

WHITE PARENTS, MIXED RACE CHILDREN:
THE ENTANGLED EFFECTS OF LOVE, RACISM, AND PARENTING

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

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Love and racism can exist together, especially when white parents lack the ability to discuss race with their Mixed Race child(ren). This study explores the racial relationship between white parents and their Mixed Race children. Eight college age Mixed Race students participated in this qualitative study that interrogated how race was discussed (or not discussed) as a part of their upbringing. Grounded in a conceptual framework revealing the linkage between white supremacy and the social construction of racial categories, this work examines the entanglement of how good-intentioned, loving, white parents can ignore or reject the racial identity of their Mixed Race child(ren) and the impacts this has on reifying colorblind ideologies and whiteness writ large. Through a feminist methodological approach, participant expertise and researcher subjectivity as a white mother scholar of two Mixed Race children, played key roles in data analysis and representation. Represented by way of a fictional panel discussion where participants share with parents of Mixed Race children their racial experiences, findings indicate that an absence of conversations about race significantly impact Mixed Race children's identity and belongingness, that love and

racism is a complex coexistence, and that parents' inability to discuss race further perpetuates inequities caused by white supremacy. Recommendations for educators (at all levels) and parents of Mixed Race children are explored with the intention of disrupting the traditional, race-neutral or race-negative ways we discuss race with children, even within the precious relationship of parent and child.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my precious Samara and Roman. Your existence inspired this project and was completed so I could become closer to you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a family outing to the store to pick up a few items, my daughter, who is Mixed Race, shared with me and my husband that “princesses only have white faces.” My heart sank. How could this happen already? Of course I knew how it happened – all of us are products of a society where white is deemed beautiful. The white ideal of beauty had already sunk into her impressionable mind. She has seen toys, played with other kids’ toys, and has seen many, many books depicting who is “royalty” and who is not. After she made this statement, my husband and I tried to quickly recover by telling her that princesses have all different color skin tones and even the first princesses had brown skin. After this brief conversation, we entered the store. One of the items we needed to purchase was Band-Aids. My daughter and I approached the Band-Aide aisle and were met with many choices, one of them being princess Band-Aids – white princess Band-Aids. The previous conversation fresh in my mind, I shared with her that she could not have the princess Band-Aids and tried to distract her with other options. She knew the difference and began to throw a large tantrum. An older white woman overheard this exchange and gave me a look that said “what is wrong with your daughter having princess Band-Aids?” The fact that the princesses are all white and my daughter is a Person of Color did not register for her. I felt the judgement as though I was the one being ridiculous and racist. Our non-verbal exchange communicated everything wrong in that very moment. The irony angered me so much I wanted to share with her what my daughter said ten minutes earlier. I wanted to put her in her place and explain these white princess Band-Aids are just one of many microaggressions my Mixed

Race daughter will face in her lifetime regarding her beauty and ability. But of course, I chose to say nothing, “it is too much to explain,” I thought to myself.

Moments like this make me wonder how I can be a better parent. I believe each parent has a responsibility to discuss issues of race and to be candid about our racial history and many injustices around race happening today. I place a special responsibility on myself; I am a white mom to two Mixed Race children. I want to know about race, racism, and the systems of oppression that sustain white dominance in our society. With all of these factors contributing to who I am, I strive to be a white mother who is helpful in their journey as People of Color,¹ rather than solely relying on their father as the person who will discuss matters of race and racism.

My deepest desire is to be a good mom, a supportive mom, a listening mom, and a mom who is always there for my children. I don't think my desire is unique; many parents I know feel this exact same way. Yet, I know I face a racial barrier with my children. I am interested in the many ways I can empathize with their racial experience and walk beside them, supporting them each step of the way. I also desire to help other white parents do the same. Other white parents who also have Children of Color are quick to discuss my daughter's “hair-care routine” or the products I use to moisturize their skin. Yet, the important questions – “How do you talk about race in your home?” or “How do you handle all the ‘white’ toys?” are never broached questions. This lack of questioning bothers me because I feel that the unimportant is more frequently discussed rather than deeper conversations about identity or the racial realities of our society. Do white parents care

¹ At points in this study I refer to Mixed Race people as People of Color as I do not want to imply that Mixed Race people are not (or cannot) be People of Color, despite having a white parent (as is the case for participants of this study).

about cultivating positive racial identity? Or perhaps they just don't know how. These questions are based upon a responsibility I place on myself to help white parents to Mixed Race children discuss race in positive ways.

I began this chapter sharing just one of my stories as white mother to two Mixed Race children for one important reason. I desire to establish my positionality as a researcher, demonstrating reflexivity and openness about my own struggles parenting children who do not share my racial identity. Drawing attention to *how* we should do this is often unmentioned or even ignored altogether. Learning how to talk about race is a systemic problem our country, despite the rise in people identifying as People of Color, especially those who identify as Mixed Race. Before venturing further into issues surrounding race and parenting, I want to illustrate the need to have this discussion using numbers, in addition to stories, to outline this issue more fully.

By The Numbers

In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau collected data for the first time on individuals from two or more races (e.g., Asian/White, Hispanic/Black, White/Hispanic/Asian, etc.) by allowing individuals to select more than one race on their census form (Renn, 2000). Individuals reporting being from two or more races grew by 32% from 2000 to 2010, compared to Americans who reported a single race, which grew by 9.2% during the same time period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Interracial marriages are also on the rise in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (2015a), 17% of U.S. newlyweds are married to someone of a different race or ethnicity compared to 3% fifty years ago. And, according to estimates of the college population, Mixed Race² college students could represent 40% of

² I choose to use the term “Mixed Race” or “Multiracial” in this study to define individuals who have more than one racial background. Mixed Race or Multiracial represents one of the current preferred vernacular describing

students in higher education by 2021 (Renn, 2011). These numbers demonstrate rapid growth within one demographic and do warrant attention all on their own, but these facts are just a small piece of the story that encompasses the Mixed Race experience today.

People of Mixed racial descent have always been part of American society (DaCosta, 2007). Many people in the United States would not be shocked to discover more than one racial ancestry runs through their blood. Racial mixing has been a part of the fabric of our nation –whether that be through consensual relationships or through rape (as in the case of white³ slave masters with Black women who were enslaved) both have produced Mixed Race children. Yet, it has not been until the last fifty years of our existence as a nation where the conversation has centered around interracial marriage rights, identifying the Mixed Race population and engaging in discourse around race in non-monoracial terms. The Supreme Court case, *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), struck down the laws in the United States prohibiting interracial marriage. Additionally, it was only 17 years ago when the United States Census began to count Mixed Race individuals. Since these significant changes have taken place, Mixed Race people have grown to encompass 6.9% of the U.S. population according to U.S. Census information and estimates from the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2015a).

Given these numbers, it is difficult to imagine that prior to the U.S. Census collecting information on Mixed Race individuals (beginning in the 2000 Census), studies showed less

this population. Additionally, Mixed Race and Multiracial is an encompassing term and accounts for people who have two, three, or more racial backgrounds (rather than saying biracial). *The Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* dedicated a portion of their first volume to discuss the issue of language and appropriate terms. The journal's editor, G. Reginald Daniel (2014), wrote "We accommodate the terms Mixed Race and Multiracial interchangeably in the journal...since both are widely used in the field of Mixed Race/Multiracial studies and consciousness, as well as in the public imagination" (Daniel, 2014, p. 5).

³ Throughout my research, I will intentionally capitalize all races other than white. I have chosen to do this as a form of support and respect for those that have been victims of racial oppression in the United States.

than 2% of the population indicated they belonged to more than one racial category (Schmidt, 1997). It is quite significant to see how one change in how government collects information can illuminate U.S. racial statistics.

Due to these documented rising numbers, Mixed Race individuals are becoming more visible and vocal as a group on college campuses. DaCosta (2007) notes, “[Mixed Race individuals] are comprised of people at a variety of ethnoracial ‘mixtures.’ There is no group ‘history’ or culture that all Mixed Race people share” (p. 7). However, there is growing evidence that Mixed Race individuals are collectively coming together and embracing their shared identity (DaCosta, 2007). DaCosta (2007) references these groups forming even before the census issue was addressed to include groups such as the *Hapa Issues Forum* (Berkley), *Multiracial Americans of Southern California* (Los Angeles), *I-Pride* (Berkley), *Biracial Family Network* (Chicago), *Interracial Family Circle* (Washington DC), and *Swirl* and the *Mavin Foundation*, both who represent Mixed Race college students nationally. Among American colleges and universities, Mixed Race students are one of the fastest growing groups of students of color. It is estimated that one in five new students will identify as Mixed Race by 2050 (Brown, 2009; Smith & Edmonston, 1997). It is because of this growing group affinity that higher education, as well as other entities, should take notice of this politically emerging population. To this point, Renn (2000) notes, “In the ongoing battle of access, equity, and affirmative action policy in higher education, racial statistics matter” (p. 400). It matters in terms of support offered on college campuses – all of which help the problem of access and equity.

The college environment is full of important opportunities for students, both socially and academically (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One of the learning outcomes many colleges

and universities champion is assisting students in learning about others who are different from themselves. When students take part in a university community they are met with students unlike themselves, gain new ideas, and enter a learning laboratory that allows them to grow in significant ways (Holsapple, 2012). Additionally, the college environment provides opportunities to learn about themselves, different people, and how they can address issues of injustice in our society (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurado, & Gurin, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006). Goals like these assume a certain level of self-awareness around identity. For most people, regardless of how they identify racially, this self-awareness and identity begins in the childhood and adolescent years where parents serve as teachers. The college environment is often the very first time that family racial values are put to the test as students are on their own, making decisions without constant supervision.

Racially identifying Mixed Race people is not an exact science and is an ever-changing phenomenon (Gillem 2001; Korgen 1998-1999; Rockquemore & Brunisma 2002; Storrs 1999). Furthermore, concepts of identity among Mixed Race individuals is documented in the literature (Kilson 2001; Renn 2004; Rockquemore & Brunisma 2002; Wallace 2001) and theories have been created that seek to describe this identity development (Poston 1990; Rockquemore 1999; Root 1990). The interweaving theme among this research is quite clear: “In the post-civil rights era United States, Mixed Race people choose between several different racial identities” (Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006). However, this choice is rooted in the understanding that all children, Mixed Race included, are born into a world in which racial classification sits on top a foundation of white supremacy (Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006). Therefore, the ways that we seek to classify people and place them into racial boxes, benefits whiteness as a system of oppression. It

defines who is “white” or who is “normal”. White supremacy also defines who is not white, therefore on the outside. This notion is complicated by the fact that today’s racial rhetoric continues to acknowledge that race is socially constructed, and “color-blind” ideologies encourage people to move beyond the racial issues, which have divided us for the entirety of our national history (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

Many Americans are not equipped to accurately discuss race in its social, political, and institutional contexts (Jensen, 2005), much less in terms representing many intersections of race, ethnicity, and culture within the Mixed Race population. For Mixed Race people, the notion of racial identification can be a frustrating concept to broach (Kellog & Lindell, 2012). This frustration perhaps stems from the binary methods Americans use to classify race in the United States. The parents of Mixed Race children are no exception to this racial reality of binary classifications. Additionally, I argue Mixed Race students who have one white parent might be at a particular disadvantage when it comes to intentional discussions of race. White parents are sometimes criticized by People of Color for birthing or adopting Children of Color because of the ways white parents may “communicate consciously and unconsciously, a quite different lesson that privileges white framing, characteristics, norms, and ways of doing and being...children are taught that whiteness⁴ is normal and should mostly conform to the contours and requirements of that whiteness” (Smith, Juárez, & Jacobson, 2011, p. viii). I believe this normalcy is often manifested within family structures as uninformed, stereotypical, and overtly racist conversations that shape how children view themselves and others.

⁴ Whiteness refers to the social construction that being of the white race is “better than” People of Color and is seen as “normal” within society.

Parents of Mixed Race children are met with unique challenges in raising their family. Discussing fluid identity in a world with fixed racial categories can be confounding. White people in particular are often ill-equipped to discuss race, much less racial complexities outside of binary categories (Chang, 2016). There is lack of considerable research that examines a white parent's role in the racial development of their Mixed Race child. This proposed study seeks to fill that gap through interviewing Mixed Race college students, who have one white parent and one parent of color, in order to understand how racial messages are interpreted, understood, and applied in early adulthood.

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What messages have Mixed Race college students (with one white parent) received about race from their parents?
2. How do the nuances of race and racism intermingle when parenting a Mixed Race child?
3. How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity around issues of race and racism based on the messages they received from their lived experiences?

The implications for this research are important to two groups of people – parents of Mixed Race children and anyone working within education. The findings from this study are important for parents of Mixed Race children because it is parents' role to ensure that our children develop healthy racial identities and the tools to establish self-esteem within an inherently racist society. This awareness is especially important for the white parents who have Children of Color. This heightened sense of understanding not only benefits the Mixed Race child but also the partner of color who is parenting as well. Bearing the burden to

tackle a white supremacist society is best done from all parents, not just Parents of Color. Chang (2016) states, “Childhood is a *critical point of intervention* for understanding how we as individuals relate to race, which involves developing resistant racial awareness that then contributes to undoing racism” (p. 192). Thus, this study holds the potential to assist white parents in understanding the very serious responsibility that we have in our anti-racist work ahead. Further, my study bears importance to educators working at all educational levels. My interviews with college students helps to not only understand the impact of the racial experiences from home but also identifies ways that educators can fill the racial gap that was left undiscussed by parents.

My research builds upon the existing literature on Mixed Race students’ experiences today (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Harris, 2016; Jolivet, 2014; McKibbin, 2014; Reginald, Kina, Dariotis, & Fojas, 2014) by discussing the impact that parenting has had on Mixed Race children as they emerge into adulthood. Jessica Harris’s (2016) work on developing a critical Multiracial theory in education served as an academic inspiration in developing this dissertation prospectus. Her argument for a stronger consideration of Mixed Race students allowed me to think of other ways we could bring Mixed Race students from margin to center in the discussions of race today in the United States. While her approach is theoretically and methodologically different, I believe our goals are the same – to help bring a deeper understanding of Mixed Race people more toward the center of our conversations about race. This study in particular is an active action to dismantle white supremacy within the confines of parenting, hoping other white parents of Mixed Race children do the same. Before diving deeper into the heart of this study, it is important I first discuss my own

subjectivity and positionality. This perspective taking is critical in my identity as a white researcher.

Subjectivity and Positionality Statement

My own life and its experiences cannot be erased; it impacts the research I conduct and how I conduct it. Therefore, the significance of discussing my subjectivity and positionality is of great importance, especially given my racial identity. I am a white woman from the upper Midwest and racism was an undercurrent in my family home. I went to a conservative Christian school for most of my school years, and I do not recall any time that valuing another perspective was ever intentionally presented to me (unless it was one interpretation of the Bible over another). The conservative Christian beliefs that I was exposed to taught me to value everyone who looked and thought like my family. The biblical principle of “love thy neighbor” did not necessarily apply across the board; it was used when convenient (e.g. when we were with people who looked like us). My upbringing fits neatly into many ways scholars describe how white people learn about our racial positionality in American culture. I was taught not to see or notice my whiteness (or other dominant identities I hold) as a benefit. I was “normal.” My dominant identities (e.g., my whiteness, Christian religion, identifying as cisgender) were never named, thus, everyone else who did not identify like me was an “other” and they needed to take steps to be more like me (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). I saw this frequently in school where my Classmates of Color were often stereotyped as loud, bad, or lacking direction. I believe it is important for me, as a white person, to understand that racism lives within me as a result of the society in which I was raised (Jenson, 2005). Recognizing all the ways white supremacy⁵ has worked in my life is a necessary component

⁵ White supremacy is defined as an ideology that white people are superior to People of Color. This is manifested in systems that have been created to affirm, preserve, and protect white people. This ideology has

to understanding my subjectivity as a scholar and also in the other roles I occupy in life. Throughout my childhood, my father was the strongest voice that taught me racist ideologies; he was the direct mouthpiece of a racist world, brought into my very own home. His messages, along with a lack of discussion on race in our household, and the every-day racism I absorbed from television, music, and magazines, formed a childhood where I learned that being white was better than being a Person of Color. In fact, I have a very vivid memory as a third grade student sitting next to a Black, male classmate of mine. I remember looking at him and thinking I was glad I was born white. Issues of race and racism were not really talked about in my home, unless it was a statement about how lazy, ignorant, or bad a Black person was. I got the message that race was taboo to talk about and when it was brought up, it made people feel uncomfortable. My family did not live around any People of Color and I cannot remember any Person of Color coming into my childhood home. My father liked to believe he was accepting of others (and others to him meant Black people) because he liked to brag about the Black guys at work he was “friends” with and how he was forming community partnerships with a Black church in town. We also attended this Black church at least once per month in addition to ours as a part of my dad’s ‘community partnership.’ Attending the Black church made my dad feel good, like he was better or different than other white people. I could see it in his demeanor. I remember feeling uncomfortable during these church services. Not only because my family were the only white people in the church, but also because I was scared. During my childhood, I learned to fear People of Color. My dad would frequently drive me through the north side of town where many Black people lived.

justified crimes against Indigenous people, slavery, disparities in wealth and education, beauty standards that are set based on light skin and straight hair texture (among other characteristics), and a society where white people occupy top leadership positions (Jenson, 2005).

These drives made me fearful of groups of Black people, and my dad would often crack racial jokes and say racial slurs like “porch monkey, gorilla, and nigger.” His favorite was to say “Tyrone Shoelace” as a mockery of his assumption that Black names were ridiculous. When I was in high school, I began taking an interest in basketball because I loved playing the sport. I started to watch NBA basketball quite frequently and became a huge fan of Michael Jordan. I decided to put a poster of Michael Jordan up in my room and also a picture of my favorite Detroit Pistons player, Grant Hill. My dad became upset and started a serious conversation/interrogation of me and these posters. Did I like Black men? Was I attracted to them? Why would I want to “glorify” Black men by having these posters? He made me feel ashamed of the posters, but I kept them up anyway; this was my rebellion against him.

As a teenager, I saw my dad as a hypocrite -- saying one thing and then doing another. His public racial perspective was very different behind the closed doors of our home. I later began seeing the other ways he lived a double life when he got into legal trouble when I was thirteen, and he served three months in jail. When my family visited him, he would talk about the Black guys in the jail using racial slurs and made it sound like he was better than them, like it was unjustified for him to be in jail compared with his Black jail-mates. A few years after he was released, I found out he had cheated on my mom with her best friend. Just like that, he moved out of our home and in with the other woman. The image of the perfect, Christian, white man was shattered in my mind.

If my dad could be this way, any Christian white man could be this way. Due to the deterioration of the relationship with my father, I was ready to hear anything that contradicted his opinions on life – topics of race included. As I look back to this time in my

life, as painful as it was, it helped to lay the groundwork to understand how white racial power, dominance, and all elements of white supremacy are part of a socially constructed hierarchy of race (Roberts, 2011). In my childhood, my dad served as the representation of a constant in my life, something that I saw as fixed and unshakable. When my dad let me down in my teen years by going to jail and being unfaithful to my mom, I understood that any part of my life was subject to change – my racial perspective included.

I am not the picture my father wanted for my life; I married a Black man. My relationship with my husband is in direct contradiction to the number one relationship advice my dad gave me, “Shannon, don’t date a Black man.” After my husband and I began dating and our relationship became serious, I did a lot of soul searching (at the prompting of my husband) to think about why I was attracted to him. Was it simply because he was Black? Was I unconsciously rebelling against my father? In many ways, I cannot get around that the answer to my second question is yes. I am with my husband as a rebellion to my father – as a rebellion to his hypocrisy, hate, and outright racism. I also came to the conclusion after much of the family trauma I experienced in my teens, I felt a lot of shame. The type of shame that caused my panic attacks and closed me off from people who seemingly had everything who, in my world, were white people. The People of Color I did know growing up had stories of resiliency despite life’s hardships. This sort of connection, the connection that didn’t make me feel strange or weird when I told my family’s story was what I desired in order to be close with someone. This connection is what I found in my husband. I could be me, even with my broken messed-up family. As I became older, I realized that white people can have messed up families just like me. It is white supremacy at its finest for it to convince me that only Black people had these struggles. Why is it that I only feel that I can have a

deep connection with a Person of Color? Is it really the desire to rebel from my father? Overly sexualized ideas of Black men? Subconscious internalized white superiority? The answers to these questions are ones that I wrestle with frequently, especially during the process of writing this dissertation; it troubles me a great deal I cannot pinpoint them. But this struggle is reflective of how white supremacy operates – it is subconscious, so much so that I struggle to determine how it found its way into my being. I am a product of our racist society and have been complicit in white supremacy. I try to resist the informal racist teaching I was given, but the programming is difficult to undo. This is the part of my racial story that represents white supremacy within me. It is not something that is easy to admit but inspires the racial work I am doing and will continue to do in the years ahead.

My husband and I have two Mixed Race children together. My six year old daughter and three year old son are my joy, my pride, and I simply do not have the words to express the happiness I wish for their lives. Despite all the love I give them, I understand their lives as People of Color will be dramatically different from my own. As a mother and doctoral student studying race and our society, I am keenly aware of the racial messages my children are receiving. No cartoon or toy purchase is free from my thoughts about race. I despise the aisle full of dolls at Walmart or Target; I find I do not even take my kids to the toy section anymore. I prefer to go on my own, combing the shelves, trying to find toys with their skin color or hair texture, looking for someone with whom they can identify. I prefer it this way, so I do not see the disappointment on their faces as I tell them “no” to the far too many white choices available. I don’t want to see the disappointment on their faces because I don’t want to have to explain our white supremacist society. They are too innocent to already experience its effects. I want to protect them from the inevitable – that they already are

subject to racism. I often question my ability to have these conversations and wonder if when I talk about racism with my children, am I doing it right? Also, I am afraid of my own racism. Where will my negative programmed thoughts about People of Color seep out in my parenting? I take steps to be anti-racist, but I am most terrified of my blind spots.

Throughout my journey as a doctoral student, I have concluded that my research and academic interests must be driven by tangible actions. Thoughts like the ones I have shared are important, salient issues for anyone parenting a child of color. My dissertation, as the capstone portion of my educational experience, set out to accomplish how I, as a white parent, can fully understand my role in helping to shape positive racial messages for my two Mixed Race children. I desire for this research to help other white parents who have Children of Color. Further, I gathered information from current Mixed Race college students who have one white-identifying parent to reflect on how race was discussed as a part of their upbringing and how these messages have been applied in their early years outside of the home, in college. Because, after all, my own children will be young adults as well, making their way through our racist world. How will I have equipped them to appreciate who they are? Because of these personal experiences and passions, I sought out to study Mixed Race college students.

In fall 2015, I conducted a pilot study for my qualitative methods research course. I chose to facilitate a focus group with four Mixed Race college students, thinking that it would be useful for helping to shape my dissertation topic. My intended goal of the focus group was to discuss my participant's racial identity and how their experience within the residence halls contributed to their identity formation. Through the pilot study, I learned a great deal, both about my participants and me as a researcher. In just one hour, I heard rich

information about their experiences in college as it pertains to their racial identity. I asked many questions about their college experiences but discovered many of my questions' answers had deeper roots in the ways race was discussed with these students. In this moment, I abandoned my original research idea and began focusing on how families might discuss race with their Mixed Race child(ren). This idea was the beginning of the formation of my research questions central to this dissertation.

My personal story unfortunately reflects the racial reality for many white people – we were raised to not see race, much less notice the effects of racism. If it were not for my racial experiences with my father, I am not sure if my obliviousness to white supremacy would have been challenged. The discovery of my racism came together due to a perfect storm of rebelling against my father's ideologies, the privilege I had to attend college and become exposed to different ideals than what I knew growing up, and being exposed to People of Color and listening to *their* stories instead of relying on stereotypes. I want for my children to grow up in a home where their racial identity is valued, and I desire this for other Mixed Race children as well. Through the pilot study I conducted, I found that discussions of race did not exist and their identity as a Mixed Race person was not valued. At the same time, however, I believe most white parents are well-intentioned. This juxtaposition inspired me to ask the question “Can love and racism can exist together?” And, if this notion is true, how do parents craft this reality? To understand these questions fully, it is necessary to peel back the layers of how a racist society is created. This can be uncovered by discussing the historical, political, and social racial framework that allows white supremacy to remain a key part of U.S. society.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

The task of a conceptual framework is to guide and provide a basis for a particular perspective that informs “an underlying system shaping thought and practice” (hooks, 2000, p. 19). To date, there is no one accepted framework that addresses the multiple components of the experiences of Mixed Race people and parenting. There are, however, many concepts within current literature informing the ways in which I understand Mixed Race experiences and the role parenting plays in racial identity formation. Viewing race through a critical lens allowed me to examine the multiple ways race and racism have systemically made it difficult for us to account for the experiences of Mixed Race people. Issues of race as they intersect with United States history and politics are essential for understanding the racial binary thinking that makes it difficult for us to include and account for racial identities outside Black and white. Thus, the proposed conceptual framework is the marriage of the messiness that is race and racial frameworks in the United States today, especially in relation to discussing race in non-binary terms. I have chosen to borrow some tenets from Critical Race Theory (CRT) without fully using it as a theoretical framework. CRT gave me the scholarly language and understanding of how race operates in our society. It also gave me insight into how a Scholar of Color might view race and its endemic nature. Conversely, I needed to think about my topic from a white scholar’s perspective addressing white supremacy. I felt that with my white identity, I could not fully take CRT, as some CRT scholars argue that CRT is not fully open to white researchers. In fact, I have struggled with the notion that I cannot “be” a critical race theorist. I do not want to claim scholarly space that is not mine, yet I want to pay homage to CRT and the ways it has helped me to understand race. I hope that through my strategic use of a few of its tenants, I can still remain sensitive to the

concerns present for white researchers fully using this theory. Bergerson (2003) discussed this dilemma by asserting,

White scholars must join the fight to legitimize research that utilizes alternative methods such as CRT, that comes from the lived experiences of individuals who have traditionally been marginalized and considered unimportant to scholarship, and that grows from the passion of doing research to effect changes that will benefit people of color. Stepping beyond the positivist view of research as neutral requires care...White scholars must join the ranks of those celebrating the experiences of People of Color and insisting that the academy recognize these experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. (p. 60)

Given this perspective on my use of CRT, I develop my conceptual framework below by interweaving the historical and contemporary information that contributes to the ways our society views and discusses race by critiquing elements of whiteness and white supremacy. I then connect the ways in which whiteness and white supremacy inform how white parents discuss (or do not discuss) issues of race with their Mixed Race child(ren).

A Critical Perspective on Whiteness & White Supremacy

Many people, especially white people, deny the existence of white supremacy. When the term “white supremacist” or “white supremacy” are stated, images of skin heads or the Ku Klux Klan come to mind; we believe that there is a great distance between ourselves and white supremacy. The United States of America is a white supremacist society, even 150 years after the end of slavery and 40 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act (Jenson, 2005). In fact, white supremacy is entrenched into the very fabric of our existence as citizens of the United States. In our 400 year “existence” (from Jamestown settlement in the 1600s and on), we have fostered extreme racial oppression in forms of slavery and segregation that

have greatly shaped our nation (Feagin, 2013). When we begin to examine what we mean by the term white supremacy, it becomes clearer that the term does indeed define us. Jenson (2005) defines a white supremacist society as:

A society whose founding is based in an ideology of the inherent superiority of the white Europeans over non-whites, an ideology that was used to justify the crimes against indigenous people and Africans that created the nation. That ideology also has justified legal and extralegal exploitation of every non-white immigrant group, and is used to this day to rationalize the racialized disparities in the distribution of wealth and well-being in this society. It is a society in which white people occupy most of the top positions in powerful institutions, with similar privileges available in limited ways to non-white people who fit themselves into white society. (p. 4)

For hundreds of years through today, white supremacy has defined who is the superior racial group and has structured society accordingly. Feagin (2013) calls this the “white racial frame” and cites that “this dominant framing has shoved aside, ignored, or treated as incidental numerous racial issues including the realities of persisting racial discrimination and racial inequality” (p 22). Thus, the foundation of my conceptual framework is a critical perspective on white supremacy. By critically analyzing its elements and numerous structural impacts, I can see more clearly how parents of Mixed Race children, consciously or unconsciously, transfer elements of white racial framing into their family structure, thus impacting how they discuss matters of race with their children.

It is difficult for white people to talk about white supremacy, especially with children, because we fumble when trying to pinpoint how it operates and what it looks like. Traditional schooling does not provide this type of education when discussing our society

either in historical or contemporary contexts. President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors (1998) for the President's Initiative on Race, gathered several facts about race and our society. The list below provides tangible examples of the racial inequalities in our nation, thus exposing the work of white supremacy. Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors' report described how whites are more likely than People of Color to:

- 1) Attend primary and secondary schools with smaller class sizes.
- 2) Have access to computer technology in public schools and at home during primary and secondary school.
- 3) Attend and graduate from a four-year college or university.
- 4) Earn higher salaries.
- 5) Retain employment during a downturn in the economy.
- 6) Be covered by health insurance and consequently gain access to health care.
- 7) Survive certain life-threatening illness.
- 8) Experience more favorable housing conditions (less crowding, less crime, less litter and deterioration, and few problems with public services).
- 9) Spend a smaller percentage of household income on housing.
- 10) Have unimpeded access to home mortgage loans and home ownership.
- 11) Own stocks, mutual funds, and IRA accounts.
- 12) Gain substantial net worth.

While this list is daunting to read, it is not exhaustive by any means. Although this list is from nearly 20 years ago, these facts still stand and in fact, our racial inequalities have worsened over time (Feagin, 2013). Other studies and stories (e.g., Manning & Mullings, 2000; Pager, 2003; Snipp & Cheung, 2016; United for a Fair Economy, 2004) have described

further inequities that help illuminate the issue for even the most well-intentioned skeptic. The list above creates a roadmap for how many people, regardless of race, “have positive stereotypes, images, and understandings about whites and negative stereotypes, images, and understandings of People of Color” (Feagin, 2013, p. 14). White supremacy is very fundamental in our society, so fundamental, that it is difficult to critically analyze. Still, white supremacy has been the backbone of racial formation in our country.

Racial Formation and Social Construction: The Historical, Legal, and Political Background of Racial Mixing 1600s-Present

Like citizenship, race is a political system that governs people by sorting them into social groupings based on invented biological demarcations. Race is not only interpreted according to invented rules, but, more important, race itself is an invented political grouping. Race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that has been disguised as a biological one.

(Roberts, 2011, p.4)

Understanding race as a political structure is imperative to understanding Mixed Race people within the hierarchy of racial classification. Since the United States was colonized, racial categories developed with similar distinctions we see to this day. One’s position in society was directly linked to race and to be classified as white would be to one’s social benefit. Set racial classifications determined who was enslaved and who was free (Carter, 2013). The racial mixing muddied these classification systems and also threatened racial purity in the United States. The laws regulating sex and marriage cemented racial categories. The state of Virginia outlawed interracial sex in 1662. Further, Virginia added to that law in 1691 making it a crime for any “Negro, mulatto, and Indian men to marry or accompany a white woman” (Roberts, 2011, p. 179). The benefit to protecting white women from People of Color was to preserve racial purity. This tight grasp on racial purity was to cement whites as the owners of American society. Whiteness and the benefits that come from it in America,

were protected as closely as property. Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars have been most adept at explaining this phenomenon. Specifically, Harris (1993) coined the term “whiteness as property” as one of the ways white supremacy owns formal structures within society.

Whiteness as property. “Whiteness as property” contains both the literal and figurative definition of property: land or homes, *and* ownership over laws, policies, and systems preserving whiteness as a central power. White people today still hold the keys to pieces of property necessary to navigate our society successfully. Furthermore, Harris (1993) described the concept of whiteness as property by explaining:

The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country, it was not the concept of race along that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination (p. 1716).

The embedded racism in our nation is seen as having caused white people to be the central property holders (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). During enslavement, Black men, women, and children were treated as property; subjects of white ownership to be bought and sold. Many Black women were raped by their white slave owners as they (and the children born out of those assaults) were treated with no regard and only as objects of their desire, despite laws that that forbade racial mixing. The contradiction of the law and sexual desire is a fascinating concept to consider. White supremacy is seen here in its ultimate form – the power to define who and when the laws apply.

The exclusionary nature of owning property is foundational to understanding “whiteness as property.” Owning property means those who are in possession of it have absolute control

and have the ability to exclude others from its use. McKesson (2016) explains, “whites and those perceived to be white have historically enjoyed privileged social, political, and economic statuses from which non-white others have been systematically excluded” (p. 24). Additionally, laws such as the “one-drop rule” prohibited anybody with any amount of Black ancestry from claiming the benefits of being white. Under Jim Crow laws, “what mattered to the state was not how much white ancestry an individual had, but whether one had any black ancestry at all” (DaCosta, 2007). Laws such as the “one-drop rule” including anti-miscegenation laws (laws against interracial marriage), preserved white purity and thus the material advantages are part of its benefit. In the history of our nation, whiteness has been protected by the law. Thus, racial mixing was the ultimate enemy in preserving white racial purity in the United States.

Despite the repeal of Jim Crow laws and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, whiteness as property still remained a part of American society, even for those Americans who would not claim any measure of land ownership or wealth. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued, “even those whites who lack wealth and power are sustained in their sense of racial superiority and thus rendered more willing to accept their lesser share by an unspoken but no less certain property rights in their ‘whiteness’” (p. 28). Understanding whiteness as property and access to the resources it grants its beneficiaries is critical in dismantling racism as a structure in our society.

Further, anti-miscegenation laws guaranteed that Black men, women, and children would not benefit from legal marriage to a white person (Roberts, 2011). This practice remained in place until *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967. Even more shocking is that the state of South Carolina held their anti-interracial marriage laws until 1997. Laws like these ensured Blacks,

as well as racial groups of color, would not have the same access to social, legal, and political benefits as whites. Laws developed post-slavery continue to preserve whiteness as a social position. In short, race was created “as a modern system of power” (Roberts, 2011, p. 12).

Moving to our society today, whiteness as property can clearly be seen in the contemporary plight of Mixed Race people through the power to name who can bear the fruits of whiteness and who cannot. Non-white passing Mixed Race people are often subject to the same treatment as monoracial People of Color and thus suffer from the same consequences of white supremacy. The bigger question coming into play is will those with power and position (i.e., owners of property and those with decision making power) be willing to share their proverbial legal, political, and economic rules in order to give People of Color the same benefits whites enjoy? History has shown us the answer to this question is a resounding *no*; this point again ties in to the continual loop of racism that supports critical theorists’ assertion that racism is permanent in society (Bell, 1992).

The legal landscape of racial definition and mixing. The political landscape of our nation has been formed by the legal backdrop of many court cases that determined the structure of race in our society. Despite the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, that guaranteed “equal protection of all laws” to all Americans (U.S. Constitution, amendment XIX), People of Color have continued to face legally upheld obstacles. The purpose of laws regarding race can be reduced to three categories: defining race mixing, defining who was a Person of Color, and defining who was white. Perhaps one of the most famous court cases involving a Mixed Race American was *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In 1890, the state of Louisiana passed a law that required separate train car accommodations for Blacks and whites (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). A concerned group of citizens in New

Orleans came together to fight to repeal the law. The group convinced a Mixed Race man (born a free man, 7/8 white, 1/8 Black), Homer Plessy, to participate in a test against this law (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). Plessy was classified as Black under Louisiana's racial definitions, thus was required to sit in the train cars for "colored" people. On June 7, 1892, Plessy boarded a "whites only" train car traveling from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). Plessy was arrested and in his case *Plessy v. The State of Louisiana*, his lawyers argued the segregated trains were a violation of his Fourteenth Amendment rights, which provided for equal treatment. In the end, the judge on the case, John Howard Ferguson, ruled Louisiana had the right to regulate railroad companies. The case went to the Supreme Court of Louisiana and again the ruling by Judge Ferguson was upheld. The ruling cited precedents from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The rationale for these precedents believed racial order was divine providence, and humans should not interfere with the racial order that was established (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). As one can easily see, the commonly held thought that races should not mix was entrenched in our society, even more so than the words of the constitution.

In addition to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, several laws were passed by states that discriminated against People of Color and protected the racial dominance and purity of whites (Brown, 2017). One of the barriers put in place was laws against interracial marriage. These laws were enacted to varying degrees and were mainly set up to ban relationships between Black men and white women. *Loving v. The State of Virginia* (1967) was the landmark case against laws that banned interracial marriage. Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter married in June of 1958 in Washington DC (Brown, 2017). Five weeks after they married they were arrested at their home in Virginia. For fear of being thrown in prison, the

couple moved to Washington D.C. Mildred wrote a letter to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy and was then referred to a lawyer named Bernard Cohen. With the civil rights movement on the rise, Cohen believed they had a strong chance of winning the case citing that their last name “was a good omen” (Brown, 2017, p. 20). Finally, in 1967 the case reached the Supreme Court. The Lovings won by a unanimous decision. By this time the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 had passed. Fifty years later, *Loving v. Virginia* stands as the most prominent legal example striking down the racism and segregation that had a hold on our nation. The story of the Lovings, however, provide an interesting example of how laws are upheld or overturned depending on who holds power in our society. Would the story have ended the same if the Lovings were a man of color and a white woman? Did Richard Loving’s identity as a white man account for the law being overturned? Historical decision making regarding race issues tells me that Richard’s identity could have played a role in the success of the case, despite the overall virtuousness of the court’s decision and anti-miscegenation laws.

Our country’s troubling racial history laid the groundwork for the political system that has used racial categorization as a basic function of its operation. Our nation’s efforts to solidify racial identity were “instrumental in securing property, defending slavery, and maintaining segregation...to this day, many Americans label each other monoracially, interracial marriage remains a rarity, and group identities work best when easy to comprehend” (Carter, 2013, p.2). Despite the need for racial categorization (to uphold white supremacy), the stability of these categories has been insecure. Groups such as the Irish, Italians, and people of Jewish descent showed that racial purity was not necessarily the standard of “whiteness” (Carter, 2013). These groups were once classified as non-white yet,

over time, have been added to the white racial category. These groups today demonstrate that racial purity is not always necessary for access into the benefits and privileges afforded to white people and racial definitions change over time. Due to the isolating experience that many People of Color face in the United States, adopting a monoracial label (rather than Mixed Race) is a demonstration of “unity, cultural pride, and mass action toward civil rights” (Carter, 2013, p. 8). For many reasons, acknowledging and understanding Mixed Race identities has been silenced (due to rape, family rejection, politics, etc.). The political motive to do so sets the stage for how we think and feel about Mixed Race people today: Our historic methods of categorization still prevail.

The political structure of race and racism in the United States has truly set the stage for how we think and feel about Mixed Race individuals. As outlined above, racial categories, have a very profound influence on the way we view people in our society. In *Racism without Racists*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) poses a key question regarding racial structures: Why are they reproduced? He answers by stating that racial structures exist to benefit white people. Thus, our racial categorization system supports white supremacy through politically gerrymandering racial categories and disguising them as products of biology. The creation of these laws within the history of our nation boils down to the power to control and define. This tactic has been used to maintain our white supremacist society.

Post-racial ideology: essentialism, color-blind rhetoric, and intersectionality.

Throughout the history of the United States, racial lines have consistently been drawn on the extremes of the Black/white binary and have been crafted by century long struggles between white supremacy and People of Color resisting domination (Omi & Winant, 2015). Not only has the issue of race and racism been conceived around the Black-white binary

where Black people and issues surrounding Black experiences have been essentialized into a monolithic story or set of experiences, but People of Color as a whole and individual groups of People of Color also have been essentialized. Essentialism in racial terms represents the reducing of many racial experiences into a single “People of Color experience.” Critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic (2012) assert that essentialism functions to tell a single perspective story about People of Color that often leaves People of Color out of the telling altogether. Additionally, essentialist thinking plays a significant role in racial stereotyping, especially as it relates to out-group assumptions about another group (Pauker, Xu, Williams & Biddle, 2016). Essentialism is an aspect of the United States’ post-racial thinking that asserts that in order for People of Color to be heard in our white supremacist society, everyone must be lumped together with one common experience. Bonilla-Silva (2001) contends that we do not have a dichotomous but a trichotomous racial structure in our society – whites, honorary whites, and Black. Essentialism has played a significant role in the maintenance of a white supremacist society by allowing those in power to name who is in each of these three groups. Those that are “honorary white” can enjoy some of the benefits that white people do, but only as those in power allow it. Mixed Race people can vacillate between “honorary white” and Black and are almost always victims of essentialist thinking. Their specific experience is blotted out and seen in simple, one-dimensional racial terms. The importance of my implementation of anti-essentialism in my work is to provide a vehicle for my participants’ voices to be placed in the center and for their unique truths to be presented as valid, regardless of where their story fits within mainstream racial rhetoric. Mixed race people can be seen as the measuring stick for racial progress, as they are the embodiment of races coming together, but this view is misinformed. Racial progress does not take place

when physical intimacy occurs between different races. Racial progress occurs when laws, policies, and practices that prohibit people of color from experiencing our society as white people do are abolished. One of the most powerful vehicles for preventing this from occurring is color-blind racism.

Bonilla-Silva (2001) discusses color-blind racism as a powerful, modern tool that has kept white supremacy afloat in the Post-Civil Rights era. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement racism was explicit and legal, but today “it is accomplished through institutional, subtle, and apparently nonracial means” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 12). The term “color-blind” is a phenomenon whereby white people claim its function is to explain they are not racist. However, color-blindness sustains white supremacy, assisting people to believe that we are “race-neutral” and that by identifying race and the problems with it, we are bringing up problems of the past. Color-blindness sustains white supremacy by disregarding people of color and their experiences. It essentially says, “I am choosing not to see a large part of your identity – your race.” Bonilla-Silva (2006) explores how white people approach racism in his text *Racism without Racists*. Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that few whites claim to be racist and insist they are color-blind and often believe that People of Color play the race card too often. Additionally, Bonilla-Silva (2006) claims that because white people claim they cannot see color, discrimination is hidden in within their seemingly pleasant smiles. Even today, many white scholars believe that racism is on the decline, and they frequently minimize the extensiveness of discrimination due to race (Feagin, 2013). If the most academically trained among us has bought into the false notion of color-blindness, why would white parents be any different? Do well-intentioned white parents want to raise their children believing that race isn’t a factor in their lived experience? If so, do they see their

color-blindness is allowing for a white-racial frame to dominate through their non-discussions about the impact of race in our society?

Looking at the larger landscape of how it is possible for white parents to neglect the racial identity of their Mixed Race child becomes conceivable when we begin to lay out the timeline of how white supremacy has come into existence in the United States. The formation of our country upon racist ideals eventually turned into legal examinations about who was white and who was a Person of Color. Mixed Race people disrupted racial categorization efforts and also threatened the “purity” of the white race. Thus, their experiences were (and still are) left undiscussed, unsupported, and marginalized. These practices have caused the essentialist and color-blind parenting practices that are described by the participants of this study. The backdrop of our racial reality has taught parents how to avoid an important aspect of their Mixed Race identity – their race.

The way to combat white supremacy that is laden within essentialist and color-blind thinking is to advance the notion of intersectionality. Legal scholar Kimberlè Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality and argued that both oppression and resistance are always situated in multiple categories of difference (Crenshaw, 1989). Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2002) also uses intersectionality in her work to define the many systems of oppression that work together based on Black women’s identities described in her groundbreaking text, *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins (2000) states, “intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (p. 21). Failure to understand how race, sexuality, gender, class, and other identities interact and shape each other leads to fragmented understanding and decision making (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of intersectionality was

helpful for me to not only understand the intersections of race within Mixed Race people but to also understand how other elements of identity and positionality manifest and function together. Each intersection that participants presented was considered in efforts to uphold an anti-essentialist perspective. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002) argues that race and gender are related concepts within an intertwined system. For example, my own identity as a mother, a white person, and researcher all interact in a way that impacts my parenting and might offer insights for other white parents with Children of Color as well. Understanding how intersectionality is often forgotten and Mixed Race children are essentialized and taught color-blind rhetoric can provide powerful insights into why white parents are ill-prepared to discuss the nuances of race with their children. These elements of white supremacy are interwoven into every one of us, parents included.

White Parents Discussing Race

When white parents cling to white racial framing, denying being white and cannot (or refuse) to see their children's color, they shut themselves off from being able to have real, healing, and transformative conversations about race. This means they are also unable to support their non-white children in understanding the racist system and buffering against racism, abilities central to forming healthy identities of color.

(Chang, 2016, p.128)

To date, there are few resources dedicated to raising Mixed Race children. Among them include titles such as: MAVIN Foundation's *Multiracial Child Resource Book: Living Complex Identities* by Matt Kelley and Maria Root (2003); *A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children* by Donna Jackson Nakazara (2004); and *Raising Mixed Race: Multiracial Asian Children in a Post-Racial World* by Sharon Chang (2016). While having some resources available is wonderful, it is troubling that so few titles exist to help the millions of parents raising Mixed Race children. Chang (2016) argues, "race is one of the most salient ways we move through the world, and a child's first race lessons are learned on

parent's knee" (p. 6). Many white parents have little understanding of white supremacy or what it means for them as a parent to be white in our society (Chang, 2016). It is an interesting paradox to explore because one might assume that if someone is willing to enter a relationship with a Person of Color that would produce a child, they also might be eager to explore issues of race, racism, and white supremacy. But just as saying "some of my best friends are Black" doesn't work to explain away racism; neither does "I have a Mixed Race child." Intentional effort must be made by white parents to unlearn a racist system and fight against the common color-blind approaches to understanding race in today's society. White people who become parents of Mixed Race children must remove their color-blind facade and realize that their efforts to not discuss race or ignore its affects are ultimately perpetuating the racism that they hope will not happen to their child(ren). Chang (2016) discusses the concern of race-ignorant parents by explaining:

For white parents with white children this practice transfers white privilege, white-framed color blindness, superiority, and entitlement from generation to generation. But what happens when white parents by default use the same white parenting practice in raising Mixed Race Children of Color? As we have seen, parenting a Child of Color does not automatically enlighten whites, nor does it remove the blinding effects of white privilege. (p. 126)

With this poignant reality in mind, a major concept framing this study is most white people do not have deeply formed racial self-awareness. Indeed, Maria Root (2001) found that adult children of Mixed Race families often feel their white parent was less equipped to raise mixed children than their parent of color. Without this self-awareness on the behalf of white parents, Mixed Race children will face many struggles as they form their racial

identities in spaces that have uninformed intimate contacts with whiteness (Chang, 2016). To this date, I have yet to find literature that directly states the implications of parenting (from the experience of an unexamined white supremacist frame) on Mixed Race children, and I hope that my study has implications to fill this gap. However, I hypothesize that the impact of this leads to Mixed Race children being the all too common cliché of “confused.” Without proper dialogue to frame the racial messages in our society today, I believe Mixed Race children fill in the gaps by themselves.

Parenting Mixed Race children today in the United States provides a unique set of circumstances to navigate. Our “post-racial” and “colorblind” ideologies clash with the racial realities created by white supremacy. Rockquemore, Laszloffy and Noveske (2006) state that this parenting challenge is two-fold:

First, to become conscious of their [parents] own racial ideology and the messages they are sending to their children, and second, they must critically evaluate if the messages they are communicating create a healthy or unhealthy context for their children’s racial identity development. (p. 215)

Therefore, a Mixed Race child’s understanding of race and their own racial identity isn’t so much determined by the race of their parent(s), but by their parents’ racial ideologies (Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006). Pursing a deeper racial knowledge is critical for everyone, not just parents. To this effect, Tatum (2001) wrote,

In a race-conscious society, the development of a positive sense of racial/ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for both white people and People of Color. The development of this positive racial identity is a life-long

process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but about ourselves. (p. 53)

During my pilot study in fall 2015, the discussion of the participants' families and the way they discussed race in their homes represented various racial ideologies. The participants spoke at length about how these messages affect them still today. Positive messaging around the Mixed Race experience was not discussed, and the majority of my pilot study participants chose to identify on the racial binaries at some point in their lives because their unique identity as Mixed Race was not acknowledged. This led me to believe the cultivation of a racial ideology that values People of Color within our white supremacist society is a task paramount to successfully parenting Mixed Race children.

In conclusion, white supremacy has informed laws, practices, and beliefs that have made it difficult for Mixed Race children to fully understand and appreciate their race. Messages that white supremacy has perpetuated quite possibly created an environment where Mixed Race children are taboo, on the outside, and ill-equipped adults have little to no education about how to talk about the complicated nature of how race and racial hierarchy has formed. To most of us, it all is invisible. However, white supremacy is learned everywhere – in school, from the media, and on our parents' lap. When the power of its grasp is understood, it can be fathomed how loving parents perpetuate its existence. Finally, societal prejudice join with naive parenting to fully develop a negative self-image and downward trajectory for any Child of Color who is not taught a positive counter-frame to white supremacy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Glesne (2006) states that our methodology guides us to know what we want to know. Guba and Lincoln (1998) affirm that our ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (nature of knowledge), and methodological (broad approach to understanding) beliefs craft the way in which we see our world. This in turn, guides our research process. Feminist qualitative research was selected as the methodology for this study due to its ontological and epistemological foundations against standard scientific method, strict binary classification systems, and male-dominated research that holds reason and logic as “more valid” than intuition and feelings. I have ascribed to feminist qualitative research because I believe that there are shortcomings to traditional scientific method when it comes to understanding perspectives outside of people who are privileged. Consequently, this study is guided by my own critical epistemological perspective and my lived experiences and questions around being a white mother to Mixed Race children. While my research topic centers on matters of race, feminist methodology allows me to explore issues of power, subjectivity, and equality within my scholarly work. Feminist qualitative research provides the necessary framework in which to understand and to produce knowledge that is centered on matters of power and relationships.

My role as a white mother of two Mixed Race children is steeped in issues surrounding concepts that feminist research helped to give me language to explain. The relationship between society, white parents, and Mixed Race children is layered and needs further examination with the help of this particular methodology. The relationship between these three items is not as simple as parents erasing the societal racial programming we all have received in an effort to parent our Mixed Race child(ren). Removing the racism we all

possess is very difficult to do, even if it is something parents work on regularly. As a parent of Mixed Race children, I am a part of this dynamic and was struck by Leonardo (2009) who discussed the complicated connection of white women with Mixed Race children by stating:

The racial interpellation of white women is a feminized form of racism that complexifies the patriarchal myth of women as protectors of the family, captured in the saying “blood is thicker than water.” That is, it is assumed that women choose family first. Because racism makes sense only in the context of group interest, white mothers of Mixed Race children are torn between race and family. As split subjects, they may vacillate between two poles. If blood is thicker than water, then sometimes skin is thicker than blood. At crucial junctures where white power is threatened, such as the debate over affirmative action, white mothers of Mixed Race children should just as easily choose race over family, identifying with the former rather than the latter. This largely unconscious act is motivated by supra-individual desires, which does not suggest that white women do not know what they are doing. They may not know the extent of their participation in racism, but they are not dupes of it either. As investors in race, they know that their decisions matter, whether or not they understand the implications. As interrelated racial subjects, white women indeed answer the call but record different responses than white men. In other words, they occupy a different post in the racial army as whites defend the territory, real and imagined. (p. 39)

Leonardo’s quote deeply resonates with me as mother-scholar. How have I made decisions to value my family (who are People of Color) over my own white privilege? When have I done the opposite? These sort of questions have implications for all white parents

who have Children of Color. This study is an active action to dismantle white supremacy within the confines of my parenting while hoping to help other white parents to do the same.

Therefore, this study acknowledges parents of Mixed Race children are met with unique challenges in raising their family. Discussing fluid identity in a world with fixed racial categories can be confounding. White people in particular are often ill-equipped to discuss race, much less racial complexities outside of binary categories (Chang, 2016). There is lack of considerable research that examines a white parent's role in the racial development of their Mixed Race child. This study helps to fill that gap with the stories of Mixed Race college students, who have one white parent and one parent of color, in order to understand how racial messages are interpreted, understood, and applied in early adulthood. In order to accomplish this goal, the following research questions framed this study:

- 1) What messages have Mixed Race college students (with one white parent) received about race from their parents?
- 2) How do the nuances of race and racism intermingle when parenting a Mixed Race child?
- 3) How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity around issues of race and racism based on the messages they received from their lived experiences?

Feminist qualitative research was well suited to help me answer these research questions because it allowed me think of my subjectivity as a mother in relation to the research. It also challenged me to place the minoritized voice of the participants of this study into the center of this research, viewing their experiences as truth. And feminist qualitative methodology drew me to its possibilities, its freedom, and ability to answer these important research

questions with an understanding of systematic oppression and how that penetrates every facet of our society, including the way we conduct research.

In this chapter I outline how feminist qualitative research and its tenets guided my research process through the web of society, race, and white parents raising Mixed Race children. After expanding on the foundational aspects of feminist qualitative research, I organize my discussion using the following concepts: 1) Power imbalances between researcher/participant, 2) The politics of difference and representing others, and 3) The insider/outsider relationship. I then detail the methods for data collection, analysis, and considerations of this study.

Feminist Qualitative Methodology

How do I know research is feminist? It is there a way to neatly package a study to firmly situate it within feminist inquiry? Sandra Harding (1987) discusses in the introduction to her edited text *Feminism and Methodology* that “it is not clear what one is supposed to be looking for when trying to identify a distinctive ‘feminist method of research’” (p. 2). She continues by suggesting that “this lack of clarity permits critics to avoid facing up to what is distinctive about the best feminist social inquiry. It also makes it difficult to recognize what one must do to advance feminist inquiry” (p.2). Therefore, if there is anything that feminist methodologies have in common it is variance. Feminist methodology has many tenets, many ways of carrying out its concepts. As a researcher, this lack of clarity, untidiness, and disagreements between feminist researchers can be both frustrating and liberating. Frustrating for the fact that a common playbook does not exist in order to “fact check” for feminist consistency. Liberating for the opposite reason – one does not need to bend to one way of thinking or viewing the world. Feminist ways of knowing (epistemology) are

entangled with how research is conducted (methodology) and even steeped in discussions of gathering evidence (method) (Harding, 1987). This knot of inquiry questions male-dominated ways of knowing (positivism), regardless of the field of study. In their chapter titled *Feminist Methodologies and Epistemology*, Doucet and Mauthner (2006), affirm the rejection of traditional inquiry in their field of sociology by maintaining “Feminist sociologists have made important contributions to this debate as they began to criticize positivism as a philosophical framework and, more specifically, its most acute methodological instrument—that of quantitative methods for its practice of detached and objective scientific research and the objectification of research subjects” (p. 38). In this example, the rejection of seeing research participants as nothing more than data, and recognizing the power dynamic of researcher/participant, is one way of showing the methodological impact of feminist inquiry. The solution to understanding and making sense of this confusion is to simply find the concepts within feminist inquiry that make the most sense methodologically for the research being conducted. For this study, those concepts consisted of breaking down power imbalances between researcher/participant, discussing the politics of difference and how to represent others, and also the nature of me, as the researcher, having an insider/outsider relationship to the topic of this study. Through these concepts I embraced feminist ways of knowing and pondered how they could be applied to research centered on Mixed Race college students and their parents’ messages regarding race.

Centering participants as the expert. Feminist methodologies, first and foremost, place the stories of subjugated people front and center, beginning with the oppression that women have faced in traditional methods of inquiry. It is in this way that the role of feminist

research “is to support social justice and social transformation” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3).

Those who practice feminist research are able to formulate unique questions and perspectives that might not otherwise be researched by the existing hegemonic system that often reinforces oppressive power structures on individuals who are oppressed within our society (women, People of Color, sexual minorities, religious minorities, those with disabilities, etc.) (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Feminist research encompasses examining all parts of the research process – not just the topic of research. Feminist research accomplishes this by making the research “a holistic endeavor that incorporates all states of the research process, from the theoretical to the practical, from the formulation of research questions to the write up of the research findings” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). Feminist researchers have powerful critiques of positivist research paradigms because of the way positivist research has silenced the voices of women and made men central in research without calling it a limitation. Through this research project, I looked for stories of Mixed Race children (through their college-age perspective taking) regarding their experiences of race within their homes. These stories are often silenced because race is seen as a taboo topic to discuss for white Americans. Further, this topic is silenced due to white parents being ill-equipped to discuss race, thus leading to the topic rarely being mentioned at all, even when they have a Child of Color. Feminist inquiry allowed me to explore the emergent stories regarding the study participants’ engagement with their Mixed Race identity and the whiteness of one of their parents. The research I have completed follows a feminist paradigm by the way I chose to highlight the silenced and often unheard voices of Mixed Race people, especially as it relates to their opinion on the way their white parent discussed and modeled behavior around race. This study also employs the feminist paradigm through the way I examined and paid attention to

the power relationship between my participants and me. My knowledge as the researcher is not seen as the ultimate authority within this research; I did not look to apply scientific techniques to affirm my own thoughts and beliefs. The life experiences of the eight participants from this study drove the research agenda and formulated how the data is represented, discussed, and analyzed.

Power Imbalances between Researcher and Participant

Heese-Biber (2014) states that feminism, “centralizes the relationship between the researcher and the researched to balance differing levels of power and authority” (p. 3). Within the context of my study, the power dynamics went far beyond researcher and participant. They extended into the parent and child relationship and further unfolded into racial dynamics as I engaged the relationship between *white parent* and *adult Child of Color*. For example, during the interviews I conducted, I sensed that the participants (Mixed Race college students) could sense that their parents were uncomfortable discussing race, so it was not discussed frequently in their home. The power dynamic between parent (who should be knowledgeable) and child (who should learn from their parent) was disrupted as the parent *should* know about race but did not. Racial dynamics were also at play because the white parent used their world view of whiteness to inform what was discussed regarding race. This placed the Mixed Race child in a further subjugated position not only because they were a child but because they are a Person of Color whose racial experience was ignored. Feminism is a vehicle for understanding how inequities of all kinds undermine all lives and its tenets are necessary for researchers to trouble scientific method, binary systems, objectivity, truth, and power (Sprague, 2016). It is these concepts that allow me to take ownership for the mark I placed on my research. I used these concepts in my research by first practicing reflexivity

as a researcher. I interrogated my own social position by virtue of my upbringing, race, gender, class, status as a mother of two Mixed Race children, and partner to a man of color and thought much about how these factors influenced this research. Feminist inquiry required me to think about these things and rather than be limited by them, I was implored to acknowledge them and discuss them as a part of this study. Feminist inquiry also helped me to see how our society's dualistic way of viewing difference limits the stories of those who are not situated on the extremes of the binaries (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Studying the experiences of Mixed Race people directly correlates with this principle. Giving space for varying perspectives due to varying racial make-ups, phenotype presentation, and racialized experiences all are inspired by feminist inquiry's challenge to me as a researcher to see and consider multiplicity. I also considered my voice as a white researcher and the power dynamic I hold due to my race. Racial power dynamics were always on my mind and how my own racialized experiences would manifest during interviews and within my representation and analysis of the data. I was careful to consider this through each step of the study. I acknowledge that my own racism and privilege is present in this work despite my best efforts.

Recognizing and acknowledging power. The power I possess as a researcher was constantly present with my work with the participants of this study. The reflexivity that I needed to possess as a white researcher inquiring about the racial experience of Mixed Race people was the most crucial ability to cultivate. The power imbalance that occurred between me and the participants of this study was always on my mind as research is often about relationships and how power interacts between the researcher and the participant. Power exists as a barrier for feminist researchers. Feminist researchers highlight three ways in

which they have power: 1) The researcher has more control over the researched because the researcher controls the process and how the relationship is constructed; 2) the researcher controls the interpretation of the research and how it is displayed to others; and 3) researchers have social power and usually have privileged positions within our societal structure (Wolf, 1996). Researchers have power over those whom they ask to participate in their research, and participants have power too – they choose how to answer the question (Sprague, 2016). Power is present no matter who has it, the researcher or participant. Feminism desires for researchers to counteract the power that they possess by being reflexive, owning their perspective, and ceding more of the text to the voices of research subjects (Sprague, 2016). That power must continually be negotiated between the researcher and participant because power is held by different parties at different points in the research process (Phoenix, 1994). During my interactions with participants, I was careful of the power dynamic and sought to build strong interpersonal connections first. I also discussed openly my position as a mother of two Mixed Race children and shared my desire to understand their experience. This could have been problematic, however, because I represented a shared identity with their white parent, who in some cases wielded power that was potentially traumatizing, I clearly stated to them that I am not the expert on this topic, I simply wanted to learn more from them and their experience to inform this study. The power dynamic between us certainly still existed, but I believe I cultivated strong relationships with each of the eight participants by placing our relationship and connection as the first priority in our researcher/participant relationship.

I was keenly aware of the power that existed for me as a white researcher studying People of Color. I often wondered during the research process (and still do), “Who am I do to this work?” Despite my questions and reservations, taking on projects that intentionally make

space for another voice to be heard is still a powerful contribution to make. I could not rid myself of my power as a white researcher. Therefore, I chose to use it in as productive way as possible. Sprague (2016) states that “researchers still point the microphone” (p. 71) and goes on to write, “Scholars who want to privilege the subjectivity of a particular group inevitably must choose the members to whom they will listen – that is, identify which members of a category are the ‘best’ spokespersons for that category. Thus, researchers retain the power to decide who among their participants have authority” (p. 71). To this point, I noticed in myself that I have a tendency to privilege the stories of Mixed Race people who identify as both Black and white. To me, their story is the most “real” perhaps because of my own personal story but also because of the power of the Black/white binary in our country. This realization is troubling but one that I was aware of through the study. Feminist epistemology and methodology allowed me to explore the power I have as a researcher to “point the microphone” and understand how this power manifested within my work. With this knowledge, I learned to truly listen to each story, giving each the attention they deserve and was careful to imply interpretations of participant stories that they did not state themselves. Additionally, I was mindful that one participant experience does not equal another and to acknowledge variance in the Mixed Race experience.

The Politics of Difference and Representing Others

Much in the same way I was very cognizant of the power I held as a (white) researcher, there was another layer to unfold. With my power, I chose when to write something, when to give it life. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) write, “It seems difficult for those who are privileged (for example, by class or material advantage, racism, heterosexism, being able-bodied) to recognize their own contributions to the maintenance and reproduction of relevant

discourses and institutionalized power relations in their everyday practices” (p. 83). It is this difficulty that makes researching “others” a task of great responsibility and seriousness, especially given the fact that we are trained not to see or notice that privilege. For example, as a white person, it is easy for me to forget that when I walk into a room, I am likely seen as non-threatening, as good, and as “normal,” especially within the contexts of my daily life on a predominantly white campus and community. I believe my rapport with the participants of this study was positive, and I was able to break down researcher/participant barriers due to white women being seen as non-threatening. As the researcher for this study, this fact was to my benefit. Yet, it was in this comfortable normativity where I had to be most cautious. Through this realization, I learned that I could not assume what participants thought of me – for my identity could have helped me connect with participants or push them further away.

My whiteness could have been seen as a barrier to working with People of Color. If I was not careful, the power and privilege I held as a researcher could have worked against the racial injustices I was fighting against. I realized through conducting this study that power and privilege is good to have unless you are trying to rid yourself of it in order to better connect with People of Color. I have found this is where “white guilt” finds its way into my words and actions. I feel ashamed of my privilege and for what I and other white people have done to diminish and demean the experiences of People of Color; at times, this is very difficult to remove from my thoughts. Milner (2007) outlines a framework to guide researchers who are studying matters of race and positionality. This framework implores scholars to do the following: “researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system” (p. 394). Milner (2007) notes that these matters of racial self-work are not linear but are rather interconnected.

It is through feminist epistemology that a framework like Milner's (2007) is allowed to fully come to life. Through answering important questions inspired by Milner's (2007) framework, I examined the everyday privilege I take for granted such as my ability to not think about race or to have conversations about racial inequalities with People of Color yet walk away from them not feeling the impacts of these disparities on my life.

I must also not forget that I could have been viewed as an "untrustworthy white institutional figure" (Edwards, 1996). My role as a campus administrator within Student Affairs at my research site perhaps amplified the assumption of who I am. On a daily basis, I make decisions that impact the lives of students. This could have influenced everything from recruiting participants to the stories they chose to share with me. Yet another political implication is that the voices of People of Color are often documented in research but are never given any real authority in an academic sense. Romazanoglu and Holland (2002) support this claim by stating, "The voices of the researched have a critical part to play in the production of feminist knowledge, but they may have to struggle against considerable odds to be heard, or to be heard on their own terms. If they are not heard, then knowledge production proceeds without them" (p. 84). This is similar to when stories about People of Color are collected by white administrators (in order to meet "diversity requirements or initiatives") and get shoved into a drawer, never to have the stories heard or acted upon. I recognized the negative implications this study could have if I did not accurately share and represent their stories. If care and attention was not given to matters of representation, it is only a white person's interpretation of the experience of a Person of Color instead of it being a piece of work that illuminates the voices of the participants. The representational work I set out to acknowledged the differences in the participants' lived experiences in an attempt to

not also exploit their difference (Romazanoglu & Holland, 2002). I worked toward this in my study by sharing transcripts and findings with participants to ensure my representation is an accurate depiction of their stories. It is at this point where representation entangled with ethics and issues of power regarding how I chose to show what my research is “doing.” Was it damaging? Emancipating? Fetishizing? Reifying? What is difficult for me to comprehend is that I am not always aware of how me and/or my work is interpreted or experienced by others, especially by Mixed Race people, given my own racial identity. As I reflect on the research I completed, I hope my representation was one that reified their experience by giving their stories a voice regarding how we talk about (or not talk about) race in our society.

Alcoff (1991) discusses my dilemma in depth as she describes support for researchers to venture into experiences different from their own with a few caveats. She states, “I am not advocating a return to an unself-conscious appropriation of the other, but rather anyone who speaks for others should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved” (p. 24). She later provides guidance for how to do this by asserting that “speaking should always carry with it accountability and responsibility for what one says” (p. 25). Thus, it is better for me to discuss the topic of Mixed Race children and how their white parent discussed race than for me to select a research topic that does not ultimately help to contribute to a body of knowledge that will help parents understand the impact of racial ignorance and silence. Although I might be criticized for attempting to speak for another, a part of my reflexivity was to understand where those criticisms might come from and not let them shake the ultimate purpose of the work I accomplished in this study. Through my connection to (being a parent of two Mixed Race

children) and disconnection to (being a white person), this research topic provides an interesting balance of power and representation for me to navigate. This insider/outsider relationship is worthy of further examination.

An Insider/Outsider Relationship

As the (white) mother to two Mixed Race children, I can only hope this research helps me become closer to them. Although I will never share their racial identity like children and parents from single-race relationships, I am still the person who knows them best – I carried them, birthed them, and bonded with them through breastfeeding and caretaking. Of course, I want the very best for their lives and will do whatever it takes to help them gain insight into a world that can be challenging, especially from a racial standpoint. It is this motherly drive that makes me the ultimate insider in my research. Outside of being a Person of Color myself, I cannot think of any greater connection. Although I am an insider, I still am on the outside and need to negotiate the privilege I have due to the color of my skin. The balance between my racial privilege and role as mother of two mixed children are constantly in negotiation with one another. The insider/outsider distinction was explored by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) where she cited the negotiation between women scholars of color and their outsider status within the academy. While major differences between our outsider/insider roles exist, the unique positionality caused by this duality make for a distinct, unique perspective that result in many researcher conundrums. I acknowledge the limitations I have as an insider/outsider in my research relationship. Feminist methodologies allow this discussion to happen and acknowledges the complicated relationship I can have personally and academically with this work. Davis and Craven (2016) pose important questions to ponder as I stretch to consider my role as an outsider/insider in my research. These questions

are: “Is the outsider/insider dichotomy a definitive way to understand the researcher/researched relationship? Does the insider role establish legitimacy for the researcher? Does being familiar with the group make it easier to interview or conduct extended fieldwork with them?” (p. 60). No matter the answers to these important questions, it is clear that group membership (insider or outsider) does not automatically mean sameness (insider) or objectivity (outsider) within a participant group (Davis & Craven, 2016). I noticed this in my field work by sometimes being seen as an insider to my participants in the sense that I have Mixed Race children yet was also seen as an outsider by being a white parent not fully understanding their experience. This insider/outsider relationship was a good check and balance system for me allowing for both understanding and learning. Feminism recognizes the fluidity and complexity of the researcher and their group memberships. Davis and Craven (2016) assert, “The spaces between the poles of insider and outsider are far more complicated” (p. 61). Joyce Ladner (1987), a Black feminist researcher who did work with young, urban, Black women cited the complexity of her insider/outsider relationship by explaining that:

I knew that I would not be able to play the role of dispassionate scientist, whose major objective was to extract certain data from them that would simply be used to describe and theorize about their conditions. I began to perceive my role as a Black person, with empathy and attachment, and, to a great extent, their day-to-day lives and future destinies became intricately interwoven with my own. (p. 76)

I believe I embraced the way that I straddled the line between insider and outsider, using the strengths embodied in each while being cautious of the limitations that each membership provides me. For example, I was able to use stories from my own parenting experiences to

ask relevant questions and demonstrate empathy and understanding. Yet, I maintained appropriate reverence for participants' experiences by letting them share their story instead of me making assumptions based on the limited knowledge I have from my insider status. Thus, in this element of feminist methodology, the reflexivity that I engaged with is important here as well. The "interrogation of one's positionality, how one is situated in relation to participants" (Davis & Craven, 2016, p. 65) was critical to my work.

In summary, the three concepts of power imbalances between researcher/participant, the politics of difference and representing others, and the insider/outsider relationship allowed me to understand where I situate myself within this research. Feminist methodologies gave me a vehicle to better understand the experiences of my participants. Additionally, feminist methodologies gave me a repertoire of tools to use in spite of its varied nature. It demonstrated how sound ethical practices (care, compassion, kindness, relationships, and reciprocity) look within a research project and ultimately become inhabited within me as a researcher.

Site and Participant Selection

Setting. A mid-size public university in North Carolina was the setting for this study. Situated in the rural Southern United States in the Blue Ridge Mountains, this location served as an important mirror to reflect the long history of racial inequalities and the area's once firm grasp on anti-miscegenation laws (Davis, 2006; Glaser, 2006). Moreover, the South represents a place where sociohistorical and sociopolitical aspects of race and racism are reflected into society (Morris & Monroe, 2009). Further, according to 2010 U.S. Census Statistics, the South and Western regions of the United States have the greatest proportions of Mixed Race people living within them (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Diving even deeper into

the census statistics, North Carolina saw a 99.7% increase in the number of people reporting they were two or more races from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This change is second highest in the nation behind South Carolina who saw a 100.1% increase during the same time period. This information does not demonstrate to me that Mixed Race people have dramatically grown but giving people the opportunity to identify through formal means as Mixed Race made a difference in Mixed Race people sharing their racial information. To give a broader picture, North Carolina's racial demographic information as reported by the U.S Census, according to population estimates taken in July 2016, cite that 29% of the state identify as People of Color with 2.2% of that amount being North Carolinians who identify as Mixed Race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The town in this study is in the western-most portion of the state and has a population of nearly 18,000 people. It is situated in a county where 95% of the people are white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The town doubles in size when students arrive for classes and this change represents a dramatic shift in the size and age demographic (and a slight shift racially) when the town welcomes 18,000 students each fall. The University is a predominantly white campus reporting that 83% of students as white. The University also reports the following percentages for their Students of Color: .03% American Indian/Alaska Native students, .1.7% Asian students, 3.9% Black/African American students, 4.6% Hispanic students, .01% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students, .09% Non-Registered Alien students, and 1.4% whose race and ethnicity were unknown. Specially related to my research, the University reported that 565 students identified as two or more races on admissions data. This represents 3% of the total population of the University. The University does increase the diversity of the area, but the lack of racial diversity still

demonstrates challenges around race and racism both on-campus and within the community at large. Due to the many issues that arise with a racially non-diverse student body situated within a non-diverse community, discussing matters of race and racism is essential to balancing the white racial rhetoric embedded into the cultural framework.

The University's Mixed Race population is similar to the Mixed Race population numbers overall within North Carolina, making my research setting a representative place to gather participants for this study. I have learned through conversations with Students of Color that many of them feel ostracized and unheard at the University. In relation to this study, the pilot study I conducted with Mixed Race students at this university solidified this notion as well. They often feel that their voices are forgotten among the monoracial Students of Color and of course, the larger white student population. The comment that was repeated frequently during my interviews with participants is how much they wanted their voices heard and that is why they participated in this study.

Participant Selection. "Exploitation involves questions of power" (Glesne, 2006, pp. 134). Being a trustworthy researcher involves giving up power to avoid the exploitation of participants. As a staff member at the University where I conducted my research, this potential ethical issue was on the forefront of my mind as I thought about the potential for some of my participants to be within my purview of responsibility on campus. Questions such these became ethically important: Will they fall into assuaging my feelings if and when they speak negatively about their white parent? This in itself is a function of white supremacy in action – People of Color making white people feel better about and less guilty about our own racism. Will they feel that had to "say the right things"? In order for me to be an ethical feminist researcher, I needed to both recognize and attempt to surrender my role as

an authority figure and put their wishes, their voice, and their experience to the forefront of my mind. The elements of ethical feminist research practice of care, compassion, kindness, centering of relationship, and reciprocity were all concepts I implemented as a researcher but from my cultural framework. I also pondered, “What if they told me something that was troubling for me to hear, from my employment standpoint?” I am a mandated reporter for the University and have a legal obligation to report certain crimes. I shared this information with participants via the consent forms I asked participants to sign and also stated this in person prior to any focus group or interview. I worried how this obligation on my part would get in the way of me being a true listener and advocate for their story. Perhaps they don’t want me to “help” them at all?

In the end, my worries were not realized in the way I envisioned them to be prior to conducting my research. Perhaps the greatest way that my position conflicted with participants’ is that they wanted my opinion or help with another issue they were having on campus. These sort of conversations occurred usually prior to or after an interview, where the informality of the relationship we had formed was evident outside of interview protocols. I saw their questions as a way to learn something they needed because they felt comfortable asking me, given my role on campus and also the relationship we had created with one another. Ultimately I saw this as a strength of my ability to build rapport with each participant. From my demonstration of care and compassion for what they were currently going through in their lives, they were able to better trust that I cared about them as a person and not just a participant of this study. I believe this is what feminist ethics is all about – not simply using the participant as a means to an end but to acknowledge each part of their lived experience as it played out during our times together. Additionally, these conversations

demonstrated the complexity of my insider/outsider relationship – I was enough inside and outside to understand what they were saying without being them. In many ways, my authority-figure status at the University gave them a reason to ask questions about their college experience that opened up doors for me to further learn their experience as Mixed Race college students.

Participants. I purposively selected college students who identified as Mixed Race with one white parent for this study. This purposive sampling strategy is one where the researcher selects participants for the specific perspectives they offer (Esterberg, 2002). I used a three prong approach to recruiting participants for this study. First, I attended a student group at the University whose focus is on supporting and celebrating Mixed Race students. I happened to attend their first meeting of the Fall Semester. I was given time to talk about who I am, my study, and what I was looking to learn. Two students participated in the study from this recruiting medium. Second, I designed a flyer (Appendix B) that I posted in strategic areas on campus where I had permission to do so. I posted the flyers in the library, in the College of Education, in the Multicultural Centers in the Student Union, and also in the building where academic support services are administered. From these flyers, I had four students respond, three of whom ended up as participants in the study. Additionally, I posted this same flyer on my Facebook account. From this social media post, I had potential participants respond or had friends of mine share the information with people they knew. From this strategy, six people responded, two of whom ended up being participants in the study. Finally, two colleagues of mine referred two students they knew and both ended up participating in the study as well. In total, I had thirteen people initially contact me to participate. I eliminated two people because of their distance from the University and three

people removed themselves from the study for various reasons prior to the interviews beginning. This left me with eight participants whom I broke into two groups of four. Their groupings were based on common available times for focus group interviews. These two groups of four were in the same focus groups for both focus group interviews.

Below is a general snapshot of the participants selected for this study including their pseudonym, year in college, and the races of their parents. At the end of this chapter, I provide a detailed biographical sketch of each participant.

Table 1
Participant Biographical Sketches

Participant Pseudonym	Year In College	Mother's Race	Father's Race
Sue	Graduate Student	Korean	White
Diana	Senior	Filipino	White
Karl	Sophomore	Lebanese	White
Olivia	Graduate Student	White	Black
Clark	Sophomore	White	Black and Filipino
Rachelle	Senior	White	Black and White
Shelley	Senior	Korean	White
Lynne	Freshman	White	El Salvadorian

Prior to the study beginning, each participant filled out a Participant Information Collection Form (Appendix C) where they indicated how they racially identify, how their parents racially identify, and best times for them to participate in the interviews. Through these eight students, I was able to gain the thick, rich data I was seeking. Patton (2002) states that, "in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if

the cases are information rich” (p. 244). I was encouraged by the numbers of students wishing to participate in the study and immediately saw their desire to talk about their racial experiences as a Mixed Race person through their initial emails to me in response to the study advertisements.

Data Collection Methods

Through conversations we get to know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in. In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about and listens to, what people themselves tell about their lived world
(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. xvii)

As this study sought to capture participants’ personal experiences, two focus group interviews and two individual interviews with each participant were the primary method of data collection. This conventional qualitative research strategy allowed me to gather thick, rich descriptions. Although the main subject of my study focused on participants’ perceptions of how their white parents discussed race in the home, I chose to only interview the student. I made this decision based upon the power that I desired for my participants’ voices to carry through my research. I wanted their voices to be illuminated, not the voice of their white parent. While some may argue that excluding the white parent from the research process did not allow for a complete picture of the racial dynamic and familial lived experience, focusing on the white parent also re-centers whiteness and further perpetuates a white authority on knowledge. By exploring the racial dynamics, experiences, and meaning-making from the perspective of the Mixed Race adult child, I was better able to understand the effects of family dynamics and messages around race, regardless of the parents’ intent, justification, or explanation. Feminist researchers clash against who those traditionally hold truth and authority (Sprague, 2016). Through this study, I desired to “point the microphone” at those that are often spoken for. Finally, feminist methodologies argue that “the knowledge

and theories of marginalized populations (women, People of Color, gender and sexual minorities, etc.) hold more epistemic authority than the knowledge and theories developed by dominant groups” (Naples & Gurr, 2014). Thus, my participants were the sole source of data, using their experiences in order to understand their perceptions of how race was engaged with in their home by their white parent.

Focus group interviews. The initial data collection took place within a focus group setting, followed by one individual interview, and then a concluding focus group. Thus a total of eight individual interviews and four focus groups were conducted. I chose to conduct a focus group prior to the individual interview so that trust was first built between me and the participants in a group setting. This was done so that the power dynamic of interviewer and interviewee in a one on one individual interview setting was somewhat mitigated as there is, to some extent, power in numbers as the participants were together. At the very least, I would conclude that the participants felt more comfortable sharing their stories as they experienced this process with participants who shared some similarities in identity and lived experience.

I believe the richness in information that can emerge from a group of people playing off of one another’s ideas and experiences can not only be enlightening for the researcher, but also helpful for the participants. Additionally, their collective nature served to be more culturally relevant and less constricted to my ideas of where our conversation should go within each focus group interview. Prior to beginning my data collection, I fully acknowledged that focus groups can be messy, but I believed that it paired well with the “messiness” of working with issues that are complicated such as race, parenting, and making sense of society’s racial constructs as it relates to moving from childhood to adulthood. The focus groups helped me, as a researcher, understand more fully the power of group dynamics

that are present within this method (Barbour & Schostak, 2011). While I had the desire, through my research, to understand the individual experiences of Mixed Race students, I also had the desire to understand their collective thoughts on how they deal with life in between the binaries of race. Barbour and Schostak (2011) state that “focus groups allow participants to debate issues and to provide the researcher with insights into the lengths to which they are prepared to go to defend their views in a specific context” (p.63). Additionally, Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) explain that focus groups are “better for exploring how points of view are constructed and expressed” (p. 5). Through focus groups, I better understood their stories as each individual built on or diverged from others’ comments and experiences.

Finally, due to my identity as a white woman wishing to have Mixed Race college students open up to me, the focus groups aided the participants in feeling comfortable sharing their experiences with me as a researcher. Barbour (2008) states that in some situations, focus groups are beneficial for reluctant participants. In fact, focus groups are preferred over one to one individual interviews because this interaction can be intimidating for some to talk about their experiences, or they may feel that they do not have much to share in an individual setting (Kitzinger, 1995). I believe that by using the focus group method I helped to remove some barriers in order for me to understand the experience of my participants. This characteristic of focus group interviews provided a solid rationale for my data collection structure.

The focus group interviews were semi-structured, free-flowing, and worked toward building community between myself and the group members. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and was audio recorded. I transcribed each focus group within one and a half months of the data collection. The initial focus group interview questions

(Appendix E) were focused on trust and relationship building and also on discovering narratives among participants in order to delve deeper into during the individual interview phase of data collection. Informed by data collected in the first focus group, I created subsequent individual and focus group interview protocols. I used the final focus group with participants to revisit common narratives discussed through the process and also to formally conclude the interview process.

Semi-structured individual interviews. I conducted one individual interview with each participant as a piece of my data collection. Individual interviews collect thick description – or nuances of meaning – enmeshed within personal experience (Geertz, 1973). Further, Darlington and Scott (2002) state that “The in-depth interview takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon” (p. 48). Given that feminist methodology seeks to dismantle power structures and illuminate untold stories, in-depth interviews best fit this methodological approach.

As with any barrier (race, job position, and age being mine), I worked to be aware of and attempted to assuage these obstacles. Selecting a method that breaks down this power imbalance was one way for me to address this shortcoming as a researcher. I came to see that my selected method was one of the keys to mitigating significant researcher/researched hierarchy. Therefore, I decided to use the semi-structured interview method. Oakey (1981) stated that conventional interviewing, where scripted questions are asked to participants is a “pseudo-conversation” in that interviewing within traditional methods would be considered rude within any other social context. Given the power imbalance and the barriers that existed for me as a white researcher with participants of color, I tried to remain far away from the

risk of having such shallow conversations with Mixed Race students participated in my research.

A semi-structured interview is both feminist and critical because it is concerned with uncovering stories that are hidden (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Conducting an in-depth, semi-structured interview with participants permitted me access to the stories of racial identity. Additionally, it allowed for freedom and movement within the interviews to chase a thought and to pursue an avenue that I never had thought of before until a participant brought it to light. As a feminist interviewer, understanding the stories of subjugated people is my primary goal as these realities “often lie hidden and unarticulated” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 184). The semi-structured approach allowed for participants to have a greater voice than my own. Due to my identity as a white woman, my perspective will never fully be erased from an interview protocol I create. However, a semi-structured interview can help to soften the inherent power and authority issues that present themselves through research conducted between the dominant and subjugated identities.

From the very start of the interviews, the researcher sets the agenda deciding what to ask, to not ask, and when to ask those questions (Hesse-Biber, 2014). In the most basic fashion, a semi-structured interview erases some of this formality but not all. The choice of conducting a semi-structured interview meant that I was listening to the participants more than I was focused on my script of prepared questions. My heightened listening led me to understand the experiences in new ways due to my dependency on the participant to lead me through the interview. My focus was on the building of a relationship with the participant rather than focusing on my own agenda. This release of control from the interview perhaps helped to level the field between us. In some ways this was difficult to do because it felt as if I didn't

have a firm plan in place and was relying on participants to carry the interview. In other ways, it was liberating to not focus on a strict script. I believe it allowed me to listen more intently and to be less robotic. Oakley (1981) discusses the reciprocal relationship approach in interviewing by providing the argument that a close bond between researcher and the researched produces more trust from the researched and more empathy from the researcher. Sprague (2016) states that Oakley's (1981) model of interviewing is innovative and is frequently cited within feminist research for her work on the necessity of reciprocal interviewing. What made Oakley's (1981) approach to interviewing so special was the relationship she developed. Sprague (2016) continues to say that:

Oakley approached each interview as a meeting of peers, encouraging the respondent to introduce themes for their conversation. When respondents asked her questions, she was forthcoming in answering them. If during the course of an interview, demands for domestic work cropped up, she would help the interviewee do the job. (p. 161)

Other researchers have advocated that rapport building and creating trust is the way to conduct an interview, even to the point of sharing information about one's self (Laslett & Raoport, 1975; Reinharz & Chase, 2002).

This style does not come without critique, however. Reinharz and Chase (2002) also make the point that sharing too much information as a researcher can give fewer opportunities for participants to share and can convey the message that their story is not as important as the researcher's. Additionally, the semi-structured interview and reciprocal relationship technique is not a sure-fire solution to breaking down power imbalances. Using the semi-structured interview as a way to build rapport is not conventional or guaranteed by any means. I decided to use this method, despite its risk, because I felt that it appealed to my

strengths as a scholar and that personal disclosure was necessary in establishing my relationships with the participants in this study. The relationship that was built between me and the participants was distinctly feminist because I thought about, in all interactions, how our relationship can be more reciprocal. I felt that my actions with them, from initial participant recruitment, to email communication, to our last conversation together, was an attempt to make it like a conversation between two friends rather than researcher and subject. I felt that I was successful at accomplishing this and that our relationship was genuine. I paid close attention to how they interacted with me and also how they acted toward me when I saw them outside of the interview setting. Each interaction was positive and enthusiastic and they were genuinely interested in the outcome of this study. One participant asked me to be a reference for her for a campus job, another asked me to be a participant for her senior thesis, and another was always willing to strike up a conversation whenever I saw him on a regular basis due to a similar involvement we have on campus.

The semi-structured interview was a perfect methodological fit for the study. Breaking down power imbalances and creating reciprocal relationships is the researcher that I have grown to be. These principles embedded within the feminist semi-structured interview and the give-and-take process that helps participants to feel ownership in the interview process made this method attractive. The minimal control involved in the semi-structured interview was the strongest way to help give the research participants in my study as much control as possible in an interview setting. As Sprague (2016) writes, “qualitative methods are far from fail safe” (p. 139), but any tool I use to mitigate issues of power and authority can help curtail these downfalls and helped to create research that not only brings greater awareness of Mixed

Race people but also provides contributions that did not further perpetuate inherent issues found in traditional interview styles.

The individual interviews were sandwiched between the two focus group interview sessions. Each interview lasted between 40 and 75 minutes, was audio recorded, and took place in a private conference room in an academic building. I took abbreviated notes during the interview sessions so that I remained fully engaged. The individual interviews centered on rapport building and we built on our initial conversation from the first focus group. I set an atmosphere where their experiences were the center of our conversation. Some participants were more conversational than others and allowed me to dive further into their stories where I was able to hear very poignant memories regarding race, their white parent, as well as many other familial memories.

Compensation and other factors. There was no compensation for study participants and the research risk was minimal. The largest risk I identified to each participant at the beginning of the study was psychological impact from discussing difficult topics such as race and parenting. I maintained the confidentiality of each participant by having them select a pseudonym of their choosing and not naming the institution where my study took place. I transcribed all individual interviews within a month and a half after they were collected. By transcribing the interviews myself I was able to absorb more fully the interviews and the content from them. After all transcribing was finished, I sent them to each participant to look over and eliminate any pieces that they did not wish to have as a part of the study.

Participants were given two weeks to review both individual interview and focus group transcripts. Participants were told they were able to withdraw from the study at any point. Prior to the study beginning, each participant signed a participant consent form (Appendix D)

and agreed to any additional published materials regarding the results of this study, that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point, and that all interview materials would be stored on a password-protected computer or in a lockable desk.

Interview Protocols

Both focus group and individual interviews were conducted in a private, confidential setting, yet was easy for students to find. The focus group interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes, and the individual interviews lasted between 40-75 minutes. The first round of focus groups were held in a classroom in an academic building, the individual interviews were held in two different conferences rooms within an academic building, and the final focus groups were also held in a conference room in an academic building. I recorded all interviews using a voice recorder and then immediately uploaded the audio file to my computer for efficient transcription; the recordings were then deleted from my voice recorder.

Data Analysis

Analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity...Analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous.
(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.10)

Analysis of initial focus group interview. A large part of my analytical technique was to transcribe my own data. This initial pass through of the data allowed me to soak in all elements of what was shared and obtain a broad perspective of the information I had collected from participants. After transcription was completed, I shared copies of the transcriptions with each participant. This member-checking and engagement from participants helped to ensure the accuracy of how each participant wished to be portrayed in this study. After member-checking was complete, I listened to each focus group carefully in

order to pay attention to not only the multiple voices but also to interactions between participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The tone of voice, my remembrance of the room, participants' body language, laughter, points of silence, who appeared to lead the discussions, and who appeared to feel on the outside of discussions, and general emotions were all items I took into consideration in my analysis. Listening to the data with these things in mind, I crafted methodological and positionality memos noting my feelings, thoughts that occurred to me, things I noticed, and steps taken during this time spent with the recordings. These memos were frequent documents I relied upon to record thoughts and steps throughout my analysis process. Examples of thoughts I recorded were items such as: "parenting around race is difficult...how am I doing?" At times my thoughts on this were very complimentary of my parenting because I do talk about race with my children. At other times, great doubt was cast about the racial challenge before me with raising two Mixed Race children; certainly I am bound to mess up greatly at some point. I also had thought, "there is no mixed experience...how could I possibly represent their stories?" The pondering of this question is what led me to represent the data in a panel discussion format. I also recorded my feelings of uneasiness as I led the focus groups for the first time. Recording these memos helped me to track and process my thoughts during the data analysis phase. I found this very useful to do due to my personal connection to this topic. Allowing myself to become immersed in the stories shared from the focus group data was an important part of the analytical process in order to retain the feminist methodology that I utilized in this study.

I did a third pass through the data, this time, listening for various themes from both verbal and non-verbal cues. I documented items where the group seemed to have conversation flowing well and playing off of each other's stories as these were areas that resonated

strongly. I paid attention to the moments where participants asked questions of one another, documenting this learning from participant to participant. Where there was frequency and intensity of discussion were the moments that became the data that informed this study. This was all documented through a spreadsheet organized thematically (Appendix F).

Analysis of semi-structured individual interviews. I approached the data analysis for the semi-structured individual interviews in the same way as the focus group – transcription, member-checking, memos, and then listening for important take-aways based on frequency and intensity. “During the telling” (Riessman, 2008), I began my analytic process for the participant individual interviews. In other words, by sitting in the room during the data collection process and through process of transcribing, I began to make sense of each participant’s experience. The initial focus group interview was an excellent ice-breaker in order to get to know each participant and dive further into items they mentioned during the focus group in the individual interview. Thus, the analytical process took shape with each interaction I had with the participants. By using a semi-structured process, I was able to have planned questions but also use the story of the participant dive deeper into certain topic areas. Since feminist researchers are “interested in getting at experiences that are often hidden” (Hesse-Biber, 2014), I used the interview as a way to have the participant explain their story deeply, rather than relying on my ability to connect their stories to others’ stories and to the literature. Thus, participants were the center of the data analysis, the experts of their own lived experiences. How they made sense of their parents, their racial identity, and other considerations guided the representation of their stories in this study. The analysis of the individual interviews was done by grouping themes together using a spreadsheet after

reviewing the member-checked transcripts. Focus group data and individual interview data were combined to begin to clearly create connections between stories and experiences.

Analysis of second focus group interview. In analyzing the second focus group interview, I first transcribed the audio recording, proceeded with member-checking, and then completed a third pass through of the data by following along in my transcript also while listening to the recording. The data from both of the second focus groups were very raw, emotional, and thoughtful. I was able to sense that the rapport I built with participants and the participants built with one another was present in our interactions. The conversations flowed more smoothly and the richest data came from these focus groups. In analyzing this data, I matched the thoughts presented with elements from the first focus group and individual interviews looking for consistencies and inconsistencies in my existing thematic data by adding them to the spreadsheet I had created. I noticed that the data began to emerge very naturally, and I noticed that many themes were repeated several times. These themes were general issues of racial identification, the complexity of both loving their white parent yet feeling like a large part of them (race) was left ignored, and why they thought their parents did or did not discuss race (either positive or negative discussions). I spent a great deal of time with the final notes in the spreadsheet, thinking about how this data should be represented. I thought about how the data would become the findings and continued to refine my thematic analysis making an effort toward data saturation (Merriam, 2002).

Power, Positionality, and Trustworthiness

Even the most committed feminist researcher is in the game of research out of self-interest... You will need to work out your ethical position in relation to the researched, your accountability for the research, how you should present yourself, what the researched are being consented to, and what information is proper to give them to this end.

(Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 113)

As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) argue, feminist methodologists, even with the best intentions, need to be on guard for selfish practices that allow for self to come before the stories of participants. These self-serving pitfalls can lead to issues of ethics, especially among feminist methodologies. When we think about issues of trustworthiness, we often think about the reliability of the findings and how the researcher obtained their information. But it is also important to consider trustworthiness as a matter of methodology. I pose a great danger to my participants' stories by misrepresenting their experiences, thus crafting a false story with the decisions I make as a researcher.

When interacting with the participants of this study, I made my obligations clear. I articulated my role on-campus and what I needed to do if I heard something reportable. I also explained they are not obligated to share what they do not feel comfortable with sharing. By their very being, ethical dilemmas in research have no easy solution; researchers continue to argue over what areas should be researched (Glensne, 2006). With this being said, ethical codes and guidelines guided my behavior, but my relationship with my participants constructed an experience that gave their experience the reverence it deserves.

“Story-telling is cultural” (Wilson, 2012). Misrepresentation can occur between me and my participants, despite my best intentions. For example, I (the white researcher) collected information about the lived experiences of Mixed Race college students who use communication techniques I do not understand (use of tone or expression); my own cultural lens interprets that information differently than someone who is an insider to the group. I might interpret their stories inaccurately or even worse, from a deficit perspective (Wilson, 2012). This pitfall is one I hoped to avoid, but I am not naïve enough to think that elements of my own biases and prejudices did not find themselves into this study.

I also needed to consider how time is perceived differently between my participants and myself. As a white researcher, I prefer stories to move from beginning to end in a sequential order. Storytelling doesn't always occur in that order; this can be because of cultural differences or even by way of how a story comes to mind. This ordering of stories carries with it an element of white supremacy since it is rooted in Western thinking. I was careful not to assume an order of events without asking for clarification. Yet another cultural consideration within matters of trustworthiness is my reactivity. How I asked or responded to questions, in addition to my body language, carried with it many messages. All of these are culturally laden with what I feel is funny, sad, joyful, etc. As participants recalled their childhood memories, I tried very hard not to place my own standard of "good parenting" on my participants or their parents. This was immensely difficult, and I had to remind myself frequently that I do not know the entirety of their home dynamic and my thoughts are not "right." This was perhaps the area that challenged me the most through the data collection process.

Closely tied with the trustworthiness threat of cultural difference is the threat of misrepresenting participants' stories. In this study, it is my biggest fear that I misconstrued the data and made research assumptions based on false notions or leaned on literature that is also misguided. In an effort to avoid misrepresentation, I used member checking strategies during all phases of my data collection process. I asked participants for their thoughts and feedback about what is included and excluded in the final transcripts from where I garnered my data. I also asked for feedback on the final write-up of this study. Using four separate interviews also aided in clarifying unclear statements and information.

Another threat to trustworthiness is my subjectivity or “researcher bias”. While I had the lofty goal of entering into interviews with a clean slate, I knew that was impossible. Rather than avoiding this untidiness, feminist researchers lean in to their subjectivity and make it clear to their participants who they are (Harding, 1987). This is what I aimed to do as the researcher for this study. For instance, I have a bias in thinking that people who have a white parent and a Black parent have the “truest” Mixed Race experience because of the racial extremes of their heritage and also because of my own personal experience. I also have the negative assumption that most white parents do not understand matters of race and racism and in fact cause their children a great deal of harm by not discussing race and raising their children through a white-centered home experience. These assumptions are deep within me and are difficult to set aside. But by understanding how these thoughts impacted me as a person and researcher, I was better able to understand my own subjectivity and keep these notions on the front of my mind as I interpreted the data.

In summary, I consistently worked toward a trustworthy study by understanding my power, positionality, and subjectivity as a researcher. Continued conversations and critiques with trusted scholars and colleagues was a part of my daily work on this study. The only difference between me and the white parents I am asking about within my research is the ways that my assumptions, ideologies, and biases are challenged on a daily basis by those around me. Without being reflexive and understanding how much personal experiences shape my interpretations of my participants and thus my data, I cannot be a credible researcher. In order to check my work, I asked participants for their feedback about the interpretation of the data; this helped to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of this

study. Additionally, I engaged with colleagues and scholars about my findings and new information that informed my data and its interpretations.

Considerations

It is important to take a moment to reflect on this study's considerations. While this study contributes to both education, parenting, and broader race perspectives on both of the aforementioned, I must acknowledge that the findings are limited to this study's setting and the unique, lived-experiences of the eight Mixed Race college students who chose to be participants. Therefore, this study's findings may only be relevant to predominantly white institutions in the Southern United States who grew up with parents from relatively the same geographic region. I do hope, however, that this study contributes to the broader conversation around race and parenting and supports other research that is occurring by scholars on similar topics.

Through the process of data organization and analysis, it became clear I needed to re-craft two of my research questions as the information that emerged became more relevant to this study. When I proposed this study, I asked the following question: *What are the relationships between discussions of race in the home and the racial ideologies espoused in college for Mixed Race college students with one white parent?* Through the interviews, I was not able to get a firm sense of how talking about race in childhood was connected to their current racial ideologies in college. Consequently, I decided to forgo this question altogether and craft a new research question that represented a great deal of the findings for this study. This question changed to: *How do the nuances of race and racism intermingle when parenting a Mixed Race child?* I also initially asked this research question: *How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity(ies) around issues of*

race and racism based on the messages their received from their parents? I re-worded this research question to more clearly represent the connection between racial subjectivity and many lived experiences, not just those from their parents. The final wording of this research question was: *How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity around issues of race and racism based on the messages they received from their lived experiences?*

Additionally, while I had a diverse participant group in terms of who was their parent of color and varying levels of parent support around race, another consideration to note regarding participants was that they all reported a generally positive college experience. They all noted the transformational experience that college has been for them, and I believe this study might offer little insight into the true racial impact of college, especially when given the absence of parent dialogue on the topic. Accounting for these considerations, it is important to continue to research Mixed Race college students and their parents to continue the conversation further about this timely topic, given the demographic shifts our nation is experiencing.

In conclusion, a final consideration is the messiness involved in having People of Color (Mixed Race college students in the case of this study) tell white people (white parents) about what we need to do in order to be less racist. This extraction of stories from Mixed Race college students to make white parents better equipped is problematic. However, I hope that my methodological choice of feminist qualitative methodology helped to mitigate that inadequacy of this study.

Meet the Study Participants

Below I provide a composite of each student who participated in this study based on information I gathered about them through the pre-interview and interview phases of this research. The eight participants of this study were a dynamic group of students to talk with. I could tell that by participating in this experience, they were able to share aspects of their life that were left unsaid, without words to describe what was happening among their family dynamic. There was often a lot of laughter in our times together as well. We laughed about things happening around us on campus and in our country and of course laughed about the ridiculous things parents do. After each focus group, many often stayed around to talk with one another. I saw the significance of them coming together and sharing their stories not only with me but with one another. Ironically, I saw the power of their love and appreciation for one another begin to chip away at the racist effects their upbringing had on them. Through my relationship with each one of these students, I found that they were highly engaged in this topic and deeply desired to share their story. These sentiments were confirmed by their comments after interviews and also by emails of appreciation for having them as a part of the study. In turn, I was deeply moved by their words as they drove me to represent their stories with care and a fervency to share their experiences with other white parents.

Clark. Clark is a sophomore and identifies as Black, white, and Filipino. Clark's mother is white and his father is Mixed Race as well (Black and Filipino). Clark's phenotype is a mix of all his racial identities, yet Clark says that most think he is white. Clark is very involved on campus in several organizations including holding an executive position in the campus organization focused on Mixed Race students. Clark also holds two important and

prominent leadership roles on campus. Clark's parents are married, and he describes a very positive relationship with both. Clark shared that his father initiated most of the racial conversations at home but that his mom played a supportive role in what his father said about race. Clark said that the most common advice that his father gave him was advice around safety and being a Person of Color. Clark's dad wanted him to be aware of his surroundings and to understand how he might be perceived by others. Clark spoke about going to a mostly white school for the early years of his education and then his parents moved him to a more diverse school for the later half of his education. Clark was very complimentary of his parents through our interviews together. He recalled some conversations about race but also cited that it wasn't a central theme in their household.

Diana. Diana is a senior and self-identifies as biracial. Diana's father is white, and her mom is Filipino. Diana can be read as a person of Asian descent and told a very impactful story during the interview process about a day in second grade when classmates told her that she was Asian as she did not know this about herself before. She recalls running home and sharing this with her mom, who told her that she is Filipino. Her mom pulled out a map and began sharing a few items about their culture. Diana's parents divorced when she was in elementary school and felt that at times, she was caught between her white family and her Filipino family. Her dad remarried a white woman, and they had a daughter together. Diana cited some confusion on behalf of her half-sister (same father, different mother) who didn't understand why Diana looked different. Diana recalls very little conversation between her and her parents about race, and it can be a point of contention now as Diana has dived fully into learning about her racial identity since she has been in college. Diana is active on campus in organizations and has looked for ways to understand various social justice topics.

Diana presents as very confident regarding her racial identity and appears to be at a place where she is embracing who she is.

Karl. Karl is a sophomore. His father is white and mother is Lebanese-American. Karl identifies as Arab-American. Phenotypically, Karl can pass for white to some and as a Person of Color to others. I would describe Karl as somewhat racially ambiguous. The story between Karl and his father is filled with racial discrimination and prejudice against his Arab identity. Karl recalled several times where his father would call him and his mother derogatory names and that overall, his father could be emotionally abusive. Today, Karl has a poor relationship with his father and cites the racial discrimination as a large contributing factor. Karl's mother and father recently divorced and described it as a very good thing for his mother. Outside of the negative names, race was not intentionally discussed in the home. Karl has felt that he can be between two families - his Lebanese family and his white family. Karl shared many stories about negative experiences he has had because of his race. Despite these experiences, Karl is involved in campus in organizations that are politically active against systems of oppression in our society. Karl sometimes does not feel safe on campus, yet embraces his Arab identity in a way that is bold and outspoken. Karl sees himself sharing more with his mom about race now that his father and she are no longer married.

Lynne. Lynne is a freshmen and racially identifies as Multiracial, white, and Latina. Lynne's mom is white and her father is El-Salvadorian. Phenotypically, Lynne presents as Latina but just as many other participants have gotten the "what are you?" question, so has she. Lynne's parents have been divorced since she was very small, and she was mainly raised by her mother. Lynne describes an incredibly intentional, meaningful relationship with her mother around race. Lynne's mother spoke Spanish and spoke it in the

home, and her mother surrounded Lynne with many positive images of Hispanic culture. Lynne remembers attending Hispanic festivals, cooking Hispanic food, and engaging in conversations with her around race. Lynne does know her father but is not very close with him. She shared many memories of visiting her El Salvadorian family where they would share negative thoughts about white people, including her mother. She felt that most negative assumptions about race came from this side of her family. Despite this, her mother always kept the conversation positive regarding her dad's side of the family. Lynne expressed a lot of appreciation for her mom's willingness to learn about Lynne's El Salvadorian roots. Lynne is very involved on campus for a first year student and is also in the honors college. She shared a very successful first semester of college with me through her interviews.

Olivia. Olivia is a second year graduate student who identifies as African American and white. Olivia's father is Black, and her mother is white. Olivia presents as a Person of Color and not able to pass for white. Olivia's story is a painful one for her. Olivia has never met her father, and she grew up with her mother. Olivia told me that she is struggling with how to describe her mother's racial perspectives. Her mother's very conservative values and negative perceptions of People of Color (mainly heard through her mother's reactions to racial stories on television or on social media) left Olivia wondering about her own racial identity. Olivia grew up around mainly white people and perceived herself to be white until a few years ago when she was encouraged by a faculty member and cohort members to explore her identity as a Person of Color. Olivia has a half-sister (same mother, different father) who has a close relationship with her Black family members. Olivia recalled her interactions with her half-sister's family as the only time she was able to spend time with

People of Color. Olivia is learning to embrace her identity, and it has helped for her to be surrounded by other People of Color in her academic program. She is looking for ways to connect with other Mixed Race people and desires to help others heal through her eventual career as a therapist. Olivia also discussed her desire to one day discuss with her mother her racial identity and to share her feelings about the lack of positive racial dialogue in her childhood.

Rachelle. Rachelle is a senior. Rachelle's mother is white, and her father is Mixed Race (white and Black, and adopted by a Korean mother). Rachelle passes for white and shared how people often do not believe her when she shares her racial identity. It wasn't until high school when Rachelle found out that she was Mixed Race. Rachelle never knew her father or much about him until one day, he connected with her on Facebook. During a Facebook conversation he said, "you know you are Black, right?" Rachelle describes learning this as something that shook her world and her identity. Rachelle attempted to reach out further to her father but was met with silence and was eventually blocked from further communication with him. Rachelle's mother met her father when she was very young and was never in long-term relationship with him. Rachelle's mother was sixteen when she was born. Rachelle shared that race was never talked about in their home and when it was, it was often negative perceptions about Black people. Rachelle's mom is very conservative and when Rachelle shared that she was participating in this study, she asked "what for?" and "what are you going to say about me?" Despite this negativity around race, Rachelle and her mom are close and they talk about many things. I believe Rachelle has accepted her mom for who she is and is choosing to learn about her identity via the support and connections she has made in college.

Shelley. Shelley is a senior and self-identifies as biracial. Shelley's father is white, and her mom is South Korean. For the first ten years of her life, Shelley lived in Texas and then moved to North Carolina. Shelly expressed that her phenotypical features have begun to change to look more like her father's features as she has gotten older. Shelley referenced this a few times during our interview together citing her appearance as the way that she knew she was different from other children, but now Shelley feels that at times she can pass for white as she often receives the "what are you?" question. Shelley's mother was adopted by a family from West Texas and often spoke that her mother's racial identity was not talked about or acknowledged much in her upbringing. Shelley's parents are married, and she describes her relationship with them as very good, yet they don't often talk about race in their home. My impression of Shelley is that she is embracing her identity as a biracial person and is looking for ways to learn more about who she is by being involved in campus organizations that focus on racial identity and engaging in these topics with friends. Shelley is exploring ways to discuss race more with her parents, especially her mother, who she feels knows little about her heritage and desires for her to embrace that aspect of her identity in a deeper way.

Sue. Sue is a second year graduate student. She identifies as biracial. Her father is white (he passed away a few years ago), and her mother is Korean-American. Sue is a mother herself to a little boy who is four years old, and her son's father is white. Sue is currently a single parent with full custody of her son. Sue describes a very positive and loving relationship between her and her parents, yet her family was extremely race-neutral, rarely discussing race. Sue often cited a stark difference in her experience with her white family and her family of color, but these experiences were left for Sue to interpret on her

own. Sue shared that she felt at times that there was fetishization occurring from her father to her mother, and it hasn't been until recently that she has fully understood what occurred. Sue looks Asian but does get the "what are you?" question from time to time and wonders how others perceive her son's racial identity. Sue shared that she is often the social justice advocate among her current academic cohort and feels that she needs to represent the multicultural perspective among her classmates. She has many big dreams for her and her son's life and big ambition to match.

Chapter 4: Findings

Here, I represent my data through the use of a fictional panel in which the eight participants from this study and I have been invited, at the request of the local school district, to discuss Mixed Race children, white parents, and racism. This panel is a part of a series the school district has organized in an attempt to help families and educators understand our nation's rising "plurality population" where, in the year 2044, it is said that no single racial group will comprise more than half our country's population (Colby & Ortman, 2014).

I have employed the use of this fictional panel discussion to represent the chosen methodological approach – feminist methodology. By situating this study's participants as panelists, answering questions for parents centers them as credible, knowledgeable experts of their experience in addition to showing their connection with me as researcher (Heese-Biber, 2014). Additionally, my role in the panel is one of analysis, combining their stories with research and literature in order to illustrate that the participants' stories are not isolated instances and to ground them within the concepts of my conceptual framework. I demonstrate how their stories are connected to concepts of white supremacy, even in the loving arms of parent and child relationship. My role on the panel shows how I am working through the difficulty of parenting Mixed Race children in a race-conscious manner in a relentlessly white supremacist society. My voice as a researcher is present as the panel discussion emerges; it is used to serve as a facilitator helping to provide a lead-in to many questions. My comments are grounded in the literature with citations present. The findings and analysis are intended to be read as if the panel is occurring organically without citations spoken out loud. I include them here in my findings to give scholarly support for my claims. I present my questions for the participants as I use variations of my research questions via my

interview protocols to help stoke the conversation for parents who are unsure of which questions to ask or who are afraid to present the questions that spark their curiosity. In filling this role on the panel, I am bringing feminist methodology to life through presenting my subjectivity and breaking down the traditional researcher/researched dynamic that is present in typical methods of data representation and analysis. The data presented via the panel is taken directly from my interviews with participants.

This use of speculative fiction draws its inspiration from Derrick Bell's (1992) use of parables to uncover the understanding of racism and white supremacy. Bell's (1992) seminal book *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism* provides an example of the power of parable and speculative fiction to illustrate every day concepts regarding race, racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. This method of presenting this dissertation's data and findings pays homage to Derrick Bell (1992) and many other important Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars as some of CRT's concepts are cited within the theoretical framework for this study. Further, the use of this method employs others to find similar stories within their own lives to show that racism is not as uncommon as we are made to believe in popular society. Montonya, Matias, Nishi and Sarcedo (2015) support this notion by saying that "Fiction resonates because it is quite easy for People of Color and other marginalized people to find similar examples and experiences in contemporary society" (p. 2). The use of storytelling not only benefits People of Color but white individuals as well by providing a personal connection to racial stories that can seem unreal through a privileged perspective. Delgado and Stefanic (2012) shared that using stories or counterstories, as they are called in Critical Race Theory, are used to "challenge, displace, or mock these [racist] pernicious narratives and beliefs" (p. 49). Additionally, the use of stories connects to me as a

mother grappling how I can explain race and racism to my children. I also believe that the use of a fictional panel represents feminist methodology as the research is presented in a way that “centralizes the relationship between researcher and researched to balance difference levels of power and authority” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3).

The panel discussion is organized into three sections. Each centering around a major concept that emerged from participant interviews. These concepts are: *Parenting In A World of Checkboxes: Notions of Labeling and Defining*; *“I Didn’t Think It Was Important”*; *Parents and Their Role in Post-Racial Ideology*; and *The Race Talk: Parents Discussing Race (Or Not)*. These concepts emerge from questions from our fictional parent audience. I crafted the panel questions due to the frequency or intensity in which I saw these topics discussed in the literature on Mixed Race students and through my focus groups or individual interviews. The panelists (the study participants) answer the question from their experience and stories (as told from the direct quotes from participant interviews). Some responses have been edited from their original content to remove any unnecessary words (such as “like” or “um”) and some repeated phrases or statements to ensure clarity. All responses in this data representation are a compilation of the twelve interviews I conducted with the eight participants of this study. Each section contains a short introduction explaining its importance and then follows with parent question(s) and subsequently by participant responses.

Panel Information

The participants of this study and myself have been invited to our local school district’s high school auditorium to conduct a panel that help parents and educators understand the rising student of Color population not only in our school district but in the country. This

panel is occurring in a small Southern town in 2018. Specifically, we have been invited to talk about Mixed Race students, white parents, and discussions of race between the two. Our panel presentation is part of a programming series titled “The Plurality Population”. The year 2044 is on the minds of educators in this school district as it is the year population projections mark when the United States will be known as a “plurality nation” where no single race or ethnic group will comprise more than 50 percent of our country’s population (Colby & Ortman, 2014). In 2044, the shifts in the racial composition of the United States will lead to a “majority-minority;” further, it is projected that children of the United States will cross this “majority-minority” threshold in 2020, twenty-four years before the adult population (Colby & Ortman, 2014). Addressing the needs of this great population shift is paramount to schools and parents in preparation for this demographic shift. This panel operates with attendees asking questions from an open microphone about how they can parent their Mixed Race child in a race-conscious way. Questions emerge from the audience and the panelists (the study participants) offer their perspectives. Approximately 100 parents and educators have shown up for this panel and an introduction is given before the questions begin:

Good evening, everyone. My name is Shannon Jordan. I am serving as both a moderator and panelist for our panel discussion tonight. I am excited you have joined us for what I hope will be an important time of learning and reflection for you as a parent. I am pleased that our school district has sponsored this opportunity to discuss Mixed Race children and how we, as parents and educators, can help guide our children in a race-conscious way. A panel of eight Mixed Race college students have agreed to join us this evening and share their thoughts with you. We have microphones set up for you to ask

questions you have and will operate in fairly organic fashion allowing the conversation to take the direction it wishes.

Parenting in a World of Checkboxes: Notions of Defining and Labeling

To begin the first portion of our panel discussion, the notion of defining and labeling emerges as a central question for the parents participating in our discussion. It is difficult to imagine a world without binaries where labels, boxes, and categories are secondary to multiplicity, fluidity, and intersectionality. Additionally, various social situation questions also arise that leave parents wondering how to respond when they cannot be “matched with their child” or when others question if they are related to their child at all. An initial question emerges from parents curious about how to talk about their child’s racial identity on forms.

***Parent Question:** What should I teach my child to check on forms? Some forms don’t have an option for Multiracial so I usually just check the boxes that apply to the racial make-up of my son or say “other”. Is this ok? I am so confused!*

Diana: I’m from Charlotte, and I came up through CMS, Charlotte Mecklenburg School System. In kindergarten, when I enrolled in school, my parents marked biracial (on the school form), and they were called into the principal's office. The principal said you marked biracial for your child’s racial identity. They said yes, I am white and she’s Filipino that’s how our kid is. They said, no, in CMS, biracial is defined as one white parent and one African American parent so you cannot mark your child as biracial in our school system. I don’t know if that has changed since. I was always told to mark Asian, one, because that looks better for whatever reason, and it makes you stand out more because you’re a minority, which is kind of counter-intuitive, but also because I don’t fully look white so it makes more

sense for me to identify as Asian for somebody who might see me and might be confused if I were to pick white.

Shannon: So you are accommodating other folks?

Diana: Yeah, with my identity.

Sue: Yeah, my hometown is very, very conservative. When I was growing up I don't think they had an option for biracial or Multiracial, so the school told my mom to put Asian on all my stuff because I had to pick one or the other.

Shelley: Yeah, on test forms where it says to mark your race in the boxes, I remember switching a lot.

Shannon: Like switching between the boxes you would check for your racial identity?

Shelley: Yeah. Then I kind of got to the "other" box, and I was like, alright. It is about that time when I understood what "other" is. But I don't think I ever knew the term biracial. I think I only referred to myself as half.

Karl: Yeah. It was when I was 13 or 14 that it became very clear I wasn't white. Even though I'm half white, they don't consider me one of them. They'll consider me one of them when it benefits them but otherwise I'm not white.

Olivia: Applying to college, scholarships, grants, stuff like that (was the only time my mom asked me to identify as Black). My mom was like, oh yeah, you'll have good chances, you're a minority. That's the only time she has ever said anything positive about being Black.

Lynne: Yes. My mom has never told me you have to be one or the other. She's always been inclusive, and I can decide how I want to present myself as to the world, and I've just always presented myself as both.

Shannon: Wow, so it sounds like for most of you checking boxes and defining yourselves has been hard and frustrating, not because of you but because of people's narrow definitions around it (Kellog & Lindell, 2012). I would say to the parents in the room that checking boxes can be confusing because there isn't often a "Mixed Race" box. You will see a "check all that apply," like the US Census, and you will see "other," which is problematic in itself if you think of the word "other," but I would encourage you, as soon as they are able to discuss how they racially identify, have the conversation about how your child wants to be identified and put that on the form. What I do is if there isn't a box that I feel that represents my children, I make one. Screw their racial categorical system. It is my small act of resistance and something I feel I should do to help my children be seen. Let's go to our next question.

***Parent Question:** "I am so confused as to how to racially identify my child. I usually say biracial, but I think I am wrong in that. What is the correct term to use?"*

Lynne: I always answer that I'm Mixed. When they ask what I'm Mixed with I normally tell them that I am El-Salvadorian and white. I am proud of who I am; I like where I come from so it doesn't bother me to say I'm Mixed because I have two worlds that are great. So, it works out. I don't like long words with multiple syllables. So it (Mixed) is an easy thing to say. But to me, growing up, I never knew that there was different things to be called until I got to school and people were like "what are you?" and I was like, "I don't know...a human being?" But for me, I don't really like the idea of race just because of how it's structured in

society, and it's really different other places, so I like the idea of multicultural because I am a part of two cultures, not just races, you know? So, I'd rather be identified as multicultural rather than Multiracial or Mixed. But it is easier when you are talking to people to say Mixed instead of saying, "no, I have Latin-culture and white-culture both," you know?

Clark: Kind of along the same lines as Lynne, it has just been hardwired in my brain to just say my ethnicities and not necessarily correct them when they say "what are you?" I am like...I am a human. I am hardwired to say my identities that are white, Black, and Filipino. Whenever I try to portray to people who I am, I like to try to portray to them that I am Mixed. A majority of the time, and based on appearance, that means Black and white, but I am still very strong with my Filipino heritage. So, I say I'm Mixed and Filipino -- that is kind of how I need to portray that to others. I'll say, especially nowadays, when I'm in a formal setting Multiracial or multiethnic but in passing people in a casual conversation and they say "what are you?" or "what do you identify as?" I will say, I'm Mixed. It is just a kind of quick thing to say instead of saying Multiracial or multiethnic.

Shelley: I feel like for some people is more of an umbrella term because I just realized in college the difference between multiethnic or Multiracial or how people choose to identify and what that means to them differently. So at times, Mixed is easier so you are not specifying, and I don't actually need to go into this with you and that satisfies your curiosity. As I have gotten older, I'm more white presenting, so I don't get a ton of questions. A lot of times it is other people of Mixed Race who usually are able to tell. And sometimes people can tell something and are like, "I know you are something, I just don't know what you are." But I usually just kinda default to my ethnic background. I usually just say, my mom is Korean, but I do identify as biracial. But then I sometimes feel the need to explain that I

don't actually have any connection to Korean culture or being raised like that since my mother was adopted and was raised in West Texas. So a lot of times it is other People of Color or Asian-identifying people who expect me to know something or be able to talk about it, so I really quickly have to explain, but, that's not how that works.

Olivia: Well, this is a conversation I recently had with my step-father. He is white. He said something like Mixed Race makes him think of a mutt or something. So that triggered something in me and made me more intentional with how I introduce myself racially. So that is why I went with the biracial term. I am wondering if other people have that sort of negative connotation around it.

Karl: I have definitely been called a mutt before by some members of my family. I have been called other names too because I'm half white and half Lebanese. I don't claim the white half normally. Normally, I tell people I am Arab-American. Historically, the term white is a lie. I mean in America it was created in the Civil War to convince the poor white farmers to fight with the bourgeois of the South. It became a rich class struggle. The term white, it doesn't exist.

Sue: I guess I have always identified kind of as biracial. It is actually interesting that you ask that question because I remember when I took standardized testing and stuff in elementary school, my teachers told my mom that I should always check the box that says Asian instead of white because I'll stand out more in school, and they'll like that more or something like that. But I have always identified as biracial but, I don't know that if that school experience had anything to do with this, when I take surveys if there isn't an option for biracial, I tend to pick Asian. I tend to identify with my Asian side more, but I typically prefer biracial.

Shannon: As you see, there are many ways that Mixed Race students identify and varying terms that can be used. While there were some commonalities between these panel members, there is variance as well. Karl mentioned that he prefers to be called Arab. I would guess that no one in this room would have referred to him that way if he hadn't said anything. Lynne talked about wanting to be seen as multiethnic. Clark talked about different situations calling for different names. My point in summarizing this is that for you as parents, it is essential that race conversations occur in your home, and you ask your children how they want to identify, when they are old enough to understand this question of course. And before they understand, talk to them about mommy's skin and daddy's skin and other people that you know or notice when you are out. What makes this conversation difficult for parents is that many Americans are not equipped to accurately discuss race in its social, political, and institutional contexts (Jensen, 2005), much less in terms representing many intersections of race, ethnicity, and culture within the Mixed Race population. What I mean by this is that for many of us race is Black or white, very binary. We are taught to essentialize race into one set of experiences or one set of terms. When we don't talk race in our homes, the essentialism that we are brought up in functions by allowing a singular binary racial story to be told and at times this leaves our Mixed Race children out of the telling altogether (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Your child's story is important, and what I have learned from each of the students on this panel is that no matter how much I research or how many times I talk to my own children about their racial identity, it doesn't make me the expert on every other Mixed Race person; each story is unique. So open the dialogue and talk to your child, you might be surprised at what they tell you about their racial identity. I don't want to make it sound like it is easy, because it truly isn't. Sometimes I wonder how I can make race

understandable for my children when it can be complicated. I mess up, you will mess up, but what is important is that we have these conversations. We aren't ever going to be perfect at anything! What I want to express to each parent in the room is that our involvement in the racial identity of our children is very important. Both you and I need to be committed to this work, because if we aren't, who will be? I want to warn you that talking about race might make you look strange to your other white friends. They won't understand why you make such a big deal of it and that you are "causing the race problem." Believe me, I have had some folks look at my like I was crazy for not having white dolls in my house or for pointing out all the people with beautiful brown skin in the magazines and catalogs that are mailed to my home. I want my children to see themselves in the world and I want to remind them they are beautiful, because I can't rely on others to do that. This is highly political stuff we are talking about, but I challenge you to take this strong stand with me. Whew, I really went on a soap box there (laughter). I just feel so passionately about this. How about another question?

***Parent Question:** My child doesn't even look Mixed. Most people think he is white. How do I respond to this? Should I be correcting people? And if my child looks white, should I even worry about talking to him about race? I guess I don't know what to say.*

Shannon: What you are referring to is what people call "passing" as passing for white. Just because your son passes for white doesn't mean that you shouldn't pay attention to his racial identity and discuss everything that makes him who he is. What I have learned is our children's understanding of race is not so much determined by your race or the race of his father but by your racial ideologies (Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006). What I mean by this is that if you allow him to go through his childhood believing he is white and if

he is treated as if he is white by the world because he can pass, he will not have any other language or experience to know or share fully who he is. Pursuing a deep racial knowledge is important for both you and your child. Beverly Tatum (2001), a well-known scholar who discusses race, says that the development of positive racial identity requires us to unlearn the bad information or stereotypes we have received about others and ourselves. You know your son is Mixed, and he needs to know that too. Until you introduce a conversation where he can begin to understand race, he will identify where people can place him. Give him the language to talk about who he is. This, of course, requires you to learn in this process as well because talking about race, for most of us white folks, is taboo and uncomfortable. So when situations come up where people might question his racial identity, he can be comfortable talking about it because he has practiced with you and you have practiced with him. Know that not everyone deserves an “explanation” of his racial identity. I think that talking to others, especially strangers, depends on the situation and your mood to handle people’s questions because remember, we are taught to see things in binaries and when we can’t classify neatly, it bothers us. You will see this on people’s faces as you talk about his race. Rachelle, I remember you talking about this quite a bit during our interviews together. You shared with me that since you can often pass for white, you are never asked about your experience and how much this hurts you.

Rachelle: Yes, it blew my mind someone wanted to hear a Mixed person talk about their experience [when I was invited to participate]. I feel like it is never asked, no one ever wants to know what being a Mixed person is like. I feel as a white passing person no one has ever asked me because they just assume I am white, and they don’t ever think about the fact that I might have a different perspective because I try not to talk over other People of Color when

they are talking about their experiences. One time I did (talk over a Person of Color) and a girl in the group said that “we don’t really want a white person’s opinion on this,” and I was like, actually, I am Multiracial, and I get why you are saying that but also if we could not assume that would be awesome.

Shannon: What was their response to you saying that?

Rachelle: Oh gosh, I just remember that moment the adrenaline rushing. I think she was just taken aback. I am one of those people that with issues of race white people need to sit back and let People of Color talk first. So, I just wanted to add in my two cents (as a Mixed Race person), and it was kind of awkward because everyone was like, why is she talking? I have had so many people say, if you want to identify as a Person of Color that’s okay, and I’m like, honestly, I almost feel like it would be wrong for me to because I don’t feel like I was raised as a Person of Color, I was raised white. I mean, I was raised as a white person, and I don’t feel like I am a Person of Color but then also, I do have this identity where like I am Multiracial and that matters a lot to me. I don’t feel like I can speak out on issues of race because I have never had anyone discriminate against me. I have never had anyone act weird toward me. I don’t really get a lot of questions about race because I am white passing. But a lot of times the questions come from like, “What’s up with your hair? You don’t have white hair.” People have literally told me that I have ethnic hair. And I’m like, cool. Wow, I don’t know what that means. Usually people start to question my race because of my hair because I am very white passing and I have blue eyes, blond hair. When I do get that question, usually I’m like “I’m Mixed,” and people are like ha, no, really. And I am like, no, I’m Mixed. So usually people don’t believe me at first and that is tricky to navigate especially someone who has already had issues with that, like racial identity growing up. It’s really

annoying when people don't believe me because I'm white passing. So usually I just personally identify as white predominantly, but I also know that I'm Mixed and that means a lot to me, but a lot of times people ask me these days, and I say I'm white. It's just really annoying to explain and really frustrating as well.

Shannon: These frustrations were common to hear in my interviews with these folks when I was collecting data for my dissertation. So common in fact that in one of the interviews I asked one of them to share what they thought was their parent's approach to discussing race. I asked this to get at the root of their frustrations of how their parents talked about race. There were a lot of themes around seeing them as white, as in the case of Rachelle, and also just not calling attention to race at all. Karl, I remember you had some powerful memories around this. What did you say when I asked you all this question?

Karl: Yeah, I think my dad would say that I raised you to be white. I think he would say that I raised you as a white kid. I didn't try to raise you as an Arab kid. I think he would regret that to an extent but then I think he would just say, "Why would you not want to be white?" He had a disregard for honoring my Arab half, and he just didn't really think it existed unless he was tossing insults about it.

Olivia: I said I think my mom is one of those people who would say, "I don't see color." I feel like she would say that. I feel that has been insinuated in our conversations. If you asked her to elaborate, I think she would be, like, it is just not a thing, why do we need to focus on it in society?

Sue: I said I think my dad would have said something along the lines of we just didn't really talk about it or acknowledge it, and she went to school with other people that were white, so

we didn't want to make her feel different or something like that... we didn't want her to feel marginalized or didn't want her to think too much about it.

Diana: I think my dad would have been super offended by this question. Just having had conversations with him about race and like things that I know now, I think, one, for you to question his parenting and then, two, to bring in race, he would be like whoa, what are we talking about here? My dad, who is white, is very stubborn and very argumentative and that's become a major theme with him whenever I try to have a conversation -- somebody has to win and it is never me. So, I feel like if you were to ask him that question and maybe he'd calm down a little bit to answer, I think he would say similar things about, you know, we raised her not to see color, we never wanted her to feel different or marginalized. And he might even say, too, "well, you know I grew up in Idaho, and I had one Black friend, and I didn't want that for my daughter, and I always tried to make sure that she was around other people who were different or other people who were like her. But, how dare you ask me that question?" In my head that is what I see.

Parent Question: I get so upset because people don't associate me and my child as family members. I have even been stopped from picking up my own child at dance practice because the teacher didn't believe I was her father. Most times I just smile, say yes, she is my daughter and answer any questions they have because I don't want to be rude. Have any of you experienced this with your parents? What is best to do?

Diana: Well, I was thinking about it because I have never had to think about it until my step mom had my sister. She is white and struggles because I will go somewhere with her and people will see that we look very different, and they don't understand what our relationship

is. I try to rationalize that with her, and she gets so upset, which I love, because my sister will always claim me, and I love that, but she's only nine years old. When she was five, I went to her school for something that was going on in her class, and people were asking her is that, meaning me, really your sister? She got so upset and just screamed at them and said, "yes, that is my sister! What do you mean? Why don't you understand?" It was hard to have that conversation with her that people won't always get it. It is going to be rare that people get it. And she was like, well, I don't understand why you don't live with us or why you only come over on the weekends or you know, why you have this other mommy, I don't get that. And I have had this conversation with her countless times, well, we have the same daddy, but we have two different mommies. And because we have two different mommies that is why we look different; that is why people don't understand we are sisters. But then, for her, it almost was like, ok, maybe we don't tell people because that was almost easier for her than having to explain every time. And that hurts, but I understand. I understand that it's easier to not want to talk about it because it is hard to have to explain yourself each and every time, like, I completely get that; that is my entire life. But I don't know, I mean, I hope with my kid that it's different. When I was in elementary school, my mom wanted to move me out of my 80% white elementary school into a school that was a magnet school, so it had academic accolades, but it was also way more diverse. So I had that experience of going to a place where I didn't have anybody who looked like me. I still didn't have anybody who looked like me over here but still a bit closer; we were moving in the right direction. I would like to think that I would do something like that for my child too because I see the value of diversity and also that this over here is not what the world looks like. You can't be singular in any form of identity because that is just now how we exist. I don't know how to bring up

the conversation of race. I don't know how to talk about gender. I say that I want my child to decide but how are they going to decide? That is just a hard conversation to have. I will also say, too, that I am a little discouraged because I have also tried to have that conversation with my sister, but it is really hard, so I can't imagine what I would do as a parent.

Olivia: You were talking about your experience with your sister. I got a little taste of that this weekend because I was babysitting two kids that are white - an 8 year old and a 6 year old. A little girl on the train, who was 6 or 8, who was white, was just staring at us. I think she just couldn't figure it out; she was so puzzled and in our conversation. I was like, can you not...like who are you? Even the adults too, everyone was looking at us on this train ride together. Yup, I am too young to be their parent but at the same time, we don't look alike, so maybe I'm the nanny. It is their problem to figure out, but they seemed very confused.

Karl: I just wanted to toss something in about white people staring. So, pretty often around campus I will wear my Shemagh, [scarf-type wrap commonly found in arid regions to provide protection from sun and blown sand or dust] and my face is completely covered. I was sitting down on my phone, and this white girl kept staring, and I made eye contact with her and look back at my phone and I'm, like, (confused facial expression). I was just like, can I help you? People give me some weird ass looks. It is cold; can I keep my face warm?

Diana: When you said you wanted to go back to the whole white people staring thing, the first thing that came to my head was the only times I can ever think about having a negative experience, whether with my white family or with my mom, was from other white people. And maybe that's not true or maybe, you know, I'm thinking about my surroundings, and maybe I've been surrounded by white people my entire life, but it was

never a question from other People of Color. Even if they didn't understand, it wasn't like a: I'm going to stare at you and try to figure it out, you know? It always seemed to be a problem for other white people. Which I just put that together.

Sue: I did have some more experiences as a child where, like, if I was someplace with my dad and people would look at us funny. I had - even after coming to college one of my friends met my dad and they were like, is that your real dad? And I was like, yeah, that's my dad. So it's just like experiences like that because, I mean, we didn't look anything alike.

Shannon: Yes, this can be so infuriating. We are taught that like things go together from the time we are small, and this thinking follows us to adulthood. While the media has gotten better about showing interracial families on TV, it is just not present in people's minds to think that a family can be different races, unless they are in an interracial family themselves or are very close to one in a relational way. The result is your frustration in these common situations. I think that it is important for interracial families to understand why we are seen as anomalies and even wrong in some people's minds. It wasn't until 1967 that people of different races were allowed to marry in the United States. Has everyone heard of the *Loving v. Virginia* court case that struck down laws that made it illegal to marry outside of one's race? It is difficult to acknowledge, but the purity of the white race was important to our nation. This racial purity not only affected our marriage laws but other laws as well – think of the separate but equal rationale that was given as a justification for separate facilities for People of Color and white people. Other laws were passed and practices established in our country that have maintained racial purity by discriminating against People of Color (Brown, 2017). This history of maintaining racial purity still exists as we still desire to think of each other in monoracial terms. Interracial marriage is rare (but on the rise), and we understand

groups, especially ones outside of the white, heterosexual, Christian norm, as all the same without variance (Carter, 2013). Understanding that racism is the “air we breathe” as members of our society helps to frame what is going on. Not that this explanation makes it any easier to experience but at least there is a “why” for what you face with your daughter. In the same vein of this question, but moving from strangers to your parents, let’s talk about how your families and friends were unsure of how to label you or even telling you what you are. I heard that from some of you in our interviews. What do the panelists think?

Karl: Yeah, I started school shortly after 9/11, and I knew I was half Lebanese and half white, but I would go to daycare and stuff and people would ask me, “What are you?” I mean I don’t look that Arab, but they could tell I was a little bit different, and they would say, “What are you?” I would say, “Half Arab...half white, half Lebanese.” They would be, like, I don’t know what that means. Once people started understanding what 9/11 was they understood. My dad always told me to not tell people that I was Middle Eastern. My dad was really, really racist. I don’t understand why he married my mom; I mean she looks fresh off the boat.⁶ I mean, he was probably one of the most racist people I have ever met in my life. He would say some pretty derogatory names. I don’t want to say words that might bother somebody, but he would call me sand nigger. And that pretty much scared me off telling people I was Arab for a long time. He just told me to tell people I’m white. Once I started getting older, I started growing a beard when I was 13, it wasn’t really easy to hide that I wasn’t 100% white. So, people started realizing, oh, you aren’t completely white. Once that started, my dad was like, well just don’t tell people. Make sure you tell them that

⁶ “Fresh off the boat” is a term used to describe immigrants who have just arrived from another country but have not yet assimilated into their new nation’s culture, language, or behavior.

you aren't Muslim. I was like, ok. Eventually I got tired of that shit and I was like, I am just going to tell people what I am.

Rachelle: Growing up I never really had an identity that I was comfortable with. My race didn't really matter to me, my sexuality I didn't really know yet, my disability I didn't have yet, so I didn't know a lot about myself. So when I was talking to my dad and he was like, oh, I think you should know more about our family. So, he sends me this message and he was like, my dad is Black and you know your grandma, she adopted me. And so I was just kind of like, what? That's not true, there is no way that is true. I kind of had this existential crisis for a year where I didn't really know what I was, and I was just confused. I was like, what am I? So I made some other biracial friends throughout high school, but none of them were white passing like me so it was kind of, I didn't really know how I feel.

Shannon: Did they believe you when you said that?

Rachelle: Yeah, okay, most people did. I had quite a few people who told me I was lying or whatever. I was like honestly, I could be lying, I don't know for a fact because I haven't talked to my dad, I haven't talked to my dad in person, so I don't know that. So yeah, a lot of people only believe me because of my hair, it is actually super curly. But I straightened my hair every day in high school, so most people didn't know what my natural hair looked like unless they saw me for the first few years. Junior year and senior year, I straightened my hair a lot. So people were just like, you are blonde, you have blue eyes, there is no way. But then I came to college and I...I don't know why, but I made almost all like non-white friends when I first came to college. I had very few white friends. My floor on my residence hall was very diverse. I was mainly friends with people of other races. And my best friend, who is still my best friend now, he still is Black and grew up in a very racially diverse community, so he

mainly believed me. And then my second semester I went down to Florida for my internship and made friends from all over the world and then that kind of was frustrating because they didn't believe me either. I made friends mainly from Asia. I worked with a lot of Japanese and Thai people, and they were all like that is not what Mixed Race people look like, there is no way, and that was kind of frustrating because for someone to sit there and just tell me that you can't be that is super invalidating.

Parent from the Crowd: So what was their definition of what Mixed Race looks like?

Rachelle: To me, I imagined it to be a lot what Rhianna looks like almost. They imagined someone with darkish skin with like curly hair, and with an accent...I don't know. Also, my mom didn't know that I did the study because she would say, you aren't that Mixed Race.

Shannon: Wow, the question was able to cover a lot of territory. We went from strangers not associating you with your parents to your parents or friends not wanting or believing that you are Mixed. In all cases, people are defining you. The notion labeling and defining is powerful as we talk about the Mixed Race experience. So as you see, parents, something as well-intentioned as not talking about race for the sake of not wanting to point out difference or make your child feel different, or even thinking that it isn't important in today's society, does have an effect on your children. As we move further into our discussion, I want to center our conversation deeper into the idea that I just stated – in today's world, talking about race isn't necessary.

“I Didn't Think It was Important”: Parents and Their Role in Post-Racial Ideology

Post-racial ideology is the notion that racism is no longer an issue in today's world. Although these findings are represented in the year 2044, I am sure, due to the slow wheels

of social progress, that twenty-six years in the future will still not produce a society free of racism, just like we saw that racism didn't end with the Emancipation Proclamation or *Brown v. Board of Education*. Bonilla-Silva (2001) shares that color-blind racism is often the mechanism used to fuel modern racial inequalities. The term "color-blind" is a term that many white people use to explain to others that they are not racist, that we are past its negative effects, and that they are good people who do not discriminate or think of anyone differently because of their race. White parents fear bringing up race for the fact that they feel that racism truly does not exist (because they do not feel its effects), or they feel that by bringing it up it is going to ignite racial problems. Through this next section, I would like to highlight the ways that white parents ignored matters of race because they didn't feel it was necessary or important to discuss. While the intention was likely good, it can be seen in the following pages that neutralizing race led to confusion, a lack of positive racial identity, and also a loss of culture that they sought to understand.

***Parent Question:** We have made such progress in our society since the Civil Rights Era, don't you agree? I don't see why talking about the past injustices is important when such great progress is evident. I feel that it will just make my daughter feel bad about herself. How is talking about race and emphasizing race in my home helpful? Wouldn't it just distance her from me?*

Lynne: I think it would be just her having my back because my mom is one of those people who is very protective of her kids. So when she sees one of us in pain she literally sees red, so I get scared for people. So my dad's side of the family would make me feel bad about not speaking Spanish, not being over there enough, or just something that was out of my control that I could never fix. It would hurt me to hear it only because I didn't know how to fix it

and coming from people I considered family it was more difficult to hear. So I know she would always stand up for me, and I know she would address it to him. As a little kid, I didn't know how to do that. She would tell him you need to get your family in check or she won't come over there anymore and things like that. So she would just have my back when I needed it the most when I am not able to express how I feel. I think that was really important to me. Also, too, just because I have a strained relationship with my dad, she still allows me to know that part of my heritage and my identity of who I am. And so I think that means a lot to me as well. Because I know a lot of people...I have a friend who is Mixed as well and her parents don't have a good relationship either, and she doesn't...they don't let her have both they kind of made her pick a side. So not having to go through that while in college while trying to juggle everything else of who I want to be, I am secure that I at least have one identity down.

Shannon: What were some of the things that your mom specifically did that helped affirm your El Salvadorian identity? Because I want some tips, just like every other white parent in this room (laughter).

Lynne: So, they have Latin Festivals in Charlotte, so she'd take me to some of those. We would actually eat...there's a Pandería, which is like a bakery sort of thing by our house, so we would go there and eat sometimes too. She cooks; she doesn't like to do traditional food for the holidays so like one year she made enchiladas, and I was like mommy that is so good. She loves Hispanic food so she will cook it for me. We watched Spanish movies together...she doesn't like soap operas so she won't watch Spanish soap operas with me...but I love them. She won't watch them with me; she is like why are you watching this-- this is

stupid. She is fluent in Spanish, so if I ever talk to her in Spanish, she will talk back to me in Spanish. Clark, I know you had some positive stories you shared about your parents.

Clark: Yeah, well, when I was younger, I was a lot darker than I am now due to playing baseball outside. My dad's fear of anything happening to me in terms of possible race issues or... what's the word...like derogatory terms thrown at me or prejudice, he told that to me early on to kind of preempt that.

Shannon: Was your mom a part of that conversation?

Clark: She was. She knew that when she married my father that there was always that possibility, and she backed my father up all the time, and he backed her up. You have two ethnicities, and you are of two races; you can be proud of both-- you should be proud of both. So they just kind of collaborated in that respect.

***Parent Question:** For the others of you, I can tell by your facial expressions that your parents didn't talk about race. What do you think is the effect of not having conversations about race?*

Clark: I feel like if you don't have that conversation, it makes it so much harder for your child to build their own identity. Especially as they go on through the years and they get to the adolescent stages, and they are forming their own identity, and they don't necessarily know the social aspects of race, and they don't know how big of a conversation it is in today's world. I feel like if they don't have a conversation, they don't understand that they are like, why did this person call me this? Or what reason do I have to even care about what they said? Just kind of understanding your own identity would be so much harder, I feel like.

Shannon: Because you fill in the blanks with anything else you are getting?

Clark: You would build your identity off reactions to you and others' schemas and assumptions of you and that's horribly detrimental.

Shelley: Yeah, I think it is uncomfortable. Having the sit down talk is very official.

Shannon: Yeah, like the sex talk (laughter).

Shelley: They (parents) just are not ready to have it. One, because it is their kids, and it is a different kind of viewpoint, almost like I don't want you to have to know this. And, two, I think it is hard for them because you wonder what they can handle and what is appropriate to share with them. I think there is a lot of ambiguity, and there's a lot of figuring it out on your own and that doesn't go the way you think it should. Because sometimes when kids have to form identity based on other people's reactions or when they hear race connected to negative things, and they don't think of it in a positive way, and they feel self-conscious about it, and they don't like themselves or they could be really confused because they can be like, I don't understand because they have never thought about it or realized that you looked different, you are like what, what are they talking about? It is like being blindsided...it doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing where they are hurt, it can just be very confusing. And it can be something that they are like, I don't understand. And when they get older they might kind of understand, and it may not come out as positive.

Shannon: Did you ever feel that way?

Shelley: I mean, it wasn't ever like bad. I know sometimes I didn't fully grasp it. I got basic things, but I didn't fully get it. I remember like whenever they would be like, which half of you is like...I was kind of like oh, I don't know...I don't think that is how I work, but maybe I

do (laughter). I don't know how it is split. I don't think it is like that. I am like, I don't know and stuff like that. I don't know, I guess so.

Rachelle: I really agree with what others have said, and I think at least in my personal experience it has been kind of like I have always denied that race was an issue, like my mom denies it, since we never talked about it. When I was in high school was when the Black Lives Matter movement started to gain attention. I was always just like, I don't know why they are protesting, that's not a problem, and I had this attitude towards it. I just didn't get it and since I didn't get it, I automatically thought it was a bad thing. Because that is what the human brain, I feel like, tends to do. If you don't understand something you assume it is bad, so I think that was kind of my reaction. That kind of set off my mom as well so yeah, if you don't talk about race, I feel like kids start to think it is a bad thing and that is also where I think it can bleed into people learning racism growing up. You know, when I was on the playground when I was a kid, I heard the n-word for the first time on a playground from a white kid talking about a Black kid, and I was just like...I thought that was ok because my mom never told me that wasn't ok, so when you are not told that it is not okay, you are just yeah, ok, whatever, because you know. So, I think that the biggest consequence is that you are going to think that race is a bad thing and not think it is a problem and think it is ok to be racist because you were never taught otherwise.

Shannon: Yes, we have made progress, but there is still so much work to do. We cannot let the progress that has occurred trick us into thinking the work is done. In fact, I remember in 2012 having my daughter just two weeks before President Barack Obama was elected to his second term in office. I remember being in the hospital watching the final debate of the election cycle and being so proud that he was our president and that he could possibly be so

for his second term. When he was elected again, I was so proud that my Mixed Race daughter was born into a world where her president shared her same racial make-up. But just four short years later, in 2016, one year after the birth of my son, I had never felt more hopeless than the day after the election of Donald Trump. Within all my feelings of despair and complete disappointment, I also knew that racism is normal in our society (Bell, 1992). This was a huge obstacle to face for me as a parent. But I knew that the struggle to help achieve racial equality is a never-ending perpetual endeavor (Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018). Through my research, I know that white parents rarely discuss race with their children (Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and if they do, they teach a colorblind philosophy (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Think of the times that you might have shushed your child when they pointed out an observation about someone's race. This reaction is not only based in fear and embarrassment, but your child broke a tenant of colorblind racism and that is "thou shalt not see race" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This causes children to think that talking about race is bad (Tatum, 2001), and it sounds like from your question that this ideology has been manifested in you as well. So, from my perspective, talking about race is helpful and won't make your daughter feel bad. It will help her to make sense of the world and to help her find her place within it rather than measuring herself against society's standards, which are often rooted in white notions of beauty, intelligence, and success.

I think it is time to move on to our next question, but I want to point out that our panelists illustrated that talking about race isn't bad, in fact, it can be helpful for your child. Don't pretend that race or racism doesn't exist; talk with your child about it. We must be willing to deconstruct racism in our parenting. We must realize that our color-blind parenting goes hand in hand with the normalization of whiteness (Nishi, 2018).

***Parent Question:** I just don't hear from my children that they experience racism. Am I missing something? Have you all experienced racism and if so, what does it look like? And finally, when is it time to start talking about race?*

Lynne: Yeah. (If have experienced racism) mostly in school. This is where I get the abundance of my memories because that is where I spent the most of my time. I had much lighter skin back then and so when I would say that I was Hispanic, white people would be like oh, you're white (in a skeptical tone). I was like how are you going to tell me what I am? My most recent memories of high school are when things started happening in the media about border control and all of that. That's when there were a lot of things that were said that made me uncomfortable because they were directed toward my identity. Even though it is only half of me, it is still a part of me. I remember when Trump's platform came out about building the wall and then he won the presidency...when we came back to school there was a guy, we had class together, he was like you might want to be careful and you might want to say bye to your family now because you are going to be deported. I was like "I am an American citizen". Immigration is such a big controversy now, and it kind of always has been but right now it's so big. Actually, before I came to college, I wanted to take my mom's maiden name, Anderson, instead of my last name, Hernandez, so I wouldn't have to explain myself or get the judgements or certain things that come associated with having a Latin presence in your life right now. And my mom wouldn't let me do it at all. She was actually mad that I brought it up. She said that I shouldn't be ashamed of who I am and shouldn't be who people want me to be - assimilation and stuff like that. When my mom was reminiscing about my childhood, she mentioned instances where she remembers that other people talked about us, and they didn't realize what they were doing was ignorant

or wrong. I know one time we were in church and someone's boy came up and asked us if I was adopted. My mom was really upset about that too. She knew, it's not him, it's the parents. We didn't go to that church anymore. And then too, since people think that all Hispanics are just Mexican, I had a class that was talking about Mexican history, and I was like I am not Mexican I have no idea what this is about. I can't help you there because I don't know anything about it. I barely know about El Salvadorian history. I can't help you with Mexican history that's not me.

Karl: When I was younger I pretty much identified as white because my dad was the dominant force in the household. And at the time I didn't really get bothered by those things because you grow up like that, and you think that is normal. So for the longest time I was like yeah, I'm white. As I got older and started like hearing other people's experiences and seeing what other households were like, that is when I started getting ticked off at it. I was like, okay, this shit is not alright. As far as it affecting me, I did not like white people for a long time as a result of that. Especially, I mean like living in the South you hear stuff like that occasionally, and you know in school people will call you Isis or terrorist and that stuff gets pretty old, so for a long time I got a pretty negative outlook on white people.

Shannon: I remember when we talked you said your dad would call you horrible, racist names. Did he ever tell you or allude to a reason for using those names? Did he use them when you were in trouble?

Karl: No, no not at all. He said it as a joke. He would laugh, people around him would laugh. And you know, hearing it from a young age, I was like, well, I guess I am supposed to laugh. Out of instinct I would laugh too, almost like it is funny. Now, if someone calls me that they are probably going to catch the hands. I am not going to laugh. I was absolutely

self-loathing for a long time. When I was younger I hated the fact that I was Arab. Growing up after 9/11, I was like, I hate these people why do I have to be one of them? Why do I have to be of Arab descent? These people are just...they are like Neanderthals over there just killing each other. And it was self-loathing for a really, really long time. It was like, well, I'm proud of my white side, and I was happy I had that white half because it was something. I was like well, it is not a Mercedes Benz but it is a new Accord, you know? It was something I could cling on to. Then it's almost like that kind of flipped as I got older. I realized that these white people are racist, and that is when I started to get proud and embrace my Arab heritage.

Rachelle: So, my youngest sister's dad, who is one of the worst people I have ever met in my life, I hate him. So him and my mom have not been together for a long time. They haven't been together for around seven years now. This was four years ago, and he came to pick up my sister from my house, and he was talking to my mom, and he was like, oh my gosh, do you think that we are going to have a Black president for the next four years? And my mom was like, oh, well I don't care, and I knew that he would get all the votes because he is Black. I know they have had a lot of conversations that have been super racist, mainly about Obama and my mom not disagreeing, you know. But yeah, a lot of Obama being president and my mom had a lot of conversations with my dad, like he is only getting votes because he is Black or people in America only want Black people, that type of thing. And also, me and my mom kind of have this unspoken agreement; we don't talk about issues of race because my mom is very conservative, so my mom does have a lot of racist mindsets, so we don't talk about racial issues because she found out that I went to a Black Lives Matter rally and was so angry. She just had to cast it out of her mind. She couldn't even talk about it

with me; she was just so mad. Because she is one of those people that consider Black Lives Matter a terrorist group.

Diana: So last time I talked about my white family being my dad, my step-mom, and my sister. I love them, but they are very social so whenever I go over to their house they go to this Christmas Party and this New Years Party, and I hate stuff like that, but I go with them because they are my family. I think I feel really uncomfortable because I don't know everybody so like, it is like this question of who are you? And how have you come into this situation? Which is normal -- that is normal for people to ask me that. I noticed that the way my step-mom claims me is different than the way my dad claims me. So, my dad introduces me as this is my daughter or this is our daughter in reference to my step-mom and my step-mom says this is Ellie's sister, so...

Shannon: So, not claiming you?

Diana: Right, so that was sort of weird. Maybe she has always done that, and I hadn't noticed but when I did, I was like oh, okay, I don't really know what to say about this or do I say anything at all because I mean, my sister will always claim me, and I will always love her for it, but I thought that that was a little odd.

Parent Question: Do you think it is racially motivated?

Diana: I think maybe. I don't think she has any bad intentions. I think that it is, you know, I don't know really how to explain this to other people. And maybe I don't want to take the space that my step-mom should have as explaining her relationship as a part of this family. I don't know, I don't think she has any ill intent, but I just felt it was a little weird.

Shannon: What I think is interesting, and I don't know if anyone else in the crowd noticed this, but I was expecting their stories of racist things to come from outside their family, not within it. But as you see here, most of these stories stemmed from conversations inside their homes. Hughes and Chen (1997) talk in their work about how racial socialization practices of children are shaped by families of origin, meaning that how our children think about themselves and race in general is passed down from us as parents in addition to the media and other influential places. Parents are the first teachers in our children's lives. It is time we understand the power of realizing that racism is still real in our society today and talking about racism is necessary for their survival in our world. The post-racial reality that we try to live in is fictitious. Let's move on and talk to our participants about their specific stories with their parents talking about race or not talking about race. I think hearing from them will help to cement that talking about race will help your child *and* you and might perhaps identify some things that are happening in your household as well. But, I want to get back to your question directly – when is a good time to start talking about race? Have folks ever heard of the study that used Black and white dolls to see which doll children would associate with good, bad, beautiful, and ugly? This study conducted by Clark and Clark (1939) is infamous and found that no matter the race of the child, the white dolls were seen as smarter, more beautiful, and as “good.” This study has been replicated and repeated, and one of the most astounding findings from this study is that children learn to internalize dominant messages about race by age three (Matias, 2016). Yes, age three. For me, this breaks the misnomer that children are too young to learn about race, and therefore we should not teach it (Matias, 2016). Obviously, there are age appropriate things to say at different phases in their childhood – perhaps for a 2 or 3 year old you are pointing out differences among people

and talking positively about those differences. At 4 or 5 you might want to start talking about their race and discuss how their features and abilities are beautiful and wonderful and pointing out others on TV in books, etc. who are doing amazing things that look like them. My point is, unless your child is still in the womb, start talking about race.

The Race Talk: Parents Discussing Race (Or Not)

Conceptualizing how to talk about race is difficult for many white folks because they have not rehearsed this skill, in fact, they are taught to avoid topics of race altogether. This final section shares why discussing race is important and provides examples and thoughts from the panelists about how to approach this.

***Parent Question:** What did talking about race look like in your home? Hearing you all talk, I wonder how I am doing. I understand that talking about race is important. But if I am being honest with myself, I don't even know where to start in having these conversations or if I am doing this right. My child is smart; they will know that I don't have the answers.*

Shannon: Yes, your child is smart and that is exactly the reason why you should discuss race with them. One of the biggest takeaways I found from talking with these eight folks is that they know, especially now that they are college aged, the extent to which their parents discussed race. And for those that told me they didn't talk about it, there is some pain associated with the neglect of their identity. As we have mentioned quite a bit with this panel, most of us are not prepared to talk about race, especially those of us that are white (Jenson, 2005; Smith, Juárez, & Jacobson, 2011). We have never had to think about race like People of Color do, even if they are our child. Sending our children into our education system, where 90% of teachers are white, does not do much to help break our race neutral

way of discussing race (Matias, 2013). So if we, as parents, do not educate ourselves and do not challenge our school systems to do the same, what prevails? Racism and white supremacy does. So, I ask you what would you rather be? A parent who continues to operate within their white, race-neutral frame or a parent who is trying to unlearn the racist things that you have been taught and helps their child navigate the turbulent racial environment that needs help and support of understanding family? I would wager that you want to be the second kind of parent. If so, it is time to get to work, no matter how inadequate and unknowledgeable you may feel. If I am being honest with all of you, I struggle with parenting Mixed Race children too. I feel great pressure to say the right thing so I don't mess up their racial identity and I often have the doubts about whether I am the right person to deliver these messages. I am white...what do I know? But then I snap back to reality and realize I have a responsibility to learn about race and racism. There have been too many of us white folks ignoring race and I don't want to be one of them, especially when it comes to my children. We have to learn and do the hard work around this stuff. I appreciate your question, and this is where I envisioned us going by the end of this panel. I am going to turn it over to our panelists to share their stories and advice.

Rachelle: I think everyone has their racial biases, and I'm not going to sit here and say my mom is a racist, but my mom has said some racist comments before and made some very derogatory comments, especially when it regards Black people. I almost feel like my mom has this resentment, almost, and maybe it's because my father is not really involved in my life, and I don't really know why. But every time race was talked about growing up, especially around the time of the Trayvon Martin shooting and a lot of the racial tensions grew, the forming of the Black Lives Matter, it's always been very negative. My mom was

like, people just want everything to be about race, playing the race card all the time, it's always that sort of dialogue. It's not about, let's talk about what racial tensions are like in America; it is always like people are playing the race card. It almost feels as if my mom has resentment about that type of thing and also just my mom comes from a very conservative background, so she's one of those white people who is like white people when with white people, so it is really interesting that she had a child with a Mixed man.

Shannon: How do you make sense of that?

Rachelle: I'm still trying. I think a lot it is just I have to try to understand where my mom was coming from, a sixteen year old...well, actually she was fifteen when she got pregnant with me. She was very young and she made a lot of mistakes and maybe blames them on my dad so that might be where that is coming from. My mom does not have a lot of positive conversations about race with me and never has for my whole life.

Shannon: So you getting messages about race would be from what experiences? How have you formed your thoughts about race outside of your mom?

Rachelle: Just like coming to college, mainly. Because I came to college and people were like, it's okay to talk about race. It's okay to respect people of other races; it is not all about white people. I started meeting lots of other people from different races and I was like, wow, this is like really cool, this is like my high school, it was very diverse, but I hung around other white people for the most part. So coming to college and meeting with other people from different races and engaging in dialogue and being a political science major, we talk a lot about race. So that was a really good opportunity. All of my experience with race outside of my mom has mainly been coming to college.

Shannon: Lynne, how did your parents talk about race?

Lynne: So with mine, so back to my mother. She spent most of her time in South Chicago, which is very diverse, it is great. I love it. But, my grandparents on her side aren't as inclusive as my mother. I wouldn't consider my mom racist at all, by any means, she is the most liberal person I have ever met. But my grandparents have that privileged mentality, even though on some level, they're not privileged, you know? It is interesting to see that. my mom always gets upset when she sees children on the news, especially Black children, and they are being demonized when the crime could be committed by a white person and nothing is said about their background. People don't see them as human beings but as a color first, and she has a problem with that. And since her kids are Mixed, she's very protective of how people talk about certain things around her. Especially nowadays with the whole immigration controversy, she works in a very conservative area, which is where the rich people live and she hates it. But like, people forget that she has, I guess, Mixed kids, so they're more free in what they say to her. So it really offends her sometimes, but she is like I need to keep my job so I can't kick them in the mouth...I'm like mom, violence is never the answer (laughter). So that's interesting, but on my dad's side of the family, which is actually where most of the racist things come from, they don't like white people at all, which is funny because my mom is white, so I don't get it. They don't like Black people either. They basically only like themselves, which is pretty interesting because not that many of them are here but it's fine. Most of the negative things that people come up with, the implicit bias, I learned from my dad's side of the family and my mom, when I was little, worked hard to counter that because she doesn't ever agree with what they say. An interesting balance she had to do when I was little. I would spend time with his family, and I'd come back with all

these ideas, and she'd have to correct them, you know. It was just interesting and then when I spent less time with them and made friends from predominantly other marginalized identities, then it was like what you are saying is not true. And my mom always said you judge a person by their character, not by their race. So I never grew up thinking one race is better than another. My thing is that is how I look at it too. So people are quick to say all Black people are all this or all white people are like that. No, that person you met was like that, not the whole race is like this. That is how my mom...we liked to have discussions about race because it should be talked about, they should be had. My mom gets very heated on the subject because she feels very strongly about certain things, but I have never felt what she says is demeaning to one person or the other.

Shannon: So your mom, it sounds like, is taking some steps to understand?

Lynne: Yes. I think that deals with a lot of her childhood and seeing other people struggle and it wasn't like just a Black person struggle, it was an everybody struggle. So having that perspective that multiple races can have the same struggle, that it is a person by person thing, not just a Black struggle, not a Hispanic struggle, everyone can have the same struggle.

Shannon: Shelly, how did your family talk about race?

Shelley: We didn't really talk about race. I think it was kind of just in a way of like not having to think about it or reckon with it. Like I said, I have that weird thing, somehow I knew I was Korean, I don't know how. We never talked about it. Even other kids really didn't talk about it...they didn't understand it, and they were all white, and they didn't need to know, and we moved to a much more diverse area. I had never been around so many people from different backgrounds, so I think that was kind of when I really understood what that was. It wasn't

anything negative or positive necessarily. We still didn't really talk about it that much. I don't think my parents have ever been outright discriminatory or like derogatory at all. There may have been benevolent racism and stuff but surprisingly, I don't think I got much of that from them. I really only know my dad's side of the family, and my mom's is nonexistent, and she was adopted by two older white people who were already previously married, and they adopted her together, so I don't have really have any - so it is really only my dad's side of the family. And we don't even really ever acknowledge it, but I think especially as I have gotten older it is slowly becoming more of a thing to talk about. And I think when I came to high school and college and realized things about race and nuances and how it affects things, I think my mom also was kind of like, okay, I'm learning too, and so now I just go home and I'm like, guys I learned all this stuff and let's educate each other.

Shannon: You are taking on the role of a teacher?

Shelley: Kind of. Yeah. Or it seems like it. Either that or even now we can talk about it or now, maybe, it feels like we have to talk about it. It's really not talked about at all. It is funny because I talked to my aunt who is white and when I went to visit her, and I think it was like between one of my years of college, and I was talking about being in the Mixed Race group on campus and she was like, what? I never even really thought about your mom as not white. I was like... what do you mean? What? What? It was just very odd because I guess they just never talked about it, and they just all fooled themselves into thinking it wasn't a thing, and I was like, how? That was very shocking.

Shannon: I think the second part of what you said - they fooled themselves into thinking that it wasn't a thing. That says a lot right there.

Shelley: I kind of realized how much I think my mom really assimilated in a lot of ways, and I think that kind of played into it a lot and I was like...oh, yeah, that's probably why it was not a thing because they probably didn't want it to be.

Clark: So, a lot of the talk about race in my household in recent years, really the only talk I had in childhood, was to stay true to yourself and don't allow others to influence who you are. I don't want to say, don't get whitewashed but like, you know, understand and appreciate and be proud who you are-- that kind of message. But in recent years, especially since I have come to college and have been away from them and since race has become more and more an issue in the current political climate and social climate, whatever. I've recently gotten texts, or I will text my dad, and he will be like, be careful, you may be white and passing but still be vigilant and take care of yourself and watch out for yourself and others, and my mom has been sharing that same message with me. It has been kind of collaborative, and they have provided me with the same message. You are Mixed Race; you should be proud of who you are and kind of in recent years be careful, be vigilant.

Shannon: So the message grew with intensity, and it could be because of everything that is going on, like you said, so they are more concerned about your safety.

Clark: My safety, yes.

Shannon: Sue, what was your experience talking about race?

Sue: I think that race would have been talked about more if we lived in a more diverse area. But because we didn't and it was like all white people, I think my parents just kind of thought that, like, I was going to fit the mold, or I wouldn't be that different or something like that. I don't think I wish that I would have more support in terms of my own personal

development with it, but I do wish it was more of a topic in the household because it wasn't. My parents owned a bed and breakfast while I was growing up. So my dad was always pretty much there, and I was always with my mom. Not that my dad wasn't around, but I just didn't really hang out with him that much. My mom is Korean, so it was like I had a lot exposure to Korean culture from her. We would always eat Korean food and talk about her childhood growing up in Korea and stuff like that. So I never really thought it was weird or anything to be different until I went to school, I think, and my peers noticed that I was different...and my dad was very accepting, and I have a lot of cousins. My mom had a lot of siblings and some of her siblings married white people and some of them married other Korean people, so that dynamic is kind of interesting sometimes, and I have some cousins who are biracial like I am, so that's always been an interesting dynamic at family get-togethers. We recognize our differences, and I would say that my full-Korean cousins are much more immersed in the culture than I ever was growing up, even though I did get a lot of exposure to it.

Shannon: For me it is interesting to hear the different way that family plays out. Even one person in your family can make a difference in your experience, someone that you can relate to.

Sue: Yeah. Even this one time, a few years ago, it was like Christmas dinner or something. Of course we started talking about gay marriage and most of my family is conservative and so my aunt, who is Korean, was talking about how she doesn't think that gay marriage should be legal, and I was putting in my two cents about why I think it should be and my uncle, who is white and conservative, he actually kind of backed me up and was like, 50 years ago in the state of Virginia I couldn't have married my wife because we aren't

the same race. I really liked how he backed me up on that and took a different perspective that was more relevant to my family. So that was an interesting experience.

Shannon: Yeah, a great point. I like how he took the personal and applied it to another situation to create understanding. Olivia, we haven't heard from you yet on this question; how would you say that race was talked about in your home?

Olivia: So, my mom and dad aren't together. I actually never met my dad, so I guess that responsibility was put on my mom, and she kind of just avoids the topic of race at all times. Even with the election of Donald Trump, whew, we won't even get into all that (laughter). But, we don't talk about race or politics or any of those touchy subjects, even though it is what I identify as. So I guess there was a brief period of time when I lived with my half-sister's grandmother...like, so my half-sister (who is also Black and white) and I are super close. Luckily we grew up in the same house together, and she is really close with her dad's family. Actually, I spent time with them over Thanksgiving break, and they are very close to me; they are like family to me. So that was my exposure to learning about the culture and race and things you don't even think about. Like food and hair products and things that are so crucial to me, I learned through them. So there is nothing in my immediate family, no one ever talks about it. I felt like an absence there but also, that speaks a lot too. Not talking about something is talking about something, you know? I knew early on that she wasn't going to be the one that I could get all my answers from about my culture, this other part of them so, if anything, I have learned it from other people, so I don't really know how much she has shaped it. I feel like she didn't really play a huge part of it; we didn't really talk about race.

Diana: What sparked my memory was when I was in second grade, my parents got divorced. So by second grade, my parents were living in separate houses so the first time, I kind of realized that I was different. I would say I had a very similar experience. I never thought there was anything different about me until I went to school, and I was kind of defined as different. But, we were doing a project in second grade on your family tree or your heritage or something, and I came home and asked my mom about it, and my mom she said, “Diana, well you know my parents are Filipino.” And I was like, what does that mean? She was like, well...she pulled out a map and she showed me this is where the Philippines are and that is a part of Asia. I was like, wait...we are Asian (laughter)? And she said, “yes,” and I was like blown away, and I was so excited to go to school the next day and tell my teacher and tell my classmates that I had discovered a part of me that I didn’t know was there because it had never really been talked about.

Shannon: I love hearing about that excitement you had as a child for learning your racial background. It is interesting to hear that you didn’t talk about you and your mom’s Filipino background until the second grade. Like Olivia said, when there is an absence of something that still says something, right? So, what did you pick up on in terms of race? How would you say, now in your college student mind, how would you say you interpreted that absence of talking about race? That silence on that topic? Or maybe the absence of positive messages?

Sue: I honestly firmly believe that my parents didn’t even think about it. I don’t think they realized that it was an important thing to talk about. And I mean, of course, you know, my dad was white, so he didn’t really know much about how to talk about it and he...and like I said, it wasn’t like he wasn’t there but in terms of talking about emotional things, he was

kind of removed and that was left up to me and my mom. And then, I mean, examples of my mom telling me now she wishes that she would have taught me to speak Korean when I was younger, but there was no reason to know because there were no Korean people where we lived. I honestly think they didn't think about what my experience would be like with peers. I don't think they realized how important it was to talk about it.

Shannon: Why do you think they made the decision to not talk about race?

Sue: I think...I don't know. I think they didn't want me to feel that I was different from everyone else. Because they knew I was, but I think they didn't want to make me feel like I was set apart from everyone.

Olivia: I think for me that the absence of talking about race just sort of socialized me to think I'm white. Which is kind of weird, because my only family members are white people...and my mom, I don't think she had any Black friends growing up, but I don't remember seeing Black adults outside of the previous family I was telling you about. But I sort of had to face that when I got to grad school because we had to face our racial biases and stuff like that, and I had an identity crisis I guess. I was like what am I? There is this whole part of me that is a mystery, and I don't know much about it. The absence of talking about it socialized me to think I was white but at the same time, I knew I was different because of the lack of representation and not seeing any other biracial people at all.

Shannon: So when you say you approach the world as white because of the white experiences, when do you remember your first recognition of, oh, I'm not white?

Olivia: Growing up in a predominantly white town (laughter). People around me noticing I'm different. Getting stares and people looking at you with a blank face, no expression, and

you don't know what they are thinking, and this made me feel like an animal in a zoo almost. I always felt unwelcomed. ..I was like, ok, I'm different.

Diana: I think for me the absence of the whole race conversation, I think my parents didn't know how to talk about it, but they kind of framed it in a different way. So, if my dad came to school pick me up after the school day was over, he would have trouble because he doesn't look like me, and when I asked a question about that he kind of framed it in a way that was, he was talking about differences - physical differences. It was never a race conversation. It was never a -- this is my identity vs. this is your identity, but he framed it in a way that was easy for me to understand at the time; well I don't look like you. We have the same last name and that is how people know I am your father but just by looking at the two of us, people wouldn't know. But, it was interesting too, because my mom would have a hard time picking me up too, and we have two different last names. That was kind of the thing they kind of clung to, whether it was a difference in last name or whether it was a difference in appearance, kind of skirting around the topic of race. Framing it in a way that was more understandable, I think.

Karl: I think in my case, when my dad talked about race it had a very deliberate meaning. I mean, he was super racist, so that hits the nail on the head right there. He didn't want people to know that he had a Mixed Race kid. I think his meaning was pretty clear behind why he did that and it wasn't really until I got older that I came to terms with not being white. It was kind of like a shock, oh yeah, I'm not white like all my other friends.

Shannon: I see another hand in the audience, what is your question?

Parent Question: So why, in your opinion, do you think that parents don't talk about race? It seems like to me we would if it was relevant.

Rachelle: Well, I think because it is easy to not talk about race. Because when you get a subject like race or any of the big topics like abortion rights that type of thing, I think that people skirt around it because we just don't have to talk about it, like whatever, it isn't a choice for some people, some people have no choice but to talk about it. I think, especially if you have like a white parent, it is really easy for them to skirt around the topic because it doesn't really affect them-- not to say it doesn't affect them-- but it doesn't affect them the way it affects their child. And not only that, I think that also it's scary in today's society when you see the number of People of Color who are being incarcerated and murdered as opposed to the number of white people. I think it is just the topic that is really intimidating and scary, you don't want to think about your kid being incarcerated or killed because of the way they look. I feel a culmination of those two factors are reasons I assume that they are not talking about it.

Shelley: Yeah, I think it is uncomfortable, like, even if you are with People of Color, and not necessarily just Black people, they don't like having to talk about it. Sometimes you have to, but I still don't think they want to. So having the sit down talk is very official (laughter).

Shannon: Yeah, like the sex talk one night and the race talk another night (laughter).

Shelley: They just are not ready to have it, one, because it is their kids, and it is a different kind of viewpoint almost, like, I don't want you to have to know this, you will, but that is just how that works. I think it is just like a thing that, one, they are uncomfortable with it because it is an uncomfortable topic, and it isn't something that you talk about with random people, like someone you don't know. And it's also like a...I think it is hard for them to because it is

their kids, and they are younger and depending on your age and wondering what you can handle and what's appropriate to share with you.

Shannon: Other thoughts?

Clark: I was going to say exactly what she said.

Shannon: I get it, amen (laughter).

Lynne: I never understand why it wasn't something that she sat down and talked to me about when I was younger. And like you said, it came up so she had to talk about it then. But having my little sister, I know why...I don't want her to know the things that happen, the things that she has to look forward to growing up being different in a way, and so I get why my mom did it but, at the same time, I still feel like she should have only to prepare my sister because she doesn't have a thick skin at all. It is something that you learn growing up and being who you are and different, you learn to get one. I had mine, and I got it learning about race and knowing how it is going to affect you. You have to grow up a little bit faster to learn to deal with the things that come with it. My sister is very innocent because she's seven. She shouldn't have to worry about these things, that is what my mom is for -- to worry about these things for her. I still feel that she should still know about them before they happen so when they do happen, it doesn't hurt as much, I think. I think for me, if I knew that it was going to happen before it did, it wouldn't have hurt me or been so shocking to know, which is a bad thing to say, but that is the truth.

Shelley: I think there's a lot of ambiguity, and there's a lot of figuring it out on your own and that doesn't go the way you think it should. Because sometimes, when kids have to form identity based on other people's reactions or, like, what they hear, then it's like race is

connected to negative things, and they don't think of it in a positive way, and they feel self-conscious about it, and they don't like themselves, or they could be really confused because they can be, like, I don't understand because they have never thought about it or realized that you looked different, you are like what, what are they talking about? It is like being blindsided...it doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing where they are hurt, it can just be very confusing. And it can be something that they are like, I don't understand. And when they get older they might kind of understand and it may not come out as positive.

Shannon: Did you ever feel that way?

Shelley: I mean, it wasn't ever, like, bad. I know sometimes I didn't fully grasp it. I got basic things, but I didn't fully get it. I remember whenever they would say," which half of you is...,"I was kind of like, oh, I don't know...I don't think that is how I work, but maybe I do (laughter). I don't know how it is split. I don't think it is like that; I don't know and stuff like that.

Clark: Like she said, you would build your identity off of what reactions of you and others' schemas and assumptions of you and that's horribly detrimental.

Shannon: Yes, and you form your reactions from how you see others approach race. Like when kids point out racial things our first reaction is to hush them.

Panel: Yes, yes (laughter)!

Shelley: Yeah, parents are like it looks bad on me.

Shannon: Yes. I remember when I was very small being in a grocery store, and I saw a Black man, and I pointed that out, and my mom was like “shhhh”. What do you learn from that? That you don’t mention race?

Rachelle: But I feel like a lesson can be learned from that, like a child, like when people try to pretend that they don’t see race, like I don’t see race, race isn’t a thing...yes, children will literally hear, my cute brown...maybe we should point out people’s differences and maybe make that a good thing, you know? I just, personally, I don’t see a problem with pointing out that people are different because it is when we start to not acknowledge and deny diversity is when bad things start to happen.

Shelley: I think that is why a lot of parents don’t want to because they feel that their children will not understand. I don’t think you should impart them with all...the complex history of racism from the entire Civil Rights Era. I think there’s ways, there are things that kids get, even watching TV or just like things that are showing that people are different, just like things are different, and that’s ok and introduce that, and I think that these things are more prevalent with children’s books and TV shows and things like that. Introduce to them some kind of acceptance so that it is easier for them to understand when they get older that they can recognize it I think.

Shannon: Positive exposure at a young age takes the place of where a race lesson cannot be comprehended. If children see People of Color on TV, in books, in their family, and other places they will get positive messages about themselves. But, I know for me growing up and probably all of you, the positive images shown are of white people and their experiences. But, there’s another story to tell of success, beauty, and community impact from People of Color that needs to be exposed. I see it sometimes in the media, and I get

very excited for a commercial that depicts an interracial family, or a cartoon character of color who is smart and beautiful for my daughter, or a group of college students like you all who are doing great things on your college campus. But seeing that, depending on where you are, is often times not the case. If we (as parents) are not careful, the world will give you what they want your children to see, which are white images. I think it is getting better but in other ways, the old standard prevails. And it is for this reason that we, as parents, need to talk about race. We need to flip the script and expose our children to positive images and messages because we can't trust anyone else to do that for us. And, if you are a parent in the room who has a white child, you have a responsibility too. You need to talk about race and expose your children to positive images and stories of People of Color. This will build their understanding, respect, and appreciation for all people. These stories are out there, but you have to be intentional about finding them because as we shared, our society does not share this view. We are given a deficient model to represent People of Color (Yosso, 2005). But we can do better. It is a hard journey because you are going against the current. I struggle to move my knowledge into action, too; it is a choice I always need to make, even though I love my children very much and would do anything for them. My white frame is powerful and there are times that I don't even recognize when something might be harmful to their identity as Mixed Race people. Two researchers on the topic of Critical Race Parenting, which is the concept we are talking about, Christin DePouw and Cheryl Matias (2016), stated something that was powerful for me as I have begun to understand the importance of talking about race, even though it might be difficult. They said, "And so we share brief moments of our personal experiences as a way to articulate that small instances that make up our struggles, teachable moments, frustrations, and fears as part of being critical race motherscholars" (p.

255). These moments facilitate a deeper understanding of the intellectual and emotional complexity of critical race parenting. And so, even those people who are in the work of race daily, find this hard. But we must persist. Tonight we have heard from eight amazing college students who were brave enough to come before you and share their story for your benefit as a parent. They have exposed their relationship with their parents around race, and this is not easy stuff to talk about. They have shared with us their stories around how they were labeled, how they have experienced racism, how race was discussed in their home, and how to talk about race with your children – based off their personal experiences.

Parent From the Crowd: Thank you! I learned so much tonight (followed by applause from the crowd).

Shannon: I feel like this is a good place to end our time together tonight. Thank you so much for having us. I want to thank each parent here who took the time to come and hear our panel. This is the first step in your journey. I also want to thank our panelists, who have touched me with their stories and vulnerability. I hope they have affected you as well. Look at your children differently tonight. Embrace them and tell them that they are beautiful, smart, and that you love them very much. Listen to them and ask them about what it is like to be them. Expose them to people who look like them and all the positive imagery that you can find. And finally, talk to them about race, don't hush them when they ask questions, learn *with* them. Thank you, everybody.

Post-Panel Thoughts

After the panel concluded, I went home and began to reflect on all that was shared tonight. The messages were powerful, yet I wondered the impact we were able to have on parents who were in attendance. Were they able to see the importance of discussing race

with their children? Did they begin to see the role they have in forming positive racial identity in their Mixed Race child(ren)? As I began to sort through what was said, one simple yet powerful message became very clear to me – love and racism *can and do* exist together. This combination seems impossible as the thought crosses my mind, but the more I ponder its possibility, the clearer the unintelligible reality becomes. I do not believe the parents who chose to attend this panel are racist, in fact, they love their children very much and that is why they took time to attend our event. I was struck by the sincerity and honesty of their questions. These parents wanted to be anti-racist, but were never given the tools to understand how racism operates. The parents who attended tonight’s panel love their children *and* are applying the same principles of their white racial reality to their parenting. We, as parents, are doing the best with what we have. Yet, sometimes our best isn’t enough and we must learn new knowledge to assist our children in their growth and development. It is more clear to me than ever that systematic racist realities of white supremacy in our society have infiltrated our ability to parent in a race conscious way.

As I was having this conversation with myself, I took a moment to jot down the racist things parents do, with the intent of providing a safe, affirming, and loving environment for their children. I was able to come up with the following...

- 1) Notions of colorblindness and race neutrality are used by parents to help their child not be seen as different. Parents want their children to fit in and don’t see why “just skin color” should make them any different from anyone else. Therefore, by not talking about race, they believe they are not speaking the issue into existence. But, the opposite occurs because ignoring race and “treating everyone the same” might sound good in theory, yet creates a home where their racial identity is not affirmed. Our Mixed Race children are

also led to believe that the racism they might experience is rare and isolated in our society, rather than systemic. In order to combat this, parents must educate themselves and put in significant work to undo the “I don’t see race” ideals peddled as beneficial for our racial progress.

2) The absence of talking about race causes our Mixed Race children to feel invalidated and unheard. Our open acceptance of who they are is extremely important. Just as we should openly praise our children for their grades, kindness, or other positive characteristics, we should also openly affirm their racial identity. The presence of toys that share their physical features, integration of positive media images with People of Color, and use of books that represents who they are cannot be underestimated. Additionally, we should frequently discuss race as to not make it a taboo topic. A deficiency in racial discussions can cause self-doubt, internalized racism, and a lack of appreciation and pride for who they are.

3) Our inability as a society to see beyond racial binaries and government defined racial categories leads to invisibility and exclusion for those who do not fit neatly into these categories. Our neatly packaged labels and definitions is a symptom of a racist society because we must know who is white and who is not. These rules of exclusion have granted power, privilege, and access. Thus, it is these labels we use that can hurt our Mixed Race children. It is our role as parents to help them see that racial realities exist yet we see them for all of who they are whether they can pass for white or look like a monoracial person of color. As parents we have a deep impact on the racial subjectivity of our children. Our discussions of their identity set up their perceptions of themselves

and what to expect as they enter the world. If we do not have these conversations, who will?

It is these three racial realities embedded in parenting that help me begin to make sense of how both love and racism can exist together. As I see these thoughts scribbled on my notepad, they become the foundation of how I begin to understand the entanglement of white parents, Mixed Race children, love, racism, and parenting.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter, I use portions of the data to answer this study's guiding research questions:

- 1) What messages have Mixed Race college students (with one white parent) received about race from their parents?
- 2) How do the nuances of race and racism intermingle when parenting a Mixed Race child?
- 3) How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity around issues of race and racism based on the messages they received from their lived experiences?

The subsequent sections, organized by research question, provide a discussion and analysis using participant stories and experiences shared in this study. First, however, I use love and racism as the foundation of my analysis, allowing this notion to support the discussion presented in this chapter. As I discuss my first research question, I explore the messages Mixed Race college students received from their parents and discuss how white supremacy has influenced parents' ability to discuss race. These manifestations of white supremacy can arise in many forms through both ill-intentioned and well-intentioned messages from parent to child vis a vis race-neutral, colorblind racial ideologies. In discussion of the second research question, I share how acceptance and validation is paramount for Mixed Race children. I then present my third research question and share how participants view themselves through discussing labeling, defining, and "passing," demonstrating how parenting has an impact on racial subjectivity. Finally, I share how college has informed their racial voice concerning their Mixed Race identities.

Love and Racism

How do the nuances of love and racism intermingle with parenting a Mixed Race child? The most interesting aspect of my findings was the way that each participant balanced their disappointment for not discussing race and also their love for their parent(s). I could tell that the big question running through the minds of my participants was, “Can my mom or dad both love me and disrespect my identity at the same time?” I found that the two participants whose parents discussed race in positive ways, Clark and Lynne, it was evident in our conversations just how much they appreciated and respected these talks they had with their parents. Conversely, the other six participants experienced a lack of acceptance and validation from their white parent regarding their identity as a Mixed Race person. The most complex and nuanced aspect of this study, however, has been the dynamic between the pain caused by parents in their failure to talk about race juxtaposed to the love expressed by the participants between them and their parents. This is not surprising given the research conducted by Root (2001) who wrote the following after interviewing 200 Mixed Race participants across the United States: “One of the truths uncovered by my six-year study is that people can hold internalized prejudices that originate in fear and still love the object of their fear very much” (p. 40). I relate Root’s (2001) findings to my own in this study – parents can be both loving and racist toward their child(ren) at the same time. During my interviews with participants and hearing the stories of contemporary white racism within the dynamic of parent and child was very difficult. I created a negative picture in my mind of these parents based off the participants’ recollections of their racial experiences. Nonetheless, I wanted to be careful not to dispute or judge the connection each participant had with their parent(s). As we dove deeper into our interviews together, and I learned about

more aspects of their lives with their parents, I learned how deeply each participant loves their parents, even in the most tumultuous of relationships. This balance between loving parents so deeply yet realizing that their racial identity was left ignored or degraded was a fine line to walk for the participants of this study. I sensed that some of them felt disloyal to their parents as they talked about their racial stories with me and/or were hesitant to critique them. What does this mean that their parents did not talk about their Mixed Race identity? The answer was equally satisfying as it was disappointing. Racism was an element present in their relationship. But, we must remember when discussing race that the system of white supremacy is far more powerful than our individual actions as parents. “This is a system founded by generations of white dominance; a system that has the power to sway and move entire nations of people; a system that impacts on and controls free will and personal choice, often unbeknownst to the individual” (Chang, 2016, p. 31). If you are making sense of this for the first time as many of my participants were, this is an earth shattering notion. Diana shared with me a deep, personal insight about her dad’s thoughts on her being a Person of Color. This thought was spurred by us discussing the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and her hearing her dad’s negative opinions regarding what BLM was about. The conversation turned to how she translated his thoughts about BLM to her identity:

It was this idea too [about my dad] Well, have you always thought this [negative thoughts about People of Color]? What about when you met my mom and were together and had me? If you had these opinions about People of Color who are Black what do you think about me? What do you say about me when I am not around? What do you say to other people? And this realization that I will never fully understand my dad, and he will never fully understand me and my experience because I am a woman and because I am biracial

and that's hard, you know? Because like I said, there are just some fundamental differences that we have and things that I feel like I am willing to talk about but he is not.

After this very vulnerable moment with me, Diana then immediately discussed how she knows her dad will always "claim her," which I heard her say several times through our interviews together. I gathered this to mean that her dad will never deny her and will be there for her, but perhaps not in the ways that she wants him to be, at least racially speaking:

Yeah, I mean, well...my dad will always claim me (laughter). I appreciate that. So even when there was this confusion about who I am and how I kind of fit into the picture, he would always claim me and say no, that is my daughter. So I will never fault him for that. But as far as ways to help me kind of understand, I don't know because I think for him it's not a lack of understanding, it's just not knowing how to talk about it. Even just being willing to be vulnerable with me and have a conversation about, you know, even ask what is it that you are experiencing? What do you think? Here's what I think. Maybe we can bridge the two things together? Maybe grow in this willingness to be vulnerable with one another.

Diana's complicated racial dynamic with her father was expressed beautifully within this statement. Diana knows her father does not understand, but she is willing to put that aside to learn *together*. She recognized that this learning might be difficult for her father to engage in independently, so she willingly offered herself as a partner in the journey. I took that she is willing to do this because she loves her father and wants him to be a part of her understanding her Mixed Race Identity. I was lucky enough to have one of the participants, Sue, who is a parent to a Mixed Race five year-old boy (who is Korean and white), share

with me the difficult dynamic between parenting and discussing race. She is just beginning to think about how to talk about race with him. Sue said:

I think with Charlie, it [race] hasn't come up too much because Charlie's dad is white, but he hasn't seen his dad since before he turned one, and he doesn't remember him at all. So it is just me. I don't think he really notices that I'm different from other people. So it hasn't really come up for us yet. But, I think the way that I would navigate that with him was just letting him know that people come from all different backgrounds and that is ok, and people have their own strengths and weaknesses based on who they are as an individual. It is interesting to think about because I think those conversations with him are going to be important. Even my family has had conversations about 'does Charlie look Asian or does he look white?' So that's really interesting to navigate too. I wonder if his peers will notice that he's different and if that will ever come up for us but then, also, just like...and that's something that I like about the daycare is that there is some diversity there.

Sue has dual roles – one as a Mixed Race person herself and another as a parent, raising a Mixed Race child. Through these positions, Sue was starting to see how difficult parenting a race conscious child is. Even with her lived experience as a Mixed Race person, her education and knowledge of issues of diversity and inclusion have not made her confident in this area. She still was subject to racist ideas and internalized many of the messages her parents did as well. It is difficult to unlearn the messages we hear about race each day such as “we are all equal” or “we should not see color”.

During this process of discussing how parents can be racist, I found myself, as a researcher, supporting the participants' perspectives while also explaining to my participants

how it was possible for their parents to manifest symptoms of our white supremacist society. I also drew many connections with them about why this is. I did not want to paint a picture that made it look like their parent's racism was intentional, although I could argue it was in some cases, but I shared with them how hard parenting is, perhaps to soften the blow of learning that your parents are no different than other racist people you might encounter as you move about our society. Once people have children they cannot turn off the "programming" that was given to them in their own home or through society – this includes how we learned think and approach topics of race. Additionally, parents want their children to have a positive experience in the world and shielding them from the pain of racism can seem like a good idea. A phrase used often in inclusion work is "intent does not equal impact" (Tannenbaum, 2013). This saying applies to this study as well in the sense that all the love, affection, adoration, and shared values that can be present in a parent/child relationship do not necessarily translate to a positive racial impact. Racial intentionality must be present for this portion of their child to develop positively. Accessible resources for parents to discuss race are limited, and a parent would need to know to look for resources to begin with. Most, however, fall back on their race-neutral, colorblind ideologies they were taught as children as their method to approach race in all contexts – parenting included. It is this racial reality that allows for both love and racism to coexist together between parent and child. The existence of both love and racism play a role in each element of my discussion on the research questions posed for this study. The acknowledgement of this impossible combination make each finding possible.

Research Question 1:

What messages have Mixed Race college students (with one white parent) received about race from their parents?

Colorblindness and race neutrality. Feagin (2013) asserts that white scholars who study race believe racism is diminishing and that race discrimination is getting better. Additionally, a study in 2013 of 20,000 educated white people found those who were educated were just as racist as others who had less education, and worse, those who were educated were better at hiding it (Wodtke, 2013). I bring these points to this section to convey that it is popular and even “normal” to believe that issues of race and racism are a diminishing problem in America today. Racism is not diminishing; however, it is just more covert and hidden within our claims of colorblindness. Bonilla-Silva (2001) reminds us in his writing that the most powerful modern tool today to keep racism alive is the notion of color-blind racism. The participants of this study have shown me that white supremacy in the form of color-blind ideology and race neutrality is the way that racism prevails in parenting. Messages about race are everywhere, regardless of the racial make-up of the family (Nash, Howard, Miller, Boutte, Johnson & Reid, 2017). As a parent of two Mixed Race children, I was curious how other families discuss race. I knew that my childhood family did not intentionally discuss race unless I was hearing about it in a negative context. My family experience is not the exception; it is the rule as race and racism impacts many aspects of our lives and yet is silenced in our society’s families (Milner & Self, 2014). Additionally, white supremacy prevails when it is not taught in families how to disrupt racism (Matias, 2016). Now that I have a family of my own, my husband and I hardly go a day without talking about race, both in comedic and serious ways, and I make every attempt to be a parent who goes

about my child rearing in a race conscious way. I have not always been aware of race. I spent most of my life living like many other white people, oblivious to racial oppression, complicit to racial jokes and other forms of every-day racism and tried to smooth over racial difference and pretend I did not notice. It was through my relationship with friends of color, influential professors, and my husband that helped me to realize my racial privilege and the flawed nature I was taught about race. I knew I could not continue to replicate what I had been taught; I wanted to be different for my children. Matias (2016) asserts that parents (and educators) staying silent regarding issues of race is a form of neglect. Though this statement is strongly worded, I believe this to be the case after hearing many of my participants' stories on their racial experiences with their parents.

One of the participants of my study, Sue, attributed her family's color blindness to the fact that they did not want her to be different. She stated, "I think my parents just kind of thought that I was going to fit the mold [of being white] or that I would not be different." Similarly, Shelley shared with me how she felt her family "fooled" themselves into thinking that [talking about race] "wasn't a thing." On a greater level, color-blind racism led Olivia to believe that she was not a Person of Color and stated that she was "socialized to be white." These statements reflect the literature on colorblindness and the evasion of racial discussions. White people are conditioned to avoid bringing up race, I believe, in order to avoid sounding racist. But according to DePouw and Matias (2016), this practice "helps to obscure the ongoing salience of racism in denying its existence and instead focusing on presumed deficiencies in the people being targeted by that racism" (p. 243). The deflection of the real issues surrounding racism is a clever tactic that has led us to accept colorblindness as the right way to approach racism and further, has led to the belief that we live in a post-racial

society (Carter-Andrews & Truitt, 2013). Sue, Shelly, and Olivia's comments about their parents are on one end of the colorblindness extreme that almost seems innocent to the untrained ear. On the other end of the colorblindness spectrum, the refusal to discuss race caused a distinct relational strain between Diana and her father. Diana recalled during our discussions together an intense fight she had with her father about race and identity one night after they had been drinking at a wedding. After Diana stated to her father that he will never understand her because she is a woman and Biracial, her father said (in Diana's words) "you don't understand that you're someone with privilege and to stop using your (he didn't use this phrase) marginalized identity to say that you and I are different." Diana described her hurt after this altercation because he never brought it up again, affirming her belief that he does not want to admit when he is wrong and does not understand her. These four accounts demonstrated a lack of recognition that race is important or a factor in these participants' lives. Their lack of preparation around race issues demonstrates that "the white racist system reigns as forcefully normative and, by design, becomes the default without intentional effort in a different direction" (Chang, 2016, p. 106). With white parents ill-prepared to discuss race, they are reproducing racism in their home. The recognition and acknowledgement of race and how it operates in our society is one way we can disrupt racism. One step further, the appreciation for and infusion of anti-racist beliefs in a white parent/Child of Color relationship can help to build aware parents and racially-equipped children. This racial awareness is beneficial as Communities of Color have long recognized the importance of healthy racial identity as a means of survival in our society (DePouw & Matias, 2016).

Race neutrality eventually grew to overt racism for a few participants as they described their homes growing up. They experienced hearing racial slurs and consistent negative

messages about People of Color, and their racial identity was dismissed. What I was shocked to discover was that overt racism existed for about half of the participants. Karl recounted for me many stories where his dad mistreated him on the basis of his race, and this led to a lot of self-loathing behavior. Karl told me in his individual interview that he identified as white when he was a child and did not interpret the names he was called as racist and would laugh with his dad because he did not know better, but now he “gets the ulterior motive behind it.” I gathered it was somewhere between his childhood and teen years that Karl truly discovered his racial heritage. He explained to me that he did not like white people during his late teens because he thought they were all racist like his father. Rachelle expressed to me that her mom refuses to acknowledge she is mixed and created an environment at home where People of Color are not appreciated and are insulted. She cited a time when her mom was angry at her for attending a Black Lives Matter rally and, in a separate incident, overheard her mom say that President Obama only got elected because he was Black. Olivia shared with me a time where her mom told her she was not Black. Karl, Rachelle, and Olivia’s stories shocked me the most because the racism was so apparent. In fact, it was not nuanced at all. Many of their stories seem to counter the notion of race-neutrality and color-blind racism. It was clear that Karl’s white dad and Rachelle and Olivia’s white moms demonstrated outwardly racist attitudes when they spoke with me and the other members of the focus group about their experiences. They shared with me racist name calling in the case of Karl and a rejection of Mixed Race identity in the cases of Rachelle and Olivia. From my interpretation of their experiences, it seemed to me that what went on in their families are demonstrations of racist behaviors; an uncomfortable environment was created for Karl and Rachelle and Olivia based on their identities. There were elements of colorblindness in their

stories about their white parents, but most of what they shared was overt racism and was very difficult for me to hear. In the case of their stories, this information seems to both connect and deviate from the literature. It connects because as Derrick Bell (1992) has told us, “racism is a permanent component of American life” (p. 13). If racism is embedded into our culture, then we should expect racism in all its manifestations. But Karl, Rachele, and Olivia’s stories also deviate from the literature because the form that racism is seen in today is often disguised in colorblind attitudes that mask the racist assumptions that white people often have about People of Color. Bonilla-Silva (2001) shares that “The belief that the United States is truly the land of opportunity for all allows whites to use liberal arguments...to explain racial inequality and justify all sorts of race-related matters” (p. 161). This colorblind form of racism is far more popular and acceptable; it is a variety that I saw with most participants’ parents with the exception of these three.

On the contrary, Lynne’s story was full of examples when her white mother seemed to appreciate her ethnic identity and did things to expose her to her El Salvadorian culture including cooking El Salvadorian food at holidays, attending festivals, speaking Spanish with her, and not shying away from talking about race. She stated that her mom “really dials down my insecurities that I have of being biracial and being between two different cultures and not having to pick a side...I am stronger than some only because I didn’t have to worry about having familial acceptance of who I am.” Lynne’s mother could be critiqued in her actions from the angle that her support came through traditional methods of cultural celebration by white people – celebrating “heroes and holidays” where other cultures are introduced by focusing on dress, food, music, and other tangible items. This approach can also hold race and culture/ethnicity as synonymous with one another when in actuality, they

are very different items to address with a child. This phenomenon is discussed by Banks (1993) and McIntosh (2000) in context of how multicultural education is infused in curriculum, but this also applies to how white parents might infuse concepts of race into their parenting. The approach of “heroes and holidays” might seem better than ignoring the experiences and traditions of other cultures, but this approach still falls short at helping children understand how the overall experiences, contributions, and voices of marginalized groups can be a part of mainstream culture. This approach is akin to post-racial ideology where the experiences of People of Color are reduced to monolithic stories and “out-group” thinking (Pauker, Xu, Williams, & Biddle, 2016). The approach that Lynn’s mother sometimes took is well-intentioned but still compartmentalizes her El Salvadorian identity. In my interviews with Lynne, she remembered that her mother also offered very real conversations about race and did not shy away from these discussions. Lynne shared her thoughts about why she appreciated her mom and the discussions she had with her by saying, “she never told me who I wanted to be or who I needed to be. She would let me find that for myself, and then I’d go home and tell her, and then she would have a discussion with me about it.” Lynne experienced two racial approaches from her mother. The “heroes and holidays” approach was a well-intentioned mom’s way of duplicating how she saw diversity taught and celebrated. Lynne is appreciative of her mom for all the ways she supported her racial and cultural identity. Lynne’s story is layered with pieces of the “heroes and holidays” approach as well as pieces that moved toward deeper conversations about race and racism in Lynne’s world.

Clark also had many positive things to say about his parents and how they spoke about race. He told me that his mom backed his dad in whatever racial conversation they were

having – his dad, being the Parent of Color, initiated a lot of racial conversations that his mom would be there for and would “provide her input as well.” Clark also powerfully explained about his mother that “she realizes that both of us (Clark and his brother) are Mixed Race and that we will have those (racist) experiences despite our skin color. And I guess just her messages to us are to be open about how you are and don’t forget about anything that your dad tells you because it will help you later on in life.”

I am struck by the spectrum of experiences described by the participants in this study – supportiveness, outright racism, and race neutrality. I feel certain, however, that after conducting this study and studying the literature on race and parenting, that children who are exposed to positive racial messages (in the form of explaining the racial realities of our society and positive cultural messages) from their parents and their surroundings are better able develop a positive Mixed Race identity, even in a racist society (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016; Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018; Nishi, 2018; Nishi & Montoya, 2018). The choice of parents to raise a Mixed Race child in a home where race is not discussed might seem like a safe, protected environment to white parents but, ultimately, in the case of these participants, led to a confusion, misunderstanding, anger, and hurt for not discussing it at all.

The racial work of parents. Chang (2016) articulated beautifully that “we certainly cannot expect our children to discourse intelligently on racial matters, resist racism, and feel good about their racial identities if we (parents) cannot do the same. Self-education is the keystone of difficult race dialogue” (p. 195). After conducting these interviews and having done research on how racism works, I have come to believe that white parents are espousing what they know when it comes to race. Our own internalized thoughts about race come out in parenting; in short, they have not self-educated. “Children do not want to be confronted

by their own parent's lack of competence in an area where they need a role model," writes Maria P.P. Root (2001). The experiences of the participants of this study point to the need for parents to be involved, informed, and introspective with their children. Winkler (2009) summarized this imperative point by stating:

Sometimes adults are silent on the issue of race, prejudice, and racial inequality because we ourselves are not comfortable talking about them. Sometimes we give no information or inaccurate information because we ourselves do not fully understand how racism works, why racial inequality still exists in our society so many years after the Civil Rights Movement, or what we can do about it. Remember, adults have also been socialized into society and are also "breathing the smog" of cultural racism on a daily basis. Although race and racism are difficult topics, it is important to educate ourselves and discuss them with children. (p. 4)

Many white people are taught that discussing race is bad, and somehow we are more racist for bringing it up. But more importantly, most white people never practice talking about race and when they do talk about it, it feels uncomfortable. This all translates to parenting, even when their child is a Person of Color themselves. Parents do not want to discuss race because it means that they are acknowledging some of the pain, hurt, and denial that their child(ren) might face in the world. If this were to be brought up, there would need to be a remedy to help children get through it, but racism is often out of our control as parents. It is easier to believe that the world would treat a child just as the world treats a white person – with regard, respect, and mutual understanding. This reality is what makes white supremacy so powerful because the lack of discussion perpetuates the system of racism that exists. The lack of discussion on race silences Mixed Race children and causes pain when it comes to

understanding their racial identity and racialized experiences. The trope of Mixed Race people being “confused” is often put on the Mixed Race person instead of on the society that refuses to acknowledge their identity and appreciate their multiplicity. This connects to the “tragic mulatto” concept often described in American literature as being sad and depressed because they do not fit neatly within one racial world (Mixed Race Studies, 2018). When I asked the participants of this study to tell me what they liked most about being them, Diana described herself as a “pioneer”. She stated:

We were talking about uncharted territory [earlier in the interview]...there are very few people who have the experience that I have or will have. It’s weird because being first is always like, ‘oh what do I do there is no precedent for this?’ but at the same time, it is really exciting because I can form my experience however I want. It doesn’t have to be based on anyone else’s. It is exciting and scary and confusing all in one, but it’s really unique to think that you have such a unique identity and experience because of it.

Rachelle echoed this sentiment by saying:

I think it just gives you so many unique perspectives and I feel like in our society, we don’t celebrate individuality so it is kind of cool to be different. I have always taken a lot of pride in being different, and I’m different in a lot of ways, but I think my favorite thing about myself is having a diverse background and having a story.

Both Lynne and Clark discussed the emphasis their parents put on discussing matters of race, even when it was not a happy message. They shared a few moments with me where their parents talked about the racial realities on both the societal and individual level. I was

surprised to hear these comments as both of these stories demonstrated race-conscious parenting, which was heard in limited amounts during my study. Lynne shared:

[My mom and I] liked to have discussions about race because it should be talked about, they should be had. My mom gets very heated on the subject [of race] because she feels very strongly about certain things, but I have never felt what she says is demeaning to one person or the other and talks about how people are put down or oppressed in certain situations...it is never they [People of Color] did this to themselves...but these events have caused this to happen...it was all in the way it was presented to me.

The racial messages that Lynne's mom put forth here were discussions of societal racial structures but in a context that Lynne understood. Clark did not have many early memories of his family discussing race; he recalls many recent conversations where his family talks about race through current events, giving him advice for coping with what is going on in our society. Clark recalled this by saying:

I've recently gotten texts, or I will text my dad, and he will be like 'be careful, you may be white and passing, but still be vigilant and take care of yourself and watch out for yourself' and others, and my mom has been sharing that same message with me. It has been kind of collaborative and they have provided me with the same message. You are Mixed Race, you should be proud of who you are and kind of in recent years be careful, be vigilant.

Indeed, in sharing their stories, the participants clearly made many connections between how their parents discussed race and how they felt about themselves growing up and the struggles they have had to face. In many ways, how they see themselves now, as college

students, has much to do with the messages they learned about themselves at home and through other significant figures in their lives. For many of them, college has been the time where they have learned to appreciate their identity and have found friends and organizations that have helped with rewriting the racial narrative they have been told. In order to reject the lies of white superiority, it was important that parents engaged in discussions about race directly. Lynne and Clark's stories demonstrate a way that race talk can solidify racial messages that are important to understand. The exposure to racial realities properly equips Mixed Race children (and other Children of Color) to understand that they must know white society well in order to become adept at responding to the discrimination they may face (Chang 2016). Parents must share anti-racist ways of thinking about the world and provide strategies that can break the cycle of racism that has been passed down from generation to generation (Feagin, 2014).

Research Question 2:

How do the nuances of race and racism intermingle when parenting a Mixed Race child?

The power of acceptance and validation. Not surprisingly, the participants who selected to participate in this study had a desire to talk about their experience as a Mixed Race college student who has grown up with one white parent. Their willingness to participate in a study that talks about race places them in a category different from some of their peers – they volunteered to share about parts of their lives where race, parenting, and memories, both good and bad, all intersect. This preliminary information about them allowed me to see the powerful impact college can have on one's racial identity formation in terms of providing spaces and opportunities for one to learn about oneself. As a student

affairs professional, this does not shock me as I know the research behind the notion that college as a transformative experience is well-established (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The need to be recognized, to be heard, and to have the space to share who they are was critical. Having the platform to be seen for who they were was important. We must work to disrupt the fixed monoracial frame that limits Mixed Race students (Rockquemore & Brusma, 2008). In this study, there was a strong connection between having the desire to form a racial connection in college due to not having one at home. This connection and validation is important for Mixed Race students to possess and is discussed by Jessica Harris (2016) in her work developing MixedCrit, a theoretical approach to understanding Mixed Race students' experiences. She states in her work that having the framework to talk about these experiences is necessary and helps to validate Mixed Race experiences. Having the space to talk about who they are and having people who understand who they are seen to be the common thread that was woven between each participant in each of my interactions with them. Even Lynne and Clark, who had more supportive family members regarding race, sought out a racial connection while in college. Lynne and Clark's need for connection seemed to be centered around finding friends who looked like them because they knew it was important. For the other six participants, their need for racial connections was to learn more about themselves and to rewrite a racial narrative that they knew enough to know was incorrect. For example, Olivia described a series of racial events that illustrates this point perfectly. When I first met Olivia, she told me that she wanted to participate in this study because she did not feel validated as a Person of Color by her family. During our first meeting, she recalled an event when one summer day she went to the pool with her family:

We [my family and I] went to this country club pool one day during the summer with all these white people. I had made the comment that I am the only Black person here, kind of sarcastic, I knew I would be the only Black person - it is a white town, and it is a country club. My mom said, "You're not Black." She just totally dismissed my whole identity as a biracial person. I didn't know how to unpack that. I was like what do you mean?

Olivia explained to me through the course of our interviews that she always felt invalidated in her identity by her mother. Her mother refused to see that she was a Person of Color, and it took her coming to her graduate school and talking to other cohort members in her program before she started talking about this part of herself. She told me that it was not until she met her friends of color in her program when she started to learn how to take care of her hair because her mother called her hair a "rat's nest" and said, "this is the shampoo and conditioner that I use and that you will use." Hair was a catalyst for Olivia to describe to me how she wanted to be accepted for who she is by her mom. Olivia told me the following about what she wishes her mom would have talked about with her:

I feel like just simple things, like the differences about me [is what I wanted my mom to talk about]. Hair is the one that stands out to me because it wasn't until like a year ago that I started finding the right products for my hair, and these are things that are really important to me now but wasn't a big deal in the past. I didn't realize how big of a deal hair was in African American culture. So I went through this whole period in middle school and high school of like straightening my hair and trying to assimilate to the white culture that I was around and ended up damaging my hair and my thoughts that I had of myself. [I wondered] how was I going to fit into this culture? I guess just embracing my

differences at a young age would have helped me developmentally, you know? Finding my place in this world.

For participants of this study, college filled the gap many parents left. Olivia's discussion with me about her hair and her mom was powerful for me to hear. Her hair was a way that could have helped Olivia see her mom validate her identity as a Mixed Race person; instead, the relationships she formed in college, specifically graduate school, helped Olivia learn to appreciate her identity. Parents are often the first and the center of acceptance and validation and when it is not given, the pain can be deep as Olivia articulated above. Chang (2016) affirms this notion by defining positive Multiracial identity as:

The ability of a Mixed Race person to confidently comprehend and navigate the race construct, understand society's ascriptions, self-identity, and then hold that racial self-concept (whether fluid or static) in a healthy, affirming, and transformative way" (p. 62).

In my opinion, Chang's (2016) notion of positive Multiracial identity cannot be achieved without having the healthy and affirmative figures Chang (2016) speaks of. Chang (2016) continues to discuss positive Multiracial identity by stating that one's ability to resist and be resilient to racist belief systems is key to developing this positive identity. Therefore, in order to achieve acceptance and validation, parents (or other critical influencers) must speak openly and honestly, providing much needed attention to the discourse around race and its affects. The participants of this study helped me to see that we, as white parents, must unlearn the ways we have been taught to discuss race for the sake of our children's racial identity and to help eradicate white supremacy within our society. Color-blind racism and race-neutrality have prohibited most white parents from seeing the damage we have done (or can do) to identities of our children. The results of this study point to the assertion that

Mixed Race children are not getting what they need from their parents in terms of discussing about race and affirming their racial identity.

Research Question 3:

How do Mixed Race children (with one white parent) navigate their subjectivity around issues of race and racism based on the messages they received from their lived experiences?

Labeling and defining. In the findings chapter of this study, readers see I devoted an entire section to “Notions of Labeling and Defining”. I chose to do this because of how often and how intensely this came up during my interviews with participants. Labeling and defining is even a question I have pondered for my own children. Forms and other ways to “make our children count” statistically speaking represent a challenge and often do not allow for the multiplicity of our children to be captured due to our society’s desire for a monoracial paradigm (Harris, 2016). Racial identification classifications are ever changing and if the individuals creating these forms and systems are not educated on how to arrange them, Mixed Race people can be left out of the picture (Gillem 2001; Korgen 1998-1999; Rockquemore & Brunisma 2002; Storrs 1999).

As I interviewed the participants of this study regarding how they identified, what they checked on forms, and how they talked about who they are racially, I discovered that what impacted them most when it came to racial identification was the narrow ways they were forced to share about themselves. As a parent, I often ask myself how racial information will be used from forms. I know from my research on this topic that racial classification seeks to simplify race. Learning to see people in more than one way can confound us. Little do we know that these categories set up who is “normal” (white) and who is not (People of Color)

(Smith, Juárez, & Jacobson, 2011, p. viii). This perpetuates a system where white supremacy is allowed to remain in our normal practices (Rockquemore, Laszloffy & Noveske, 2006). Identifying race in itself is not bad but when we force people into categories for the benefit of any societal system, this practice becomes problematic. Our United States census has been doing this since the first census was taken in 1790. The function of the census and race has changed over time with each edition interpreting who “counted” for a specific social purpose (Pew Research Center, 2015b). The participants of this study often took issue in how others chose to identify them through these very systems. They were told what classified as Mixed Race. Diana shared with me that she was informed that “biracial is defined as one white parent and one African American parent so you cannot mark your child as biracial in our school system [on school forms].” Olivia was told by her mother what racial boxes to check because it would “look better for scholarships.” Comments like these indicate a rejection of Multiraciality by defining what is okay to be selected in the boxes versus what is not okay to be selected. For the participants of this study, making the choices on forms to select what they wanted to was never quite an option whether dictated by the form’s author or others dictating what they should select. Additionally, classification systems, such as the ones on forms, told the participants of this study that they were not worth being accurately defined by nature of the “other” selection option. Their thoughts of themselves were affected by these labels and conversations and often the discussion at home was not sufficient to counteract the many ways that people were telling them in direct ways, such as forms, that there was no place for them to be counted. This message connects to our history of issues with racial identification. Racial identification has always been a political process, one that has been dictated by those in charge, a process that failed to accurately count Mixed Race individuals.

We continue to see this dynamic play out today when our government organizations and family members fail to see that multiple racial identities can exist in one person. Thus, things like ill-thought out forms and racially dismissing comments from parents are constant reminders of social exclusion. This exclusion takes its toll and without positive family dialogue to supplement these messages, the impact can be significant for a Mixed person's racial identity – this seemed to be the case for the participants of this study.

Parent impact on racial subjectivity. Another way the subjectivity of the participants was impacted was through their parent's comfort level in discussing race. Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, and Ezell (2007) published a study that asked 17,000 families with kindergarteners of all different races if they talked about race. Forty-five percent of parents in the study said they never, or almost never, talked about race with their children. Chang (2016) author of the book *Raising Mixed Race: Multiracial Asian Children in a Post-Racial World*, asked parents of Mixed Race children if they purchased learning materials or toys with the race of their child in mind – many parents did not even understand the question. Chang (2016) noted that this was because parents could not see their child outside of the white racial frame that they were taught to be normal. The participants in this study reflected this racial ignorance shown in the literature. Participants noted that, for the most part, their white parents did not want to engage in topics of race. This led to some participants feeling that their racial identity was ignored and that their existence and experience is not important. The notion is supported in literature on critical race parenting, an emerging field of study, and asks parents (white parents in particular), to consider race and racial-realism in their daily conversations with their children (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016; Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018; Nishi, 2018; Nishi & Montoya, 2018). Racial realism, the

practice of openly acknowledging racial inequities in our society, allows parents to have open dialogue about what their children might face in our racist society. When the realities of our society are shared, we can properly equip children to combat the negative racial messages they hear and to have an alternative script in their mind, one that affirms their racial existence and identity. Racial conversations can play a significant role in how Mixed Race children view themselves.

Parents without a racial understanding are informed by our society's white frame (Chang, 2016). The cultivation of a positive racial identity is essential to parenting Mixed Race children in a society that does not value the experience of People of Color and also that does not understand the experience of mixed people. Parents have a significant responsibility to be just as informed around racial issues just as other things we care about – like schooling, safety, and the friends our children have. Our messages are important and have lasting effects on our children's lives; parental racial ideologies play a strong role in a child's understanding of race (Rockquemore, Laszloffy, & Noveske, 2006; Tatum, 2001). The negative subjectivity around racial identity from Mixed Race people stems from improper dialogue from parents about race. While this statement might seem controversial, a child's upbringing has influences with the home being one of the largest pieces. As a parent myself, I get defensive when it comes to others telling me how to parent; Diana described this when she spoke about her dad and how he might react to the findings of this study. She stated, "I think my dad would be super offended [about this study telling him how to parent, racially speaking]. Just like having had conversations with him about race and like things that I know now, I think, one, for you to question his parenting and then, two, to bring in race he would be like 'whoa', what are we talking about here? But if white parents do not know how

to talk about race, we leave racial messages up to society to deliver. Just as parents gravitate to parenting books and information to learn to “stop a tantrum” or to “provide positive discipline” we must also read and learn about race in the same ways – through seeking out information. Participants of this study did not expect their parents to have all the answers in relation to their racial identity, but they did want them to walk this journey with them. In their eyes, the effort involved in learning about their racial experience would be a major act of love and acceptance.

“Passing.” Each participant of this study navigated varying subjectivities due to their racial make-up. One story emerged the most loudly from the group, and that was the issue of passing as white. Discussion on this topic was powerful and Clark, Rachelle, and Shelley all spoke about their stories as it related to how others viewed them and how this affected how they saw themselves. These three participants have light skin tones with some visible phenotype of color – in the case of Clark, his skin gets very tan when he plays baseball in the summer, for Rachelle it is her curly hair, and for Shelley it is her almond shaped eyes. In the same way that these three were pointed out as non-white, they were also never firmly placed as white either. A significant influence on their subjectivities was how their parents dealt with their white-appearing phenotype. Clark’s family discussed race in his home, his father and his mother were especially supportive of these conversations. Clark’s brother is more white-passing than Clark to the point where he would need to show a photo of his father to others to prove they were related. Despite Clark and his brother’s phenotype, racial conversations were had in their household. In the case of Shelley, her family played a much more neutral, passive role in discussing race and how Shelley identifies. Shelly told me that she loves her parents and “can tell them anything” but stressed that her Mixed Race identity

and the fact that she is white passing was an issue that she wished they would have thought to talk about this with her. In fact, she said that the subject of race is “weird and difficult to bring up” with her parents; however, she feels that she could broach the topic with them now. Shelley’s interviews with me highlighted the push and pull of her wish for parents to talk about race and the love and admiration she has for them. Shelley approached their racial journey as one that all three of them need to take together but one that she will likely need to initiate. It was interesting for me to hear this comment from Shelley as it manifested what she had always experienced in her life – parents not bringing up race and Shelley, as the Mixed Race child, helping them to learn about race and her identity. At times, Shelley offered many reasons as to why she thought her parents did not discuss race with her. The most frequently noted explanation was that she is white passing. I interpreted this to mean that either she looked white enough to justify not bringing up race, as her parents thought it might not be a factor in her life, or to justify that her being white passing was complicated and difficult to explain, thus they didn’t discuss it.

Finally, Rachelle’s experience as being a Mixed Race person who is white passing was met with the most rejection from her mother. Rachelle shared with me painful stories of how her mother rejected her Mixed Race identity, and said she was not “that Mixed Race.” Rachelle also stated that she found herself being caught between being a Person of Color and not being a Person of Color within her group of friends. She described for me the push and pull of this dynamic within her:

I have had so many people say, if you want to identify as a Person of Color that’s okay, and I’m, like, honestly I almost feel like it would be wrong for me to because I don’t feel like I was raised as a Person of Color; I was raised white. I mean, I was raised as a white

person, and I don't feel like I am a Person of Color but then also, I do have this identity where, like, I am Multiracial and that matters a lot to me because I don't feel like I can speak out on issues of race because I have never had anyone discriminate against me. I have never had anyone act weird toward me. I look like I am white. You know?

Rachelle went on to discuss how she feels as she has to frequently identify herself:

For most people I've talked to they've felt like they have had to...kind of like me, feel like I have had to identify as just white. I feel like a lot of [Mixed Race] people I know have just had to identify as a certain race because they feel like they don't want to explain because it is tiring and people question and they are like are you really? It is exhausting... I had a co-worker this summer who was a Black man from France. I was like, oh, he is a Black man in a very white dominated society, maybe he would understand better, but no, he was like you're not mixed...mixed with what? Scandinavian and British? And made some kind of joke, and I was, like, that's not funny. And he was just like there is no way you are Mixed Race. Well, first of all you are calling me a liar, so I was very defensive, and you telling me what I can and can't be is just ridiculous, you don't know what I am. Why does it matter to you?

Rachelle's interviews with me often discussed her being white-passing and how much this weighed on her. Her mother was very outspoken about her not being Mixed because of the way she looked and when she sought understanding from a Person of Color, such as her co-worker, she was rejected again. Rachelle's story was tough for me to digest as I could tell that her passing as white was at the root of a lot of her pain in coming to appreciate her Mixed Race identity. Shelley's experience with passing outlines issues with family discussion and taking on the burden of being an initiator to have race-based conversations.

Rachelle's experience with passing demonstrates the pain from not being seen as a Mixed Race person from both her mother and in public. These examples from Shelley and Rachelle have caused me to consider the phraseology of "passing" itself. For in the case of these two, passing as white is not a "pass" but seems to be associated with an extra set of responsibilities and stress that was unsolicited.

The notion of "passing" is at the center, rather than the periphery, of racial identity for Mixed Race people (Elam, 2011). The challenges of their proximity to whiteness through their "passing" are great. Not being "enough" to be accepted by People of Color is well documented in Multiracial research (Renn, 1998; Renn, 2000; Rockquemore, 1999; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Passing also provides a closeness to white privilege, which gives passing Mixed Race people a unique perspective. Harris (2016) calls this unique perspective "differential micro-racialization." She describes this by saying, "Today, many Multiracial Americans have become differentially racialized as 'honorary whites', which once again puts distance between 'whites' and 'collective Blacks'" (Harris 2016, p. 807). Chang (2016) also discusses this concept by saying, "light/white privileges offer obvious advantages at the same time they may induce pain when the child sees that family or friends of color do not receive the same. Light/white-appearing Multiracials may be expected to collude with whites and white racist behaviors knowing full well that loved ones (and frankly themselves) are the targets" (p. 121). Passing can also be taken as being a "safe" Person of Color, making them the "ideal" minority because they don't look like one. As long as white supremacy exists, passing will continue to be an issue impacting how Mixed Race people are "perceived, received, and treated, and ultimately, how they feel about themselves" (Chang, 2016, p. 121). The maneuvering of Mixed Race identities for the benefit of others continues

to be an issue affecting the subjectivity of Mixed Race individuals. Therefore, passing was an issue that emerged as important and dramatically affected the participants' views of themselves.

The racial impact of college. For six participants in this study, discussing race in the home was not done or was discouraged. This led to them feeling less supported by their parents when it pertains to racial identity. Lorenzo-Blanco, Bares, and Delva (2013) discuss this very notion in their research on Multiracial youth and parental support. Despite this general lack of support at home, the eight participants of this study found beneficial connections and spaces in college to make meaning of their Mixed Race identity. College was the first opportunity to truly learn who they are as a Mixed Race person. My conversations around this positive impact was powerful and needed to be given space in the study to describe. I outline below just how meaningful college has been for the participants of this study.

I would describe Rachelle's college experience as transformational in terms of her racial identity. She took classes and participated in organizations that allowed her to learn more about herself. She also found a friend group that supported her for who she is. Rachelle had the following to say about her college experience:

I have to say, I have loved coming to college as a Mixed Race person. Just because, I don't know, I feel like I can be myself. I feel like in high school, I never talked about my identity. No one ever wanted to know anything about me. No one ever wanted to know, like where do you come from? Where are you going? You are just another statistic basically. Coming to college [I noticed] race is talked about, social issues are talked about. I can share my opinions, and I can use my identity in a way to, first of all, educate

others and, second of all, have an open dialogue because in high school, I was just so stuck in this rut of being like being surrounded by so many white people, and the Black people were always just seen as the ghetto, like nasty, literally that is how people thought of them - like ghetto and nasty and not equal. Coming to college and seeing so much empowerment of People of Color, it's just...there's just not any words to describe it really, especially because we are a predominantly white institution. And seeing so many white people here acknowledge the power and like awesomeness of People of Color, it's really cool. Even between people who are just white or just Black or Hispanic or Asian or whatever. There's some genuine friendships formed and really important dialogue going on, even if those people aren't mixed, there are people talking about it.

The student organization on campus for Mixed Race people was talked about frequently in my interviews with participants. The need for conversation around racial identity is important but equally as important is the space to have them in. Kristen Renn, a researcher who has conducted many studies on Mixed Race college students, asserts that intentionally planned spaces and opportunities for Mixed Race students to discuss and explore their identity and heritage is critical (Renn, 1998; Renn, 2000). Clark mentioned his campus' Mixed Race organization several times during his interviews as an important space for him, explaining to me that his "primary relationship to race now is through [the campus' Mixed Race organization]". Shelley told me that when this organization was first founded, she and other Mixed Race-identifying students said:

Oh my god, we should all do this thing [the organization], it is going to be great, and it was, and it is. It is a super great thing and a place where you are like, oh my gosh, there's

so many of us. My people are together. Realizing there's a lot more people than you thought of or even didn't know about is really validating and is a really nice experience.

Lynne told me she liked this organization because she felt that she didn't need to choose between her identities when she was at meetings:

Being able to discuss both of my identities rather than just one, in the right setting, where we all people don't feel like I am taking over and making it about me [and being mixed]. So it is really nice to have that to have that talk and to feel comfortable with talking about myself. Where people understand who I am.

“In loco parentis” is the phrase in Latin that means “in place of parents”. The structure of our colleges and universities today have created environments that have given rise to the “in loco parentis approach, which involves the regulation or supervision by administrative officers and faculty of a college acting in the place of a parent” (Winston, Anchors & Associates, 1993, p. 29). The role that college and some of its staff played for each participant filled the role of the parent, racially speaking. In the case of Olivia and the stories she shared with me, I would say this is true. Karl shared very powerful stories about how both the classroom and extracurricular activities began to impact his racial formation. He shared a concept he learned in class – internationalism – that helped him make sense of his identity. Below is a snapshot of our exchange during one of the focus groups that illustrates this concept and his learning about himself:

I'm a history major and one of my professors this semester has really gotten me into reading a lot of Trotsky and his idea of internationalism. Trotsky said, I am not Jewish, I am internationalist. It is that sense of taking various cultures and creating a new one to

really fight back against white supremacy. Using that sense of solidarity with other marginalized groups, that's something I would have told me to do when I was younger. I didn't really associate with a whole lot of other Mixed Race people, and I just thought I was white. I thought I identified with whiteness. Obviously, in our current society race matters a lot. Your identity matters a lot.

It was during moments like these in our interviews together where I saw the power of the college experience come to life. Despite not talking about race at home for most participants, college seemed to be a place where they began to make sense of their Mixed Race identity. During their classes, extracurricular activities, and with friends they were able to reflect on what they were told about race from their parents. Participating in this study also seemed to be an impactful experience for them. As I was recruiting participants, I expected to have difficulty finding people who wanted to talk with me. I was shocked when I had five emails within 24 hours of posting flyers. The emails I received were not just messages that stated they would participate – they were enthusiastic requests to be a part of the study, sharing their stories with me of why they want to talk about being Mixed Race. When I shared this information with one of the participants, Rachelle, she stated:

It blew my mind someone wanted to hear a mixed person talk about their experience because I think it is awesome about hearing about People of Color from specific cultures, but I feel like it is never asked, no one ever wants to know what a mixed person is like and especially, or not especially, I feel as a white passing person no one has ever asked me because they just assume I am white, and they do not ever think about the fact that I might have a different perspective.

This different perspective and the opportunity to share it was important to each participant. These conversations might not have been a part of their experience growing up, but I am thankful that they have found a way to do so in college. The subjectivities of each participant is as varied as their racial make-ups. How they view themselves, how their parents view them, and how their world views them all represent different viewpoints of their identity. I thought this to be intersectionality at work, accounting for their varying realities. Yet, it is often attempted to lump the Mixed Race experience together (similar to what happens with other Groups of Color). This generalization can lead Mixed Race people, who have not had their identity discussed, to feel that they do not know much about themselves. Maria P. Root (1992) was the first researcher who tackled the “*Who Am I?*” question as a starting point for understanding Multiracial identity. In Root’s (1992) work, she was able to situate this question within the larger societal issues regarding race in our country.

The emergence of a racially mixed population is transforming the “face” of the United States. The increasing presence of Multiracial people necessitates that we as a nation ask ourselves the questions about our identity: Who are we? How do we see ourselves? Who are we in relation to one another? These questions arise in the context of a country that has held particular views of race – a country that has subscribed to race as an immutable construct, perceived itself as White, and been dedicated to preserving racial lines. Thus such questions of race and identity can only precipitate a full-scale “identity crisis” that this country is ill-equipped to resolve. Resolving the identity crisis may force us to reexamine our constructions of race and the hierarchical social order it supports (p. 3).

I see Root’s (1992) words at the heart of this study. Because we as a society are “ill-equipped to resolve” our race and identity questions, we place “others,” Mixed Race people

in this case, as having an identity crisis. The negotiating of our racial identity occurs within “racialized social systems” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Mixed Race people are causing us to examine what we think about race and how we have categorized ourselves, forcing us to think with an intersectional lens. The subjectivity issues I bring up in this chapter speak to how our notions of labeling and defining connect to the important role parents have in dismantling this system for their Mixed Race children so they do not merely see themselves through the eyes of the our broken view on race in this country. Institutions such as colleges and universities are well-positioned to support and move forward this topic in the absence of parental education and knowledge on this subject, especially given the role that college administrators play in absence of parents. Yet, a university’s impact is not available to all and comes too late for those who are privileged to be enrolled. The ways that Mixed Race people view themselves and navigate their subjectivities depends on how this complicated world was explained to them, starting within their family structures.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how white parents discussed race and racism with their Mixed Race children. Further, through this study, I sought to understand how the racial structures of our society impacted the ways parents approach their parenting responsibilities as well as how this impacts the other lived experiences of Mixed Race students. It is clear that white supremacist ways of thinking inform the modern-day color-blind race neutral rhetoric that is sold as “racial progress” in our society (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Given this study’s conceptual framework borrowed from tenants of Critical Race Theory and other concepts discussing race and racism within United States history, the assertion that race and racism are endemic in our society (Bell, 1992)

allowed me to keep issues of race and racism at the center of this study. Whiteness and white supremacy clearly play a role in how white parents discuss (or do not discuss) race with their Mixed Race children. It is very messy, but love and racism can (and do) exist together.

In large part, the stories of the eight participants of this study spoke with love and respect for their parents, but they also spoke out against the system of racism that was introduced into their lives by the people who loved them most. The findings of this study illuminated how the voices of these participants are challenging the notions of how we should talk about race with children. Additionally, the findings dispel the notion that because one produces a child with a Person of Color and parents a Person of Color that their racist programming can be left at the door. The participants of this study demonstrated they did notice racial difference as a child, and they knew they were not always viewed equal to others – they perceived their difference. They desired to talk about who they are, even though their white parents might not be able to relate to their story racially speaking. Spaces such as our college campuses are helping these students to find voices similar to theirs so their experiences can be shared with others, but a college experience alone does not replace the lessons and discussion that can occur in childhood leading up to the college years. A key component of this study's findings is how parents' abilities to discuss race (in race-conscious ways) can correlate with today's racial realities to either help alleviate or further reinforce our nation's culture of racism and racial inequality. In concluding this discussion, I hope to leave readers – especially parents and educators – with practical, useful ways to approach conversations and to ignite a desire to address this difficult topic with consistency, even if it means we are learning with our child(ren).

Chapter 6: Implications and Conclusion

The intersection of parenting and racism feels like an unsatisfying place to conclude, but it book ends with the theoretical framework I outlined in the beginning pages of this dissertation - racism is engrained in every fabric of our society, even between parent and child. White parents' deficits in understanding/discussing race and racism causes more emotional pain than they realize in their Mixed Race children. One of the best hopes to thwart these negative feelings is for white parents to create an affirming home environment where race is a part of normal discussions. However, most participants of this study expressed that this kind of space did not exist for them; overt racism and covert colorblindness were a part of their formative years. The findings of this study remind us that we have much work to do, as parents and educators, to break the cycle of the negative or absent race talk. Thus, my implications are directed at both parents and educators.

White parents who are not properly equipped to discuss race serve as a barrier to their Mixed Race child's positive racial development. As a parent of two Mixed Race children, I feel overwhelmed with the racial responsibility and have asked myself through the course of this study, "so where do we go from here?" This chapter is my response to that question; a roadmap to action as I present my recommendations for both parents and educators, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts.

Implications for Parents

Teaching parents how to talk about race to their Mixed Race child(ren) is the most tangible element of this research. As I learned through this study, discussion of race is often not the focus for white parents with Mixed Race children. While there were some positive stories from participants, they spoke to happenstance and not the intentional nature of what I

believe these conversations should be. The implications of this study take root in an emerging field called critical race parenting. This approach to parenting, used by Communities of Color for generations, focuses on real-world discussions and implications of race. It is here in implications where I believe this topic carries the most weight.

Critical race parenting. The topic of parenting is often discussed in the field of education but almost always in terms of deficiency rather than the opportunities that exist within parenting to explain race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Few, 2007). Critical race parenting is a relatively new perspective on parenting. It is a term and practice used to describe how parenting manifests itself among the many societal racial struggles we see in our post-racial world today (DePouw & Matias, 2016). This approach to parenting was born out of a critical perspective of our post-racial U.S. society and includes examination of systems of racial oppression that are embedded in our Communities of Color (DePaouw & Matias, 2016). Critical race parenting argues that we must be race-conscious as parents in order to break the cycle of white supremacy and also to help our children understand the racialized world in which they live. This approach goes against the very notion that many of us (especially who are white) were taught about race – not to mention it. This is mainly for the reason that we, as white parents, are not taught how racism continues to thrive in our country, but also we believe that these concepts are too complicated and too intense for our children to learn about.

Critical race parenting is not a new concept for all of us, however. Communities of Color have been employing this “racial realism” for generations out of necessity for surviving in a white supremacist society. Parents of color often warn and explain to their children the many unfair realities that are present by not being white. These are not conversations for the sake

of having them; they are life saving measures (DePaouw & Matias, 2016). These race-conscious conversations are not just for families of color; they are for all families. It is important for white children to discuss and acknowledge the many systems at play when it comes to race. Critical race parenting employs the methodological approach called counterstorytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) in order to demonstrate how to explain to children systems of racism but also to help provide another perspective when it comes to discussing matters of race. The racial stories we tell our children should break the cycle of raising children who recycle or internalize dominant messages of race in our society (Matias, 2016).

Much of the research on critical race parenting discusses how difficult it can be to talk about race with children. Many of these barriers exist not because discussing race is all that complicated but because we are not rehearsed. Naomi Nishi (2018) describes in her autoethnographic article on critical race parenting by discussing how she navigates daily racial conversations with her Mixed Race children. She shares many situations she has encountered where there have been opportunities to discuss race. She describes how she maneuvers through each situation whether it be complicated or not, providing an example of how to broach racial subjects with children as young as three years old. These kinds of examples demonstrate examples that are missing in common parenting advice. Nishi states, “Mothering is my biggest responsibility and it is the most personal place where, as a white woman, I find myself sifting out my whiteness, sometimes in what feels like desperation as I work to combat white supremacy” (p. 21). For a scholar in critical race parenting to discuss this demonstrates the great need for all of us to learn to discuss race, especially those of us with the great responsibility of raising Children of Color. Our lived racial experience is not

sufficient enough to understand the situations our children will be faced with. What was fascinating to hear from the eight participants in this study was that they didn't expect their white parent to be an expert, their only expectation was to listen and to be willing to sit in the uncomfortability of racial dynamics in our society. At no point in this study, did any of them express the need for their parents to be experts on race or racism. It was the opportunity to discuss their experience and open the door to learn about them that mattered most.

Additionally, the ability to say "I don't know" and then to go and learn together was all that was required. Although this is simple in concept, we are afraid to do this – to say, "I don't know" as a parent and on the other hand to discuss race at all. The participants of this study had a lot to say about what they expected from their parents and at the root of their desires, it was for their parents to practice the basics of critical race parenting and that is to talk about race.

Reaching parents. Parents talking about race – through listening, learning with their child, and creating a space for these conversations to emerge – is at the heart of this study. The concepts and impact of whiteness and white supremacy is knowledge not magically absorbed; it must be learned. How do we get parents to understand the implications of the white racial frames I have laid out in this dissertation? It is clear that both our formal and informal structures for learning are not facilitating this message to white parents. I believe that discussing race must exist where parents go first when they learn they are expecting a child – the doctor's office. When I became pregnant with my two children, I was inundated with information not only about my changing body but also about parenting and parenting resources. Many of these resources focused on health, developmental milestones, and positive discipline, which are so very important, yet nothing is shared – or even available

regarding race. I feel that due to our race-neutral way of approaching topics of race, we think this is taboo to bring up in a doctor's office, especially so early such as during prenatal care. If prenatal care is too early, I believe that hospitals and birthing centers are also excellent spaces to share resources about how to discuss race positively. Spaces where young children go such as childcare centers, libraries, and pediatrician offices are also excellent places to infuse the discussion of race with parents. For parents who are transracially adopting, this topic should certainly be infused into the adoption process. I also see a need for these conversations within our foster care system as well. Discussions about race, specifically the reifying of racial binary categories in our society, are necessary topics for parents of Mixed Race children. It is certainly easy to say that schools have to bear the burden of this education, but I believe there are many other resources available where this message can be taught to parents. People who do social justice work in educational settings are perfect for taking on this mantle. Their knowledge of racial systems paired with knowledge of children make them a powerful influence in our ability to shift our silence and ignorance about racial matters. I also implore leaders in obstetrics, hospital administration, pediatric care, and early childhood development to think about how health race identity development can help a child thrive and how they can help get this message across to parents early in their parenting journey.

Practical advice for parents. For parents who have not been taught how to discuss race with their child(ren), I asked each of my eight participants, "What advice do you have for parents who are raising Mixed Race children?" This question yielded many responses, depending on their individual life experiences. I do think, despite this variance, that there is powerful information here to share with parents and those who act in loco parentis as

university faculty and staff often do. The insights shared below are the many ways that the participants of this study cited as what they want parents of Mixed Race children to know. What is shocking is that their thoughts don't ask a lot of parents; the advice given is strikingly simple. I share their words in detail because their advice gets to what I want the lasting impact of this study to be – helping to equip white parents with the tools to practice critical race parenting in their relationship with their Mixed Race child(ren). Additionally, I decided to break from a traditional conclusion chapter format by using the direct participant quotes below in order to methodologically position this study's participant knowledge with my own.

Diana:

You are not always going to get it as the white parent and that is ok. Sometimes you are just going to have to sit in your shit and in your lack of understanding, and sometimes you are going to mess up and your child is going to take it the wrong way but that's ok. As long as at the end of the day you understand that their experience is not yours nor are you trying to impose your experience on them, then you are going to be just fine.

Olivia:

I think if there are any moments where you feel uncomfortable or that there is uncharted territory that you are not ready to explore, I'd tell you lean in to it instead of avoid it. Do research, have conversations, ask your child how are they feeling today? What did they see today? Just like don't avoid it. Don't avoid it because it is important, and it is a part of their identity, and that is how society is going to view them.

Karl:

I think I would say that your child is not you. Your child's identity is going to be this culmination of different cultures...their identity will be built off of your culture and your spouse's culture. There is not a level of socialization that you can push on a child that will eliminate that other side. Your child is not you, and you are not your child. So that you can empathize but you will never understand, and I think that is ok.

Sue:

Embrace who you are and acknowledge that you aren't going to understand all the time.

Rachelle:

For me, it would be listening to understand and taking a step back as a white person and letting your child who has an experience as a Person of Color, especially as a Mixed Race person, let them talk to you about how they feel rather than you trying to tell them how to feel because I think my personal experience has been why I really feel that way especially. I think a lot of times white people like to talk for People of Color. I feel like that has been my experience in my world, just like letting them talk about how they feel about things. And even if you don't agree, just try to understand their point of view because your experience is so different as your experience as a white person.

Shelley:

Be able to understand that there are going to be things that they [parents] cannot connect to because their experience will be different, and they will need to just get past that and understand that and know they cannot completely sympathize, but I can empathize with you. I'm sorry...just, if this feels bad or that it isn't a good experience for you. Just know that you may need to be open to learning things and stuff like that probably because you

are probably not going to have a lot of the same experiences and know that going into it. Just being there is still beneficial.

Clark:

I think one thing I would say is to shelter but allow your children to understand. Like for example, say there was news coverage on a certain event going on involving race, don't turn the TV off. Let your kids watch it, let them ask questions to help them. Your opinions allow them, maybe not young kids but, will allow them to get their things out because they are still valid. Also, I will...kind of along the lines of what Shelley was saying is to support. There are things that you won't agree on or have a stance on or won't have the opportunity to have a stance on and just kind of allowing that parent of color provide that perspective and to be supportive of that perspective is the biggest thing. And have a balance between sheltering and not sheltering your child at the same time.

Lynne:

I would say the big thing for me would be to let your child come into their own identity in their own time. Don't force preconceived notions of what their identity should mean to them. Let them decide and define what it means to be mixed or what it means to be whatever they decide to be. Don't put pressure on them to have that be their main identity. Yes, they are mixed, but they are also intelligent, kind, and great. Focus on other things that are going to let them succeed and what they need to have in life to get from where they are to where they want to go. And if they decide that they are mixed vs. other identities as what they want as a central thing, allow that to happen, but don't force it upon them and kind of let them see what it means to them and how it can empower

them into being something that they maybe thought they couldn't be. I think that is something you cannot tell they should feel but is also something they get from the experience they go through. Even though it may be bad at the time, you still have to go through them to see the good. I think that is something that is hard because you want to show up for them, they want to make sure you don't go through some of the things you hear about other people going through or see, and so I think it is important to have them even though it hurts, but it makes you understand more the importance of your identity and how it...yes it hurts to be that in certain ways and, yes, it is more powerful to be that, and I think you get further accepting that about yourself but knowing that I'm all of these things.

This advice from each participant demonstrates the importance of discussions regarding race in the home. These discussions (or lack thereof) helped to shape the racial identity of each participant and laid the groundwork for their racial journey into college, whether it was full of pride or uncertainty. Those participants that had positive and open parenting around race seemed to have less difficulty around their Mixed Race identity than parents who were race neutral or racist in their discussions on race. I want to be careful to say that I do not think that one participant is more "evolved" than the other regarding their racial identity, but some did have an easier time, racially speaking, when their parents were there to discuss race *with* them.

Implications for my parenting. Conducting this research has certainly left its impact on me as a parent. I engaged in this research because I knew it was important work and something that was deeply personal to me. Being a race-conscious white parent has been something that I have strived to achieve, yet I know that this journey is a long one with many

more obstacles to hurdle. The Band-Aide story I illustrated at the beginning of this dissertation was just one of many race conversations that has already occurred with my daughter in her six years on this Earth. In fact, just the other day, my daughter came home from school with a handout about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. discussing what his vision and action did to spur the Civil Rights Movement. The story was highly simplified for kindergarteners but there was a line that stated prior to Dr. King, Black and white children could not go to school together and that now, after Dr. King, Black and white children enjoy attending the same schools. While this is true, there is nuance to discuss. I know that in our future, I need to share with her that schools are more segregated than ever before due to things like “white flight” and income disparities between Black/Brown children and white children that lead to better schools for white students. These conversations get harder, and I have learned through this study that I need to be skilled at knowing the facts about how race operates and have the ability to explain these things at an age appropriate level. Perhaps discussing our school segregation issue in this country is not appropriate for her six year old mind, but discussing why children should learn together is developmentally appropriate.

Additionally, I have learned through this study that my children will remember the things I say and do around issues of race. They will attach meaning to my actions, even without me knowing. Their racial identity development is something that needs to be on the forefront of my mind, just as my desire for them to have a strong education, healthy behaviors, and positive relationships. I am inspired to continue to learn about their Mixed Race identity in order to help them love and appreciate who they are.

Implications for Educators

Education is a partnership between parents and teachers. What is taught in the home can easily be undone in the classroom and vice versa. Thus, my implications for educators are just as central to this issue despite my focus on parents in this study. Children learn racial messages at a young age. Racial messaging in school comes in many forms – through words and actions of educators, through curriculum, school celebrations, and other students. All these mediums are racialized, and it is important for educators to interrupt policies, practices, interactions, and images that reinforce the status quo. I have a burning desire for educators to take responsibility for racial education in their classroom environments, thus teacher preparation regarding this issue is paramount as we graduate future teachers for our universities.

Educator training. Interrupting the status quo is difficult to do when teacher training does not teach future educators about how to discuss race; in fact, it often remains unspoken until a racial incident arises. Lynne, a participant in this study, spoke about how other students in school would think that because she was El Salvadorian, she could also speak for Mexican people, or all Latinx people in general. She explained that her teachers did not know how to correct these comments; therefore, they were allowed to stand in her classrooms. Because the common demographic for a future teacher is often a white woman, teaching how to disrupt and address race is critical due to the color-blind programming that many white people are taught to believe and accept.

I urge teacher education programs to examine the ways in which they teach their future educators to discuss race and address race in their classrooms, I believe that this premise is the largest implication for higher education. It is in college classrooms that provide that last, best hope to interrupt racist programming disguised as well-intentioned, misinformed, white people

going out to “change the world.” Courses and exercises designed to teach how racism is systemic, even within our educational systems, will provide a necessary foundation to understand how racism is tightly woven into our society. Discussing race in terms of representation in course materials, interrupting racist conversations, racial tokenization in the classroom and how a teacher can avoid this practice, and also how to discuss race on all levels are practical competencies for a budding teacher today. Thus, the implications for faculty and administrators working in teacher preparation programs are significant as well. Curriculum requirements must be written so that diversity and inclusion are at its core, and professors with competence in this area should be hired. Additionally, faculty who teach in these programs should be required to discuss how diversity interfaces with all aspects of teacher competence from curriculum preparation, to classroom management, to reading literacy. When these items occur, I believe we can change how our K-12 schools discuss race today. Further, I believe that once these future teachers are in the classroom full-time, post-graduation, their school superintendents and principals must reinforce in-service training that focuses on topics of inclusion in a way that does not reinforce race-neutral, color-blind ideologies. All eight participants in this study spoke about how their educational experience crafted many of the thoughts and opinions they have about race. Whether it was from identification systems that boxed them into a monoracial race category, misunderstanding how someone could be two or more races, or lack of representation of Students of Color in general, each had experiences in school that caused them to feel unseen and unheard. My hope is that we can begin to deal with racism by facing it head on, with open conversations, shedding the shame and guilt that often stops us from having them in the first place.

Outside the classroom. Teachers in K-12 and university settings are not the only ones who impact students. Those in support roles such as school counselors and coaches in the K-12 setting and student affairs administrators in the higher education setting also have a significant responsibility to facilitate dialogue on race and create spaces where students can be heard about their racial experiences. Staff members in these roles often see students in their most unguarded form – outside the classroom. I urge staff members to capitalize on these unstructured environments by being open to take advantage of times where students discuss their racial experiences. How can these stories be encouraged? Supported? Is there action that needs to be taken? Staff members have a powerful role of helping students remain engaged in the classroom by supporting them outside of that space. The positive impact of the extracurricular activities in college was evident for many participants in this student. Clark, Lynne, Diana, and Shelley all spoke highly of the Mixed Race organization on their campus and the positive space that was there for them to find common ground with others around their racial identity. Shelley had this to say about her experience with this group:

When our Mixed Race group was started, all of us were kind of like, “Oh my god, we should all do this thing, it is going to be great!” And it was, and it is. It is a super great thing and a place where there’s so many of us. You are, like, my people are together. People of Color itself is a small population [on this campus] but realizing there’s a lot more people than you thought or even didn’t know about is really validating and is a really nice experience.

Schools should focus on how they can work with students to establish spaces such as the one discussed above by Shelley to support students in their experience as a Mixed Race person. It was clear that many of my participants were not affirmed in the classroom and in general

social spaces, thus necessitating the creation of more groups and spaces to support our Students of Color. Faculty and staff should be encouraged to participate and support and be given recognition for dedicating their time to these issues (in whatever form is appropriate for the position).

Understanding race and racism outside of our binary thinking about the topic (often times only in Black and white categories) is paramount to helping support Mixed Race students. Educators must have an awareness of this population and work toward breaking the habit of only talking about race in terms of Black and white; this will go far in affirming Mixed Race students' experiences. The inclusion of the Multiracial experience into our discourses allows for us to deconstruct our monoracial paradigms of race (Harris, 2016). And finally, in order to begin the validation of Mixed Race experiences, educators must develop an analytical perspective as they approach their work, always having a heightened awareness of how their racial experiences, perspectives, and experiences informs their approaches as educators. When these pedagogical practices are implemented in school settings, alongside parents doing the same at home, there will be a powerful experience for our Mixed Race children.

Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This dissertation study provided a means for sharing the stories of eight Mixed Race college students and their racial experiences with their parents, specifically their white parent. These racial experiences were discussed at the intersection of their socialized involvement with other family members in addition to school. Through our conversations together, I was able to get a sense of their perspectives about these matters in a personal, in-depth way through use of feminist methodology. However, just like any research, there are opportunities to dive deeper and gain more informed perspective through additional work on

this topic. Below, I offer my thoughts on the limitations of this study in addition to recommendations for future research.

To begin, a glaring limitation of this study is my identity as a white person researching People of Color. My racial experiences as a white person have afforded me a life where I have not had to worry about the racial situations as described by the participants of this study and other People of Color who share the same city, state, and country with me. This study's major limitation lies in this fact of my racial identity as a researcher. Throughout this process I have asked, "What have I missed? What don't I see? How might I be perpetuating racism?" My identity as a parent to Mixed Race children does not negate the racial privilege I hold. This research might very well be better done by a person who holds a Mixed Race identity. Therefore, future research on this topic by a researcher of color, would be a good compliment to my study in order to perhaps expose my own white racial frame on this matter.

Another possibility for future research would be to examine the racial messages that Mixed Race children (and adult children) receive about race from their White Parents during various ages. For example, talking to younger children (6-9 years old), pre-teens (10-12 years old) and teens (13 and up) about the ways race is discussed in their home now. Asking college students to reflect on their childhood years was potentially too much to ask in order to get accurate recollections of their racial memories. This thought occurred to me when I was interviewing Clark. In Clark's accounts of his parents, he said they do talk about race, but many of his memories about it are fairly recent, and he had a hard time remembering specifics; he was basing his answers off of a feeling regarding the racial environment in his home but could not think of specific instances. His story specifically gave me pause and

wondered if the passage of time was a limiting factor to my study. This factor also made me wonder at what ages is talking about race easier? Is talking to older children about race easier than younger children? Vice versa? Could talking about race be easier when your children bring it up to you as a parent first (usually when they are younger)? These questions I did not discuss with my participants, but they have emerged as an aspect to this study that was not addressed. I believe it would be a fascinating study to talk to Mixed Race children of different ages about their current racial experiences with their parents. These memories would be fresher, perhaps more poignant, and would give a real-time picture of the degree that racial messages are absorbed during various ages.

Another area of future research ripe for development is the inclusion of parents in a study such as this one. At the outset of my research development, I toyed with the idea of interviewing parents with their college student. I thought that hearing the parents' perspective would be a fascinating aspect to this study. But, after considering my methodology choice, I thought it better to only talk with Mixed Race college students, to center their experiences, instead of sharing that space with their parents, specifically their White parent. This limitation is important to deal with, however, since much of what is said has an additional perspective – the parent one. There were times where I asked questions to the participants about “Why they thought their parents didn’t talk about race?” or “why they made the decisions they did in regard to their racial upbringing?” Sue provided me with the answer below when I asked her the first question above:

I think...I don't know. I think they didn't want me to feel that I was different from everyone else. Because they knew I was, but I think they didn't want to make me feel like I was set apart from everyone.

Sue's response was accurate for her, but I found it interesting how she led with "I don't know." This is a good space where parents could interject why they did what they did. Perhaps they don't know either, but allowing parents the space to explain this for themselves would be a powerful area of future research. Further, I think that conducting a study that included parents could potentially be a powerful healing space for parents and their children to (re)connect regarding race and begin a new, more racially-informed, chapter of their relationship together.

Future research should additionally respond to recent work done by scholars who are discussing critical race parenting (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018; Nishi, 2018; Nishi & Montoya, 2018). Critical race parenting as both a scholarly topic and a movement within parenting deserves to be looked at further for its impact on children of all racial identities. Talking with parents who employ this practice in their parenting or parents who have gone from race-neutral parenting to critical race parenting would be fascinating to gain greater insight into how this parenting-style has worked for them and their children. Right now, the research on critical race parenting is based on the researcher's experiences with their own children and application of this method, but expanding this to non-scholars would offer practical insights for the millions of interracial homes in the United States today.

I also think future research on this topic could tackle the discussion of gender issues within an interracial family. Are white moms different than white dads? Are moms of color different from dads of color? Does this dynamic make for a different racialized experience? And finally, I think one of the most important areas for future research would be the discussion of the role of Parents of Color in their discussions about race with their Mixed Race child(ren). In this study, their voices were silenced and understanding the perception

their children had of their racial parenting would be an excellent complement to this study. These considerations all deserve closer examination.

Concluding Thoughts

It is my hope that the most significant positive outcome of this study is to help white parents understand that their silence about race is not helpful when raising a Mixed Race child. As a parent, I believe, we need to be the biggest advocate for talking about race, in all its forms, to best equip our children for the world. There are going to be times that are difficult for our children, racially speaking, but our racial messages set the stage for their positive racial identity. As a social justice advocate and parent, I am concerned about the ways in which we perpetuate race-neutral, colorblind thinking and avoid discussions about race. I take seriously my responsibility as both a parent and educator to move beyond the neutral or defiant manner in which we have approached race as a society. This is easier said than done and consequently, this work is my greatest challenge.

The participants of this study have been able to, in some ways, reject the lies of white superiority and focus on who they are in their coming of age. I implore white parents of Mixed Race children to understand their role in parenting a Child of Color. Jenson (2005) asserts the burden of white people is “to understand that we are the problem, come to terms with what that really means, and act based on understanding. Our burden is to do something that does not come naturally to people in positions of power and privilege: Look in the mirror honestly and concede that we live in an unjust society and have no right to some of what we have” (p. 93). I hope readers of this study can see that the stories of the eight participants in this study are not tragic or confused as the stereotype for Mixed Race people often goes. Their stories are beautiful, brave accounts of finding themselves and being proud of their

identities despite living in a world that is a combination of racist and color-blind. I anticipate that this research will inform my future work as I move toward being an agent of change for the children of parents I serve through my work. Most importantly, I hope to break the entanglement that love and racism can hold together in parenting my own children.

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Appendix A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Shannon Jordan, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Appalachian State University. I am conducting a research study to understand the racial experiences that mixed race college students (with one white parent) have with their white parent. I am writing to invite you to participate in this study.

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Researchers have found that discussing race with children is important for their positive identity development. If race is not discussed, a color-blind and/or white view of the world often prevails with homes who have at least one white parent. This study, therefore, is aimed at increasing knowledge about how white parents discuss race with their mixed race children for the benefit of helping to remove the fear from discussing race and establish strong identities among children and young adults who identify as mixed race. I believe that you bring a unique perspective that can greatly inform our understanding of how racial dialogues are played out in mixed race homes.

Description of Study Procedures

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in 2 focus group sessions lasting 90 minutes and two individual interviews lasting 60-90 minutes. Focus group and individual interviews will be audio recorded. All interviews and other materials will remain confidential and will be stored on a secured computer in a locked office. If you participate, the focus groups cannot guarantee confidentiality since other participants will be present to hear what you say. Although we will request that all members of the group respect and keep what is discussed confidential, we cannot promise that they will do so.

Risks of Participation

It is not expected that you will experience any discomfort as a result of your participation in this study. Under no circumstances will your interview data be shared with anyone without your explicit permission. The results of this research project may be presented at academic conferences, professional meetings, or in publications; however, your identity will not be disclosed. Presentations and manuscripts typically contain participants' quotes, but participants will not be identified. Your involvement in the research project is entirely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue participation at any time.

Benefits of Participation

The findings of this study have the potential to offer recommendations to white parents of mixed race children so that they can become comfortable and familiar with topics of race and racial realities within the United States today. Moreover, sharing your experiences individually or with a group could prove to be beneficial for you.

Contact Persons

If you have any questions concerning this research project, please contact Shannon Jordan at 616-617-4740 or jordansn@appstate.edu or Brandy Bryson at 828-262-6093 or brysonbs@appstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

Mixed Race Students

Discuss Race, Racism, and Their Parents

Seeking participants for a dissertation study

Doctoral student at Appalachian State, Shannon Jordan, is looking for five mixed race college students, who have one white parent, to help her answer how white parents play a role in discussing matters of race and racism.

The goal of the study is to benefit universities, families, and children (of all ages) by understanding the racial experiences and perspectives of mixed race college students today.

If you are interested in participating in this study that would include focus group and individual interviews (totaling approximately 4-6 hours of your time spread out over four weeks), please contact Shannon by email by November 1, 2017.



Contact Information:

Shannon Jordan – jordansn@appstate.edu

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION COLLECTION FORM

QUESTIONS

RESPONSES

12

Section 1 of 5



Mixed Race College Student Dissertation Participant Information

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation study. I am looking for mixed race college students, who have one white parent, to help me answer how white parents play a role in discussing matters of race and racism. I hope this study benefits universities, families, and children of all ages by understanding the racial experiences and perspectives of mixed race college students today. This study would include focus groups (2 total) and individual interviews (2 total). These focus groups and individual interviews would take approximately 4-6 hours of your time spread out over four weeks, depending on scheduling.

This form will be used to select the participants of the dissertation study in order to have the most diverse participant group possible.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (Shannon Jordan) at jordansn@appstate.edu. I will be in touch by November 5, 2017 with information on your further participation in the study. Thank you!

First Name *

Short answer text

.....

Last Name *

Short answer text

.....

Email Address *

Short answer text

.....

Cell Phone Number

Short answer text

.....

How do you racially identify? *

Short answer text

.....

About Your Parents

In the section below, I will refer to your parents as parent #1 and parent #2.

How does your parent #1 racially identify? *

Short answer text
.....

How does your parent #2 racially identify? *

Short answer text
.....

A Little Bit More About You...

Description (optional)

Are you a member of any group or club related to your racial identity? *

Yes

No

If your answer is yes to the above question, what is the name of the group?

Short answer text
.....

How often would you say that you talk with others about your racial experiences/racial identity? *

Long answer text
.....

Your Schedule

Understanding your availability is important to scheduling focus groups and individual interviews. Please indicate your availability below.

What times are generally most free in your schedule? (check all that apply) *

- Monday Mornings
- Monday Afternoons
- Monday Evenings
- Tuesday Mornings
- Tuesday Afternoons
- Tuesday Evenings
- Wednesday Mornings
- Wednesday Afternoons
- Wednesday Evenings
- Thursday Mornings
- Thursday Afternoons
- Thursday Evenings
- Friday Mornings
- Friday Afternoons
- Friday Evenings
- Saturday Mornings
- Saturday Afternoons
- Saturday Evenings
- Sunday Mornings
- Sunday Afternoons
- Sunday Evenings



Thank You For Your Interest In Participating!

Shannon will be in touch with you by November 5th regarding next steps for your participation

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

White Parents, Mixed Race Children: College Students' Perspectives of their Parental Racial Dialogue

Principal Investigator: Shannon Jordan

Department: Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Contact Information: jordan@appstate.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brandy Bryson, brysonbs@appstate.edu

IRB Number: 18-0039

Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider About this Research

I agree to participate in a study that will explore the racial messages that Mixed Race college students (with one white parent) received from their white parent. You will be one of nine participants. This study will ask you to participate in two focus group sessions (90 minutes each) and one individual interview session (60-90 minutes). Each focus group and individual interview will be scheduled at a date and time convenient for the participant(s). I understand that the focus group sessions and individual interview sessions will include questions about race, racism, parents, family dynamics regarding race, childhood memories regarding race, and identity.

Through the course of participation, I understand psychological risks may be present as potentially sensitive subjects will be broached. Participants may contact Appalachian State University's Counseling & Psychological Services at (828) 262-3180 or by visiting <https://counseling.appstate.edu/> if a participant needs counseling or resources related to participation in this study. There are no physical risks associated with your participation.

During the course of the focus group and individual interview sessions, I will not mention any personal or private, identifiable information (such as names) of individuals who are not participating. In addition, I agree that all conversations which take place in the focus groups and individual interviews should not be discussed with anyone outside of the focus groups and individual interviews and its participants.

I understand that the focus group will be recorded and may be published. I understand that the audio recordings of my comments may be used for publications and presentations.

I give Shannon Jordan ownership of the tapes from the interview(s) she conducts with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in Shannon's possession that will be securely protected by a lockable desk and a password protected computer. I understand that information or quotations from tapes might be used for future publications beyond this research project and all identifying information will be removed and each participant will be given a pseudonym. I understand I will not receive compensation for the interview.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can end it at any time without consequence. I also understand that I do not have to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time with no consequences. I confirm I am at least 18 years of age.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact Shannon Jordan at 616-617-4740 or email jordansn@appstate.edu. If you wish to speak with the faculty advisor associated with this research, you may contact Dr. Brandy Bryson at 828-262-6093 or email her at brysonbs@appstate.edu.

This research project has been approved on October 6, 2017 by the Institutional Review Board at Appalachian State University. This approval will expire on October 5, 2018 unless the IRB renews the approval of this research.

By continuing to the research procedures, you acknowledge you are at least 18 years old, have read the above information regarding confidentiality and anonymity, and agree to participate. If you agree to participate, please sign below to proceed with your participation.

I agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

All questions were semi-structured and time was given for follow-up questions depending on the flow of each interview.

Focus Group #1 Protocol:

1. How do you racially identify?
2. Which of your parents is white? How does your Parent of Color racial identity?
3. What were the demographic characteristics of your neighborhood and other communities (school, church, etc.) growing up?
4. How was race talked about between you and your parents? What messages about race did you receive?
5. What role did your white parent play in discussing race with you? What were the messages that they gave about race? What were the messages that they gave you about race?
6. Do you feel that your white parent was comfortable or uncomfortable discussing race with you? Why? What about your parent of color?
7. How did other family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.) discuss race with you? What other messages did you receive?
8. Now that you are in college, how do you navigate the racial pressures to fit into one group or to explain your identity?
 - a. How did your conversations/interactions with your white parent prepare/not prepare you for these situations?

Individual Interview #1 Protocol:

1. During our focus group interview, you discussed _____ about your racial identity. Can you share more about your journey in identifying this way?
2. Also during our focus group interview you shared _____ about your parents. Can you tell me more about this experience with them?
3. Can you share with me some positive racial experiences that you had with your white parent?
4. Can you share any negative racial experiences you had with your white parent?
5. Do you think that either of your parents intentionally discussed race with you or that most racial conversations occurred by chance?
6. Can you recall a time when another adult asked your white parent about anything regarding your race? What do you remember from that conversation?
7. Where else did you learn about race growing up?

Individual Interview #2 Protocol:

1. During our last time together we discussed many of the ways your white parent discussed or did not discuss race with you. How has your white parent's approach to race shaped your racial identity?
2. Now that you are away from home and in college, how do you discuss race with your friends?
3. How would you describe the racial demographics of your social network in college?
4. Would you feel comfortable if your white parent were to hear the racial conversations you have between you and your friends about race?

5. Since you have been in college, have you had conversations about race with your white parent? How did that conversation go?
6. Have you ever discussed with your white parent about how they parented you around issues of race?
7. What would be the hardest thing to share with your white parent about their overall racial knowledge regarding your identity as a Mixed Race person?
8. Share about significant People of Color in your life. What was their role in your racial identity development?

Focus Group #2 Protocol:

1. Since the last time we all met, each of you have been in two interviews with me. Have you had any discussions with your white parent that were prompted by your participation in this research? If so, what did the conversation look like?
2. Is there something that hasn't been asked that you would like to talk about?
3. What questions do you have for each other based on your participation in this research project?
4. What would you tell white parents who are raising Mixed Race children? What do you feel is important for them to know about race?
5. If you become a parent one day, how will you talk about race with your children?

APPENDIX F

ORGANIZATION OF DATA (SAMPLE)

Organization of Data

Includes:

- Data Connected to Concepts
- Patterns
- Unpatterns
- Framework Questions

<p>FG1 (6:28, 10:30)</p> <p>FG2 (5:15)</p>	<p>Names (mixed, multiracial, biracial, etc.):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Identification markers of what they want to be called and the term "mixed". I think I should have a section talking about this. Interesting how Lynne talks about wanting to be multi-ethnic or human. 2.) Referencing the word "mutt". Kari also discusses around this mark how he doesn't claim his white identity.
<p>FG1 (15:00) Rachelle Individual Interview (0:49)</p> <p>FG1 (25:15) (40:00)</p> <p>FG1 (32:30)</p> <p>FG1 (35:30) (42:00)</p> <p>FG2 (14:45)</p> <p>FG2 (18:20)</p> <p>FG2 (21:45, 23:08)</p> <p>FG2 (23:15, 36:50)</p>	<p>Parents Not Talking About Race:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Rachelle finding out from FB that she was mixed race in high school. Mom did not share this at all. 2.) Rachelle discussing racism in her home. Everytime race is talked about is is negative. Mom wants to believe that racism isn't real. 3.) Shelley discusses that her family never talked about race. Family was not discriminatory, mentioned benevolent racism. 4.) Shelley talks about her mom wanting to assimilate. She discusses that her family fooled themselves into thinking race wasn't a thing. POWERFUL QUOTES here. 5.) Kari talks about his mom "whitening herself up." 6.) Stephanie talks about how her mom avoided topics of race at all costs. 7.) Sue firmly believes that her parents didn't realize that talking about race was important. Also stated that her parents didn't want her to feel different. 8.) Stephane talks about how the absence of talking about race socialized her to think she was white, but at the same time knew she was different. Sue says this to in the second time

Individual Interview (1:00)	indicator. 9.) Sue discusses that they would have talked about diversity more if they lived in a more diverse area. Goes into a grandfather story (of him being racist toward her mother.)
Individual Interview (4:00) Individual Interview (8:00)	10.) Sue talks about her dad fetishizes her mom. 11.) Sue talks about she didn't know about her racial identity until later
Individual Interview (11:30)	12.) Rachelle shares that no one brings up the fact that she is mixed race at home...that she is the only one who cares.
Individual Interview (25:00)	13.) Clark has a strong silence when asked about his mom not bringing up issues of race. Did end up mentioning an article that she saw online about race and brought it up to him.
Individual Interview (4:41)	14.) Shelley discusses that she didn't know any people of color growing up outside of her mom (just prior to this she discusses her mom's background and how she was adopted by a white family).
Individual Interview (20:30)	15.) Shelley discusses that her family doesn't really talk about race - they are a quiet family. Can't recall any intense conversations. She says that he didn't want to talk about race because he didn't know about it at all.
Individual Interview (27:15) (29:00)	16.) Shelley talks about that overall her parents are supportive, but it is like "ok, cool". No conversation initiated by them. Then discusses her parents' overall racial attitudes. This is interesting. You get a feel for her parents' racism through benevolence. Later goes on to agree that her upbringing was race neutral.
Individual Interview (31:50)	17.) Shelley discusses that she never had to reckon with race because her parents didn't talk about it. Says it was fine for the most part and says that she wouldn't have had to come to terms with it if they were still in Texas. She thinks that her parents thought that race doesn't really matter.
Individual Interview (54:00)	18.) Shelley comes to the conclusion that her family should talk more about race and that

Vita

Shannon Nicole Jordan was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Public Administration from Grand Valley State University (Allendale, Michigan). She earned her Master of Science degree in College Student Personnel Administration from Kansas State University (Manhattan, Kansas) and Doctor of Education degree at Appalachian State University (Boone, North Carolina).

Shannon has worked as a student affairs administrator in college housing for fourteen years. She has been employed at Syracuse University (Syracuse, New York), Keene State College (Keene, New Hampshire), and Appalachian State University serving in each school's University Housing programs in various capacities. She is currently the Senior Associate Director of University Housing for Residence Life at Appalachian State University and is responsible for the oversight of 5700 students living in 20 residence halls. Shannon is active in her profession, serving in regional leadership positions and presenting at regional and national conferences.

Shannon plans to continue her work as a college housing administrator but also has future goals to begin her work speaking with parents and teachers about their responsibility in anti-racist work. Based on her research in this area, she also plans to pursue formal

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