop attending his concerts—reflects a deliberate effort to avoid unwanted attention to race and Blackness in his everyday life. Similarly, other biracial children in this study used intentional strategies to circumvent unwanted attention to their Blackness. These strategies were often subtle but significant, as these children sought to affirm pride in their mixedness even amidst negative racialized interactions centered on their Blackness. navigated how to express their biracial identities without being boxed into singular racial narratives. This finding was perhaps most pronounced in children's expressed discomfort navigating predominantly Black social spaces. Amira's experience offers another poignant example of this:

> I’m definitely not ashamed of being half Black, like I don’t try to hide that part of me ever. But, I do find it sometimes uncomfortable to be in mostly Black spaces. I think part of it is that I didn't grow up spending much time with my dads side of the family, just cause they would say some pretty homophobic things that made me and my mom uncomfy. But like on the flip side, I also just feel like the Black people I've been around are the least accepting of mixed people

Amira notes that while she is "not ashamed" of being half-Black, her discomfort in predominantly Black spaces arises from past negative experiences, as well as a feeling of exclusion from Black communities. Even so, she still positions herself as outside of the Black community via her emphasis on being "half." When probed for further elaboration, Amira explained:

> It just feels like if you aren’t equally mad about how Black people are treated, they won’t accept you. And it’s just always "white people this or white people that" but like I have white family, my mom is white, they’re just not the most welcoming in my opinion. So, I just steer clear, which I hate that it's like that but it just is right now.

Amira is acutely aware of the ways in which her biracial identity positions her as "outside" the Black community, and she frames this experience in terms of feeling unwelcome if she does not "share" the same emotional intensity about Black issues as other Black individuals. Her sense of alienation within these spaces is compounded by her mother’s white heritage, which Amira perceives as a complicating factor in her ability to be accepted by Black peers. This sentiment mirrors Josiah’s discomfort with his Black mother’s framing of every situation through the lens of anti-Blackness, and it highlights the complex interplay between familial pride in mixedness and the social realities of navigating Blackness in predominantly Black spaces.

This tendency to avoid or exclude Blackness from their social circles may be seen as an attempt to maintain a more comfortable and palatable sense of self-identity in environments where Blackness is too often framed through a racialized lens of victimhood or marginalization.

In contrast to Amira's avoidance of Black spaces, other multiracial children socialized to embrace mixedness described active attempts to cultivate diverse friend groups , highlighting that she, like many multiracial children in this study, finds comfort in diverse, multicultural social circles. Thirteen-year-old Sasha Shaw highlights this, noting:

> I pride myself in keeping a pretty diverse friend group. I mean it's kind of our nature to embrace diversity, like as mixed people. In my main friend group, there's like three of us who are mixed race, one's Chinese and white, another is Korean and white, and then there's me and we have another friend who's Egyptian and one that's just white.

This emphasis on "diversity" often reveals a troubling omission—whiteness remains consistent among the friend groups described by these multiracial youth, while Blackness is notably absent. Sasha's friend group, for example, is composed of individuals of various ethnic and national backgrounds, but none of which are Black. This pattern raises important questions about the nature of diversity for multiracial children and how it may unintentionally exclude Blackness despite its broad, surface-level appeal to inclusive identities. Multiracial youth, especially those who are socialized to embrace mixedness, were often observed to gravitate toward others who share a similar racialized experience, but these connections are frequently grounded in a shared sense of navigating the complexities of mixed identity rather than an intersectional understanding of anti-Blackness.

This tendency to avoid or exclude Blackness from their social circles may be seen as an attempt to maintain a more comfortable and palatable sense of self-identity in environments where Blackness is too often framed through a racialized lens of victimhood or marginalization. The fact that many of these friendships are built around racial categories that leave out Blackness reflects the challenges of fostering meaningful, cross-racial connections in a world where race remains a highly politicized and divisive force.

While the embrace of mixedness allows multiracial youth to feel affirmed and validated in their identity, the absence of Blackness in their chosen social circles reflects a missed opportunity for coalition-building across racial lines. The avoidance of Blackness in multiracial social spaces is emblematic of the ongoing tension between individual self-expression and the need for collective solidarity, particularly when considering the ways in which multiracial youth's racialized experiences intersect with broader struggles against anti-Black racism. As these youth navigate their racialized identities, they must reconcile the ways in which their mixedness both aligns and diverges from the experiences of Black communities, and the absence of these discussions in their social spheres speaks to the larger social dynamics at play.

Ultimately, this pattern highlights the limitations of socialization strategies that center pride in mixedness without fully addressing the realities of racialization, particularly anti-Blackness, that multiracial children must confront. As these youth seek to find community and belonging, their reluctance to identify with Blackness or engage with Black social spaces may reflect the larger challenges of negotiating a multiracial identity in a society that demands racial categories to be neat, simple, and often exclusionary. The focus on mixedness may empower multiracial youth, but it also requires a more nuanced approach to understanding how their identity intersects with the lived realities of racial domination and anti-Blackness, and how they might build solidarity across racial lines in ways that challenge and reshape existing social structures.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the various ways that racial socialization messages, centered on the embrace of mixedness and individual rights to self-expression and identity within

families, are internalized by multiracial youth. These messages shape how multiracial individuals construct and deploy their racial identities, understand racial history, and navigate racialized spaces and experiences. Section 1 highlights how the embrace of a "pride in both" identity—while empowering individuals to assert autonomy and celebrate their mixed heritage—can also reinforce broader racial structures. The narratives reflect a tension between individual well-being and representation on one hand, and the reproduction of racist logics, particularly anti-Blackness, on the other. By framing mixedness as a superpower or advantage, these messages often echo neoliberal ideals of exceptionalism, positioning multiracial individuals as more adaptable or valuable, yet still embedded in societal racial hierarchies that ultimately uphold racial divisions.

Section 2 further complicates this by exploring the emotional and intellectual labor required by multiracial youth to navigate a world that continues to privilege monoracial categories. The experiences of youth like Kayla, Ari, and Monet illustrate how the effort to assert mixed identities can be empowering, yet also exposes the deeper tensions between individual identity and the persistent racial structures from which they emerge. While these youths find strength in their mixed heritage, their efforts to gain recognition—whether in educational, media, or community spaces—remain abstracted from the structural realities of race and are often met with resistance, particularly when their embrace of mixedness infringes on collective memories of Black racial history. Section 3 adds another layer of complexity by examining how multiracial youth's social circles may prioritize mixedness but avoid engagement with Blackness. This avoidance reflects a critical tension between individual self-expression and the need for collective solidarity, especially in the context of anti-Black racism.

The emphasis placed on individual self-expression and pride in mixedness within multiracial families, while undeniably empowering, can have unintended consequences for

multiracial youth when it comes to confronting the realities of racialization in a society that remains deeply entrenched in anti-Blackness and white racial domination. While families may celebrate their children's multiracial identities as an expression of pride and uniqueness, this focus often centers the idea of mixedness as a self-determined identity, positioned in opposition to a singular racial categorization. Such a framing, although affirming, can inadvertently leave multiracial youth inadequately prepared for the harsh social and institutional realities of racialized experiences, particularly those rooted in anti-Black processes of racialization. This focus on individual pride and the right to define one's identity may, in turn, hinder the development of a broader understanding of how racial domination works across different communities. Ultimately, the chapter calls for a more nuanced understanding of multiracial identity—one that recognizes the empowering aspects of embracing mixedness while also acknowledging how this emphasis can sometimes reproduce racial logics that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization, particularly for Black communities.

Chapter 8: Discussion of Contributions

This dissertation has explored the multifaceted ways in which multiracial children internalize racial socialization messages, examining the role of family dynamics in shaping their racial identities. By analyzing the approaches of families who emphasize Black racial pride, those who promote mixedness, and those who attempt to strike a balance between both, this work illuminates the complex process through which multiracial children navigate race. Central to this exploration are the tensions between self-expression, racialization, and broader structural inequalities, as well as how gendered dynamics and the unequal labor distribution within multiracial households shape these processes. While the study finds empowerment in racial pride and mixedness, it also highlights the ideological limitations and unintended consequences of depoliticized approaches to racial identity.

Chapters 4 and 5 center on Black mothers and their pivotal role in shaping their multiracial children's racial identities, emphasizing Black racial pride as a core component of racial socialization. This focus builds on Riché J. Daniel Barnes' (2015) concept of intentional Black parenting, where Black mothers strategically instill racial consciousness and prepare their children for the realities of anti-Blackness. Like Barnes, this dissertation shows how Black mothers engage in this work not only out of care, but as a form of resistance to white supremacy—imbuing their children with tools to survive and thrive in a racially stratified world.

Chapter 4 offers a critical exploration of how Black mothers work to instill Black pride and resilience in their children, balancing the affirmation of Blackness with the realities of their children's multiracial backgrounds and proximity to whiteness. The families in this chapter

highlight the intersection of race and gender, as Black mothers approach racial socialization differently for multiracial boys and girls. For example, Black mothers tend to address the particular risks of racial violence and stereotypes that affect multiracial boys (Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019), while navigating the challenges associated with the "Biracial Beauty Stereotype" for girls (Sims 2012; Johnson 2024). These gendered distinctions in socialization underscore the varied racialized experiences within multiracial families and the nuanced ways Blackness is affirmed and protected.

Chapter 5 builds on these insights, focusing on how multiracial children internalize these messages of Black pride. It argues that the racial socialization practices of Black mothers—while often aimed at preparing children for the racial adversity they will face—can also serve to foster a politicized attachment to Blackness. This attachment empowers children to engage with the larger anti-Black racial order, rejecting stereotypical notions of mixedness and positioning themselves as politically aligned within the collective Black plight and community. This attachment affirms Barnes' argument that racial socialization is not just about survival, but about cultivating racial consciousness and cultural belonging. However, this process is not without complexity: some children experience tensions between their pride in Blackness and perceived racial ambiguity or desire for increased Black phenotypic legibility.

Thus, Chapters 4 and 5 reveal the empowering role of Black racial pride in fostering resilience and critical consciousness. Yet, they also point to the limits of Black identity in navigating a world that continues to privilege whiteness. The Black pride fostered in these families offers a powerful counter-narrative to white supremacy but also reveals the contradictions within racial identity formation. The intersection of race and gender, particularly for Black multiracial boys and girls, calls attention to how racialized experiences are shaped by

broader societal structures and highlights the ways in which whiteness, even within multiracial families, continues to exert its influence.

In contrast, Chapters 6 and 7 focus on families who emphasize the celebration of mixedness and pride in both sides of their children's heritage. Chapter 6 engages with the "affirming mixedness" approach, where families actively embrace their children's dual racial backgrounds. These families frame mixedness as a source of pride, believing that fostering a sense of "wholeness" and acceptance of both racial heritages can promote a more balanced and integrative sense of self. The mixedness approach, however, is not without its flaws. While these families seek to avoid the rigid racial boundaries that define Blackness and whiteness, they often fall into "color-evasive" socialization practices that neglect to address the structural realities of racial inequality. Whiteness, in these families, is often unnamed or depoliticized, with white parents either distancing themselves from their racial privilege or framing their children's identity as a matter of individual self-expression rather than collective political struggle.

These families echo what Annette Lareau (2003) describes as middle-class child-rearing logics rooted in the language of personal choice and development. In their efforts to affirm both sides of their children's backgrounds, these families often adopt a version of “concerted cultivation” that privileges self-expression and individual agency. However, unlike the explicitly class-based dynamics in Lareau’s work, these families reproduce a racially color-evasive logic, where whiteness is rarely named and structural inequality remains unaddressed. The celebration of mixedness becomes a privatized, apolitical project—one that risks masking the realities of anti-Blackness under the veneer of diversity and multiculturalism.

Chapter 7 reveals how this ideology of mixedness shapes youth subjectivity. Some multiracial children embrace a post-racial ideal in which they are imagined as symbols of progress or racial unity. This racial optimism is deeply aligned with neoliberal multiculturalism, where racial identity becomes a personal branding exercise rather than a site of political struggle. As Lareau might suggest, these families often treat race like an individual resource to be managed or navigated—rather than as a structurally produced system of inequality. Consequently, children may feel empowered by their mixedness while simultaneously failing to recognize the enduring racial hierarchies that shape their lives. This disconnect prevents them from fully understanding how their multiracial identity intersects with broader systems of power.

The overall contributions of this dissertation lie in its critique of racial socialization practices in multiracial families, particularly the ways in which they engage with or obscure the structural dynamics of race. At the same time, this work invites greater attention to the emotional and psychological dimensions of racial socialization—particularly how racial identity salience might serve as a buffer (or not) against the stressors of racism, ambiguity, and social exclusion. As multiracial youth navigate a world in which their identities are frequently misread, challenged, or rendered illegible, their coping strategies are intimately tied to the social meaning they assign to their racial selves. Understanding this dynamic is key to developing more holistic approaches to multiracial identity formation, ones that attend to both structural conditions and embodied experiences.

As demonstrated throughout the empirical chapters, families navigate racial socialization by either centering Black pride or promoting mixedness, both of which are shaped by the pervasive influence of whiteness. This dissertation extends Lareau's and Barnes' insights by asking: what happens when child-rearing is shaped not only by class or Black maternal

strategies, but by the intimate tensions of proximity to whiteness? In Black-centered families, Blackness is affirmed in response to the enduring power of whiteness and the racialization of Black bodies. Black mothers shoulder the burden of socializing their children into a racial reality that white parents often refuse or fail to acknowledge. This mirrors Barnes' analysis of the racial labor Black women perform, but in a multiracial context where white partners benefit from racial privilege without taking on the work of naming or challenging it. Whiteness, here, remains not just unnamed—it is functionally protected. The asymmetrical labor of racial socialization reflects broader societal structures in which whiteness operates invisibly but decisively.

In contrast, families that emphasize mixedness often reproduce the logics of individualism and racial transcendence—reinforcing a depoliticized multiculturalism that avoids engagement with structural racism. This affirms Lareau's argument that parenting styles can reproduce inequality, even when they are cloaked in the language of care and cultivation. In these households, the emphasis on balance, choice, and harmony renders whiteness neutral and unmarked. Children raised in these contexts may feel racially affirmed but politically disoriented—unable to account for the anti-Blackness and white supremacy that continue to shape their experiences.

While this dissertation analytically distinguishes between Black-centered and mixedness-centered approaches, these categories were not always discrete in practice. Some families moved fluidly between strategies or exhibited internal contradictions over time—highlighting the dynamic, often improvisational nature of racial socialization in multiracial households. The critique of whiteness in this dissertation is thus twofold: it highlights how white privilege is maintained and reproduced within multiracial families, and it critiques how certain approaches to racial socialization obscure the necessity of engaging with the structural realities of anti-

Blackness. Both Lareau's and Barnes' work help us see that child-rearing is never neutral—it is shaped by power, inequality, and ideology. This dissertation builds on their contributions by situating racial socialization in multiracial families at the nexus of intimacy and structure, personal identity and political reality.

Broader Implications for Racial Socialization and Multiracial Identity

Ultimately, this dissertation underscores the importance of adopting a critical, intersectional approach to racial socialization that goes beyond simply celebrating diversity or affirming Blackness. While fostering pride in one's racial heritage is crucial for multiracial children, it is equally important to engage with the political and social realities of racial oppression. By examining how multiracial children internalize these socialization messages and how they navigate the contradictions between personal identity and structural realities, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of multiracial identity.

By foregrounding the critique of whiteness, this dissertation emphasizes the necessity of confronting the privileges that whiteness affords, especially within the intimate sphere of multiracial families. The study calls for future research and practice that not only supports multiracial identity development but also actively challenges the structural inequalities that continue to shape racial relations. Multiracial families—regardless of whether they center Blackness or mixedness—must confront the ways in which whiteness continues to shape their children's racial identities and their lived experiences in a society structured by racial hierarchies.

Future Directions for Research

Building on the findings of this dissertation, future research on multiracial identity and socialization should continue to interrogate the structural conditions under which racial meaning is made in families. While this study focuses on Black-white families to expose the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness and the power of whiteness in shaping family dynamics, there is a need to move beyond this formation to examine how racial socialization unfolds in a wider range of multiracial constellations. Families that include Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and Middle Eastern heritage bring distinct migration histories, cultural frameworks, and experiences of racialization that complicate prevailing understandings of how race is negotiated at home. Expanding the scope of inquiry will allow researchers to interrogate how different configurations of race, culture, and power shape children's sense of belonging and their ability to resist dominant racial ideologies.

Moreover, future research must attend to the intersecting roles of class, geography, and kinship networks in shaping racial socialization. Too often, studies rely on decontextualized, individualistic accounts of identity formation. However, as this dissertation shows, the meanings children make of race are shaped not only by parental narratives but also by the classed and racialized spaces they inhabit, the extended family members who support or disrupt their socialization, and the institutions that structure their lives. Research must also consider non-heteronormative multiracial families—those with queer, trans, or nonbinary parents or children—whose experiences of racial socialization are deeply shaped by intersections of gender, sexuality, and kinship structure. These families offer critical insights into how norms of race, gender, and family are simultaneously reproduced and contested, broadening the possibilities for what racial socialization and belonging can look like.

Finally, future studies should take seriously the role of youth agency and reflexivity in the racial socialization process. Rather than viewing children as passive recipients of adult teachings, researchers must explore how multiracial youth critique, reinterpret, and resist the messages they receive. Social media, peer groups, pop culture, and political movements offer important alternate sites of racial meaning-making. Attending to these spaces—and to the emotional and intellectual labor youth engage in—can deepen our understanding of multiracial identity as not just a developmental outcome, but a site of ideological struggle. Such approaches will help push the field toward a more critical, intersectional, and structurally informed study of multiracial family life—one that centers not only identity affirmation, but also resistance, transformation, and liberation.

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