

ROLE OF BLACK GRANDMOTHERS IN THE RACIAL SOCIALIZATION OF  
THEIR BIRACIAL GRANDCHILDREN

by

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B.S., KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY, 1995  
M.C.J., WASHBURN UNIVERSITY, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Family Studies and Human Development  
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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
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## **Abstract**

The current study was focused on the role Black grandmothers played in biracial (Black and White) racial socialization process of their grandchild or grandchildren. Racial socialization process where by the grandmothers engaged in a systematic and deliberate attempt to ensure that their grandchildren develop an awareness and sensibility toward their Black heritage. There were several criteria the grandmothers had to meet. They included being born before 1975, ensuring that the grandmothers experienced the post 70s Black pride movement. The grandmother also needed to have contact with the identified grandchild. Qualitative methods with a phenomenological lens were employed. The Black grandmothers are seen as the experts on their experiences, thus phenomenology allowed me to probe deeper into the experiences of these grandmothers and their reality. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants at the location and time of their choice. The results revealed the perspective and methods they exercised in racially socializing their biracial grandchildren. The participants had similar beliefs as it related to what their role in the racial socialization process was supposed to be. There were eight primary themes that emerged were community influence, spirituality, social adjustment, feelings toward “the other”, social perception, cultural indoctrination, grandma’s burden, and the road ahead. Although, each grandmother had a different journey their conclusions regarding the way to socialize their biracial grandchildren as Black was unanimous.

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## **Abstract**

The current study was conducted with Black Grandmothers who have a biracial (Black and White) grandchild or grandchildren and their role in the racial socialization process of their grandchild or grandchildren. Racial socialization is how these grandchildren of biracial parentage came to understand their Blackness. There were several criteria the seven participants had to meet. They included being born before 1975, this would ensure the grandmothers experienced the 70s Black pride movement, and they need to have contact with the identified grandchild. Qualitative methods with a phenomenological lens were employed. The Black grandmothers are the experts on their experiences, thus phenomenology allowed me to probe deeper into the experiences of these grandmothers and their reality. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants at the location and time of their choice. The results revealed the perspective and methods they exercised in racially socializing their biracial grandchildren. The participants had similar beliefs as it related to what their role in the racial socialization process was supposed to be. The themes that emerged were community influence, spirituality, social adjustment, feelings toward “the other”, social perception, cultural indoctrination, grandma’s burden, and the road ahead. Although, each grandmother had a different journey and the why behind viewpoints varied, their conclusions regarding the proper racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren was to socialize them as they were Black was unanimous.

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To the teachers and my high school nurse that looked past the exterior of the loud girl from the projects, saw the potential I had yet to see, I thank you. To the nay sayers

and those that tried to block the way, what you meant for bad, God turned it into his  
Glory.

## Dedication

*The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be-* Ralph Waldo

Emerson

I would like to dedicate this Dissertation to all those little Black girls out there that start this journey as a product of poverty and low goals set for you by others, know you are the King's daughter and you too are destined for greatness.

To my children, words cannot express the love I have for you. This is been a journey we have taken together, the road was bumpy and often curved unexpectedly, we are coming out on the other side. Son you are truly Mr. Amazin and baby girl you are beautiful and multi-talented, I look forward to the day when you both achieve your dreams as you have helped me achieve mine.

To my Mother, I would have never known the adversity you faced and the struggles you made, sure I never saw if it had not been for "the book" as you called. Although we often struggled financially, you always made sure there was money when I wanted to do something that you believed would keep me in school. As a child, I could not understand how much of a scarifice that was for you and I am truly grateful. You could not tell me enough how proud you were and how you always knew I would be different and for that I am eternally indebted. P.S. this does not mean I can buy you a house now (smile), but prayerfully one day soon.

To my East Eight Street church family, your prayers and guidance through the years have helped me through the storms. I can look back and truly say, with your help I made it over. I pray continued blessings for our little church on the hill.

## Prologue

My mother and my aunts often spoke about the evils of White people and all of the things Whites had done to keep my family from getting ahead. White people were always in “our business” and often we had to keep information (e.g. discipline methods and extra money made) from them because Whites might try to take us away or get us kicked out of our house. I could not associate what they meant because most of the neighborhood was Black (as I think back there were a couple of biracial kids but in our minds they were considered light-skinned Blacks). There were no Whites in our *micro* environment and few in our *meso* environment, until 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This was the year they combined our neighborhood school with a school from the edge of the district. Our school was close to 95% Black and the other school was more than 95% White. I remember the experience being a culture shock for me and probably everyone involved. The White students were bused to our school and it seemed to many of us they received special privileges. They were allowed to leave before school was officially out so they could get on the bus before we were released. The White kids had things like fancy pencils and folders, and it was stressed that we were not allowed to touch their book bags or other belongings. They did not even have to put their school supplies with ours. It also seemed every time something happened on the playground it was never their fault. Of course, as I look back at it through a different lens, I realize my interpretation of what was happening was colored heavily by the anti-White attitude that existed in my household.

My mother always associated White, with not being right. I remember when my older sister told us she was a lesbian; I was probably 10 years old. My mom's biggest

problem was the woman she brought home was White. Another example that comes to mind involves my brother when I was about 15 years old. He did not tell us he had son until the child was two years old. The reasoning was he was afraid my mother would not accept his child because he was half Mexican. My mother's response was it is not a problem "Your uncle is part Mexican". She just did not want any White grandbabies. She quoted the saying "if she can't use your comb don't bring her home". I think these things set the stage for me as a young girl in understanding that many things were tolerable as long as I did not date a white person.

As my older siblings had children, my mother gave them nicknames; the majority of these too were based on color. The nicknames included: Little Black Granny, Pecker, Honkey, Co-Chief, and Wheat-Boy. I could never convince her how inappropriate it was to yell these names, she had given in affection to her grandchildren, out loud in public. Today, her attitude towards Whites has softened some, but there is still a strong distrust and she often will warn my siblings, her grandchildren and me, to be careful around White people. Her change of heart could be due to having two Black and White great-grandbabies. I have never really talked to her about her change in attitude but her change did lead me to want to explore the topic further.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

How individuals are socialized is a very complex experience. I often wonder what impact one's family socialization experience has on his or her worldview. Much of my perspective on life was formed by the relationship with my mother, a multiracial (Native-American, Irish and Black) woman who did not acknowledge her mixed race and ethnic heritage, preferring to refer to herself as Black only. Throughout her life, she developed both a distrust of and strong cautiousness toward White people, which she freely passed down to my siblings and me. She openly expressed how many of her choices in life were affected by her socialization and life experiences with Whites. Her stories were laced with what she perceived as prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and other overt forms of social maltreatment from the dominant population—White Americans.

Historically, my mother's distrust served as a catalyst that produced a mixed effect on her offspring. There appears to be a lingering distrust for Whites among my generation of siblings, but it has not extended beyond that generation as evidenced by the behavior of her grandchildren. Among that group, three of her oldest four grandchildren have biracial children and my son is currently dating a White classmate.

Dufion and Kowaleski-Jones, (2007) noted that grandmothers have always played a role in the socialization of their grandchildren. This realization piqued my curiosity about how grandmothers would choose to engage in racial socialization, especially in the instance where there were biracial grandchildren. How would these grandmothers socialize their biracial grandchildren in view of the their life experiences? In short, I



intend to examine the role non-custodial Black grandmothers who have limited and focused time with their grandchildren and how that time impacts the racial socialization of their biracial (Black and White) grandchildren.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Grandparents throughout history have played a vital role in the lives of their grandchildren (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Gordon, 1999; Dufion & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). Believing the role of grandparents is to spoil their grandchildren and to be their refuge is a commonly held perception in American society. Some of the more obvious social clues can be found in the many whimsical sayings that are present on infant clothing, *if mom says no ask grandma* or *what happens at grandma's stays at grandmas*. As a result of societal ails, grandparents have been placed in a more authoritative and influential role, whether it is as a custodial guardian or as a *de facto* co-parent due to the grandchild or grandchildren living in their home with their parent (Aquilino, 1996; Census, 2005; Dufion & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). To develop a greater understanding of how influential Black grandmothers can be I will explore the role of the Black grandmother (without regard to whether she is the paternal or maternal grandmother) in the racial socialization of her biracial (Black and White) grandchildren and how important it is with the changing 'face' of family.

### **Brief Review of Race Relations in the USA Since 1920's**

A brief examination of the history of race relations in the United States of America since the 1920's serves as the basis by which I examine what Blacks do to prepare their children for life in American society. In particular, I shall review the

literature, on the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process of their biracial grandchildren.

History has ‘colored’ the perspectives of Blacks about living in the United States of America (USA). The freeing of the slaves created a transition in the order of society endorsed by all Americans (Omi & Winant, 1994; Hill, 1999; Sherry et al, 2006). The elimination of slavery created an expectation of equality between Blacks and Whites; however it did little to thwart the racial prejudice and racial discrimination. In fact, contemporary racial prejudice against Blacks in America is rooted in slavery but it is also largely a developmental and characteristic outcome brought by the fight for freedom (Crowell, 1927). Blacks have continued to struggle to make economic and social gains (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Bruce, 2010; Taylor & Mateyka, 2011). The racial antagonisms increased as the efforts of individuals to advance produced equality through business or other social relationships (Crowell, 1927; Taylor & Mateyka, 2011). The threat of lynching for “stepping out of line” (efforts to be treated equal to Whites) was an ever-present fear (Brink & Harris, 1967; Welch, Sigelman, Bledsoe & Combs, 2001). In other words being free did not necessarily mean being seen as equal by Whites and even some Blacks. This was evident in the laws that were passed and how Whites and Blacks had differing views on what the Civil Rights legislation meant.

Laws were created to assert racial ceilings and separation of Blacks and Whites were known as Jim Crow laws. In 1952 the Kansas delegation to the Southwest Unitarian Church Conference was refused entry because their delegation had one Black member (Eick, 2001). Kansas actually had the first successful sustained student sit-ins in protest to the Jim Crow Laws, years before sit-ins swept the South (McCusker, 1999;

Eick, 2001). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was the most powerful empowerment tool to southern Blacks since the Reconstruction, because it gave them a voice (Brink & Harris, 1967), which led to the efforts of Blacks and Whites working together to end legalized Jim Crow Laws. The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed many overt indications of racial inequality such as forcing the removal of Whites only signs in public accommodations (Eick, 2001). This added further pressure on the full integration of schools and the fight against job discrimination (Brink & Harris, 1967; Erik, 2001).

However, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not address anti-miscegenation laws established during Jim Crow. During this time there were 31 states with laws that prohibited Whites and Blacks or those that came from Black ancestry from marrying (Barnett, 1964). The central premise of anti-miscegenation laws was to define racial identity, establish racial inequality and preserve moral propriety (Moran, 2001; Orbe & Harris, 2001; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008). These laws served two purposes, to establish clear racial boundaries and to ensure that Blacks and Asians would not have access to White privilege through social contract (marriage) and inheritance of family (Korgen, 1998; Daily, 2000; Moran, 2001). This was made clear in the case of *Scott v Raub* in 1888, where a daughter was denied the inheritance of her father because her father, who she said was a free man of color, was classified by the Albemarle County Circuit Court *Scott v Raub* in 1888 as a White man and since her mother was of mixed race (Black and White) their marriage was illegal, making her illegitimate and unable to inherit (Dailey, 2000). However on appeal the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals used social factors and the “privileges” he enjoyed, like if he voted and where he went to church to determine his racial identity (Dailey, 2000). Based on the fact that he waited until Blacks

earned the privilege and he attended a church normally attended by Blacks, it was determined he was Black. These social perceptions and definitions on what makes one Black are often still used today (Hill, 1999; Hamm, 2001; Moran, 2001). Notably, these laws had provisions for Americans Indians and none of them covered Hispanics. For example, in Virginia there was the “Pocahontas exception”, this was added so the descendents of John Rolfe could be assured of their Whiteness (Moran, 2001).

The end of the legality of anti-miscegenation laws came as a result of the *Loving v Virginia* case (Korgen, 1998; Parker, 2009). In 1958, a Virginia court ruled their marriage, which occurred in Washington, DC, was not legal and convicted them of unlawful cohabitation. They were sentenced to a year in jail or their sentence could be suspended if they left the state for 25 years, which they did. On a visit back to see relatives they were arrested again for traveling together. This incident and inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement caused Mrs. Loving to write to Robert Kennedy, then the Attorney General, about the law. He forwarded the letter to the Supreme Court and in 1967; they found the Virginia law unconstitutional. The Supreme Court asserted that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional and an increase in interracial marriages and relationships followed the verdict. Despite the 1967 Supreme Court ruling, 40 years later Keith Bardwell, a Justice of the Peace in Louisiana, denied a marriage license to an interracial couple, citing he was concerned for the well-being of the children of this type (mixed race) of union (Brink & Harris, 1967; Funderburg, 1994; Korgen, 1998; Parker, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Authors Brink and Harris (1967) use the term Negro an artifact of the time they were writing but I have replaced it with Black, a more acceptable term and one consistent with the discussion.

Blacks and Whites interpreted the new legal access and protections granted by the Civil Rights legislation differently. In the eyes of Blacks, while access to job equality was still a large issue there were now steps that could be taken. For example, Boeing Company, a Wichita, Kansas based aviation factory, was sued for failing to train 1,475 disadvantaged workers (read here as Blacks) as it promised when given the Federal Government contract in 1967 (Eick, 2001). Black Power and Black Nationalism also served as a wedge to pressure the system into opening the doors for racial minorities. Black power embedded a confidence that enabled Blacks to seize opportunities that were newly available to them (Blauner, 1989).

There was the appearance of acceptance by Whites that the lack of prosperity for Blacks was present and that discrimination played a role in their current position within society (Brink & Harris, 1967; Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006), the best way to rectify the situation was unknown. Whites attitudes about the Blacks' press for equality focused around what Whites believed the Blacks were ready for and that Blacks were asking for too much too soon (Brink & Harris, 1967; Beals, 1994). Whites also believed that Blacks were being pushed to demand equality by the Communists (Brink & Harris, 1967). Hoover's anti-communist and anti-Black belief system allowed him to violate FBI's statutory mandates (Eick, 2001). The FBI used its powers to secure presidential approval to assemble a large network of informers and provocateurs directed against civil rights leaders and organizations during the Civil Rights Movement (Eick, 2001).

### **Race Relations and My Family History**

My mother was born and raised in Kansas. She was born in Council Grove, and late in her childhood moved to Junction City. Her family was moved to Topeka in her

teens. When asked to shared insight my mother remembered her mother never took them anywhere with her. No matter where she went the children were not allowed to leave the yard. My mother believed it was because her mother had a temper (local law enforcement called her ‘Geronimo’) and they were racially mixed children (Black and Indian) and she did not want to have to fight Whites for calling her children names. My mother also remembered being in the same classrooms as White children but, they sat on different sides of the room. She did not like White students because they were treated better than the Black students at school and did not get ‘whipped’<sup>2</sup> by the White school officials like the Black students. She reported not having White friends because her mother referred to them as “snakes”. The pigment of my aunts’ and mother’s skin was very light due to the combination of Native American, Irish and Black ancestry. Two of them even had gray irises. I asked her why did she and her sisters not try to pass<sup>3</sup>. She stated matter-of-factly that she did not want to be like those people. Based on the racial socialization she received and her negative experiences with Whites it was clear that her racial socialization of her children was based on these negative perceptions of Whites.

### **What do Blacks do to Prepare Their Children?**

America is a society where race is treated as an important and largely impenetrable social boundary (Davis, 1991; Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Herring, 1995; Moran, 2001; Rockquemore et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006; Herman & Campbell, 2012). Race can be seen as a pervasive feature of everyday life that organizes peoples’

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<sup>2</sup> Whipped is defined as corporal punishment used by school officials and teachers on students when they misbehaved during school.

<sup>3</sup> Passing is a term that was commonly used when referring to individuals mixed with Black and White, which physically looked as if they were all white (Crowell, 1927, Hill, 1999).

experiences. Based on the history of race relations between Blacks and Whites and their lived experiences has resulted in the need of Blacks to racially socialize their children (Stack, 1979; Thornton, 1997; Hill, 1999; Hamm, 2001; Moran, 2001; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). In a 1993 issue of *Time* magazine, a young Black three year-old tells her mommy she wants to be White. The article details how mortified her parents were and that they thought by providing Black dolls and screening what she was able to watch on television, they had given her what she needed to develop a positive 'racial identity' (White, 1993). Her parents, one of which is a psychiatrist, continued to express to her that she is bright, Black, and beautiful. The parents vowed to continue doing so until she loved herself as much as they love her. Another example involved a Black boy in a predominately White daycare environment. He reported to his father that he was tired of being Black (White, 1993). Comer and Poussaint (1992) in their book *Raising Black Children* recommend a calm and straightforward approach when addressing issues as they arise, where Powell-Hopson and Hopson (1990) authors of *Different and Wonderful: Raising Black Children in a Race-Conscious Society*, suggest a more aggressive proactive approach in preparing children against negative messages at an early age. Both books in essence describe the racial socialization and racial identity development that needs to occur with Black children.

### **Racial Identity Development**

The precursor to racial socialization is racial identity development. This process must occur before racial socialization can occur since ones racial identity predicts the path of the racial socialization process. Racial identity development is a component of the overall identity development of non-White individuals. Racial identity is defined as

an individual's self-concept or how they feel about themselves as it relates to group membership status and their perceptions of that membership (Thomas et al., 2010). Parham and Helms (1981) describes it simply as "a person's beliefs or attitudes about his or her own race" (p. 251). Earlier works on the relationships between racial identity attitudes and other racial constructs revealed that racial identity attitudes were significant in predicting self-esteem, both collectively and individually (Bianchi, Zea, Belgrave, & Echeverry, 2002) and that these identities had their roots in ancestral backgrounds (McAdoo, Martinez & Hughes, 2005). Several factors contribute to the creation of one's racial identity, including family, friends, social institutions, and organizations (Orbe & Harris, 2001, Thomas et al., 2010; Snyder, 2012).

Identity development of biracial people is multifaceted, evolved over time and shifts contextually. Thus, understanding these complexities are impossible without considering political context, family, community influences as well as socio-historical factors (Root, 1992). Poston (1990), argues the problem biracial children face with self-esteem may lie in the lack of support received from their parents' cultures and how these biased beliefs are internalized not the differences between the cultures, that create the marginality. Thus illustrating the role of family in the development of identity as paramount, but for biracial children it carries even more weight. What their parents do or not do, what they say or not say, as it relates to race, can prove love supersedes racial barriers and provide a lifeline to close gaps between the cultures that were once thought insurmountable or they can cement the gaps where actual intent can be irrelevant (Funderburg, 1994). Furthermore, understanding the role of the intermediate family and extended family, namely the Black grandmothers, in the process is also crucial.



## **What is Racial Socialization?**

Socialization of children is the process of teaching children to function in society. It is more or less a map or guide designed to help with navigation through the outside world. So what is racial socialization, why is it so important for Black children to be racially socialized, and what happens if the process does not occur? First racial socialization is the transmission of information, norms, and values about race and ethnicity to children (McAdoo, 1974; Hughes, Smith, Rodriguez, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Thomas, Speight & Whitterspoon, 2010). The key role of racial socialization is to provide children with a shield from the devastating effects of racism, by preparing them through the racial socialization process (Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Snyder, 2012). In the literature the systems approach to racial socialization is the most common. Since children and families do not exist in a bubble, their extended families, community, society and societal beliefs all play a role in their racial socialization.

Current research shows that parental influences play a major role in the socialization of children (Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1990; Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2010). There are several factors that influence parents decisions on when, how and if to racially socialize. The life experiences of the parents as well as the environment in which they reside play a role in the direction of the socialization decision (Milan & Keiley, 2000; Lesane-Brown, et. al, 2010; Snyder, 2011). Parents will also guide the child when they go through the self-identification process (Rodriguez, Mc Kay, & Bannon, 2008; Thomas, et. al, 2010).

Society's perception of the child also plays a role in the decision (Funderburg, 1994; Milan & Keiley, 2000; Snyder, 2012).

Second, it is important because when children are not properly racially socialized, they will internalize the discrimination that they face and believe there is something wrong with them (Thomas et al., 2010). It is necessary for Black children to learn how to live in a society where race is still stratifying and stigmatizing (Waters, 1991; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). The research stresses how Black parents look at it as preparing their children to face the world (Thomas et al., 2010; Snyder, 2011).

Finally, when children are not properly racially socialized it has effects on their self-esteem, depression levels, and academic performance (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990; Spencer, 1995; Hill, 1999; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). For example, when Black males received positive racial socialization they were less likely to initiate fights (Rodriguez et al., 2008). When racial socialization does not occur or is done incorrectly it can cause racial mistrust, which was a significant predictor of both major and minor deviance in adolescents (Rodriguez et al, 2008) and feelings of low self worth and lack of pride in who they are (Cheung, 1997, Hill, 1999; Hamm, 2001; Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

Thus racial socialization from the Black perspective includes exposure and development of knowledge in regards to cultural practices to help negotiate between broader society and their own community, promotion of racial pride and preparation for bias and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Peters, 2002). In essence, parents are teaching their children how to be Black in a White Society (McAdoo, 1974, Bluner, 1989; Waters, 1991; Martin & McAdoo, 2005; Thomas, et. al, 2010). Racial

socialization is seen, as a key parental practice for Blacks that provides needed protective factors for children. The role of the extended family, namely grandmothers, is well known among the Black community and exploring their role in the process of racial socialization should provide valuable insight.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

Beginning research on grandparents (1964-1991) did not name the theory the work was based on, instead it would borrow concepts from various theories and applied them where they fit best (Bates & Taylor, 2013). Therefore, the majority of the terms referred to like role performance, exchange, and function are likely borrowed from well-established theories like symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and structural functionalism theory (Bates & Taylor, 2013). The second wave or current research on grandparents (1991-2012) utilized mid-range theories (Gibson, 2002; Goldman & Silverstein, 2002; Cox, 2003) framework and limited theory building (Kivett, 1991b). The focus of grandparent roles to this point has focused on the types of grandparenting and the symbolic meaning of the roles. Thus over the last 50 years research on grandparents has addressed; who they are, what they think, and how they feel about themselves in the role of grandparent, and the affect it has on them and the family (King & Elder Jr, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Muller & Elder Jr, 2002; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006).

The two theories I have chosen to examine the issues and constructs of racial socialization are symbolic interaction and social construction. Symbolic interaction is a perspective that relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Doerthy et al., 1993; White & Klien, 2008;

Forte, 2009). Where social construction is essentially the attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality (von Glaserfeld, 1996; Cheung, 1997; Cottone, 2001; Andrews, 2012). In addressing the issue of racial socialization, the worldview of Black grandmothers will play a large role. The symbols and their interpretation or the construction of the meanings associated with these symbols will be crucial. For example, if these grandmothers define race as they did in 1950s or before, which was the one-drop rule<sup>4</sup>, will it result in the same racial socialization message given if they use the definition after late 2000s, with the emergence of the acceptability of identifying as biracial?

### **Significance of the Project**

The research left some questions regarding preparation of children who have a White and a Black parent. For example, when the family is interracial what socialization messages are passed on to the children? Does the message change based on which parent is delivering the message? Which parent is responsible for this transmission of the racial socialization messages? What role if any does the Black grandmother have in the racial socialization process?

In an ideal world, racial socialization and racial identity development would not matter and one could focus on being judged by the content of their character. However, we are still far away from gaining utopian status. The question then becomes how important is the choice of racial identity made by biracial Americans and more importantly should choosing one race over another be the only option? When one is biracial, struggling to find any racial identity can be problematic (Funderburg, 1994; Korgen, 1998; Moran, 2001; Hamm, 2001; Rocquequomore et. al, 2006). On the one

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<sup>4</sup> One-drop rule refers to blood quantum necessary to deem an individual to be legally Black (Dailey, 2000).

hand, placing them in either category is somewhat of a false racial identity; and on the other hand, not placing them would leave them without a defined racial identity at all (Herring, 1995; Korgen, 1998). Snyder (2012) provided two examples of where parents' reluctance or dismissive attitudes toward addressing issues of race were detrimental to the identity development of their children. In one case the parents told the child she was 'tan'. They affectively took away both of her cultural heritages and supplied no replacement. In the other case the respondent was told by her parents that they believed racism did not exist. Her parents held the belief that race did not matter; everybody was the same so there was no problem. This mixed message, the one from her parents and the one from the society in which she lived, resulted in her thinking something was wrong with her because there was a problem and she felt she could not talk to them about it, therefore she internalized all of it (Snyder, 2012).

Studies show that biracial youth struggle with depression more than mono-racial youth (Parham & Helms, 1985; Herring, 1995; Chiong, 1998; Storr, 1999; Milan & Keiley, 2000). Biracial individuals that have Black and White parentage have the added struggle of developing a healthy racial identity, due to the years of conflict between the races, which compose them (Poston, 1990; Storrs, 1999; Morrison & Bordere, 2001; Henriken & Trusty, 2004). This is evident in Crawford and Alaggia (2008), where Michelle says this:

*...if I'm gonna learn who I am, I'm going to need both parents and experience both worlds for sure, that was resentment towards both of them for not taking note of that ever, not trying to teach me...that was confusing.. I think I internalized it really negatively (pp. 90).*

Healthy identity development is the foundation to a healthy life. Blacks see racial socialization as a necessity for Black children to develop a healthy identity. Black-White

biracial individuals are in a tenuous position due to the turbulent sociocultural experiences of Blacks and Whites in the US. Biracial children are in a unique situation. They are unable to fully see themselves in either of their parents or their extended family. Historically they would have been considered Black and that would have been how they were socialized; now we are in the era of multiracial and biracial identities (US Health & Human Services, n.d.) so such mono-racial identity would not be so readily available. Now parents and other caregivers, who are often mono-racial, are tasked with helping them develop these biracial identities or continue with the mono-racial approach. The difficulty arises when racial socialization issues occur. Often racial socialization is based on lived experiences and neither of the parents or the extended family will have the same experiences of the biracial individual. The potential for disconnect widens if the socialization is completed by the grandparents.

Grandparents are increasingly becoming more active in the day-to-day upbringing of their grandchildren (King & Elder, 1997; Chan & Elder, 2000; Muller, Wilhelm, & Elder, 2003). The proposed project is an attempt to address this issue by studying the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization of her biracial grandchildren. This study will contribute to the literature on the study of biracial families. It will also help providers working with multicultural and multigenerational families. The uniqueness of this project is that it is a pioneering effort focused on the role of the Black grandmother in racial socialization of her biracial grandchildren.

### **Plan for Dissertation**

I am interested in the role of non-custodial Black grandmother in the racial socialization of their grandchildren. The focal question is what is the role of non-

custodial Black grandparents who have limited and focused times with their grandchildren in promoting racial socialization of their biracial (Black and White) grandchildren. I will focus on the Black grandmothers of grandchildren whose racial makeup is of African and European descent. I have chosen these two races because of their long history of racial conflict in the United States. It is this conflict and history that I believe aids in the importance of how the offspring of these races are socialized.

We view the world through the lens in which we live it and function according to the symbols that we have discovered to be safe and fruitful to our overall well-being (Forte, 2009). This suggests the personal experiences and the race of the person doing the socializing would influence the direction and type of socialization the child would receive. What influences the decision to socialize Black, White, or not at all? What role does the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the Black grandmothers play in how biracial children are racially socialized? Lastly, how much of the decision is based on what will help them develop a positive sense of self?

The study will examine Black grandmothers life experiences and how they influence their choices in racial socializing their biracial grandchildren. The study will inquire about their methods of racial socialization as well as the style they use. The grandmothers will be placed on a generational timeline to determine which events in their lives were present. By examining what racial socialization messages the grandmothers received, it may be possible to understand the rationale for the messages the grandmothers passed on to their children and biracial grandchildren.

To answer these questions and others I will conduct a qualitative study. The data collection will consist of in-depth interviews with at least five (n=5) Black grandmothers

of biracial grandchildren in a semi-urban region of a large Mid-Western state. The participants will be gathered using criterion and snowball sampling. I will interview at least two maternal and three paternal grandmothers. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face and will include a short questionnaire regarding specific demographic and historical information that will make it possible for me to place the grandmother within a particular epoch regarding race relations in America. Care will be taken to ensure the study includes grandparents that are a representation of as many of the different family structures as possible (e.g. two parent, single family, SES, education levels, and religious backgrounds). Data will be coded and analyzed to identify patterns and commonalities concerning the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of biracial grandchildren as it relates to racial socialization.



## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The decision on how to racially socialize mono-racial individuals is a non-issue. The racial community in which the individual belongs is used as the foundation for the socialization. This process can be based on lived experiences (Wright, 1998; Hill, 1999; Lesane-Brown, 2010) or on potential scenarios they might find in themselves (McAdoo, 1974; Waters, 1991; Storrs, 1999; Martin & McAdoo, 2007). The methods in which racial socialization occurs, such as the use of racial pride (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes, et al., 2006; McHale, et al., 2006) or messages of distrust and bias (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Cokley, 2002; Thomas et al., 2010) can create a positive self-image or a hypersensitivity to race.

The makeup of any family is unique and is influenced by cultural, political and societal contexts of the time period in which it exists (Goode & Jones, 2008; Cootnz, 2010). Families are ever changing and the composition of what is considered a family and the current state of the family are matters of national debate.

The racial socialization of the child is not limited to the immediate caregivers. For instance, data from the US Census (2005; 2010) indicated a rise in children living in one-parent households; and a child living with a single mother were more likely to also have a grandparent in the household. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, are often called on to provide childcare duties, resulting in their direct involvement in their grandchildren's development (Hunter, 1973; Hill, 1999; Gibson, 2002; Williamson et al., 2003). In some instances, the grandparents' racial identity or socialization experience may not be congruent with that of the child they are helping to raise (Root, 1992; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004).

## **Role of Grandparents in Grandchild Development**

Grandparents have always played a role in the lives of their grandchildren.

Bengston (1985) identified four symbolic roles of grandparents: *Being there; as national guard or family watchdog; as arbitrator; and as their social construction of biography.*

The first role, *being there*, in essence means being an emotional, spiritual, financial, or other significant resource for the family. This corresponds with the perception of grandparents being the “fun relatives” and spoiling their grandchildren (Kennedy, 1992; Gordon, 1999; Robbins, Scherman, Hideman & Wilson, 2005; Dufion & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). Additionally, Barranti (1985) found that the bond between a grandparent and grandchild could not be conferred via any other person or institution.

The second role, *national guard or family watchdog*, is symbolic of the need to protect or provide for their grandchildren. The grandmother is often the surrogate parent (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Watson, 1997; Kemp, 2004; Robbins et al., 2005). When the mother works the grandmother is often called on to care for the children (McCready, 1985; Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Hunter, 1997; Gibson, 2002). On the other hand, grandfathers tend to have a more traditional gender role approach— that of an advisor in areas of instrumental matters, like advising them to get a education, find a job, and other goal oriented advice (Hagestad, 1985). This illustrates that part of the initial development of grandchildren is influenced by their grandparents.

The *arbitrator* is the third symbolic role. Grandmothers have historically been identified to be the one to facilitated intergenerational exchanges (Bahr, 1976; Cohlert & Grunebaum, 1981; Hagestad, 1985). This role is that of a mediator between parent and child. In the rearing process there will inevitably be instances when the parent and child

will disagree on what is in the best interest of the child. In such cases, grandparents are seen as a third party in family disputes; therefore their opinions and views have high potential to be accepted, especially since it is often a situation they have encountered before (Bengtson, 1985; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007).

The last symbolic function mentioned was *social construction of biography*. This concept reflects the building of reasonable connections amongst the past, present and future. It stresses the importance of the role of grandparents as the perpetrator of the cultural legacy of the family (McCready, 1985; Robbins et al., 2005); the sharer of history, wisdom and folk beliefs; and the source and communicator of values and ideals (Gibson, 2002; Robbins et al., 2005). The *social construction of biography* is believed to be the main function of the socialization role of grandparents (Hagestad, 1985; Robbins et al., 2005). Hagestad (1985) envisions socialization by grandparents to involve the range of personality and social structural variables that reflect antecedent or consequent influences on the socialization processes. Thus the process is used as an intergenerational continuity and connectedness between family members (Waters, 1991; Robbins et al., 2005).

Mueller, Wihelm, and Elder (2002) identified five types of grandparents—*authority-oriented, influential, supportive, detached, and passive*. *Authority-oriented* grandparents are highly involved with the disciplining of their grandchild. *Influential* grandparents are more likely to be highly involved in the life of the grandchild. *Supportive* grandparents have close interactive relationships with their grandchildren but do not engage in any parent like authority role. *Detached* and *passive* grandparents have the least remarked involvement with their grandchildren (Muller et al., 2002).

There are similarities between the symbolic roles identified by Bengston (1985) and the type of grandparents identified some twenty years later in the research of Mueller et al. (2002). For example, *being there* and *supportive* are essentially the same as *influential and authority-oriented* and *national guard or watchdog*. These grandparents are very active in their grandchildren's lives and play a key role in their upbringing (Burton & Dillworth Anderson, 1991; Bengston, 1985, Mueller et al., 2002; Kemp, 2003). Since the roles identified by Bengston were the ideal roles for grandparents it stands to reason why the latter two types (*detached* and *passive*) identified by Mueller et al. are congruent with Bengston's identified roles.

Muller and Elder (2003) examined the influences on what determined the type of grandparent an individual would be based on the types identified in their 2002 study. They surmised that the factors affecting the type of grandparent were based on everything from income to geographic proximity (Kemp, 2003; Robbins et al., 2005), to what type of grandparent they had, and the relationship they had with their grandparents as children (Williamson, Softas-Nall & Miller, 2003). Grandparents with higher education and social economic status (SES) were more likely to be *influential* or *supportive* grandparents (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Mueller & Elder, 2003; Strom, Heeder & Strom, 2005; Dolbin-MacNab & Kelly, 2009). Maternal grandparents were more likely to have active roles (*influential, authority-oriented, supportive*) than paternal grandparents (Wilson, 1989; King & Elder, 1997, Chan & Elder, 2000; Muller and Elder, 2003).

**Custodial Status.** Although grandparents have always played a role in their grandchildren's upbringing, current trends indicate that they are increasingly co-parenting

or becoming the primary caretaker of their grandchildren (Cox, 2003; Brintnall-Peterson, 2009; Census, 2010). Several reasons were given for this increase. They included an escalation in drug and alcohol problems among parents of their grandchildren; harsher prison sentences— especially those crimes involving drug dealing; the spread of HIV/AIDS; increase in teen pregnancy rates; and most recently the economic recession (Hunter, 1997; Gibson, 2002; Kemp, 2003; Williamson, Softas-Nall & Miller, 2003; Wetzstein, 2011). The number of children living with a grandparent in 2005 to 2007 was estimated to be 4.6 million. By 2009 it had risen to 7.8 million, a 64% increase from two decades ago (US Census, 2010).

Although the majority of these families were three generational (having at least one parent living in the home), about a quarter of them were being raised by their grandparents alone (Gibson, 2002; Cox, 2003; Williamson et al., 2003; Murphey, Cooper, & Moore, 2012). This increase can be attributed to the more recent surge of White children now living with a grandparent (Wetzstein, 2011). In 1991, 5% White children lived with a grandparent, 15% Black children and 12% Hispanic children, but by 2009 that number increased to 9% for Whites, 17% Blacks, and 14% Hispanics. The increase in White families was found to be a significant change and that of Blacks and Hispanics was not. Additionally, of those children living with grandparents without their parents, 64% were Black, 55% were White and 61% were Hispanic (Wetzstein, 2011).

A recent study conducted in Kansas from 2008 to 2010 revealed that 35,000 children lived with a grandparent. The grandparent was the primary provider for 20,000 of the 35,000 children (Murphey et al., 2012).

Whether with a three generational family or as skipped generation family (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994), grandmothers are increasingly becoming the primary caregiver of their grandchildren. Although the reasons for many of the skipped generation families is due to neglect of some kind by the parent(s), grandchildren raised by grandparents have strong emotional bonds and feelings of gratitude for the positive influences grandparents had on their lives (Dolbin-MacNab & Kelley, 2009). The relationship between the grandparent and the grandchildren is an important one. They share a familial closeness second only to the parent-child relationship (Brussoni & Boon, 1998).

**Race.** The involvement and role of the grandparents tend to vary based on race (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). The literature reflected that White parents reportedly tend to view involvement by grandparents as interference when it comes to parenting their adolescent children (Gibson, 2002; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). On the other hand, Black grandmothers, whether living in the household or not, were considered part of the family interior and among the proactive forces in the lives of family members (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004). Blacks depended on the grandmother for support in care giving (Colletta & Lee, 1983; Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Hunter, 1997; Watson, 1997; Strom, Heeder, & Strom, 2005). However, the effectiveness of this involvement was mixed in the research. Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2007) found that it was beneficial for single White mothers as it relates to cognitive stimulation but it was not for single Black mothers who lived with a grandparent. However, higher test scores for children living with a single Black mother living with a grandparent in reading recognition and comprehension were recorded (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). Where other

research showed the effect on children of Black single mothers living with a grandparent or the grandparent providing care to them to be beneficial and created stability for the grandchild (Wilson, 1989; Hunter, 1999; Gibson, 2002). Additionally, teaching of family history and values, interpersonal skills and religious beliefs, is identified as the greatest strength of Black grandmothers by all three generations (grandmother, mother and granddaughters) (Strom et al., 2005).

Black grandmothers most frequently accepted the role of primary caregiver than any other race (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). Black grandmothers rarely demonstrated a passive style of grandparenthood. Their approach was a more authoritative or influential grandparenting style (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Hunter, 1997; Mueller, Wihelm, & Elder 2002). The reasons for Blacks assuming care of grandchildren has changed. In the past the role was assumed knowing it was temporary, usually related to enabling parents to work toward upward mobility in another city, with the intent of sending for the children once they were stable (Aquilino, 1996; Gordon, R, 1999; Gibson, 2002). Today the acceptance of their grandchildren was due to any number of social problems and their children's inability to care for their grandchildren (Kemp, 2003; Williamson et al., 2003).

In the literature reviewed the issue of the role of the grandparent in the racial socialization of the grandchild was not addressed. The research reflected the importance of the grandparent's role in the lives of their grandchild, the strength of the bond between the two, but nothing about their role in racially socializing their grandchild. Although, it was most certainly a likely outcome specifically given the roles the grandmothers played in the lives of these children. The literature that focuses specifically on Black

grandmothers centered on the role of being a helpmate or surrogate mother to the grandchildren because the parents were absent due to some sort of encountered hardship. This further illustrates the need for research in this area. These findings suggest the need for further research on the influences grandparents have on the racial socialization of their *biracial* grandchildren.

### **Importance of Racial Socialization**

In the beginning, a young child's world consists almost exclusively of their family and immediate environment. It is the primary responsibility of the child's caregivers to equip them with the coping skills that will enable them to deal with the challenges that they will face throughout their lives. In Black families these tools include the concept of racial socialization (Stevenson, 1994; Hill, 1999; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Snyder, 2012). Racial socialization is the transmission of information, norms, and values about race and ethnicity to children (McAdoo, 1974; Hughes, Smith, Rodriguez, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Thomas, Speight & Whitterspoon, 2010). Racial socialization themes can generally be grouped in four themes or categories: *ethnic pride*, *self-development*, *racial barriers* and *egalitarianism* (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Peters, 2002; Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

*Ethnic pride* was identified as the most popular form of racial socialization (McAdoo, 1974; Billingsley, 1992; Hill, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Leslie et al., 2013). This form of racial socialization stresses pride in being Black in terms of history, place in society, and importance to the overall development of the country. It is imperative to have a positive self-image. Historical stories are shared with children. They are told of the struggles Blacks have had to overcome (e.g., slavery, segregation, not being able to



vote, and a host of other important events). They are also told of famous Blacks (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, and a litany of others who helped to shape history) to help show they too can achieve greatness despite their circumstances. The final message of this theme is to give back and support Black causes.

The concept of racial socialization also includes positive imaging. *Self-Development* focused on striving for individual excellence and self-reliance (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Billingsley, 1992; Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006). For example, messages of working twice as hard to compete equally are shared. It is stressed that becoming somebody through hard work is important in life. Additionally, following the golden rule of treating others the way you want to be treated was often reinforced.

The presence of *racial barriers/inequalities* and how to deal with them strategically and defensively was the third theme. For example, when defensive interracial protocol was shared, children are taught things like how to stay in their place and stay calm when they are called a racial slur (Lewis, 2003; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010). Another dimension of defensive interracial protocol was to be cautious (Stack, 1979; Beals, 1994; Hill, 1999). Strategic interracial protocol is another way children are taught to handle *racial barriers*. This is in the form of doing what whatever was necessary to take care of your family. Other methods of strategic interracial protocol include, watching, learning the ways of the dominant group, and how to get along with the dominant populations and others different than oneself (Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1990; Strom et al., 2005; Leslie et al., 2013).

*Egalitarianism* is the method that in essence focuses on how things have changed. In this exchange, messages are shared that underline the need to no longer fear Whites;

that expanded opportunities has negated some of the limitations of prejudice and segregation; and that all races are equal in God's eyes, thus skin color is not a factor in one's worth (Thomas & Speight, 1999; Welch et al., 2001; Yancey, 2007; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). When it comes to dealing with race relations in the United States today the subject is often evaded. People of all races tend to avoid truly addressing race and the implications that accompany it both positive and negative because there is a fear of being labeled a 'racist' or being 'too sensitive'. One of the current themes is 'post racial' society, meaning a society where race is not a hindrance or catapult to advancement (Wise, 2010). However, recent events, e.g., election of Barack Obama, have heightened conversations around race, especially since the President himself is biracial. This is also related to the issue of the role of grandparents in the racial socialization process as he lived a significant portion of his life with his White grandparents.

These proactive orientations in the racial socialization of their children toward racial barriers by Black parents or the person responsible for the racial socialization of the children create resiliency and motivate youth to take advantage of opportunities that exist. This results in higher efficacy, academic performance, economic mobility and higher self-esteem (Billingsley, 1992, Bowman & Howard, 1985; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Snyder, 2012). When youth are not racially socialized they have lower efficacy scores and can believe they are the cause for what struggles they are having or that they are unable to achieve because they are inferior (Young, 1973; Hill, 1999; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

The research shows mothers are more likely than fathers to be involved in the racial socialization process (Rockquemore et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al, 2008; Lesane-

Brown, 2010; Thomas et al., 2010). Daughters are more likely to be taught about having pride and commitment (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Hill, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2010) and sons are taught about the potential social barriers and prejudices they will face (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Hill, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2010). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that grandmothers are also more likely to be involved in the racial socialization of their grandchildren.

Families with lower Social Economic Status (SES) reported less racism than those with higher SES (Marshall, 1995; Hill, 1999; Sherry, Wood, Jackson & Kaslow, 2006). A contributing factor to this could be families with lower SES attributing their own failures (e.g. lack of education) as the barriers not race. Those from higher SES were able to see no matter how much they had they were still seen as Black first (Blauner, 1989; Hill, 1999). Parents in the Northeastern region of the United States are more likely to racially socialize their children (Thornton, 1997).

The literature suggested that the family plays a key role in the formation of racial identity development and the racial socialization of children (McAdoo, 1974; Colletta & Lee, 1983; Marshall, 1995; Hamm, 2001; Rockquemore, et al., 2006; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Thomas et al., 2010). Thus, understanding the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process given the current status of the family is the logical next step.

### **Importance of Biracial Socialization**

As society continued to evolve stigmas and laws against interracial marriage and/or coupling, dissipated and more children of mixed races are born. This is reflected

in the increasing number of individuals labeling themselves as two or more races. In 2010, more than nine million people checked the box indicating that they belonged to more than one racial group on the 2010 census (Humes, Jones, & Ramierz, 2011). Likewise, the 2010 census report showed 2.9% of the national population is comprised of two or more races. This is up 32% from the 2000 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Currently there is no straightforward, easy, legal definition of what it means to be biracial (McClain, 2004; Hall, 2005; Snyder, 2012). Biracial is commonly defined as being of more than one race, (e.g. Black and White, Asian and White, Black and Native American). Being of 'mixed race' or 'cross-racial' are other terms that are used interchangeably for individuals of mixed racial heritage (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Snyder, 2012).

While some studies have focused on identity development among biracial or multiracial individuals, few have examined the racial socialization process of biracial or multiracial individuals (Storr, 1999; Omi, 2001; McClain, 2004). Racial socialization for biracial children can be considerably more complicated. As empirical studies have shown difficulties with self-hatred, suicide, delinquency, alienation, alcohol and other drug abuse, and gender confusion (Herring, 1995; McClain, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2007) were more prevalent. Within interracial families there is the added complexity since both the parents and extended families have different cultural backgrounds. The potential for differing ideas on what is the best way to racially socialize their child (Martin & McAdoo, 2005; Rocquemore et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, et al. 2010) was often present even if not spoken.

When these children are raised for whatever reason by the single White parent the likelihood of any racial socialization is further diminished (Hamm, 2001; Wise, 2010; Snyder, 2012). Most often the White parent chose color-blind ideology (Hamm, 2001). This could be due to their position of privilege, the choice of not having to see race or to raise their children to be colorblind was one not available to parents of color with a biracial child (Wise, 2010). This is affordable behavior when you are a part of the majority culture. Due to the fact that most Whites do not directly racially socialize their children, they often grow up with the understanding of race meaning people of color (Aboud, 1988, Hamm, 2001; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2010). This precludes them from understanding what it is like to have to think of yourself as part of a race and what privileges their 'Whiteness' has afforded them (Rockquemore et al.; Wise, 2010; Leslie et al., 2013). This creates a challenge for parents of biracial children; on the one hand one does not truly know what it is like to not see color and the other hand they do not have an understanding of explicit experiences of racism thus lacking a clear model for racial socializing their children.

Biracial children however, do have more positive outcomes when they are raised in supportive family systems and are involved in positive social and recreational endeavors (Herring, 1999). One of the respondents in the Funderburg (1994) book discussed being born and raised in Iceland and how he had to learn 'to be Black' when he came to the United States. He recalled how after being one of few Blacks in Iceland, how different it was when he came to the United States. His stepfather was in the military so a Black neighbor helped him learn how to identify with Blacks, because in Iceland he was just Icelandic. Then when he went to stay with his biological father in

Miami he again was faced with a lack of identity and had to re-socialize because he was not “Black enough” to be considered Black in Miami (Funderburg, 1994).

Rockquemore et al. (2006) argues *racial ideology*, racially based frameworks used to explain or justify the status quo, play a major role in how parents choose to socialize their children. The use of either color-blind ideology or ideologies that challenge the status quo, were not solely based on the race of the parent. When examining which model was best, color-blindness or challenging the status quo for socializing biracial children, the scale tips heavily toward challenging the status quo. As pointed out in the research, when biracial individuals face discrimination without being prepared (color-blind ideology) they easily internalized the rejection and assumed there was a flaw or shortcoming in their make-up (Marshall, 1995; McClain, 2004; Nuttgens, 2010; Snyder, 2012; Leslie et al., 2013). Being able to not see color or be judged by your character was not something that is yet afforded to all (Welch et al., 2001; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Wise, 2010). Thus as long as societal views on race remain the same, so must the inherent safety mechanisms passed down to children of color, whether they are considered to be Black or biracial.

Considering the research on the lack of racial socialization by White parents and what has been found to be the role adopted by Black grandmothers, exploring the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization of the biracial grandchild does appear to have gained more prominence.

### **Black Grandmothers Role in Racial Socialization**

The extended family of Blacks remains a source of strength in the Black community despite current societal, political, and economic changes that have occurred

in family life (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992). For Black women motherhood and grandmotherhood symbolize the culmination of socialization processes started when they were just young girls, providing a social role identity beginning at the birth of their first child throughout adulthood (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Watson, 1997; Gibson, 2002). The Black grandmother is described as the guardian of the generation, maintainer of the extended families, and the protector of her grandchildren. Her role is to share history, wisdom, folk beliefs, and to share ideas and values (Gibson, 2002). Their strong faith and relationship with religion is thought to be a reason they are more apt to take an active and protective role with their grandchildren (Gibson, 2002). Their grandchildren are the recipients of their moral and altruistic orientation. Grandmothers view this exchange with their grandchildren as a catalyst from the past into the present and forward into the future (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992).

In contrast, White grandparents often play a less substantial role in socialization but still exhibit moral and altruistic behavior toward their grandchildren. This may account for why they may not be able to offer as much support for racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. Black grandmothers see the need to properly socialize their grandchildren on all aspects of life, as an essential part of their role to correct and prevent misbehavior in their grandchildren (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Strom, et al., 2005). They see the importance in helping with appropriate decision-making, avoiding peer pressure and resisting impulsive negative behavior, despite that fact that it is all around them, as crucial to their grandchildren leading productive lives (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Hunter, 1997; Gibson, 2002; Strom, et al., 2005). Additionally, they have a the greatest desire of all racial groups to attend

grandparent education classes (56%), but this is not surprising since the grandparent role in Black families is recognized as important and well defined (Watson, 1997; Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Cox, 2003; Strom et al., 2005). They communicate easily with their grandchildren. It is not surprising, that in contrast with many other cultures, Black grandmothers are often identified as trusted advisors to their teenage grandchildren; with an expectation they will continue as counselors (Strom et al., 2005).

The literature focused on the importance of the Black grandmother to the family unit and the overall development of their grandchildren and examined the grandparents' well-being. The Blackgrandmother's role in the racial socialization of their grandchildren was not directly addressed once (Hunter, 1997; Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Williamson et al., 2003; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Strom et al., 2005). Strom et al. (2005) mentioned race and the struggles Black grandmothers had to endure growing up prior to and through the civil rights movement, but it was as a descriptive reference only. They did not examine the role race and racial socialization played in how grandparents communicated with their grandchildren.

When race was identified in the research at all, the race of the grandparents' was primarily examined as a comparison tool. Researchers examined how Blacks compared to other races in the grandparenting roles assumed, geographic proximity to grandchildren, and levels of life satisfaction for the grandparent when caring or heavily involved with grandchildren, but they did not examine the specifics of racial socialization (Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Watson, 1997; Goodman & Silverstien, 2002; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Strom et al., 2005; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). Only the work by Gibson (2002) addressed race as a potential barrier. It found that one of the reasons for



refusal to become the caregiver of a grandchild was the racial makeup of the grandchild or grandchildren. Of those interviewed three had biracial grandchildren and one of the Black grandmothers interviewed believed that the other grandparents did not take responsibility for caring for the grandchild because he was biracial and did not want to deal with the situation (Gibson, 2002).

### **Gaps in Literature**

There is an abundance of, although often contradicting, literature on the parents' role in racially socializing both mono-racial and biracial children. What the literature did not discuss was the specific and direct work of the role the grandparents played in the racial socialization process. Society is changing and so is the structure of the family. There are a growing number of children being raised by their grandparents or at least with a heavy influence from them (Hunter, 1997; Gibson, 2002; Kemp, 2003; Williamson, Softas-Nall & Miller, 2003; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). The numbers for biracial children being raised by their grandparents has also increased. It is important that a clear understanding on what race is and how it influences the way grandparents racially socialize their biracial grandchildren is important.

Topics of interest as it pertains to grandchildren outcomes thus far have concentrated on learning as it relates to the transmission of religion, aggressive behavior and behavior problems in toddlers (Brook, Whiteman, & Brook, 1999; Conger, Neppal, Kim, & Scaramella, 2003; Begston et al., 2009). There is a gap in the literature as it relates to the role of grandparents in racial socialization. Considering the increasing dependence on grandparents in today's society understanding the role grandparents play in the racial socialization of their grandchildren is a significant issue. White grandparents

who may not have been victimized by America's racial history may not be inherently equipped with the knowledge needed to enact minority socialization strategies (Thomas & Speight, 1999, Wise, 2010; Leslie et al., 2013). Therefore it would appear that the responsibility of racial socialization of the grandchild becomes the Black grandmother's role in households where the grandchild's Black parent is absent.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The majority of the existing research concerns teens or young adults. This is due to the focus of the research. Researchers are often evaluating the effects of racial socialization on phenomenon, like academics or self-esteem development (Young, 1973; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Rodriguez et al., 2008; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2010). There is a limited but fairly adequate amount of research on what influences parental decisions on the racial socialization of biracial children but very little, if any, on the influences of the non-custodial grandparent. It is essential to clearly understand how the changing role of the grandparent, to co-parent or surrogate parent, in today's society due to single parent family growth as well as socio-economic effects of divorce, which causes a heavier reliance on the extended family namely, grandparents will have on the racial socialization process on their grandchildren (Williamson et al., 2003; Robbins et al., 2005; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). With this growth of grandparent, namely grandmother involvement, examining the potential racial socialization messages they have or will pass down to their biracial grandchildren is timely and can help providers in working with these families (Hunter, 1997; Gibson, 2002; Williamson et al., 2003).

Therefore, the gaps in the literature I will attempt to address are what is the racial socialization message from the grandmother, how is the message similar or different from

the one the grandmother received and is it similar or different from the one they passed on. The use of qualitative research methods will allow the population to tell their own story.

## **Chapter 3 - Research Methods**

The majority of research on racial socialization has been done from the perspective of either the child or the parents of the child. With the changing role of grandparents looking at their affect on the racial socialization process seems like the next logical step for the research.

The central focus of my research concerns the role of the Black grandmothers in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. I examined what role the Black grandmother's beliefs on race and race mixing played in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. What influenced Black grandmothers to become involved in the racial socialization process? What role they have in the decision to socialize the grandchildren toward one race or the other, or not at all? How does the relationship with the parents of their grandchildren influence their involvement?

### **Rationale for Qualitative**

When looking to define qualitative research one must understand that qualitative research means different things within the historical complexity of historical moments (i.e. traditional, modernist, blurred genres, etc...)(Gilgun, 1992; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Gilgun (1992) defined qualitative research as processes used to make sense of data represented by words and pictures, but not by numbers. It is also the method of conceptualizing, collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data (Gilgun, 1992; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, Hanson, Clark & Morales, 2007; Wang, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offer this generic definition: "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (pp. 3)". In brief, qualitative research is

the study of a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Gilgun, 1992; Wang, 2008). Qualitative data describes a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2002; Creswell et al., 2007).

Qualitative approaches have proven to be extremely affective when understanding individuals' lives. This is due to qualitative studies tending to focus on the meanings placed on events and interactions and connecting these meanings to the broader social world (Snyder, 2012; Seidman, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) qualitative research crosscuts critical movements in North American history, the last being *fractured future*. This movement as they explain it began in 2005 and confronts the methodological backlash connected with the evidence-based social movement and addresses the need for critical conversations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The areas addressed in this movement include the issue of race and its influences on ones identity, how they see the world and how the world sees them, thus further justifying my choice to use qualitative research for this study. The phenomenological approach was used to help me understand these influences and the meanings they attached to them (Patton, Riessman & Speedy, 2007; Wang, 2008).

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures and internal meaning structures of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Wang, 2008). This perspective asks the question of “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, pp.132).

The Black grandmothers interviewed are the experts on their experiences, specifically living through racial struggles and how those struggles now translate into how they engage in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. The voices of these grandmothers will allow insight in the evolution they had to go through to come to grips with the choices made by their children to intermingle and the potential effects these choices had on their relationship with their grandchildren. Additionally, knowledge was gained on how the participants now see the world verses how they viewed it when they were children and how the current view influenced how they racially socialized or plan to racially socialize their biracial grandchildren. I gained an understanding of the message they give to their mono-racial grandchildren verses the message they give to their biracial grandchildren. Thus, phenomenology is a great fit for this research in that it will allow me to probe deeper into the experiences of these grandmothers and see their reality.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

Choosing a theoretical approach is based on several things. The two things that are most important are, its application to the chosen topic and the ability of the user to apply it. Multiple theories can often be applied when examining most topic areas as they relate to research on the family (Daly, 1992; Patton, 2002; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Therefore the researchers ability and understanding of the chosen theory/theories is critical. With the aforementioned in mind, I have chosen symbolic interaction and social constructivism as the lenses through which I will view the role of the grandmother on the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren.

## **Symbolic Interaction Theory**

The first theory used to frame my research question was symbolic interaction (SI) theory. One of the things that was consistent throughout my studies was to make sure I knew what I am doing before you start. Using SI was a natural choice in this aspect as well as it was the “best fit”. Having a background in sociology and social work, I believe I have a clear understanding of SI.

The world is composed of symbols. Identifying or giving meaning to these symbols dictates how we interact with each other (Blumer, 1969; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; White & Klein, 2008). Thus, grandparents understand their role as a grandparent through interaction with their grandchildren (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) and subroles, including co-parent, caregiver and financial benefactor based on the needs of the family (Vo-Thanh-Huan & Liamputtong Rice, 2000; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004). Racial categories over the last thirty years have begun to shift and the lines that were once drawn in the preverbal sand are fading away. This is not without resistance (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Snyder, 2012); nonetheless a look must be taken at what these new symbols mean and if there is a shared meaning that can be derived (Creswell, 2003; Riessman & Speedy, 2007; White & Klein, 2008). When looking at racial socialization as the phenomenon, SI helps identify the symbolic meanings attributed by the different factorial influences including familial, historical, and cultural of the unique and variable world of multiracial families (McAdoo, Martinez, & Hughes, 2005; Mertens, 2005). Realization of how the Black grandmother translates, their lived experiences and their ideas of how to help with the racial socialization and racial identity development of their grandchildren based on these experiences can be done using SI. The way we come about these

definitions and how we categorize them to view the world is a central premise of social constructivism theory (Schwandt, 2000, 2005).

### **Social Constructivism Theory**

The second theory employed was social constructivism theory. Cheung (1997) defines it as “the development of knowledge as a social phenomenon and holds that perception can evolve only within a cradle of communication” (p. 332). These meanings are ever evolving because they are based on the interactions between people. Essentially, actors do not find or discover knowledge, instead it is that they construct or make it (Schwandt, 2000). This is done to make sense of the environment or interactions. This process is continuous due to the changes that occur and the need to construct meanings and symbols that make sense (Cheung, 1997; Schwandt, 2005). The social constructivism or constructionist perspective states: reality is based on a socially consensual agreed on definition of what is real by the individuals involved (Cottone, 2001). As seen in the court case *Scott v Raub*, where the State Supreme Court justice basically used what is now known as social constructionist theory when he made the decision on what race her father was (Dailey, 2000). The major strength and weakness of this theory lies in its assumption that there are shared understandings, practices, languages, and so forth of those involved (DeVries & Zan, 1996; Schwandt, 2005). The argument is the decision is not internally made; it cannot be located in the individual because it is in the social matrix.

Additionally, the lack of an agreed upon symbol for biracial identity further muddies the waters (Snyder, 2012). A twenty-one year old student said this in response



to a question regarding the race of someone that has a Black and White parent in an article by Waters (1991):

*Some say they should put other, but if their head is screwed on right, I think they should put black. Because all you need is a small percentage of the blood to be considered black by white people. I don't see how they could put down white.*

Another example is the reluctance to be viewed as half and half and choose to identify with how society will see them, disdain for the worldview is held by biracial individuals and the mothers of these children (Water, 1991; Thornton, 1997; Storrs, 1999). The fear of discrimination and biasness is ever present in the minds of biracial individuals and their families and plays a huge role in the decision to not challenge the symbol and the socially constructed definition of that symbol already in place (McClain, 2004; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010, Snyder, 2012).

Symbolic interaction and social construction theory are the best fit for my research questions. By selecting these two theories, they will first help in identifying the influences of the decisions. Second, they will help with understanding and implementation of policies, procedures and best practices for social service providers and family practitioners working with this population.

### **Research Questions**

Listed below are the research questions that were used to inform this study.

1. What is the role of Black grandmothers on racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren?
2. How did the socialization of Black grandmothers and their life experiences influence the level and type of involvement in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren?

3. What role does the age of the child play in Black grandmothers' decisions on their level and type of involvement in racial socialization?
4. What role does the sex of the grandchild play in Black grandmothers' decisions on their level and type of involvement in racial socialization?

Based on the research questions, the unit of analysis, participant selection and recruitment process, as well as the data collection, and analysis strategies were derived and will be discussed in the following section.

### **Unit of Analysis**

When choosing a unit of analysis Patton (2002) suggests asking oneself what is it you want to be able say when the study is complete. My interests are what are the racial socialization messages given by the Black grandmothers to their biracial children and what influences these messages. Research has shown that White parents do not actively racially socialize their children (Wilson, 1989; Hamm, 2001; Robbins et al., 2005). White parents indirectly send socialization messages to their children as it relates to race, being associated with people of color (Frankenburg, 1993; McIntosh, 1998; Rockquemore et al., 2006), so it is reasonable to assume White grandmothers would not play a large role in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. The likely reason for this is the understanding that the world functions parallel to their culture so there is no need for additional socialization (Lewis, 2003; Rockquemore et al., 2006; White, 2010). Therefore, I chose to interview the Black grandmother of the biracial grandchildren. To answer to my research questions, my unit of analysis was racial socialization practices of Black grandmothers with biracial grandchildren. I have chosen the individual method because I want them to be able to tell what has been their personal

experience. I am not interested in what the parents of the children or the grandchildren believe the reason for their parents or grandchildren believe is the reason for the grandmothers' actions and beliefs for this stage of the study.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Two types of sampling techniques were employed for this study. The participants were chosen through criterion sampling as well as snowball sampling (Faugier & Sargent, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Criterion sampling involves the selecting of cases that meet predetermined criterion of importance. A snowball sample is a non-probability sample that is appropriate to use in research when the members of a population are difficult to locate (Faugier & Sargent, 1997, Patton, 2002).

Criterion sampling was chosen because of the specific population being studied. It is necessary to ensure the participants in the study fit the criteria of being Black grandmothers of biracial children of African/Black and European/White descent. They also had to have been born during a certain era in history (before 1975). This timeframe was necessary due to the rise of teenage pregnancy and the age of the mother at the birth of the first child (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Hunter, 1997; Hunter, 2007; US Census, 2010). In today's society it is quite possible to have a thirty-year-old grandmother. This would have been ineffective for this study because these Black grandmothers will have been raised in an era where racism and distrust was not as overt or prevalent. Snowball sampling was chosen because this population is specific and it will likely be necessary to use the participants to help recruit other participants. They are likely to have friends or others they know that are similar to them. This could be due to a child they saw in their

grandchild's school or someone at their church.

Initially, personal contacts and social media were used. If the sample size had not reached, the intention was to send letters to the local churches in urban and suburban region of a large Mid-Western city. Additional attempts would have been made by requesting permission to send letters to families in the local school districts based on their public racial demographic numbers. Potential respondents that made contact due to interest in the study, whether it was via email or phone, were given asked the following preliminary questions to ensure they met the criteria set forth for the study.

1. How do you describe yourself in terms of race?
2. Do you have at least one biracial grandchild of African/Black and European/White descent?
3. Do you have contact with your biracial grandchild?
4. Were you born before 1975?
5. Are you the paternal (father's mother) or the maternal (mother's mother) grandmother?
6. Are you willing to participate in a 45-60 minute interview?

After these questions have been answered in the positive, they will be given an invitation to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection method will be face-to-face interviews utilizing the Long Interview Method (LIM) (McCracken, 1988). The LIM is an inductive approach where close attention is given to social and cultural contexts (McCracken, 1988; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008). The LIM involves a four-stage process designed to include all phases of the research process. The first stage is the review of the literature. The review is done critically to ensure the process is a "deconstruction" of the scholarly literature and aids in the construction of interview questions (McCracken, 1988, pp. 31). The second stage

involves self-examination. The purpose is to give the researcher the opportunity to examine his or her personal experience with the topic of interest. McCracken states;

*“Only by knowing the cultural categories and configurations that the investigator uses to understand the world is he or she in a position to root these out of the terra firma of familiar expectation. This clearer understanding of one’s vision of the world permits a critical distance from it”* (pp. 32).

The third step involves developing the questionnaire. It is to be structured with planned prompting in the areas of contrast, category, special incident and auto-driving questions, all the while making sure the interviewer is demonstrating an openness and eagerness to listen to virtually any testimony with interest (McCracken, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Cognitive interview questions will be utilized as it has been found to be the most effective with the older populations (Duffy, 1988, Jobe et al., 1996; Wenger, 2002).

Additionally, open-ended questions are the best choice, because understanding the ‘what’ is the goal. This will also help in reducing the affect of the values of the researcher and the potential assertion of perceived causes. Meanwhile allowing the interviewer to see the world and experiences through the eyes of the participants can occur (Patton, 2002; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Seidman, 2013). Basic demographic questions will also be employed. They will include questions regarding their age, race, level of education, social economic status (SES) and marital status. The final stage is the analysis of the data. This is the most demanding stage and the investigator must be prepared to go where the data leads even if that means constructing a view of the world that bears no relations to his or her own view or the one evident in the literature.

## **Data Analysis**

McDoo (1974) stated, "...the most important aspect of the process in research is synthesis to interpret the data" (pp. 68). My ability to make sense of the data collected is crucial in whether or not the research is meaningful. Analyzing qualitative research is quite challenging, there are no specific formulas on how to determine what is important. As pointed out by Korgen (1998) and Patton (2002) no research can be completely objective. Patton (2002) argued that the human factor is the strength and weakness of qualitative analysis. I will use phenomenological analysis, thus starting with the description of the lived experiences provided by the participants. This is the best approach when studying individuals and/or families when trying to identify variations in their experiences (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996; Dahl & Boss, 2005). Additionally, the next logical step in my research will be to compare the results of each of the paths taken by the Black grandfather and the White grandparents and this format could be used to do cross comparisons.

The data was analyzed according to the procedure recommended when using LIM. There is a four-stage process where the data is scanned, edited, refined and reassembled (McCracken, 1988). I examined the data with symbolic interaction in mind. I checked the data for symbols of culture and deviations for societal prescribed meanings for certain symbols.

The most important part of my analysis was the use of indigenous and sensitizing concepts. Indigenous concepts are terms used by the participants. This is the discovery process, known by the anthropological term, *emic* analysis (Patton, 2002). When using indigenous concepts, I explored how the participants define these concepts and how they

relate to the respondents environment. Sensitizing concepts are categories brought by the researchers. The anthropologists' term for this type of analysis is *etic*. The concepts in turn have to be defined. Two types of definitions are presented. The first is the meaning the participants gave the concepts. The second was based on ensuring the potential audience is able to understand the meaning of the concepts and what role they play in the participants' environment (McAdoo, 1974, Dahl & Boss, 2005). McAdoo (1974) stresses the importance of making sure the research is translated into everyday language that parents on the firing lines raising children are able to understand.

Lastly, logical analysis techniques were employed. As Patton (2002) suggests sometimes the patterns you find inductively just do not seem to fit the data. Taking it a step further I would purpose it is even more likely when you are using sensitizing concepts. The logical analysis process involves crossing one dimension or typology with another for the purpose of creating new categories that better fit the data (Patton, 2002). Although, this is a great tool for qualitative researchers to have, Patton (2002) cautions to not force the data to fit the new matrix and the new sensitizing concepts must be confirmed by the actual data. I found logical analysis to be useful to me when examining the data for patterns.

### **Transcription**

The process of transcription is multifaceted and having that understanding will make the process more manageable (Daly, 2007). To ensure the integrity of the interview several methods were engaged during the interview. The sessions were videoed and I also took notes. Permission from each participant was obtained prior to the interview being set and then again at the start of the interview. The interviews were transcribed

shortly after the interview to make sure the information was fresh in my mind to help with soft points in the conversation and correct explanation of the nonverbal communication that occurred during the interview. Before I transcribed each interview, I viewed the interview in its entirety. I transcribed five of the interviews then two were selected and given to two different individuals to transcribe. The interviews had no identifying information on them and there was no possible contact between the transcriber and the person in the interview.

### **Themes**

Once the transcriptions were complete, I conducted a content analysis for themes and patterns. The purpose of a content analysis is to make sense of data gathered. Patton (2002) explains there is no way of defining the difference between a pattern and a theme, but a general rule is a pattern is topical in form. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings I enlisted two colleagues to conduct a separate content analysis of the data for themes and patterns. One colleague was male as to ensure the perspective of the opposite sex. The other was a Black grandmother in effort to account for potential familiarity with the participants. This was not only to ensure the reliability of my conclusions, but also to look for things I may have missed and to confirm things that I had found.

### **Coding**

I used a color-coded system when identifying the patterns and themes found in the interviews. The first step was to read through all the interviews. The second step was to re-read through all the interviews and make a table of the answers to the questions putting the answers to each question next to in the same column making the search for patterns



easier. The third step was to identify potential patterns noted in the margins. Then a color (highlighter) was assigned to each pattern. The process of convergence and divergence occurred once saturation occurred. The next step in the data analysis process began, the argument of substantive significance. This part of the process is to ensure my findings are useful to practitioners and policy makers that work with biracial families. Also, using quantitative terms in the explanation may allow the reader to gain a better understanding and acceptance of my findings.

### **Summary of Methods**

The choice of depth over breath was dictated by my topic. There was very little in the literature about the role of the non-custodial Black grandmother in racial socialization of their grandchildren. Thus it was crucial that I captured the voices and the experiences of this population. Using phenomenological perspective, in addition to criterion and snowball sampling, I was able to accomplish this goal. I began the analysis stage, using open-ended questions aiding in reducing researcher influence (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008). Additionally, LIM is designed to exam the cultural contexts making it ideal for this project (McCracken, 1988). Thus as patterns and themes were found categories were identified and coding began (Patton, 2002). All the while I made sure to read and re-read the transcripts to ensure saturation has occurred.

My experiences during the interview process were that it actually what I would call a 'work in progress'. The first interview you can hear the nervousness in my voice. Their responses to the questions provided insight on my need to clarify certain terms. One term was that of race relations. Some of the participants answered in the form of physical relationships. This required a follow up question, which clarified my interest

was in their relationships as it related to interaction with other races. I also gained insight on the lack of general understanding of the distinction between socialization and identity development.

## **Chapter 4- Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to report the racial socialization message from the Black grandmother to their biracial grandchild or grandchildren; how the message was similar or different from the one they received; and was the message similar or different from the one they passed on to their children. I will use the term racial socialization messages (RSM) when referring to how the families communicated or acculturated racial socialization messages. These RSM were specifically guided by the philosophies of symbolic interaction and social constructivism theories. This chapter includes demographic tables, a summary of the experiences of the data captured from each of the Black grandmothers, and a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

### **Participants**

Seven Black grandmothers with at least one biracial (Black and White) grandchild participated in the study. The inclusion criteria for the sample of grandmothers were that the participant must (a) be a grandmother (paternal or maternal), (b) have at least one biracial (Black and White) grandchild, (c) have contact with the biracial grandchild, (d) be born before 1975, and (e) be willing to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview. The majority (four) of the sample came from individuals responding in the affirmative to my initial invitation to discuss their role as grandparents and agreed to participate. Two came by referral from one of their family members and one came from a response to a social media request. The initial thought was to have five participants. After the initial request went out there were seven responses and I believed it would be better to interview all seven than to devise some sort of system for choosing which of the seven would be selected.

Once the decision was made I contacted each participant to arrange for times to meet and discuss the study in detail. Before proceeding with the interview the participants were assured their identity and those of their family members would be kept confidential and no personal information would be used to identify them in the final product.

Table 4.1 presents basic demographic information on the participants including, each participant’s pseudonym, birth year, martial status, employment status, SES, and educational level.

Table 4.1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Study’s Grandmothers

Grandmother	Birth year	Martial Status	Employment Status	SES	Educational Level
Michelle	1949	Married	Retired	Middle	Masters+
Dr. Jeanne	1951	Married	Yes	Upper Middle	PhD
Chanda	1960	Married	Yes	Lower Middle	Year College
Renee	1963	Separated	No	Working Class	Technical Trade
Stacey	1969	Single	Yes	Upper Lower	Technical Trade
Clara	1970	Married	Yes	Middle	Masters
Mary	1970	Married	Yes	Middle	Technical Trade

Note: + refers to the participant having graduate hours beyond a Masters Degree. For instance Michelle had over 30 hours of graduate hours in addition to her Master’s Degree.

Specific identifying factors as it relates to their grandchildren are found in Table 4.2.

It includes information on whether they are paternal or maternal grandmother, how many grandchildren they have, how many of their grandchildren are biracial, how many they perceive that they are offering appropriate racial socialization, and how often they have contact with these specific grandchildren. Table 4.3 presents the perception of their

grandchildren's race as they see them, as they believe society sees them, and how they are currently or plan to socialize them.

Table 4.2. Frequency of Grandmother Involvement in the General and Specific Socialization of Their Grandchildren

Grandmother	Status	N of Grandchildren	N of Biracial Grandchildren <sup>a</sup>	Number Socializing	Frequency of Contact <sup>d</sup>
Michelle	Paternal	4	3	4	Very often
Dr. Jeanne	Maternal/Paternal	7 <sup>b</sup>	7	7	Often
Chanda	Maternal	2 <sup>c</sup>	1	1	Very often
Renee	Maternal	5	3	5	Very often
Stacey	Maternal	2	1	2	Very often
Clara	Maternal	6 <sup>b</sup>	1	4	Very often
Mary	Paternal	1	1	1	Very often

Note: <sup>a</sup> Biracial refers to their grandchildren that are mixed with Black and White. For instance, Michelle and Stacey have Black and Hispanic grandchildren but they were not included in the count because that particular combination was not the focus of the research. <sup>b</sup> References when non-biological grandchildren are included in the number. For instance Dr. Jeanne has 2 step-grandchildren. <sup>c</sup> Refers to one of the grandchildren being deceased. <sup>d</sup> Frequency of contact was measured from every day to at least weekly= very often, and often = an average of twice monthly.

Table 4.3. Social Perception of How the Grandmothers Believe Their Grandchildren are Viewed by Society.

Grandmother	Grandmother's perception	Society's perception	Socialization/ Socialization Plan
Michelle	Black	White/passable <sup>+</sup>	Black
Dr. Jeanne	Black	Obviously Biracial	Black
Chanda	Black	White/passable <sup>+</sup>	Black <sup>a</sup>
Renee	Black	Obviously Biracial	Black
Stacey	Black	Black/passable <sup>+</sup>	Black
Clara	Black	White/passable <sup>+</sup>	Black
Mary	Black	White/passable <sup>+</sup>	Black <sup>b</sup>

Note: <sup>+</sup> refers to the role of the physical characteristics of the grandchildren would play in how their grandmother believed society would conceptualize what race they were. For example, Clara noted the color of her grandson's eyes; Mary and Chanda referred to the texture of their granddaughters' hair. <sup>a</sup> Denotes that although the grandmother may have said they have no plan or had not thought about racial socialization when asked directly, their responses to other questions made it evident what their socialization plan for their grandchildren was or would be. For example, Chanda says what her granddaughter comes across is what she comes across but states that she wants to make sure her granddaughter learns how to be strong like Blacks. <sup>b</sup> Refers to the grandmother's main socialization plan being Black but is willing to do White if she is told how.

## **Summary of the Interviews**

Summaries of the interviews with each of the participants that describe the lived experiences of Black grandmothers of biracial grandchildren and their perceived roles in the socialization process of their grandchildren revealed a myriad of responses around how grandmothers engage their grandchildren's life choice issues. Excerpts from the transcribed interviews give voice to the beliefs of the grandmothers. While each experience varies, the summaries assist in pointing out key themes, as well as disparate viewpoints of these women. In the next section I have provided a summary from each of the grandmothers.

### **Michelle**

Michelle was the oldest of the participants (b. 1949). She was raised in an all Black community in an urban Mid-western town, however her current neighborhood is half Black and half White. As a child her social circle and her schools were all Black. She noted that while working she would often do things with her different race co-workers, but now that she is retired, she is back in her Black community with her Black organizations. She continues to attend an all Black church and feels that it has helped her through hard times.

Among some of the more positive and direct messages she received from her parents about race were, she had to work three times as hard as Whites. In addition she noted that her brothers were taught how to behave around Whites. She recalled the first time she had experienced discrimination was in college. Michelle attributed this to being raised in an all Black community. She did not recall having a specific conversation with her son about races but that she would answer his questions about why this or that person

was different. Although, Michelle was sure her son was exposed to racism at school, because he was usually the only Black in his class, he seemed to be able to handle it on his own. She stated,

...the unique thing about [son name] was that he was leader. He would always win all the spelling competitions, he would always score through the roof on his standardized tests or whatever, he earned his respect. I think to the extent that he was not put down, you know whereas some children who can't do that and be in situation might be face a little more because maybe call them dumb.... He did not face a lot of that (teased because dark skintone) he is lighter complexion, so he didn't get any of that kind of stuff.

Michelle admits she was uncomfortable when she learned of her son's desire to marry a White woman and believe he knew it. She recalled her conversation with her son,

Cause he came to me and we were talking about it and he said, you know mom you put me, which is what we did, we put him, cause we were looking for the best situation for him education wise. You put me in a situation with all Whites, he was always the only Black kid in his class from kindergarten on up. It wasn't until he went to Sumner as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, 8<sup>th</sup> grader really, that he was in a situation where there were other Blacks. You know he said he was raised in a White environment, so what did you expect. So you know kinda put back on me, so I just kinda had to be quite and say, you don't realize your doing that you think you're putting them in a situation that is going to be best education wise for them to get a good education and be able to go off and do whatever they want but that was his response to me.

Michelle spends a lot of time with her grandchildren and believes it is part of her role to help socialize them. She sees them at least three to four times a week, and they often spend the night with her and her husband. The children live in a White environment and she believes that their school is 95% White. She noted throughout the interview the importance of her grandchildren being exposed to their father's culture. To the extent that she has encouraged their parents to join Jack and Jill, a Black social group

that allows Black children in majority White environments to socialize with each other <sup>5</sup>. She commented how it would be interesting when her daughter-in-law and grandchildren who do not “look” Black go to their first meeting.

Michelle admits to struggling with seeing her grandchildren as biracial. She knows they are both Black and White and believes they are getting the best of both worlds. She thinks the world will see them as White, and this will work in her granddaughter’s favor, as long as there is racism. However, when asked how she sees them as it relates to race, Michelle sees them as Black. She believes this may have to do with how things were when she was growing up and “one drop rule” was in affect. The other reason maybe that she questions what exactly that means. She is Black and we can identify with what that means, she is unsure how a biracial child can identify.

**Dr. Jeanne**

Dr. Jeanne was the next to the oldest participant (b. 1951). She was raised in a small town in the Midwest with a small Black population. Her neighborhood, school and social circle were integrated. The commonality was the families experienced higher poverty rates. She currently lives in a neighborhood with few minorities. Dr. Jeanne socializes mainly with Black educators but she does attend an all White Methodist church. She previously attended a majority Black Methodist church but switched because she missed singing the classical style of music she was trained to sing in high school and her early college years. She believes singing is how she praises God, even

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<sup>5</sup> Jack and Jill is an African American family organization. Marion Stubbs Thomas founded Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated on January 24, 1938 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Twenty mothers came together to discuss creating an organization to provide social, cultural and educational opportunities for youth between the ages of two and nineteen. In 1946, ten chapters were involved in the national restructuring process. Constitution and bylaws were drawn up and the organization was incorporated under the laws of the state of Delaware (jackandjillinc.org, 2013).



when she cannot pray she can hum or sing a song and get the deeper connection to God she needs at the time. When asked how her faith has helped her she replied,

...my work (school principal) kinda deeper to spiritual work. I used to say that when I die, I always felt that God was going to ask me one question. That was how many children did you leave behind? How many children did you miss and so therefore my work has kind of a different meaning for me. It's more about making sure we serve all children anyway we can. That we don't put limits on what we will and won't do for children and the help that they need. That is kind of a different approach. It is more than just a job.

RSM she received, as a child from her mother were, how to dress and behave a certain way. She recalled her mother marching and in organizations that addressed Black issues, but she stressed what things were important to be employable and thus survival. As an adult and mother of four Dr. Jeanne shared that there were both good and bad in all colors and sizes. She stressed the need to be intelligent and work hard. She emphasized to her children they could not just be a good athlete; they also needed an education as well. She also informed her children when they were teenagers how to be appropriate when pulled over by the police primarily because of a negative experience to her brother had with law enforcement.

Dr. Jeanne was unique in this study because she was the only participant where both her sons and her daughter had children by someone White. In all, she had a total of seven biracial grandchildren, five biological and two step-grandchildren. She remains involved in the lives of all of her grandchildren even though her son is no longer with the mother. When Dr. Jeanne reflected on her feelings about this she was ambivalent. She had taught her children everyone was equal but, at the same time she wondered why her sons had not chosen to date or procreate with someone that looked

like their mother. This prompted Dr. Jeanne to reflect and think out loud and state that she was going to have this conversation with her sons.

Dr. Jeanne was also the only participant that had teenage biracial grandchildren. She shared how her oldest step grandson had experienced racism while at his aunt's on his mother's side in a smaller Mid-western town. Her hands are tied since he is not biologically hers but she told him they love him and that he is smart. She knows the older grandchildren consider themselves Black. They even ask when they are there to visit to attend the Black church she used to go to.

When asked what are the parents of her grandchildren doing to racial socialize her grandchildren she responded,

I don't know that because their mothers are White that they're taking any approach specifically or not. They do list their children as African American on their school information sheet, student information sheet. I don't think they're doing much specifically. I think that's more their dad's job or me as their Black grandparents job.

She purposely purchases children's books with Black characters as well as African American dolls for them to have good role models as they play and grow. When they express interest in something Dr. Jeanne makes sure to find an African American in that area and make sure they know that Blacks can succeed in many areas. For example, one of her granddaughters expressed interest in gymnastics, so she bought her a big Gabby Douglas poster. Additionally, when they come to visit they go to places that highlight achievements of Blacks or teach them about the history of Blacks. When asked about what RSM her sons were giving their children, she focused on how they are professional and dress and behave as such.

## **Chanda**

Chanda was also born at the nuance to the Civil Rights legislation (b. 1960). She grew up in a neighborhood with Mexicans and Blacks and a few White families. Chanda's friends were also of different races. Her school consisted mostly of Blacks and Mexicans but there were a few White kids. She is not sure what families live in her neighborhood now because she keeps to herself. She lives across the street from work so she goes to work and comes right back home. Chanda occasionally socializes with her co-workers but for the most part she spends her free time with her family. She admits she does not go to church as much as she should but knows they will be there for her when she needs them, as she will be there for them.

RSM she received from her grandmother "were to not go over there because White people are over there." Her mother treated everybody the same but she did observe her mother getting mistreated by Whites. She stated,

...she was mistreated because maybe she could've got this if would have been White, but she took it in stride and went on to showed me on how to be a strong person about it. Just how to get around it go on and get what you can get out of life. Don't worry about what you could of got if you was this color or that color, just go on work harder for what you get so you know you can get ahead.

Chanda told her children people are people also. She did recall saying while her children were young when something happened it was because they were White, usually in reference to children misbehaving. Chanda recalled as a child and through her daughter's teenage years she did not have many Black friends and she was unsure if it was because she already had that at home. They have a several relatives and an adopted sister are biracial so the family did not have a problem with her daughter's husband and her

grandchild being mixed with White. She was not shocked about her daughter marrying a White man but the type of person he was surprised her.

Her grandchild is neither in school nor daycare so besides her father and her great-aunt (who is Black and White), she is mainly around Blacks. Chanda's daughter kept her grandchild from her father's side of the family because her son-in-law's father used the "N word" with Chanda's daughter. They did go visit him just before the interview, because he was very ill. The visit was without incident.

She believes it is her role to help social her granddaughter. When asked if she had a mono-racial grandchild would she socialize them the same. She initially said yes, then she changed it. After thinking about it she observed,

I don't want to say that, because if I have a child or grandchild say my son has a grandchild and he's with a Black girl and it's a girl or a boy, that child to me I feel it's probably have to work a little bit harder to get what they want than (biracial grandchild), maybe has to and hopefully its not because of the color, the way I feel, that's just the way its always been. And me trying to teach that child, look it's not always going to be like that but your going to run into a situation where, you going to have to work harder for what you get because their not going, some people, are not going to look at you cause the color, for what you got here [points to heart] or what you got up here [points to head]. They're going to look at you for what color your skin is.

She reports that she does not expose her granddaughter to Black or White culture on purpose but states that she wants her to be a strong person and to her a Black woman or Black man is a strong person. So even though she could pass for White and it will be to her advantage to do so if she was to, she is where she needs to be right now.

### **Renee**

Renee was born pre-civil rights legislation (b. 1963). The first 12 years of her life she was raised in a Mid-western city with a very small Black population. Although her

neighborhood was mostly low income Black single mothers, her school was predominantly White. As a result her social circle was diverse. When she moved to another Mid-western city with a larger Black population her neighbor was mixed with Blacks and Whites. Her current neighborhood and social circle is mostly Black. She was one of two participants that responded to not be religious. She went to a Black church as a child, but could not remember the denomination.

RSM she received centered on her going to work with her grandmother. She took care of “rich Whites”, so there were things she could not do. For example, she would have to go to another room to eat and had to refer to them as ma’am and sir. There were no direct conversations about race and race relations but she stated she understood there was a big difference. When asked to explain she recollected,

Ok, it was a small town and probably in my age group, there was like four Black girls and then the rest of them was like the White girls. I was the more popular out of us four Black girls. So I got invited to more of the White girl parties. You know, it’d be like ten of them and one of me. And not so much did I see a difference you know from the girls, but you could tell there was a difference with the parents. They were kinda edgy, like I don’t know if we want her to come over and spend the night or you could tell the difference.

As an adult she remembered feeling uncomfortable about being questioned by some Black men in a car outside of a gas station about her husband, who is Puerto Rican. She said they thought he was White and it made her feel uncomfortable. So when her daughter decided to date, marry, and have children with a White guy she was not happy. She communicated,

I had believed that the different races need to stay within their own races. I am uncomfortable, I’ve had White men ask me out but it’s just not something for me and as far as, as getting together and making kids as I said earlier. I wasn’t happy with that you know. I think Black people

should have Black kids and White people should have White kids, Mexicans have Mexican kids. You know stay with your own race.

She has both biracial and mono-racial grandchildren and spends a lot of time with them.

She sees all of her grandchildren several times a week, which includes overnights and attending their school functions. She shared she does not see race when she sees them; they are all just her babies. When asked how they would be viewed by society she thought times had changed and they would not be seen as Black but as biracial.

She reflected on an incident when two of her biracial granddaughters referred to her as a 'nigger' in regards to their older mono-racial sister. She did not address it with the girls but did tell their mother. She was unsure if their mother addressed it with them or where they learned the term. Therefore, she believes it will be her part of her responsibility to racially socialize them because she does not believe their mother will and their father is currently incarcerated. She currently and plans on continuing to expose them to only Black culture, because that is what she knows.

### **Stacey**

Stacey was one of two participants born in the same year (b. 1969). She was brought up in a majority Black neighborhood and attended majority Black schools. As a child she socialized with only Blacks. She currently has "only one friend and she is Black". Her current neighborhood is fairly diverse. She does not believe in religion and although she has attended church as a child and an adult but never got anything out of it.

Racial socialization messages she received, as a child from her grandmother was her dislike for “dark skinned Blacks”. Her mother “hated Whites”. When asked for examples of when this would be portrayed she shared,

Hell, just everyday conversation. You know (laugh). It wasn't something secret in our household. You don't tell the White man nothing. You don't let them know none of your business. Still to this day.

When probed on what still to this day meant. She expressed,

Oh yes, I still live by that today. I mean, I kind of feel the same way my mother do, because although we feel that way, we're still very respectful towards the White people. I would say I am. I would say she was too you know. Because I've seen her feed White kids, I seen her be nice to White people but, like I said you don't trust them as far as you can throw'em.

She acknowledged that her feelings towards Whites have become somewhat of a juggling act, since her grandson was born. Although she was not surprised when her daughter entered into the interracial relationship that resulted in her becoming a grandmother. Her daughter knows how she feels and had warned her now fiancé. They live in the basement of her home and Renee says she is respectful of him and tries to watch her comments when he is around. She is also wording things differently because right now her grandson considers himself to be White. She mentioned being able to spell things out when her grandson is around and recognizes soon she will not be able to do that. She is concerned about when he understands that he is Black and White and unsure of what she will do when he realizes that she “really can't stand White people”.

Renee is glad he has contact with both sides of his family and believes it is her job to give him Black culture and they can teach him White culture. She believes it is part of her role to racially socialize him. She is and plans to continue to social him as if he is Black. She believes this is necessary because,

...the world is going to see him as a Black man. That is how the world is going to see him, you know just like the way they see my son. They're going to see him as Black man even though his skin is way lighter, he still a Black man to them, so therefore he's still going to have the same problems as my sons have in getting jobs or whatever it maybe or getting watched doing whatever. You know that's the problems he's going to have. And I'm quite sure by the times he is able to understand; he will have heard it in this home. So it's not going to be a surprise when it happens.

She feels very strongly that there is not a reason to sugarcoat racism and wants her grandchildren to be prepared. She did say that since there are so many "mixed kids these days maybe racism will die down because of that".

### **Clara**

Clara was one of the youngest participants (b. 1970). She grew up in mostly Black neighborhoods and went to schools with high Black populations. Currently she is one of two or three Black families in her neighborhood and although her social circle is not as diverse as it could be she describes it as fairly diverse. Her church is 99% Black and her faith has kept her grounded and helps her treat people like Christ would.

RSM she received included how to act around what was referred to as "company", which she understood to be "White folks". She also remembered overhearing her grandmother and mother talking about it being important to have White friends. Her mother's best friend until she passed away was a White women. When asked if she ever experienced discrimination she responded, "absolutely". Though she was sure there were examples from her childhood, the examples from when she was adult stand out the most. She recalled an incident 25 years ago when she and her husband were trying to rent a home close to where she lives now in the White area of town.

.... me and my husband were going to go look at it, and he was real nice over the phone everything was great. We had to meet him at his work



place; he was a doctor, actually. We had to meet him there we were going to take the keys and go look at it and then come back with them. The minute we walked in, it was like he totally shut down; was no longer interested, didn't even want to talk, he was like, blunt. I was like what the hell is going on, and he just refused to talk, just totally shut down, "I'm sorry it's not available now". I literally had just like talked {to} him, like 30 minutes before we got there to say I'm on the way to get the keys and I don't know, that was kind of like the most, craziest and blunt incident that I had ever had.

Clara did not give her children any specific guidelines as it relates to race relations just to "love thy self and appreciate who we are". She did tell her sons "not to be dating White girls just because they are White." Her son was athletic and believes Black boys have that option, whereas girls do not.

She thinks her mother's beliefs helped her to not have a problem with her daughter having a interracial relationship or biracial child, although admittedly she has never met the father and did not know the baby was coming until he arrived. She sees him at least six days a week and helps her daughter out a great deal. His environment right now is majority Black. She further explained that her grandson "looks White, has different color eyes, and my daughter is so dark". This contrast often prompts people to stare at them and it seems they are waiting for her or her daughter to provide an explanation. He is just a baby so racial socialization has not started, but it is noticeable that he is different. She stated,

I think with Black people when we have biracial children; I think we tend to raise them as they're Black because, really in society, they are. You know the being mixed is just you know part of who they are, but society is just going to see them as Black. That's how we plan on raising that little boy...baby, the same way. He's still Black and you know he needs to know that now. But that isn't to say that we don't appreciate who he is, and he doesn't need; you know that he won't appreciate his other side as well. But for the most part, I think he will be raised like all the other kids.

Clara sees herself and her husband, but mainly her playing a large part in his racial socialization process. She intends to purposefully expose him to Black cultures as well as other cultures. She did say she did not know about White culture, because she believes that is everything, but wants to make sure he gets what he needs but also that he knows who he is.

### **Mary**

Mary is the youngest participant in the study (b. 1970). She is also the only participant that spoke of direct ties to the south. She was born in Mississippi and would spend summers there as a child. In Mississippi, she lived on a dirt road and the only neighbors were family and when she moved to the Midwest she lived in a housing project where she reports all her neighbors were Black. Her school and social circle were Black. Her current neighborhood is mostly White (she says this with a laugh). Her current social circle includes “a little bit of everybody”. She is COGIC (Church of God In Christ) and attends church or is doing something for the church four days a week. Her faith is very important to her and helps her handle situations differently because she prays and waits for God to give her direction.

RSM she received from her grandmother were not to trust White people. Her grandmother would not be happy that her son had married a White girl or has a mixed child. Her parents’ opinions are virtual opposites. Her father brought her up, as race was just a color and she has several biracial siblings on her father’s side. Her mother told her not to trust White men or White women. She believed her mother’s feelings were because her dad left her for a White woman. Mary raised her children not to judge, God made everybody and treat others the way you want to be treated. When asked about

being the victim of discrimination, she spoke of how her granddaughter's mother said she was treating her different because her mother is White. In clarifying her statement, she believes she does not approve of how she disciplines her because Blacks discipline their children different than Whites. She reported not experiencing discrimination besides as it relates to her interactions with her granddaughter. This was interesting because the stories she relayed about being a child in Mississippi revealed the opposite,

If we go into a store and say we were talking to a sales clerk or talking to someone in the grocery store of cutting meat or getting something in there for us. We would have to stop and if the White person came in, we would have to step to the side and they would take their order before they took ours.

Mary also recalled having to cross to the other side of the street if Whites were coming.

Her feelings on these events were,

It didn't bother me because most of the time we were kids and we were playing around.... Little things like that (waiting in store) but it didn't affect me because I felt that we still got what we in there for. Verses it took us a little bit longer.

Based on her experiences with not being able to see her younger brother because of his race and her faith she has always raised her children to believe race does not matter. Thus, she had no issues with her son's choices to date other races. Likewise neither she nor her family has a problem with her granddaughter being biracial. She believes the world sees her granddaughter as a "little White girl" because her hair is fine and her skin tone being fairer. She reported,

I do get a lot of people that look back and I used to judge all the time. Oh look that White lady has a little Black baby, you know she done adopted that baby. I wonder now if when I am out in public if somebody thinks I adopted her.

Although society may see her as White, Mary sees her as Black and what she does for herself she does for her granddaughter. She sees her granddaughter two to four times a week (her son's visitation days). She loves her granddaughter and believes it is her role to make sure she gets to know both sides of whom she is. She exposes her to "Black traditions" but is also willing to expose her to White culture also. She often asks her mother if there are things they do that she may not know about so she can make sure to do them when she has her granddaughter.

### **Details of the Analysis and Results**

Each interview lasted between 25-60 minutes and was transcribed verbatim with identifying information removed. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings using VLC media player. The program allowed the videos to be slowed down without distorting the voice of the participants.

After multiple reviews of the individual transcripts the researcher developed tables based on the questions and the participant's answers for easier reference. The answers were left in the participants' own words. The tables were used for comparative analysis. The transcripts and the tables were given to two independent reviewers to ensure validity of themes that emerged from my review.

### **Summary of Research Questions**

The current research study addresses the following questions concerning the role of Black grandmothers in the racial socialization process of their biracial (Black/White) grandchildren. By answering cognitive open-ended interview questions, the participants provided insight and a clearer understanding of the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process. It also provided insight on how their life experiences

influenced their belief in the need for racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. Additionally, whether sex or age influenced their approach or method used was explored.

The research questions used to frame the interview questions were:

1. What is the role of Black grandmothers on racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren?
2. How did the socialization of Black grandmothers and their life experiences influence the level and type of involvement in the racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren?
3. What role does the age of the child play in Black grandmothers decisions on their level and type of involvement in racial socialization?
4. What role does the sex of the grandchild play in Black grandmothers decisions on their level and type of involvement in racial socialization?

Through my research questions several themes emerged.

### **Themes**

There were several key words and phrases, which came forward from the data. They were given a name (theme) to represent the overall meaning. The eight major themes that emerged were (a) Community Influence, (b) Spirituality, (c) Social Adjustment, (d) Feelings Toward “the Other”, (e) Social Perception, (f) Cultural Indoctrination, (g) Grandma’s Burden, and (h) The Road Ahead. The theme names used to capture the meaning of the key words, key words and phrases identified and phrases along with the definition are shown in Table 4.4. For each theme I present a narrative description and in-depth quotations from the participants to ensure the vital connection between my own interpretation of the data and the actual stories from the participants.

## Community Influence

The theme, *Community Influence*, reflects on the role the neighborhoods and social circles of the grandmothers had on their racial socialization as it relates to Whites, and the relationships their children entered into. As it relates to the role of environment, who lived around them affected their social circles as children. Michelle, Stacey, and Mary reported growing up in all Black neighborhoods and having only Black friends as children. Michelle recalled,

It was an all Black community. Of course we were lower economic status at that time, you know you don't realize that as you're growing up. Probably not living in a middle class situation. It was all Black urban community. Went to an all Black elementary school, all Black middle school and really all Black high school. We had maybe a couple of White students that's it.  
 [Okay, umm then your social circle, how diverse were your friends were they of different races?] No they were all Black.

Table 4.4. Summary of Themes Reported by Grandmothers

Theme	Key Words/ Phrases	Definition
Community Influence	Past social circles Current social circles Neighborhood	Based on the diversity present, where they grew up and currently reside and associate with
Spirituality	Their rock Keep grounded Keep from judging	Importance of having God in their lives as the help mate He is, no connection or lack of belief
Social Adjustment	People are people Already had Black at home Limited Blacks Family history	Justification or explanation for why their children chose to date/marry interracially
Feelings Toward "the Other"	Not white Change feelings Hide feelings better	The mates were seen as not White or they would forget they were White, acceptance so their race no longer mattered, learn hide their feelings about Whites around their grandchildren

Theme	Key Words/ Phrases	Definition
Social Perception	Light skinned Enough tint Can't pass Skin tone Hair texture	The affect of the color of their grandchild/grandchildren on how they would fair in society, role in played in their feelings of how they saw their grandchild/ grandchildren
Cultural Indoctrination	Purposeful Pride Safety Prepared	Deliberate exposure to Black figures historical and current, focus on what there is to be proud of because they are Black, Worried about what they may face and how to behave or respond so they will not be harmed by Whites
Grandma's Burden	It will be on me Me and my husband Heavily involved	The belief it was their duty to make sure the grandchildren know their Black side even if their own child does not recognize the importance
The Road Ahead	More of them now Not a issue Still Black	The belief their grandchildren were still Black to society, since the biracial population was so large concern dwindled, racism will end because everybody mixed

Stacey recollected,

My neighborhood was fine. I never had any problems people was just like me. [And when you say just like you what do you mean] Black, poor [Okay, as a child how diverse was your social circle, umm were your friends of different races?] Nope, they were all Black

Dr. Jeanne reported her social circle as diverse due to her living in an integrated neighborhood as a child. She accounted,

I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. Working class people and also probably families that were low income. Also lived in my area. Umm always integrated community, higher Black population on that particular side of town that I lived on. [As a child how diverse was your social circle, were your friend's different races?] Yes, I grew up in a neighborhood where there were you know two or three White families in the block of each block, so I grew up in an integrated school and lived in an integrated neighborhood. But poverty was of course, higher poverty in that area.

The same was found to be true with Renee, as she reported a small number of Blacks in her small town, thus resulting in her having a mixed social circle.

A mixture of things were believed to influence the decision have romantic relations outside of their race, including the change in the time (post 1965), all of their current neighborhoods were either fairly diverse or mostly White. Dr. Jeanne shares her neighborhood is,

not as diverse as it was when I was growing up, I live in an apartment complex area I would say maybe 1, 2, 3 percent [Black]. In the apartment complex I guess

Clara reports her neighborhood is,

Not very, I think there are my family and...1, 2 other Black families on my block. Or in my neighborhood; a 3 block stretch there, yeah.

Although their neighborhoods have changed, only three (Mary, Chanda, and Clara), considered their current social circles to be diverse. I will note Chanda's diverse social circle was due to hanging out with co-workers occasionally and Whites being a part of her family. Also a mixture within Mary's family or mates of family members also represented the diversity in her current social circle. Whereas, Dr. Jeanne reports currently living in a majority White neighborhood and attending a White church, when describing her current social circle she states, "I socialize more with African American educators". Additionally, Michelle reflected the change in her socialization pattern,

Umm my social circle is still all Black. It was when I worked I would say it was diverse with Whites and Hispanics as well because I did things with them. Now that I'm retired I am back in my Black community with my Black organizations.



## Spirituality

The theme *Spirituality* refers to the relationship all but two (Renee and Stacey), had with “God”. This fit with the history of African Americans in the United States being punctuated by two things—slavery and religion. Traditionally the “church” has served as a place of safety, warmth, love, and trust (Gaillard, 2007; Watson et al., 2003). The grandmothers spoke of their connectedness with “God” as an integral part of their lives. In their accounts it was evident how this relationship somehow made everything bearable or forgivable.

Dr. Jeanne discussed how her beliefs guided her to her current career choice of an elementary school principal. Mary uses her beliefs and faith to help guide her decisions. She also attributed her ability to be open-minded with past and current discrimination she faces. She stated,

...right know I think it is the God that I serve. Because everything that is going on in the world right now, will make you go from one side to the other. You know far as races because so many things are happening. But you have to look past it and focus on your beliefs and what you want out of life. I don't want to be caught judging nobody by their skin tone, what their doing, weight, or anything like that. So I want to educate my grandchild and let her know some of the things that I experienced growing up. That I think was wrong or that I think was right or that I just don't care how it was then because that is just a form of being raised up. I want her to be able to get out there and experience different things and know that she can do anything that she put her mind to doing and getting it done.

Additionally, Chanda shared how her spirituality is reflected in how the church helped her deal with her granddaughter's death,

...they've been there for me. We had an incident when my daughter was younger which I had another grandchild. She was mixed. She was biracial. She passed away and when she passed. The church was there for me. I mean they were there when she left here. They helped us get through that situation. So they were really supportive. When it came time to have the service for my grandchild even though my grandchild hadn't

been baptized in the church. They we didn't have any problems with them letting us in to say goodbye to her. They supported us through all of that, any of the times where somebody's been sick in the family they've been there. So church have been real supportive. Even though I don't attend like I should. I grew up around the people that are in the church and they know me. My mom is in the church all the time so they know me through her and they will be there no matter what. I have not had a problem, and I am there for them. If they call for me, I go.

Although Renee reported not being religious she used "God" to ease/explain racial issues that arose with her daughter when she was five-years-old,

I had a nephew, and my oldest daughter and him were like three months apart. But he was mixed and his family would tell him you know that he was better than my daughter. You know because he's White and she's Black. My daughter wasn't nothing but a little nigger. So um when he would come back and repeat these things to her you know we would have to sit down and talk about it. ... I tried to tell her to really like ignore it you know because in Gods' eyes everybody's the same.

This same reference is how she plans to help her granddaughters see they are no different than their mono-racial sister.

I found it noteworthy that Stacey, who was adamant that she was not 'religious'. Even though she had to attend church as a child and even attended during part of her adult life but "it never did anything for her", had a harsher outlook and appeared to still harbor or hold on to past wrongs experienced due to discrimination.

### **Social Adjustment**

The theme, *Social Adjustment*, manifested from the grandmothers' giving 'excuses' on why their child made the choices they did as it related to engaging in interracial relationships. None of the grandmothers in this study had biracial children. Renee and Stacey were the only two to admit to dating outside of their race. Renee's estranged husband is Puerto Rican and Stacey dated White guys but "grew out of it".

Even those grandmothers that referred to ‘people as people’, like Clara expressed not ever having the desire to date White men.

The explanations/rationalizations centered on availability. Michelle, Dr. Jeanne and Mary shared how their children went to White schools and lived in majority White neighborhoods. Thus they did not have Black choices.

Dr. Jeanne described the following,

...their dating selection was pretty limited in the community that they grew up in. Matter fact my oldest daughter when she started dating, she was dating a young White boy. I would say if she would have had 5 African American boys to pick from, I would be surprised. And this came true when I went to her graduation, you know they have it in the big hall and I looked down at all the kids in her senior class, all the kids that had made it and there was about two and a half Black boys in her senior class.

The same could be said for her sons but she still openly wondered why as adults they have not changed their dating patterns. Michelle recalled her son pointing out the environment as the reason for his mate choices,

You put me in a situation with all Whites, he was always the only Black kid in his class from kindergarten on up. It wasn’t until he went to [High School] as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, 8<sup>th</sup> grader really, that he was in a situation where there were other Blacks. You know he said he was raised in a White environment, so what did you expect.

This, alluded to what I believe was, their belief that they would have chosen Black mates if they had the option. Additionally, Mary focused on the hurt she felt by not being able to have contact with her half-brother because her mother would not allow them to see him because in her eyes he was White, although he was actually biracial Native American and Black,

We couldn’t hang out with my brother, when we were, we was just, I was two years younger, I mean older than him and him and we could not hang out with him just because his mom was Indian. And but her and my dad

got married but we didn't get to see him until we were much older you know so.

In contrast Chanda and Stacey noted their daughters always seem to socialize and associate with and date non-Blacks. Stacey responded to not being surprised by her daughter's choice because she was dating a White guy before her current fiancé. Chanda reflected,

...daughter did seem to hang around more with, less the Black more White or Mexican. She just, that's just who she was drawn to. I don't know if that's cause that's [Black] what she had at home or she had Black at home she didn't need that.

### **Feelings Toward “the Other”**

The theme *Feelings Toward “the Other”* refers to how the grandmothers were dealing with their child or children's decision to engage in an interracial relationship that resulted in a biracial child or children. Two coping approaches were taken as it related to the mate. One was general acceptance. This occurred in two forms, either the mate was no longer seen as White, as reported by Chanda,

It doesn't matter you know to me and half the time, husband is White and I don't even consider him White (laughs). [Do not] Consider him that when he's around us all the time, so.

The other form was since they were now a part of the family their race was not a hindrance or an issue, as demonstrated by what Michelle shared,

I thought at first in family situations when we wanted to talk about Black issues, that they were a little reserved because she would be the only White in our presence and they did not want to hurt her feelings or you know whatever, especially if we were being derogatory about some racial discriminatory White issue. So umm, I think it was at first, a little uncomfortable for my family to try not to hurt her feelings but then I said, no she is married into a Black situation, she needs to understand how we feel about whatever we say, so they slowly they have eased up, and you know this Trayvon situation, I mean she had to sit there and listen to us ranting and raving.

As evident in her statement, Michelle's daughter-in-law has been accepted as part of the family and fully participates in the discussions on race and the result is both racial (Black and White) perspectives of the issue are discussed.

The other coping mechanism was that of tolerance. Feelings about the race of the mate were still an issue for the grandmother, but for the sake of their child and their grandchild or grandchildren they tolerated their child's decision. Stacey shared that her daughter warned her mate early in their relationship that Stacey did not like White people. Her daughter, her daughter's mate, and grandson live with her. When asked how do her feelings for White people affect their living situation, she replied,

... he can stay here and be my daughter's man as long as he don't hurt my daughter. You know like I said. He is a pretty okay guy, I mean he has his problems but ummm, I respect him for my daughter. My daughter knows how I felt about White guys. She warned him before she got with him. So it's not like he didn't know how I felt about White people coming into the situation. Well getting with my daughter and moving in with me. I mean I respect him and he respects me.

Although not directly stated by Dr. Jeanne, it was also apparent in the way she discusses her communication with one of her granddaughter's mother,

The second oldest son whose daughter lives in Oklahoma and lives out of state, she may call occasionally if she is upset about something but other than that, I don't approach her. Between you and me (motions to the camera) she took him to court and tried to keep him from seeing her. So I haven't got over being angry with her. I don't you know if she calls I'm pleasant but I have to get past that. I haven't quite prayed through that yet. (laughs).

As it relates to coping with their grandchildren being biracial, the method is best described as denial. Either the grandmothers reported not seeing race when they looked at their grandbabies or they saw them as Black. Renee and Stacey, were the most vocal in their dislike for their child's decision, noted they make a special effort to conceal their

feelings on their racial mixture and/or their true feelings for Whites from their granddaughters and grandson.

### **Social Perception**

The theme *Social Perception* related to the role the color or the tone of their skin, hair texture and other physical characteristics their grandchild or grandchildren possess and the role it would play in how they would be viewed by society and ultimately how they would fair in society. Although most of the grandmothers recognized and even referred to the “one drop rule” as it relates to whether someone is Black or not, they believed skin tone was still critical in how their grandchild or grandchildren would be viewed by society. Several as demonstrated in *Table 3*, believed their grandchildren could ‘pass’ for White. They also indicated this could/would be beneficial to them. Michelle stated,

You know as long as there is racism, viewing her as White could be a positive. You know if she goes in for a job and she sits down and she’s talking and they think she’s White, she may get the job...

Chanda recalled as it related to having a mono-racial grandchild and preparing that child for the world in contrast to how she would prepare her biracial grandchild would be guided by skin tone,

...because if I have a child or grandchild say my son has a grandchild and he’s with a Black girl and it’s a girl or a boy, that child to me I feel it’s probably have to work a little bit harder to get what they want than my biracial granddaughter maybe has to and hopefully its not because of the color, the way I feel, that’s just the way its always been. And me trying to teach that child, look you know, it’s not always going to be like that but your going to run into a situation where you know. You going to have to work harder for what you get because their not going some people are not going to look at you cause the color, for what you got here [points to heart] or what you got up here [points to head]. They’re going to look at you for what color your skin is.

The other side of coin was those grandchildren whose grandmothers stated that were obviously mixed with Black. Skin tone, physical characteristics, hair texture and facial features were used in these assessments by the grandmothers.

Dr. Jeanne stated,

Through maybe some would I say what do I want to say politically correct persons that would say you know well their biracial.... They could not pass of White [darker skin tone].

Renee reported,

There was a time when I thought they would be viewed Black, you know because they do have the Black blood in em. But nowadays I think it might just be biracial.

Mary recalled,

...no matter what nobody says about your skin that you are still beautiful and that you are created by God. Cause her mom made a statement that she has big red lips like her daddy, her nose is like her daddy and you know when she was saying that the whole time, I let her talk and say what she had to say. But I also corrected her and said no matter if her nose is big and wide or her lips are big and red. She is still beautiful because she is created by God. She is lucky, I can't even say lucky anymore your blessed that umm you have all the features. You have the best of both worlds you know.

It was interesting that only one, Stacey felt that her grandson was obviously Black even though his skin tone and hair texture made it physically obvious that he was biracial.

Stacey expressed,

I mean even though because he's one of the light mixed kids, you know you can still tell that he's Black or he's mixed with something. So therefore White America is going to see him as Black anyways. So no matter how much you tell him your mixed, or half White and your half Black and or his other family is telling him that he's White. When White America sees him they are going to see a Black man. So there is no me tell him that you're White going just because your light you're going to pass for White. No your not. You're still going to be a Black man.

This I believe had more to do with her personal feelings than any judgment based on his appearance.

## **Cultural Indoctrination**

The theme *Culture Indoctrination* reflects the grandmothers' acknowledgement of how important it is for their grandchild or grandchildren to be exposed to Black culture.

Dr. Jeanne does this by buying books with African American characters in them. She recalls,

Went to a birthday party for one of my younger grandchildren and of course all the story books he got from grandma were (laughs) and I'm sure his White grandparents were you know his White aunt were wondering why is she giving all books that have Black characters children in the picture books. You know that's the way it is was for his dad and way it was for his aunts and uncles and cousins so I'm continuing grandmas message that you have to show books that show African American as positive role models positive characters in books and I'll be looking for Biracial books like that too for them.

Additionally, she shares the importance of appearance of her grandchildren,

...hair combing is one thing. By getting their hair combed. Having their hair looking nice and not all over their heads. So they probably as they were young and growing up when they got to grandmas they that was a big thing. You have your hair done, you don't have it looking like probably like mine does now but. So that's probably one thing. So when you step out in the world you know they always dressing dress appropriately.

Michelle takes her grandchildren to Black events like the UniverSoul Circus. The UniverSoul Circus is a traveling circus that is more than 20 years old and targets urban plazas across the country. It showcases Black and minority talent from across the global.

Overall, the grandmothers want their grandchildren to know their "Black side" and that it is something to be proud of. As reflected by Mary,

... that he needed to make sure that the child's knows both sides. If it is her side or his side, with him being married to her she kinda pulled toward her mom's side. But the baby needed to know us just as well as her side of the family. So I told him he just needed to educate the baby on her background his upbringing so she will know how he was brought up. What it was like.



Clara's grandson was the youngest (infant) in the study. She has never met the father nor does her grandson have contact with his father's extended family. She plans to purposely expose him to Black culture along with other minority cultures. She states,

I think with Black people when we have biracial children; I think we tend to raise them as they're Black because, really in society, they are. Umm, you know the being mixed is just you know part of who they are, but society is just going to see them as Black.

Although only one, Mary, expressed an intention or desire to purposefully expose to White culture,

I do both, even when she is with me I ask if there is something that they do special on holidays, that maybe I don't do, and that you want to keep that tradition going for her, cause I am willing to learn too. I just make sure I do it over at my house too.

The majority of the grandmothers reported the grandchild or grandchildren having exposure to both cultures, whether it is through contact with the father/mother or their extended families. Renee's granddaughters' father is in prison, but their paternal grandfather has contact with them and provides financial support for the girls when asked. Stacey's grandson spends time with his father's side of the family and she reflected on how that culture was evident in his mannerisms,

He gets a lot of the White behaviors from them. Okay with the Whiteness thing, I mean his speech. The way he says the way he words his words, you know the things he says. He already talks like them. He doesn't talk like he's grown up in a Black household. He talks like he's grown up in the White household. He says things that White people says. You know he words it that way, they way White people will word something. Differently then the way a Black person will say it.

There was a consensus among all the grandmothers, but Mary, that it was not their responsibility to ensure they were exposed to White culture. Stacey's belief as it related to exposing her grandson to White culture was,

That's what his father and his parents are for. I mean I do take him to the library where he plays with White kids. I take him to the park where he plays with White kids. So I guess if that's culture, yes.

Michelle also believed this was the role of her daughter-in-law,

I think they are getting some of the White culture because the mother is very in tune with doing cultural things and so you know she'll take them to the Nutcracker suite and she'll do she'll take them to Mainstream Art gallery. So she is doing the things you know the things that she was raised doing. So I think they are getting some of that.

She believed "they [grandchildren] were getting the best of both worlds". Whereas, Clara when projecting on purposeful exposure to White culture, she responded, "I don't know necessarily about "White" culture because I think that's everything."

### **Grandma's Burden**

The theme *Grandma's Burden* refers to their belief that it is their duty to make sure their grandchild or grandchildren know their "Black side" or were racially socialized. This was the belief even if their own child or children did not recognize the importance of this knowledge for their children. Noteworthy, was the mention of those that were married, believed their husband played a role, but as stated directly by Clara it would be more her responsibility. The grandmothers also were heavily involved in other rearing and socialization aspects of their grandchildren.

The importance of their role in the racial socialization process was evident through the purposeful exposure to Black culture and their personal reflections and perceptions of the environments their grandchildren are in. As with Dr. Jeanne, it manifested in the giving of support to them when they face adversity because of their mixed parentage as with her step-grandson. She recalled,

That is the way [acceptance of everyone] they grow up in the our family on my side, our side of the family. So hopefully, they have the foundation

that will help prepare them to go out to the world and be who they are. They call themselves Black, at least the older ones, One of the [her son's] older stepsons had some problems living in a majority White community that I heard about last summer. So your heart breaks for him, hopefully he's going to be a stronger younger man from the love and support he has from his stepdad, my son and his grandparents, hopefully, its going to be able to weather that.

*Grandma's Burden* also includes making what could be considered parenting decisions, on what the children need. When reflecting on the amount of contact she has with her twin granddaughters, Dr. Jeanne shared,

They don't call as much we kinda of done some little facebooking. They don't have a phone and mom has the cell phone. So I if they had a phone I am sure if they had a phone I would be talking to them a lot more. I am really about ready to get them their own phone. Now here is grandma intervening. But I really, you know mom kinda of the middle man and I really would like to, I feel like my son should have access to them at anytime verses having to get her waiting on her to answer the phone and sometimes she don't or texting her and waiting on her to get back to him, so I am just about ready to get them their own phone. I think I this year. I am getting a raise I'm get them a phone.

As shown with Renee who shared with her daughter the racial slur used by her biracial granddaughters toward their sister. It was apparent by her tone and body gestures, Renee did not believe her daughter had addressed it. Thus, serving as justification to her assumption that she will need to be the one to talk with her biracial granddaughters about race.

Many of the grandmothers see their grandchildren several times a week if not daily. They also report being a part of the rearing process in terms of discipline, teaching them how to behave, and be respectful.

Stacey reflected,

I'm his grandmother. I'm his babysitter, I'm his momma, I'm his friend, I'm his sibling, I'm everything to him (Laughs).

Clara attested,

...but I keep him all the time; just have him all the time. Me and my husband do, umm, just babysitting, helping her out, stuff like that.

Michelle indicated,

Mainly because she is going to school and she the mother does work part time and he works a lot. Cause he is in real estate so we have them a lot. My husband and I have them a lot. As a matter of fact we just had them for a whole week... Well aside from the care of them. Okay because we do keep them over night 2 or 3 days if need be. So other than that which is taking total care of them.

Thus their heavy involvement with other aspects of their grandchildren's lives it was not unexpected that the racial socialization of their grandchildren would be a role they believed they were supposed to play.

### **The Road Ahead**

The theme *The Road Ahead* refers to what the grandparents believe lies ahead for their biracial grandchildren. Several key words and phrases emerged with this theme. For example prepared, both Chanda and Stacey expressed their desire for their grandchild to be prepared for what hardships they might face as adults. Chanda alluded to the fact that her granddaughter would need to be a strong person but never specified why. Whereas Stacey outlined the potential problems and racism her grandson would endure,

That even though your skin is light damn near White that most White people are still going to see him as Black. They're not going to care that your father's White. They're still going to, if their prejudice they're still going to call you a Nigger. They don't care if you have blue eyes and long blonde hair. If you still got that little bit of kink or that little bit of tint to your skin. You're still going to be considered a Nigger to them. So therefore, you are quote unquote, a Black man out in the streets out in the job field. You're a Black man and that's how I will explain it to him.

Another common perception was related to the increase in the biracial population and how this increase might make their grandchildren's lives easier. Michelle stated,

You know I was worried to be honest with you Lover, I was very worried at first because, I thought it's you know enough stuff out here that you have to deal with why do you have to have one more burden of what are you, kind of thing but ummm, goodness I guess what open my eyes that there was so many biracial kids, when I left the school district and retired, I went to one of the middle schools and I was a counselor there for 2 years. I kid you not about a 1/3 of the population of those of that school were biracial. White, basically White mothers Black fathers. And then everywhere I go it is such a focus because I know I have biracial kids, I see all these biracial kids. We went to the soccer game the other day with the kids and I looked along the sideline and all these White mothers and I'm looking at these biracial kids out there on the field. So I think, that if they were if they weren't so many of them I think I would be concerned that they are going to have to deal with something but I think I think to a certain extent its going to take care of itself.

Even Stacey thought this increase was the potential answer to the end of racism,

No matter how America wants to say that racism is over or racism is coming to an end or you know things like that and that nature. It's not I see it everyday even on TV, in the streets. You know I see it no matter how much they try to sugar coated it's always going to be there always. Well not now because all the kids are mixed these days. Maybe that's something. Maybe racism will die down because of that. You never know.

### **Conclusion**

McCracken's (1988) the long interview four-step method of inquiry was used to identify common themes within the lived experiences of Black grandmothers with at least one biracial (Black and White) grandchild. This chapter presented the stories of seven Black grandmothers with a least one biracial grandchild. Eight common themes were identified: (a) community influence, (b) spirituality, (c) social adjustment, (d) feelings toward "the other", (e) social perception, (f) cultural indoctrination, (g) grandma's burden, and (h) the road ahead.

Although all the Black grandmothers in this study shared the distinction of having at least one biracial (White and Black) grandchild, all of their stories had unique aspects.

Some of the grandmothers after initial hesitations did not have lasting reservations about their child or children's choices. Others have just learned to "live with" their child or children's choices.

In contrast to the differences of each of their experiences there were also commonalities. There was a shared experience of discrimination or racism by all the grandmothers whether recognized or not. The method each used to deal with or internalize these experiences seem to focus around their faith and/or understanding of, that was just what life in America was like for a Black person. Another similarity was their love for their grandchild or grandchildren. The love for their grandchild or grandchildren was evident in how they spoke about them and the amount of time they spent with them. As it related to their grandchild or grandchildren's racial makeup either they did not see race as it related to them or it had no mitigating affect on how they felt about them. They only wanted what was best for them and would do what it took to make that happen. There was also a common belief that since the "Browning of America"<sup>6</sup> their grandchildren may have it better then they initially thought.

Lastly, an understanding of what these families have faced and the barriers placed by the history of this country, can prove to be instrumental in working with these families. The dissertation research may provide new evidence for professionals who work with this population in developing and delivering culturally relevant services. As stated by Michelle,

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<sup>6</sup> Browning of America refers to projections of in all five series; the racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population is shown to increase. With the minority groups projected to maintain or increase their shares of the population, the proportion of the population that is non-Hispanic White alone is projected to decrease (Ortman & Guarneri, 2009).

You know what is biracial, you know what I am saying. When a kid is you know, we can all identify, I'm Black, we can identify, but I don't know how a biracial child identifies. I mean so that is the only thing I'm wondering how that's going to pan out for them. And when someone says you know what are you, biracial, I just don't know how that works, so that's my only issue.

## **Chapter 5- Discussions and Conclusions**

The phenomenological framework was used as a guide for this investigation. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process of their biracial grandchildren. The goal was to provide professionals working with this population additional knowledge about the many factors that affect how and to what extent the Black grandmothers were involved in the process of racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren. Research has been limited related to racial socialization and even the role of grandparents (Mueller et al., 2002; Kemp, 2003, Rodriguez et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2010, Snyder, 2011). This study was distinct in two ways. First, it addressed the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process. Second, it added the complexity of how this is done when the grandchildren are biracial. Moreover, the findings of this study shed light on the challenges grandmothers faced. On the one hand they dealt with the historical background between these two groups (Whites and Blacks) and their personal experiences of discrimination. On the other hand, they also sought to ensure their grandchildren knew who they were and that they were loved unconditionally by them.

### **Summary of Results**

Black grandmothers whether living in the home or not are viewed as part of the family interior and are extremely active in all aspects of the lives of their grandchildren (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Hunter, 1997; Watson, 1997; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Strom, Heeder, & Strom, 2005). This qualitative phenomenological research study examined seven Black grandmothers who lived in urban and suburban towns in the Midwest. The research question guiding this study was, “What is the role of Black grandmother in the



racial socialization of their biracial grandchildren”. Findings from this study helped to bring to light the importance of the Black grandmother in this process. Using a symbolic interaction and social constructivism theoretical lens to highlight the role of Black grandmother led to a rich body of vitally important information for mental health professionals and public policy makers related to the delivery of care.

The results of the literature review indicated that there was scant research on this topic. I identified research on racial socialization, biracial socialization, grandparent roles and Black grandparent roles as critical factors in the development of biracial grandchildren. I then compared previous research results to determine similarities and differences. The results from the current investigation identified eight key themes that impacted the process of racial socialization of biracial grandchildren by their Black grandmothers. I will discuss the implications of these themes (Community Influence, Spirituality, Social Adjustment, Feelings Toward “the Other”, Social Perception, Cultural Indoctrination, Grandma’s Burden, The Road Ahead) in more detail later in the chapter.

### **Discussion of the Results**

It should be noted that I encountered several limitations discussed in detail later in the chapter, but are referenced briefly here. The first limitation was the age of the grandchildren in the sample. Only one of the participants of the study had biracial grandchildren over age seven. The second and most important was a lack of knowledge of the overall effectiveness of the methods employed. Due to the age of the grandchildren many had not yet faced racial issues, therefore the grandmothers could not attest to the effectiveness of their method of racial socialization. These limitations may have had some impact on the results.

The seven grandmothers who participated in the study shared their history of race relations and how they felt about their children's decision on entering into interracial relationships that resulted in biracial grandchildren. The eight themes that emerged during the data analysis have been documented in previous research as central factors when examining the perceived view of race relations in America and how Black families have coped with and prepare their children for life in America (Burton & Bengston, 1985; Timberlake & Chipungu, 1992; Erik, 2001; Wilhelm & Elder, 2003; Robbins et al., 2005; Rockquemore et al., 2006; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Snyder, 2012). The themes provide insight on how their grandchildren being mixed with White, influenced the racial socialization process they followed. Themes will be discussed within the context of my research questions.

### **Community Influence**

The grandmothers in this study reported for the most part to have limited early community exposure to Whites. Most grew up without close relationships with Whites and having selected to maintain mainly homogeneous social circles as adults, with the noted exceptions of co-worker relationships or integration within their family or extended families. Previous research revealed a young child's immediate environment is an integral part of defining their world; thus being exposed to limited amounts of diversity and negative events, like racism and discrimination when exposure to dominant culture does occur, can explain choices to have racially homogeneous social circles (Hill, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Leslie et al., 2013). As relayed by Dr. Jeanne,

I socialize more with African American educators that's probably the bulk, family friends. I do go to a White church however.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, as it relates to the process of social interaction, people rely on the symbolic meaning developed (Blumer, 1969; Doerthy et al., 1993; White & Klien, 2008; Forte, 2009). As suggested by SI theory, the fact that many of the grandmothers in this study currently live in diverse or majority White neighborhoods has had little effect on their social circles.

### **Spirituality**

The role of spirituality for Blacks has always played a major role in their lives (Gaillard, 2007; Watson et al., 2003). It has helped them be resilient when dealing with prejudice, racism, and discrimination, by giving them a sense of warmth, safety, and upliftment. The grandmothers in this study (except Stacey) credit God or their belief in God as why they were able to deal with the “wrongs” they have experienced. This is amplified best when Mary’s ex-daughter-in-law made what Mary perceived to be negative comments about her granddaughter’s physical features, she responded,

Cause her mom made a statement that she has big red lips like her daddy, her nose is like her daddy. When she was saying that the whole time, I let her talk and say what she had to say, but I also corrected her and said no matter if her nose is big and wide or her lips are big and red. She is still beautiful because she is created by God. She is lucky, I can’t even say lucky anymore your blessed that you have all the features.

Mary referenced God often in how she is able refrain from being judgmental about how people look. Essentially her faith has prevented the same disapproving feelings her grandmother would have had about her granddaughter being biracial.

Another example was with Renee, she voiced a lack of spirituality and could not even remember what denomination the church was she attended as a child. However when questioned on how she has handled and would handle racial prejudice she referred to God in her explanation,

I tried to tell her [daughter] to really like ignore it you know because in God's eyes everybody's the same. If you take off that first layer of skin everything's that same color. Your veins, you know, your muscles everything's the same color.... I'm assuming I'm gonna have to have that talk with the three girls [biracial granddaughters].

As acknowledged earlier, Stacey was the only grandmother whom voiced no spiritual connection. Her tone was harsher and she still posed resentment, when describing her encounters with racism she had encountered. Her responses and outlook were remarkably grimmer than the other grandmothers as it related to what the future held for their biracial grandchildren. Additionally, she appeared to struggle the most with how she was going to be able overcome her dislike/distrust of Whites and other races for the benefit of her grandchildren. According to social constructionists theorist, this could be due to her lack of connection to the socially constructed spiritual belief of Blacks. Which is premised on the belief, suffering over in this world is but a few days and joy comes in the morning.

### **Social Adjustment**

This theme reflects the apparent belief that the grandmothers felt it necessary to justify their child's choice to enter into relationships and procreate outside of their race. From an SI perspective, this could be evidence of the negative symbolism historically associated with engaging in inter-racial relationships (Korgen, 1998; Moran, 2001; Orbe & Harris, 2001; Parker, 2009). Comments such as 'people are people', or the example given by Michelle from a conversation she had with her son:

You know he said he was raised in a White environment, so what did you expect. All of his White boys, were friends were over course, talking about the qualities of White girls so to him, that's what he viewed as what was right.

Whereas, the social constructionists would attribute the grandmothers' attempts of rationalization, as their desire to come to terms with their new reality (Cheung, 1997; Cottone, 2001; Andrews, 2012) of their children having engaged in interracial relationships that resulted in biracial grandchildren. For example, several of the grandmothers' referred to the lack of Blacks at their children's schools as well as their neighborhoods as reasoning why they dated outside of their race. Utilizing the social constructionist lens one could argue that the actions of their children were not due to lack of ethnic pride or preference but merely propinquity and availability (Cheung, 1997, Hill, 1999; Hamm, 2001; Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

### **Feelings Toward “the Other”**

The theme *Feelings Toward “the Other”*, demonstrates the way the grandmothers were able to cope with their child's decision and love their grandchildren unconditionally, despite the grandmothers past experiences with “the Other”. The data suggested these feelings manifested in a couple of different ways. In relation to mate selection of their child or children, a couple of the grandmothers exercised tolerance as demonstrated by Stacey,

.... he can stay here and be my daughter's man as long as he don't hurt my daughter. You know like I said. He is a pretty okay guy, I mean he has his problems but, I respect him for my daughter. My daughter knows how I felt about White guys. She warned him before she got with him. So it's not like he didn't know how I felt about White people coming into the situation. .... I mean I respect him and he respects me.

Then again by Dr Jeanne,

I kinda was not as happy or not as satisfied with their [sons] choice. The next underlying thing, which I don't know if I admit openly or not, but I wonder why can't they pick someone that looks like their mother.... I want them to be happy with whoever they pick. I would like them to find

women that are intelligent educated, good role models, and good mothers but they wont let me pick so.

Another method engaged by the grandmothers was remarking that they did not see them as White. Chanda stated,

It doesn't matter to me and half the time, daughter's husband White and I don't even consider him White (laughs). [Do not] Consider him that when he's around us all the time, so.

Michelle and her family had the unique approach of looking at is as having insight to the 'Other side' as described below

.... you know this Trayvon situation, I mean she had to sit there and listen to us ranting and raving. So you know and she is good about that she listens and she gives her input and she doesn't seem to get offended.

As it related to their grandchildren the approach was somewhat universal.

Although they recognized and some of the grandmothers commented on how they were both Black and White, the all intended to treat their racial mixture as irrelevant and racially socialize them, as they were Black. SC theorists would accredit this to their understanding of what being Black means and the lack of a concrete meaning of what it means to be biracial (Creswell, 2003; Riessman & Speedy, 2007), especially as it relates to what treatment to expect (DeVries & Zan, 1996; Schwandt, 2005). Whereas, symbolic interactionist theorists, would extract the symbolism represented in the physical characteristics of the grandchildren and those being the same characteristics in themselves, as to why they anticipate racially socializing the children as if they were mono-racial [Black] (DeVries & Zan, 1996; Schwandt, 2005).

### **Social Perception**

Clara made the following observation as it related to her biracial grandson,

.... the way he looks right now, I just know that and if we weren't around, people would think he was White.... Even White people will do that; you know or make comments "Look at his eyes". ....Yeah, my daughter is actually dark so it's just kind of like "Whose baby is this?"

This is representative of how the theme *Social Perception* materialized. The grandmothers were acutely aware of how the physical characteristics of their grandchildren would be anatomized by the society and ultimately benefit them or be to their detriment. The aforementioned quote is laden with the definitions attributed to what is White. The grandmothers who believed their biracial grandchildren could "pass", even went as far as to postulate it would be a good thing for their grandchildren if they were viewed as White (Rocquemore et, al.; Wise, 2010; Taylor & Mateyka, 2011; Leslie et al., 2013), thus relying on long standing symbolism of the privileges associated with the White race in America (Wise, 2010).

Likewise those grandmothers who were determined to ensure their grandchildren were prepared for being Black (Comer & Poussaint, 1992). In this study were those that were obviously biracial and those that appeared all Black, were seen as needing the same preparation, thus exercised the shared meaning as would be found in SC schools of thought (Cheung, 1997). As demonstrated in what Stacey believes her biracial grandson will face,

That even though your skin is light damn near White that most White people are still going to see him as Black. They're not going to care that your father's White. They're still going to, if their prejudice they're still going to call you a Nigger. They don't care if you have blue eyes and long blonde hair. If you still got that little bit of kink or that little bit of tint to your skin. You're still going to be considered a Nigger to them. So therefore, you are quote unquote, a Black man out in the streets out in the job field. You're a Black man and that's how I will explain it to him.

A latent concern that surfaced was what if the RSM of being Black to the biracial grandchild are accepted and those messages result in an identity that does not match the social perception assigned to the biracial child as demonstrated by Michelle's social perceived "White" granddaughter's behavior,

.... we came in [dance class waiting area] and she immediately went over to the there was a little group of two or three little Black girls and then there were some groups of White girls, well she went over to the little Black girls. And I was really shocked that she did that, only because I just see her in that White environment. Cause she's got to be more comfortable in the White environment cause that's what's she in. But instead she went right over to these [Black girls] and sat down. I don't know if is cause they of the toys they had, I don't know, but she went to the little Black girls and sat down and started playing with them and then every week that we've gone in for lessons she comes in and goes over to the little Black girls and plays.

### **Cultural Indoctrination**

*Cultural Indoctrination* is direct exposure to the Black culture. This theme directly addressed how the grandmothers intend to ensure their biracial grandchildren have knowledge of, exposure to, and pride in their Black heritage. The literature on racial socialization supports the grandmothers' attitudes on how crucial RSM are for their grandchildren's development (Omi, 2001; McClain, 2004; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Thomas, Speight, & Whitterspoon, 2010).

The grandmothers' pointed out how there are traits and behaviors their grandchildren have picked up from their White side of the family. These traits are often in opposition of what is acceptable in their presence or homes. For example, Mary mentions how she had to explain to her granddaughter's mother that no child would run her household. She shared that her granddaughter is in charge when she is with her mother and does whatever she wants. Likewise, Michelle commented,



.... she never raises her voice. She does very well controlling her children, not raising her voice, but she does never raise her voice, she does use time out. But my son and I raise we our voice, we are very emphatic with them, we tan their little legs, we spank their legs.

The grandmothers also stress how they make sure their grandchildren are exposed to positive Black role models whether in books or public figures. Dr. Jeanne mentioned she gave her granddaughter a poster of Gabbrielle Douglas, after she expressed interest in gymnastics. Furthermore, Michelle noted that her daughter-in-law takes the children to mainstream<sup>7</sup> museums and circuses, while she takes them to the UniverSoul circus and Black exhibits whenever they are available. In summary they attend to share or are currently sharing the heartaches and pleasures of being Black in America. They want them to be strong and know they come from legacy of strong men and women and they should be proud.

### **Grandma's Burden**

The theme *Grandma's Burden* is the belief they are responsible for ensuring the grandchildren are reared appropriately. Divergent from White grandmothers, Black grandmothers are reared with the understanding their role is to ensure their grandchildren are properly socialized in all facets of their lives (Gibson, 2002; Goodman & Silverstein, 2002). Their role is unaltered by the involvement or lack of involvement of their children in the process. This is evident in how Dr. Jeanne describes what visits to grandma's house often entail,

.... getting their hair combed. Having their hair looking nice and not all over their heads. .... as they were young and growing up when they got to grandmas they that was a big thing. You have your hair done. So when you step out in the world they always dressing, dress appropriately. So I don't know if that is racially motivated or just socially.

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<sup>7</sup> In this document mainstream is synonymous with White culture.

conscious of that. But you know when we go, need to go some place your clothes etc are ironed get belts on etc. So, I think I'm preparing them to be, this might be said that I'm preparing them, to be part of the White culture. I know that as African Americans we know there is an appropriate way to be dressed when your out and appropriate way to be dressed when your at home so. Hopefully that's one message that they've gotten from grandma. And you know when we're out they're acting appropriately.

The literature does not directly address the role of grandmothers racially socializing their grandchildren (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Strom et al., 2005; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). However as witnessed in the above quote, it is safe to imply based on the role they play in their grandchildren's lives and the importance of racial socialization in the Black community (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Stevenson, 1994; Hill, 1999; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Snyder, 2012) it is part of *Grandma's Burden*.

Additionally, Black grandmothers were found to be trusted advisors by their teenage grandchildren (Storm, et al., 2005). They are often called on to be the *arbitrator* to mediate disputes between parents and children, because they are seen as a neutral party (Bahr, 1976; Cohlert & Grunebaum, 1981; Hagestad, 1985) and in the Black community is well known that Mommas' always have the 'last word' no matter how old you get. Their 'last word' extends to their grandchildren as demonstrated when Dr. Jeanne made the decision to buy her teenage granddaughters a cell phone, so their mother would not have control over their contact with her granddaughters.

### **The Road Ahead**

In interviewing the grandmothers, I started with their personal history on race relations and how they were racially socialized. The process included reflections on their personal experiences with racism to gain insight on how the symbolism of those

messages affected the messages they shared with their mono-racial children. The goal was to ascertain if the grandmothers used or intended to use symbols based on socially constructed ideals of race to racially socialize their grandchildren. They indeed used a combination of the symbolic interactionist and social constructionist schools of thought (Cottone, 2001; McAdoo, Martinez, & Hughes, 2005; Mertens, 2005; Schwandt, 2005), which were validated by statements like the “one drop rule”, “things you are not suppose to do in front of White people”, and “work twice as hard”. By the end of the interview the grandmothers were slightly optimistic about their grandchildren’s future. The focal point of this optimism was the changing “face” of the world. This was most remarkable in the contrasting statements made by Stacey,

.... but he’ll find out for himself and then he’ll say grandma you was right, you wont believe what happen to me [racism]. And I’ll say you know what baby it’s always been that way. [this was relayed with a soft comforting tone]

You know I see it [racism] no matter how much they try to sugar coated it’s always going to be there always. Well not now because all the kids are mixed these days. Maybe that’s something. Maybe racism will die down because of that. You never know.

Ultimately all the grandmothers’ desired for their grandchildren are for them to feel safe, secure, and loved. Their apprehension in using new RSM are tied to the unknown that is associated with being biracial. Michelle’s statement sums it up best,

I guess the only thing that maybe concerns me is. You know what is biracial, you know what I am saying. You know when a kid is you know we can all identify, I’m Black, we can identify, but I don’t know how a biracial child identifies. I mean you know so that is the only think you know I’m wondering how that’s going to pan out for them. And when someone says you know what are you, biracial, you know I just don’t know how that works, so that’s my only issue.

## **Limitations**

While my study provides insight into the phenomenon of the role of the Black grandmother in the racial socialization process of their biracial grandchildren and what they believe lead to their children's decision to date interracially. It also provided a glimpse at how the Black grandmothers' children are racially socializing their grandchildren. The study had a number of limitations that are important to discuss.

First, the majority of the grandchildren in the study were under the age of seven. Therefore, a lot of the information as it related to RSM, was in the form of what the participants plan to do. Resulting in concrete information on the effectiveness or lack thereof, of the RSM on their grandchildren for the majority of the participants yet to be realized. This was due partially to the age of the biracial grandchildren, but also to their restricted contact with the outside world. For example, in one family the biracial granddaughter was three and did not go to daycare. The only contact outside of her immediate and extended family, which outside of her White father and a biracial aunt whom considers herself Black, was limited and controlled.

Second, the study was restricted because I only interviewed the Black grandmothers. This approach adequately addressed the research questions for this study. However, to get a complete picture, using the holistic approach would provide a valuable understanding of how the parents, grandchildren, and White grandparents felt about RSM as it relates to the importance of the biracial grandchildren knowing their "Blackness".

Thirdly, when interviewing the participants there were several occasions in which it was apparent the grandmothers did not understand the concept of racial socialization. For example when asked about their experiences with race relations, one grandmother

expressed feelings against race mixing. Other times clarification had to be given that could be considered by some to have a skewing effect on the results. Although in this study, I firmly believe it was a lack of understanding of the terminology and not the latter.

Fourth, although it is a common limitation in qualitative research to have a lack of a representative sample (Patton, 2002), it is not a problem in this investigation rather; I believe geographic location could have played a significant role in the results. The study was conducted in urban and suburban cities in the Midwest. Only one of the participants spent any of their formative years outside of the Midwest. Considering the topic and the history of race relations in the Southern part of the United States, the results could be extremely different if participants were selected or the study was conducted in the South.

Lastly, the issue of biracial individuals and the struggles they face as it relates to identity, is well documented in the research literature (Chiong, 1998; Bianchi et al., 2002; Leslie et al, 2013). However, the racial socialization process of a biracial individual, as to how to function in a world that values the majority over the minority, was remarkably absent. Furthermore, the role of their Black grandmother in sharing RSM were equally absent. I see this as a significant limitation of this study, as I was unable to find direct ties in past research to which to compare my findings. Thus, I had to draw conclusions based on research designed for the racial socialization of mono-racial children and the overall role of Black grandmothers, which may have distorted the results.

## **Recommendations**

This section provides two types of recommendations. The first is related to the advancement of the field in the area of future research. The second is linked to the implementation of the findings in practice and policy development.

### **Future Research**

The outcomes of my study highlight numerous possibilities for future research on the topic of the role of Black grandmothers in the racial socialization process of their biracial grandchildren. Although the population was sufficient for this study, the study should be repeated including the grandchildren as participants. It would also be useful to add an age requirement so insight into the effectiveness or lack thereof, of RSM being shared by the Black grandmothers could be ascertained. This will require an additional pre-screen question, asking if the biracial grandchild or grandchildren they are referring to are at least five years of age and are available to be interviewed.

Additionally, selecting a wider or different geographic location is recommended. Including participants from the Southern sections of the United States and/or from rural areas in the Midwest could have remarkable differences in the attitudes and beliefs of the Black grandmothers as it relates to race relations thus resulting in a strong possibility of different RSM being shared with their biracial grandchildren. The aforementioned populations should be in two different studies for the best results.

Another aspect of my study that was revealed but not in depth was the concept of the biracial grandchild having the advantage of being able to function in both worlds. Specifically several of the grandmothers mentioned how their grandchildren were hopefully getting the best of both worlds (White and Black). One grandmother in

particular mentioned that since her granddaughter appeared to be White, she would have an advantage in gaining employment, but she would be a better employee because she would be able to relate to and work with the Black employees as well. Questions for future research on this topic might include: How are biracial individuals able to function in both cultures? What affect do they believe their physical characteristics play in how they are seen by Blacks and by Whites? Which world are they most comfortable in? What, if any, do their physical characteristics play on their decision to identify with one world over the other?

### **Service Providers/Policy Makers**

As noted in the limitation section, the lack of research in this area puts service providers and policy makers at a disadvantage. It forces them to utilize clinical and non-clinical samples to develop theories and policies. It is imperative to work on clarifying and separating the definitions and meanings of racial identity and racial socialization. In this way, more appropriate and more human policies can be developed.

I also recommend providers and policy makers pay special attention to learning and understanding the role of the Black grandmother as it relates to RSM, ensuring providers recognize the impact she has on her biracial grandchildren's racial socialization process. I believe it is crucial for service providers when working with these families to understand the significance that including or excluding the Black grandmothers from the process generates. Additionally, when working with these families, using the Black grandmother as a resource, when trying to reestablish stability or when helping the family see what resources are available to help them, as issues related to RSM arise resulting in conflict of lack of direction with the biracial grandchild.

## **Conclusion**

This study looked at the role of seven Black grandmothers in the racial socialization process of their biracial (White and Black) grandchildren. While the families did not have any knowledge of the information shared by the grandmothers before or after them, their experiences used to guide their RSM were fairly similar. Across the cases the message embodied was one of love and their desire to protect and prepare their grandchildren for a world that they have known to be cruel and exclusionary. They believed that have made it this far by being resilient and they know this s a trait their grandchildren must possess. The interviews provided valuable insight into the phenomenon, yet to be adequately addressed in the literature, of shared interactional experiences of Black grandmothers with biracial grandchildren as they navigate through the racial socialization process of these grandchildren.

The results of this study should be shared with family therapists, policy makers, social workers, and other families with similar makeup. The ever changing dynamics within families and the changing “face” of the world makes this research a valuable tool. The stories shared by these grandmothers highlight the struggles they face with balancing negative historical experiences with their desire to raise healthy well-adjusted biracial grandchildren, can serve as teaching tools for professionals that work with families. Finally, the results should be shared with other professors of multiracial studies in family studies, sociology and social work, as a building block for future research in the area of multiracial families.



## Epilogue

The experience of writing this dissertation brought to life for me some issues that I had not considered in some time, more specifically, how did my own grandmother engage in socializing me to be a productive and valued member of society. Was she in fact preparing me for dealing with experiences involving race and racism in a more indirect way than some of the grandmothers in my study had to do with their grandchildren? These things remained as a constant issue as I began to explore the questions concerning racial socialization with these wonderful women in my study.

One of these issues was how do I as a Black woman feel my own experiences affected my interpretation of my findings. This is always a concern for qualitative researchers. In my case I believe it enhanced the experience. As I interviewed the women their answers often “*hit home*” as things I had experienced myself. The grandmothers seemed comfortable with me and with this assumption I had made and often supported my thinking by simply saying, “well, you know what I mean.” Therefore, I believe my findings were not so much influenced by my experiences rather they were enhanced by the connection that I felt between the grandmothers and my own experiences. Their comments and observations served to validate my experiences—a rather unsettling issue since I did not undertake this project to serve as a healing device for me, but as is the case in qualitative research, the results always inform the researcher.

Another issue required me to own the pervasiveness of discrimination in my own life. This project called for me to re-hash some of the experiences of racism I have encountered. I note in this writing my first experience with discrimination as a child, was dealing with discrimination as a fact of life for people of color in America—specifically

for a little loud mouth Black girl who wanted and desired answers as to why I could not do things others freely had the opportunity to do. The life lessons I was taught by my grandmother and mother helped prepare me for it, thus reducing the sting of racism and allowing me to reach my life goals.

The theme spirituality arose as an issue. I drew conclusions about Stacey and her lack of spirituality based mostly on my strong sense of how spirituality served me. Perhaps I was not being open enough to realize that some Blacks may have experienced negative consequences as a result of some of their earlier spiritual encounters and that in turn accounted for the so called lack of spirituality that Stacey displayed. The other participants had a connection to a 'higher power' and were less hostile about their experiences with racism and discrimination. I believe that if they had had bad experiences with their spiritual connections they might have displayed some of the hostility that I sensed in Stacey. In addition, the role religion or spirituality plays in the Black community, as a place of solace and refuge, nevertheless supports my analysis.

This project has allowed me to grow and develop a deeper understanding of the importance and significance grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren. It has shown me that no matter what the social, economic, or education backgrounds, grandparents have a unique awareness that they must continue to share with their grandchildren, especially when it comes to helping them to navigate the difficulties of growing up in a complex, fluid, dynamic, and ever-changing society.

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## **Appendix A - Pre-screen Questionnaire**

1. Do you have at least one biracial grandchild of African/Black and European/White descent?
2. Do you have contact with the grandchild referred to in question number one?
3. What year were you born?
4. How would you describe yourself in terms of race?
5. Are you the paternal (father's mother) or the maternal (mother's mother) grandmother?
6. Are you willing to participate in a 45-60 minute interview?

## **Appendix B - Interview Question List**

### **Basic Demographic Information**

Hello and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. First, I am going to ask you a few questions that will give me some basic background information about you. I am going to ask you questions that may seem personal and I will understand if you decline to answer them. Your answers will not be examined for any other purpose than exploring the potential relationship it may have on your involvement with your biracial grandchild or grandchildren. You may also stop the interview at any time.

1. How far did you go in school?
2. What is your social economic status?
3. What is your marital status?
4. Do you work outside the home?

### **Environment**

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Tell me about who lived in your neighborhood?
3. As a child how diverse was your social circle, were your friends' different races?
4. How diverse was your school?
5. How diverse is your neighborhood?
6. How diverse is your social circle?
7. How diverse is your grandchild or grandchildren's school?

### **Religion**

1. How often do you attend church or religious services?
2. What denomination are you (e.g. Baptist, Pentecostal, Catholic, Muslim)?
3. How diverse are the religious services?
4. How has the church helped you with situations in your life?

Now I am going to ask you questions about your relationship with your biracial grandchild or grandchildren. The questions are not intended to be judgmental, but an attempt to help me measure the differences between your relationship with your grandchild or grandchildren and the relationship of other grandmothers and their grandchild or grandchildren. I want to remind you that you are the expert on the information you are providing and I am here to learn. So I may need to ask for clarification occasionally. Additionally, if you are unclear of what I am asking you, please ask me to explain it better.

### **Involvement**

1. Tell me about your relationship with the parents of the identified grandchild or grandchildren?
2. Are the parents of your grandchild or grandchildren still in a relationship together?
3. How often do you get to see or have contact with your biracial grandchild or grandchildren?
4. What type of activities do you do with your biracial grandchild or grandchildren?

### **Race Attitudes**

1. Have you ever been the victim of discrimination? Tell me what it was like for you when you first experienced discrimination?
2. How did you feel about your child or children's decision to enter into an interracial relationship?
3. How did you feel about your child or children's decision to have a biracial child?
4. What does biracial mean to you?
5. Do you experience race the same way when you see your grandchild or grandchildren as when you see yourself?
6. How would you say the race of your grandchild or grandchildren affects your relationship with the rest of your family or friends?

## **Racial Socialization**

1. Growing up what do you remember your grandmother telling you about race and race relations?
2. Growing up what do you remember your mother and father telling you about race and race relations?
3. When you became a parent what did you tell your child or children about race and race relations?
4. How old was your child or children when you began discussing issues related to race and race relations?
5. Was there an event or cause that sparked the conversation? Please explain.
6. What approach are the parents taking in regards to racially socializing your biracial grandchild or grandchildren?
7. What type of racial messages do you share with your biracial grandchildren?
8. If you have mono-racial grandchildren do you give them the same messages?
9. Do you purposefully expose your grandchild or grandchildren to either Black or White culture?
10. How do you prepare your biracial grandchild or grandchildren for how they will be viewed by society?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?