Family Racial/Ethnic Socialization Through the Lens of Multiracial Black Identity: A M(ai)cro Analysis of Meaning-Making

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Abstract

The role of family members in racial identity development is often constrained to conceptualizations of parental socialization, with a focus on socialization during childhood and adolescence. However, parents may continue to play a role in racial identity development as youth enter young adulthood and continue to explore who they are. Our study investigates how parents feature in the racial identity meaning-making of multiracial Black college students to understand the role that parents may continue to play for youth's identities as they age. We invoke a critical m(ai)cro perspective to fully consider how parent influence necessarily intertwines with macrosystem dynamics of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and monoracism for multiracial Black youth's identity meaning-making in the context of Black Lives Matter. Through inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews with 11 multiracial Black ("Black+") college students, we found that young adults mention parents or familial adults when discussing their racial identity to (1) recount parental guidance on racial identity, (2) illustrate the racial politics of multiracial identification, and (3) expose the nuances of navigating (un)shared identity spaces within the family. Our findings highlight the relevance of parental socialization in the adulthood years, and that parents are inextricably implicated in how youth are making sense of macrosystem dynamics of anti-Blackness and monoracism. We end with a discussion of takeaways for parents of multiracial youth.

Keywords Multiracial identity · Identity development · M(ai)cro framework · College students · Young adults · Black identity · Black + identity

Introduction

Racial identity is a core part of identity development for youth growing up in a society structured by racism. This identity is simultaneously shaped by micro-contexts like family and school as well as by the macro-context of cultural values and beliefs about race (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Rogers et al., 2021). During childhood and adolescence, a sizable literature has emphasized the role that parents play in racial identity through processes of racial socialization to help youth understand their race, culture, and who they are as they face of societal racial inequities (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006b; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). This literature focuses mostly on the reporting of direct or explicit racial socialization practices in monoracial families (e.g., Ruck et al., 2021)

as well as the early years of development, with less research on how young adults interpret the role of family in the meaning of their racial identities (Rogers et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). These trends continue in the growing field of family-focused research among multiracial youth and families (Atkin & Yoo, 2019).

Though there is ample research showing the influence of racial socialization on racial identity development (e.g., Huguley et al., 2019), thinking about socialization through the lens of identity by engaging youth's meaning-making may afford us a different perspective on the broader role of parents for youth identity development. That is, what can we learn about the significance of parents in racial identity development through listening to how multiracial youth make meaning of their racial identities? The current analysis takes this identity-centered approach to racial socialization and asks: *To what extent and in what ways do multiracial Black (Black+) young adults incorporate their parents or other adult family members when making meaning of their own racial identities?* Our analysis engages the microsystem

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of family in dialog with macrosystems of race and multiracial identity in the United States (U.S.) in the years following Derek Chauvin's murder of George Floyd in 2020. As such, our research is situated within the historical and present-day societal definitions of race, as well as sociopolitical context in which multiracial young adults negotiate their racial identities. In this section, we ground our analysis in the m(ai)cro model of development (Rogers et al., 2021) and the organizing tenets of MultiCrit (Harris, 2016). We introduce these frameworks and then use them to structure our investigation of the continued role of family in the identity meaning-making of multiracial youth.

Framing (Multi)Racial Development: M(ai)cro Model & Critical Multiracial Theory

An ecological systems perspective to human development sees individuals as nested within layers of context, from the proximal contexts of the microsystem (e.g., family) to the more 'distal' macrosystem (e.g., societal norms) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Spencer et al., 1997). The macrosystem contains societal belief systems and norms, which are constantly reinforced and broadly disseminated through master narratives—widely shared mainstream scripts of how society "should" operate (McLean & Syed, 2015; Rogers, 2018). The *m(ai)cro model* (Rogers et al., 2021) reframes this conversation to explicitly center the role of the macrosystem in human development, not as distal but as proximal to developmental processes. Using a m(ai)cro lens particularly attends to the ways that societal structures of power are inseparable from the micro-level racial identities and socialization experiences of multiracial youth. The m(ai)cro perspective disrupts notions of a neutral macrosystem that indirectly shapes differences in developmental outcomes, instead centering systems of inequality as embedded within youth's everyday experiences (Rogers et al., 2021). Leveraging a m(ai)cro approach is applicable for any facet of development, but is particularly important for racial identity, where the understanding of one's membership in racial groups interlaces the personal as well as political.

A core feature of the m(ai)cro model is a critical contextualized perspective of racial development and experiences. Yet, there is a tendency in investigations of multiracial identity to focus solely on microsystem experiences of race (i.e., experiences with parents, teachers, and friends) without a systematic consideration of the macrosystem of racism (Harris, 2016). Failing to investigate how the macrosystem of racism is inextricable from microsystem experiences ignores the fundamental ways that racism and white supremacy undergird everyday experiences and, in turn, shape multiracial identity development. This has at best led to an incomplete picture of how multiracial folks navigate the question of who they are, and at worst has upheld the

master narrative of the United States as a post-racial society where multiracial folks are a sign of racial harmony. Critical Multiracial Theory (MultiCrit; Harris, 2016), an extension of Critical Race Theory, contends that to fully understand what it means to be multiracial, we need a critical contextual perspective. Like the m(ai)cro lens, MultiCrit centers the ways that the structure of white supremacy constructs multiraciality and how that construction shapes the everyday experiences and individual meaning-making of multiracial people. Harris (2016) put forth eight tenets of MultiCrit (for a complete discussion, see Harris, 2016), six of which are most relevant to the current inquiry: (1) *challenge to ahistoricism,* which attends to racial history to make sense of multiracial experiences*;* (2) *monoracial paradigm of race,* which recognizes that the racial system of the U.S. is built on mutually exclusive racial categories that by definition erase the existence of multiracial people*;* (3) *racism, monoracism, and colorism* attends to the share and unique ways that multiracial folks experience racism like their peers, as well as more nuanced manifestations related to phenotype (skin color, hair)*;* (4) *challenge to dominant ideology,* or racial narratives that position multiracial folks as unaffected by race or racism, or as signs of a post-racial society*;* (5) *experiential knowledge,* which upholds the necessity of centering the narratives of multiracial folks in our understanding of the multiracial experience*;* and (6) *intersections of multiple racial identities,* which highlights the nuances of experience that multiracial folks may experience based on their racial background given the differing histories of racialization across groups in the U.S. (Harris, 2016). We use MultiCrit and the m(ai)cro framework to understand how and why multiracial youth make meaning of their own racial identities *through* their family experiences within this broader macro-context.

Macro-Context: (Multi)Racial Construction and Anti-Blackness

The beliefs, values, and narratives that uphold the system and structure of the macro-context are yoked to the dimension of *chronological time,* shaped and reshaped within cultural–historical moments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Engaging with historical trajectories of race in the U.S. is necessary to *challenge ahistoricism,* where historical analysis of specific issues is necessary to understand the present-day multiracial experience (Harris, 2016). The social category of race is a central part of the United States' macrosystem. Racial categories were designed to determine who was a full (white) citizen in this country—able to vote, own property, and obtain legal protection—and who could be subjugated without recourse (Masuoka, 2017). Thus, racial categories were rooted in anti-Blackness, used to legitimize the systematic devaluation,

dehumanization, and oppression of Black enslaved people. Racial identification was assigned by this system, operationalized through a mixture of physical appearance judgments and investigations of racial categorizations of one's ancestors. This essentialized approach constructed race (and racial identification) as heritable and biological. The biology of race was further legislated through hypodescent, which dictated that anyone with any Black ancestry be categorized (exclusively) as Black. While quantification of the share of Black "blood" someone had was sometimes documented, marking individuals has "1/2" or "1/8," which in theory acknowledged multiracial backgrounds (e.g., U.S. Census practices), any quantity of Blackness was a disqualifying factor for whiteness—and thus for rights and citizenship. In this way, the politics of race as biology created a rigid binary, the *monoracial paradigm* of race, where racial categories (particularly Black and white) are firmly bounded and mutually exclusive (Harris, 2016) for the purpose of upholding white purity and justifying anti-Blackness.

While multiracial folks—whose racial backgrounds and identities may reflect more than one socially defined racial group—have existed for hundreds of years, broad structural and academic recognition of multiracial status as distinct has only existed for a few decades in the United States (Rockquemore et al., 2009). This notable change coincided with a shift away from racial identity as something that is wholly *assigned* to something that is *personally chosen* (Masuoka, 2017). The 1960 U.S. Census marked the first time that respondents, rather than a Census Bureau employee, could fill out their demographic information themselves. While at this time the Census still only accepted identification with single racial categories, this opening to race as a personal choice allowed for research to understand the variety of potential identity labels chosen by multiracial folks (Renn, 2008; Root, 1990). The Multiracial Movement in the 1980s and 1990s was championed by parents of multiracial children and transracial adoptees who campaigned for explicit recognition of personally held multiracial identity. The 2000 U.S. Census marked the first time that individuals could choose to select multiple racial groups to identify their racial and ethnic background.

However, this trend toward multiracial recognition cannot be disentangled from anti-Blackness and white supremacy. The Multiracial Movement was in part pursued by white parents who sought to distance their children from Blackness *even* if they could not attain whiteness, and was supported by conservative politicians as a way to weaken political representation of monoracial minoritized groups (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Using a MultiCrit lens, we can see how legacies of heredity-based racial assignment and anti-Blackness also continue through systems of *monoracism*, which exclude or oppress multiracial folks by upholding racial categories as discrete and singular. For multiracial folks, *racism and colorism* intersect in monoracism such that they experience anti-Black racism while also potentially benefitting from (perceived) proximity to whiteness (Harris, 2016). These overlapping systems operate to uphold a monoracial paradigm of race, often producing invalidation experiences where an individual's personal racial identification is challenged, questioned, or denied by others (Franco & O'Brien, 2018; Franco et al., 2019; Harris, 2017). For example, a multiracial Black person with a lighter phenotype may personally identify as Black but others may question or even deny their membership in the Black racial group. This tension between personal choice and societal assignment of race is reflected in Root's (1990) early foundational work on multiracial identification, where she identified that many multiracial folks may adopt the monoracial label that society assigns to them, given the pressure to adhere to the established system of race. Even in a society that focuses increasingly on personal choice for racial identification, social messages of race defined by monoracism and anti-Blackness still play a defining role in shaping who people think they can be—and who they can be in the eyes of others.

The chronosystem changes related specifically to multiracial identity also exist within a broader dynamic sociopolitical system of race and racism. This was acutely salient during the recent resurgence of Black Lives Matter. In May 2020, Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, murdered George Floyd, setting off international protests about systemic anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and police brutality. Dynamics of race were deeply embedded in mainstream consciousness in the United States through months-long media coverage of ongoing activism. This conversation marked a notable (if temporary) shift toward a more critical discussion of race than was previously engaged at the national level. However, these conversations also reinforced racial status quo in many ways. Mirroring the historical origins of racial hierarchy in this country, much discourse furthered the master narrative of race as a monoracial construct and focused specifically on the Black–white binary, talking about what Black folks vs. white folks needed to be doing in this moment to further racial equality, occasionally including non-Black people of color as well. While this was an important and necessary conversation to have because of how white supremacy and anti-Black racial hierarchy manifests in the United States, this emphasis on monoracial groups did ignore the fact that multiracial, specifically multiracial Black, people's identities span these categories.

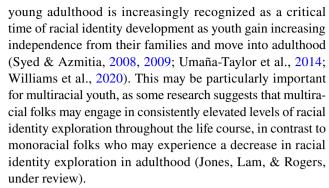## Micro-Context: The Role of Parents in Racial Identity Development

Embedded within the macro-context of race, racism, and BLM, the micro-context of the home and family environment plays a large role for how youth think about who they are,

and can act as a vessel for, or a disruptor of, macrosystem messages about race. Research on the impact parents have on racial identity development is often investigated through the lens of racial socialization, where parents impart information about race to their children. Parental racial socialization falls into several broad categories in the literature: *cultural socialization*, where parents implicitly and explicitly teach children about their racial heritage and history, promote cultural traditions, and facilitate racial and cultural pride; *preparation for bias*, where parents imbue an awareness of racism and prepare them to cope with racism in their daily lives; *promotion of mistrust,* where parents emphasize a need for caution in interracial interactions; *egalitarianism,* where parents emphasize the values of individual traits over racial group membership and position race as unimportant; and *silence about race*, which is characterized by an avoidance of race messaging or discussion (Hughes et al., 2006b; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

This parental socialization is perhaps most impactful for racial identity development (Csizmadia et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2006b; Huguley et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). However, much of this research has been done with monoracial youth. Even when multiracial youth are the focus of research, parental socialization work is overwhelmingly focused on the parent-directed messages that youth receive (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). There is less research on what messages or practices are taken up or elicited by multiracial youth in their racial identity navigation. Yet, we know that racial socialization is a dynamic, reciprocal give-and-take between parent and child, where children also exert agency amidst messages from their parents and family members (Williams et al., 2020). Indeed, a question raised in prior racial socialization research is the low congruence between parent and child reports of the frequency and content of socialization messages (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006a). The potential for disconnect between what the parent is saying and what the child is hearing may be especially salient in the case of multiracial youth, where parents and children may not have a shared racial background or racial identity.

As youth age, the parental role in racial socialization is theorized to decrease as other sources of socialization—peers, teachers, and social media—take up more time. But parents do not naturally disappear from their children's lives and may still be important for youth's racial identity development as they increasingly navigate a world outside the home. *How* they continue to be important for their older child's racial identity development is less known, both from the perspective of how *past* messages from their childhood linger into the present as well as how parents continue to feature in racial identity meaning-making for older youth as identities continue evolve. While adolescence is often emphasized as the key developmental stage for identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Rogers et al., 2020),

young adulthood is increasingly recognized as a critical time of racial identity development as youth gain increasing independence from their families and move into adulthood (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2009; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020). This may be particularly important for multiracial youth, as some research suggests that multiracial folks may engage in consistently elevated levels of racial identity exploration throughout the life course, in contrast to monoracial folks who may experience a decrease in racial identity exploration in adulthood (Jones, Lam, & Rogers, under review).

By taking up the assumption that parental socialization and racial identity are ongoing developmental processes, we enter the conversation about racial socialization in multiracial families from multiracial Black youth's racial identity meaning-making. In this way, we are allowing the youth to tell us how and why their parents maintain a salient role in how they are thinking about their racial identity in the present day. We can also understand how youth see their parents' actions as related to the larger racialized world they are trying to navigate outside of the home, a unique multiracial perspective that (monoracial) parents themselves cannot give.

The Present Study

The present study examined the interviews of 11 self-identified multiracial Black college students to understand how and why they mention their parents while making sense of their racial identity. We employ a m(ai)cro lens to explore to what extent parents remain a salient influence on multiracial Black emerging adults' understanding of their racial identities in the United States context, and how parents serve to reproduce or counteract macrosystem dynamics around race and racism. We take up this exploration within the context of the years following Derek Chauvin's murder of George Floyd in 2020, which not only made race and anti-Blackness increasingly salient at the national level, but also implicitly reinforced definitions of race as monoracial. By starting from the perspective of young adult meaning-making in our exploration of socialization messages, we hope to gain a broader understanding of what continuing socialization can look like for young adults, specifically how parents and other family members continue to play meaningful socializing roles beyond the younger years.

Method

Data were collected as part of the "Beyond Black and White" project, a larger multimethod study examining how monoracial and multiracial Black American adults navigated the 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement (Jones, Lam,

& Rogers, under review). The current analysis draws from the subsample of multiracial Black college students ($N=11$) who participated in semi-structured interviews. Because all participants disclosed a multiracial Black background or identification—that is, they identify with being Black and another racial/ethnic group or identity—we will use the term Black + (pronounced Black *and*) to highlight this shared identity and relevant experiences in an anti-Black society. This approach also aligns with MultiCrit's call to *challenge dominant ideologies* in the U.S. that position multiracial folks as a signal of a society which has transcended racism by centering Black + youth's *experiential knowledge* on what it means to be multiracial and Black in American society (Harris, 2016). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Northwestern University (IRB #STU00213321).

Participants

Participants for the interview portion of the "Beyond Black and White" project were recruited through social media posts in online Black and multiracial affinity groups, emails to Black and multiracial affinity groups, and posters placed in public spaces on the campus of a large research university in the Midwestern United States. Recruitment materials called for folks who identified as Black, African American, or mixed/multiracial Black to participate in an interview about race, racial identity, and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Participants who disclosed a monoracial or multiracial Black background or identity on a screening survey were eligible for an interview; participants were compensated $20 for their time.

For inclusion in the present analysis, participants had to identify as multiracial young adults, resulting in a sample of 11 participants. Multiracial status was determined via self-reported family background and subjective identification; participants completed a screening survey where they could select multiple racial groups from a checklist and also reported their racial identification as part of the semi-structured interview. The 11 Black + young adults ranged in age from 20 to 22, with a mean of 20.73 (*SD* .75). All participants were college students. Participants' racial identifications, collected during the interview, were diverse; the majority used biracial/mixed-race/multiracial identity labels ($n=8$); 3 used monoracial Black identity label while acknowledging that they held a multiracial background (Table 1). Nine out of the 11 participants identified as female; one identified as male and one identified as gender-queer/non-binary.

Data Collection and Analysis

All interviews were conducted via Zoom by the first author and lead project researcher. Interviews lasted an average

Table 1 Participant demographics

ID	Identity resolution	Racial identity	Age	Gender
1[a]	Multiracial	"I identify as half Black and half Vietnamese"	21	Female
2	Multiracial	"Um I am mixed um but I'm more Black presenting, African American presenting but I'm Jamaican, German, and Indian, um [pause] yeah"	20	Female
3[b]	Multiracial	"I'm half Black and half Mexican, um, and I'd like to say I'm Afro-Latina as well"	20	Female
4[c]	Multiracial	"I'm biracial, my dad is Black and my mom is white"	21	Female
5	Monoracial	"Um, Afro-Latina but I've used term a lot more recently so maybe just Black and Latina….I've never identified as mixed race or multiracial because […] Black is more of a race while being Latina is more of an ethnicity"	20	Female
6	Monoracial	"Um [I identify as] Black/Caribbean. […] Um so my mom um is kind of multiracial. She has Venezuelan and Basian roots and I have Trinidadian family as well on that side so she's kind of very mixed up"	20	Gender-queer/non-binary
7	Multiracial	"I am biracial mixed with Black and white"	22	Female
8	Monoracial	"I'm Black. I guess like African American to be more specific…I mean technically my mom's dad is Native American and Blackfoot, but I never really knew him growing up"	21	Female
9	Multiracial	"I guess I would usually just describe it as myself being biracial between like African-American and white"	21	Male
10	Multiracial	"I describe myself as being biracial, so my father's African-American and then my mother is white or Caucasian"	22	Female
11	Multiracial	"I'm ¼ African-American, um, but racially I'm white, um, and so yeah, it's always difficult to know, do I check-off mixed race because I consider myself—my race as white, but ethnically I am, like, I'm mixed ethnicity"	20	Female

Superscript letters indicate that the participant is included as a case study in our results section as follows: [a]Maya, [b]Betty, [c]Savannah

of 45 min (*SD* 12.5). Video option was at the participant's discretion and audio was recorded for all participants. Audio recordings from Zoom were professionally transcribed and then verified by trained research assistants.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol, designed to elicit racial identity meaning-making. Interview questions focused on how participants racially identified, the meanings they ascribed to their racial identities, and how they were navigating race during the BLM context. It is important to note that parents and parental socialization were not focal constructs in the study and the interview questions did not ask specifically about parents or family. However, parents and other familial adults may have been more present not only because of the salience of race after George Floyd's murder in 2020, but also because many college students were living at home with their family due to school closures amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, our analysis involved listening for whether and how family members were mentioned in multiracial students' racial identity narratives.

We used a phronetic iterative analytic approach (Tracy, 2020) guided by two primary questions: (a) Are parents/familial adults mentioned in the racial identity interviews? and (b) Why are parents/familial adults mentioned? Our coding process unfolded in three phases. Phase I involved identifying references in the interview transcript were participants mentioned parents and family members within the context of talking about their racial identities. The co-authors read each transcript and conducted a systematic key term search using parental/familial terminology (e.g., mom/mother, dad/father, grand*). Each reference was read in context to ascertain relevant meaning in the discussion of racial identity. In Phase II, we read the "parent stories" and wrote analytic memos to understand the stories they shared about their parents and family members in relation to their racial identities, attending to content, themes, and evidence of racial socialization topics (e.g., cultural socialization, preparation for bias). We then read and discussed our observations to understand the role and relevance of parents. We used our analytic memos and discussions in Phase III to generate a preliminary coding that focused on *why* parents were mentioned and coded the interviews using the initial coding scheme. In Phase IV we used a m(ai)cro lens to interpret the "parent stories," attending to how monoracism and anti-Blackness were implicated and interwoven into why and how parents were mentioned. Using selective coding (Rogers et al., 2021; Wolcott, 1994), we organized the "parent stories" into three themes that illustrated why college students spontaneously mentioned their parents when describing their own racial identities. The final codes are outlined in Table 2 and discussed below in the Results.

Results

Our analysis follows the stories of Black + college students navigating their racial identities in the midst of the sociopolitical period of Black Lives Matter 2020, with a focus on the role and function of parents and familial adults. We found that all of the Black + college students mentioned family in their racial identity interviews, even though the interview protocol was not designed to ask about parental racial socialization. Our substantive analysis explored *why* Black + college students talked about their parents in their racial identity stories and how these stories offer insights into racial socialization experiences in multiracial families. We identified three themes (Table 2). *First*, parents were mentioned as a source of racial information or guidance; parents provided race-relevant advice in childhood and young adulthood that prepared Black + college students for, and guided them through, racial systems and experiences. *Second*, parents were mentioned to describe (multi)racial identification and functioned as a tool to explain and/or justify the young person's (multi)racial identity; this strategy underscored the politics of (multi)racial identification in a monoracist society. *Third*, parents were mentioned in stories about navigating (un)shared identities within their diverse multiracial family systems.

The themes were not mutually exclusive, nor do we presume they are exhaustive of socialization experiences. Rather, they collectively represent the spontaneous ways that parents were seamlessly integrated into the racial identity narratives of Black + youth, offering insights into the content and forms of racial socialization that are identity-relevant. Moreover, the results demonstrate how the m(ai)cro-context of monoracism and anti-Blackness are inseparable from how Black + youth come to understand their racial identities in society and within their diverse family systems. We coded and analyzed the interviews with all 11 college students to answer our research question about how and why youth mention their family members as part of their racial identity meaning-making. The three major themes we identify were very common across our participants. However, rather than focusing on quantified prevalence, we present qualitative analysis and interpretation of the themes we unearthed using three case studies as our guides. In keeping with the MultiCrit tenet of acknowledging the *intersections of multiple racial identities,* we selected our case studies to highlight the diverse multiracial identities that exist within the shared racial positionality of being Black + (Harris, 2016) and represent the diversity of identity resolutions and multiracial backgrounds in our Black + sample (Table 1). Our case studies represent the varied ways that parents and family members were mentioned across the interviews and to illustrate how

Table 2 Inductive codebook: How parents emerged in racial identity meaning-making for Black + college students

Theme & definition	Example quotes
Theme 1: Racial information and guidance	
Parents are mentioned to illustrate explicit socialization, including parent-directed messages—such as engaging in cultural practices, specific guidance on what racial label is appropriate for their child, or how they need to conduct themselves in a racialized world—as well as youth-solicited advice or guidance on navigating race-related events or experiences	*Parent-directed* Growing up kind of hearing her [my mom] talk and label me made me more plausible to identify as Afro Latinx or maybe multiracial. (ID 6) My mom sat us all down and was like, when you get pulled over by a cop you keep your hands on the wheel, like, you, your hands do not get off the wheel, you get your stuff, um, you tell the officer everything that you're doing, um, and that was like a conversation that we had just, we had to have, um, in my family. (ID 11) *Youth-solicited* I was like calling my parents like every other day when [...] a group of students [on campus was] trying to defund and abolish the police, and so my role in activism had turned more to educating [...] but talking to my parents about you know, since I'm not out there am I doing something wrong is something I was talking to my parents about a lot. And my mom was really helpful in reminding me that, you know, I'm not doing anything wrong at all by not directly acting in ways that other people might be expecting me to do, and that doesn't mean that I don't care, and also saying that just because I'm not acting in ways that other people expect me to it also doesn't mean that my experiences are invalid. (ID 10)
Theme 2: Racial politics of multiracial identification	
Parents are mentioned as an important component of how multiracial folks are able to identify. This includes mentioning parents as a method of racial identity justification, and as a yardstick for assessing their own racial credentials	Um, I describe myself as being biracial, so my father's African American and then my mother is white or Caucasian. (ID 10) And then I also think- I'm not sure if this is happening anywhere else, but there's a big thing in the Black community where if you're mixed who, which of your parents is a POC because if your mom's a POC they're like nah it's fine, but if your dad's the POC they're like, shut-up. [...] every time that mixed people get brought up in a conversation that I'm having with people, that's like one of the first things that pops up. (ID 2) I look at both of my parents and I'm kind of like okay, one kind of looks or appears to be fully Black. I would say my dad, and then my mom looks more like a mixed race if that makes sense. So, I'm like both y'all seem Black to me compared to people who are biracial. so that's kind of what shaped my identity just being around more people in my community and seeing how they identify. (ID 6)
Theme 3: Navigating (un)shared identity spaces within the family	
Parents are mentioned in discussions of the complexity of being in a space where not all family members *fully* share experiences and racial background. This included shared experiences and understanding that may have been unevenly distributed across the family, recognized opportunities/obligations to bridge racial boundaries within the family, feeling seen or unseen because family members do (or do not) recognize the youth's experiences or full identities, and 'adjacent racial experiences.'	I knew it's something that she [white grandmother] prefers not to talk about or sort of acknowledge, so that was sort of a nice experience to see her—how do I put this—like being more aware of something that is probably really difficult for her to be aware about just because she has a sort of personal relationship to it, you know. Like it sort of made me wonder if I had not been—like if she didn't have somebody in her family that was at least partially Black would her opinions on this entire thing be different, or has my existence sort of changed her thinking because now she can kind of personalize it and in a way, I hope that it does. (ID 9) Of course, I've been discriminated against and I've been called the hard "r" before but I've never—the very physical violence that was coming with it in particular in this case [George Floyd's death] I feel like I kind of realized like that that doesn't happen to me and it was really difficult to think about my position in that case and I feel like I kind of almost wished that I could bear some of that because I think that for me it- it felt like it hurt to be in a position of privilege because it was like *I know what my father went through* and it hurts me that other people in my family have to bear that pain but I don't. (ID 7)

these themes manifest across differing family structures. In taking this approach, we do not purport to encapsulate the entire experience of being Black + during this time. However, we do hope to show how an identity-first perspective attends to the relevance of parents in the lives of their young adult children and broadens our view of the nuance within as well as commonalities across groups of multiracial folks. Before turning to the results, we briefly introduce our three case studies.

Betty is a 21-year-old young woman: "I'm half Black and half Mexican, um, and I'd like to say I'm Afro-Latina as well," Betty's multiracial identity narrative is intimately connected to her parents and family experiences, which provide a foundation from which she can navigate her own identity and positionality. She speaks about creating an identity "in between" that intentionally interlaces her Black and Mexican cultures, that, she notes, have not always shared solidarity. Betty illustrates a case in which multiracial college students are intimately supported by both sides of her family and yet monoracism and anti-Blackness are persistent forces.

Maya tells a complex narrative, rich with stories about navigating and balancing her Black and Vietnamese identity. At 21 years old, Maya identifies strongly as "mixed"—"half Black and half Vietnamese" and these identities are at the forefront of her interactions and experiences of (dis)connection with family members. Her differing relationships with her mother and father, who are separated, are often at odds with how she is treated outside the family. Maya's story not only highlights a strong racial identification with two racially marginalized identities but also how the ways that race is policed and polarized within and outside of the family profoundly shapes racial identity.

Savannah identifies as "biracial," which she sees as "its own entirely unique experience because it's not like you're treated white half the time and treated Black half the time." At 21 years old, Savannah's experience with her parents and extended family highlight the dynamics of racial privilege and whiteness in how multiracial folks make sense of who they are and how they move through the world, especially during times of racial unrest. Being "white passing" and "racially ambiguous," according to her white mother, Savannah's narrative also highlights how Black + folks navigate their proximity to white privilege and exclusion of Blackness.

A Source of Racial Information and Guidance

The first way that college students mentioned parents in the context of their racial identity narratives was as a source of racial information, reflecting on the ways their parents provided race-relevant guidance through childhood and young adulthood. These socialization stories, present in 73% of the sample, included both parent-directed messages and moments when youth solicited advice from parents on how to navigate race-related experiences. In both instances, we learn the ways (and reasons) college students draw from their parents in learning how to navigate racism and cultivate a secure sense of (racialized) self in a monoracist society.

Stories of parent-directed guidance mirror the common threads of cultural socialization, like the food, music, and media that their parents modeled and immersed them in as they grew up. Betty, for example, who is Black and Mexican, explained the reason she identifies as "Afro-Latina" is because her parents were "very into their own identities" throughout her childhood which granted her "full access to both cultures." Betty explained:

> So, my mom being Mexican, being Latina, um, I grew up listening to like Selena, we watched all the quintessential movies and she spoke—I don't speak Spanish fluently but my mom like—I understand Spanish because my mom will speak it to me sometimes... [T] hen for my dad I think similar, um, aspects of just like raising me like oh you need to know the Black greats just as well as you know the Mexican greats and there was like an expectation to know both cultures. And, um, I would say especially with like, being Mexican, our food, that was a really big part of growing up. I grew up eating a lot of Mexican food, um, and my dad like, still brought in some parts of soul food, bringing in rap and hip-hop, again with the movies, that was a big part of growing up, but it was just always around.

In this extended excerpt, Betty describes the childhood experiences—the lessons, foods, music, and values her parents routinely practiced, so that she was "aware from a young age that I grew up in a household full of people of color." She carries this socialization with her today: "[E]ven though I don't live at home with my parents anymore I still find ways to integrate them into my own life through my cooking, through my music, the things I like, the events I go to." For Betty, being Afro-Latina is inextricable from the identities her parents modeled; it is a foundation on which she continues to nurture her identity in community: "it's what I know; it's very near and dear to my heart, so a very big part of my life."

Participants also shared how parents directed their racial identity choices, specifically. "My parents were very, like, 'you're mixed'," Maya, explained, "so I've always identified as both […] as half Black and half Vietnamese." Maya is clear that her parents directed this identification and socialized her into seeing herself as multiracial: "my parents raised me to, you know, acknowledge my mixed identity and appreciate both of my cultures." Even while Maya identifies herself as mixed, she is forced to confront monoracism: "I've seen the ways that the monoracial Black community rejects mixed people," Maya said, "sometimes it makes me wanna

like not claim being Black but I'm really close to my mom who is the Black parent, and I feel like that would be rude, you know, like a diss to her." This conflict draws attention to the m(ai)cro system in which racial socialization unfolds. Identifying as mixed is "critical" to Maya's identity and relationship with her (Black) mother, but monoracism threatens to untether it. Across interviews, we heard the repeated messaging to identify with "both cultures"—either explicitly, like Maya, or through joint exposure, like Betty. From a m(ai)cro lens, parents socializing their children to identify as *multiracial* and affirming their membership in *both* cultures may be an act of resistance to entrenched monoracism that organizes racial groups.

At the same time, claiming a *multiracial* identification (in lieu of a Black racial identity) can function as a strategy or intention to distance the self from blackness in society, as was the project of some (white) parents as they pushed for multiracial recognition for their children in the 1980s and 1990s (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). This does not appear in Betty or Maya's narrative, who both hold multiple minority multiracial identities. However, Savannah, who is "biracial, Black and white," offers perspective on how parental guidance functions with the m(ai)cro-context of anti-Blackness and white privilege.

Savannah's parents guided her racial identification through repeated comments about her being "racially ambiguous; that was something that was just commented on so frequently growing up…" This continues to undergird her racial identity: "my mom thinks I'm white-passing," Savannah explains, but immediately adds, "I don't know if I am." Indeed, throughout the interview, Savannah repeats "I don't know" when discussing her racial identity, and this uncertainty seems tied to information she received from her parents growing up and even now: "my parents talk about that I am very light compared to how dark my dad is; my dad is like pretty dark-skinned and my mom is pretty pale…" Holding her parents as racial anchors, the skin color comparisons with her (Black) dad and repeated assertions from her (white) mom that she is "white passing," add to the uncertainty about her Blackness. This changed, however, "when I started applying colleges because my dad was like the 'one drop rule', like I should be able to use my minority status in applying to colleges because, you know, it's more competitive." Following his guidance, Savannah said "I started referring to myself as Black just like as a statement instead of biracial." This shift, in response to explicit instruction from her dad was a strategy, a political engagement with racial structures. Pointing to the closeness of these racial systems, Savannah articulated how she felt when started to claim a Black identity:

Yeah, well I was a little *scared* about it, and I don't know why I thought this, but I thought what if they

consider it to be *lying* and I get *in trouble* or something, but he was like no, you won't, and I haven't, so yeah. I think it felt weird for me but also it wasn't a problem.

From being socialized as "white passing" to invoking the "one drop rule," Savannah's narrative highlights the power of racial surveillance in a monoracist society (scared, lying, in trouble). While she knows, "it's not wrong" to say she is Black, uncertainty persists, which she downplays by saying "it doesn't really matter" and in the end "it wasn't a problem." Savannah's position as racially "ambiguous" and the ways her parents socialized her identity choices also illustrates how colorism, as a manifestation of anti-Blackness, can operate for multiracial people. Protected by the wings of whiteness through her light skin and racial ambiguity, Savannah articulates both the privilege of having access to whiteness ("I'm probably not at risk of violence the same way someone else [Black-presenting] would…") and the ability to leverage Black marginalization ("use my minority status") to be a "more competitive" applicant for college admissions. These socialization stories highlight the proximity of (mono)racism and anti-Black racism.

Another way we observe monoracism in the examples of parental guidance was in the use of monoracial socialization for multiracial experiences. For example, Maya shared a story about her mother, who is Black, always telling her "oh, why don't you get your hair braided" but Maya resisted, questioning whether she was allowed to wear "typical like Black hairstyles." Maya explained her inner dialog: "[It]'s like, am I going to be accused of cultural appropriation? And then when I explain, are people going to be like, '*Well, you don't count, so'*." Like Savannah, Maya feels the threat of monoracial surveillance, that because she is multiracial she will not "count" as Black. Despite her mother's use of racial pride socialization and encouragement to wear "Black hairstyles," Maya navigates a monoracist structure that questions her access to Blackness.

This theme of mismatch also occurred in the context of parents preparing youth for anti-Black racism. As Maya explained: "I've never had anyone assume I'm Black, ever. Even though that's what my parents told me was gonna to happen to me." Prepared for anti-Black racism she never encountered, Maya found that this socialization inadvertently buttressed the notion that she "doesn't count" as Black. In fact, the "only time" Maya has felt *seen* as Black—and she reiterates its isolation ("once"; "one time"; "the only time")—was in the context of being stopped by the police. Maya recalled: "I was stopped by a police officer once, because I was like jaywalking and I was late to class. Happened one time, and that was the only time I feel like someone has actually seen me as Black, and that was terrifying." Thus, faced with monoracism and anti-Blackness, Maya
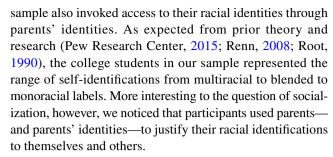
benchmarks her inclusion as Black based on anti-Black fear. Preparing one's child for bias has long been identified as a core component of parental racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006a, 2006b). However, without attending to how multiracial positionality may affect a Black + youth's lived experience, preparing Maya for (mono)racial bias unintentionally set her up to experience implicit invalidation, where the absence of bias was interpreted to mean that others do not recognize her racial identity. Maya's story highlights the specificity of multiracial socialization and perhaps specific need to prepare multiracial youth for monoracism (Atkin et al., 2021) in addition to racism aimed at monoracial groups.

A final pattern we noted in the stories of parental guidance is youth-solicited advice. Unlike the above examples where youth recalled the ways parents guided their racial identities, these are moments when youth asked their parents for advice on race-relevant situations. Multiple participants spoke about racial conundrums, for example, how to contend with racism they encounter or how to navigate safety concerns with racial protesting during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that they went to their parents to help them process. Betty shared an example concerning online race experiences: "I'm constantly like Black and proud, Latina and proud" on social media platforms but "I don't want to feel compelled as a Black person to educate you [a white person] on these issues." Unsure whether or how to engage about race with white people online, Betty called her parents to help her figure out how to respond. Betty shared another moment from her senior year in high school when her "English teacher forced us to read *Hillbilly Elegy*," which she described as a book about "a white, Republican man telling me he knows the Black experience?" Her response "was like, I have to talk to the teacher about this!" and she went to her mom: "I was like I don't know how to bring this up and she gave me like some talking points…" A focus on youth-solicited advice is not often captured in the racial socialization literature. However, it draws attention to the transactional nature of socialization, which could be especially important during the young adult years (Phinney, 2006; Rogers et al., 2020, 2021).

The overall prevalence of parents as a meaningful source of information may also show how parents move from a leading to a supporting role in socialization processes for young people's racial identities well into the college years. Given the spontaneous inclusion of parents in these college students' racial identity narratives, this may be a gap in our understanding of socialization.

The Racial Politics of Multiracial Identification in a Monoracist Society

Parental guidance focused on how youth understand what to do and how to navigate racial situations, and 91% of the sample also invoked access to their racial identities through parents' identities. As expected from prior theory and research (Pew Research Center, 2015; Renn, 2008; Root, 1990), the college students in our sample represented the range of self-identifications from multiracial to blended to monoracial labels. More interesting to the question of socialization, however, we noticed that participants used parents— and parents' identities—to justify their racial identifications to themselves and others.

While Betty identifies as "half Black and half Mexican" as well as "Afro-Latina," she said the term "mixed" also applies. Betty turned attention to her parents to explain *why* she identifies as such:

> [A] lot of it comes from my parents who are both like, very into their own identities so like, being Black and Mexican I felt like both were presented pretty equally when I was growing up […] like I felt like I had full access to both cultures and then just my identity is like creating the in-between all of it, so that's what it's meant for me.

For Betty, it is clear that her identity is inextricable from her parents' own identity expressions. It is interesting to note that this is not about her parents being "very into" *her* multiracial identity but about their equal investment in each of their identity cultures—Black and Mexican—that modeled and created space for her to have "full access to both cultures" as well as establish "the in between" for herself as someone who can legitimately claim a "mixed" identity.

However, parents are not just individually meaningful for the identities of multiracial youth; broader society crafts narratives of racial legitimacy that are grounded in parentage, and these narratives are salient to multiracial youth in our sample. This was often implicit in how participants understood their multiracial identification. As we saw with many participants, Savannah immediately mentioned her parents in the narrative of racial identification at the beginning of her interview: "Yeah, I'm biracial, my dad is Black and my mom is white." Her identification is inseparable from her parents' respective identities. Specifying her parents' racial membership does not just tell the interviewer about Savannah's racial background (Black and white); it also leverages ancestry to explain why the term biracial *can* apply to her within a rigid system that has historically precluded identification with more than one racial group. This taps into hypodescent and legacies of hereditary definitions of race in the United States, where an individual's racial category is assigned based on the racial categorizations of their parents (Masuoka, 2017). While today we are increasingly conceptualizing multiracial identification as a personal choice rather than an assigned classification, this emphasis on parentage lingers for multiracial youth trying to figure out what identifications are available to them and why.

The tension between personal choice and assigned classification for multiracial youth is intensified by the macro-context politics of racial identification, which were front and center in Maya's narrative. When asked how the BLM 2020 focus on race and racial justice has affected how she thinks about who she is, Maya responded: "I'm not sure, like, of who I am, and like besides me being like—oh I don't know if I can like claim this [Black identity] anymore." This uncertainty stems from feeling excluded from "the monoracial Black community" and the message she has observed, particularly on social media, what asserts: "'oh well, if you only have one Black parent you can't be Black.'" Maya shared about a post she saw on Twitter about Ross Lynch, a white man, and his Black and white biracial girlfriend Jaz Sinclair: "they were like 'Oh Ross Lynch with his like, uh, Black queen' or something, or 'he's dating a Black queen'." First, the Tweet legitimizes Jaz Sinclair, a biracial woman, as *Black* ("Black queen"), which Maya recalled sparking a hot debate on Twitter about the "one drop" rule and Black identity inclusion: "And someone quote retweeted them, and it was like… '*half her family look like him, relax*'," suggesting that Jaz is *also* white and therefore using the term "Black queen" was a stretch. Observing the exchange, Maya recalled one reply in which someone argued:

> 'You can't be Black with only one, you can't be a Black queen with a white mother,' and someone else replied and was like, "that still makes her Black" and someone was like, "no." [...] And I just remembered it angered me because there are people getting, you're getting so heated in the comments. They were like "the one drop rule doesn't count."

While Maya says, "I've never experienced [these kinds of messages] personally thank God, and I hope I never have to," she is personally impacted by this overarching master narrative positioning *parental* race as an important legitimizing factor for claiming Black racial membership.

The "one drop rule" historically dictated that having one Black ancestor meant that you were legally and socially assigned a Black identification. The "one drop rule" was and continues to be problematic because it was implemented to uphold white supremacy through rigid parentage-based monoracial boundaries and served to erase the personal identities and experiences of folks with multiracial backgrounds. However, this substitution of a "two-parent" rule for acceptance of Black identity *also* erases the identities of folks with multiracial backgrounds; it again upholds rigid monoracial boundaries based on parentage to racially classify multiracial folks in a way that does not reflect their personal identification. This policing of racial group membership troubles Maya even though she has a Black mom and thus fits the racial script. To Maya, this illustrates a broader reality for "mixed people," a "general experience of like *oh I'm not this enough, I'm not this enough, I don't speak my parent's language, do I count?* And it's like, even worse when the people are like, 'Yeah no, you don't count,' you know? Like, thanks." This is the context within which Maya is trying to decide whether she can rock the "typical, like, Black hairstyles" her mom advocates for; if she is not considered Black by others despite her strong *personal* identification as both Black and Vietnamese, where does she go from there?

Given the importance of parents in societal judgments of racial identification legitimacy, it makes sense that multiracial youth might use their parents when advocating for (or troubling) their legitimate claim to certain identifications in their own lives. Some used their relationships with their parents to legitimize their identification to others. Betty highlights how her cultural upbringing gave her common ground with folks even when they did not perceive her as a racial ingroup member: "[L]ike I said, people didn't fully perceive me either side, but I still was able to have an in. Like, you have a foot in the door." Yet, her lived experiences and family relationships grounding her personal identification as both Black and Mexican were sometimes not enough. Betty faced a challenge commonly faced by multiracial people:

> Yeah, I mean I think one of the biggest challenges is like, not being taken seriously from either side; that's something I've always been like just frustrated with, is like, having to validate myself to both sides so that they will listen to me when I come and speak about various things that are really important.

Such questions of identity (il)legitimacy were resolved in part through family relationships. Betty talks about intentionally bringing her mother to legitimize her own presence in the Latinx community as she engaged with the BLM Movement in 2020: "whenever I would go and talk to other Latinos about Black issues, like I would bring my mom who is like very much like a stereotypical Mexican woman … now I have a little bit of support here." This idea that the presence of a monoracial parent can validate your identity was an important thread throughout our interviews; participants often invoked the social narrative of parental racial membership to argue for the legitimacy of their personal identification (and therefore the legitimacy of their opinions and voice). Here, Betty is leveraging that narrative by using her mom as evidence that she is, in fact, Latina, and has been granted belonging via a "stereotypical Mexican woman" who unarguably has a legitimate voice in the Latinx community.

However, invoking parents as a racial credential does not wholly resolve the tension between socially assigned identification and personal identity. Betty shared how others have questioned her on her activism around BLM, asking her "why do you care?" about these issues:

I think sometimes—I hate it because I'll say like, *oh well like, you know, my dad is Black* but like, I'm Black too, but sometimes I do defer to like, my dad is fully Black so of course that's why I care, but I'm like no, wait, I'm a Black person too and that's why I should care as well.

We hear the frustration Betty experiences as others question her—and she questions herself—and she feels the need to specify "my dad is fully Black" in order to justify why she "cares" about anti-Black racism. Yet, in that logic of justification she realizes that she places herself (and accepts a position) outside of being Black. She resists this conclusion, however, refusing the messages of illegitimacy by society and reasserting that she's "a Black person too."

While parents were mentioned to justify one's personal identification in the face of others' invalidation, our participants also used parents as a yardstick to assess the ways in which their own experiences overlap with (or differ from) the experiences of folks who are unambiguous members of a given racial group. Maya, who discussed the general multiracial experience of "I'm not this enough," shared that while she is "half Black," she also knows her experiences are not equivalent to monoracial Black women: "Like my mom talks to me about certain issues she has that I don't experience. And I just like, I'm like, oh, am I even allowed to like have a voice in this?" Betty shares a similar sentiment. Despite having "always felt like a Black woman just as much as [she] felt like a Latina," Betty still acknowledges the gap in her experience and her monoracial Black father's experience:

I know when I go out in public, someone is going to perceive my dad as obviously Black versus I'm a lot more ambiguous, and what does that mean for like how I get to fight for racial issues and what does this mean for me?

Both Betty and Maya use their respective parents' experiences as tangible markers for what being Black "should" look like, calling into question their own sense of being (fully) Black as they understand their parents' experiences are not their own. This practice of using parents' own experiences as a yardstick of what it means to be Black emphasizes a complexity of racial navigation for multiracial folks that goes beyond legitimizing identity through parents' own identities to encompass lived experience of race. Despite having a Black parent, the discrepancy Maya sees between her own experiences and her mom's experiences, much like Betty's reflection on her dad's experiences, lead to a question of whether this discrepancy means that she's now "not Black enough" to have her voice taken seriously.

Navigating (Un)Shared Identity Spaces Within the Family

The final theme, present in all of the interviews, was stories about navigating (un)shared identities within the family. That is, parents came up as multiracial college students discussed how their identities separated them, in some ways, from their parents, leaving them to navigate a third space that is not fully shared with either parent. Participants also frequently mentioned non-parent familial adults in telling these stories. Sometimes this surfaced as opportunities to bridge or bring people together. For example, feeling that they could "uniquely" promote intergroup solidarity *because* they held identities in both groups; like Betty who shared about the opportunities she has to address that "the Mexican culture has a lot of anti-Blackness in it" and engage the Latinx community in Black Lives Matter. At the same time, (un)shared space surfaced conflict and tension, points of disconnection and the sense that one's *whole* self, as Black +, was not validated, acknowledged, or understood. This sense of being "in between" positioned Black + youth as outsiders within their family systems.

Listening to Black + college students discuss their identity experiences within their families underscores how family systems function as a microcosm of societal monoracism, and its relevance for racial socialization in multiracial families. These unshared experiences were rooted in the monoracism that reinforces the racial boundaries of insider/outsider and anti-Black racism that manifests within multiracial families. Moreover, we observe the persistence of the project of white supremacy, as minoritized groups are pitted against one another, rather than in solidarity with each other in service of dismantling white supremacy (e.g., Masuoka & Junn, 2013; Molina, 2014). As we might expect, the unique positionalities of Black + people at the intersection of their specific multiracial configuration and family systems matter. To better illustrate the breadth of family dynamics and racial identity experiences, we share results for this theme for each of case studies separately.

Betty: "[Y]ou can't Even have Like Your Parents that can Really, Fully Relate to you"

To describe her unique identity position, Betty said: "I had full access to both cultures and then just my identity is like creating the in-between all of it, so that's what it's meant for me." The idea of "creating the in between" draws attention to the distinctiveness of multiracial identity within the family, the lines that exist between multiracial youth and their parents. For Betty, like many of the participants who were interviewed during the months following the summer of 2020, Black Lives Matter and COVID were significant sociopolitical moments that prompted racial identity questions. Betty

shared a conversation she had with her parents during this time:

> [A]and they both were just like kind of at a loss [...] I was definitely like, just crying and just sad and I didn't have really the emotion to do anything but protest, and I would say I was just angry and sad for days on end. And so, my parents were like, we're at a loss and we don't know what to do, like, we're out here protesting with you, we're taking care of you but what else can we do? What can get you Black to like being your normal self? And I was also confused, I was at a loss with myself because I was like, why is this impacting me so much? Why does this hurt so much?

Betty's narrative powerfully contextualizes the weight that the summer of 2020 had on many Black youth—the emotional toll on their wellbeing (depressed, crying, sad, angry) as well as the time and energies spent (protesting, organizing) during this difficult time. We also hear the careful and intentional role of her parents—joining the protests and "taking care" of her while knowing Betty was not her "normal self." She continued, sharing an insight her parents offered to her:

> Then my parents were talking about how hard it is to be parents when they don't, they can't relate to their kids, like and what they mean by that is that when you have two white parents and you're a white kid, your parents are like *oh, I can relate, like your mom, if you're a girl, they'll be like oh I'm a white woman I can relate to you*, but in my case my dad's like I'm Black but I'm not Latino and I'm not a woman so I can't relate to you there, and my mom was like I'm Latina and Mexican and a woman but I can't relate to being Black. And they were like raising two kids in this environment, like, we don't know what to do because how—what are you supposed to do when you can't relate to your own kids?

Betty names the crux of growing up multiracial in a monoracist society and the unique challenge of racial socialization for parents. Both her and her parents feel the divide. Betty goes on to explain its tangible impact—the sense of loneliness that comes with this "in between":

> I feel like it doesn't come up often where I'm like, 'oh, this is like a bad part of being mixed'—but that's when I was *like oh shit, you're right, you guys don't understand me* and that's kind of just a product of being a mixed person in this world, is like creating your own identity because you can't even have like your parents that can really, fully relate to you.

This "oh shit" feeling of not being understood, of navigating (un)shared identities is a downside of being multiracial in a racist society, where being unique can also feel a lot like being alone. This gap in understanding meant that Betty had to seek other ways of understanding who she was. While she said she always identified as "half-Black half-Mexican," it took seeing representation outside the family for her to truly understand that being Afro-Latina was an option: "I was probably like thirteen or fourteen years old and then I realized, like, there are Black Mexicans. I guess for a long time I didn't even know that term [Afro-Latinx] existed." It was when Betty started "seeing celebrities who kind of made up like similar identities to me" that she was like "Oh wait, what does this mean? Like, that's an option?" Even within a family context like Betty's where racial socialization is explicit, active, and ongoing, the (in)visibility of her multiracial identity mattered. A m(ai)cro approach to socialization calls attention to the specificity of racial tensions and options within multiracial families navigating a monoracist macro-context.

Maya: "I Felt Like my Vietnamese Family wasn't Really Seeing that I was Like Half-Black"

The theme of navigating (un)shared identity within the family runs throughout Maya's narrative, as she encounters monoracism not just between her parents, but between the two sides of her extended family. Talking about her identity experiences within the context of BLM, Maya shared a recent group chat she had with the "super conservative" Vietnamese side of her family:

> One of my Vietnamese aunts when the Black Lives Matter Movement was happening was like, she just sent a text, a message and it was like "all lives matter," and I… went off on her. And I was like, "you can't say that" and then I was trying to explain to them like why, what the point is, and it turned into an argument, so I just left the group chat.

This was not a single encounter; Maya recalls "several arguments" with her aunts "sending me all these reasons why Black Lives Matter doesn't matter." For Maya and her biracial siblings, who are "the only Black members of our family on the Vietnamese side," such comments feel "like rejection kind of." Thus, as monoracism nurtures isolation and disconnection, Maya finds herself having to explain and justify her identity within her own family:

> I felt like my Vietnamese family wasn't really seeing that I was like half-Black and how that would affect me. […] So, essentially, my point is, basically, it felt like they didn't accept, they only accepted one half of me and didn't really like consider how their words or actions would affect me as one of those people.

Maya also navigates an (un)shared identity with the Black side of her family, as the only Vietnamese person and the only multiracial person. This creates a sense of invisibility and isolation. This time, on the other side of her family's group chat, Maya "got into another fight with my, one of my mom's sisters." Maya recalled a benign text thread about her aunt getting her nails painted, and:

> Next thing I know…she said the words, "I'm never going to those chinks again," in reference to Vietnamese nail salon workers! And, you know, chink is a slur, so I was, I called her out, I was like, "That's an incredibly racist slur!" And then she started fighting me. Not like, literally, but it was like an argument in, like, the family group chat.

Maya simultaneously had to recover from the racist slur and defend her full identity. She tried "to explain how that's racist" but the message did not land: "she basically said, '*Oh, you don't need to always be politically correct around your family*'." Asserting her Asian identity in this Black family space, Maya explained to her aunt: "[Y]ou didn't consider the fact that that would hurt me as I am literally 50% Vietnamese." The argument "just kept going on for weeks" and ended with "one of those 'I'm sorry if I offended you' apologies."

In such interactions, the whole of Maya's identity—as Black *and* Vietnamese—is invisible to her family, which is deeply isolating. Adding to the impact, these interactions Maya shared occurred amid the Stop Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate Movement, which was co-occurring with the BLM 2020 protests and COVID-19-related anti-Asian violence. Even in this heightened moment, Maya's identities were not fully seen, validated, or accepted by either side of her family. More critical to our understanding of racial socialization, Maya threads these experiences to her racial identity:

> I remember crying. I was like, I don't know if it was like angry crying or just like, sad crying? I guess a mix of both because I felt really isolated and it really made me, like, rethink my experiences as a mixed person.

This within-family repeated racism and invalidation is not uncommon for multiracial people whose family members do not all share their racial background (Franco et al., 2018). These negative messages can be particularly damaging for mental health and wellbeing (Does et al., 2021; Franco & Carter, 2019; Franco et al., 2019) and creates relational tension, such as feeling like they have to "pick a side" within their own identities and families, a common manifestation of monoracism (Harris, 2016). And while pushed to "pick a side," they may find no one is picking *their* side or standing alongside them.

Savannah: "I Compartmentalize my Families"

Savannah's navigation of (un)shared identity manifests in the two-ness of her family and thus identity: "I compartmentalize my families or my experiences or like parts of my personality." Yet, this compartmentalization strategy seemed to breakdown during Black Lives Matter in 2020, in part because she was, like many college students, unexpectedly living at home due to COVID-19 lockdown, but also because racism "was just much more real and more serious than ever in the past." When asked what she thinks it means to be biracial in this moment of BLM and racial justice context, Savannah replied:

> I guess the weirdest part was like being at home because it was the pandemic and being around my white mom and my Black dad and having all these really challenging conversations being brought up and all this really harmful stuff being shown on the news all the time and really seeing the way that my own family would react to all of it, and if this was new information for my mom, or like how surprised she would be or—yeah just things like that.

The compartmentalization in Savannah's narrative is immediately evident and differs starkly from both Betty and Maya who had explicit and sometimes contentious conversations about race with both sides of their families. Savannah, in contrast, "notices," but does not openly engage. This boundary is even present with her mom. In the interview, Savannah shared her wonderings about what her mom was thinking and feeling, "if this was new information for my mom, or like how surprised she would be" to see racial violence so prevalent in the news.

When prompted based on these responses to go into more detail about her family interactions, Savannah elaborates on the silence from her white aunt, uncle, and cousins who live in a small rural Christian community: "I don't think they really reacted at all, at least not publicly. I felt like my mom was on Facebook just sharing so much stuff and it was like okay. But they for the most part didn't really say anything, so that was weird?" Unlike Maya who reported explicit (and negative) confrontations about race and racism with both sides of her family, Savannah navigates the pain of the silence, of not being seen at all. Yet, amid hesitancy and uncertainty, she expresses that desire to connect, to feel like her (white) family sees her and acknowledges her identity experiences:

> In some ways I am kind of glad that they didn't say anything because I don't know what they could even have to contribute, but also it was like, okay, I guess me and my dad are like the only Black people you know at all, and so you don't feel this obligation

to make a statement on social media or to—I don't know—like reach out to me, which also is fine because I don't know that I could even relate to them or have anything constructive to say to them if they had asked. But I guess it was noticing the inaction and noticing the political disengagement from those members of my family and then sort of seeing my mom just be like so sad, I think.

Savannah's uncertainty ("I guess," "I don't know") spotlights the unshared space she navigates—she is "sad" that her white family has not responded yet trepidatious about what they "have to contribute" or how she "could even relate to them." Savannah positions herself and her dad as the "only Black people" on one side of her family, underscoring the isolation that can be felt when family members with unshared racial backgrounds simply ignore the impacts of racism.

While Savannah acknowledges that her mom did "post online" about the events, her mom's reactions—"seeing all of this stuff really upset her and bothered her"—spotlighted their unshared identities. While her mom was "really reckoning with it…my dad and I also were just like, *well that was also a part of it,* and my dad and I being frustrated with the white people around us and the way that they responded…" Savannah, aware that her mom was in this category of white people with whom she and her dad were frustrated, felt stuck both "not wanting to like hurt my mom's feelings but also wanting to express my frustrations with the ignorance around me." Still, Savannah had "that level of affinity, being able to speak with my dad because we are both Black and like knowing more and being able to relate to his experiences more and having more opinions on everything as a whole." Thus, while Savannah felt on the outside among white family members, she also found "affinity" with her dad, a shared "knowing" and space to be "more" of herself within her family system.

For Savannah, talking about race and racism with white family members is something she "intentionally" avoids because it "poses sort of a risk" to relationships and "I just don't want to be having those conversations," especially with people who have such different lived experiences. At the same time, Savannah does not feel totally comfortable having conversations with her Black family members: "it's definitely weird having conversations in like Black spaces even with my own family, just knowing I am not experiencing that same things that they are all experiencing." Savannah's comments speak to colorism and the adjacent white privilege she experiences because of her own proximity to whiteness. This positionality makes her feel "self-conscious sometimes when conversations are being had about race by my Black family members and they all come from a very mutual understanding that I only know tangentially because

of being related to them, not from any of my own personal experiences." Past research has interrogated this facet of white privilege, termed white privilege by proxy (Waring, 2022), that is experienced by multiracial youth with white parents. Thus, with white family members, Savannah is aware of her Blackness and the ways in which that sets her apart from them. However, in spaces with her Black family members, she is aware of her whiteness and the privilege that positions her "tangentially" to anti-Black racism.

Across these patterns the racial hierarchy is ever-present, shaping both multiracial youth and their monoracial parents. The first two themes speak to how parents prepare and guide multiracial youth for the outside world, with racial socialization, strength in one's "mixed" identity and confidence of their "access to both cultures" as well as awareness of where that access ends; such socialization may help to buffer societal racism and help the young person move through racial systems and navigate race "outside" in the world. The third theme, on the other hand, revealed the realities of monoracism as it entrenches itself in the family system, where the young adult is uniquely unprotected and must figure out how to protect their relationships with loved ones *and* their relationship with their whole selves—"I'm Mexican, but I'm also Black […] I'm Afro-Latina."

Discussion

The purpose of this analysis was to explore whether and how Black + college students reference their parents in the context of their racial identity narratives in a race-focused sociopolitical context. By starting from the perspective meaning-making in our exploration of socialization messages, we hoped to gain a broader understanding of what continuing socialization can look like for young adults, and how parents and other family members continue to play meaningful socializing roles beyond the younger years. Through this youth-centered approach to racial socialization in multiracial families, which privileges their *experiential knowledge* as a way to unsettle *dominant ideologies* of race, we discover that parents are relevant, surfacing spontaneously in all of the interviews.

Listening across the moments when parents were integrated into college students' racial identity narratives, we heard three patterns: first, parents were mentioned as a source of racial information or guidance in racialized society; second, parents were used in the context of (multi) racial identification to explain and/or justify the young person's (multi)racial identity as embedded in racial politics of monoracism; and third, parents were mentioned in stories that illustrate the unique experience of navigating (un)shared identities *within* their families. We interpreted these patterns through MultiCrit and the m(ai)cro lens of

monoracism and anti-Blackness, allowing us to see how the racial structure exerts force on multiracial young people and their parents, shaping racial identity and racial socialization. The three case studies chosen to illustrate these patterns showed the nuances and diversity of experiences that we saw across our sample, characterized both by different racial backgrounds and proximity to whiteness, as well as different family structures and family engagement with race.

From a m(ai)cro and MultiCrit perspective that centers the construction of race and multiraciality, our research offers insights for multiracial socialization research. *First, we observe how youth activate or mobilize racial socialization messages in their racial identity narratives*. Some of the stories college students shared were from their childhood, messages and experiences lingering from their upbringing that remain relevant to how they understand their multiracial identities as young adults. These spontaneous socialization narratives suggest the long reach of racial socialization; it is not simply delivered; it *lives* in young people and their time-release effects are felt and intimately integrated as young adults *use* these messages to make meaning of their identities. Certainly, the association between racial socialization and racial identity is clear and well-researched (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Huguley et al., 2019). However, much of this research is cross-sectional or involves longitudinal designs spanning a few years; our findings suggest that longer longitudinal studies may provide even deeper insight into how socialization operates over the life course; early childhood socialization experiences, for example, may remain active sources of socialization in young adulthood that can be used to make sense of their present circumstances.

College students also mentioned current moments of parental guidance, suggesting that young adults still rely on their parents to navigate racial realities. Our interpretation is not that other sources of socialization, such as peers and media (which were also mentioned by participants) are not relevant, but with so much attention on developmental shift *away* from parents and *toward* peers during the second decade of development, these findings remind us that the relevance of parents persists alongside the multiple socialization sources. This is in line with other research indicating an interactive, rather than mutually exclusive, relationship between peer and parental influence for youth's development (Morris et al., 2021). Indeed, the racial socialization college students receive(d) from parents is an active ingredient in their racial identities. Present moments of youth-solicited parental guidance were clearly important for helping Black + youth make sense of what they should or should not be doing with regard to racial justice activism, perhaps indicating an enhanced need for support felt by youth when they are confronted with race-related social movements like BLM.

Second, we observe the functionality and utility of parents, as tools, in building (and rebuilding) multiracial identities across time and space. In this theme, we learn it is not only what parents say or do but who they *are*—the racial identities and positionalities they hold—that is taken up by multiracial youth when navigating their racial identity. This pattern may be uniquely relevant to multiracial youth given the politics of racial identification within a racist, colorist, and monoracist society, as identified by MultiCrit (Harris, 2016; Masuoka, 2017). On this surface, this pattern is simply a descriptive awareness, like Savannah who said she is "biracial, my dad is Black, my mom is white." But, in a society rooted in a monoracial paradigm with racist constructs—such as colorism, the "one drop" rule, and intragroup marginalization, which all become clear when we utilize a MultiCrit approach and challenge an ahistorical approach to race—we find that multiracial college students *need* to leverage their parents' racial positions in order to validate their identities in a rigid racial system that, by definition, excludes and invalidates them. Maya's explicit discussion of needing a "Black mom" in order to claim a Black identity, Savannah's identification as "white passing" being directly tied to her "lightness" relative to her (Black) dad, and Betty's need to bring her Latina mom with her to speak with Latinx communities are examples of the utility of the monoracial parent as a tangible credential for a multiracial person to validly claim their racial identity. As such, parents are not only a *source* of racial socialization; they are a *component* in how race is socially ascribed, and thus how multiracial youth understand how they can identify. We also see this strategy as an example of how multiracial young people claim agency within the rigid racial binary as they insist that others take their chosen racial identification seriously. But in doing so, they are forced to engage with constructions of race as biological and mutually exclusive. This points to the delicate interplay of agency and constraint for multiracial identification in a monoracist society.

Third, we observe the unevenness of racial socialization within the family—with different parents (and family members) communicating different messages and engaging very differently with racial experiences, given their different positionalities. These dynamics often arose in direct response to race-salient events in society such as Derek Chauvin's murder of George Floyd. Savannah, who "compartmentalized" her identities, was a prime example of this: she largely avoided talking about race with her white mom and extended family but found affinity with her Black dad, even while they navigated the racial context of BLM together. Maya experienced invalidation and racism from aunts on both sides of her family targeting different parts of her identity, which were either directly related to the sociopolitical context (i.e., her Vietnamese family's rejection of BLM), or more salient to Maya given the sociopolitical context (i.e., heightened

awareness of anti-Asian racism in the midst of COVID-19). These uneven experiences suggest that multiracial youth may necessarily learn certain insights or experience different messaging from one parent (or one side of their family) versus the other. Such inconsistencies may be uniquely relevant in the multiracial context (Atkin et al., 2021), but it is not a dimension typically considered in monoracial socialization research. Still, it may be a relevant area to extend racial socialization research which often relies on single parent reports as reflective of the whole family socialization context within and beyond the nuclear family.

The unevenness of racial socialization also surfaced in the ways that monoracial parents sometimes failed to prepare or mis-prepared multiracial youth for the multiracial experience. For example, preparing multiracial youth for anti-Black racism or encouraging Black cultural pride and expressions without attention to the roles of monoracism and colorism, as we saw in Maya's narrative. Betty's narrative also powerfully captured this as she and her parents both recognized that while her parents actively and expertly socialized her Black and Mexican identities, they lacked the knowledge to help her navigate being Afro-Latina, her multiracial identity, a gap in connection that Betty felt acutely as she tried to engage with BLM activism across her racial groups. Notably, support or socialization on how to navigate between the "two sides" of one's family was not evident in the narratives and could be an area of further exploration in thinking about multiracial socialization. That is, how do multiracial youth reconcile or navigate race incongruencies and monoracial paradigms that exist within their own families? Relatedly, recent research suggests that parents may need support in socializing and preparing their children for the racial system we navigate (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Jones et al., 2022); for parents of multiracial youth, this may include explicit discussion and recognition of how monoracism functions and the kinds of identity questions and invalidation experiences that multiracial children may face that they, as monoracial parents, may not.

Limitations

While our findings powerfully illustrate the ways in which parents and family are deeply implicated in how multiracial college students are navigating the present m(ai)cro-context of multiracial identification, there are limitations to our work. First, the interviews were not originally designed to understand the role of parents in identity. While our approach enabled us to identify exciting new ways that parents and familial adults feature in youth's identity meaning-making beyond traditional conceptions of parental socialization, it is possible that these findings are an artifact of the data. Additional research should be conducted to further explore the themes we have identified for Black + young adults. As

all of our participants were college students, future research should especially investigate whether these themes are seen in identity narratives of young adults who do not attend college. Second, because our study was designed during the BLM Movement, a historic sociopolitical moment, our findings reflect this context and should not be interpreted as generalizable or transferable to all contexts and moments. Drawing on the m(ai)cro model, our interpretation is that the identity issues raised are responsive to the sociopolitical moment of BLM. That said, we hear themes resonate with previous literature on the multiracial identity experience. Thus, being Black + in monoracist, anti-Black society is a persistent reality *and* the uptick of public race conversations likely contributed to the heightened family tensions and parent discussions. These tensions, however, are not absent outside of BLM; participants referenced how race was (or was not) discussed among family *before* Summer 2020. In this way, BLM may have magnified dynamics that were already present rather than creating new ones that were previously absent.

Third, because gender did not play a role during our recruitment and eligibility processes, our sample overwhelmingly consisted of female-identifying individuals; we had one male-identifying participant and one participant who identified as gender-queer/non-binary. While previous research has implied gendered patterns in multiracial identification, this may not hold true in all cases (Xu et al., 2021), and our non-gender-diverse sample hampers our ability to understand the intersectional implications of gender for multiracial experience. Our sample also consists mostly of "first-generation" multiracial folks, who have monoracial parents from two different racial groups. It is possible that multiracial individuals who have at least one parent who identifies as multiracial could have a very different within-family experience because they have a multiracial role model with whom they may share a general multiracial experience, if not the exact same racial background. Future research should investigate the nuanced ways that gender identity and having a multiracial parent may affect how family members are taken up in racial identity meaning-making. Future research should also continue investigating the multiracial experience in folks with a wide variety of racial backgrounds; the multiracial experience is all too often investigated through research on white/non-white multiracial folks which continues to center whiteness and reproduce inequities in whose voices are heard in psychological research (Garay & Remedios, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Parents

Our approach to investigating parental socialization through youth's identity meaning-making allowed youth to tell us how and why their family members are important for how

they understand their racial identities. This included traditional forms of socialization such as cultural socialization, but goes beyond that to emphasize within-family racialized experiences, highlighting the importance of family as evidence for (or against) legitimacy of one's multiracial identification, illuminating youth-directed socializing experiences, and underscoring the tensions youth feel between what they hear at home and what they hear out in the world. Importantly, our findings also engage with the ways in which historical constructions of (multi)racial membership constrain, or are reinforced by, the messages parents try to communicate about race and the ways in which multiracial youth need to leverage parents in an attempt to legitimately claim their identities. Building from these findings, we conclude with insights about what parents with multiracial children may need to be mindful of in their racial socialization practices.

Prepare Multiracial Young People for the Specificity of Monoracism

Preparation for anti-Black racism or the minority experience is relevant but may not reflect their lived realities due to colorism and other racist systems. Preparation for monoracism might include attention to identity *invalidation* and reckoning with the sociopolitical limits on racial identification (e.g., can you claim 'Black'?) even while still supporting freedom in personal multiracial identification. Because much previous research on parental socialization within the multiracial community has used scales and approaches built for the monoracial community, the importance of specifically addressing monoracism has been chronically under-researched (for the first scale designed to capture multiracial-specific familial socialization, see Atkin et al., 2021). Yet, monoracism is clearly a major constraint on the identities of multiracial youth.

Critical Awareness of Monoracism and Monoracial Positionality

Our data also suggest that multiracial college students are intimately aware of the societal definitions of race as tied to hereditary, or parental identity, and this matters for how a multiracial person may be 'allowed' to identify. Thus, the monoracial parents' awareness of their own racial identity and positionality within a monoracial hierarchy will shape how the multiracial child is perceived by others and whether they feel they have access to or legitimacy in certain monoracial groups. And awareness of the broader structure of race—its constraints and spaces for possibility—may aid parents in understanding and supporting multiracial youth's racial identity development.

Acknowledge the Reality of (Un)shared Identity

The idea that monoracial parents cannot experience race as your multiracial child seems to be an important part of socialization and identity support for multiracial youth. This may mean stepping aside when a child has a *shared* experience with one parent, making space for young people to learn from multiracial people and engage in multiracial spaces, and leaning in to learn and listen in those spaces that are *unshared*. This may also include intentionality in attending to the extended family system to cultivate 'unshared' identity spaces that are validating and affirming rather than harmful. This may also include seeking out multiracial role models who share the child's racial background. As we saw with Betty's narrative, role models can provide formative representation for youth who do not have a fully shared racial background with family.

Entering the question of racial socialization in multiracial families through the lens of racial identity afforded us insight into what kinds of messages multiracial college students spontaneously recall and incorporate into their identities. Moreover, centering MultiCrit and the m(ai)cro perspective allowed us to attend to sociohistorical and political context of these 'micro' developmental processes and unearth *why* multiracial youth make the racial identity decisions they make and the role (and potential) of parents to serve as meaningful socializing agents in this process. We believe this suggests important insights into identity processes, questions, and socialization frames that center the multiracial, specifically Black +, experiences of young adults. Our hope is that such insights can broaden the conversation about multiracial socialization and understanding of the specificity of Black + identity experiences in a context of anti-Black racism and monoracism. Future work can build on this approach broadening and deepening the literature on family socialization across development.

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Data Availability All data generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the sensitive and identifiable nature of the interview data, but may be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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