

THESIS

WHITE MOTHERS OF BLACK BIRACIAL CHILDREN: MIXED RACE AS THE NEW MULATTO

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### WHITE MOTHERS OF BLACK BIRACIAL CHILDREN: MIXED RACE AS THE NEW MULATTO

This research explores how White women perceive their roles as parents to “mixed” race or biracial Black children. This qualitative project analyzes data from in person interviews, photographs and comments posted on Internet blogs, Facebook fan pages of mixed race children. Core elements of grounded theory are used as methodology to explore how White women understand themselves in relation to the role they play in pursuing their desire to create a mixed race or biracial child. Emerging themes from this research include: Objectification of Mixed Race Children, “We are going to get designer babies!” Displacing Black Women, and “I have mixed kids, so I can’t be racist.”

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## DEDICATION

*For my many parents, who contributed to my development and unique appreciation for all people: Brooke Bell, Morris Bell, L.G. Simmons, Vivian Simmons, Rachel Turk and Dexter Turk. Lastly, for my sister and brothers: Amanda Inskeep, Ryan Turk and Robby Turk.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream White culture (Hooks, 1992, p 21)*

In the United States today one could argue our country is obsessed with mixed race people and their identities (Elam, 2011, p. xiii). The federal government only recently acknowledged mixed race people as having unique and multi-racial identities through the census data collection, which began in the year 2000 (Funderberg, 2013). When the U.S. Census Bureau first allowed contributors to the census to check off more than one race, just fewer than seven million people claimed their multiracial identity (U.S. Diversity Census, 2010). Ten years later, the number of people checking more than one race increased by thirty-two percent (Funderberg, 2013). Today, it's the norm and not the exception in the census and elsewhere to find oneself in multiple venues where identity discussions are commonplace particularly as it relates to race.

### **Background**

During my first year in the MA program in Ethnic Studies I began noticing, reading, and following social media sites to explore contemporary discourse on mixed race issues. In 2013 "The Changing Face of America" was published in National Geographic. The cover of this issue displays an attractive young woman; she has "olive" skin, green eyes, full pink lips, a slim nose and curly blonde hair. Flipping to the inside pages of the magazine the article features ten different professionally taken portraits of young Afro, Asian, Indigenous and Latino/a people who are described as "well blended." These portraits show Afro



Americans that have straight or wavy platinum hair, light skin, and green eyes. As you read on, there are two pictures displayed side by side. One picture represents the past; a Black boy, with Black Afro hair, dark skin, brown eyes, posed with a serious, almost angry face. Juxtaposed next to him is a picture of a boy approximately the same age, identified by the article as having Black ancestry. This boy represents the future; he is the one with platinum blonde curly hair, blue eyes, full pink lips, and “olive skin.” Underneath the photos is the quote “We’ve become a country where race is no longer so Black or White”

(Funderberg, 2013, p. 81). In the first sentence of the article the author offers to its readers,

What is it about the faces on these pages that we find so intriguing? Is it simply that their features disrupt our expectations, that we’re not used to seeing those eyes with that hair, that nose above those lips? (p. 80).

National Geographic’s article, “The Changing Face of America” positions the two boys, one representative of a country with a troubled historical past and the other suggesting an integrated post racial future. The picture of the darker child represents a time where race in the United States meant Jim Crow segregation, slavery and lynching for Black men that pursued White women. The picture of the other boy with the blonde hair and lighter skin represents the future; a post racial society where people live together in harmony, where the current President is Black, and race is no longer an issue for discussion and where light skinned Afro boys are proof of a truly racially blended and integrated society.

### **Statement of Need and Significance**

National Geographic and other contemporary discourses that display or discuss mixed race identity glorify the perceived socio-political changes that accompany having mixed race children in mixed race relationships. This contemporary discourse simplifies and conflates mixed race people, families, and their identities into a mere fad contributing

to an idealized integration in the United States' so-called "post racial society." This glorification of racial blending positions mixed race people as trendy and desirable, a non-surgical way to embody beauty, the next "have to have" fashion accessory. This trend of using children of color as mere fashion accessory can be seen in the ways that popular culture icons display their third world adopted children by parading them around as though they are key elements to their designer outfit. White women such as Angelina Jolie, Madonna, Sandra Bullock, and Charlize Theron among others display their children publically while simultaneously perpetuating the idea that the power of their wealth, notoriety and White motherhood in particular will prove to provide a better life than what they could hope for back in the third world homelands of the children they adopt. Much like these popular and famous cultural icons, ordinary lower and middle class White women appear to perpetuate this very trend in ways that are more accessible to them. Since many children of color are perceived to have lack luster families, White women employing White motherhood as legitimacy for acquiring and proclaiming the ability to raise children of color better than other women who mother. This mixed race trend can be observed on Facebook posts, blogs, classroom conversations, mixed race specific vocabulary that is representative of a current phenomenon of White women choosing their intimate partners in order to achieve what one blog site labels as the "perfect mixed child."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the discussions related to this phenomenon occur in every day conversations between White women when discussing family and relationship goals on social media sites. Since many of these women seek out Black men as a means to provide

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<sup>1</sup> In this research biracial, multiracial, and mixed race assumes some kind of Black ancestry since the common denominator for these "mixes" was having Black, African, and African American ancestry.

them with biracial Black children, this research will explore the racist rhetoric that accompanies these conversations and ideas. This research considers the history and theories behind this phenomenon to analyze and better understand those more problematic ideas that drive White women to pursue and desire mixed race children. In this grounded theory study White women share their perceptions about biracial or mixed race identity and mothering throughout Facebook fan pages, interviews, and mothering blogs. This study considers and explores the perceptions from White women who have biracial Black children or hope to have biracial Black children in the future.

### **Black Feminist Framework**

In this study, I examine White women's desires to have Black biracial children. I explore a recent phenomenon unfolding in popular culture where White women openly and publically articulate their goals of having mixed race children. I consider this phenomenon through an exploration of social media and other data that includes: Facebook fan pages, mothering blogs, photos posted on blog sites and semi-structured interviews with White women. The recent increase of people identifying as mixed race also accompanies an increased articulation of colorblind racism and the belief that we now live in a post racial society within the United States. White women are uniquely positioned to displace Black women and thus Black children, their communities and to lay claim over Black bodies reminiscent of historical narratives analogous to the mulatto slave.

#### **Overview of theoretical framework**

Because racism is a feminist issue, a Black feminist framework is important for the full conception of the phenomena that is under study regarding Black biracial children.

Barbara Smith (2000, p. 50) asserts,

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women—as well as White economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.

A Black feminist framework ensures the centering of women of color throughout the research as *true* feminism seeks to explore all and every aspects of women’s lives. Black feminism, as an emancipatory framework, seeks to prioritize community and self-determination within Black spaces—men and women included together in these goals. Patricia Hill Collins’ book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* names Black feminism as a response to White oppression. Through the interrogation of Whiteness and the power it yields she states that Black women thinkers have “laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society—creating a multifaceted, African American women’s intellectual tradition” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 3). Black feminist thought originates out of the ways in which Western knowledge and epistemologies have excluded the experiences and epistemologies of Black women and African American populations (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 5). White men have largely controlled structures of knowledge in the Western world and White women’s notions of feminism in the first and second wave largely excluded Black feminist thought and Black women’s experiences.

Black feminism was born out of goals to interrogate the ways in which Whiteness has continued to suggest the worthiness of Black womanhood. Black feminist thought was used as a means to reclaim Black women’s subjugated knowledge (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 13).

Hill Collins discusses subjugated knowledge of Black women that has often been diminished or discussed in ways that are harmful to them. Hill Collins claims that

subjugation of Black knowledge has been used by Whites to reduce their contributions to society, and lay claim to particular realms—such as mothering.

The shadow obscuring this complex Black women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign. Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests the subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 3).

The obscuring of Black women’s intellectual thoughts and traditions has uniquely affected Black communities, collectively. Hill Collins utilizes Bell Hooks’ analysis of domination as it pertains to Black women’s subjugated knowledge. Together, they assert as Black women’s knowledge becomes subjugated, they have become only objects, and as their objectification becomes severe, the “Other” simply disappears (Hill Collins, 2000, p 78; Hooks, 1989, p. 42). Black women become victims of obscuring and this allows for Black women to be swept to the side. This study considers specifically the erasure of Black women in their homes, and in their roles as mothers by White women.

### **Intersectionality**

Coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality is the recognition that multiple oppressions are not each suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Intersectionality is arguably the most significant contribution to feminism in the last thirty years. This is a theory born out of understanding and articulating interlocking and multilayered structures of oppression authored by Black women and other women of color. Hill Collins described this dynamic as the “matrix of domination” in her groundbreaking work, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000, p. 257), a critical text to understanding the phenomena under study since it intimately involves Black motherhood, family, sexual politics, gender and race. Hill Collins states “As long as Black women’s

subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 22). Intersectionality helps locate the unique social position that Black women and other women of color experience (Crenshaw, 1991, p 1244). It explores the ways in which Black womanhood is directly influenced by racial identity. Since intersectionality is “considered a theory, a paradigm, a framework, a method, a perspective, or a lens, depending on the content and/or scholar who is using it” it provides a unique way to consider the analysis in this study for Black women (Mehrotra, 2010, p. 420). And intersectionality as theory is attributed to Black feminists and queer women of color who consider how power and oppression impacts individuals, structures and the socio-political realms (Anderson, 2005).

### **Standpoint theory**

The development of Black feminist thought reflects the distinctive experiences articulated in standpoint theory (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 29) and inclusive of motherhood, political activism, work, family, and sexual politics. Standpoint refers to group knowledge, reoccurring patterns of differential treatment, locating Black women’s group knowledge or standpoint (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 29). Although not all Black women experience oppression equally or in the same ways, standpoint theory engages with the many ways that Black women experience oppression collectively, through similar or shared experiences. Standpoint theory centers Black women’s experiences in research, making their presence or lack thereof, key to the discussion and implications in this study. Standpoint theory is used to understand the ways in which Black women are negatively, uniquely and deliberately affected. This is used not to decenter White women, or other marginalized

groups necessarily, but rather to “pivot the center” to Black women (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 289).

### **Self-Location**

I begin by locating myself within the research context where I explore my standpoint and the ways in which my location within this project as born out my desire to understand the ways I have been uniquely racialized, sexualized, and commoditized because of my particular biracial appearance. What follows is a narrative that chronicles my experiences with White women and men and their comments to me throughout my lifetime.

#### **“What are you?”**

*To this day, my mother still talks about the perfect “ringlet” curls I had when I was little. She remembers placing my hair into pig-tails, wetting her finger, and twirling it around the strands. “That’s all it took!” she brags. She often tells the story of us running into my classmate at the grocery store with her mother. My classmate proclaiming, “Mom! This is what I want, this is the hair I was telling you about.” My mother answers to her “That’s natural, it does it on its own.” I watched my classmate as she walked away cursing her pin-straight platinum hair.*

*Some years later, I recall being at school. My teacher came behind me, tugging on my pig-tails, like she did almost everyday and asked, “Erin, I have to know. Are you biracial?” I was unsure what she meant. I went home from school that day and asked my mother, “Mom, am I biracial? My teacher asked me if I am.” She became furious. Never explaining to me what any of it meant or why she was so angry, she called the school and demanded that it was no one’s business.*

*By the time I was in middle school, I was often referred to as “exotic looking.” Everyone called me that. I remember telling my mom one day, “I hate the way people stare at me.” She would respond, “I know, but take it as a compliment, you’re exotic looking, and people like it.” She and others would often point out my green eyes, “olive” skin, and near Black hair as unique attributes that many found desirable. It was an excuse for people to stare and sometimes even touch me.*

*During my sophomore year in high school, I recall standing outside my locker on the first day of school. As I pulled out my science books for class, a group of five girls I had not seen since before summer made a ring around me. They complimented my outfit, and then there was that word again, exotic. One girl, who was White, told me, “I hope that I have kids that look like you one day. You are so exotic looking, I think it would be fun.” This was the first time I recall White women discussing their plans to have “mixed babies.”*

*During my junior year in college working towards my bachelors degree in Africana Studies, I waited tables at Red Robin Gourmet Burgers and Brews restaurant. One day, I was standing near the host stand helping greet guests that came through the door. All of a sudden, I felt four rough fingertips brush my pony-tail off of my bare back. I didn’t recognize the touch as someone I knew, I turned around and a man that I didn’t know said to me, “Don’t worry, I’m not hitting on you. I just wanted to look at your skin.” I froze. He said, “Thanks.” And walked out of the restaurant. I remember thinking that it didn’t feel like a compliment, but rather an invasion of my space and of my body.*

*For my twenty-first birthday, my mom and I went out to dinner to the upscale Capital Grille restaurant in downtown Denver. It was special moment because it was just the two of us. As we finished up our steak meal, an older White couple sat down next to us. The couple*



*started a conversation with my mother about me even though I sat inches away from them. They said to my mother, "Is this your daughter? She is beautiful. What is she?" My mother gladly answered, "We think she may have some Indian in her, but she looks just like her father, she has his coloring." After, I asked my mom, "Did that bother you? The first thing they say to you about me is 'what is she?' it's disgusting!" Again, my mother answered, "I guess I just take it as a compliment."*

*During my first semester of my second year in graduate school I was attending my required outside departmental class. This class consisted of six White women and one Asian woman who had been adopted by White parents. One day in class, I was discussing my thesis research topic; it soon became the topic of conversation for half an hour. Every woman in the class, professor included, started discussing their love and admiration for mixed race babies. One student said, "Oh my God! My goal in life is to have a Blasian baby! I've never even dated a Black man before, but somehow I will have one!" My professor, then laughed and said, "Yes, it's true, my daughter feels the same way. She always talks about how badly she wants a mixed baby. They are the cutest. She'll have to find a Black man." As though finding a Black man had little to do with engaging in a meaningful relationship and more analogous to shopping for a hard to locate spice necessary for an exotic recipe.*

*More recently as I conducted research on White women's perspectives on their mixed race children, I sat across from a participant of an interview. As I asked her several questions, as her biracial Black baby bounces on my lap. I ask, "How will you mother a child of color differently from a White child, if at all?" she says, "I don't think I will have to worry about the stereotypical Black kids are bad thing . . . I mean if he doesn't get any darker and has perfect skin like you, and is your color, I don't think I'll have to mother him differently than say if I had*

*a White child.” At this moment, I realized that I was no longer in control of my own study, but rather I was put on display with the participant’s own son, as our skin color was being dissected.*

*These stories capture how my biracial identity is mapped on to notions of beauty and race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Exotic looking girls and women are objectified in ways that others feel they can say and do things that transgresses basic boundaries. What may seem like innocuous compliments at first has become a lifetime pattern of being touched, insulted, prodded, followed, stalked, approached by strangers, propositioned and harassed on a regular basis. Somehow my mother, a White woman felt proud of how I looked and warmed up to the attention it brought but for me it has shaped my life in ways that have left me fearful for my safety on a daily basis. I also acknowledge I am hyperaware of biraciality and this positions me in the research as having or making particular assumptions which I must consider in a self-reflexive manner.*

As I reflect on my own biracial status, identity and body through the many violations that accompany being labeled “exotic”, I have developed a level of hyper vigilance about any discussions regarding multiracial people or thoughts pertaining to them that occur around me. One day as I was surfing the Internet I accidentally found a site that advertised itself as a fan page for mixed kids. I then searched for more sites like the fan page and I quickly stumbled upon and found sites, photograph posts and blogs discussing this contemporary phenomenon. Through exploring Internet sources it became apparent there are public opinions specifically about biracial Black individuals and the desire to have them. It is important to note these discussions read and appeared consistent when referring to Black biracial female children. As I continued to find Facebook fan pages for

children of color, it became evident that these were fan pages specifically for biracial children who shared a common denominator—that they each had African ancestry.

At a time when girls and women are inundated with media presentations and expectations of beauty culture, race and ethnicity are trending as multiracial identity is appropriated as a method of transformation to obtain a particular and contemporary beauty ideal. My research journey throughout this project includes discussions surrounding the complexities of multiracial identity, and the appropriation and watering-down or the whitening of Blackness that simultaneously displaces Black women. I explore the ways in which White women may simplify discussions around race and ethnicity, reinforcing ideas of superior white womanhood and beauty, positioning their children in potentially harmful ways as they use their multiracial and biracial Black children as a means of social and cultural mobility.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This research project will examine the discourse of “designer babies” focusing specifically on how these mixed raced representations work to race and gender contemporary discussions around racial identity as it relates to ideals of beauty. I argue that the goals White women proclaim to produce the “perfect mixed child” are influenced by popular discourse and media presentations for accomplishing beauty attaining status, being included in the multiracial future of America and taking up post racial ideology and a desire to eradicate racism. White women who participate in this discourse may be inadvertently engaging in more harm than good, failing to engage critically about the intersections between race, gender, class and sexuality while emphasizing their child’s physical characteristics that may further harm children of mixed race identities. To

accomplish this, I will first trace the historical emergence of the “designer baby” narratives noting its racial and gendered implications through the use of social media sites. Second I will examine the ways in which Black bodies are sexualized and displayed in ways reminiscent of past historical framings that further harm marginalize communities. Finally, I draw upon a range of data sources such as Facebook fan pages, mothering blogs, and interviews to explore the many ways White women engaging with the discourse of “designer babies.” The overall goal of this research is to contribute to the field of ethnic, race, multicultural, and feminist studies in ways that further informs contemporary race relations in the United States.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves as a literature review that outlines current theories regarding multiculturalism, racial identity development among biracial children, commodification and consumption of “the other,” and mothering. Through the lens of multiculturalism, this research explores how White mothers are working towards having mixed race children, and what it means for them. Racial identity development literature is also informative for this study as it allows for the reader to take in consideration how mixed race children conceptualize their racial situation in the United States. Racial identity development literature provides an understanding of how children understand their race while being raised in families that do not racially identify in the same ways they do. It also sets up an understanding of the many ways parents, guardians, and family influences the development of one’s own racial understanding of themselves. Commodification and consumption literature, considers how human beings are viewed as products and works to understand how mixed race people are sometimes situated in harmful ways due to their perceived exoticism. Understanding how mixed race people are commoditized and then consumed by popular culture shows the ways in which mixed race people are being exploited and how others “cash in on” them. Mothering literature centers women as one of the most important influences in a child’s life. The literature used for this study is also intended to center women of color in mothering feminist theory. Through centering women of color in conversations of mothering, the importance of community, racial identity development, and family is explored. Analyzing these subjects sets up the

background information necessary for understanding how White mothers are discussing their “mixed race” children in contemporary ways.

### **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism, first coined in Canada, is a concept that has emerged to challenge the polarity of racial affiliation in North America (Citrin, Sears, Muste, Wong, 2001, p. 247). In the article “Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion” authors Jack Citrin, David Sears, Christopher Muste, and Cara Wong, discuss the various aspects of multiculturalism in the United States. These aspects include the recognition and significance of ethnic representation, language, immigration, political identity, race, tradition, and other aspects of culture. They demonstrate how arguments about multiculturalism become necessary in the protection of the recognition of multiethnic and multiracial people so that they can ensure cultural preservation, and political protection (Citrin, Sears, Muste, Wong, 2001, p. 252). Others, they note, feel that multiculturalism successfully combats and “rejects the idea of the melting pot as the proper path towards national racial integration” (2001, p.252). Since multiculturalism encourages the recognition of cultures, rather than allows for the “melting pot” approach, many feel that it ensures the value of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity.

Multiculturalism is often understood as the celebration of multiethnic, multiracial, and multicultural people and thus, commonly used to describe the younger, hip and racially progressive generations in the United States as the “ambassadors to the new world order” (Elam, 2001, p. xiii). Nakashima describes multiculturalism in the United States as a progressive notion that suggests children of multiple ethnic identities are currently viewed as the saviors of negative race relations in the U.S. More recently, United States society has

toyed with the idea of people of mixed race people as the “children of the future” (Elam, 2001, p. xiii).

In the past two decades, Multiculturalism has made the valuing of a mixed race person’s ‘microdiversity’<sup>2</sup> all the more obvious” (Nakashima, 1996, p. 90). Although some thinking about multiculturalism suggests that it has the potential to rid the United States of many deeply embedded racial issues, it requires their denying of the monocultural identities of their grandparents, parents and extended family in favor of mixed race identities. Multiculturalism contains themes of futuristic goals to generate mixed race people to alleviate the polarization of race in the United States. In the article, “Voices From the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality” Cynthia Nakashima states,

There is concern with what is called ‘elevation of hybridity’; in the context of race and ethnicity, that multiculturals as a group are currently being culturally constructed and that they will not only join the other “groups with their own set of boundaries and limitations, but that they might become the new ideal against which others will be degraded and oppressed (1996, p. 93).

Racial hybridity has often been discussed in the case of biracial individuals who are the product of both a white and Black parent. These children have often, historically, been referred to as Mulatto. Today, not all racially mixed people view this a positive designation, as it’s original meaning has negative connotations as many people understand the word to derive from the Spanish word for mule. In other terms, a Mulatto references a sterile animal that is the hybrid of a horse and donkey (Root, 1992, p. x-xi).

Provine (2004) discusses the fear behind “race mixing” driven by the study of eugenics. He states that it was common for people to understand racial hierarchies as a

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<sup>2</sup> Microdiversity as described by Nakashima refers to low level or low scale diversity meaning that what is considered diverse is as simple as race mixing and doesn’t necessarily incorporate the diversity of religion, culture, language, heritage, etc.

result of evolution. Topics such as IQ, intelligence, obedience, problem solving, strength, brute, sympathy, independence were all understood within a framework of racial hierarchy. U.S. race relations allowed for racial hierarchies to exist through institutionalized slavery and through racial inequality that reinforced ideas and institutions about race. The eugenicist Charles Benedict Davenport, maintains, "The moral for human races was clear. Each race had, through a long process of natural selection, developed genetic traits that ere harmoniously adjusted both with each other and the environment" (Ibid, 2004, p. 102). Because Davenport believed that each race had a specific place in the world and went through a very specific and carefully thought out evolution process, the mixing of races was discouraged. According to many Eugenicists, mixing races throws off the racial environmental balance by creating "hybrid" humans that would ultimately fail at life.

Continuing with the theme of fearing "race mixing" between Whites and Blacks, Provine points to two other Eugenicists, Paul Popenoe and Roswell H. Johnson who felt that Blacks had no redeeming qualities and were inferior to the White race. To breed with Blacks meant the elimination of exceptionalism of the White race (Provine, 2004, p. 103). The author states,

Popenoe and Johnson argued that Negroes were inferior to whites. Their evidence was that Negroes had made no original contributions to world civilizations; they had never risen much above barbarianism in Africa; they did no better when transplanted to Haiti; and they failed to achieve white standards in America (Provine, 2004, p. 103).

Provine discusses "race mixing" through the lens of eugenicists who originally thought it would make the White race as inferior as Blacks. Provine concludes that during the 1950s ideas about "race mixing" significantly shifted in England. Geneticist began publishing



works that demonstrated no difference in biology between races, which questioned the reasoning prohibiting racial mixing. Although the earlier ideas of hybridity with regard to races were considered racist, negative and to be feared, there has been a current shift in the perceptions of mixed race people. As multiculturalism supports, celebrates, and encourages these shifts, racial hybridity has become seemingly special and unique to someone's racial identity. Although multiculturalism works to alleviate the polarity of one's racial makeup, it ignores outside factors such as how a person will be perceived by societal norms.

Multiculturalism is also often criticized for generically recognizing the specific racial "mixes" identified in a person. For example, when discussing a person who identifies as biracial with having a White parent and Black parent, multiculturalism would ignore the fact that the Black parent is most likely already racially "mixed" due to the institutions and legacies of slavery. Michele Elam discusses generic identities in her book, *The Souls of Mixed Folk*. Elam (2011) states,

Mixed race people bear oppression because, historically, their bodies have borne physical testimony to sexual violation as an exercise of racial privilege by a dominant culture... They represent the reference point, the very nexus of cultural collisions, conflicts, and conjoinings; those of mixed race heritage can be the issue of loving relationships, surely, but also, overwhelmingly from a historical perspective, they are the result of hypergamic relations, in which one party, usually the woman, occupies a significantly lower social and racial status (Elam, 2011, p. 54).

Although multiculturalism often ignores historical significances regarding race, it has been praised for challenging the American dichotomous system of racial classification (Daniel, 1992, p. 334). Multiculturalism allows for individuals to pick their identity based on their multiracial background. In his article, "Beyond Black and White: The New Multiracial Consciousness" Daniel suggests that before the Multiculturalism movement, many people

who have various racial background were forced to identify with either being White or Black (1992, p. 334). As these categories were the only available legally, there was little room for equality and encouraged the denial of any White a person might have. With the denial of White ancestry for a person of color came the denial of equal opportunities such as access to jobs, housing, healthcare, and basic civil rights (1992, p. 334).

### **Identity Development of Biracial Children**

The identity development of biracial children is important to explore since this research seeks to understand the ways in which White mothers discuss, and understand their biracial Black children. By utilizing James H. Jacobs's article, "Identity Development in Biracial Children" it makes clear why it is important to understand how socialization, racial knowledge, and racial self-esteem are related to the development of biracial "White-Black" children.

This article discusses the roles that parents of biracial children play in the development of their identities. Jacobs claims parents need to provide tools for their children, in the home, so that they can develop high self-esteem with regard to their racial identity as the reality of society is to treat people based on how they categorize them outside of the home. For example, a child who has one Black parent and one White parent could self-identify as biracial, but as the one-drop rule suggests, in society's eyes the child will always be Black. Jacobs states,

A biracial child, being neither White nor Black but both, is different from either parent and must assimilate a racial and ethnic label that is more complex and less readily available outside of his or her family than the labels of Black, White, Asian, Chicano, and so on (Jacobs, 1992, p. 304).

As the importance of racial labels continue to be important for the general United States' population, Jacobs suggests that parents of biracial children often are burdened with the

fact they will have to give their child a racial identity before their child is old enough to identify themselves. Parents often have to label their children's racial identity as a response to racial questions or problems that their children experience (Jacobs, 1992, p. 204).

In a study conducted on ten children ranging three to eight years old, (1992) Jacobs identifies White-Black biracial children who had one Black parent and one White parent. As a result of this study, Jacobs found that White-Black biracial children go through three stages of racial identity development. These stages are identified as Pre-Color Constancy: Play and Experimentation With Color, Post-Color Constancy: Biracial Label and Racial Ambivalence, and Biracial Identity. Within each of these stages biracial children expressed their awareness about their racial identity through their skin color, and their parents' skin color by playing with a series of dolls that represented different races. However, there were some children that did not explore the dolls at all, or they did not play with dolls that represented people in their family, which suggests "low self-esteem and/or painful personal experiences of racial prejudice" (Jacobs, 1992, p. 200).

The second stage of identity development for White-Black biracial children is where the study showed clear actions of children disassociating themselves from their Blackness through the rejection of ignoring dolls with darker skin colors. The author states,

White preference and rejection of Blackness is the most common first phase of stage two. Subsequential ambivalence, first toward Blacks and later towards Whites is common (Jacobs, 1992, p. 201).

In this stage, the children who participated in the study now understand that their skin color is unchanging, and they also start to understand the acknowledgement of other peoples' skin color as unchanging. Children in this stage have often made it a point to

identify themselves to the researcher as not Black or White, and not a mixture of the two, but rather they should be viewed and identified as brown. The author suggests that this is due to a “racial intelligence” that the child has mastered while trying to understand their perceptions of their family members, and how society identifies them. Jacobs states,

Perceptual distortion is also developed by the child’s active attempts to understand racial class membership. The pigmentation notion of physical conservation is that intelligence overcomes perception...The child distorts self and or family member’s color so that it more nearly matches the typical color of the racial class to which he or she is socially assigned (Jacobs, 1992, p. 202).

Stage three Jacobs describes the children now being able to identify skin color as being separate from racial group membership. The children express this by understanding that they are not biracial because one of their parents has White skin and their other parent has Black skin, but rather that because of their parents’ pigmentation they socially and structurally belong to different racial groups. In this stage the child is aware of the different social classes that each of their parents belong to (Jacobs, 1992, p. 203).

This study shows the significant roles that parents play on their children’s racial identity development. Whether parents are actively reinforcing an identity label to the child, or if they are just present in the child’s life, children understand their racial identity based off of their parents. Throughout this study, Jacobs proves that parents interactions with their children’s racial identity development is crucial for a healthy understanding of self.

McRoy and Iijima Hall provide an analysis of how children develop their racial identities while living with parents who do not racially identify the same way. While the focus is on the racial identity of children who have been adopted transracially, the issues

that children face while developing their racial identities are similar to how biracial children experience their lack of identification with families or origin.

The authors suggest that identity development in biracial Black children and Black children adopted into White families have a harder time understanding and situating themselves in racial development. Most of the controversy surrounding transracial adoption involves fear that children who are adopted into White families will struggle with developing their racial/ethnic identity. One of the most important quotes supporting the fear that white families can only partially support children of color through their lives derives from their ability to establish ethnic and racial identities. McRoy and Hall state,

It is clear that a White family can supply the food, shelter, stability, and love that will lead to building trust in a child of color. However, whether a White family can supply a child with the tools for being an ethnic minority in the United States and for strong ethnic identity still remains in question (McRoy and Hall, 1996, p 71).

In this passage the authors discuss the impact White families and White parenting may have on children of color. This does not mean that White families are incapable of raising children of color in ways that supports healthy racial development, but seems to indicate that White families may not have the racial and cultural awareness it takes to give children of color the tools they may need to maneuver around the racialized society that is the United States. The importance for Black and biracial Black children to learn “self-esteem, racial/ethnic awareness and pride, and survival/coping skills from their parents so they may function in the majority and minority cultures” seems an important aspect of healthy racial identity development (McRoy and Hall, 1996, p. 71).

## **Commoditizing and Consuming the “Other”**

Hooks has been an outspoken proponent of the way contemporary popular culture commoditizes racial and ethnic identity. She states, “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (Hooks, 1992, p. 21). This “Other” embodies characteristics outside what is considered the “good” within society and societal norms. For example, the Other in the case of polarized racial identities in the United States is the person of color who embodies what is considered the Other in relationship to a White norm. Hooks asserts the Other’s commodification occurs throughout many different facets in the United States.

Commodity culture in the United States exploits conventional thinking about race, gender, and sexual desire by “working” both the idea that racial different marks one as Other and the assumption that sexual agency expressed within the context of racialized sexual encounter is a conversion experience that alters one’s place and participation in contemporary cultural politics (Hooks, 1992, p. 22).

Here, Hooks connects race, sexuality and commodification with the way the United States consumes people of color sexually and assuming they are readily available. The consumption of the Other is reinforced through the media, and entertainment outlets that covertly encourage the sexualization of the Other. One example Hooks uses to illustrate this dynamic is a walk through the Yale University campus, where she was teaching at the time. She came upon a group of men and overheard them, discussing their plans to “fuck as many girls from other racial/ethnic groups as they could catch before graduation” (Hooks, 1992, p. 23). During this recollection, Hooks states,

They ran it down. Black girls were high on the list, Native American girls hard to find, Asian girls (all lumped into the same category), deemed easier to entice, were considered ‘prime targets...’ I found that it was commonly accepted that one shopped for sexual partners in the same way one shopped for courses at Yale, and that race and ethnicity was a serious category on which selections were based (Hooks, 1992, p. 23).

This passage demonstrates the connection between sexuality and race in relation to the Other, and how the Other is commoditized by Whites. The passage suggests there is a clear hierarchy of desired women of color who are considered sexually available to White society.

Commoditizing biracial people is a current theme in media, marketing and advertising, and entertainment. Multiracial people are often seen as exotic, beautiful, different, and mysterious (Elam, 2011, p. 172). Elam (2011), presents how commoditizing and exoticizing multiracial works on the bodies of women of color. She establishes a critique of the ways that the entertainment business capitalizes on the commodification of mixed race people and is given various roles that showcase the versatility of their appearance (Elam, 2011, p. 171-172).

Actors portray a race different than their own, which in turn suggests that race and ethnic identity is achievable by anyone who can convince an audience they look the part. There is expendability to racial and ethnic identities that are seemingly fixed. This diminishes the complexity of ethnic identity belonging to people actors impersonates. In this case, mixed race people are being valued for their exotic features and ability to pass for any kind of person. They can be exploited in complicated ways where their bodies are used to invade cultures through their representation of the racial Other.

Gilman's (1985) work establishes how Europeans have historically sexualized Black bodies. He maintains "The role of the Black is the icon of sexuality and a source of fascination" by examining literature, exhibits as Zoos, and racist and Eurocentric misunderstandings of Ashanti culture (1985, p. 120). He analyzes the gaze upon African

Ashanti's bodies, through the eyes of the racist Western European. Gilman claims, the heinous European gaze upon different cultures and ethnicities has meant that:

The European Zoological garden of the late nineteenth century provided ethnological exhibitions, representations of exotic cultures, eating what were viewed as appropriate foods, living in appropriate housing, and undertaking appropriate tasks for primitives" (Gilman, 1995, p.110).

Non-European people were placed on display in "exhibits" specifically to be gazed upon by Europeans who would see them as dangerous in a different setting. By placing people in Zoology Gardens, or today known as Zoos, human beings were comparable to wild, exotic, dangerous animals.

### **Mothering**

One of the many ways women uniquely contribute to their communities is through motherhood. Research by feminists of color have uncovered how "racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context not only for racial ethnic women in the United States, but for all women" (Hill Collins, 1994, p. 45). Often, when discussing motherhood in feminist theories, the imagined mother and woman is a middle class, White, straight, homemaker mother. This imagined woman is not an accurate depiction of the many mothers that make up the United States today. As Hil Collins points out "for women of color, the subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial ethnic communities—one does not exist without the other" ( 1994, p. 47). Mothers present themselves in various ways. Often, women of color mother their biological children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, neighbors, and other members of their communities. These specific ways of mothering suggest that children who grow up in these communities have many different adults contributing to their development. Hill Collins maintains that mothering of non-biological



children within Black communities is a form of mothering called “other mothers.” “Other Mothers” include a wide range of people such as religious leaders, educators, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, neighbors, friends, and community leaders, people who are not necessarily biological mothers but who nurture and support children. Many “other mothers” exist due to ideas of a communal ethos, community development, and the necessity for additional parenting assistance in communities that are disenfranchised.

The theme of mothering collectively is specific to African communities (Glenn, 1994, p. 6), a “tradition that continues in many contemporary African American communities” (Glenn, 1994, p. 6). Hill Collins discusses the importance of understanding mothering by “centering women of color” in understanding their needs while mothering instead of the dominant culture of White women.” Here Collins emphasizes the importance of focusing on the experiences of women of color. Hill Collins states,

Placing the experiences of women of color in the center of feminist theorizing about motherhood demonstrates how emphasizing the issue of father as patriarch in a decontextualized nuclear family distorts the experiences of women in alternative family structures with quite different political economies (1994, p. 46).

Through this focus, Hill Collins reveals the “importance of working for the physical survival of children and community, and the significance of the self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity” (Glenn, 1994, p. 7). As women of color often collectively mother children in their communities, they provide particular tools to these children that help them understand their perceived place in society. Glenn and Hill Collins emphasize the importance of children of color being raised by women and communities of color. Motherhood, “motherwork<sup>3</sup>,” and mothering are essential to the survival to a healthy

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<sup>3</sup> “Motherwork,” as stated by Patricia Hill Collins is used to “soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and

community for many African Americans. As Glenn notes “Both African and African American cultures prescribe motherhood as women’ central and primary mission, and their only means of gaining status (but not power)” (1994, p. 10).

While exploring the needs of Black women and mothering, there has been consistent disconnection with the goals of White women and mothering. “In the United States, middle-class, White women have made great advances in achieving civil and political rights, including control of their own fertility, thus asserting their right not to be mothers except by choice” (Glenn, 1994, p. 11). As women of middle-and upper classes have struggled to earn rights to controlling their reproduction, many women of color have yet to earn their rights to have babies at all.

For Example, Black, Native American and Latina women have been disproportionately sterilized, often without their consent or with consent coerced by the threat of withheld medication, loss of jobs, or other dire consequences. The sterilization of women of color has resulted from racism generally, and has been a stated goal of some anti-immigrant, anti-minority movements. The eugenics movement of the early twentieth century argued of the dangers of uncontrolled “breeding” by the “unfit,” a code word for the racial and ethnic minority women (1994, p. 17).

Themes of controlling reproduction, fertility, and birth are something that women of color have faced in the United States since slavery. Forced sterilization, as well as displacing motherhood for women of color in other ways, has been a result of the colonization of people of color. Since family is the central influence on children and determines where they are socialized to know their place in society, minority families become the target for the colonizer (Glenn, 1994, p. 18).

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public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual and autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one’s group” (Hill Collins, 1994, p.7).

Ifekwunigwe, while discussing “other mothers,” Black cultural surrogate sisters, and African daughters, suggests that how a child is raised based upon their inclusion within their community determines the experience of happiness in their lives. Ifekwunigwe interviewed many women being raised in White communities while being Black and discussed one woman who participated in her study who identified as a Black and White biracial. This particular participant discusses her struggles while being raised by a White mother while appearing to the rest of her community as Black. Ifekwunigwe’s (2004, p. 188) participant of the study states,

So many things happened to me because of what I am, and they shape the way I am today. I had a very unhappy childhood because of it. I had suddenly felt my world had fallen a part. I was Black and I was brought up in a white society.

Further, the author goes onto discuss that these feelings are not unique to this individual. In fact, she describes the underlying side affects that come with biracialism when Africans and Europeans started reproducing in the New World. Ifekwunigwe (2004, p.188) states,

The transgenerational psychic damage of global and historical processes of bi-racialization is meted out equally to all society designated Black constituents of the African Diaspora as well as to those living on the African continent and results in skin bleaching, cosmetic surgery, and other remedies to alter Black African physical features so that they more approximate to a White European appearance.

There has been much documentation about how biracial children who are products of Black-White relationships have struggled with several aspects of discrimination from their parents, their families, and their communities that are not identity based. Many families that are made up of biracial children suffer from issues such as colorism<sup>4</sup> from their parents, siblings, and extended family members. Often times when mothers who do not

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<sup>4</sup> Colorism is also referred to as the “color complex” meaning a psychological fixation about color and features that leads Blacks to discriminate against each other. Also known as the privilege of paler skin (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p.188).

feel that their children embody White European features, children are subjected to “psychological injuries due to the hierarchy that privileges individuals with paler skin, straighter hair, and more White European features” (Ibid, 188).

Multiculturalism, identity development for Black children, commoditizing the other and mothering are areas covered throughout this literature review. These areas of scholarship are important in this study as they provide the needed context to understand how White women included in this study discuss race, multiracial identity, Blackness, and mothering. This study will expand on this literature as we discuss the ways these issues intersect with the discussions White women make about their children or their desired children.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study is based in qualitative research although grounded theory is considered more of a general research approach. Here I use an inductive approach to methodology. This allows for the development of theory originating from the use of iterative strategies (that includes the constant comparison method) by the researcher and the data itself. Grounded theory as methodology is used to understand and explore how White women are discussing Black biraciality. Grounded theory is also used as a researcher's tool to conceptualize and understand the development of themes emerging from the collected data. According to Charmaz,

Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and fourth between data and analysis uses comparative methods, and keeps the researcher interacting and involved with the data and emerging analysis (2014, p. 1).

Grounded theory allows for the researcher to engage with the data in a way that theories can emerge from the researcher's reflexive engagement with the findings rather than simply applying a basic qualitative theory to the data. Merriam maintains, "What differentiates grounded theory from other types of qualitative research is its focus on building theory" (2009, p. 30). With grounded theory methods, the researcher shapes and reshapes their data collection, refining data to increase their knowledge (Charmaz, 2014, p. 26).

It is possible to use different versions of the method of grounded theory that can be utilized for specific research purposes. A constructivist approach to grounded theory is described by Charmaz,

A contemporary version of grounded theory that adopts methodological strategies such as coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling of the original statement of the method but shifts its epistemological foundations and takes into account methodological developments in qualitative inquiry (2014, p. 342).

This method relies on a constructivist approach to research and “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 130). Charmaz describes constructivist grounded theory as having a less positivist approach than the approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Constructivist grounded theorists adopt the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach (Charmaz, 2014, p. 12). Methodologically using a constructivist grounded theory approach can fit within the framework discussed above since constructivist grounded theory is “congenial with other approaches such as feminist theory, narrative analysis, cultural studies, critical realism, and critical inquiry” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 184). This constructivist grounded theory study seeks to explore the phenomenon of White women wanting to have mixed race or biracial children with people of African descent. Constructivist grounded theory provides a framework that allows for an analytic power to theorize how meanings, actions, and social structures are constructed (Charmaz, 2014, p. 285). Data in grounded theory studies can derive from interviews, observations, and a wide variety of documentary materials. Constructivist grounded theorists often aim for abstract understanding of studied life and view their analyses as located in time, place, and the situation of the inquiry (2014, p. 342).

As this research seeks to understand and critique how and in what ways White women attempt to conceive biracial and multiracial Black children, a critical epistemology is used in order to understand who possesses power, how power is being used, and how this study is informed by relationships of power. Thus the purpose of this study is to

understand how White women perceive their roles and interests in being mothers of mixed race babies. Websites and blogs are new and the current discussions and desires to have mixed race babies appear to be a current day phenomenon that may inform current race relations in the U.S. The research questions for this area of inquiry are:

RQ1: How do White women understand or perceive their roles as mothers of mixed race or biracial children?

RQ2: How does the current phenomenon for White women to have Black biracial or multiracial children inform current race relations in the U.S.?

RQ3: How is biraciality being discussed and desired among White women who want to conceive Black biracial or multiracial children?

## **Methods**

Qualitative methods were used for this study as qualitative research provides a means to gather rich interviews and two different types of document data for in-depth analysis from study participants. Denzin maintains that qualitative research ensures thoughtful, reflective inquiry that may not otherwise be indoctrinated into social sciences (2009, p. 153). Further, Firestone states, "Qualitative methods express the assumptions of a phenomenological paradigm that there are multiple realities that are socially defined. While this is not a phenomenological study it complements the constructivist approach used here in understanding meaning and actions within the lived experience under study. Obtaining rich description from interviews is important since it persuades by showing that the researcher was immersed in the setting and providing the reader enough detail to 'make sense' of the situation" (1987, p. 16). Document data gathered in this study includes both photos from social media sites and data from conversations and posts on social media

sites. The photos obtained from social media sites were analyzed using visual grounded theory (VGT). Visual grounded theory is an application of grounded theory to analyze images. Visual grounded theory can help the researcher understand different aspects of the phenomena through different types of data. Charmaz (2014) describes visual grounded theory as

“Archival records and written narratives, video and photographic images, internet posts and graphics may give insights into perspectives, practices, and events not easily obtained through other qualitative methods” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 53).

Through implementing visual grounded theory, the researcher was able to obtain additional data that ordinarily would not be collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. Charmaz states, “video and photographic images, Internet posts and graphics may give the researcher insights into perspectives, practices, and events not easily obtained through other qualitative methods” (2014, p. 53). Further, Knoecki suggests, “Visual data open new possibilities to develop grounded theories. Developing theories from substantive visual processes could facilitate constructing formal theories of the visualization of identity, etc.” (2011, p. 152). Additionally, document data from social media conversations and subsequent comments by participants will also be analyzed using grounded theory methods. These three data categories (interviews, social media comments, and posted photos) provide triangulation for this study. One method of providing triangulation is the use of three or more methods of data collection (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). Merriam (2009, p. 216) states,

Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and crosschecking data collected through observations at different times or different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow up interviews with the same people.



Triangulation allows for the researcher to analyze and collect data from different sources to crosscheck data. Triangulation can also make sure that the researcher is collecting similar themes from each of their data sources.

## **Sample**

The primary websites data will be gathered and analyzed from includes: Facebook's "Mixed Race Babies," "I Want Mixed Babies," "Mixed Chicks," as well as Instagram's "Mixed Race Babies." Instagram and Facebook's, fan pages, and "mothering blogs" fit the inclusion criteria for the purposive sample in this study. The selection criteria for this unique sample includes:

- A significant representation of White mothers wanting mixed race children
- Indications of a biological Black/Afro/African American father of the mixed race child
- Willingness to post photos of their mixed race children
- Willingness to discuss the mixed race aspects of their children with others
- Specific articulation of the "desire" to have mixed race children

Unique sampling is used to obtain specific qualitative data. Unique sampling also puts emphasis on sampling adequacy versus sample size to ensure the research is being informed specifically by the inclusion criteria (Charmaz, 2014, p. 214), Mixed Race Babies is a Facebook fan page that currently has 304,600 followers. As well as the other sites, many pages have over one hundred thousand followers. Individual photos represented on these fan pages often have over three hundred "likes" and up to one hundred comments

from followers and fans. These followers have access to every photo, comment, and discussion surrounding pictures posted of biracial, multiracial and mixed race children. Gathering data from the sites discussed above provides a unique sample with sample data for data analysis of these types of postings where White women are posting pictures of their biracial children or dialoging about their desire to have children.

Pictures posted on Facebook fan pages mostly consisted of young girls ranging in age from newborn infants to sixteen years old, as suggested by the photos' captions. The Facebook fan page administrator posted the photos on the sites, after the parents of the mixed race children had submitted them. Each photo consisted of the "racial mix" as a caption of the photo, also quantifying the levels of each race present in the child. Photos of mixed race children posted on Facebook fan pages are prevalent in two of the four themes; objectification of mixed race Children and "Designer Babies."

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative methods were used for the collection and analysis of this data. Visual grounded theory (VGT) was used to gather and analyze pictures posted on blogs, Instagram and fan pages since this method provides a specific approach to images and text to formulate a theoretical analysis (Konecki, 2011). Konecki suggests that, "the visualization processes are social processes and should be analyzed as basic social processes" (2011, p. 147). The inclusion criteria for selecting pictures from social media included only biracial and multiracial Black children, identified by the photo's post and indications, they have a White mother and Black lineage on the father's side. There are over fifty photos that are currently posted of multiracial and biracial children that meet these criteria. All of these

photos are posted on Facebook and Instagram social media sites. Most of the photos identified have more than thirty comments posted on each of the pictures.

An extensive collection of comments posted on the fan pages, which included pictures of multiracial children were included in this study. The first part of data collection was to gather all of the original comments related to the Facebook fan pictures of biracial children. Comments on the fan pages were also used to authenticate the children as biracial. Since this study seeks to explore perceptions about biracial children and the motivation that prompts White women to desire biracial or multiracial children, their comments were also collected and coded.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with White women who identify themselves as wanting multiracial and biracial Black children and the data from those interviews are also used in this project. Semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to ask open ended questions, prompted for specificity, thus engaging the participant to expand on their own perceptions and thoughts. Merriam maintains “Less structured formats assume the individual respondents define the world in unique ways... this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic” (2009, p. 90).

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed from the recordings. All interviews were transcribed and entered into a Microsoft word program. After transcription from the recordings, the researcher conducted line-by-line coding from the interviews, then refined codes into themes. Using visual grounded theory the researcher analyzed the pictures. The researcher uses Charmaz’s two phase grounded theory coding

scheme to conduct data analysis of the website comments and the semi-structured interviews. The two phase grounded theory coding process starts with initial codes using line-by-line coding, which then refined into more focus codes. Initial codes help the researcher separate data into categories and to see processes. During the Line-by-line coding process, it is crucial for the researcher to implement memo-writing strategies to engage with the emerging themes from transcribed interviews and document data.

Charmaz (2014, p. 343) maintains,

Memo-writing prompts researchers to analyze their data and to develop their codes into categories early in the research process. Memo-writing helps the researcher increase the level of abstraction in their ideas.

Line-by-line coding frees the researcher from becoming so immersed in the comments that they are accepted without question (Charmaz, 2014, p. 127). Using gerunds during this phase of the coding process ensures that the researcher will introduce action verbs into the coding process.

Visual grounded theory (VGT) will be used to analyze pictures posted on the sites. Triangulation is possible in this study since data from website comments, pictures, and semi-structured interviews will all be analyzed. In addition, multiple researchers also assisted in the coding process of this study at times, which Merriam describes as another method of triangulation (2009).

After conducting a line-by-line analysis the researcher used the constant comparative method to establish initial codes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 126). Initial codes derived from line-by-line coding allowing the researcher to gather data from comments on pictures that were incomplete thoughts or sentences. "Line-by-line coding works particularly well with detailed data regarding fundamental empirical problems or

processes, whether these data consist of interviews, observations, documents, or ethnographies” (2014, p. 125). During the line by-line coding process, the researcher identified reoccurring concepts in the comments, which allowed for the development of more refined codes.

Then data was further refined and analyzed to create even more focused codes. Focus codes were organized into categories and then further refined into themes. Focus codes were used to make the researcher’s observations of the phenomenon develop into more conceptual, analytical material (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). Focus codes and themes derive from the most common initial codes through comparative methods throughout the research (2014, p. 140).

Constant comparative methods were used to compare data with data for each data set included in this study (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132). Comparative methods were used to ensure that the researcher was establishing connections between the photos, comments, and interviews to develop a grounded theory based on the themes and findings for this project.

In this study the researcher used theoretical sampling to explore a process of theorizing about the new mulatto. Theoretical sampling included revisiting additional blog sites and photo posts to further explore the initial conceptualization of theory. Theoretical sampling is foundational to grounded theory and is used to, “fill out your emergent theoretical categories and make them robust” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 4). This type of sampling provides a way to gather data to refine tentative categories. “Gathering data to fill out the properties of a tentative category is theoretical sampling. You keep gathering data until no new properties of your categories emerge” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 10). From this process the

researcher developed a conceptualized theoretical framework for understanding White women's desire for Black biracial babies. Semi-structured interviews were also added after initial conceptualization of internet data to provide a means to focus data collection on analytical questions which helped to test and refine ideas about the phenomena under study.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment of participants for this study was conducted through word of mouth and purposeful snowball sampling from people the researcher already knew or approached her about the study. Purposive sampling was used as discussed above because it "reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Snowball or chain sampling is the most common form of purposive sampling (2009, p. 79). This strategy allows the researcher to locate a few people who meet the inclusion criteria or qualifications for participants the researcher is interested interviewing. As the researcher conducted interviews in this study she asked participants if they knew of others that might be interested in discussing this topic and provided information so that other interested participants could contact her directly (2009, p. 79).

Recruitment for this study occurred through an advertisement on social media sites. Since visiting fan page sites sparked the initial interest in this topic, it was important to recruit in the same or similar social media venues. The recruitment advertisement stated that the researcher was interested in studying "research on interracial families, and mothering." The recruitment flyer asked for White women who were interested in Black

biracial, and multiracial children or relationships to contact the researcher. The recruitment flyer also stated how the participants would be compensated for their time.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ethical Considerations**

Throughout this project, including data collection and data analysis, the main criteria for human risk was to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. To ensure the participants were kept confidential, the researcher excluded words, names, familial status, phrases, or storylines that could have connected the participants to their interviews. Confidentiality was held in the highest regard to protect participants from repercussions from any person, organization or government.

The Colorado State University IRB approved this research and noted this research topic may cause discomfort for some women and it may be uncomfortable for some participants to discuss the race of their children. Since this project was situated in conversations about children and family structures and ultimately a discussion around race, the researcher provided contact information to mental health services in the areas where the participants resided in the event participants felt any unease about discussing these topics.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations in this study. The first limitation was the potential for a lack of thick description within the actual comments on Facebook fan pages. Lack of thick description is important to consider when using grounded theory as well as other qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2014). Since most of the comments appear rather short and thin in description, it was difficult to explore in depth or follow up on perceptions

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<sup>5</sup> Reference Appendix B for recruitment flyer

regarding the comments therefore making it more difficult to code and potentially theorize. Another limitation is not being able to follow up with the Facebook fan comments to ask additional questions or clarifications. Since people who posted on Facebook, Instagram and blogs are members with private accounts, the researcher was unable to follow up with their posts. After all, there is no way to completely authenticate the posts or the pictures. However, conducting semi-structured interviews of similarly situated women may address in part both of the limitations discussed above. A third limitation could be the authenticity of commentators' race, ethnicity, or gender, which may not always be accessible in the comments making it unclear if White women authored it, or not. However, it appeared that many of the women posting and commenting on these photos identify themselves as White. The researcher did not collect pictures or specifically code comments that were authored by women who were not identifying as White as stated by the author herself.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Themes emerging from the data derived from comments on Facebook fan pages and blogs, posted photos, and semi-structured interviews. Four emergent themes—Objectifying Mixed Race Children, We are going to get designer babies!, Displacing Black Women, and I have mixed kids, so I can't be racist—will be discussed along with subthemes for each category.

### **Objectifying Mixed Race Children**

In my conversations and informal presentations with White women about this research it wasn't uncommon to hear women say, "I want to get me one" in reference to their desire to "get" versus "have" a mixed Black biracial child. The use of the word "get" connotes the idea of obtaining something the way one might get or purchase a trendy item. This theme then is largely defined by the emphasis White women place on the desire that manifests to obtain perhaps not a child so much as what is referred to in social media as the "perfect mix." One comment on a fan page read, "She is such a beautiful mix! This is why I have always wanted mixed kids. So I get beautiful children" (Mixed Race Babies, 2015). Facebook fan pages, blogs and websites refer to children or the desire to have a Black biracial child as a "mix." In order to obtain the perfect mix the child object must have a particular appearance. "That awkward moment when a nine year old is more beautiful than you...You're lucky to have this kind of kid, perfect mix!" (Mixed Race Babies, 2015). By posting these comments and photos White women are able to solicit both accolades and potential capital gain, as the so-called "lucky" mother while the child appears to have little or no agency in the matter. Those White women who are lucky or savvy enough to have the

perfect mix have a particular status. Being the mother of the perfect mix may present financial opportunity in addition to social status, “Honestly, if you put her into modeling she would make you a shit ton of money. Just sayin,” while another mother claims, “She is so damn pretty, I swear, you need to hurry up and put her into modeling,” and another woman adds, “If you put her into modeling, you would be set for forever. Have a mixed kid, and never work another day in your life.” The child object is claimed here as though property without agency or voice, “If or when I have a daughter, she will look like this, and I will put her into modeling, she will have no choice!! and “What a stunning little beauty, she looks like a mini Tyra Banks.”

Biracial children are posed as though on a modern day auction block. Objectification of children may also re-introduce the idea of parental control over children as chattel property. When children are thought of in this way they are at greater risk for adoration that is ill intended. Mothers also engage in descriptions of their children that if it appeared on another say trafficking website could be construed as an ad to imply the actual selling of a child,

Six years old. African American and English. She is very energetic, strong, inquisitive, loving, argumentative and most of all brave. Hobbies include: listening to music, singing, dancing, and styling clothes and hair. Ten days after turning five she survived a car accident, under went hip surgery, two months in a spica cast and never complained, she is my hero.

-Mixed Chicks, 2015

This mother goes into great personal detail not only about her daughter’s racial “mix” but also about her personality, hobbies, and her medical history. This particular description is strikingly similar to actual slave ads of available mulatto slave girls being sold in York

County in 1789.<sup>6</sup> Whether in photos posted, comments made or in interviews White women place great emphasis and interest displaying their children more akin to how one would talk about a coveted object than a child. White women getting the right mix can produce a desired object of adoration and envy.

### **The sexier the better**

A subtheme of Objectifying Mixed Race Children is the desire for sexy female children. White women present their girls as objects of desire and attribute a sexualized characterization to their young children. White women view these children (with the perfect mix) as having the potential to be so physically appealing there is anticipation they will provoke unrestrained heterosexual male desire and need added protection against an implied unwanted (sexual) assault, “She is stunning! You are going to have to beat up so many boys when she gets older...you got a heart breaker on your hands”<sup>7</sup>. Another person offers, “Good luck with this one, she’s going to be trouble. Where’s her daddy at? He better invest in a gun...” Websites and blogs are used as a platform to make these children readily available to show off and advertise the perfect mix capable of producing the sexist baby alive. Photo<sup>8</sup> shows a toddler over a ventilation system on a street. Here, the toddler is mimicking the famous Marilyn Monroe pose, pushing her skirt down with her fingertips as it blows towards her face. Here the legends of Black men’s sexual prowess meeting the imagined desire attributed to Black men for White women is engaged and believed to be able to produce a heterosexual child object people and heterosexual men in particular

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<sup>6</sup> Reference figures 7, 8 and 9

<sup>7</sup> Reference figure 1, 12, 13, 14, 18 and 23

<sup>8</sup> Reference figure 5

simply can't resist, photo<sup>9</sup> is a preteen girl lying on the floor, her arms locked behind her, her legs spread open, with her face in a sexy tilt to the side.

The perfect mix produces mixed race girls needing extra protection implying the child's looks alone warrants an uninvited, uncontrolled pursuit that is legitimized, in photo<sup>10</sup> a young mixed race girl is displayed bending over with her hands on her knees. While she's bending over, the camera shoots directly down her top.

### **Consumable commodities: eating the other**

Another subtheme of objectifying mixed race children is the manner in which Black biracial children are presented as a commodity capable of adding the perfect seasoning or spice to an otherwise boring dish or display. Mixed kids are further dehumanized into or presented as consumable foods, play things, or accessories. Children are described as one-dimensional where emphasis is placed on admiring them as a consumable object and little discussion is had about them as multidimensional people. For example, children are described as: "food," "baby dolls," or "toys." In another example, one mother refers to her child as an exotic doll,

Oh my God, look at her! She looks like a porcelain doll. She is so exotic and gorgeous . . . She looks just like a doll . . . She is a living doll.<sup>11</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

The desire to consume becomes linked to the child's imagined irresistibility, which is made available for White women. Here one mother talks about her child's "mix" as though it were similar to ice cream and something that would taste good and be delicious, like a vanilla/chocolate swirl,

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<sup>9</sup> Reference figure 11

<sup>10</sup> Reference figure 10

<sup>11</sup> Reference figure 6

Oh my God!!! They are so handsome! I can't wait for my little swirl to come! We still don't know our babies gender. Our baby will be Chinese/Cuban/African American. I'm excited!!!<sup>12</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

Other mothers go further imagining their children as analogous to edible food providing a desired spice in their life while also suggesting how they would be potentially "tasty."

That girl has more flavor than a taco! I bought that same dress for my daughter. She looks so sassy!<sup>13</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

Another mom makes a similar comment comparing her daughter to candy, "That little girl is so dang cute. She is sweet enough to eat!"<sup>14</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015). Enveloping or ingesting the other further dehumanizes mixed race children while making them readily available for White women and others. Children become a commodity and are not allowed access to the full development of their humanity or value aside from their appeal.

### **We Are Going To Get Designer Babies!**

The theme, "We are going to get designer babies!" is in vivo since it originates from an interview with a White woman desiring a mixed race baby. Designer babies are the result of the perfect mix. In order to get a designer baby White women seek and engage breeding knowledge. In pursuit of the perfect mix White mothers have specific preferences for certain physical characteristics of their mixed race children. One woman compares obtaining the perfect mix to the creation of very expensive designer dog breeds. The Labradoodle in particular is discussed since it is considered a hybrid and manifests the perfect characteristics a dog owner would want; often times hypoallergenic, having docile and friendly temperaments, thus providing the owner with the ideal pet. One participant states,

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<sup>12</sup> Photo is not shown on reference page

<sup>13</sup> Photo is not shown on reference page

<sup>14</sup> Reference figure 5

Mixed children are typically very attractive. That's the most common comment that we get. That we are going to get Designer Babies! You know? Designer as in like, designer dogs. How they have certain things you want, and you can sort of make them that way. Like your Labradoodle, you get the pieces that you want. At least, that's what people say. That's what I've heard (Interview participant, 2016).

To establish the racial makeup mothers encourage one another to discuss their children as products or ingredients contained within a "good mix".

There is an unapologetic manner in which White women casually appropriate race and ethnicity as they lay claim as a right to mold their future children. Here the partner who contributes the necessary DNA for a designer baby appears of interest primarily for their genetic contribution versus a genuine love relationship. Make no mistake White women often stay with and marry their Black male partners however the initial desire they manifest about the child object is a pursuit for the perfect mix,

Everyone says that we'll have cute babies. Mixed children are typically very attractive and that we'll have cute babies. That's the most common comment that we get. That's the big thing, we are going to get Designer Babies! (Interview participant, 2016).

### **Establishing the "racial mix"**

Information about race is traded and shared as though a fashion item or product easily obtainable or appropriated as shopping for a designer item in a high-end clothing store. By exercising the privilege of shopping for racial identities in order to create a "mixed me," (miniature version of themselves) White women are able to brand a new beauty standard by appropriating and creating a more desirable version of Blackness. After all White not Black women represent having the necessary ingredient to make this racial version the object of a current trend and desire. Descriptions of nationality, ethnicity or race enter into the necessary ingredient dialogue to generate the desired racial makeup

or “the mix.” Here the interrogation of race and ethnicity is whittled down to one dimension for one purpose only: creating a beautifully designed product,

Your daughter is beautiful. If you don’t mind me asking, what is she mixed with? I am currently pregnant by my African American boyfriend, and I am wondering what my baby will come out looking like. Is your baby African America at all? I hope so. I can’t wait to see what my mixed baby will look like!<sup>15</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

Another mother offers her mix,

My daughter is African American, Caucasian, Native American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Irish, Italian, and German! She is only 16 months here, such a dang cutie!<sup>16</sup> (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

By establishing the racial mix of their children via this type of inquiry, parents learn to gauge what race/ethnicity makes the perfectly “mixed” child. Proper proportions of Whiteness and other races/ethnicities positions them to be able to shop for the most desirable mix.

### **Managing blackness: “good hair” and “caramel skin”**

Hair texture and color, skin color, and eye color are the most sought after characteristics for the proper racial mix to produce a designer baby. White women desire “good” or White-like hair for their future children along with lighter or caramel colored skin. White Women want “good” hair not just because it is easier to maintain but fear “bad” or Black hair as a representation of real Blackness and potential scorn. One woman offers,

Quite frankly I’m terrified that if I have a child with coarse hair. Like, I’m not going to know what to do with it, I’m going to have to learn . . . Like, “Do you think your kid will have White hair or will they have Black hair?” People get made fun of for having coarse hair! Or for it being afro-ie or whatever (Interview participant, 2016).

Another participant furthers ideas about “good hair while describing her own straight, White hair. This participant adds,

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<sup>15</sup> Photo is not shown on reference page

<sup>16</sup> Photo is not shown on reference page

Oh gosh. Hair. That scares me, because I know my hair is like straight. And my boyfriends' is very curly, and we could have a kid who pops out and their hair is straight and its perfect like mine and I'll be like great! . . . I know the little mixed girl in my class asked me to put her hair back in a pony tail one day and her hair was so thick and I was like "I do not know how your mom does her hair every day, I need to practice." Hair is going to be tough (Interview participant, 2016).

White women believe straight hair (White hair) represents perfection, and "coarse" or ethnic hair (Black hair) would be unmanageable, undesirable and the source of certain ridicule. Hair color in addition to texture associated with Whiteness is also desired as one participant makes clear,

I mean as teachers we talk about the kids a lot, we aren't supposed to but we do. And my friend who teaches with me she has a little mixed girl in her class that she teaches, and she has red hair. And I've always said, "I just want one with red hair." Yeah, I would just love a mixed kid with red hair (Interview participant, 2016).

Another participant discusses the same desire to have a mixed child with red hair and says,

Everybody always says to us, "Oh they're going to have a cute little mixed red-headed baby, it's going to be so cute, you never see that!" Like the red hair thing is so weird everyone wants to see red hair on a Black kid (Interview participant, 2016).

Much like hair color, skin color is also important to White mothers and is thought about much like a summer tan. Mothers are particularly concerned about skin color and prefer a dilution of Blackness to ensure their children aren't perceived as Black. One participant mentions the comments that people often make when discussing her mixed race children.

She shares,

Well when discussing our children everyone always says that our babies will have the prettiest skin and the conversations around our children has to do a lot with skin (Interview participant, 2016).

White mothers consider their own skin color relative to their partners' color to achieve the "perfect racial blend." When discussing the "perfect blend" one participant states,

I think there is a standard of what is good and what is not. I mean when people say your kids are going to be so beautiful, they usual mention skin color, and how its



going to be like a perfect blend . . . I don't know if it's just that they don't know what to say, or if they are excited because it's something different and unique (Interview participant, 2016).

Women view their whiteness as being able to blend perfectly with Blackness making the perfect skin tone,

Everyone told me that when he was born he was the most beautiful baby that they had ever seen. That he had the most perfect skin color everything is perfect about him. People have definitely made comments about his skin color, he's not that dark, and I don't know how dark he will get, or if he'll get any darker. A lot of people comment on his skin color and how perfect it is, because it isn't too dark (Interview participant, 2016).

### **Mix gone wrong**

Lightness of skin color and whiteness of hair is equated with being good, and dark skin color and black hair as negative, undesirable, unmanageable and the focus of needed intervention. White mothers are consciously trying to understand how pigmentation works and strive to manipulate the skin and eye color and hair texture of their children in order to obtain the mix they want. Control of these characteristics like skin color is boundless since some women are willing to go to the extreme and bleach skin to acquire the desired color.

I know this sounds bad, but there are all sorts of Bleach creams you can use nowadays, they are totally safe (Circle of Moms, 2016).

Characteristics White women associated with Blackness they feared in their desire for the perfect mix included descriptions and photos of "afro-ie hair," skin that was too Black, and "poop brown" eyes. Photos and comments evidencing this theme tended to highlight: hair<sup>17</sup>, red hair<sup>18</sup>, eyes<sup>19</sup>, and "caramel" or "tan" skin<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Reference figures 3, 4, 11, 14, 15, 16 and 17

<sup>18</sup> Reference figures 21 and 22

<sup>19</sup> Reference figures 10, 11, 17 and 19

Mothering websites specific to mix race children generally exist to ask about and give parenting advice to mothers. Typical on these sites is information provided about the best ways to specifically promote functional sleeping habits for their children, best brand of diapers and clothing to purchase, and how to develop a feeding schedule etc. What happens when the mix goes wrong is reflected in website discussions that position children in harmful and public ways. One mother posed a question about her son's penis skin color,

Question: Mixed baby (Black and White) was white when born but at 2 months, he has tanned a lot and is more of an olive color. Pretty brownish color, kinda. His penis is his skin color that he is now, but around the balls it is a little darker. Will it stay that way or will he get darker, the color his penis?<sup>21</sup> (Circle of Moms, 2015).

Similar to the slave auction block, where Black bodies were displayed naked and publically for all to see, White women evaluate and engage a public discussion around genitalia. Skin color here has nothing to do with health or caretaking but a mere detail of the object on display where the humanity and modesty ordinarily accorded a child is erased. Another mother responds to the post,

Answer: To be honest with you, my son's penis appeared just as you've described; his body skin tone has remained the same except when he tans from outdoor activity (as to be expected). As to his penis, I don't think I saw it after age 8 so I have no idea if it got darker or not. If it looks like his father's, then it got slightly darker (Circle of Moms, 2015).

These inspections of their children's genitalia get discussed in ways that normalize behavior that is controversial and potentially abuse but expected parenting for Black biracial children.

White mothers articulate a fear associated with Blackness not only as a management issue with children (unmanageable "bad" hair/dark skin provoking ridicule) but perhaps a

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<sup>20</sup> Reference figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 19, 20 and 24

<sup>21</sup> There was no picture posted in relation to this post

fear the child with a mix gone wrong will be really “Black” and bring introduce cultural, racialized, and other problematic Black issues into the White home.

### **I have mixed kids, so I can't be racist**

White women do not think of themselves as seeing Black, Latino, White, Native or Asian kids any differently from each other—they are all “just children.” They will often claim they do not see race, but rather see the person. Much of this discourse demonstrates a level of cognitive or racial dissonance where there are inconsistent thoughts about race relative to one’s behavior happening among them. While White women see certain attributes they prefer or dislike, they actively select for different phenotypical characteristics associated with race they also claim they do not see race. This desire for the perfect mix of a Black bi-racial child inherently sees race first and uses racial reasoning as the primary criteria for selection. This racial dissonance among them is furthered articulated as the reason for why they cannot be considered racist, since they want to or do have mixed kids. Mothers believe having and mothering children of color would not be any different from raising a White child because White mothers would treat them as if they were a White child. One participant says she does not see race since she is married to a Black man and has a Black son, thus she is unable to be racist against people of color,

I think of my high school kids that I teach. If they would jokingly say like, I was racist, or they would say I was doing something or punishing them because they are Black I would say, “Oh really? Because I’m married to someone who is half Black and my son is a quarter Black so you can’t tell me I’m racist (Interview participant, 2016).

White women claim they do not see race, that they only the person, and this perspective is evidence of a post racial society. Racial dissonance also shows up around

culture since there is little to no interest in exploring or acknowledging Black culture as different from White culture. Consider this mother's musings:

I don't think me being a White woman, having mixed kids; I don't have to know everything about Black culture to raise a Black kid. I was taught to look at everyone is one the same playing field, and that's how I will look at my child. They won't have any privileges that others don't; they don't have anything against them that others don't because they're a certain way (Interview participant, 2016).

### **Mix up the world to eradicate racism: reemergence of the melting pot**

White women claim the ability to eradicate racism altogether through their reproductive capacities and their appropriate raising of mixed children. A prevalent belief among study participants is that if everybody just looked the same, all problems regarding race relations and racial injustices would no longer exist. In fact, "mixing up the world" by having multiracial children is believed to be an answer for how to rid the world of racial injustice. White women claim a duty to date, marry, or conceive children with someone of a different race to encourage a melting pot mentality that promotes a nation of acceptance. One post on a Facebook fan page was titled "Get mixing, and get rid of racism!" (Mixed Race Babies, 2015). The importance of melting pot ideology is to promote Whiteness in multiracial identities and leave behind other cultural diversity that causes racial discord in the U.S. For some mothers mixing up the world can be ordained by God to make the world a better place,

Beautiful! Their beauty is a sign of God! God is trying to tell you something. It's that living in harmony and unity and peace can be beautiful. Mix up the world! I hope the day comes when we're all the same, no more racism (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

Another woman comments,

Racism needs to really phase itself out. Here's a whole new generation of mixed race babies and children, who range from beautiful to breathtaking, and people still have time to hate? Doesn't make sense to me. Nothing is just Black and White anyway (Mixed Race Babies, 2015).

One participant claims it is an American's duty to "mix up" our country in order to reclaim the "melting pot" ideology. She states,

I think it's interesting to have biracial kids. It makes America look like what we really are as a melting pot. I think if we all have kids that are the same race, than nothing will be interesting. We should embrace how diverse we are through the way our families should be. We should actually prove it and show it. If we truly embrace and accept diversity, than shouldn't it reflect what our families look like? I think by having interesting kids it will help a lot because they are going to become the majority, and Whites will eventually blend out, and I think that will help racism a lot, because the minorities will become the majorities and they won't be as oppressed as they were before. Like don't just say you accept it, do it (Interview participant, 2016).

The melting pot ideology is idealized here as a method for promoting and securing Whiteness within a mixed race population of the future. A little color, spice and flavor is all that is needed to secure a White ideology and politic. White women are working towards, what they understand as a post-racial society where mixing is assumed to be positive. However, White women only consider the needs of Whites and the dominant society and not those of Black people or people of color. The participant in the quote above, referred to herself as vanilla, having no spice, or flavor in her own life. White Americans are described as needing culture to add to the perfect mix and that culture only extends to selected characteristics and a bit of flavor or spice. There is no real inclusion of Black culture and culture associated with Black people is largely pathologized.

### **Displacing Black Women and Blackness**

By implication, Black women's ability to mother emerges in various ways and places since mothering is perceived by White women as a domain that only White women can ascend to with self-proclaimed perfection of the perfect mix. There are several ways that White women view Blackness, Black culture, Black families, and Black racial identity. White women are particularly concerned with manners, work ethic, and believe that their

White DNA intervention will help Black people. Much like breeding out a race, in order to fix a problem, White women put forth ideas that are prevalent in cultural genocide. White women believe they hold the solution for Black biracial children since they believe Black families have failed Black children; specifically, that Black mothers have failed Black children. One comment on a blog states,

Black women are combative, fat, and bossy. They are simply unpleasant to be around. Some of this may be from the days of slavery when Black women who were sold, were sold with their children, making the mother the controlling one in the family. This position of power I think has carried over to the present. If two equal women, one Black and the other White, were on an auction block, which do you think would fetch the higher price by male bidders? That's right, White women would. Now, look at that, you have a bunch of angry mothers raising Black boys (Circle of Moms, 2016).

White women believe they can provide tools that would make biracial Black children overall exceptional people. White women through Whiteness are able to teach Black biracial children to become upstanding citizens, and contribute to society the way they are meant to— by adhering to White respectability politics. Another author states on a blog,

I wouldn't say Black mothers are bad parents because of their race, I would say they aren't as good as White mothers because they aren't around. They sort of just pawn their kids off to the grandmas and expect them to be raised properly? (Circle of Moms, 2016).

White mothers equate the darkness of their child to the amount of racism they will endure through their lifetime, if at all. The implication is that a proper mother can give them lighter skin (Whiteness) and they can provide a better life and world for their child. One mother states, "My son is not that dark, so I don't worry about Racism. I don't really think about it at all" (Interview participant, 2016). Whiteness in mixed children gives them access to White mothers. And White mothers are believed to be the best kind of mothers. Another participant suggests, "I think the best way to raise a child is have one Black parent

and at least one White parent” (Interview participant, 2016). White women equate their ability to be home with their children, to provide certain resources, and correctly provide education about proper behavior and manners with Whiteness.

### **Blackness equals bad behaviors**

White women believe they are able to mother children better because they are more situated within the home and domesticity. Because White Women’s power resides in the home they believe they can better provide lessons on manners and respectability. White women assume that well-behaved mixed children must have White mothers because their manners are exceptional compared to the other children of color they engage with,

I think about the little girl in my class who is mixed. I’m always curious to see how the parents carry themselves and what they look like and I’m curious to see if its a White women with a Black man... I’ve heard, “White women are more caring or can serve you better, better mothers. Black women are just too much, just too loud, too obnoxious.” If you talk to a Black man that’s just what he says, “Black women are loud and kind of obnoxious” (Interview participant, 2016).

Having one White parent to guide the child in particular ways, the child will be saved from their Blackness and Black culture. White women problematize Black women in particular ways suggesting that there is no real need for Black women, erasing them from their communities, families, and motherhood. One participant further explains how at least one White parent is truly ideal,

I have this side of my life that I can bring in, and he has another side of his life that he can bring in. I mean, back to that little mixed girl in my class, she’s the most behaved kid in my class, and I have so many kids of color who are not, and they are so disrespectful, things like that (Interview participant, 2016).

White mothers assume respectable behavior is associated with Whiteness as the above participant does with the “little mixed girl in her class.” Not only do White mothers claim

that one White parent is ideal in raising a child but they also have gendered certain behaviors expected of little boys versus little girls as one participant states,

I mean, I'm glad he is healthy and he is so perfect but it will have to do more with him growing up and being a respectful little boy. I mean he's not dark so I'm not worried about that stereotypical "Black kids are bad and they get into trouble." And I mean, a lot of that has to do with parenting, obviously. The respect is big for me, he needs to be respectful (Interview participant, 2016).

Participants associate stereotypes with the appearance of Black biracial children particularly boys as stated above and omit any consideration of the ways class, poverty, racism, health disparities, employment, and education can affect behavior in particular kinds of ways. They understand Black culture, and lack of care within the Black family to equate to bad behavior among Black children.

### **Be more than black, be mixed**

White women claim it is disrespectful and discounting for their child to identify as Black. White women claim ownership over White lineage and believe it is critical and must be recognized as part of their child's identity. Identifying as mixed or White might be acceptable as long as Black biracial children don't identify as exclusively Black. Racial dissonance shows up here since White women desire Black biracial children yet they do not want Black children. When discussing the preference for their child's racial identity one participant stated,

Not fully Black! No. No. I mean he's not very dark now, and I don't know if he is going to get darker or how dark he will be when he gets older, and I mean if he's really just going to have a perfect color skin tone that doesn't really look Black and he's just tan, he won't identify as Black. I don't think he'll ever identify as just Black (Interview participant, 2016).

Another interview participant adds,

My feelings would be really hurt! Especially since I'm all White. I mean it would be really hard if he identified as just Black. Because I feel like it would be taking away



from me. I mean I will tell my son that he is more White than anything else, and not to discount that he does have Black in him and a tiny amount of Native American too, so I mean I don't want to discount that history in him, but I think he will probably identify as more White (Interview participant, 2016).

Because participants understand Blackness as a negative aspect in their children, White women are adamant that their child will not be *just* Black, because they are something more, they are mixed, or they are White with a hint of Black.

White women understand Black culture, and stereotypes as examples of what they find as acceptable and unacceptable displays of Blackness. One participant claims there are different levels to Blackness and Whiteness represented not only in skin color but also in the way people dress that presents their Blackness or Whiteness in particularly negative ways, she states,

I think fashion correlates to identity and to culture. I'm thinking of a Black I saw the other day and they all had leather jackets on and the mom had a "boss" necklace on and "boss" earrings. There's different levels, there's that level, and that's a lot! (Interview participant, 2016).

Participants claim culture is not necessarily related to race at all. White mothers understand culture more equivalent to a fad or style preference. There is a claim that cultural difference is simply a function of being raised different and growing up in different families unconnected to behaviors, beliefs, values, language, and symbols. At times White women appear to understand aspects of cultural differences and then quickly sweep it aside as if it does not matter. One interview participant states,

I think if my kid ever has an identity crisis, I think I'll break it down as not a White and Black thing but just that people are raised differently. I would just tell my child that it isn't because dad is Black and mom is White, but because we were just raised differently . . . Like greens, why are greens a Black thing? Or like fried chicken and watermelon? Where does that come from? Everybody likes chicken, everybody likes fruit. And I think I'm just naïve, sometimes and I choose to be. I just want everyone to be the same (Interview participant, 2016).

White women are confused in their understandings of Black culture versus White culture and the relationship of race to culture. At times they are able to identify in minimal ways aspects of Black culture but are resistant to grapple with how particular foods became associated with culture. White women acknowledge they do not have a deep understanding about Black culture while simultaneously proclaiming there is no need to do so.

### **Picking apart the black family and perceived roles black women embody**

White women blame Black women for not mothering and not catering to their Black male partners properly. White women believe Black women are the cause for the perceived downfall of the Black family. This racialized gendered understanding of how to “cater” to male partners assume White women’s submissiveness and their subservience which is cast against the “obnoxious, bossy” Black woman who dares to assert her humanity and value as a Woman. White women then normalize “proper womanhood” as it pertains to patriarchal gender norms. White women also claim there are few select Black men whom perform White hetero-normative, patriarchal roles correctly,

I think that it’s still very real that the perception is that there are not a lot of Black men out there that have their lives together. I mean, I think that’s probably true. I mean statistically speaking looking at the number of minorities in the prison system. Whether that be a fault in our justice system or not, that’s typically the case . . . So the thought there is that most Black men are not raised with the same level of resources or privilege (Interview participant, 2016).

Another participant discusses perceptions of the Black family,

. . . I think that there are a lot of ideas within the Black family that are perpetuated and do not fall in line with some of the ideals of White families . . . I’ll give you an example. My husband had the idea that you could have a child with somebody and not be with them . . . Marriage is a systemic thing in the Black family that is not as valued. So, this results in more Black men having children out of wedlock (Interview participant, 2016).

White women claim the Black family fails Black children because they do not take up values held by White traditional families as this participant continues states,

It's hard to find Black men that are maybe educated, have a stable job, or you know have resources. That maybe their parents are still married so they know what it looks like to have a functioning family unit and that don't have kids at a young age (Interview participant, 2016).

The perceived proper family is believed to have one heterosexual father and mother, a reasonable number of children and adequate financial resources; there are no children out of wedlock, no illegitimate children, no queer couples, and no mention of nontraditional families.

White women do not claim to seek out Black men in order to have the perfect mix or displace Black women yet most women in the study said that they either knew someone personally or have heard that White women will seek out Black intimate partners in order to birth biracial Black children. However, beliefs about Black relationships and Black men's relationships with White women acknowledge White women are able to obtain the good, educated Black men. As a class issue White women are able to "marry up" with a Black man.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This research uncovers the public engagement of White women recreating and supporting “racist” attitudes in spite of their interest in raising Black biracial children and participating in mixed race relationships with Black men. Racist attitudes characterize the ways in which White women believe they genetically contribute to a unique and better Black child. This chapter will explore the ways White women discuss their desires to have biracial Black children and how they perceive their roles of mothering through the lens of Ethnic Studies and Black feminism. It also considers the resurgence of the ideology of the mulatto, colorblind racism, underlying conversations about Black men, contemporary forms of eugenics, the harms of multiculturalism, how children have been positioned in harmful ways, and the criminalizing of the Black family. A Black feminist framework heavily influences this discussion as it seeks to unveil the ways White women have and still contribute to the oppression of Black women.

### **Significance of Black Feminist Framework**

Black feminism was crucial for this study as it was born out of the need to be included as a result of the ways White women were inadvertently discussing them. Throughout this study, White women have participated in the exclusion and erasure of Black women and their value within Black families. Because Black feminism explores the ways in which Black women experience life uniquely and unjustly due to their social position, it became important to discuss the ways White women continue to contribute to this oppression in particular ways. It was necessary to not simply name the ways White women discuss race with underlying racist attitudes but also uncover how these

discussions continue to uniquely harm Black women. This study uncovers the profound impact of assimilation that White women continue to reinforce towards Black women. It also informs the ways White women directly contribute to the social position of Black women and Black families.

In their conversations and use of social media White women participate in multilayered structures of subordination, (intersectionality and standpoint theory) unconsciously, through their critique of Black motherhood. White women make claims that Black women are unable to care for children in the same way they are able to. White women do not consider why this might be the case or how they have come to hold such opinions. Often, White women would simply say that Black women are not home as often, they are angry, they can not raise a child with the same kind of integrity or respectability as White women. These assumptions are not only unsubstantiated but they are not explored in any manner that situates Black women as having to overcome certain obstacles that White women are unfamiliar with and are privileged by their Whiteness to not have to endure. The assumptions that Black mothers and Black women are not working hard enough made by White women positions White women within a system of White supremacy and privilege where no consideration of intersectionality is needed to explore the ways Black women must negotiate multilayered oppressive systems that continually subordinate them. A Black feminist lens is crucial to understanding what would cause Black mothers to have a more difficult time child rearing than white mothers.

### **The New Mulatto**

Although White women contemporarily discuss Black biraciality as something new and fascinating, these conversations are not at all unique to the history of Black bodies.

Historically, Black biracial children originated out of the institution of slavery in the United States. Often referred to as mulatto, biracial Black children, women and men were considered prized possessions among White slavers. Their light skin, dilution of Blackness and White DNA, genetically made them seem more human to the White elite. Biracial Black children during slavery were often the product of rape, or other manipulative relationships that controlled enslaved Black women. White male slave owners intentionally reproduced with enslaved Black women for several reasons. Reproducing enslaved people was a form of control and colonization that increased the surplus value of property through the reproduction of a new enslaved generation. Angela Davis describes the slave industry as dependent on the mulatto generations,

When the abolition of international slave trade began to threaten the expansion of the young cotton-growing industry, the slaveholding class was forced to rely on natural reproduction as the surest method of replenishing and increasing the domestic slave population (Davis, 1983, p. 6).

These practices created several mulatto children that were then given special advantages in particular ways that other Black slaves did not experience. Biracial Black children emerge within this context in. Similar to the way biracial Black children are discussed today, mulatto children often received special treatment due to their perceived value over other Black individuals. As Jones points out “White men particularly sought after mixed-race women. “Their fairer complexion often gave them more attractive features, and White men desired to buy them and use them as concubines” (Jones, 2015, p. 1). Much like today, fairer skinned Blacks experience certain advantages since they were assumed closer to achieving Whiteness and perhaps even assimilation into Whiteness. Bodenhorn (2002) discusses the many ways mulattos achieved a higher social status. He suggests that Black biracial children today achieve the same kind of status, but they are also now considered

fashionable. Bodenhorn claims,

A fair complexion conferred a decided advantage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recent discussions suggest that the mulatto advantage continues into the twenty-first century. In some circles, mulatto has become chic (Bodenhorn, 2002, p. 22).

Bodenhorn describes the direct correlation between the ways mulattos were viewed during times of slavery in the United States with the ways in which White women contemporarily discuss biracial Black people today. Their obsession with biracial Black people today is a response to the emphasis Whites have consistently put on Whiteness appearing in particular ways in the Black body. Bodenhorn notes how colorism in White America perpetuates an idealized form of Whiteness. He states,

It seems unlikely that complexion-based preferences within the African American community would have persisted without reinforcement from the White community. If African Americans esteemed Whiteness, they are likely to have done so because lighter skin conferred some advantage in a White dominated world (Bodenhorn, 200, p. 23).

In what some might characterize as auction block type displays, White mothers continue to manifest the objectification and critique of Black bodies noting what is inherently problematic and undesirable. In her book, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of US Imperialism*, Laura Wexler, critically analyzes photographs taken of Black and Brown women throughout the antebellum era. In this text, Wexler explores specifically the ways in which Black women, domestics and enslaved women, had been photographed and presented as props, trophies, or pieces of furniture. These photographs were taken to ensure the documentation of White families' status that simultaneously reinforces the power White women had over their homes through the exploitation of Black women's bodies. Much like the White women posting pictures of their Black and Brown daughters, women in this study are engaged in collecting "comments and likes" from Facebook fan

pages as evidence of achieved status of beauty they created and lay claim to via their multiracial and mixed daughters. White mothers that show off their biracial Black daughters do so in a way that exhibits a form of ownership of what they believe they have created. I argue there may be similar motives behind the displaying of biracial Black children to the motives of photographing Black domestic women. White mothers seem to feel they need to share their unique creation with the world (or at least other White mothers), assuming partial responsibility and ownership of the perceived beauty and majesty manifested in mixed race children. Wexler discusses the contemporary pictures as a manifestation of contemporary ownership and displaying of Black and Brown bodies.

Wexler states,

Post Civil War era photographs with Black women working as domestics shown in the photos validates the memories of slave holding that lay in the bosom of many White families by creating saccharine fictions of the “good darky” who happily served the family’s interests from her “place” just outside the focus or the frame (p. 9, 2000).

In her text, Wexler warns that without accurate naming of what the photographs represented throughout this time, history is likely to repeat itself through the contemporary exploitation of Black and Brown women in modern media. Wexler continues,

Working with these photographs has taught me, most fundamentally, that if we do not interfere with certain of the stories about gender, race, and nation that the repertoire of nineteenth-century family photography still evokes their destructive aspect will continue on unchecked (p. 8, 2000)

Posting photographs of young biracial Black girls in a manner that displays them as objects, I argue, reflects the motivations present in the pictures of domestic and enslaved Black women. One specific example of this similarity was the picture posted of the biracial mixed girl with the commentary that was reminiscent of a Mulatto slave advertisement



from the eighteenth century. The White mother posting the picture establishes her daughter's racial mix as being biracially Black with a White mother and Black father, then goes on to describe her daughter's habits, past illnesses, hobbies, talents, and personality. With the picture placed in proximity to the comments, the post appears very similarly to the Mulatto slave advertisements from the antebellum era. This is an example of ways that contemporary photographs have manifested the legacies of slavery through White mothers displaying their biracial Black children for public consumption.

### **Grounded Theory**

The grounded theory developed from this research argues that White women who have explicit goals of reproducing mixed race children participate in the creation of a contemporary form of a slave narrative. The ways in which White women scheme, gossip, and understand mixed race people is very similar to the ways mulatto individuals were discussed in the slavery era. Contemporarily, White women use language that correlates with themes that mimic slave ownership, production, and value over mixed race people. White women become "saviors" of the failing Black family and community by creating and upholding standards for a "perfect mix," claiming ownership over their children, impairing a child's autonomy for decision making, and deciding racial identity. White mothers have created a virtual modern day auction block for mixed race children through mixed race Facebook fan pages, displaying their children much like property, and disclosing all aspects about them. The engagement of a racist attitude whether manifested in racialized displays of what White women believe only they can produce, or presentation of Black bodies as objects sets the stage for the reproduction of Black racist narratives from a disturbing, troubled and historical past in the United States.

## **Colorblind Racism**

Colorblind racism is used as a rouse to deflect any challenge of racism for White women's desire to produce the perfect mix. Bonilla Silva describes colorblind racism as a form of racism that is covert, and undercover. Colorblind racism often allows for the ignoring of people of color in the form of accepting them without consultation of their identity and experiences due specifically by their race and social location.

Another example of colorblind racism can be seen when participants suggest they will not need to raise a child of color differently from a White child, as well as making comments about not seeing "color" as a deciding factor for how the child will behave. When White women apply the same parenting goals, and standards of child rearing to their children without considering their child's mixed race identity or heritage, they do not critically think about how to prepare their child for the world and realities outside of their own homes. Jacobs states the importance for parents to provide tools for their children, in the home, so that they can develop high self-esteem with regard to their racial identity as the reality of society is to treat people based on how they categorize them outside of the home. The development of their child's racial identity depends on White mothers and their Black partners collectively acknowledging their child's color.

Another example of colorblind racism manifests when participants discussed how children of color are raised compared to White children. Many women believe it is the way a person is raised that determines if they will become good people. Although this idea may seem post racial, and forward thinking, the White women interviewed do not consider, or critically think about how a person is raised is the result of one's culture. The women do not think about how culture is related to race and how it correlates with socioeconomic

status, education, income, cultural capital, etc. The women interviewed connect that the way that one is raised is simply a matter of choices, not opportunity, or equality.

### **Underlying Discussions About Black Men**

Since each of these children were identified as having Black ancestry it is crucial to understand historical aspects of how Black males have been sexualized in the United States. What Malveaux (1979) calls a fascination with Blacks is reflective of the data found and the themes in the comments of the biracial fan pages. Many of the White mothers on the Facebook fan page posts often describe a perfect “mix” as someone who has some amount of Blackness in them. Not only is there evidence that White women are over sexualizing Black men, but Black men and Blackness are used as the ingredient to create the “perfect mixed” child. By exploring Malveaux’s concepts of the hyper-sexualization of Black males, she discusses how Black men are viewed and depicted in society. The author argues that since Black males are seen as hyper-sexual and perhaps even more sexually satisfying, more women have started to seek Black men out for specific sexual expectations. Much like during the era of slavery in the United States, Black male bodies are simply turned into sex machines, sexual laborers, and used for social gain and advantage. Contemporarily, White women continue to articulate the ways in which they are simply using Black men in order to achieve a mixed child. Using Black men, only as an ingredient originally was noticed during the class discussion about my project when one student and the professor said (of her own daughter) she would have to “find one” in order to have a mixed child. Throughout this study, Black men have been only seen as an ingredient towards the goals of creating a mixed child. The ways Black men are discussed by White women in this study

is such that their personhood does not matter and is erased, and only valued regarding their help in reproduction—consistent with the ways they were treated during slavery.

### **Dressing Up Eugenics**

Picking the characteristics of difference races to create the perfect mix child is a form of modern day eugenics. Although the earlier ideas of hybridity with regard to races were considered negative and to be feared, there has been a current shift in thinking. Here, White women are actively participating in modern day eugenics under the idea that they are contributing to the multicultural agenda. Historically, the pseudoscience of eugenics ensured that races stay “pure,” and to ensure that race mixing did not happen, in order to preserve Whiteness. White women believe mixed race children will simply not identify as Black and it is inconceivable to them that their mixed race girls could actually become Black women. Both Hill Collins and Elam explain that when a person who is of mixed race and Black identify with each of their ethnic backgrounds, it diminishes the significance of Blackness and speaks to the hesitance of non-Black parents wanting to shift their children away from being *too* Black. White women in this study articulate how the perfect mix diminishes Blackness in particular ways and they are intent on eradicating undesirable Black phenotypical characteristics.

As Provine describes eugenics as a tool used to help understand the perceived hierarchy of racial evolution, the author discusses the ways in which people of color have been studied in efforts to claim a superior and inferior race. Much like the eugenicists that Provine discusses, White women shared concerns about behaviors such as: independence, reliability, manners, obedience, brute, sympathy, etc. Like eugenicists, White women whose goals include helping the Black race through having more mixed race children through

providing what they consider to be adequate mothering often felt that Whiteness and White DNA was the only way to improve the lives of Black children.

### **Multiculturalism Encourages Breeding**

Multiculturalism supports, celebrates, and encourages racial shifts through discussions of racial hybridity. In a similar manner, the White women interviewed describe their goals in having mixed race children as a duty to help combat racism through multicultural ideals. They often repeated that it was not good enough for the United States to be considered multicultural, but rather we had to prove it through the racial mixing of its future children. As a result, these racially mixed children will contribute to the eradication of racism. Multiculturalism as described by Elam has the potential to breed the notion that mixed race people are the “children of the future” (Elam, p. xiii, 2011) and reflect a true “melting pot” mentality. Like Elam, Nakashima discusses the ways in which multiracial and biracial people have been devalued in simplistic ways. Nakashima and Elam suggest that multiculturalism often places heavy, futuristic goals onto mixed race people by suggesting that their mere presence will rid the United States of its racism (2001). Much like the participants from this study, this form of multiculturalism seeks to acknowledge a very one-sided analysis of racial identity through a naïve celebration of mixed heritage without an informed discussion of racial identity struggles or the historical implications of racism. Participants go as far to say that it is the *duty* of Americans to prove their acceptance of racial minorities by having children with them to ensure the United States reflects the “melting pot” image. Comments that reflect these ideas ignore the legacy of slavery and the race mixing that occurred through rape, manipulation and absolute control exercised and legalized over Black bodies. Furthermore this idea of melting pot requires assimilation to

Whiteness without regard or concern for the cultures, histories, and lives of nonwhites with whom they would presumably mix. Here we witness the development of a preferred racial identity, a new racial order complete with the proper dosage of whiteness for race “mixing,” described by White women over their biracial Black children. This represents a hegemonic exercise of power to control identity that privileges White women’s role within a prescriptive mix of Blackness that adds spice or flavor to the coveted Whiteness for their children. This research exposes one of the many ways contemporary ways that racism shows up in the United States and explores privileged individuals who feel like they are doing progressive work, but who in reality are only rehearsing old narratives—albeit updated—from the slave era.

### **Positioning Children in Harmful Ways**

The data suggests biracial Black children are positioned on the Internet in potentially harmful ways. Mothering blogs and Facebook fan pages have upwards of eight hundred thousand people following their sites. As mothers post intimate pictures and details about their Black biracial children, they make them fully available to anyone on the Internet. What is born out of this availability comes a willingness to discuss anything and everything—even the color of their son’s genitalia. This type of public display and conversation is problematic as it objectifies the child and holds little regard for its privacy, not to mention participation in the hyper-sexualization of the child that allows for the child to be examined as though he was some sort of science project. The data suggest White women engage in racializing and sexualizing mix race children that may set the stage for harm and predation. These sites are problematic since hundreds of thousands of people follow these sites and many of the photographs are provocative and inappropriate

suggesting mixed race children will be and can be treated in sexual ways. At one point, it was necessary for me to look up the definition of child pornography to make sure I did not have to report them. What was particularly telling about the harmful nature of the photos was that I was asked to leave a library while I was coding pictures the photos made people around me so uncomfortable that complaints were made about my activity on a computer in public spaces.

### **Criminalizing the Black Family**

One of the most disturbing aspects of this research was the ways in which White women discuss Black families. Many women interviewed attributed the contemporary racial issues that face the United States as a result of the ways in which Black families function. Throughout the interviews, White women often blamed Black families for any and all problems that Black children are perceived to encounter. White women interviewed felt that Black children often come from broken homes where the father is not present and the mother is working so they cannot pay adequate attention to the development of their children. Participants discussed how Black families accept out-of-wedlock births, which inherently hurts Black men who fathered those children. The lack of two-parent households makes Black families faulty and inadequate as families. When White women discuss Black families in this way, they claim authority on how to parent, mother, and rear Black children more successfully than Black mothers, and Black fathers. They also reify a specific family form that is White, middle class, and nuclear. White women see badly behaved Black children in society as a sign of bad parenting and more specifically—bad and inadequate mothering. As White women, they believe that they can

parent children of color better than Black women, and they begin to displace Black mothers from their roles in Black families, thus displacing them from Black communities.

Patricia Hill Collins discusses the importance of Black women's roles in their communities and families as crucial for the development of Black children. Collins discusses that women of color often collectively mother children in their communities; they provide particular tools to help their children understand their perceived place in our society. When White women come in to act as a savior for Black children, they simultaneously take children away from the many ways they are being cared for by many different people in their families and communities who are positioned to contribute collectively to their development. As McRoy and Hall specify, when White parents raise children of color, they are often unable to provide the racial and ethnic awareness that is necessary for the racial identity development of the child. Much like transracial adoptions, McRoy and Hall suggest that White families can provide food, shelter, and stability, and love, but questions how well White families can provide a child with the tools for navigating what it means to be an racialized ethnic minority in the United States.

Much of Black culture including hip hop culture, clothing, rap music, dance, language and hipness all have been appropriated by corporate America for profit and exploitation. More recently Black biracial people have also been commoditized by mainstream culture and corporate America in the United States. As Elam discusses, "Commoditization of biracial people is a current theme in media, marketing and advertising, and entertainment. Multiracial people are often seen as exotic, beautiful, different, and mysterious" (Elam, 2011, p. 172). As White women recognize that biracial people are seen as valuable to



mainstream entertainment businesses they are encouraged, and encourage others, to enter their children into modeling in the hopes of financially capitalizing on their unique looks.

There are important racial, cultural, and psychological implications from this research. White women that desire Black bi-racial children indicate little solidarity with other women particularly Black women on racial and cultural grounds and appear to hold assumptions about Black family structures, culture, genetics, and social engineering that suggests they contribute to contemporary forms of racism.

I understand this research is provocative particularly for White women who have relationships with Black men, as well as those who have Black biracial children. I also understand this research can cause discomfort to biracial children as it critiques the roles of their parents. However, this research aims to interrogate the surface level engagement White women articulate on race, gender, and class. It also speaks to the authority White women as participants in this study claim over motherhood, and womanhood. It is my hope that White women will engage with this research critically to understand the implications from this project as it relates to everyday perceptions about Blackness and the many ways White women appear to work to “whitewash” their own Black biracial children. It was initially my intention to share the findings from this research with the participants and engage in dialogue about the many ways the perceptions shared in this research may have negative side effects for our children and our communities.

I hope to encourage women who desire Black bi-racial children to re-consider the implications of such a desire on a deeper level —deeper than simply being an object of desire over Black women and engaging notions of mixed race beauty. Children particularly children of color need to feel validated by their family, friends, and community. Mothers

take on a significant role for the many ways that all children grow to understand themselves, their family and community. I hope this research will reach White women who are still in the contemplation stage of this type of family planning. As for the women who participated in this study, they have told me they are uninterested in reading or engaging with it.

### **Personal Reflections of the Researcher**

*Throughout this study, I continued to think about the women who participated, as well as the other women in my life that actively seek Black men in order to achieve the “perfect mixed child.” Many of these women were very invested in their Black male partners; after all, they had extensive relationships and married them. But what I kept thinking about was the ways in which the women were so willing to answer my questions, engage in these conversations, and offer details about their reasoning regarding their desire for biracial Black children. I was very much surprised to have so many women interested in participating in this study. I was originally worried that no one would come forth. But as my conversations began with White women, it was then that I noticed that they had no consciousness about how complicit they were in what I understand as contemporary forms of racism. They appeared totally unaware of how they were engaging with ideas that reflect directly with language, actions and practices of slavery in the United States. Many women were subconsciously racist, and shared racist attitudes with me openly, suggesting that having mixed race children and “mixing up the world” was a form of philanthropy. I originally theorized that the perceived beauty status of mixed children would be the most significant reason as to why White women wanted to bear them. However, I never considered that they would acknowledge and believe the unique disparities between Whites and Blacks in America resulted from an inherent*

*pathology of the Black family attributed to Black women, and how widely these ideas were expressed. With these acknowledgements came their own understanding of activism and this would manifest in so many problematic ways. These women so adamantly desired to prove they were not racist that they often shied away from saying appropriate racial identifiers such as "Black" "African American" or "African" as if these words already had negative connotations to them because they clearly indicated Blackness. Instead, each woman asked me before the interviews what word was appropriate or considered politically correct in describing Black people. This really disturbed me since they were already in relationships with Black men and many also already had Black biracial children. Interestingly, although participants proclaimed time and time again that they did not "see" race they sure spent a lot of time noticing racialized physical characteristics of their children. They also had very racialized understandings of Black families, Black men, and Black women and their roles in society. It eventually became clear these women were not necessarily malicious, but they had certain imagined understandings of United States race relations that they engaged and then manifested through racist thinking and behavior.*

*Throughout my life I wanted to know the reasons why so many people interacted with me in the ways described by the White women I write about and critique. Why did people stare? Why did people touch? Why did people invade my personal space? At this point I think it was a matter of some kind of distorted curiosity about my body racial identity. As the White women who participated in my research have demonstrated, there is a contradicting outspoken yet hesitant way they talk about race. It seems as though post racial attitudes have stumped our conversations about race, mixed race, racism, and racial identity. These*

*conversations expose some of the many ways racism continues and the multilayered ways  
Black women continue to be subordinated in the United States.*

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APPENDIX A: "MIXED ME" PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)

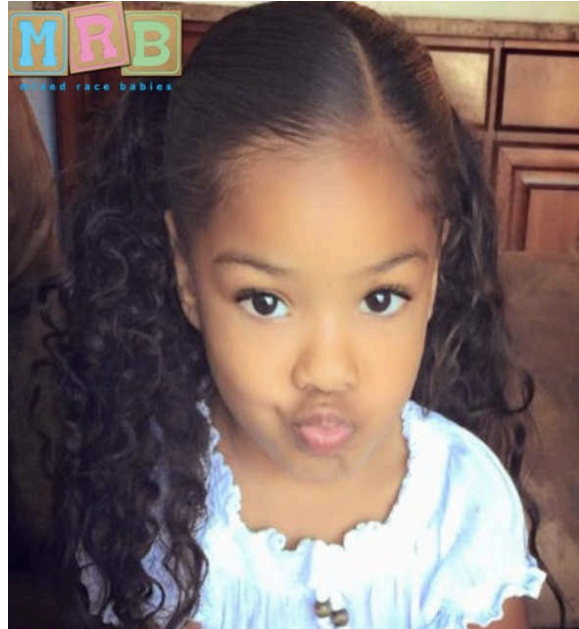


Figure 2 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)



Figure 3 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)



Figure 4 (Mixed Chicks, 2015)



Figure 5 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)



Figure 6 (Mixed Babies, 2016)



### Mixed Chicks

February 3 · 🌐

6 years old African American and English  
She is very energetic, inquisitive, strong,  
loving, argumentive and most of all brave.

Hobbies include listening to music, singing,  
dancing, styling clothes and hair.

Ten days after turning 5 she survived a car  
accident, under went hip surgery, two  
months in a spica cast and never  
complained, she is my hero.

Figure 7 (Mixed Chicks, 2015)



Figure 8 (Mixed Chicks, 2015)

To be SOLD,  
 A likely Negroe Girl,  
 ABOUT fifteen years of age, has had the  
 Small Pox and Measles, and is duly regis-  
 tered. The owner has no other reason for  
 disposing of her but the want of employment.  
 One year's credit will be given on giving ap-  
 proved security. Further particulars may be  
 known by applying to the Printers hereof.  
 York borough, January 26, 1789.

York County Heritage Trust

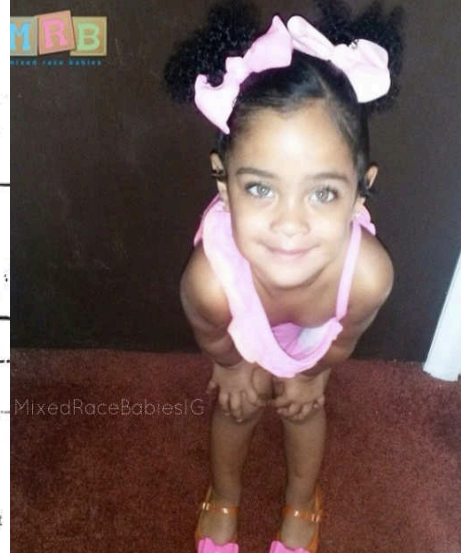


Figure 9 (York County Heritage Trust, 2015)      Figure 10 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 11 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 12 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)



Figure 13 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 14 (Mixed Race Babies, 2015)

Figure 15 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 16 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 17 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 18 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 19 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 20(Mixed Race Babies, 2016)

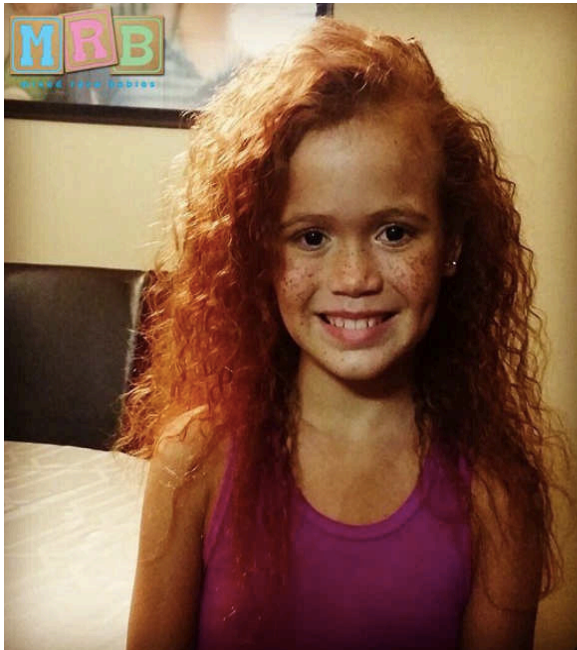


Figure 21 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 22 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)





Figure 23 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)



Figure 24 (Mixed Race Babies, 2016)

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me what you think has contributed to the current trend of an increasing biracial population in the U.S. particularly of biracial African American populations?
2. Tell me about how you became interested in Black biracial relationships? (Prompt for media and social media influences in having biracial children)
3. Tell me about how others typically respond to you when you share you are interested in having a biracial relationship and/or biracial children? (Prompt for strangers, friends and family members).
4. What types of comments do people typically say when discussing your children or biracial relationship? (Prompt for what would you like people to say or notice)
5. Tell me what aspects or characteristics about your children are most important to you as a mother or future mother?
6. Tell me what you think is important about parenting or mothering children? (Prompt for different considerations for biracial children and racial identity development?)
7. How is parenting biracial Black children different from parenting white children if at all?
8. Tell me about concerns you might have about parenting or mothering children that are biracial?
9. Tell me how others in your life discuss biracial children and relationships.
10. Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't or anything else you want to share with me?

## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

Hello, I am a graduate student in the Ethnic Studies Department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. For my thesis I am conducting research on interracial families, and mothering. Specifically, I am interested in White women who have, will have, or are interested in having Black multiracial or Black biracial children.

For this research I will need to interview up to ten women who identify as White. These interviews will last no longer than an hour with a potential follow up interview lasting no longer than half an hour. Participants in this research will be compensated with a \$10 gift card to Starbucks, as a “thank you” for your participation.

If you fit the criteria, and are interested in participating in this interview, please direct message me, or you may contact me at (720) 206-7146 or you can contact me via e-mail at [Erin.Bell@colostate.edu](mailto:Erin.Bell@colostate.edu)

## APPENDIX D: MIXED ME DICTIONARY

\*Multiracial slang and other definitions as told by participants, bloggers, and commentators of photos

Blasian- A Blasian is a person or child who is physically identifiable as having one Asian parent and one Black parent. This is a desired mix in mixed race conversations.

Caramel Skin Color- "tan," "light skin," or "olive skin" that is not noticeably Black, but not "too Black." This skin color is referred to mixed race kids who identifiably have some kind of Black ancestry.

Exotic- Exotic often refers to women of color that are multiracial, or that are racially unidentifiable.

Facebook Fan Pages- Websites that are public to anyone with a Facebook account. These accounts have administrators who chose the photos, phrases, posts, and content of the site. Facebook fan pages that are represented in this research are "Mixed Race Babies" and "Mixed Chicks." Together, these pages have upwards of four hundred thousand followers.

Good Hair- Good hair refers to hair that isn't kinky, coarse, or Black. When participants discuss "good hair" they are most often referring to White hair.

Mixed Me- Mixed Me's refer to the children of the White women who live vicariously through their children. Many times women suggest that they always wanted to have tan skin, and not their daughters will be lucky to have those features.

Swirl- A "swirl" is a person or child who has one Black parent and one White parent. "Swirls" often reference children. A "swirl" is a reference to an ice cream swirl cone that has both vanilla and chocolate flavors.

APPENDIX E: GROUNDED THEORY MEMO CHARTING

Mulattos & U.S. Slavery	“Mixed Me’s”
Legalized ownership of human beings—often requiring labor and servitude. Slaves have no freedom and are often kept in bondage.	Parents have custody of children claiming that they “belong” to them. Ownership over children is implied.
Whites own slaves who are Black, and have African ancestry.	Features of ownership, such as: custody, and decision-making. However, there are limits regarding abuse and healthcare.
Mulattos received their status from their father’s White lineage.	The value of mixed children relates to desired characteristics from father’s lineage.
The institution of Slavery produces goods, services for profits or value.	There is a perceived value of mixed looks that can be utilize for monetary gain in careers such as modeling, and acting. The mixed look gives a person the ability to pass as almost any racial identity.
Enslaved men, women and children were often denied agency over their own bodies and decisions.	Children often can’t access autonomy with their parents because parents are discussed and thought of as the ultimate protectors of children.
Lineage of enslaved is often discussed as pedigree as evidence of their value as discussed in slave advertisements.	Comments posted with photos on Facebook fan pages actually list blood quantum and percentages of racial makeup. Blood quantum and racial percentages
Under slavery, mulatto status could equal special treatment, thus attaching higher status to them.	Mixed Race is the new Mulatto—light skin, light eyes, and “good hair.”
White slave owners had status if they owned slaves. Their desire for wealth and status perpetuated owning slaves, specifically, mulattos.	White women engage the goal and idea to produce a “beautiful” mixed race child may be motivated to obtain either wealth or status.
One justification for slavery was that White slave owners were doing enslaved Blacks a favor by suggesting that freed Blacks would not be able to survive without them given their lesser status.	White women invoke DNA intervention combined with a White savior mentality.
Breedability was critical to determining the worth of enslaved females because of their value for reproduction and selective breeding.	White women displace Black mothers by repossessing the power of birthing Black biracial children.