Making sense of the mix: understanding the role of family dynamics in the racial identity experiences of black-white emerging adults

Crystal Austin
University at Albany, State University of New York, claustin@albany.edu

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Counseling Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
MAKING SENSE OF THE MIX: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF FAMILY DYNAMICS IN THE RACIAL IDENTITY EXPERIENCES OF BLACK-WHITE EMERGING ADULTS

by

Crystal L. Austin

A Dissertation Submitted
to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology

2018
Dedication

To the participants of this study and to my therapy clients, past present and future. I am grateful and humbled that you have shared your stories with me. I honor your trust in me and the strength in your vulnerability. Thank you.
Acknowledgements

It has taken a beautifully dynamic, never perfect, ever resilient village to get me to this point in my life. I am full of gratitude for my many blessings and would like to acknowledge those who have encouraged and supported my journey to pursuing a doctoral degree.

Thank you to my advisor and chair Dr. Micki Friedlander, who in our first meeting during my first week of graduate school told me that “it wasn’t a mistake” that I was accepted into the program. Those words, and the direct and indirect reminders from Micki, Dr. Alex Pieterse and other supports throughout my time in the program were held close to my heart each time I doubted my belongingness in a world that I never thought could be for me. Thank you to Micki, Alex, and Dr. Kelly Wissman for their invaluable roles on my committee. I so appreciate your facilitation of me finding my voice in order to help give voice to my participants’ stories.

In addition to the above professional mentors, I would like to express my appreciation for the Binghamton University McNair Scholars program, Dr. Matthew Johnson, Dr. Leo Wilton, Dr. Jared McShall and other supervisors and teachers throughout my education. I am certain that if it were not for your faith in me, I would not have dreamed of having what it takes to be in this elite group of professionals who I respect and admire so much.

Thank you to my college friends who have become family and have supported me in all of my post-Binghamton endeavors, especially Vanessa, Noah, Janie, Luisa, Dorothy and Sharisse. Thank you to my graduate cohort members and dear Counseling Psychology friends, especially Lauren Dasen, Patricia Cabrera, Shantel Powell, Abi Nicolas, Abi Dubovi, Gabrielle Groth, Andrew Gibson, Natalia Ruiz de Cortazar Gracia, and Laura Kortz. Having you all through this professional and personal journey has given me so much strength and has kept me grounded through humor and a sense of community. An extra special thanks to Dr. Michael Gale and (soon-to-be Dr.) Christina Martin for their tireless hours of reading and coding. We will
forever be connected through the meaningful journey of learning through the narratives of the participants.

Thank you to my partner Greg for your love of and commitment to my dreams. From driving me through snowstorms to get to internship interviews, to supporting me in all ways through the dissertation process, having you in my corner has been liberating, empowering, and unlike anything I’ve ever known. Thank you for being.

I am thankful always for the love and support of my family whose pride in me can never be doubted. Thank you to my Ma, Aunt Rosie, Aunt Joanie, Aunt Josie, Aunt Theresa, Aunt Barbara, and Bobby, whose attitudes of resilience and prioritization of family embody the values that I too hold and hope to be remembered for. Thank you to my cousins Julie, Joe, Ron, and Gary, through whom I first learned the bonds of siblinghood. Thank you to my brother Nick, whose challenges and triumphs have shaped my narrative of empathy, forgiveness and hope. Thank you to my family members who are no longer on here Earth, but whose presence is felt throughout my life and whose memories I honor through my achievements, especially my father Charles Austin, Aunt Linda, Papa Joe, and Eddie.

Finally, words cannot express my appreciation to God for bringing me to and through each chapter in life. I am always where I need to be, to learn, to grow, and to be reminded of your power, your mercy and your love for me.
Abstract

As a population, Black-White (B-W) biracial individuals have been relatively overlooked and underserved in the psychological literature. Although some theoretical attention has been paid to the racial identity development of biracial individuals, research is lacking on the psychological processes influencing the identity experiences of these individuals (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Specifically, little is known about how adults’ family-of-origin dynamics influence the racial identity construction process of B-W individuals.

The current study was designed to provide a rich understanding of how some B-W biracial emerging adults construct a racial identity when they were raised by monoracial parents. The general research question was: how do Black-White biracial emerging adults view the role of family dynamics in their racial identity experiences? Theories of racial identity (Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), parental attachment (Ainsworth, 1991), racial socialization (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), and family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) were used to inform the study. The research question builds on the relevant literature in that racial identity is viewed as complex and informed by multiple layers of individuals’ identities and environments.

Giorgi’s (2009) phenomenological analysis was used to identify salient themes in participants’ narratives in order to develop a rich conceptual understanding of the racial identity construction process for B-W biracial individuals. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 10 B-W emerging adults. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed by a coding team. Fourteen sub-themes were identified from the narrative data, organized into three larger themes: Interactions with Family Members Contributed to Individuals’ Experience and Understanding of Race, Experience of Race and Racial Tension Affected Family Dynamics, and How the Family Addressed Racial/Biracial
Identity was Influential. The thematic results (e.g., *Awareness That Neither Parent Could Fully Relate to the Biracial Experience*, *Allyship/connectedness with the Parent of Color due to Shared Experiences of Marginalization*) were consistent with the literature on the role of racial socialization and family dynamics in racial identity construction. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for theory, practice, and future research with this population.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................. iii

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................. vii

List of Tables and Appendices ............................................................................................................... viii

Statement of the Problem and Review of Literature ................................................................. 1

Method .................................................................................................................................................. 11

Personal and Professional Motivations ................................................................................................. 11

Participants ........................................................................................................................................... 12

Design ................................................................................................................................................... 13

Interview Protocol ................................................................................................................................. 14

Procedure ............................................................................................................................................. 16

Reflexivity and Social Positioning ......................................................................................................... 18

Results .................................................................................................................................................. 22

Qualitative Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 22

Validity and Trustworthiness .................................................................................................................. 23

Themes and Sub-themes .......................................................................................................................... 25

Discussion ............................................................................................................................................. 36

Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory ................................................................................. 36

Racial Socialization Theory .................................................................................................................... 40

Implications for Practice ....................................................................................................................... 42
Strengths and Limitations ................................................................. 44

Recommendations for Future Research .............................................. 46

References .......................................................................................... 49

Tables ................................................................................................... 59
  Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Characteristics .......................... 59
  Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Additional Significance Statements .... 60

Appendices ......................................................................................... 68
  A: Interview Protocol and Follow-up Interview Protocol ..................... 68
  B: Demographic Questionnaire .......................................................... 70
  C: Recruitment ................................................................................... 71
  D: Consent Form ................................................................................ 72
  E: Debriefing ..................................................................................... 74
  F: Coding Team Positionality Statements .......................................... 75
  G: Sociopolitical Context Positionality Statement ............................ 78
List of Tables and Appendices

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Characteristics .................................................. 59
Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Additional Significance Statements ....................... 60
Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Follow-up Interview Protocol .......................... 68
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire .................................................................. 70
Appendix C: Recruitment .......................................................................................... 71
Appendix D: Consent Form ......................................................................................... 72
Appendix E: Debriefing ............................................................................................ 74
Appendix F: Coding Team Positionality Statements .................................................. 75
Appendix G: Sociopolitical Context Positionality Statement ...................................... 78
Statement of the Problem and Review of Literature

Due to increased globalization and other sociopolitical changes in the U.S., ethnic and racial pluralism has burgeoned. Currently, people who self-identify as both Black and White make up the largest multiracial group in the U.S., with more than 1.8 million people and a 134% growth in this population between 2000 and 2010 (Frey, 2014). Trends suggest continued growth of multiracial populations beyond that of any monoracial group (Frey, 2014). Accordingly, psychologists need to gain a greater understanding of these individuals’ lived experiences, which was the general aim of the current phenomenological study.

Authors have long recognized that racial identification is more complex for multiracial than for monoracial individuals due to the necessity to differentiate and navigate two or more ancestral heritages (Coleman & Carter, 2007). For Black-White (B-W) biracial individuals, the process of navigating the political, social, economic, and cultural disparities between Blacks and Whites presents a particular challenge. In addition to having ties to two highly divergent cultures, these individuals are often pressured to choose a single racial identity, which may contribute to their development of anxious and depressive symptoms (Coleman & Carter, 2007). Racial self-identification is further complicated by trauma experienced on a personal and group level due to the historic and ongoing oppression of Blacks by Whites in the U.S.

The current study was designed to provide a rich understanding of how some B-W biracial emerging adults construct a racial identity when they were raised by monoracial parents. Although scholars in several disciplines (e.g., Miville, Constantine, Baysden & So-Lloyd, 2005) have written about racial identity in multiracial individuals, there is no generally accepted conceptual model of identity construction for this population. While some relevant literature has

---

1 In this paper, the term Black refers to individuals who identify as African American, although in other literature the term is used to identify any individuals with African ancestry (e.g., Afro-Caribbean).
been published (Bowles, 1993; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Katz, 1996; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), although research on the psychological factors that contribute to the development of a multiracial identity is sorely lacking (Renn, 2008). This lack is especially problematic since B-W individuals who have monoracial parents differ from their parents in various ways that can influence their mental health and wellness (Gushue & Sicalides, 1997).

Much of the research relevant to the present study is based on social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1971), which describes a person’s self-identification as largely based on social perception, particularly how the person’s phenotype is interpreted or labeled by others. As one theorist put it, multiracial individuals are particularly challenged because the complexity of their social identities makes it difficult for them to obtain a solid sense of how others view them (Bodenhausen, 2010).

*Colorism* likely plays a role in the self-identity of B-W individuals. This concept, which is historically related to slavery, derives from a time in U.S. history when a light skin tone implied Whiteness, elite status (Kerr, 2005), and positive personal attributes like intelligence, friendliness, and beauty. For B-W individuals this historical inter- and intra-racial group valuing of a person based on the darkness of his or her complexion (Kerr, 2005), is particularly salient and arguably adds another layer of complexity to the identity construction process for these individuals.

Two other identity constructs are relevant to the present study. First, *social identity complexity* refers to how multiple identities may be in conflict or dissonance with one another, which complicates the search for other people with whom to identify (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). From this perspective, an individual’s social self-identification is not fixed, but rather has
the potential to shift over time and across contexts. Second, *biracial identity integration*, broadly defined as the integration of two races in a person’s racial self-perception (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), seems to be a protective factor in relation to psychological harm (Brittian et al., 2014; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). Findings from studies on biracial identity integration, as well as from research indicating that a strong racial/ethnic identity tends to buffer the negative effects of discrimination for people of Color (Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra & Harrington, 2012), underscore the need for the present research.

The major question addressed in the study concerned familial influences on the identity construction process\(^2\) of emerging B-W adults. Emerging adults were studied because (1) emerging adulthood is marked by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling “in-between,” and preoccupation with possibilities for the future (Arnett, 2007, p. 69) and (2) emerging adults are temporally closer to their family-of-origin experiences and thus could be expected to report on them more readily and accurately than older adults. In contrast to children and younger adolescents, emerging adults are close enough to late adolescence to be able to reflect on that developmental period of their lives while actively exploring their identity independently from their families of origin. College students, for example, have many opportunities to consider their dual racial identities not only through coursework, but also by joining cultural organizations and attending cultural events.

\(^2\) Although many authors describe racial identity in terms of the process of *racial identity development* (e.g., Root, 1998, p. 240), the word *development* is associated with linear, non-fluid, progressive stage models. Rather, since the assumption in the current study is that while developmental influences on identity are salient, the process of making meaning of oneself racially is neither categorical nor a linear progression. For this reason, the term *identity construction* is used here to describe how individuals with bicultural backgrounds actively explore, experience and understand their complex social identities (Katz, 1996; Rockquemore, 2002).
Theoretically, the study was informed by developmental research and familial influences on identity that are prominent in the literature: parental attachment, racial socialization, and family systems theory. Although research on B-W adults’ family-of-origin experiences is lacking, some studies have explored the process of biracial identity construction in children and adolescents (e.g., Csizmadia, Rollins & Kaneakua, 2014). In general, results support a model of identity based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) insofar as various contextual factors seem to be influential in the racial identity development of biracial children (Gonzalez-Backen, 2013). According to the ecological perspective, racial identity is more contextual and complex than is reflected either in developmental or categorical theories of racial identity. In other words, an individual’s racial identity is thought to be influenced not only by the process of development from childhood, but also by how a child identifies at a given moment within a particular social context, e.g., school or neighborhood (Douglass & Yip, 2015).

Theoretically, biracial individuals’ developmental experiences are said to influence their racial identity, sometimes challenging them to identify with one racial group while rejecting or the concealing the other (Khanna, 2011). Supporting this theory, case studies of two B-W biracial college students (Gillem, Cohn, & Thorne, 2001) showed that various situations had an impact on how each student identified racially. For example, both individuals had “encounter” experiences in sixth or seventh grade in which they were made more aware of the complexity of having one Black and one White parent, which led to their subsequently shifting their self-identification (p. 192). Notably, neither student reported feeling fully accepted by either Blacks or Whites. One student immersed herself in Black culture to compensate for what she had not learned previously about her Black ancestry, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of herself as White. The other student embraced a Black identity while rejecting White culture
altogether. It is likely that environmental and individual differences influenced the way that each of these emerging adults responded to awareness of being biracial and navigated the construction of a racial identity (Gillem, Cohn, & Thorne, 2001).

In terms of familial influences on biracial identity construction, no conceptual model takes into account influential familial factors. It was reasoned that in the absence of information about B-W emerging adults’ family-of-origin experiences with monoracial parents, an in-depth understanding of their identity construction process is likely to be incomplete.

Specifically, one relevant consideration is the degree of attachment to each parent. Parental attachment, as conceptualized by Ainsworth (1991), contains elements of affective connection, fostering of a child’s autonomy, and the provision of emotional support. Theoretically, a “high-quality” relationship with parents is said to be necessary for an adolescent to develop a positive social identity (Meeus, Oosterwegel & Vollebergh, 2002, p. 93). It seems likely that a biracial child’s attachment to parents from divergent racial groups is likely to influence the child’s identification with one, both, or neither of these groups. Supporting this reasoning are two studies of poor parental attachment in families with biracial children. First, in interviews with 20 biracial sibling pairs (Root, 1998), results indicated that participants’ experiences of abuse and abandonment affected how they identified racially. For example, one participant who was physically and emotionally abused by her Mexican-American parent indicated being inclined to self-identify as White rather than as Mexican. In the second, more recent study, parental closeness and ethnic identity was investigated in 275 part-White biracial individuals (Stepney et al., 2015). Results showed that participants who reported high parental ethnic identity by their non-White parent and who also reported a relatively high level of
closeness with that parent tended to strongly endorse their non-White ethnic identity (Stepney et al., 2015).

Another relevant familial influence on B-W racial identity construction is racial socialization, which refers to messages about race and racial relations that people receive throughout their development (Else-Quest & Morse, 2014). Racial socialization also refers to how parents help their children make sense of confusing and complex topics of race relations, racial disparities and discrimination in order to dampen the negative impact of racial oppression (Neblett et al., 2008). Racial socialization derives from a number of sources, including the media, a person’s social group, and the family of origin (Gonzalez-Backen, 2013). For parents of non-White children, deliberate racial socialization is necessary to “promote racial pride… orient [children] to race-related barriers, and prepare them to succeed in mainstream endeavors” (Hughes & Johnson, 2001, p. 982). For B-W individuals, racial socialization seems to be particularly important although complex, since White parents, as members of the dominant and privileged racial group in the U.S., likely have had no direct personal experience of race-based bias (Stepney et al., 2015). It has been asserted that in families with children of Color, racial socialization is critically important for decreasing the impact of the race-based challenges that these children are unlikely to be able to avoid (Neblett et al., 2008).

Three ways in which a sample of predominantly White adoptive parents of children, most of whom were of Color, approached racial socialization were reported in a qualitative study by Goldberg, Sweeney, Black and Moyer (2016). Using an engaged approach, some parents actively and intentionally encouraged their children to embrace what makes them diverse by, for example, educating them about racism and its role in history and current events, in order to instill racial pride. Using a cautious approach, some parents endorsed the importance of socialization,
but expressed concern that their children might be overwhelmed and/or distressed by being pushed to learn about their differences. These parents acknowledged racial differences like skin tone without fostering in-depth conversations on topics like racism or racial empowerment. Using an *avoidant* approach to racial socialization, other parents evaded conversations about race, which they did not deem important; rather, these parents endorsed what has been called a “colorblind” racial perspective (Goldberg et al., 2016, p. 282).

The thematic results of Goldberg et al.’s (2016) study highlight the importance of understanding how racial socialization is approached in non-monoracial families. This importance is further underscored by the results of a qualitative study of Black adults (Butler-Sweet, 2011) in which participants described a relative fluidity of racial identity and the importance of racial socialization in childhood.

Although authors writing about biracial identity (e.g., Brittian et al., 2014) have acknowledged the family as influential in a child’s racial socialization, the role of family dynamics in biracial identity construction has not specifically been examined. Since the present study aimed to understand participants’ experiences in their families of origin, the study drew on family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), which provides a multidimensional explanation of how family members function together so as to influence their interpersonal relations and individual functioning.

Several constructs in family systems theory are particularly relevant for B-W racial identity construction. Although race was not specifically discussed by the major proponents of the theory, Bowen (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) claimed universal applicability of the theory across cultures. Notably, research supports this claim for the major theoretical construct, *differentiation of self*, across various racial/ethnic groups within the U.S. (Gushue &
Constantine, 2003; Skowron, 2004) and in several other countries, including Turkey (İşik & Bulduk, 2015), South Korea (Kim et al., 2015), China (Lam & So, 2015), and the Philippines (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000).

According to the theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), differentiation of self refers to an individual’s ability to be genuinely connected to family and significant others while simultaneously holding onto a “solid self,” or a sense of separateness from others in thinking, feeling, and action (Gushue et al., 2013, p. 344). This construct was reasoned to have particular significance for biracial children whose racial identity distinguishes them from their monoracial parents. Highly differentiated individuals are said to be “internally-defined” (Gushue et al., 2013, p. 344) and therefore less prone to be psychologically harmed by others than poorly differentiated individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen theory maintains that an emotionally-grounded concurrent sense of autonomy and relatedness predicts a person’s psychological health and wellness, a proposition that has been empirically supported (e.g., Johnson & Buboltz, 2000; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000).

Notably, Gushue and Sicalides (1997) reasoned that strong differentiation of self is highly relevant to racial identity development, in that relatively more differentiated individuals can maintain a strong sense of racial/ethnic group belonging when challenged by race-related discrimination. Supporting this hypothesis, in a study of 309 students of varied monoracial backgrounds, Gushue et al. (2013) found that self-reported scores on a measure of self-differentiation were positively associated with racial identity attitudes reflective of a “more internally-defined sense of self” (p. 344).

Despite empirical support for the association between differentiation of self and strong racial identity in monoracial groups (Gushue et al., 2013; Skowron, 2004), a literature search
yielded no studies on differentiation of self, or indeed on any aspect of family dynamics, in relation to multiracial identity. It was reasoned that as children, B-W individuals need to try to make sense of the racial differences between themselves and their monoracial parents, and this differentiation process may have aspects unique to this group.

A second construct in family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1998), emotional triangles, is also relevant to ways in which family dynamics may influence the multiracial identity construction process. In theory, the construct refers to three interrelated relationships which, unlike dyadic relationships, leave one member left outside the personal connection between the two other members. Theoretically, when there is tension with one side of the triangle, there is often harmony with the other two sides, and vice versa (Kerr & Bowen, 1998). Thus, for example, when a child experiences ongoing conflict with one parent, he or she is likely to align more closely with the other parent. Although emotional triangles are said to be common in families (Bowen, 1978), compared to poorly functioning families, those that are highly functioning tend to have more fluidity, with children sometimes aligning with one parent and sometimes with the other parent. By contrast, rigid or inflexible emotional triangles can negatively influence a child’s process of self-differentiation (Bowen, 1978).

It was reasoned that the emotional triangulation process might influence the biracial identity construction process if a B-W child repeatedly experiences a high level of conflict with one monoracial parent and turns for comfort or support from the other parent. In other words, it seems likely that emotional triangles may influence biracial children to identify racially with the parent in the triangle with whom they are more closely attached. In other words, similar to parental attachment, emotional triangles may be an important feature of the family dynamics that influences a B-W emerging adult’s racial identification. Indeed, results from
several of the studies described above are consistent with this interpretation (Gonzalez-Backen, 2013; Root, 1998; Stepney et al., 2015).

In sum, theories of racial identity development, parental attachment, racial socialization, and family systems informed the design of the current study. The primary research question was: *How do Black-White biracial emerging adults view the role of family dynamics in their racial identity experiences?* Since the aim of the study was to uncover participants’ lived experiences, a phenomenological (Giorgi, 2009) approach was used. It was anticipated that the thematic results, although not generalizable, would have implications for psychotherapists working with B-W clients who may be experiencing difficulty due to their sense of self and racial experiences within and outside the family.
Method

Personal and Professional Motivations

In addition to addressing paucity in the literature in psychology on this growing population, I acknowledge several personal motivating factors related to this project. As *bracketing* or *epoché* (Giorgi, 2009) is important in phenomenological analysis, throughout this section, I present a clarification of my viewpoints and personal and professional lens that impact how I understand the phenomenon studied. My status as a Black-White biracial woman in academia has provided me with the opportunity to explore my identity in a scholarly way (e.g., through learning about extant models of identity) to complement knowledge gained from my lived experience. Countless examples of racial identity navigation during my personal development provided the backdrop for this inquiry.

Although I would not describe my identity construction process as particularly distressing, identifying as a member of two distinct racial groups and navigating societal issues related to race and oppression certainly highlights the inequities and social injustice that I have become passionate about studying and addressing in my work as a graduate student in counseling psychology. Based on my personal experiences and a review of the literature, I recognize that biracial individuals’ experience related to racial and ethnic identity can be quite complex and varied from person to person, depending on a multitude of environmental and situational factors, including childhood experiences in the family.

In addition to sources of motivation and knowledge for the current project as stemming from personal experience and academia, my psychodynamically-informed theoretical orientation as a psychotherapist often leads me to conceptualize clients’ distress related to their interpersonal relationships (e.g., feelings of belongingness) as informed by their family of origin dynamics. According to theory and my clinical experience, I expect that relationships with parents and
other family members tend to inform individuals’ understanding of the world. In addition to family dynamics contributing to an adult child’s attachment to or disengagement from the family, these dynamics influence how the individual sees the larger social world and their own role within society. The assumption of socialization of race, culture, identity, and interpersonal relationships as occurring within the family unit is a major guiding supposition of my research interests and the current research project.

Participants

Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to study the lived experiences of those belonging to a particular group and/or within a specific context (Maxwell, 2013). For the current study, I recruited a sample of “biracial adults” aged 18 to 30 who were raised until adulthood (in one household) by biological parents who identify monoracially, one as African American and one as non-Hispanic White. The rationale for limiting the sample to individuals raised by both parents in one household was based on the decision to limit the sample to participants who had continuous access to both parents (and presumably, both cultures) throughout their childhood.

Ten individuals (3 men, 6 women, and one person who self-identified as gender-variant) participated in the study (see Table 1 for demographic information on each participant). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 29 years (median = 24, SD = 3.02), and 6 were enrolled in college or graduate school; the others had obtained one or the other degree. Participants reported living in Virginia, New York, California, Indiana, Illinois, and Tennessee. All participants were raised in households with their biological mother and father through adolescence, and all but one participant had biological siblings with whom they were raised. The parents of two participants were divorced after the participant was an adult (i.e., after they were 18 years old). All participants reported having fathers who identified as monoracial Black and mothers who...
identified as monoracial White (non-Hispanic). When asked about the racial identity that they would typically endorse on surveys like the U.S. Census, 9 participants indicated “multiracial,” and one participant indicated “Black/African American.”

**Design**

A qualitative methodology was selected for this study for several reasons. First, the study addresses a complex phenomenon, since there is little information on the role of familial dynamics in racial identity construction for this population in previous research. Another salient reason for a qualitative exploration of identity has to do with empowerment and autonomy. For a minority group that has been overlooked and underserved in many ways, participation in the interview process may be cathartic for participants in some aspects and empowering in others. Second, the emphasis in qualitative research is on understanding the process of a phenomenon and on “generating results and theories that are understandable and experientially credible” to researchers and to the population of interest (Maxwell, 1996, p. 21). This emphasis was precisely the aim of the current study.

Phenomenology was the qualitative methodology chosen for this study. Specifically, Giorgi’s (2009) phenomenological analysis was used to identify salient themes in participants’ narratives in order to develop a rich conceptual understanding of the racial identity construction process for B-W biracial individuals. Using this approach, “the researcher has to analyze the description with a special sensitivity to the perspective of his or her discipline (psychology, sociology, etc.) and with a sensitivity to the phenomenon being researched (learning, group dynamics, etc.)” (p. 28).

---

3 Throughout the interviews, participants used a variety of terms to identify themselves racially, including “biracial,” “multiracial,” and “mixed.”
Interview Protocol

Detailed semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews approximately one month after the initial interviews (See Appendix A) were conducted with each participant, with the exception of one participant who chose not to participate in a follow-up interview. The purposes of the follow-up interview were: (a) to provide participants with the opportunity to describe their experience of the initial interview, (b) to allow participants to clarify their initial responses after reviewing the interview transcript (i.e., member checking), and (c) to allow participants to expand upon their previous responses as desired. Generally, the nine follow-up interviews confirmed and elaborated on the content of participants’ the initial interviews..

The primary interview was designed based on recommendations for phenomenological research interviewing by Englander (2012), who stressed the importance of depth-seeking questions that relate specifically to the participant’s experience of the phenomenon of interest and that ask for as much context information regarding the phenomenon being discussed. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed based on the various constructs and theoretical frameworks that informed the research question (i.e., social identity theory, family systems theory, parental attachment and racial socialization). The interview questions were refined based on consultation with dissertation committee members and two different groups of graduate students in counseling psychology.

In order to obtain rich qualitative data, the interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured, so that unplanned follow-up questions could be asked as appropriate. The intention of this interview format was to allow participants to share the extent of their experiences and allow me to adjust the protocol based on the unique responses of each participant. In addition to being engaged in the content of participant's responses to questions, I
noted nuances in participants’ responses and asked for details in order to obtain a greater depth of information.

While phenomenological methodology was used in the study, the interview protocol was also informed by narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005), which is designed to gain a greater breadth and depth of responses by asking clients to share their stories. The rationale for including some narrative questions within the protocol (e.g., *Tell me about the first time you came to recognize racial differences.*) was that participants may recall richer information from their development if it is asked in the context of a memory of events and/or relationships (Chase, 2005). *Narrative identity,* or a person’s “internalized and evolving life story,” is a construct related to how an individual constructs meaning in their life and is studied by the content and context of the story they tell about life memories (McAdams & McLean, 2013, pp. 233). Since the phenomenon studied in this inquiry is related to identity, it seems appropriate that narrative identity was considered in developing the interview protocol.

Each interview began with questions about participants’ general experience of being biracial in order to help them acclimate to the discussion and to build rapport. The latter half of the interview focused on more detailed questions about participants’ family of origin dynamics and how these dynamics shaped their experiences. Finally, participants were invited to share any additional information that they believe may be salient to their narrative.

Participants were sent a copy of the transcribed interview via e-mail one week before the follow-up interview to allow them to reflect on their previous responses. This second interview asked participants to describe their experience of the initial interview and if, upon reflecting on the experience and reading the transcript, they had additional thoughts on the topic.
A pilot interview was conducted in order to obtain feedback on the interview questions so as to identify any flaws or limitations in the protocol (Turner, 2010). The male-identified volunteer met all criteria for the study (i.e., B-W biracial emerging adult) with the exception of being raised by both biological parents. Nonetheless, he provided feedback on the structure of the interview protocol. Based on this feedback, some questions were revised to improve comprehension (e.g., the use of the term “current events” as opposed to the original term, “sociopolitical issues”).

**Demographic questionnaire.** A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) asked participants to identify their age, gender, state of residence, educational level, the race of each parent, family structure (e.g., two-parent or single parent household), and composition of family of origin (e.g., number of siblings). Participants were also asked the following for descriptive purposes: “When you are asked to identify your racial/ethnic background, for example, on the last U.S. Census, what category do you usually endorse?”

**Procedure**

Potential participants were recruited through the listservs of national multiracial organizations and online communities like MAViN and Swirl (also used by Johnson et al., 2012), as well as flyers posted on college campuses and social media (e.g., Facebook, Reddit). The recruitment notice (Appendix C) requested volunteers 18 or older who are “willing to discuss experiences of being biracial and being raised in one household until adulthood by one African American and one White parent, each of whom were your biological parents.”

I assessed whether inclusion criteria was met when volunteers contacted me by email to express interest in participation. When it was confirmed that these criteria were met, we agreed on a date and time for the initial interview, and the volunteer provided contact information.
One participant was interviewed in person at the university, and the others were interviewed by telephone. Before each interview began, the participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent (see Appendix D), which I read aloud to the participant. The informed consent outlined the purpose of the study, the practical details (e.g., approximate time required for interviews), and the financial incentive (see below). The consent also explained the voluntary nature of participation and the participant’s right to withdraw at any time and provided my contact information as well as how to contact my dissertation advisor and the Office of Research Compliance at the university.

After participants provided informed consent, they completed the demographic questionnaire, which was followed by the initial interview. The interviews were 45-90 minutes in length. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed for the analysis by 5 master’s students in mental health counseling. Brief (i.e., 15-30 min) follow-up interviews were scheduled with each participant approximately one month after the initial interview. At the completion of follow-up interview, I sent a debriefing document to participants via email and read it aloud over the telephone. The debriefing (Appendix E) noted the purpose of the study and provided the contact information of a local counseling agency (based on participants’ current location), acknowledging that the participant may wish to further process their challenging experiences and any related distress they may feel related to the racial identity construction process. A $50 Amazon e-gift card was provided to participants after completion of the interviews.

To maximize multiple interpretations of the data, I kept notes about ideas, themes and questions that occurred to me during the interview and transcription review processes (Creswell, 2013). Further, reflective notes were written after each interview to help me be mindful of how my perspective influenced my collection, analysis and presentation of the data (Glesne, 2011).
Reflexivity and Social Positioning

The description of the qualitative researcher provided by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as an interpretive bricoleur who “understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (p. 5) is particularly apt for the current study. Reflexivity, or “the ‘presence’ of the researcher in the accounts [he or she] present[s]” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45), is an essential element of qualitative inquiry and requires that researchers explore and describe their social positioning within the context of the study. For example, what information is shared and how it is told in part reflects the environment of the interview and the interpersonal dynamics between interviewer and participant (Gallagher, 2000). In phenomenological data analysis, the process of bracketing (Husserl, 1931) involves making explicit the researcher’s biases and preconceived notions about the research topic with the goal of understanding the essence of the phenomena as purely as possible.

As discussed above, my experience as a B-W biracial woman has influenced my perceptions of racial identity construction and the role of family dynamics in that process. That is, based on reflection of my own experiences around racial identification (i.e., by others), socialization and social identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood, I perceive family dynamics to be influential in identity construction. In conducting individual interviews with participants who also have African American and White ancestry, I was aware that how they identified me racially may have influenced participants’ narratives. Some participants asked directly about my racial background. Others assumed I was biracial and would include me in generalizations about the biracial experience (e.g., You know, that’s part of how they see us.)
Gallagher (2000) highlighted the importance of considering factors that differentiate the researcher from the participants, such as social position, in addition to factors that are shared, such as race. Although there were some shared themes in the narratives of the researcher and the participants around constructing a sense of self from two divergent racial ancestries, I recognized a number of contextual factors and other salient identities. Specifically, my post-secondary education and experience in a graduate psychology program that emphasizes self-awareness and exploration of identity was likely to distinguish me from some of the participants with regard to social privilege and the amount of time spent understanding and describing racial identity and social positioning. I was mindful that my understanding of the data reflects a perspective based on my counseling psychology training and my understanding of identity, which is largely grounded in psychological research.

As another salient difference from the participants, I was not raised in one household by both monoracial parents, but rather primarily by my White mother. In turn, I do not share the experience of having relatively equal access to each parent and each culture. Additional social identities that shaped my sense of self and the world are my status as a first-generation college student from a low socioeconomic background, as a heterosexual woman, and as a person who was raised in New York City, one of the most racially, culturally and economically diverse cities in the world. It is reasonable to assume that these elements of my identity influenced my interpretations of the narrative data in this study.

Coding team. In addition to myself, the team was composed of two judges, a 31-year-old, B-W male counseling psychologist and a 25-year-old B-W female doctoral student in counseling psychology.
I met with the coding team to discuss the study in greater detail and to offer the judges an opportunity to share their motivations for and perspectives on the inquiry. Positionality statements (see Appendix G) included an explication of the coders’ personal and professional backgrounds related to B-W identity and their expectations for the present inquiry. The coders were asked to take notes throughout the coding process of their reflections/ reactions, which were discussed during the negotiation of codes and themes.

I trained the two judges, each of whom had previous exposure to qualitative literature, in the thematic analysis approach to phenomenological studies. The training included assignment of readings (e.g., Maxwell, 2013) and review of a few qualitative investigations that used phenomenological methodology (e.g. Friedman, Blustein & Friedlander, 2005; Miville, Constantine, Baysden & So-Lloyd, 2005). The judges also reviewed the interview protocol prior to the start of participant recruitment.

**Sociopolitical climate.** In consideration of the context in which data was collected, it is essential to position participants’ narratives of race and racial tension within the current sociopolitical climate. During the time of data collection and analysis, 2017 - 2018, the topic of racism and xenophobia as woven into the political, social and legal fabric of the U. S. has received immense attention due to specific events (e.g., killing of unarmed Black men by police officers throughout the country) and political structure change (i.e., the 2016 election of Donald Trump). Due to questions related to race, racial identity and experiences of oppression within the current study, and the fact that participants all identified as biracial or Black, it was reasonable to assume that the narratives of participants were influenced by the country’s sociopolitical climate. Appendix F contains a sociopolitical positionality statement, in which I
explain my understanding of the political climate as it influenced relevant statements from participants.
Results

Qualitative Analysis

Phenomenology involves immersion in the transcribed narrative data and the systematic coding of the gathered information, with the intent of discovering particular processes or phenomena not illuminated in existing theory (Creswell, 2013). This approach has been used to study social identity and similar complex constructs (e.g. Miville et al., 2005; Friedman et al., 2005). This method was considered appropriate for the current inquiry because it allows for a rich understanding of participants’ lived experiences and interpretations of those experiences.

Consistent with phenomenological methods and informed by my understanding of other qualitative analysis strategies like those of grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a multistep data analytic approach was used. The goal of this analysis was to address the research question related to how family dynamics affect how B-W biracial individuals experience and make meaning of their racial identities.

The present analysis began with the three judges independently identifying codes, also known as meaning units, in each interview transcript (Giorgi, 2009). The organization and expression of data into meaning units allows for the findings to be presented in a way that is reflective of emergent themes related to the central phenomenon of interest. As is standard in phenomenological data analysis (Creswell, 2013), the choice of code names was as close as possible to the participants’ words so as to avoid inaccurate reflections or distillations of the narratives.

After independently coding each participant’s initial and follow-up interviews, members of the coding team met to negotiate codes that would best reflect the participants’ narrative responses. When the coders’ interpretations of the data were discrepant, each person discussed
his or her understanding of the code in the context of the overall interview. In some cases, the outcome of this negotiation was the inclusion of two codes to capture the essence of the same narrative data.

Next, through the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), I identified sub-themes, or clusters of meaning, present in the data. Significance statements, or illustrative quotes from participants, were then chosen for each sub-theme. I subsequently organized the sub-themes into larger themes or clusters and named each one. The final steps of analysis involved the development of a textual and structural description of the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994).

My textual, or direct content, description of the findings (i.e., themes, sub-themes and significance statements) is presented below. The structural description, or the context and larger understanding of the content, is presented in the discussion section that follows.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Morrow (2005) outlined standards for general qualitative research in counseling psychology that are comparable to the standards by which quantitative research is evaluated. In its design and analysis, this study followed Morrow’s standards for maximizing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility, which is parallel to internal consistency, refers to the extent to which research rigor is present and is communicated to readers. The present study addressed credibility through researcher reflexivity, the use of a coding team in co-analysis, participant member checks via follow-up interviews (Creswell, 2013), and the presentation of rich, illustrative and detailed narratives of participants. Transferability, which is similar to generalizability in
quantitative research, is maximized by explication of the coders’ roles in and reactions to the research process (e.g., expectations).

Dependability, comparable to reliability, was maximized by use of an audit trail, described by Morrow (2005) as a “detailed chronology of research activities and processes” (p. 252) which, in this study, included emergent themes and coders’ reactions to the data during the process of coding. Dependability is also evident by repetitions of similar thematic content across participants.

Confirmability, which refers to the “management of subjectivity” (Morrow, 2005, p. 252), was addressed through the use of my memos and the positionality statements of all members of the research team. These efforts were intended to make biases and expectations as transparent as possible, with the goal of enhancing the representativeness of the study’s themes (as opposed to an extreme skew of information based on researcher perceptions). Although bracketing and epoché (Giorgi, 2009) are the terms for this concept in phenomenological research, contextualization is essential in all qualitative research, as highlighted in the most recent American Psychological Association standards for reporting qualitative studies (Levitt et al., 2018).

Finally, another source of trustworthiness has to do with the coherence of the themes as a group and the degree to which they reflect the extant psychology literature, reviewed earlier. Coherence was attended to in the discussion of the findings. Although the relevant literature is limited, reference to the theoretical concepts (e.g., racial socialization, differentiation of self, etc.) throughout the discussion of the results is intended to enhance the coherence of the emergent themes.
Themes and Sub-themes

Fourteen sub-themes were identified from the narrative data, organized under three larger themes. The themes were Interactions with Family Members Contributed to Individuals’ Experience and Understanding of Race, Race and Racial Tension Affected Family Dynamics, and Influence of how the Family Addressed Racial/Biracial Identity. The sections below are organized by theme, with a description of each sub-theme and sample significance statements. See Table 2 for additional significance statements for each sub-theme.

Interactions with Family Members Contributed to Individuals’ Experience and Understanding of Race

Experiences with/ thoughts about each cultural community formed through extended family relationships. Interactions with extended familial relationships were influential in the racial identity construction process by contributing to participants’ experiences with and thoughts about each cultural community. Participants described how their exposure to respective cultures/ race-based communities was, in part, informed by their time spent with extended family members from each monoracial background. Geographic and relational closeness to each extended family played a role in how much each biracial individual learned about his or her cultural and family history. Moreover, negative experiences with or perceptions of extended family members belonging to either racial group influenced the attributes that participants ascribed to each monoracial group.

For example, Participant 4 explained that learning about her maternal grandfather’s prejudice toward people of Color as well as the emotional distance she felt towards him in their relationship had an impact on her general view of White people:
Um so I never felt like I was hated by my grandfather per se, I just felt like I was tolerated. So um I kind of...it happened that within my own family it kind of, you know, made my perception of all White people the same as just like well you might not you know act outspokenly be racist or say negative things but you probably have just learned to tolerate and...and that's the best you all can give me.

**Benefit of seeing/experiencing both racial “worlds.”** The biracial participants in this study noted that due to having parents from each racial group, they were able to see and experience both racial “worlds” and that as a result, they often serve as intermediaries between those worlds (with families and others). For example, the ability to see both perspectives made some participants think that they could better advocate for the other monoracial group (e.g., P5 stated that he could explain the perspective of White people when around Black people).

Participants also noted an awareness of being more well received than their monoracial counterparts when interacting with the other race (e.g., P7 stated that she is “less threatening” to a group of White people than a monoracial Black person would be). Some participants described this benefit as coming with a sense of pressure during times of conflict between Black and White groups/ communities, and others described the role as a unique and positive skill (e.g., P10 expressed pride in seeing herself as a conflict resolver between her mother and her father's family due to her ability to "speak both languages").

Participant 5: I'm proud that I'm mixed, that's like a, it's a blessing in my book. I get the, the best of both worlds... I mean there are some negative things sometimes, but uh, it's cool to say hey, I'm a part of two, two whole generations or uh, uh, legacies of those two cultures I'm a part of, you know, two different kinds of histories, and uh, um, I just think that's awesome.
Learning about racial non-acceptance in childhood. Several participants described experiences of prejudice or non-acceptance of one of their parents by the other parent’s family of origin (e.g., White extended family not accepting the participant’s Black father). Whether through directly witnessing or learning about this non-acceptance afterward, these experiences served as some of the formative messages about racial differences and racial tension for participants. For example, P2 reflected on how her experience of the two extended families as disparate and regularly in conflict resulted in how each family treated her.

Further, learning that members of one extended family did not accept the counterpart parent influenced how some participants is related to that side of the family. For example, Participant 9 indicated feeling less secure about having close connections with maternal extended family members whom she saw as prejudiced against her father. She said, “Yeah, it, it does kind of make you feel a bit more, weary about the person, or just like, um not always sure about getting too close to that person, because um—ya, they, they said something that makes you think that they don't totally agree with the fact that I exist, I guess. Sucks…”

Participant 2: This is an ongoing thing throughout my entire life. Uh, my mom’s family is all Caucasian and my dad is mainly all African American. And when they got together, it wasn’t accepted by either sides of their family. I don’t want to call either side of my family racist, but at times they can be. And neither of them was open to the relationship. So when I came around, they tried to inflict their ideals and ethnic backgrounds onto me.

Experience of verbal microaggressions within the immediate and/or extended families. Participants described experiences of microaggressions within their immediate and/or extended families, related either to being a person of Color or being biracial. The
microaggressions were sometimes directed at the participant (e.g., P2’s stated that her Black cousins called her “White-washed”) and sometimes were in the form of generalized comments about Black or White people. The latter comments were at times couched as not seeing the participant as a member of the “other” group because they are “mixed” (and therefore there was no intention to offend the participants). For example, Participant 10 spoke about stereotyped messages about Black women that she received from her White mother, which reflected this nuanced experience:

I think my mother was particularly biased against Black women. I think that was…Umm, I remember hearing a lot of Black women are angry… Umm, and at the time this wasn’t offensive to me in any way because I wasn’t Black. I was biracial… It’s troubling for everyone to realize how imperfect your parents are (laughs), but umm….And then to also realize that in a lot of ways those negative things that I used to think particularly about Black women are the same stereotypes that a lot of people ascribe to me feels a little perfectly just.

**Important role of siblings.** Siblings played an important role in racial identity construction process for some participants. These roles were varied, though, and included being an ally, mentor, or mentee with whom (a) to discuss racial identity experiences, (b) to feel understood in the immediate family (based on the perception that monoracial parents could not fully relate); and (c) to compare and contrast racial identities and expressions of a racial self. As an example of comparison to a sibling’s expression of identity, Participant 3 explained that she and her sister were referred to as “the Black sister and the White sister,” respectively, due to the racial composition of their social groups.
Participant 8 expressed appreciation for his older sister, with whom he could discuss incidents of microaggressions within the family unit and seek support around the race-based bullying he encountered in middle school. He stated that other than with the interviewer, his sister is the only person with whom he speaks about race. He said, “It’s awesome to have another person just to like express how those awful those middle school years felt and why they felt awful. And like, I don’t know, me and my sister are really close.”

Race and Racial Tension Affected Family Dynamics

Awareness that neither parent could fully relate to the biracial experience.

Participants expressed an awareness that neither parent could relate fully to their childhood experiences of racial identity due to the parents’ monoracial identities. Participants acknowledged this awareness in (a) discussing the extent to which their parents discussed the child’s unique (from either parent) racial identity, as well as (b) exploring their own feelings of relatedness to monoracial parents’ racial identity. Some participants postulated that the lack of relatedness was part of the reason why their parents did not understand or discuss the challenges of being biracial and instead focused on the positive aspects, e.g., “cool hair” texture (P2). In describing the advice she would give the parents of a biracial child, Participant 3 suggested that they acknowledge that biracial children have a different experience than monoracial people, including each of their parents:

We're acting like the kid's not going to be conscious to biracial problems, tell them it doesn't matter if they're half White, half Black, it's not known… And I say that from exp-
-I've had teachers, who you know, "it doesn't matter!" It does... It does matter, because they operate fundamentally in, fundamentally in a different way. They have to experience the world differently, even from either one of their parents, right?
Tendency to educate the White parent (and other White family members) about the race-related issues/experiences of People of Color (POC). Sparked by their own motivation or because family members sought out their perspectives, participants indicated a tendency to take on the role of teacher with their White parent and sometimes other White family members when discussing race-related issues and experiences of POC. This perspective was frequently voiced in the context of discussing current events, e.g., police brutality against unarmed Black men in the United States.

Participants generally expressed positive emotions about being able to have “teachable moments” (P4) with some White family members, meaning that they could serve as a bridge to a better understanding of POC and could help prevent their family members from committing microaggressions with members of marginalized groups in the future. Participant 3 expressed appreciation for her maternal grandmother’s interest in learning about Black issues and described some of her grandmother’s questions about the Black experience:

You know, like [she] reads great books by Black authors, or like about Black issues, and you know, she'll ask questions sometimes. So, I think as we get older, I think she is getting a little more comfortable, um, you know asking us these things, or you know, wanting to--she really like, makes an effort to um, kind of be engaged socially. I think that part is really cool for grandma...

Allyship/connectedness with the parent of Color due to shared experiences of marginalization. Some participants shared a sense of connectedness and relatedness to their parent of Color, with whom they were aligned to some extent because of a shared experience of marginalization. Although most participants self-identified as biracial rather than Black, all of them identified as people of Color and endorsed having had some experiences of being “othered”
in interactions with Whites. For this reason, these participants could relate to their Black parents’ experiences of prejudice and discrimination, and they generally felt more understood by the Black than White parent when it came to experiences of racial oppression. For example, Participant 6 commented on her relatively closer relationship with her father because of their phenotypical similarities and his willingness to validate her difficulties with systemic oppression based on his own experiences:

I would definitely say like I have a, umm, closer, I feel more close to my father, umm, because, umm, I don't know if that has, is maybe why sometimes I identify as like just Black because it's what, 'cause I look like him, like we have a lot of the same features and so whenever I go out, or whenever we're out together people very frequently, or automatically are like, "oh is this your daughter?" And so I, I don't know if that connects me more to that identity, since I don't look like my mom, and my dad is willing to like have some of those conversations with me about, "yeah, the system is messed up for Black people, and it does suck and let me tell you this experience I had."

**Challenges related to phenotypical presentation.** Participants noted having experienced some challenges related to their appearance and presentation of their mixed race ancestry. For some, phenotypical uniqueness was a manifestation of not fitting in with either monoracial group, which brought up issues of skin colorism, intragroup privilege within people of Color, and lack of belongingness to either community based on appearance. Participant 8, for example, commented on the dissatisfaction he feels due to having "in-between" racial features.

For other participants, the challenge also had to do with not fully resembling either parent (e.g., P10 expressed wanting to have same hair texture as her "beautiful" White mother). Two
participants mentioned struggling with body image issues and mental health concerns (depression and an eating disorder) that they saw as directly related to their appearance.

Participant 8: At least to some degree, there’s a physical aspect to that… I think, to where particularly with hair, that’s a really big deal to me where like there have been some days where I have just wished I had White hair or Black hair. Like, the in-between deal has been less than ideal. … There are probably some days where, aesthetically, I would prefer being all Black or all White.

Shared experiences of microaggressions with parents. Microaggressions experienced when participants were with their parents outside the home had an impact on how they understood themselves racially, compared themselves to each parent, and understood how their family differed from monoracial families. Participants provided narrative information from childhood and adolescence regarding these types of events, describing a variety of personal and parental responses to the microaggressions that they experienced. Participant 9, for example, recalled in detail her discomfort when witnessing her mother being asked by a White child about their biological relatedness:

I was friends with this one girl and then this other girl was her friend, but just tagged along. And um, ya, she went up to my mom and, um, she was—ya, like, she... "Your daughter adopted?" And, um, I think my mom was, ya, pretty taken aback, and uh, she just corrected her and said that no, we were her, um—I was her biological daughter... Um, but ya so, it was—I just remember being kind of awkward.

Influence of How the Family Addressed Racial/Biracial Identity

Influences on the extent to which race/ racial issues were discussed with parents. According to participants, a number of factors influenced the extent to which racial identity and
racial issues were discussed with their parents, including (a) personality traits, such as a general discomfort with discussing difficult or potentially painful subjects; (2) an awareness that they and their parents had different opinions on race-related topics; and (3) the parents’ desire to protect participants from knowing about injustice or from feeling inferior than monoracial children. Some participants mentioned that their closeness to one or both parents allowed them to feel comfortable discussing difficult topics like racial tension. On the other hand, comments from Participant 2 reflect her parents’ avoidance of racial topics:

Both of my parents, they didn’t really put on the news when I was in the room. They were very protective, they tried to shield me from really what was going on in the outside world. And even when I was older, I think part of that stuck with them. So when things go wrong in the world, even if it’s in regard to our race, they don’t speak about it to me.

Influence of social and geographic contexts on racial self-identification and identification by others. Social contexts influenced how biracial individuals thought about and sometimes chose to present their racial identities in various social spaces. Examples included the racial composition of peer groups at school and in professional settings. Participant 7, for example, who indicated experiencing fairly segregated spaces during his childhood, explained that his racial positioning and identification tends to be shaped by the race-based group context:

When I’m in an all-White space, I feel like I’m Black, and when I’m in an all-Black space I feel like I’m mixed and in some way feel like I have access to like White point of views in a way. I kind of sometimes when I’m in like homogeneous spaces, I feel like the other in this this way, so I think um it’s probably a little bit of like the imposter syndrome or you know whatever but I just yeah, it just it really does my race does tend to be kind of like contextual in that way.
According to participants, the impact of social context on racial identity construction is clearly influenced by a biracial individual's geographic location within the U.S. Participants who indicated having been raised in areas or attended racially homogenous schools were aware of feeling “othered” and experienced a lack of belongingness to either monoracial group. As a result, some participants felt pressure to choose one monoracial identity and community over the other.

All participants also explained that geographic location was a determinant of how they were identified by others. For example, Participant 10 explained that she is identified (and sometimes subsequently self-identifies) as monoracial Black in southern states and as biracial in more heterogeneous northern cities. Other participants echoed this sentiment.

Although neither geographic location nor social context was directly related to family dynamics, participants’ explained that where their parents chose to (or had to) raise their children affected the extent to which participants were exposed to various social and cultural contexts.

Participant 10: I think the further south I go the more I’m just identified as Black as opposed to biracial. In [mid-Atlantic state], a lot of people would see me and think that’s a half Black, half White person. But now that I live in the south, it’s very much “Oh, you’re just Black.”

**Family responses to racial microaggressions.** How families responded to racial microaggressions in the presence of participants or after learning of their experience (e.g., verbal teasing and name-calling at school) was important. For example, Participant 1 explained that his mother’s regular reminders of self-acceptance in response to his being teased at a predominantly White school and subsequently wishing he were White were meaningful for him in shaping his eventual biracial pride: “I think my mom always told me that like - she was just a
super supportive, loving person. So, she would always sit here and be like, “You’re amazing just
the way you are.” And I was like - it kind of just stuck.”

**Sense that discussing racial identity journeys is valuable for self and others.** All B-W
emerging adults interviewed for this study noted the importance of and value in discussing their
racial identity journeys and indicated wanting to encourage others to do the same. These
sentiments were expressed in participants’ discussions of how often their parents discussed race
with them as children (e.g., the wish that they had spoken more about race) and in their reactions
to the current interviews as generally positive and facilitative of insight-development. In
reflecting upon her participation in the study, Participant 9 said that it was an emotional process
that led to increased insight and self-awareness:

> I think it's definitely helped me understand myself a little better, um and maybe, helped
me reflect on some of the things that um, have maybe contributed to kind of like, the, the
parts of my personality that have always kind of confused me, and sort of frustrated
me. Um, like just my... Uncertainty in public at times, or just like my fear of other
people's free actions. Um, and... Yeah, and then, it didn't just like my avoidance of
controversial topics, or um, in general conversation, I, I think that um, just revisiting
them, these things that I have kind of forget about, or just kind of try to, like black out a
little bit, has um, it's, it's been hard, but I think it's healthy to just try and understand
myself a little bit more.
Discussion

The current qualitative study was designed to discover the role of family dynamics in the identity experiences of 10 Black-White biracial emerging adults. Although psychological research on this topic is limited, the study was informed by literature on racial identity construction as well as developmental research and familial influences on identity: parental attachment (Ainsworth, 1991), racial socialization (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), and family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Moreover, I applied an ecological systems framework to understanding participant narratives, highlighting the complexity of racial identity for these Black-White emerging adults. The themes and sub-themes reflected in participants’ phenomenological experiences of their families’ role in their racial identity construction process were largely consistent with the theoretical foundations of the study, as explained in the following sections.

Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory

The participants discussed at length their relationships with immediate and extended family members, sharing anecdotes from the recent and distant past and responding to semi-structured questions about the impact of these experiences on their racial sense of self and others. Several sub-themes within the two larger themes of Interactions with Family Members Contributed to Individuals’ Experience and Understanding of Race, and Race and Racial Tension Affected Family Dynamics are consistent with family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and parental attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1991) in terms of the role of parents and other family members on these individuals’ sense of self as a racial being.

The awareness on the part of some participants that neither of their monoracial parents could fully relate to their biracial experience seems to have contributed to an early development
of a unique and differentiated sense of self. Participants conveyed an understanding that their parents’ perspectives on race and on what it is like to be biracial were shaped by the parents’ monoracial identities. Although some participants related strongly to one or both parents in personality style or in terms of other attributes and interests, these B-W individuals described feeling a somewhat differentiated sense of self. That is, due to an awareness of how they differed from both parents racially at a young age, these B-W individuals experienced the need to make meaning of their uniqueness in terms of race.

According to Bowen’s (1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) family systems theory, highly differentiated individuals are able to balance separateness from and togetherness with others due to having a unique sense of themselves within a close family-of-origin unit. In line with this theory, participants discussed several challenges related to the construction of this distinct sense of self, indicating that over time they began to feel less distress related to having a social identity that differed from that of each parent. The decreased distress and increased confidence with and appreciation for their racial uniqueness (e.g., the sub-theme of benefit of seeing/experiencing both racial “worlds”) reflects the process of developing a well-differentiated, or internally-defined, sense of self.

It is important to note the presence of contradictions and tension in participants’ narratives with regard to their sense of self racially. In general, these individuals described having difficulty with some elements of their biracial identity, such as their appearance, while also experiencing pride about being biracial. A developmental perspective may be helpful to interpret these contradictions. That is, it seems that participants’ meaning making regarding their racial identity evolved as they aged, so that at the time of the interview they seemed to experience themselves as well-differentiated in terms of race. Although much remains to be
understood about how racial differentiation within the family of origin influences individuals’ functioning, such as the degree to which differentiation may be associated with psychological protective factors, the present results offer a novel perspective on the development of differentiation for biracial young adults.

Another theme, the important role of siblings in the racial identity construction process, also reflects one aspect of Bowen theory (1978), which posits that siblings are influential in the emotional dynamics of family life. Although the roles played by siblings varied for each participant, it was clear that having another person in the family of origin who had the same lived experience of being B-W biracial was an important factor that seems to have diminished the sense of isolation felt in their immediate and extended families due to racial uniqueness.

The occasional tension with White parents described by some participants around issues of race and racial oppression is also reflective of Bowen’s (1978) description of emotional dynamics within the nuclear family. For example, Participant 10’s explanation that her White mother felt “left out” when she (P10) was recognized for achievement as a student of Color reflects what Bowen (1966) referred to as an emotional triangle. In this case, Participant 10 felt in harmony with her Black father, who celebrated this kind of the achievement with her in a way that her mother apparently could not fully appreciate.

Allyship and/or connectedness with the parent of Color due to shared experiences of marginalization is further reflective of emotional triangles (Bowen, 1966). Participants who expressed more closeness or feeling more understood by their parent of Color described having a relatively lesser connection with the White parent. According to Bowen theory, emotional triangles change over time and shift depending on context or circumstance. As one example,
Participant 6 described being closer to and discussing more difficult racial issues with her Black father in adulthood than she had in childhood.

In terms of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1991) as well, the sub-theme of connectedness with the parent of Color reflects previous research (Stepney et al., 2015) in which a positive association was reported between biracial children’s feelings of closeness to their non-White parents and an endorsement of the non-White ethnic identity. The present participants described varying degrees of closeness with each parent, with several individual factors influencing these relationships, e.g., personality, political views. Moreover, many participants described connections with their parent of Color through shared experiences of marginalization.

This result underscores the need for further research on the association between parental attachment and biracial racial identity. Indeed, the family dynamics described by the B-W emerging adults interviewed for this study provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the role played by racial identity in family attachments. Since participants expressed closeness to or distance from each parent to varying degrees, it seems that participants’ experiences of microaggressions and other forms of racial invalidation within the extended family and in other social contexts influenced attachment bonds within the family. For example, Participant 9 described not being recognized by others as the daughter of her White mother due to their phenotypical differences, and other participants described having been told that they were “Black with a White parent” (P3). It seems likely that participants who received the indirect or direct message that they were not as closely related to their White parent as to their Black parent may have (perhaps unconsciously) felt more relationally distant from that parent.

In sum, the thematic results that emerged from these interviews extend our knowledge of family systems and attachment theories as they apply to B-W biracial individuals and their
families. Notably, relationships with participants’ monoracial parents seem to have been influenced by their early and evolving perception of relatedness to each parent, particularly around issues of marginalization, especially when faced with a microaggressive invalidation of the familial tie with either monoracial parent.

**Racial Socialization Theory**

The third theme that emerged in this study, Influence of how the Family Addressed Racial/Biracial Identity, reflects parent racial socialization theory (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), which posits that how parents help their children understand race, racial disparities and discrimination plays a large role in how children come to understand themselves racially and how they cope with race-related stress. Although the present inquiry did not focus on how participants cope with racial discrimination and race-related stress, all participants shared narratives of experiences of prejudice, and some discussed how they and their families responded to such instances. Despite variation in the extent to which parents explicitly discussed race and racial differences with them, all participants explained that when those topics were addressed, these conversations were critical for their understanding of themselves and their social worlds.

The sub-themes within Influence of how the Family Addressed Racial/Biracial Identity are reflective of how participants’ families addressed race add to what has previously been written about racial socialization in this population (Csizmadia et al., 2014). Notably, much variation was observed in the extent to which parents were reported to have discussed race and racial oppression with participants. Some participants speculated that their White parents wanted to avoid the tension of bringing to awareness their own White racial privilege. Other participants described a relatively colorblind racial attitude on the part of their parents. That is, since these parents did not acknowledge differences between racial groups, participants inferred that their
parents did not think about how people are treated differently based on race. Both of these barriers to racial socialization are consistent with previous literature on White parents’ avoidance of racial discussions when raising children of Color (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016).

Another important aspect of racial socialization for participants in this study was how parents were described as responding to microaggressions and overt prejudice directed toward the interracial family or the participant as an individual. Intentionally or not, through their reactions to offensive comments about the child or the family, these parents were described as modeling how to address racial issues for the children. Based on participants’ detailed recollections of these experiences and what some participants described regarding the personal meaningfulness of their parents’ advocacy efforts on their behalf, how their parents responded to microaggressions seemed to have a profound impact on participants.

Despite variation in the degree to which racial differences were addressed within family units, a common theme in participants’ narratives was the lack of an in-depth discussion with parents about the unique experience of being biracial. Also consistent with previous literature’s explication of racial socialization styles (Goldberg et al., 2016), some parents were described as emphasizing the favorable qualities of being “mixed” (e.g., the idea that, as the children of an interracial couple, B-W people symbolize the progress of society) rather than preparing participants for foreseeable challenges, such as the social pressure to choose one racial identity/community over the other. Participants explained that they understood the lack of family conversation about the challenges of a biracial identity to be due either to their parents’ desire to be protective or due to ignorance about the challenges participants would face. Nonetheless, most participants expressed the sense that they would have benefitted from these
kinds of discussions. They further emphasized that parents of biracial children need to create a space for open conversations about the benefits and challenges of biracial identity construction.

In brief, the present results add to parent racial socialization theory in their application to the B-W population. One specific implication is the need for parents to attend to family dynamics as they support or threaten their child’s divergent racial identity. Moreover, these results suggest that much remains to be learned about biracial socialization as unique from racial socialization within monoracial families. For these participants, parental socialization was a nuanced familial process that involved addressing what it means to be a biracial individual and a multiracial family.

Implications for Clinical Practice

All of the participants in this study indicated that having had the opportunity to be interviewed about their racial identity construction process was valuable, and noted that this kind of experience would likely also be valuable for other biracial individuals. Based on this feedback, the thematic results may have important implications for counselors and other professionals, such as teachers and career counselors, who support B-W emerging adults. First, because this study’s findings supported the ecological framework of identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) rather than fixed or stepwise models of racial identity (e.g., Poston, 1990), it is important that these implications be considered thoughtfully and in light of other factors about the individual, such as his or her intersecting identities and present concerns.

Further, since having a multicultural lens is important for working with all clients, it is important for therapists to consider their biases and blind spots about biracial individuals and interracial families. As was described by all participants in this study, verbal microaggressions are a frequent and particularly hurtful experience in academic/professional settings, especially
when it mirrors experiences within the person’s immediate or extended family. Therapists should also be thoughtful about the language used to racially identify clients (i.e., not assuming an identity based on their appearance) and to address/inquire about clients’ biracial experiences in a way that does not perpetuate or re-enact race-based stress from other sources.

Based on the present themes, some B-W biracial clients might benefit from exploring relationships with each monoracial parent and with extended family members as a part of therapy, since closeness to/distance from family members seems influential to an individual’s exposure to and thoughts about each racial community. Further, it seems important to explore the impact of biracial-based stress or trauma within the client’s family on the overall family dynamics and on the client. Examples of the impact of race-based trauma shared by participants in this study included issues with their phenotypical presentation and a poor sense of belonging to either monoracial community.

Additionally, the experience of working with a monoracial therapist may evoke emotional dynamics reminiscent of the client’s experience with one or both parent figures. As such, therapists who identify as monoracial Black or White should consider how their B-W clients might view them based on the client’s parental relationships. For example, White therapists may find themselves placing their B-W clients in the teaching role regarding race or racial issues, as some participants described behaving with their White family members.

Finally, another important implication of the present results is the appreciation expressed by all participants for the space to discuss their racial identity journeys. For this reason, when working with biracial children or adults, it is important to allow for the exploration of the multifaceted and nuanced racial identity construction process.
**Strengths and Limitations**

Some strengths of the development and execution of this study include (a) the use of detailed qualitative interviews and follow-up interviews to understand the lived experiences of a specific racial minority group; (b) attention to qualitative standards of validity and trustworthiness through bracketing and other strategies necessary for this kind of inquiry; and (c) the application of psychological theories to the phenomena described by a select group of participants.

By attending to the standards for qualitative research in psychology (Levitt et al., 2018; Morrow, 2005), the study provides rich and illustrative information about participants’ experience of the phenomenon while also adhering to a rigorous research process involving bracketing and member checks to enhance its credibility, confirmability, and transferability. The thematic analysis of the data, which indicates some commonalities of themes within participants’ experiences, further supports the study’s dependability. The study’s coherence is indicated by the connections made between the phenomenological findings and theoretical concepts, such as differentiation, emotional triangles and parent racial socialization.

As previously discussed, the lack of research on the psychological needs of Black-White biracial individuals is notable, since they represent one of the largest growing racial groups in the country. In particular, researchers need to investigate the racial identity navigation process for a group that faces unique and complex challenges in consolidating a solid sense of self. The current findings illuminate some aspects of the overall identity construction process and specifically address the role of family within this larger phenomenon.

Through the incorporation of elements from attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1991), parental racial socialization (Hughes & Johnson, 2001), and family systems theory (Bowen,
1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), this study focused on family factors likely to influence racial identity construction in a way that has not been attended to in previous research. Although not generalizable, the results of the study have meaningful clinical and theoretical implications, as discussed above. The themes emerging from this study are informative in terms of the distinctive circumstances faced by B-W emerging adults, providing professionals with a nuanced understanding of these individuals’ needs in order to promote a healthy sense of self.

In terms of limitations, I used purposive sampling to select B-W emerging adults who were raised by both biological parents in the same household. This sampling, therefore, did not study the experiences of individuals who were not raised by both parents, as these individuals are likely to have different family experiences. I chose to study the emerging adult population due to the salience of identity exploration and reconciliation at this developmental time (Arnett, 2007) and because individuals in this age range could be expected to report on childhood family of origin experiences more readily and accurately than older adults due to temporal closeness. It is important to consider, however, that as they mature and continue to construe their identities, participants’ narratives around family of origin and other developmental experiences may be re-interpreted.

Another limitation is that the inclusion criteria included having been raised in the same household until age 18. However, the parents of two participants were divorced when the participants were older than 18. The experience of presumed familial conflict in the context of divorce may influence emotional triangulation within the family and/or how participants understand their relationships with each parent in retrospect.
Additionally, all of the participants in the present study had a Black father and a White mother. Individuals with White fathers and Black mothers might have had different experiences in terms of familial dynamics and attachments.

A final limitation has to do with participants’ potentially faulty memory and/or social desirability bias, especially as participants were asked to reflect on their early developmental experiences.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon under study and the detailed themes and sub-themes found in this qualitative inquiry, there are several recommendations for future research. As research on this unique population is lacking in psychology literature, it is important to expand the present findings through further exploration of each subtheme and by larger and more heterogeneous samples in terms of family-of-origin composition.

As an example, sibling pairs could be interviewed to better understand the role of these relationships in the racial identity construction process. Other research could explore the impact of siblings’ intersecting identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation) and other attribute differences (e.g., phenotypical presentation) on how each sibling makes meaning of their own racial identities, as well as the impact of differential closeness with each parent on siblings’ racial experiences. Additionally, a study of monoracial parents’ experience of their own identities in relation to raising biracial children seems important in terms of how these parents experience themselves racially and the value they place on racial identity meaning-making may play a role in family discussions of race.

Another way to add to our knowledge of this population is to expand the current research to samples beyond the emerging adult age range (i.e., older than 30 years of age). Given the
potential for changes within the perspective of emerging adults over time, it seems important to conduct future research with samples of B-W middle-aged and older adults in order to compare and contrast thematic findings.

An emergent theme about which there is currently limited psychological discussion and research has to do with the impact of racial identity on B-W individuals’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their appearance. Moreover, future studies may seek to explore the connection between biracial individuals’ phenotypical concerns and feelings of relatedness vs. distance with each parent. A qualitative study on these topics would help to better understand the phenomenon of B-W phenotypical concerns, which is likely to have important theoretical and clinical implications.

To further work in creating a voice for this marginalized population, it seems important to validate quantitative measures of constructs studied primarily on monoracial populations (e.g., differentiation of self) on B-W biracial individuals. Due to the inherent differences in racial identity construction and family dynamics as noted in the present results (e.g., lack of racial relatedness of either parent to a biracial child), measures should be created specifically for this population to operationalize, for example, parental biracial socialization. Based on the study’s findings and the earlier suggestion that biracial socialization is different from racial socialization within a monoracial family unit, research with a measure of parental biracial socialization may add to our understanding of how monoracial parents address what it means to be biracial with their children.

The narratives and reflections of participants in this study provided a detailed look into how 10 emerging adults understand their families, themselves, and their social worlds. This research gave a voice to a group of individuals whose experiences have been sorely
underrepresented in psychology theory and research. As a whole, the present findings can be interpreted to underscore the point that family dynamics play a significant role in racial identity construction, a role that is contextual, nuanced, and far beyond black and white.
References


in the United States, and White Americans. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 41*, 72-85.


Table 1

Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mother’s Race/Identity</th>
<th>Father’s Race/Identity</th>
<th>State of Residence</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Italian American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Some college*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Scottish American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Irish American</td>
<td>Afro-Caribbean American</td>
<td>IN</td>
<td>Graduate/Professional degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>German/Irish American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Some graduate studies*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Canadian American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Some college*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Irish American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>TN</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Gender-variant, queer</td>
<td>German/English American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Some graduate studies*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Irish/French Canadian American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Some college*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>German American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Irish/French Canadian American</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Some college*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * current student.
### Table 2

*Themes, Sub-themes and Additional Significance Statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with family members contributed to individuals’ experience and understanding of race</td>
<td>Experiences with/ thoughts about each cultural community formed through extended family relationships</td>
<td>P9: I um, like, my, my mom was always a very um, she was always like, a very loving parent, and she's always very um, she's just a whole lot of fun, and um, she spends a lot of time with my brother and I when we were growing up, so, I was um, so, I'd like always loved her very much, and um... So, I think um, because of that, and also just for the fact that I spent so much more time with her family. I think um, that... Maybe, kind of, um... We believe—I don't want to say less interested, but just less inclined to want to explore kind of the, Black side of my ancestry when I was younger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P1: I, when it comes to my White side, like we’re Italian. My mom’s Italian, my grandpa’s Italian. So you know, spaghetti, pasta, this and that. Not anything crazy. But with my Black side, um, my dad, a lot of the people from his side of the family just weren’t in the best place. So I didn’t get to be in contact with them so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P2: Um, when I was around, let’s say if I went to the house of my White friends, I’d fit in pretty easily. I think it’s because of being around my mom’s family so often. I knew of what traditions they had, I knew how to behave. I knew - um, I was very comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit of seeing/experiencing both racial “worlds”</td>
<td></td>
<td>P6: I think that being in this position that is like kind of straddling two worlds, I can easily shift back and forth between perspectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P7: I see like certain things in the world that exist but are invisible to like other people who are just one or the other, like in this way of like I don't see, I don't necessarily see like racial reconciliation as being all the burden of White people, um, I think there is a lot of internalized racism that we perpetuate in the Black community, and I also think that there's a lot of ways in which we shut ourselves off from um from teaching um White people what we want from them, because I think we see that as like taxing, some? But I think because of my straddling two worlds I really see work and growth on both sides, um. And I feel like I can speak both languages and I'm accepted in both worlds, whether or not I really feel like I'm a part of them, I feel like I can navigate pretty freely in both worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about racial nonacceptance in childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>P1: I mean it’s kind of interesting that like my grandparents before I was born like they were racist… I mean, like they didn’t like the thought of my mom being with my dad and I mean their whole mindset changed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of verbal microaggressions within the immediate and/or extended families</td>
<td></td>
<td>P2: So when I did see my dad’s side of the family, oftentimes they, they would say it jokingly and I could understand that but it still bothered me as a child, they would call me “White-washed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P8: “Oh my god, [name]! Let me touch your hair!”…it just felt like a little bit on the pedestal to the point of being uncomfortable… “Can you tan? Can you get sunburned?” It’s like stuff like that where I’m just like okay you’re pushing it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important role of siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td>P5: he was my brother, you know, he, he was my best friend, so I, I, could tell him everything, but um, once, once I learned something, uh, of course he wasn't around for the chocolate milk thing [way P’s father explained mixed race skintone to P]. And well, I told my dad to do it, I uh, did the chocolate milk thing for [brother].So, it's kinda cute when you look at it, but, uh, um, he never, he never really questioned… I did the chocolate milk thing for him… I think he grasped it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P3: people would like, always</td>
<td>people would like, always joke that my older</td>
<td>P3: people would like, always joke that my older sister was the White one and I … Essentially, her friends were, weren't mostly Black, and I don’t know how it kind of happened, just like I said we were all together, pretty much all the time. Um, but uh, most of her friends were, you know White, and most of my friends were, um were Black, and, um, like growing up—like understanding her, um I could kind of, hmm, I guess not thinking about it, they all, they were all Black. I guess I just kind of… I don't know, I think…times when I get told things that I just don't feel comfortable…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joke that my older sister was</td>
<td>sister was the White one and I … Essentially,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the White one and I …</td>
<td>her friends were, weren't mostly Black, and I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>don’t know how it kind of happened, just like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I said we were all together, pretty much all the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Um, but uh, most of her friends were, you know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White, and most of my friends were, um were</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black, and, um, like growing up—like understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her, um I could kind of, hmm, I guess not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thinking about it, they all, they were all Black.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I guess I just kind of… I don't know, I think…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>times when I get told things that I just don't</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feel comfortable…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P8: Umm, my sister and I have talked about it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and asked just how like we’re this new section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the family tree that’s…I don’t know…the lack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of homogeny with like both of our grandparents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race and racial tension affected family</td>
<td>Awareness that neither parent could fully relate to the biracial experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dynamics</td>
<td>family dynamics</td>
<td>P2: I feel like I have a lot more to prove than my mother but a lot less to prove than my father. Um because my mother grew up White, I don’t want to say that everything was handed to her; but it kind of was. She was the cheerleader in hs, she participated in beauty pageants, um everybody loved her. There was never really a problem for my mom. My dad grew up in Brooklyn, never had a lot of money, had to get a job at a young age. Um to be honest, my parents are different as night and day, they really are. Like I always felt like I had to prove a lot more than my mom. Like when my mom would say, “Oh that’s easy,” I would kind of think um I’m like yea, well you would think that. And then with my dad, as opposed to my dad, if he was having a difficulty I was a lot more sympathetic. And as I got older, I realized that that wasn’t right. Both of my parents um if they’re having problems, I should weigh both of them equally…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to educate the White parent (and other White family members) about race-related issues/ experiences of POC</td>
<td>P7: My parents they didn't, first, like they talked about race in this way that they definitely didn't shy away from race, but I don't know that my parents taught me the weight of what being mixed race was going to be like, and I don't think they could have known because neither one of them are um which is another weird thing for your parents to um being gay and being mixed race are both things that my parents can't relate to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to educate the White parent (and other White family members) about race-related issues/ experiences of POC</td>
<td>P4: I can't really think of you know of a specific example but I definitely know that my mom's you know relationship with um me, she really relies on me um a lot of times to help her just to become like a better human, become you know more um aware of her privilege and things like that so you know, she knows, she knows very much that um you know I... I identity more with my Black identity. And she's okay with that, you know, she knows that um the world most likely you know sees me um as a Black woman and you know she's been fine with that and she really does um that really does um...like my experiences and my stories that I tell her has definitely made her more aware of you know what I have to go through, what you know other um minorities have to go through. Um, you know, things that she says, that could be potentially you know ignorant or you know underline racist or um it's...it's really just a lot of um of making her aware of her privilege and kind of catching her on the things that could be known as like ignorant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to educate the White parent (and other White family members) about race-related issues/ experiences of POC</td>
<td>P 7: she kind of explains her justification a little bit I get a little concerned, That it's superficial sometimes I get frustrated and end up coming off as like superior and arrogant some like &quot;no, that's not how you should think about it, here's how you should think about it,&quot; and um you know also thinking like sometimes when we're talking about things, we're talking about what it's like to be Muslim in America, and neither one of us is Muslim, and I also don't want to be this person who seems to be an authority on the topic, but I also sometimes get concerned by how she brings her critical thinking around how to like treat people or how to like feed the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allyship/connectedness with the parent of Color due to shared experiences of marginalization</td>
<td>P5: They do an awesome job to keep that, an um, my relationship with my dad... Is... Not overall better than my mom, but it's um... It's a little bit more, like we get each other better.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P8: I think my father being a strong role model and like...again, I’m hesitant to use the word friend...but, just like a strong role model and really like great guy. And I feel that was really important for me, growing up, to kind of disregard any like media portrayals of like Black people and never being less. I think having...having a dad who antithesize those falsehoods like really did a lot to drill that home for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges related to phenotypical presentation</td>
<td>P10: I guess I just had this idea that you know...We all kind of idolize our mothers when we’re younger...And she was beautiful and I wanted to be beautiful. And I guess there was part of me that realized that because you know my complexion, I would never be as beautiful as her and that was hard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P7: I had like relaxed my hair, I had hair down to like my shoulders, I would like um, I listened to you know like White music like angsty punk music, I um, I was you know pretty chubby growing up so I hated myself for that and hated that I couldn’t like fit into this like ideal of this kind of like androgynous like a skater punk image like White like guy/girl image or whatever and um yeah it just was I was depressed and I just wanted to like be accepted by White culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared experiences of microaggressions with parents</td>
<td>P4: when he shared with his friends or classmates, I would say, um that his mom was White and his dad was Black, um (laughs) I specifically remember one of...he kept telling me one of classmates asked if my dad got my mom um drunk (oh) um and is that how he was conceived or something.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of how the family addressed racial/ biracial identity</td>
<td>Various factors influencing the extent to which race/ racial issues were discussed with parents</td>
<td>P9: I kind of felt caught in the middle, a little bit, instead of, um, like I was alone, and, and I couldn't really relate to anyone… It made me pretty uncomfortable, and just embarrassed to talk about, and uh, also as a kid, I was very um, determined to please, I guess. So, I never really wanted to worry my parents, or upset them. P6: …because of the difficulty I had with, like, President Trump being elected, and like feeling endanger, like, cause like I was in physical danger because of it, and [my mother] not understanding why or how and just kind of dismissing those feelings for me, umm, and saying things like, &quot;well, I mean I just don't understand you guys never experienced anything bad growing up or&quot;, so just not really wanting to listen and try and understand. And I think it's more just to protect herself in her own like fragile, uhh, ideas, that everything is equal and she, she's not part of the system that oppresses her own children (laughter) like, and that's where I've landed and so I've tried to be, umm, aware of that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of social and geographic context on racial self-identification and identification by others</td>
<td>P6: I grew up close to my mom's family, I went to all predominantly White schools. Like from kindergarten to through like my PhD and now I work in a predominantly White, umm, profession, like in psychology and so in that setting I'm definitely identified as like a Black woman, but when I'm more with a more ethnic or racially mixed crowd, I’m identified as like a multiracial or light skinned Black woman. So people will ask like, &quot;what are you mixed with?&quot; or &quot;what are your parents?&quot;. So that its definitely context specific. P2: But because of the way that the [extended] families and the schools treated me, I always wondered if I had to sway towards one or the other. So because of my childhood, I tried to act more White or tried to act more Black to try to fit into certain groups. P7: I mean you know growing up I you know I’ve always operated in either White spaces or Black spaces um there wasn’t a lot of like... [southern US city] definitely has a long history with like with race and racial reconciliation and oppression and stuff but um it's it I’ve I I felt like I haven’t been in too many spaces where there was like mixed uh uh like a lot of diversity… Um so um yeah, it just felt like growing up I’ve always kind of um had to be like I was always never I had like one foot in both worlds and kind of always felt like the other in the room.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responses to racial microaggressions</td>
<td>P6: in fourth grade, umm, a classmate called me the n word and I didn't even really know what that meant, I knew it didn't feel good, I knew I was like mad and my friends got mad, but I went home and told my mom and that's, we like had a conversation, and then my dad wanted to go up to the school, and it was like a big deal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3: my mother, like, walked by [laughs]. She was absolutely furious! Like, told me I could leave if I didn't want to finish the tournament, you know, she was just like, completely appalled that day, because of course there was no comment, no personal comment that all, especially something like your &quot;hair is out of control&quot;?... and like the way my mother reacted to that, I honestly think that that was, um, interestingly enough... I think that was probably one of the, just a really formulative experience for me, because, you know, I think by definitely being um, being Black, you just kinda like learn to roll with the punches, like, because you can't respond to everything.</td>
<td>Sense that discussing racial identity journeys is valuable for self and others</td>
<td>P2: Whether it's an interview or talking with a significant other or even with your parents if you have a close enough relationship with them, about how you see yourself in regards - because as much as people today try to avoid race and it's like “it's not that big of a deal because it's the color of your skin,” it's not. It's it's kind of who we are. Every race has a different upbringing and a different way of seeing themselves, so it's a cultural thing. And it's something that is good to talk about. It's not something that people should avoid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4: I think early on...um my mom and dad, they tried to really get me to have like a big you know um sense of pride in being biracial and being um being multiracial or multiracial...and just being able to experience um you know both cultures or...or things like that. So um... I want to say that they...tried um you know to just to be for me to understand that um that I am like the direct result of um antiracism I guess. So... you know, in a sense. So, they tried to get me to understand that oh you know, you're so beautiful because you're the product of you know what...what true love looks like or what um...you know I guess um what you know, antiracism looks like and things like that.</td>
<td></td>
<td>P5: You know not a lot of people talk about it. you—you know, they, they, they don't talk about, they don't talk about um, uh, uh, multicultural. You always hear the, the, the quote-unquote just, you know, the Black issues, or just the White issues, or just the Black versus White, blah, blah, blah... But they don't talk about, uh, uh, us cats in the middle [laughs] you know so, we, we got a lot to offer to the table too,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. What are your most salient social entities? [e.g., gender, religious, interpersonal roles]
2. How do you usually describe yourself racially?
3. Generally, how do other people see you racially? How does this compare to how you see yourself?
4. How do you view yourself and/or describe yourself with regards to race based on the social context?
5. Tell me about the first time you came to recognize racial differences. [When did you first think of yourself racially?]
6. Describe your group or groups of friends during adolescence. [What comes to mind when you think of your cultural background as compared to that of your peers?]
7. What events stick out in your mind regarding your development with regards to race?
8. Growing up, what messages were you given by your parents or other adults about your race?
9. How did your parents teach you about each of your cultures?
10. To what extent did your family talk about what makes you racially/culturally unique?
11. How do you view your racial identity in relation to those of your family members?
12. How, if at all, have your relationships with your parents influenced your sense of yourself as a person and your thinking about your race?
13. What important events in your family’s history or during your childhood or adolescence that influence your sense of yourself racially?
14. How were current events regarding race handled in your family (e.g., level of openness in discussing)?
15. What, if any, challenges have you faced in understanding who you are racially and/or culturally?

16. What has been your experience with racial/ethnic bias or discrimination? [Who were the sources of discrimination?]

17. What do you enjoy about having a biracial identity?

18. What do you enjoy least about having a biracial identity?

19. How, if at all, has your racial identity affected your opportunities or choices in life (e.g., education, employment, romantic partners)? [What is the racial background of your current/past partners?]

20. What advice would you give (or “what would you say”) to the parents of a biracial child?
   What would you say to the child? [What do you wish someone would have said to you?]

21. In what other ways has your biracial identity been important in your life, other than what we’ve already discussed? [Is there anything else you’d like to share?]

22. What has discussing this topic today been like for you?

23. Is there anything else you would like to add before concluding this interview?

**Follow-up Interview Protocol**

1. What was it like for you to share some of your experiences around being raised by one Black and one White parent with me during our first interview?

2. Upon reviewing the transcript of our last meeting, is there anything you would like to add to or clarify in your responses?

3. Is there anything else you would like to add before concluding your participation in this study?
Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following information

What is the race of your biological mother?
  o White, non-Hispanic
  o African American
  o Multiracial
  o Other: ______________

What is the race of your biological father?
  o White, non-Hispanic
  o African American
  o Multiracial
  o Other: ______________

What is the ethnic background of your White parent? Please fill in: ______________

When you have been asked to identify your racial/ethnic background, such as on the last U.S. Census, what category do you choose?
  o White, non-Hispanic
  o African American
  o Multiracial
  o Other: ______________

Gender Identity
  o Female
  o Male
  o Transgender
  o Other

Age: Please fill in ______________

State of Residence: Please fill in ______________

Highest Level of Education
  o Less than high school
  o High school
  o Some college
  o Undergraduate degree (BA; BS etc.)
  o Graduate Degree (MA, Ph.D.)
  o Professional Degree (MD, JD etc.)

Please list who lived in your household during your childhood (e.g., siblings, grandparents, etc.).
Appendix C

Recruitment

ATTN: Looking for Black-White biracial adults willing to discuss experiences of being biracial and being raised by one African American and one White parent

Greetings!

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to consider participating in my dissertation study. I am a doctoral student at the University at Albany, State University of New York and this research will be conducted for my dissertation.

I designed this study to obtain an understanding of racial identity in biracial individuals, how a person’s racial identity status may influence his or her life, and how family dynamics play a role in the identity process. It is my hope that the findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge of racial identity in biracial individuals and help to increase the awareness and understanding of scholars, mental health professionals, and the general public of the challenges and benefits of being raised in a multiracial family.

If you are between 18 and 25 years of age and were raised until adulthood in one household by one Black and one White parent who were your biological parents, I ask that you contact me at claustin@albany.edu. Participation in the study will involve completing a brief information sheet and a 60-90 minute in-person or telephone interview and a 30 minute follow-up interview a month later about your experiences.

This dissertation study is being supervised by Dr. Myrna Friedlander, Ph.D. If you have any additional questions regarding any aspect of this research project, please do not hesitate to contact Crystal L. Austin at the University at Albany, 518-442-5056, or claustin@albany.edu; or Dr. Friedlander at the University at Albany, mfriedlander@albany.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance in the Office for Sponsored Programs, at the University at Albany, at 518-437-4569 or orcc@albany.edu.

To show my appreciation for your time, participants who complete the interviews will receive gift cards worth $50 each. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Crystal L. Austin
claustin@albany.edu
Appendix D
Consent Form

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to consider participating in my study. I am a doctoral student at the University at Albany, State University of New York and this research will be conducted for my dissertation. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Myrna Friedlander, Professor, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, at the University at Albany. Please consider participating in this study if you are between 18 and 30 years of age and were raised by one Black and one White parent living in one household.

This research project, entitled *Understanding Racial Identity in Black-White Emerging Adults*, seeks to get a better understanding of multiracial identity and how an individual’s biracial identity status may influence their life. Although you may not receive direct benefit from your participation, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research. It is my hope that the findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge of biracial identity and help to increase the awareness and understanding of scholars, mental health professionals, and the general public of the challenges and benefits of being raised in a biracial family.

Participation in this study consists of a demographic questionnaire, followed by a 60-90 minute initial interview and an additional 30 minute follow-up interview. At the conclusion of the initial interview, we will schedule the follow-up interview for approximately one month from today. If for any reason the follow-up interview must be cancelled or rescheduled, we will communicate via e-mail to coordinate. Before the follow-up interview, I will e-mail you a written version of today’s interview for your review. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study and transcribed interviews will be archived. Please refrain from using any names or identifying information of third parties within the interview to protect your identity and those of the discussed third party.

Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part, not to respond to some of the questions, or to withdraw your consent at any time (by expressing withdrawal to the interviewer during or after the interviews). I do not anticipate any risk in your participation other than you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions and may be distressed in recollecting and sharing some challenges you’ve faced. At the conclusion of the interviews, I will provide you with the contact information for a community counseling center should you wish to further process your challenging experiences and any related distress you may feel.

Your participation will also be confidential. Your name will not appear on the demographic questionnaire or within the written version of the recording. Instead, your interview and demographic questionnaire will be saved with a code number. Dissemination of research results will include descriptions of your narrative, including exact quotations, but will be de-identified. All contact will be had through e-mail. Your contact information will be saved on a secure drive and will be linked to your interview code number for scheduling purposes only.

To thank you for participating in this study, participants who complete the two interviews will receive Visa or Amazon gift cards worth $50 each.
By continuing with today’s interview and completion of the demographic questionnaire you are giving consent for participation in the study, indicating that you have read this consent form and understand its content. You are additionally providing consent for audio recording of the initial and follow-up interviews.

If you have any additional questions regarding any aspect of this research project, please do not hesitate to contact Crystal L. Austin at the University at Albany, XXX-XXX-XXXX, or clausin@.albany.edu; or Myrna L. Friedlander, Ph.D. at 518-442-5049, or mfriedlander@albany.edu. Research at the University at Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance in the Office for Sponsored Programs, at the University at Albany, at 1-866-857-5459 or hsconcerns@albany.edu.
Appendix E

Debriefing - *Understanding Racial Identity in Black-White Emerging Adults*

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to participate in my study. This research project, entitled *Understanding Racial Identity in Black-White Emerging Adults*, seeks to get a better understanding of multiracial identity and how an individual’s biracial identity status may influence their life. Although you may not receive direct benefit from your participation, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research. It is my hope that the findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge of biracial identity and help to increase the awareness and understanding of scholars, mental health professionals, and the general public of the challenges and benefits of being raised in a biracial family.

I understand that because we were discussing such personal topics, you may have become uncomfortable answering some of the questions and may have been distressed in recollecting and sharing some challenges you have faced. As such, I would like to provide you with contact information for [agency name], a mental health practice with several locations in [city, state] should you wish to further process your challenging experiences and any related distress you may feel. The website for [agency name] is [website URL] and the telephone number is [XXX-XXX-XXXX].

Thank you once again for your participation. As you were informed prior to your participation, you are receiving a $50 gift card as a thank you for your time.

If you have any additional questions regarding any aspect of this research project, please do not hesitate to contact Crystal L. Austin at the University at Albany, 917-256-9447, or claustin@.albany.edu; or Myrna L. Friedlander, Ph.D. at 518-442-5049, or mfriedlander@albany.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance in the Office for Sponsored Programs, at the University at Albany, at 518-437-4569 or orcc@albany.edu.
Appendix F
Coding Team Positionality Statements

Coder 1 Reflexivity Statement

I identity as a 25 year-old biracial (Black-Native Indian/White), cisgender, heterosexual, woman. I am currently a third year doctoral student in a Counseling Psychology program. Prior to pursuing my graduate studies, I attended a small, predominately White, liberal arts university in Virginia. I was born and raised in Virginia by my Black mother and native Indian/White father. I, along with my brother, are the only biracial individuals on both my mother and father’s extended family. I therefore relate to this population because of my own racial identity and family dynamic.

Growing up I was the only biracial individual amongst my family and friends, which presented many challenges. As such, I have always been interested in learning about other biracial people who have similar lived experiences. I have conducted research exploring feelings of distinctiveness and satisfaction across the lifespan for biracial people and more recently, exploring how the experiences of racism and biracial identity development influence the mental health and well-being of biracial people. I was thrilled to join this research project and team because of my own personal and professional connection with the biracial population and to contribute towards gaining a more complete understanding of this population. Biracial individuals are the fastest growing racial group in the country and yet the most understudied. Therefore, I believe the findings from the current study will be useful and critical to mental health professionals, educators, parents and extended family members to better understand the lived experiences of biracial individuals.

I expect that all participants will identify themselves as biracial; however, they may identify more closely with their monoracial Black identity. I also expect that the findings will
indicate that participants have had difficulties with their biracial identity development as a result of living with two parents who are of different racial backgrounds. Furthermore, I expect that participants received implicit or explicit messages of colorblindness regarding race relations from both parents. Finally, I expect that many participants will be excited and passionate about partaking in this process because of the scarce literature and research with this population.

**Coder 2 Reflexivity Statement**

I identify as a 31 year-old, B-W biracial, heterosexual, cisgender male. I completed my doctorate in Counseling Psychology in June 2017 and am currently serving as Visiting Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology in a Psy.D. program. Prior to moving to larger metropolitan areas (i.e. Albany, NY; Washington DC) for graduate school in my early 20s, I lived in a small, predominantly White, suburban/rural college town in eastern Connecticut. I was raised by my White mother, a single parent, and maternal family without contact with my Black father or paternal family. I am married to a White woman and together we have a newborn biracial daughter. Thus, I am interested in the present study for both personal and professional reasons.

I have conducted research exploring multiracial identity integration as a potential protective factor among mixed race (combination of races non-specific) individuals and am continuing a program of research with multiracial individuals in my ongoing academic career. Reflecting on my own experiences, and in learning of others’ biracial experience through conversation and literature, I have found the interrelated topics of racial identity development, experiences with racism, and multiracial pride to be fascinating in their complexity. As such, I was excited to join the research team for this project and to contribute to a more complete understanding of biracial experiences. Family dynamics, in particular, seems a highly important yet understudied aspect of the biracial experience and I believe that findings
from the current study will be useful to parents, educators, and helping-professionals in their efforts to facilitate the development of the biracial individuals in their lives.

I expect that findings from the current study will be varied and responses from participants will contain both common themes and idiosyncratic experiences. I expect that some participants will identify as biracial, that others will primarily adopt a monoracial Black identity, and that few, if any, will primarily endorse adoption of a White identity. I expect that participants will report feeling that they have more in common with their Black relatives than their White relatives. Similarly, I anticipate that participants will report receiving more frequent explicit messages about the meaning of race and how to navigate issues of race from their Black parent/family members and that participants will rate these messages as more helpful than racial messages received from their White parent/family. In contrast, I expect that participants will report receiving little guidance from either parent regarding their biracial experience specifically (as opposed to their Black experience) and participants will report receiving implicit and explicit messages about biracial experience more frequently from media, peers, teachers, and other mixed race individuals, if present in their lives. Finally, I expect that few participants will have given much conscious, prolonged thought to the topics covered within the interview and that some will develop new insights or self-reflections about being biracial through discussing their experience.
Appendix G

Sociopolitical Context Positionality Statement

The current racial climate used as a lens through which participants understand their racial identity construction was evident in how they responded to several interview questions. In discussing how they choose to identify racially, several participants alluded to understanding and asserting their identities as Black or a person Of Color in light of race-related unrest and prejudice. For example, Participant 5 reacted to the experience of being invalidated within monoracial groups by thinking about himself as a POC in the eyes of prejudiced people and systems.

Among the Black people, it's like, oh you're not really, you know, you're not really Black, and you're not, you know, you don't understand the struggle, or you don't understand this, and you don't understand that. It's like, hold on brother, yes I do! Because, [laughs] we're still Black, don't get it twisted. You go out in, uh, uh, Alabama or Mississippi, somewhere... We, we, we get, uh, we get just as in trouble just as quick as y'all would...

The initial interview with Participant 4 took place just a few days after the Charlottesville, VA riots, which was particularly provocative for this participant who is from the southern state. In exploring the impact of race and racial discrimination in her life, this participant related it to the Neo-Nazi group rioting in Charlottesville. Throughout her childhood, her parents had conveyed messages of biracial pride by noting that she is the product of anti-racism by being racially tied to these two historically divergent groups. However in the face of recent events, the participant questioned how prejudiced people and systems felt about biracial people for the same reason (i.e., they represent anti-racism and integration).
So, not only is that exhausting but I almost just wonder um you know for the Neo-Nazis and those people who participated in that riot, in that rally, um am I, or people like me more of a target or do they hate people like biracial people more, because not only are we like you know Black but we're like the direct product of you know when a White person you know goes against their views and you know has a child with a Black person. Like do they hate me more?

In responding to the interview questions about how they and their families think/ talk about race-related current events, several participants named the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the events leading up to it like the shooting of Black teen Trayvon Martin as catalysts for family discussion of race. Some indicated that discussion of BLM and other recent race-related political commentary was the most they had talked with their parents about racial tension (i.e., more so than they did in childhood or adolescence), while others avoided lengthy discussions with parents for a variety of reasons including the potential for conflict that could arise. Several participants learned more about or were reminded of the prejudiced and xenophobic views about people of Color that some extended family members held through posts on social media in the wake of the arguably polarizing 2016 presidential election. Participant 10 shared about the emotionally evocative comments that her mother made in reference to the killing of an unarmed Black person.

I remember my mom was very convinced that he had it coming, and he deserved it, and he was a thug, and all these words were used. And I remember just having this moment where it was like I felt very angry. I felt very angry. I felt this sense of, How could you think all these pretty inherently racist things and, you know, bring Black children into the world?
While it is apparent that family–child interactions around race affected some participants in a negative way, for others discussing race-related current events with parents has facilitated closeness in adulthood. Participant 6 noted that she appreciates that her father “is willing to like have some of those conversations with [her] about, ‘yeah, the system is messed up for Black people, and it does suck and let me tell you this experience I had.’” Although the current racial and political climate of the United States has influenced B-W biracial emerging adults and their families in varying and nuanced ways, it is clear that the historical period in which data collection took place helped shaped the lens through which participants understood and talked about how their families address race.