

## Racial Socialization of Biracial Youth: Maternal Messages and Approaches to Address Discrimination

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### **Abstract:**

We explored how mothers of biracial youth prepare their children to navigate diverse racial ecologies and experiences of racism and discrimination. A qualitative thematic analysis was used to identify racial socialization messages mothers used and emergent racial socialization approaches. Mothers of biracial youth engaged in the full range of racial socialization discussed in the literature, including cultural, minority, self-development, egalitarian, and silent racial socialization. These messages varied by the biracial heritage of the youth, such that mothers of biracial youth with Black heritage were more likely to provide self-development racial socialization messages, whereas mothers of biracial youth without Black heritage were more likely to provide silent racial socialization. On the basis of the array of racial socialization messages mothers delivered, we identified three emergent approaches: promotive, protective, and passive racial socialization.

**Keywords:** biracial | ethnic minority family issues | family diversity by race | multiracial families | parenting | racial socialization

### **Article:**

For multiracial individuals, there is a permeability of racial group membership and an opportunity for fluid and plural self-defined racial labels and racial identities (Root, 1996). Despite the ways multiracial individuals may traverse racial categories or reveal the constructed nature of race, they must still navigate the symbolic, institutional, and interpersonal aspects of race (Collins, 1993). It is through interactions with others, especially parents, that children and youth gain insight regarding their racial heritage and learn to assume, resist, or negotiate the statuses associated with racial group membership. An important question is how parents of multiracial youth prepare them for a social position that may include not only multiple racial heritages but also racial categories that may include marginalized and privileged statuses. This study explores how multiracial families negotiate the borderlands of race within the American context and prepare their children to navigate the complexities of their racial heritage and social

position. Of particular interest are the racial socialization messages and approaches mothers use to help their biracial youth negotiate discrimination.

### **Racial Socialization: Racial Ecology, Adaptive Culture, and Socialization Approaches**

We used an integrative cultural ecological model, developed for the study of minority youth, (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) as a framework to conceptualize how racial context influences racial socialization practices of parents raising biracial youth. Although developed with a focus on monoracial minority children, it is a useful framework for the study of biracial youth because of its emphasis on understanding the experiences of children in relation to their social position and the influences of racism and discrimination that may impact their environment, resources, and, ultimately, developmental outcomes. To explore racial socialization in biracial families, we focused on two interconnected components of the integrative model: (a) racial ecology and (b) cultural adaptations and family and child influences.

*Racial ecology* refers to the racial context in which individuals are embedded, and it includes social position variables (e.g., race, social class, ethnicity, gender) that influence experiences of racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and privilege, which often results in segregation (residential, economic, social, and psychological). For biracial youth who are members of multiple marginalized racial groups or marginalized and nonmarginalized groups, racism, discrimination, and prejudice subjugate them via personal and institutional relationships. Moreover, because biracial youth exist between and transcend racial boundaries they often evoke contradictory stereotypes. Racial identification (ascribed and assumed) and appearance also influence biracial youths' acceptance and or rejection from the groups from which they were born (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). To negotiate this racial context parents with biracial youth are challenged, not unlike monoracial minority families, to develop adaptive strategies to negotiate the ecologies associated with their child's social position.

### **Dimensions of racial socialization**

Racial socialization is an adaptive strategy parents use to prepare children to negotiate experiences associated with social position. These strategies shape family and child characteristics and give meaning to and provide a context for racial consciousness, identity development, and cross-race relationships. Parents use racial socialization strategies to foster an understanding and awareness of race, racism, and racial privilege as well as enculturation of ethnic heritage and culture (Hughes et al., 2006; Quintana & Vera, 1999). There are multiple dimensions of racial socialization, which have been variously conceptualized (see Hughes et al., 2006, for a complete list), with a focus on three central areas: social position in a racially stratified society, ethnicity and culture, and a third focus, which has received less attention, political philosophies that deemphasize the salience of race and emphasize individual development.

When parents provide cultural experiences and talk about race and ethnicity, they help biracial youth sift through society's inconsistent, confusing, and prejudicial messages about race (Nakazawa, 2003). Open communication fosters racial awareness, reduces inconsistent messages, minimizes ambiguity, increases familial interaction, buffers youth from stereotype

threat effects, and decreases the effects of conflicting messages about race (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Rollins, 2009; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). Small qualitative studies of biracial families suggest, however, that parents of biracial youth provide very little racial socialization (Marbury, 2006; Samuels, 2009), and when they do, it typically includes messages that deemphasize race and is often in response to specific experiences of racism and prejudice as opposed to providing proactive preparation (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Samuels, 2009).

### **Social position in a racially stratified society**

Racial socialization messages impart parental perspectives regarding the current nature of race relations and their ideological perspectives about race. The racial socialization parents provide is also a reflection of parents' racial heritage, received racial socialization, racial identity, class, gender, experiences with racism and discrimination, beliefs, and values (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Ogbu, 1982; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Thornton, 1997). Parental racial socialization influences how children understand their group's social position and their membership within that group. Unlike monoracial youth, without a clearly defined "biracial or multiracial" group, biracial youth are socially positioned between hierarchically organized racial groups. Within the context of this racial ecology, parents prepare their children for what they perceive as their future position within a racially stratified society; for many biracial youth that means parental socialization toward monoracial identification. The monoracial identities that parents prepare children for reflect how racial categories are constructed (including phenotype) as well as the potential access to Whiteness, as the most privileged racial status. Parents, however, may also prepare their children for hoped for futures where racial categories are deemphasized (Orbe, 1999).

Within multiracial families, parents bring distinct racial experiences and racial identities as well as socialization experiences that prepared them for either privileged or marginalized statuses. Relying on intergenerational models of racial socialization, White parents are more likely to engage in racial socialization by answering questions and teaching equality, whereas African American parents are more likely to emphasize awareness of racial differences and preparation for bias (Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Thus, White parents of biracial youth are more likely to react to their child's experiences and queries (Marbury, 2006; Samuels, 2009) as opposed to proactively equipping them with the tools needed to negotiate racist and discriminatory institutions. Further, some White parents instruct biracial youth to ignore racist taunts (Samuels, 2009; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993), which may leave youth vulnerable and unprepared to address racial discrimination. There is little research on racial socialization among non-Black/White biracial families. Lee and Bean (2010) suggest, however, that Asian and Latino parents of non-Black biracial youth are adopting White/American identities for themselves and their youth; thus, their socialization efforts mirror that of White parents of biracial youth.

Racial socialization was historically conceptualized as strategies Black parents used to help their monoracial minority youth negotiate racial discrimination and to buffer racial stereotypes (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Peters, 1985). This *minority socialization* does not address multiracial experiences of racial exclusion and racial authenticity or experiencing racism and discrimination that is inconsistent with one's racial self-identification. Exploration of minority socialization among biracial families could broaden our understanding of how parents prepare

youth for different types of bias and how such preparation can aid youth whose racial identity challenges traditional racial classifications.

### **Ethnicity and culture**

Whereas discussions about racism and discrimination are difficult and may evoke negative emotions, socializing about one's ethnicity and culture is easier and occurs more naturally. Passing on cultural traditions and values is a socially accepted and socially expected parenting practice. Multiracial youth have unique access to multiple groups and an opportunity to integrate diverse traditions and values. Whereas parents can help youth celebrate these differences and understand how people are more interconnected than typically acknowledged, they also must decide what and how to pass on this knowledge. Interracial couples may have to negotiate what they pass on to their biracial youth. Unlike passing down one's own cultural traditions and values, imparting the traditions and values of another group is different in the absence of a lifetime of enculturation. History can be found in books, but cultural ethos and legacy reflect cultural knowledge that is personal and experiential.

Parents passively and actively transmit *cultural socialization* messages, which includes the cultural conditioning (Boykin & Toms, 1985) that reflects traditions and values directly related to cultural ethos and includes historical lessons that promote group pride and empowerment (Stevenson, 1995). Parents engage in cultural socialization more than any other racial socialization (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), and cross-ethnic findings suggest that it is a normative component of parental socialization for minority parents (Hughes, 2003). If both parents (or families) are not actively involved in this cultural socialization process, youth may find it more difficult to access this knowing and incorporate it into their identity. Providing cultural socialization is more complex for multiracial families than monoracial families, as it requires proactive forethought if biracial youth are being raised in monoracial environments, lack relationships with extended families from both racial groups, and live in single-family homes with limited or no access to the other-race parent.

### **Postracial society: Color blindness, humanism, and self-development**

Studies of racial socialization have emphasized minority and cultural socialization but have given less attention to political philosophies that deemphasize the salience of race or emphasize self-development. Thornton (1997) described this type of message as mainstream socialization, suggesting that in response to racial stratification, parents emphasize skills that are necessary for success in the dominant American society. Within the context of multiracial families, which often include both marginalized and privileged members, political philosophies that deemphasize race and encourage the acceptance of a de-raced American identity may be a strategy of racial socialization in which parents of biracial youth engage. It is noteworthy that the 2008 election of President Obama, as a biracial individual, was a catalyst for much of the public discourse about the emergence of a postracial America that is also predicated on color blindness (Wise, 2010). However, endorsing color-blind and postracial perspectives in a society where racial stratification persists does not challenge and helps to maintain the symbolic, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions of race and racial oppression. As Johnston and Nadal (2010) suggest,

denying or minimizing racism and discrimination multiracial people may face is a form of monoracism.

Among multiracial families *self-development socialization* messages, which emphasize individual development as opposed to group membership and solidarity (Hughes et al., 2006), may be more prevalent, as parents highlight the transcendent nature of their biracial child's racial heritage. With the exception of interracial couples where one partner is Black, focusing on self-development, positive character traits, and an endorsement of White/American cultural values reflects a growing sentiment among many interracial couples who believe that racial and ethnic boundaries do not matter for their children's life chances (Lee & Bean, 2010). Black parents of biracial youth may be more aware of the potential limitations of their child's racial boundary crossing whereas parents of non-Black biracial children (White and Asian or Latino) may not associate or encounter explicit negative racial experiences with their child. The latter may support parental socialization toward White/American identities for biracial youth, particularly when Asian and Latino parents see themselves as White/American and do not identify with an ethnic or minority experience (Lee & Bean, 2010).

Many parents identify their biracial child as human, maintaining that racial categories are unscientific and socially used to denigrate and separate; thus, not wanting to perpetuate the significance of racial classifications, parents advocate a color-blind perspective (Orbe, 1999). Few investigations have included color-blind messages; of those that have, findings suggest that the usage of color-blind messages is reported only by White parents (Hamm, 2001) and parents of biracial youth (Orbe, 1999). *Egalitarian socialization* deemphasizes racism and discrimination with the primary focus on promoting equality and acceptance of all people (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes et al., 2006). Instead of encouraging the abandonment of differences, parents espousing egalitarian messages encourage their children to celebrate all people, look beyond skin color, and treat everyone equally. It is the latter that distinguishes an egalitarian perspective from a color-blind or postracial ideology because it implicitly challenges racial inequality (i.e., not treating everyone equally). Unlike minority socialization, however, egalitarian socialization does not explicitly acknowledge or highlight racial inequality as a core feature of society. In a sample of three generations of Black families, Bowman and Howard (1985) found that only 12% of youth (14–24 years of age) reported receiving egalitarian messages. Socializing youth within a self-development, egalitarian, or color-blind worldview may leave them unprepared to handle the complexity inherent in race relations within the United States (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Nishimura, 1998).

Beyond expression of political philosophies through verbal racial socialization messages, parents may also deemphasize the salience of race through *silence*. Parents may choose not to provide any direct racial socialization in an attempt to avoid the harsh reality of racism and discrimination, or their silence may reflect the difficult nature of such a subject; however, silence speaks volumes. The absence of any racial socialization may be just as powerful and important as overt messages (Hughes et al., 2006). White, Asian, and Latino parents are less likely than Black parents to provide racial socialization, especially minority socialization (Hughes et al., 2006). The distinction between European American ethnicities has decreased (Waters, 1990) as the perceived racial distinctions have diminished such that these ethnicities are now broadly viewed as White. Similarly, recent sociological investigations suggest a declining emphasis on

racial differences between Whites, Asians, and Latinos (Lee & Bean, 2010). When Asian, Latino, and Whites intermarry, the racial boundaries between them may become less salient. If race and ethnicity become less salient for Asian and Latino parents in biracial families, parents may be less likely to engage in discussions about racial discrimination.

Investigations of racial socialization have primarily focused on the content, antecedents, and consequences of the above mentioned racial socialization dimensions and often do not report the percentage of parents who indicate that they do not racially socialize their children. Stevenson, Reed, and Bodison (1996) found, however, that 49% of Black young adults reported they had talked in their families about racism and discrimination; thus, we presume that about 51% of young adults in this sample had not done so. Likewise, Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) found that 64% of Black parents reported racially socializing their children; thus, about 36% did not report using any racial socialization. Bowman and Howard (1985) found that Black youth (38%) who reported receiving no racial socialization had lower self-efficacy scores and lower academic achievement than youth who received racial socialization. Silence, either as a strategy, oversight, or lack of knowledge, may be problematic for biracial youth who are negotiating permeable—and not so permeable—racial boundaries and developing their racial identity and racial understanding.

Whether directly or through their silence, all parents provide racial socialization. What has yet to be explored is how mothers who do not share the same social location as their biracial youth prepare their children to negotiate racial discrimination. To explore parental racial socialization in families where parents and their children traverse race, cultures, and racial ecologies, we examined the racial socialization messages that mothers of biracial youth use with their children and variations in these messages by maternal race and the biracial heritage of their children. On the basis of the diverse array of racial socialization messages they impart, we also explored emergent racial socialization approaches used by mothers of biracial youth. This approach is particularly useful for multiracial families where parents are blending their racial experiences as well as developing racial socialization practices for their children whose racial status, experiences with race, and racial self-perceptions are likely to be different from their own.

## **Method**

Data for this study are from a public-use subsample of the longitudinal Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS; Eccles, 1997). The purpose of the MADICS was to describe and understand the influences of social context on the psychological determinants of behavioral choices and developmental trajectories during adolescence. Data were collected from multiple informants in an economically and ethnically diverse sample of adolescents and their families.

Six waves of data were collected from the adolescents, their parents (both mothers and fathers), and one older sibling via in-home and telephone interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Data collection began in 1991 as the adolescents entered middle school (seventh grade), and the most recent wave was conducted 3 years after high school graduation. The current investigation utilized data from the primary caregiver and the target child at Wave I (1991) and Wave III (1993). The sample at Wave I included 1,482 families who had a seventh grader attending a

public seventh- and eighth-grade junior high school. The adolescent sample was approximately evenly split, with 51% boys and 49% girls. The adult sample was predominately female (92%) and identified as 61.3% Black, 33.3% White, 2.2% Asian, 1.6% other, 1.1% Latino, and 0.5% American Indian.

## Identification of Biracial Families

The MADICS was not designed to specifically address the experiences of biracial families; however, the diverse ways race was captured made it possible to identify multiracial families and youth. Both the youth and the primary caregiver identified the target child's race. Questions about race were asked in multiple formats (i.e., open ended, self-administered, multiple choice), across several waves of data, and respondents were allowed to choose more than one race, and in some cases were given “mixed” as a choice. These varied approaches captured the fluid, shifting, and situational identifications prevalent among biracial people. For this investigation, *biracial* refers to a person whose biological parents are from two different racial groups. Three approaches were used to identify a biracial sample. Youth were often identified by more than one approach; thus, groups are not mutually exclusive. First, biological mothers and fathers who were both involved in the investigation were identified. Of those identified, adolescents were selected if mothers' and fathers' self-identified racial categories were different from each other ( $n = 10$ ). This investigation was limited to first-generation biracial adolescents; thus, parents who identified themselves as biracial were excluded from this sample. Second, adolescents were selected if the mother identified the adolescent as biracial ( $n = 47$ ). Third, adolescents were selected if they identified themselves as biracial ( $n = 50$ ). There were a few adolescents ( $n = 6$ ) who were only identified as “biracial” and a single monoracial identification; thus, we were unable to identify their exact biracial heritage. They were coded as biracial and retained in the sample. Because of the fluidity of racial identity and the multiple identity choices biracial people may select (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002) and the potentially divergent racial categories parents may use to describe their child (Rollins & Hunter, 2008), adolescents were included if they were identified by at least one of the approaches at either Wave I or Wave III.

## Sample

The sample consists of 73 biological mothers (adoptive mothers were excluded), whose mean age was 38.17 years ( $SD = 5.6$ ), and their biracial children, whose mean age was 12.27 years ( $SD = 0.55$ ). The majority of mothers were married (58.9%,  $n = 43$ ), and on average their household income was between \$40,000 and \$45,000 annually. Mothers racially identified themselves as Black (42.5%,  $n = 31$ ), White (39.7%,  $n = 29$ ), Asian (11%,  $n = 8$ ), Latino (4.1%,  $n = 3$ ), American Indian (1.4%,  $n = 1$ ), and other (1.4%,  $n = 1$ ). There were 10 biracial heritages of youth including Black/White (32.9%,  $n = 24$ ), Black/American Indian (24.7%,  $n = 18$ ), Latino/White (9.6%,  $n = 7$ ), Biracial (8.2%,  $n = 6$ ; specific biracial heritage undeterminable), Asian/White (8.2%,  $n = 6$ ), American Indian/White (6.8%,  $n = 5$ ), Black/Latino (4.1%,  $n = 3$ ), Black/Asian (2.7%,  $n = 2$ ), Asian/American Indian (1.4%,  $n = 1$ ), and Asian/Latino (1.4%,  $n = 1$ ).

## Data Analytic Strategies

In the MADICS, mothers were asked in face-to-face interviews about racial socialization. The following questions were asked: (a) What kinds of things are you doing for (child) to protect (him/her) from being discriminated against because (he/she) is (race)? (b) Are you trying to teach (him/her) any special things to help (him/her) deal with discrimination? (c) What are you teaching (him/her)? Interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. The MADICS research team conducted qualitative analyses and coding of the open-ended responses, which resulted in summarized qualitative text. Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was used in the current study to identify racial socialization messages (variables) from the summarized qualitative text. These racial socialization messages were then used in comparative analyses to explore group variations. This methodology was chosen to explore the application of current racial socialization conceptualizations, to identify emergent approaches, and to examine the prevalence of racial socialization messages within groups. Because of the small number of mothers who were not Black or White and the diverse combinations of biracial heritage of youth, for the purpose of comparative analyses, the racial categories of mothers and biracial youth were collapsed. Mothers' racial categories include Black ( $n = 31$ ), other minority (including Asian, Latino, American Indian, and other;  $n = 13$ ), and White ( $n = 29$ ). For biracial youth, racial categories include Black/White ( $n = 24$ ), Black/other minority ( $n = 23$ ), White/other minority ( $n = 18$ ), and other minority/other minority ( $n = 8$ ). Because of small cell sizes, the other minority/other minority biracial category was dropped in chi-square analyses.

### **Racial socialization messages**

For each mother, a list of summary statements was generated from their responses to the open-ended racial socialization questions. The statements were reviewed several times to get a sense of the type of racial socialization messages discussed by mothers. The statements were then grouped by similar sentiment and reviewed for overlap and redundancy. Once the statements were thematically organized, the racial socialization literature was used to label the messages. Statements were coded as cultural, minority, self-development, egalitarian, or silence. On the basis of the racial socialization literature, statements focused on developing a sense of pride, fostering group affiliation, and passing on cultural traditions and values were coded as *cultural socialization*. Statements that prepared youth for experiences with racism and discrimination were coded as *minority socialization*. Statements encouraging youth to do their best, to be smart, and to be respectful were coded as *self-development socialization*. Statements that encouraged a color-blind perspective and promoted the equality of races were coded as *egalitarian socialization*. The absence of a response and mothers who responded that they do nothing were coded as *silence*. Two raters, coding each statement to identify what type of message it represented, achieved 86% interrater agreement. Points of disagreement were resolved by discussion so that 100% consensus was reached.

### **Racial socialization approaches**

Coding for individual messages (as listed above) revealed that more than a third of mothers use more than one type of racial socialization message. Cross-classifications of the racial socialization messages were analyzed to evaluate how the racial socialization data could be layered to reflect the single and multiple racial socialization messages parents use and to identify patterns and intersections (Patton, 2002). Examination of the interconnections between the

messages revealed an emergent pattern that allowed us to divide parents into three groups: (a) those who provided minority socialization, alone or paired with other message (*protective socialization*); (b) those who provided cultural, self-development, and/or egalitarian socialization, but did not provide minority socialization (promotive socialization); and (c) parents who were silent (passive socialization). To evaluate the validity of the approaches identified, multiple raters assigned individual messages and combinations of messages to each emergent racial socialization approach based on narrative descriptions provided for each approach. Interrater agreement was 90%.

## Findings

### Racial Socialization Messages

The majority of mothers (64%,  $n = 47$ ) engaged in racial socialization with their biracial youth. Among these mothers, the full range of racial socialization messages was evident, including cultural (CS), minority (MS), self-development (SDS), and egalitarian (ES) racial socialization messages. Mothers of biracial youth were most likely to use self-development messages (49%,  $n = 36$ ). Minority socialization was used by 27% ( $n = 20$ ) of mothers, and egalitarian socialization messages were used by 24% ( $n = 18$ ) of mothers. Cultural socialization was used by the fewest mothers (12%,  $n = 9$ ). Thirty-six percent ( $n = 26$ ) of mothers did not engage in any racial socialization (silence). Paired analyses were conducted for each racial socialization message (dummy coded) by maternal race (Black, White, other minority). Statistical analyses (exact likelihood ratio chi-square tests) confirmed that racial socialization messages did not vary by maternal race (CS:  $p = .04$ ; MS:  $p = .06$ ; SDS:  $p = .01$ ; ES:  $p = .06$ ; silence:  $p = .34$ ). Among mothers engaged in racial socialization, 38% used more than one type of racial socialization messages.

Table 1 illustrates examples of summary statements for each type of racial socialization message. Mothers who engaged in *cultural socialization* educated their children about current events and the history, heritage, and legacy of their people and encouraged youth to take part in cultural activities. They focused on the legacy of their cultural heritage and encouraged their children to trust in a higher power as a strategy for dealing with racial discrimination. Mothers who engaged in *minority socialization* taught youth to expect racial discrimination, to fight against it, and how to respond to it, and mothers served as role models for how to fight against historical racial atrocities, civil rights violations, and present-day inequities. Youth were encouraged to be strong and stand up for their rights but also warned that they must work harder, be competitive, and outperform others to combat the racism and discrimination they will face. Mothers cautioned that race is not an excuse, they cannot be hostile, they must exercise self-control, and, above all else, they must be prepared—prepared for an opportunity to shine and also prepared for inevitable inequities. Mothers who engaged in *self-development socialization* focused on the development of self-esteem and positive character traits and encouraged a strong work ethic. Mothers focused on how to communicate with people, on how to be a leader, and on the importance of getting a good education. Mothers who engaged in *egalitarian socialization* taught their children about other cultural groups and encouraged interactions with a diverse group of people. Mothers valued equality and acceptance and taught their children to respect all people, not to be prejudiced, and not to assume others are prejudiced.

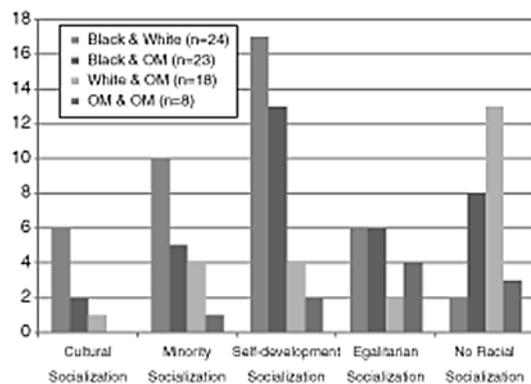
**Table 1. Racial Socialization Messages**

Racial Socialization Message	Summarized Qualitative Statements (Examples)
Cultural socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach child to be proud of race and heritage</li> <li>• Encourage positive view of own race</li> <li>• Educate about racial heritage, history, background</li> </ul>
Minority socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate and foster awareness about racism and discrimination, teach child to be aware of racism and discrimination, explain why discrimination occurs</li> <li>• Teach child his or her rights</li> <li>• Teach child to stand up for his or her rights, stand up for what he or she believes in</li> <li>• Work harder than others, outperform others, be competitive, be the best at what you do</li> <li>• Encourage child to ignore discrimination and racism, do not let it get to her or him, do not get hostile, do not get upset, self-control</li> <li>• Be prepared</li> </ul>
Self-development socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-respect, self-acceptance, positive self-view, promoting self-esteem</li> <li>• Work hard, satisfaction from activities, work hard for satisfaction</li> <li>• You can accomplish anything you set your mind to, you can accomplish your goals, encourage to fulfill potential</li> <li>• Be good at what you do, be the best you can, pursue goals, use abilities</li> <li>• Be considerate, caring, kind, a good person, honest</li> <li>• Good behavior, appropriate behavior</li> <li>• Treat others as you would like to be treated</li> </ul>
Egalitarian socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage interactions, getting to know people of other races</li> <li>• Awareness of other ethnicities, teaching child about different races and cultures</li> <li>• Respect for others, others' worth</li> <li>• Teach child that there are no significant differences between people of different races, encourage "color blindness"</li> <li>• Not be prejudiced, all people are created equal, including child</li> </ul>

**Variations in Racial Socialization Messages and Youth's Biracial Heritage**

Figure 1 shows the number of mothers who engaged in racial socialization by type of message and the youths' biracial heritage. Maternal racial socialization messages did vary by youths' biracial heritage. Seventy-one percent of mothers with Black/White biracial youth engaged in

self-development socialization, compared to 57% of mothers with Black/other minority biracial youth and 22% of mothers with White/other minority biracial youth,  $\chi^2(1, n = 65) = 9.99, p = .007$ . In addition, 72% of mothers with White/other minority biracial youth engaged in silent racial socialization, compared to 35% of mothers with Black/other minority biracial youth and 8% of mothers with Black/White biracial youth,  $\chi^2(1, n = 65) = 18.37, p = .000$ . Thus, mothers of biracial children with Black heritage were engaged in self-development racial socialization more frequently than mothers of children without Black heritage. Mothers of biracial youth with White and other minority racial heritages engaged in silent racial socialization most frequently, whereas mothers of biracial youth with Black/White heritage engaged in silent racial socialization least frequently.



**Figure 1.** Racial Socialization Messages by Biracial Heritage of Youth.

### Racial Socialization Approaches

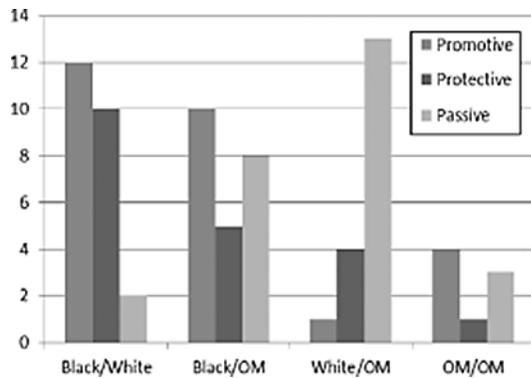
Thematic analysis of the constellation of racial socialization messages mothers used revealed three approaches to racial socialization: promotive, protective, and passive racial socialization. Table 2 shows the frequency of each racial socialization approach and the racial socialization messages (individual and paired messages) embedded within each approach. Thirty-seven percent ( $n = 27$ ) of mothers engaged in a promotive racial socialization approach, 27% ( $n = 20$ ) of mothers engaged in a protective racial socialization approach, and 36% ( $n = 26$ ) of mothers used a passive racial socialization approach. A *promotive racial socialization approach* focuses on strengthening the child's sense of self, believing in one's ability, and passing on cultural traditions and values. Mothers emphasize equality and encourage a color-blind worldview with no preparation for or direct teaching about racial discrimination. A *protective racial socialization approach* focuses on preparing children for experiences with racial discrimination, but this preparation for discrimination is tempered by encouraging their child to be the best he or she can be and strengthening their child's sense of self as a member of a racial group. Mothers encourage their children to stand up for their rights but also to exercise self-control, be respectful, and not forget where they came from. Mothers emphasized the importance of equality for all people but explicitly prepared their children for discriminatory experiences. Mothers who engaged in a *passive racial socialization approach* either indicated they did nothing to prepare their children for discriminatory experiences or did not answer the question posed by the interviewer. Statistical analysis (exact likelihood ratio chi-square tests) of racial socialization approaches (promotive, protective, passive) by maternal race (Black, White, other minority) confirmed that racial socialization approaches did not vary by maternal race ( $p = .65$ ).

**Table 2. Racial Socialization Approaches**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Messages</b>
Promotive socialization (37%, <i>n</i> = 27)	Self-development
	Egalitarian
	Self-development and egalitarian
	Cultural and self-development
	Cultural and self-development and egalitarian
	Cultural
Protective socialization (27.4%, <i>n</i> = 20)	Minority and self-development
	Minority socialization
	Cultural and minority and self-development
	Minority and egalitarian
	Minority and self-development and egalitarian
Passive socialization (35.6%, <i>n</i> = 26)	Cultural and minority
	Silence

### **Variations in Racial Socialization Approaches and Youth's Biracial Heritage**

Figure 2 shows the number of mothers who engaged in each racial socialization approach by type of message and the youths' biracial heritage. Mothers' racial socialization approaches did vary by the biracial heritage of the youth. Fifty percent of mothers with a Black/White child engaged in promotive socialization compared to 44% of mothers with a Black/other minority child and 6% of mothers with a White/other minority child,  $\chi^2(1, n = 65) = 9.91, p = .007$ . In addition, 72% of mothers with a White/other minority child engaged in passive racial socialization compared to 44% of mothers with a Black/other minority child and 8% of mothers with a Black/White child,  $\chi^2(1, n = 65) = 18.37, p = .000$ . There were no differences in the engagement in the protective socialization approach,  $\chi^2(1, n = 65) = 2.85, p = .24$ .



**Figure 2.** Racial Socialization Approaches by Biracial Heritage of Youth.

## Discussion

Biracial youth must navigate diverse racial ecologies and potential experiences of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. This study explored racial socialization mothers of biracial youth used to prepare their children for discrimination. Mothers engaged in a variety of racial socialization messages, including cultural, minority, self-development, and egalitarian messages and also remained silent with regard to racial socialization. Although the racial experiences of biracial families and youth are distinctive, this study indicated mothers engaged in the same range of racial socialization messages delivered in monoracial minority families (Hughes et al., 2006). Previous studies suggest there may be variations in racial socialization by mothers' race; we found none. The racial socialization in which mothers engaged did, however, vary by the biracial heritage of their children. This suggests, not unlike those of monoracial minority parents, expectations about the discrimination and prejudice their children may face influences how mothers of biracial youth prepare their children for discrimination. In addition, we identified emergent racial socialization approaches (promotive, protective, and passive) that provide further insight into the complexities of racial socialization of biracial youth and are suggestive of mothers' socialization goals. That is, mothers' racial socialization approaches are indicative of a repertoire of strategies available for youth to counter or buffer discrimination they may face as biracial individuals.

### **Biracial Heritage of Youth: Preparing for Discrimination**

Within the United States, racial groups differ in the value ascribed to them, their risk of bias and negative stereotypes, and in the social position, resources, and power available to them. The variation in racial socialization messages by the biracial heritage of youth is suggestive of the ways mothers are tailoring racial socialization to the perceived needs of the biracial youth given the social location of the racial groups that are part of the youth's heritage. Biracial youth with any Black heritage (Black/White, Black/other minority) are more likely to receive self-development racial socialization to prepare them for discrimination. Thornton et al. (1990) also found that Black parents use these types of messages, which they termed mainstream socialization, to prepare children to negotiate the dominant (White) society. In contrast, parents

with biracial youth who are White and Asian, American Indian, or Latino are more likely to be silent with regard to racial socialization.

Differences in the racial socialization for biracial youth with Black heritage (in combination with any other racial group) and for non-Black biracial youth are suggestive of actual or perceived differences in social hierarchies of biracial people. Moreover, Lee and Bean (2010) would argue that the patterns we observe reflect Black exceptionalism in the social constructions of race within the United States. Specifically, there are not only differences in perceptions of the racial distance between Whites and groups of color, but there is also a convergence of racial boundaries between Whites, Asian, and Latinos even as the Black and non-Black divide persists. For mothers of biracial youth with Black heritage, self-development racial socialization, which focuses on striving, working harder, and being one's best, not only may counter the effects of bias, discrimination, and stereotypes encountered but also are strategies that can lead children to be successful despite biases they may face. In contrast, mothers of non-Black biracial youth are more likely not to provide racial socialization to prepare youth for racial discrimination. Mothers with non-Black biracial youth may underestimate the importance of preparing and protecting their biracial child from race-based discrimination.

### **Approaches to Racial Socialization in Biracial Families**

On the basis of a qualitative analysis of the array of racial socialization messages used, we identified racial socialization approaches among mothers of biracial youth. These approaches—promotive, protective, and passive—illustrate how mothers layer racial socialization messages to provide nuanced strategies to help children prepare for potential bias and discrimination. Moreover, Stevenson, Herrero-Taylor, Cameron, and Davis (2002) suggested that combining racial socialization messages that prepare youth for racism and discrimination with education, awareness, and racial pride better equips youth to negotiate their minority status. When mothers of biracial youth provide promotive and or protective socialization, they provide information about their child's dual racial heritage, transmit family beliefs and values, and prepare biracial adolescents to respond to multiracial microaggressions. A protective approach explicitly prepares youth for negative racial experiences; parents talk openly about racism and discrimination and provide specific lessons about how to handle these experiences, whereas a promotive approach builds the youth's sense of self, preparing them to be successful in the face of racial discrimination. When mothers actively deliver racial socialization, they provide biracial adolescents with tools to negotiate a racially polarized society and experiences of racial discrimination. Studies of racial socialization among monoracial minority families are now beginning to look at the cluster of racial socialization messages delivered. For example, Black adolescents received clusters of racial socialization messages (Neblett et al., 2008), but our study is a first effort to identify racial socialization approaches in biracial families with diverse racial heritages.

### **Theorizing Racial Socialization in Biracial Families: Future Directions**

Racial socialization, as conceptualized in the parenting literature on Black families, reflects the intersections of race, ethnicity, and culture. Indeed, the dimensions of racial socialization include both preparation for racial inequality and enculturation with the understanding that each may

help children negotiate racial discrimination and buffer racial stereotypes. This investigation is exploratory and descriptive, yet it is suggestive of the ways racial socialization among biracial families may mirror that found among monoracial minority families. The study of racial socialization, whether monoracial or multiracial, requires that we attend to the meanings of race and systems of inequality that maintain racial hierarchies. Moreover, enculturation may not only inform biracial youth of their cultural heritages and shape ethnic identities, but parents may use cultural socialization to buffer children from a marginalized minority experience. For parents of biracial youth, this may also include making sure they understand and appreciate the cultural heritages of the racial groups to which they belong.

Yet, to acknowledge that the hegemonies and social realities of race also impact biracial youth and their families in ways that overlap with monoracial minorities, especially when Black racial heritage is present, is not to suggest that racial socialization in biracial families is not distinctive. Parents of biracial youth may engage in socialization that addresses the unique challenges (and perhaps rewards and privileges) associated with transgressing racial boundaries. As the MADICS study did not specifically explore these issues, we do not know what socialization messages parents delivered that were specifically connected to rearing biracial youth. For example, the ways biracial youth transgress racial boundaries can also lead to tensions with monoracial groups, both Whites and racial minorities. In addition, studies of racial socialization have largely focused on stigmatized racial minorities, but it is also important to consider whether parents of biracial youth engage in aspects of White racial socialization. We need to better understand how parents of biracial children apply different types of racial socialization messages and strategies that may overlap to address different aspects of their experience. For example, self-development, minority, and cultural socialization messages may all help biracial youth navigate interpersonal tensions that result because they “don't fit” into a monoracial group as well as the ways they will be viewed as part of a stigmatized racial group. Egalitarian and color-blind racial socialization may help biracial youth negotiate the transgressive nature of their dual heritage and buffer negative stereotypes. Additional research should explore approaches to racial socialization and what parents convey about race, group membership, and race relations through racial socialization.

The socially constructed meanings of race as well as racial stratification within the United States place multiracial families and their offspring at differential risk for bias and racial discrimination. Indeed, we found that two thirds of mothers engage in racial socialization to prepare their children for discrimination, and differences in this socialization suggest that mothers are aware of and responsive to their child's social location. The changing racial landscape in the United States, however, including an increase in multiracial immigrants, decreased stigma against biracial couples, and the overall increase in the population that identify themselves as multiracial, may signal a shift in the experiences of multiracial families and youth, especially, if these shifts disrupt social meanings of race and Black exceptionalism.

This investigation examined mothers' self-reported messages about how they prepare their children for and protect their child from racial discrimination. It is unclear how often mothers provide racial socialization and whether they convey these messages in daily conversations or, with more foresight, in planned conversations. We used a self-reported measure of racial socialization that may have elicited messages parents want to deliver or believe they should

deliver but may not reflect actual socialization practices. In addition, self-reported racial socialization messages do not capture the decision-making process (or lack thereof) preceding socialization and cannot account for other contextual factors (i.e., phenotype, antecedents to socialization, who initiated, sociopolitical context) and the role of other socialization agents. Further, what mothers do to combat discrimination may not represent the full range of messages mothers of biracial youth use to communicate about race, group membership, and race relations. Additional research should explore the frequency of racial socialization messages in multiracial families, the influence of phenotype, differences between mothers and fathers, and how parents make decisions about co-socialization of biracial youth and further explore the array of racial socialization messages that reflect parents' approach to racial socialization in biracial families.

### **Implications for Parent Education**

Racial socialization buffers youth from racism and discrimination, gives meaning to their social location, and provides information that aids in the development of racial identity. Multiracial youth, however, experience race differently from monoracial groups (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Lacking a shared racial experience, parents of biracial youth may feel ill prepared to help youth navigate their unique dual heritage. We found that one third of mothers of biracial youth are not actively providing racial socialization. Parents may assume that biracial heritage, particularly if it does not include Black racial heritage or alternatively because it includes White racial heritage, protects children from discrimination and, thus, do not expect challenges or are unaware of the challenges their biracial child may face. Parent education for multiracial families can help parents identify the unique challenges their youth may face, including monoracism and racial microaggressions (see Johnston & Nadal, 2010, for a complete list). Parents can also be informed about approaches to racial socialization and the importance of providing proactive and promotive racial socialization for biracial youth. Thus, parent education can help parents make informed decisions about the strategies they develop to prepare their biracial child to not only successfully navigate their racial status and potential discrimination but to also support positive racial identity development.

There is a plethora of opportunities and resources for adoptive families (especially transracial adoption), but providing parent education for biological parents is more challenging. Unfortunately, most parents only seek guidance when they have or perceive a problem with their child. Thus, we suggest unconventional methods for providing parent education and for attracting multiracial families. Using social media, blogs, and podcasts will heighten awareness and increase visibility of available education and resources. Partnering with community groups that provide support and advocacy for multiracial people (e.g., [ameasite.org](http://ameasite.org), [mavinfooundation.org](http://mavinfooundation.org), [swirlinc.org](http://swirlinc.org)) will attract persons seeking support and information. Developing support groups and advertising available resources through schools, pediatricians, and churches could also help attract multiracial families. Moreover, highlighting the psychological, academic, and social benefits of racial socialization will attract multiracial parents. After all, parents want their multiracial children to have the best of both worlds.

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