



**The Development of Racial Understanding
as Told by Black People in America:
A Narrative Analysis Regarding Colorblindness, Blackness, and Identity**

by Maraki Russell

Senior Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Honors in
the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

Advisors:
Sara Moorman, Ph.D., Eve Spangler, Ph.D.

Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
May 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Theoretical Background.....	7
Critical Race Theory.....	7
Social Identity Theory.....	8
Literature Review.....	11
Children and Colorblindness.....	11
Racial Socialization and Mainstream Socialization.....	12
Implications for Youth.....	14
Methods.....	16
Results.....	18
Colorblind Upbringing: No Race Talk at the Kids’ Table.....	18
Non-Colorblind Upbringing: Blackness as a Restrictor.....	23
Non-Colorblind Upbringing: Blackness in Celebration.....	26
Moving Forward: Participant Perspectives.....	31
Discussion and Implications for Future Research.....	33
A Typology of Racial Socialization.....	33
Distinctions between Types of Individually-Centered Racial Socialization.....	37
Limitations.....	38
Implications for Further Research.....	38
Conclusion.....	40
Works Cited.....	41
Appendix A.....	43

Abstract

This research project explores the narratives of how and when young Black people came to understand their race, as well as the implications of it. In order to expand upon the existing studies regarding racial realization and provide specific stories of such instances, qualitative interviews with nine Black people (ages 18-22) were conducted. The upbringings of these young Black people were analyzed in depth in order to provide insight to different types of racial socialization. It was found that both colorblind upbringings and non-colorblind upbringings that center individuals rather than systems of oppression are not helpful in the racial identity formation of young Black people. They both result in the perpetuation of the idea that racially marginalized people should modify their behavior. Additionally, this project exposes some of the reasons why racial realization is often a jarring experience for Black people in America, and in turn, expose some of the ways it can be less so.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me immensely in the process of writing this thesis. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Moorman, for guiding me throughout this journey. She has provided me with so much insight and unwavering support, and I feel lucky to have gotten the chance to work with her. I am also grateful for my other advisor, Professor Eve Spangler, who began working on this project with me a little over two years ago now – when it existed as the beginning stages of a McNair Scholars Program research project. I am thankful for her encouragement and support as this project has developed and evolved. I would also like to thank Chasneika Astacio and Sara Wong, of the McNair Program at Boston College.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my family and friends. Their love and support has motivated me to continue working on this project. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of this study. Without them and their willingness to share their stories, this project would not be possible. To them, I would like to say *thank you* for your vulnerability and your contribution to this important topic.

“And the moment you were born, since you don't know any better, every stick and stone, every face is white, and since you have not seen a mirror, you suppose that you are too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5 or 6 or 7 to discover that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians — when you were rooting for Gary Cooper — that the Indians were you! It comes as a great shock to discover the country which is your birthplace, and to which you owe your life and your identity, has not in its whole system of reality evolved any place for you.”

-James Baldwin

Introduction

One of the first things many people perceive about others when they meet is their race – specifically, their skin color. However, a colorblind approach to race – in which people claim to not see race, only human beings – contradicts this natural tendency. Many people hold the misconception that children are colorblind, not noticing or learning about race until they are older, but in fact, they categorize and assume things about people’s appearances in a manner that aligns with adults’ processing (Winkler 2009). Leaving kids out of the conversation when it comes to race results in jarring experiences for children of color when they come to realize that people see them differently than the majority white population in the United States and the predominant white narratives in the media.

There has been a great deal of research regarding the ways in which parents and guardians teach children about race; however, there has been less research about exactly how those upbringing practices influence kids’ understanding of race. Additionally, little research exists regarding the impact of “colorblindness” on young people. This is extremely relevant now, as colorblind ideology is so common, and because children’s perceptions of race and racial discrimination will shape their understanding of such topics as adults (Hughes et al. 2006). Further, conversations about race and racial socialization experiences from a young age can aid

young people in navigating racial discrimination they may encounter in the future (Nunnally 2010).

This research project will explore the stories of how and when Black American college students first came to understand their race, as well as examine how colorblind aspects of their upbringing have impacted them. I expand on the existing psychological research regarding the development of racial identity by adding a sociological perspective and by providing and analyzing lived experiences. Further, this project will expose some of the reasons why racial realization is often a jarring experience for Black people in America, and in turn, some of the ways it can be less so.

Theoretical Background

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theories represent ways of thinking about and assessing social systems and groups that incorporate recognition of the following principles: (a) race is a central component of social organizations and systems, including families; (b) racism is institutionalized—it is an ingrained feature of racialized social systems; (c) everyone within racialized social systems may contribute to the reproduction of these systems through social practices; and (d) racial and ethnic identities, in addition to “the rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power” associated with them, are not fixed entities, but rather they are socially constructed phenomena that are continually being revised on the basis of a group's own self-interests (Burton et al.).

Essentially, critical race theory examines society's law and power dynamics through the lens of race. In the article “Critical Race Theory Speaks to the Sociology of Mental Health: Mental Health Problems Produced by Racial Stratification,” Tony Brown explains that the theory often exposes how deeply rooted and relevant racial stratification is in all aspects of life (Brown, 2003). Brown also emphasizes that critical race theory can provide insight to people's mental health by examining mental health problems caused by racial stratification, as well as assessing the risk factors and social conditions that go hand in hand with racial stratification (Brown, 2003).

One facet of critical race theory is colorblind racism. The concept of colorblind racial ideology was developed by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in his 2003 book *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Contrary to a critical race perspective, colorblind racism is the belief that race is largely unimportant, and that drawing attention to race only divides people further (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Colorblind ideologists often believe that if we simply treated everyone equally, racial discrimination would decrease, or end completely (Apfelbaum et al., 2012). A common rhetoric under this ideology is “I don't see race; I only see people.” Colorblind racism is problematic in multiple ways – it

diminishes the lived experiences of people of color, it further drives racism by foregoing conversations about race, and it absolves racist institutions and systems of responsibility, therefore making the need for change less obvious (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

As a framework of this research project, critical race theory and colorblind race ideology provide insight into reverberations of sociological phenomena on the individual level, and centers race in the process.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory was proposed by Henri Tajifel in 1979 (McLeod 2019). Tajifel asserted that “groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem” (McLeod 2019, p.1). He also theorized that organizing individuals into groups is the result of conventional cognitive processes (McLeod 2019). Under social identity theory, people are categorized as the in-group (the group which one belongs to and had similarities with) and the out-group (people who are different/do not hold the same identity as the in-group) (McLeod 2019).

A group of researchers who worked with Tajifel proposed three sequential stages in social identity theory – categorization, identification, and comparison (McLeod 2019). During the first stage, social categorization, we categorize individuals as a way to better understand the world around us (McLeod, p.2). In the course of the social identification stage, “we adopt the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves as belonging to” (McLeod, p.2). At this time, emotions will begin to be tied to the group with which one identifies, and self-esteem will be correlated to one’s relationship with the group (McLeod 2019). Within the last stage, social comparison, people often compare their in-group with out-groups (McLeod 2019). A great deal

of maintaining one's self-esteem has to do with whether one's group's needs and treatment by society are equivalent to that of other groups (McLeod 2019).

In their 2015 article "Racial Identity and Well-Being Among African Americans," Hughes and colleagues theorize about social identity further and more specifically through the lens of race. They define social identity theory as "a multifaceted social psychological theory of how people's self-conceptions as members of social groups influence intergroup behavior and group processes. It deals with cognitive, motivational, interactional, and macrosocial aspects of group life" (Hughes et al. 2015, p. 26). In other words, under social identity theory, a group or category can influence the behavior of an individual within that group (Hughes et al. 2015).

Hughes et al. define a social identity as "a person's awareness of belonging to a social category or group, together with the value and emotional significance of belonging" (Hughes et al. 2015, p. 27). When the group or category with which that individual identifies is devalued or stigmatized, they must put in more effort during the comparison stage of social identity development (Hughes et al. 2015). People in this situation have to dedicate more effort towards finding characteristics of their group that set them apart and elevate them in comparison to other groups, since society devalues them (Hughes et al. 2015).

William Cross developed a racial identity model specific to Black people in 1991. He theorized that first, all Black people go through the Pre-Encounter Stage, in which people don't think race plays a role in everyday life but, in reality, people are noticing racial differences as well as ways in which society favors whiteness and euro-centric qualities (Cross 1995). Then, Black people go through the Encounter Stage. At that point, people's ideologies/ worldviews are challenged (Cross 1995). Often people are forced into this stage upon acknowledging the presence and impact of racism in their life (Cross 1995).

Conclusion

For this project, social identity is being examined through understandings of race and colorblindness, and therefore, critical race theory and social identity theory are closely linked. This research poses the questions “what happens to social identity development, as it is presently understood, when racial identities are undervalued under colorblind race ideology and other forms of socialization?” In order to fully address this question, an understanding of critical race theory, colorblindness, and social identity theory is necessary.

Literature Review

There exists a great deal of research regarding “colorblindness,” how children understand race, and racial identity formation. However, the ways that these topics interact with and affect each other has not been examined in-depth or from a solely Black perspective. Here, the existing literature will be analyzed, and the ways in which this research will fill the gaps in the preexisting work will be proposed.

Children and “Colorblindness”

In the article “Children are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race,” Erin Winkler explains that colorblind ideologies may appeal to parents because of the misconception that “children are ‘blank slates’ who cannot develop racial prejudices until they are explicitly taught to do so” (Winkler 2009, p. 1). However, a 1997 study which followed 200 Black and white children from ages of six months to six years (among other studies: Hirschfield 2008; Aboud 2008; Ausdale & Feagin 2001; Katz 2003) have found evidence that strongly contradicts this. At six months, children can nonverbally categorize people by race (Katz & Kofkin 1997). This was determined by the fact that infants looked at the face of someone of a different race than their family/caregiver for significantly longer than at faces of people of the same race as their caregiver (Katz & Kofkin 1997). By two years old, toddlers can begin to use racial categories to make assumptions about people’s behaviors (Katz & Kofkin 1997). Between ages three and five, children begin to racially categorize people and may express racial bias (Katz & Kofkin 1997).

Winkler writes that this racial categorization and bias is because the “immature cognitive structures” of children at this age allows for a great deal of stereotyping to occur (Winkler 2009,

p.2). Kids likely group people by race and not by height or hair color, for example, because they cannot focus on multiple characteristics at one time, and because “factors in children’s environments, and in our society as a whole, teach children that race is a social category of significance” (Winkler 2009, p.2).

Racial Socialization and Mainstream Socialization

In 2006, Hughes and colleagues conducted a review of existing research on this topic and drew several important conclusions. First, they define *racial socialization* to be a broad reference to the transmission of information about race from adults to children (Hughes et al. 2006).

Dissimilarly, *mainstream socialization* (coined by Boykin and Toms in 1985) is the strategy of orienting young people “toward developing skills and characteristics needed to thrive in settings that are part of the mainstream, or dominant culture” rather than orienting them towards their culture or minority status (Hughes et al. 2006, p, 757). This is the strategy of being silent about race among children; it is the practice of not teaching children about their own race, in turn leaving them to be socialized by the predominantly white mainstream society.

In examining how caregivers address race with children, Phinney & Chavira conducted qualitative interviews with parents, and found that across multiple ethnic groups (white, Latin-x, and African American), two-thirds of parents reported egalitarianism – the concept that everyone is equal – and colorblind strategies in raising their children (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). To address Black racial socialization more specifically, a 1997 study found that “Black parents were more likely to talk about racial identity with their preschoolers than were white parents (48% of Black parents vs. 12% of white parents), but neither Black nor white parents were likely to discuss the racial differences their children saw in media, on playgrounds, or in stores at this

[preschool] age” (Winkler 2009, p. 4). Similarly, a study by Hamm (2001) in which focus-group interviews with parents were conducted, the promotion of colorblind ideologies was more prominent among white parents than Black parents (Hughes et al. 2006). This discrepancy is likely on the account of the discrimination that Black parents and caregivers face (Hughes et al. 2006). Hughes et al. hypothesize this in saying “one might expect that parents who experience discrimination will be more likely than others to anticipate that their children will also experience it, and to provide their children with tools for coping with it” (Hughes et al. 2006, 760). They then support this hypothesis by drawing data from Hughes and Chen’s 1997 study which found that

African American parents’ messages regarding discrimination (preparation for bias) were significantly associated with their perceptions of interpersonal prejudice at work. Parents’ cautions and warnings about Whites (promotion of mistrust) were associated with their perceptions of institutional-level discrimination at work. These relationships were evident among parents of children 9–12 years of age but not among parents of children 4–8 years of age (Hughes et al. 2006, p.760).

These parenting trends are roughly representative of the ways in which participants of this study were raised, as they were born between 1998 and 2002. According to Hughes & Chen’s study, at the time, Black parents and caregivers are more likely to discuss topics of race with their children than their white counterparts, but they only begin to do so after the age of nine (1997). However, children begin understanding race much earlier than that, as Winkler established. Therefore, despite the efforts that Black parents and guardians make to racially socialize their children, many kids gather information from their environment (mainstream socialization) at a young age, before conversations about race begin at home.

Implications for Youth

Even if parents are not discussing racial issues with their kids, children *are* taking notice of it (Winkler 2009). Avoiding the topic will not make it go away, as colorblind ideology suggests – it will only create more room for mainstream socialization. Without conversations about race, children learn about the topic through the media they consume, the actions and behaviors of people around them, school lessons, institutions, and other factors (Nunnally 2006). They then infer what the “norm” is (Winkler). This is how colorblind upbringings and silence about race at a young age can lead to mainstream socialization.

Because the “mainstream” in the United States is largely white and therefore afforded certain privileges, children of color who are exposed to colorblind upbringings may have a more difficult time understanding and coping with instances of discrimination, Hughes et al. propose. (2006) This is likely because children who receive “messages about appreciation of all groups and equality” are socialized to expect equal treatment (Hughes et al. 2006 p. 763). Hughes et al. also suspect that one of the main functions of racial socialization is to “enable youths to recognize and cope with societal discrimination” (Hughes et al. 2006, p.762).

There is not much evidence to support this assertion – that racial socialization prepares young people of color to face discrimination and that mainstream socialization does not. McHale et al. conducted a study entitled “Mothers’ and Fathers’ Racial Socialization in African American Families: Implications for Youth,” in which 162 Black/African American families, each with a mother, father, and two children were interviewed (McHale et al. 2006). One of their main research goals was to explore the links between parents’ efforts toward racial socialization and young people’s ethnic identity development by examining their locus of control and levels of depression. They found that when mothers exhibited more racial socialization, children

experienced fewer depression symptoms (McHale et al. 2006). However, McHale et al. express that this data “only reached trend level,” “does not replicate prior work,” and “should be viewed with caution.” (McHale 2006, p. 1397). In addition to the lack of support for this data, this research was quantitative and did not provide specific experiences of young people.

Conclusion

A large amount of research regarding how children learn about race and how they are racially socialized and/or socialized by the mainstream has been conducted. However, there lacks a perspective from young people about how racial socialization, mainstream socialization, and colorblind processes have impacted them. This research will address Hughes et al.’s assertion that colorblind upbringings and mainstream socialization leave young people ill-equipped to grapple with instances of discrimination by providing and analyzing narratives of racial realization among young people.

Methods

Data for this research was collected through one-on-one semi-structured qualitative interviews. By publicizing an informational flyer for this project throughout different offices on Boston College's campus, I gathered 9 Black participants between the ages of 18 and 22. These interviews were conducted over videoconference, and were approximately 45 minutes in length. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Only people who identified as Black were permitted to participate in this study because the existing research lacks a perspective from young Black people on their personal experiences with racial identity formation.

Interview questions were guided by the existing literature on this topic, and more specifically, the gaps in that research (see Appendix A for interview questions). Interviews were transcribed and coded with the following codes:

- racial socialization
 - at home
 - at school
 - elsewhere
- mainstream socialization
- consequence of socialization
- modification of behavior
- upbringing alternatives
 - in education
 - in media
 - financial
 - community support

I also identified three different upbringing types among participants: *colorblind*, *non-colorblind: Blackness as a restrictor*, and *non-colorblind: Blackness in celebration*. These categories will be defined in the following results section. The names, ages, race, upbringing type, and area of upbringing of participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Name	Age	Race (self-described)	Upbringing Type	Area of Upbringing
Will	19	Black	Colorblind	Long Island, New York
Kim	18	Black	Colorblind	Queens, New York
Grace	22	Black	Colorblind	Southern California
Tess	21	Black	Non-Colorblind: Blackness as a Restrictor	Chicago, Illinois
Jayden	21	Black - Guyanese	Non-Colorblind: Blackness as a Restrictor	Boston, Massachusetts
Isaiah	20	Black	Non-Colorblind: Blackness as a Restrictor	Chicago, Illinois
Olivia	20	Black and Asian	Non-Colorblind: Blackness as a Restrictor	North Carolina
Grace	20	Black	Non-Colorblind: Blackness in Celebration	Harlem, New York
Brendon	21	Black	Non-Colorblind: Blackness in Celebration	New Jersey

Results

Throughout the interviews for this study, participants were very open about their upbringings and navigation of their racial identity. In my analysis of young adults' narratives of growing up as Black Americans, I identified three different types of upbringings:

- 1) *colorblind upbringing*, in which participants expressed that they rarely discussed race in their youth, and were largely left to pick up cues from society about race;
- 2) *non-colorblind upbringing with Blackness framed as a restrictor*, in which interviewees received messages about how their Blackness may hinder them, and how they might need to modify their behavior;
- 3) *non-colorblind upbringing with Blackness framed as celebratory*, in which participants were raised to be proud of their Blackness, but were not taught much about the negative ways society views Blackness.

Here, the narratives which fall into each of these three categories will be analyzed in depth, and the ways in which they are similar and dissimilar will be examined. Additionally, participants' perspectives on how to make the navigation of racial identity more seamless for young Black people are explored.

Colorblind Upbringing: No Race Talk at the Kids' Table

For this study, I identify a colorblind upbringing to be one in which young people *explicitly* receive messages that that race is unimportant in daily life, and that there are no racial divisions between people. Examples of this might include rarely, if ever, breaching the subject of race or rhetoric such as "everyone is the same." People with colorblind upbringings may, however, receive *implicit* messages from society that lead them to believe otherwise. Three

participants of this study described their upbringing as almost entirely colorblind. One of those participants is Kim, an 18-year-old Black woman from Queens, New York. She said “Honestly, I don’t think my family ever really talked about race, especially when I was younger. Obviously I knew we were Black, but I never really knew what that meant because we never talked about it.” Another participant, Will, is a 19-year-old Black man who grew up in Long Island, New York. He lives in a predominantly white town, but attended racially diverse private elementary, middle, and high schools. Will said that “At a young age, racial issues were rarely discussed in my house. But as I’ve gotten older, it’s become more of a common topic to talk about.” In Will’s classrooms, at least in his elementary school years, Black History Month, Martin Luther King Jr., and a few other prominent Black figures were briefly discussed. Will explained that he had “some sort of idea” about his race at that age (5-10), but that he did not, in any way, understand the significance of it.

In further explaining his experience with race and racism in his youth, Will says,

when I was younger, we didn’t really discuss race too much, and the people I was around never really made me feel like I stood out because of my race. I think I grew up in a time where racism died down a little, at least in suburban areas. So I never really experienced racism growing up... or maybe I did and never noticed because I was young.

Will’s lack of exposure to racism (or perception of such) as a young person perpetuated the colorblind perspective that was imposed upon him. He expressed feeling “out of place” in white spaces, and even says, “When I was younger, I wanted to be white.” This is somewhat contradictory –how could Will want to be white if he was raised with a colorblind ideology and was never explicitly taught about the differences between white people and Black people? It can be understood that while Will never discussed race as a child, he learned about whiteness and Blackness through his experiences. At an early age, he learned that whiteness was preferred over Blackness in society all on his own. Upon reflecting on his desire to be white as a child, Will

attributes that “bad mindset” to two things: his colorblind upbringing and the media representation at the time. Will’s lack of explicit conversations about race as a child left him to understand race all on his own, partially by receiving racist messages from the media he consumed. He explains that he barely ever saw people who looked like him on TV, and that he might have perceived whiteness to be “the norm.”

Will did not fully understand the implications of his Blackness until his first explicit encounter with racism when he was 16. While at a store in the Dubai Airport, Will was followed around by a staff member there, and while checking out, the cashier asked Will all sorts of questions and insisted to check his hands and pockets. Since that encounter, Will says “When I’m in public, I understand how I’m generally viewed. For many people, they just assume that I’m dangerous in some way. So I try to show people that I’m not... I try to disprove their beliefs – do things that they don’t really expect of me.” He provides examples of making sure his pants are not sagging, not wearing hoods, and smiling at strangers, especially in new spaces and/or white spaces. Will went on to express his frustration with modifying his behavior for others’ sake: “It shouldn’t be my responsibility to behave a certain way. Because at the end of the day, it’s them that have that bias, not me... But, you know, I still have that responsibility, just because it protects me.”

Will explained that as he got older, he had to work on himself and unlearn many misconceptions he held about Blackness in saying,

I guess I reached my age of reason or whatever, and I began to really think for myself. And I realized I don’t want to be anything else than what I am. But that took a lot of self-education... learning about what Black people have done for the world.

When asked whether or not he thought it should be his responsibility to dispel what he had learned from society and educate himself on “what Black people have done for the world,” Will said,

I mean, it's not my responsibility, but at the same time, I didn't mind having to do that. It would have been nice if I never had that thought in my head [wishing to be white] when I was younger, though, and I think having discussions about race earlier on would have changed my perspective and helped me understand race and myself earlier.

Another participant, Mia, is a 21-year-old Black woman who grew up in Southern California. Her parents employed a colorblind approach with her. In Mia's words, “My parents tried to raise me in a bubble of colorblindness. They said things like ‘what matters is the content of your character, you don't see race, you see the people.’” However, simultaneously,

They were also very clear on the racial injustice that they faced in their daily lives and so that was a discussion at the table, but it never was in relation to me. It was always like, ‘This how your mom is impacted or this is how your dad is impacted or how your sister's impacted’ but it was never about me.

This presents an interesting duality. Mia's family seemingly held the belief that kids are not affected by race and racism, especially because Mia's sister was 17 at the time. However, throughout the rest of Mia's narrative, it can be observed that this was not the case, as she encountered racism in multiple forms as a young Black person.

At eight years old, Mia switched from a school in a predominantly Black area to a predominantly white school. There, she ran into “issues with teachers” for the first time. Mia explains that she would always be the “Example of what *not* to do in the classroom. My teacher would say ‘Oh Mia did this problem wrong. Let's not be like Mia.’” Mia's mother would come to the school to speak with her teachers often. At first, Mia didn't understand why her mom always had to come to school; she wondered “Why was nobody else's parents in the school?” She began to understand while in conversation with her mother and a teacher, when her mother

said something along the lines of “You’re not going to pick on Mia just because she’s the only Black kid in the class.”

At that same “all-white” school, Mia became more aware of her race while at a swim meet in sixth grade. She explains, “I was a swimmer. A competitive swimmer on an all-white team. And in the sport of swimming, you don’t really see Black people at all. And so I realized at a young age that I was different.” For Mia, these realizations occurred not because of the way she saw herself and her family, who were the only Black people at the swim meet, but because of the way the white people around her saw them. She details the exact moment when she realized that people not only saw her differently, but differently in a negative way:

I’ll never forget this very distinct moment. I was getting ready for my competition, and there was a family with a mom, dad, brother, and sister, and I was racing the sister. And they all looked at me, and the mom said ‘Beat her. There’s no way that this Black girl should beat you.’

This experience was extremely hurtful for Mia, and she began to understand that people do not simply look at her and see her character, as her parents taught her, they look at her and see a Black person. And some people might judge her or disrespect her for her Blackness alone. Upon reflecting on this incident, Mia says,

Before that, I went into everything with an open mind. I was very carefree and open about who I was. And I think after that moment, I became very insecure in my Blackness. I did a lot of things to try to minimize my Blackness... So yeah, I can’t change my skin color, but I can act in ways that aren’t stereotypically Black. After that moment, I wanted to fit in one hundred percent, like trying to figure out how I could have the straightest hair possible and still get it wet in the pool. And before, that was never a problem I was concerned with.

Mia had to work hard to unlearn the “oppressive thoughts [she] had against [her] own community.” She emphasized the importance of forming friendships with Black people and educating herself about systemic racism.

Both Will and Mia modified their behavior, or in Mia's words, "dialed back [their] Blackness" because they encountered situations and social cues to do so. They were also faced with incidents of racism which contradicted their colorblind upbringing, leaving them to reconcile their understanding of Blackness and racism on their own.

Non-Colorblind Upbringing: Blackness as a Restrictor

Four participants of this study described their upbringing as not colorblind – they discussed race in their youth, usually in a negative or restrictive manner. The first of these participants is Tess, a 22-year-old Black woman who grew up in Chicago. In discussing the ways in which her family approached the topic of race when she was younger, Tess said,

They mentioned race, or said certain things to me. But it was in an attempt to protect me and keep me safe. Like if I'm maneuvering in a public space or something, or if I'm going someplace alone, they would give me warning or tell me to be aware of certain things.

When asked to elaborate on what those conversations were about, Tess explained that her parents would tell her to be aware of how others might perceive her because she is Black – to carry herself a certain way so as not to validate the stereotypes people hold about Black people. As a result of these early conversations about race, Tess was aware that she was different from the white majority. Jayden, another participant, expressed similar experiences when discussing race with his family when he was young:

We talked about race, but it wasn't direct. It was like, you assume that type of thing... My mom and dad always told me to stay away from law enforcement and told me what to do if I got stopped by them, but I didn't understand why for awhile. It was never like, 'you should know that cops are racist.'

While Jayden believes conversations like this weren't "direct," they were undoubtedly more direct than the conversations participants with colorblind upbringings had about race – or rather,

the lack thereof. In both Tess and Jayden's case, discussions about race were about modifying their behavior on account of their Blackness and how they might be perceived – not about the biased people and systems that discriminate against them. It can be observed that the participants who defined their upbringings as colorblind – Will and Mia – modified their behavior because they received social cues to do so, while the participants here, Tess and Jayden, did so because they were explicitly told to. In both cases, responsibility is placed on young Black people to disprove stereotypes and biases, and not with perpetrators of those stereotypes and biases.

When Tess entered the sixth grade, she moved from a public, predominantly Black school to a private, predominantly white one. There, she developed a better understanding of what it meant to be Black. She details a specific experience in saying, "I was the only Black kid in that school. So it felt very different. One time, in class, a kid turned to me and said 'You don't belong here.'" Tess had already felt out of place in this new school, and this prejudiced incident with a classmate of hers only exacerbated that feeling. Tess remembers wanting to talk with her teacher about what happened, but ultimately did not do so because all the teachers were white and she feared they would be prejudiced as well.

Tess explained that in an effort to overcome feelings of "imposter syndrome," "I didn't allow myself to be easily influenced or dismiss that [Black] part of myself. I became more aware of who I was and more proud and unapologetic about it." This was difficult for Tess because she lost friends in the process, but it was worth it for her. In her words, "There are a lot of uncomfortable situations and conversations, and maybe you're left alone. Maybe there are some people who you can't trust, but I was willing to give that up in order to keep my dignity and my identity as a black woman in that space."

Isaiah also grew up in Chicago. He is a 20-year-old Black man who did not define his upbringing as colorblind. Isaiah explained that he was surrounded by Black people in his youth, and adults rarely ever shied away from discussing race and racial issues with him when he was a child. In his words, “The Black people in my life - which was who I really associated with as a child - talked a lot about the Black experience and issues that were facing the Black community.” However, Isaiah went on to say, “It was always in a negative sense... it was always in a limiting aspect and about what we couldn’t do. It was focused on the circumstances and experiences and challenges we were faced with as Black people.” He expressed frustration about this – Isaiah found it disheartening that he had to teach himself about the stories of successful Black people and about the joys of Blackness. In his understanding, hearing about the ways in which Black people are limited “Plants a seed in your mind. And every time you hear how you’re limited, it waters that seed and then grows and grows and grows, until the point where you really think you’re limited.” Isaiah believes he reached this point during his second year of undergraduate study at Boston College. At that point in time, he began doubting himself and feeling less capable than his white peers. These sentiments began shortly after several incidents of microaggressions, as Isaiah calls them, at Boston College. One of such incidents involved a professor assuming that Isaiah attended a nearby community college, despite the fact that he was wearing Boston College attire and was in a Boston College classroom. The same professor assumed that Isaiah was an “athlete on financial aid.” Another encounter involved a Chemistry professor, who urged Isaiah to drop the course within the first week of classes, despite the fact that he had no grades to reflect his abilities as a student at that time. These incidents watered that seed in his mind – that he was limited in some way because he is Black. Isaiah clarified that there are, undoubtedly, limitations placed on Black people in regard to social and socio-economic

mobility as a result of structural racism. However, Isaiah feels as though the ways in which race was presented to him, as well as the encounters with microaggressions he faced in college, led him to believe that he was also limited in his capabilities, which he now knows is not the case.

He explains,

The label most people put on you, on me, subconsciously made me conclude things about myself and what I couldn't do, or what society wouldn't allow me to do. And it had negative impacts on my identity because I felt like I was limited, like there was a glass ceiling for me and I couldn't go so high. But in developing my own identity... I had to learn a lot. It took years and years and years of rejecting what people consider Black people to be and focus on what I wanted to be.

Isaiah worked to “get rid of the ideas that other people planted” in his head. He educated himself about people such as Madam CJ Walker who “proved that it was possible” for Black people to be financially successful. Isaiah wished that he had been taught about such people in his childhood, because then, maybe that seed in his mind would not have grown so much.

Non-Colorblind: Blackness in Celebration

Two participants in this study expressed that their childhoods were not colorblind, and that conversations about race in their youth were grounded in celebration of Blackness. The first is Grace, a 20-year-old Black woman who grew up in Harlem, New York. Grace regularly discussed race and Blackness with her parents when she was young. Not only that, but her parents raised her to celebrate her Blackness. During our virtual interview, she spoke of the Black Barbies sitting in her childhood bedroom, and recalls the children's books about braiding hair in cornrows that her mom used to read to her as a child. Grace also learned a lot about race at her predominantly Black church which she attended every Sunday as a child. A large portion of that community consisted of “older people who went through Black migration and grew up in Jim Crow or marched in the Civil Rights Movement.” Grace explained that she was surrounded

by people who “went through trauma and were trying to make sure that I didn’t have to live through that trauma too.” While Grace is grateful for the support she found in her church community, she reflects on the colorism and “internalized anti-Blackness” that community carried. Her parents told her stories of church members looking at the inside of her ear when she was in infant, in an attempt to see whether Grace would grow up to be light-skinned or dark-skinned. Grace says, “They would say ‘Oh, she’s gonna be beautiful.’ Like, I wasn’t gonna be that dark so therefore I would be beautiful.” As Grace reflects on this attitude towards lighter skin, she says “It’s honestly disturbing, and contradictory to the sense of empowered Blackness that they wanted me to grow up with.”

Overall, Grace learned from her parents that “Black is good; there’s nothing to be ashamed of.” She went on to say “I was constantly reminded of my race but I was never really told about the systemic things – I always just looked at my Blackness as a strength.” To exemplify that in her youth, Grace celebrated her Blackness, but did not fully understand how her Blackness fit into the bigger picture, socially and systemically, she says, “I was constantly aware that many of my friends looked different than me, but I didn’t realize the classism or racism or gender dynamics involved. I didn’t think it meant anything.” To further exemplify this lack of understanding of structural racism, Grace discussed the conversations she had about race and ethnicity at her predominantly Black middle school. She explains,

Whenever topics about race came up, it was usually about respectability politics. Like since you’re Black, don’t do drugs, don’t be rude to police, and respect your authority figures. But they never explained the systemic side of it, or try to explain why. They sometimes made it sound like ‘You are the problem, because you’re Black,’ instead of saying ‘This is a repercussion of our society,’ and us kids are not the problem.

This sentiment is similar to other participants – Will, Mia, Tess, and Jayden - in that responsibility was placed on young Black people to modify their behavior, perhaps because the

adults in their lives did not believe them to be old enough or mature enough to understand systemic racism. The issue with this approach is that while those adults may think that they are protecting young Black people, they may indirectly lead children to believe that they are the problem, not the flawed society they are in.

As Grace began to enter white spaces more regularly in college, she began to understand that “There are people who think I shouldn’t be proud of my Blackness.” She explains further, “I am a very independent person and I always had my own voice - I think mostly because I grew up in very empowered spaces. But when I came to college, people were afraid of how strong in myself I was.” This perception of Grace is likely a result of her intersecting identity – a Black woman. While Grace did not go into depth about how her gender plays a role in her perceptions of race when we spoke, she did discuss how attending an all-girls school improved her confidence. Entering a co-ed, predominantly white college made Grace question her strength as a Black woman.

Grace believes that she “regressed” in her racial identity formation as she spent more time in white spaces. She became more aware of the fact that even though she was raised to celebrate her Blackness, the environment she was in did not celebrate Blackness. Further, her departure from an all-girls’ school and into a co-ed institution made her feel more insecure. In her words,

I think my understanding of race has sort of changed over time. I obviously have become a little more insecure because I'm more aware of other people's awareness of me now. And I'm aware that there are people who don't want me in certain spaces, when before I literally didn't care because I didn't know.

Brendon, another participant, is a 21-year-old Black man who grew up in New Jersey. He attended predominantly white schools between kindergarten and his second year of high school. For his junior and senior years of high school, he went to schools that consisted of mostly Black

students and students of color. He details the experience of walking up to a new, predominantly white school for the first time when he was entering fifth grade and his sister was entering fourth:

We walked up to our school, and it was a sea of white kids and they parted as we walked through, as if they had never seen Black kids before. And that was sort of my existence on a day to day basis... race and identity was something that I was constantly reminded of, because of the fact that I have dark skin and I'm very different than a lot of people around me, just phenotypically speaking, but also, it was something that I clung to as a person as sort of, at times, the essence of empowerment to be proud of some things. It wasn't something that was used against me to be detrimental.

Here, it can be observed that Brendon was aware of his race and how he was different from his peers, but he did not perceive of any negative connotation regarding his Blackness.

Brendon's family often discussed race and racial issues, even when he and his siblings were young. He explains that his parents

Sat us down we watched Roots together. I remember being a young kid and, they kept us home from school so we could watch Obama's inauguration. So we had a lot of different moments throughout my childhood even once I got older to sort of really break down the idea that we are Black and that does make us different but that's not bad.

In his youth, Brendon was confident in his Blackness, and he was “accustomed to being reminded [he] was Black, but [his] understanding of it was not concrete” until he encountered a difficult experience with his younger sister. He details the memory, “I remember dropping her off at school one day with my mom. I think she was going into pre-k. She came back to us after we dropped her off, and she said ‘Mom, Brendon, why are the kids being mean to me because I’m brown?’” Brendon explains,

I had never been in a position where I had to explain [race and racism]. Having that conversation forced me to reconcile the idea that I am Black and this is something that makes me different, and some people might not like that. And I have to be aware of that fact. And this was when I was in middle school. Before then, I knew I was Black, but it had no real meaning to me. It was just another identifier, like brown hair or curly hair or wearing a blue shirt. It wasn't real to me until I had that experience with my younger

sister and I had to explain race to her and that people might be mean to her because of her race, but that being brown is not a bad thing.

Brendon, like many other participants, encountered experiences with racism at a young age which made him understand race and his own Blackness differently than he previously had.

Brendon's was the only case of participants who was not encouraged to modify his behavior due to his Blackness, from what he shared in the interview.

Summary

The three different types of upbringing experiences examined here are each distinct in their own ways. Colorblind upbringings left the participants of this study to pick up cues about race indirectly from their environment, and may have been less prepared for encounters of racism because they expected equal treatment. Non-colorblind upbringings with Blackness framed as a restrictor resulted in a lack of understanding about systemic racism and those participants were led to believe that their Blackness was an issue, not the society within which they lived and how it discriminates against Black people. They may have been more prepared for encounters of racism because they did not expect equal treatment. Non-Colorblind upbringings with Blackness framed as celebratory also did not provide participants with an understanding of systemic racism, and they may have been less prepared for encounters of racism because they expected equal treatment.

None of these upbringing types focuses on the ways in which society and institutions are built to disadvantage Black people. Further, multiple participants, regardless of the way in which they were raised in regards to racial socialization, modified their behavior because of messages they received about race. Overall, each participant except for Brendon and Grace (who had non-

colorblind upbringings with Blackness framed as celebratory) voiced complaints about the ways in which they were racially socialized.

Moving Forward – Participant Perspectives

When asked about ways in which the Black racial identity formation process could be less harmful in the future, participants responded within four main topics – education, media/representation, overcoming financial barriers, and early conversations about race within supportive communities.

Regarding the need for a change in education, one participant, Olivia, stated:

I think the narrative of how black history is taught needs to change. Like, it really needs to change. Because, like say when a school system does a pretty good job of telling Black history in America it's always from a sad point of view, like it's always about slavery, and it's always about having to fight for rights and it's always about police brutality, you know, and it's like, yeah those things are very real. But why can't we ever see really nice stories of Black Americans and why can't we ever learn about their culture and what they believed in, you know what I'm saying?

Olivia also called for more of an integration of Black history. She says “It can’t be out of pocket either – like the subsection of chapter four of a History book is about Black people.”

In addressing the media and representation of Black people, many participants called for not only an increase in diverse narratives of Black people in mainstream media, but also for an increase of Black creators behind the camera. One participant, Mia, also addressed the need for more diverse children’s books and toys – perhaps similar to the Black Barbie and the book about braiding natural hair that Grace mentioned.

One participant, Jayden, brought up financial issues as a barrier for less complicated racial socialization experiences for Black people. He says,

I think when you get to the root of the problem – at least from my point of view – it’s a financial thing. Because you have families that are living paycheck to paycheck, you

have families that don't make enough money to feed their families. You have families that don't know where the next meal on the table is going to come from, and families who've got to work almost 24 hours straight. They might not see their kids for weeks just to try and put food on the table. So sometimes talking about race or Black Lives Matter is not on the top of your priority list. I think if there was more financial stability within these communities, we would have more time, more space, and more energy to educate ourselves on racism and empowering ourselves. But some people's minds are so focused on survival and you know, seeing tomorrow, that they just don't have the time.

Jayden presents an interesting point that no other participant discussed. A "race talk" with one's children may not seem like a priority at all when feeding one's children is an unknown.

Brendon discussed the need for early conversations about race when he was asked how the process of racial identity formation can be more seamless for Black people in America. He says, "Something my parents did that was really good was that they brought up race very early on, when it came from a place of curiosity and not a place of fear." Expressing a similar sentiment, Olivia said,

It's so important to have a good community around you. A community of people who've already done self-work to reject the anti-Blackness they were taught, so they can instill that in their children from a young age. People who don't say things like 'Oh my god your hair would be nicer if it was less kinky,' or things like that. We should take away all that vocabulary. I think that when a child is young, only positive words should be associated with them. Because sometimes you'll hear those types of things and it can really dig at you.

Interestingly, only these two participants discussed the need for a new approach of racial socialization from parents, despite the fact that some participants expressed frustration with the upbringings their parents raised them with and how it did not center structural issues. Perhaps this indicates a shift towards more of a focus on how society needs to change, rather than how Black children, Black families, and Black parents need to change. This, in turn, suggests a development in understanding that messages about race permeate all aspects of society, and are not simply passed from parent to child.

Discussion and Implications for Further Research

For this research project, I interviewed 9 Black young adults and analyzed their narratives. This research offers the following new insight into this topic moving forward:

- 1) the extent to which young Black people feel they need to modify their behavior is likely correlated to their racial socialization and/or mainstream socialization
- 2) the extent of positivity or negativity of messages that young Black people receive about Blackness is extremely important in understanding how young Black people begin to understand their race
- 3) there is a distinction between individually-centered racial socialization, and systemic-centered racial socialization.

In this section, these key findings will be explored, and the ways in which the different theories, hypotheses, and findings from existing literature aligns with and/or contradicts my findings will be observed.

A Typology of Racial Socialization

Hughes and colleagues broadly define racial socialization as the transmission of information about race from adults to children. They stress the importance of racial socialization, theorizing that it helps young children of color to be more prepared when they do inevitably experience racism. Racial socialization might be extremely present in young people's lives, it might be almost entirely absent, and it might be somewhere in between. Mainstream socialization, on the other hand, is a fixed component of life. Hughes and colleagues define mainstream socialization as the strategy of orienting young people "toward developing skills and characteristics needed to thrive in settings that are part of the mainstream, or dominant culture"

rather than orienting them towards their culture or minority status (Hughes et al. 2006, p. 757). Mainstream socialization seeps into people's minds through TV, movies, news, textbooks, schools, and countless other tools that reinforce messages of white supremacy. It is harmful for all people (especially young Black people and young people of color) to receive these messages, because they result in negative views towards marginalized groups, and even themselves. While mainstream socialization is not completely avoidable, racial socialization might serve as a way to push back against it. Racial socialization is extremely important in combatting negative messages about Blackness that Black people may receive from mainstream socialization. Here, I define three kinds of socialization and assess their effectiveness in resisting mainstream socialization: *colorblind socialization*, *individually-centered racial socialization*, and *systemic-centered racial socialization*.

Colorblind socialization is the practice of not explicitly discussing race and perpetuating the idea that racial divisions do not exist. This type of socialization does very little to combat mainstream socialization. The colorblind ideologies imposed on participants who defined their upbringing as colorblind – Will, Mia, and Kim – allowed for a great deal of mainstream socialization to occur. For example, Will's desire to be white at a young age likely stems from a lack of racial socialization, leaving him to be socialized by his environment, which sent him messages that whiteness was the norm – the mainstream.

Both Mia and Will were shocked to find that people see them differently because of the color of their skin. This aligns with Hughes and colleagues' hypothesis that children exposed to colorblindness have a more difficult time understanding that they are not afforded the same privileges as their white peers, as well as a more difficult time coming to terms with instances of discrimination (Hughes et al. 2006). Will and Mia were likely socialized to expect equal

treatment because they received “messages about appreciation of all groups equally.” (Hughes et al. 2006).

Colorblind socialization was not helpful for Will, Mia, or Kim in the navigation of their racial identity. We might turn to racial socialization as a better alternative strategy in raising young Black people, but some participants took issue with the way in which they were racially socialized. In the cases of Tess, Jayden, and Isaiah, who discussed race in their youths but only in the context of how their race might restrict them, it can be discerned that racial socialization in this form is not helpful either. Tess, Jayden, and Isaiah all voiced their frustrations about receiving messages to modify their behavior, without any discussion as to *why* – without any responsibility placed on the systems that required them to “dial back their Blackness.” This is contrary to Hughes and colleagues’ assumption that racial socialization helps to “enable youths to recognize and cope with societal discrimination” (Hughes et al. 2006, p. 762). I define this as *individually-centered* racial socialization, which focuses on the realities of people of marginalized racial groups – but largely absolves the systems at work that create those realities. I propose that there are two kinds of individually-centered racial socialization, the first of which is *negative individually-centered* racial socialization. This type centers responsibility for changing race relations with the marginalized racial group, and the “bigger picture” of systemic racism is neither examined nor questioned. This type is exemplified in Jayden’s statement, “My mom and dad always told me to stay away from law enforcement and told me what to do if I got stopped by them, but.... It was never like, ‘You should know that cops are racist.’”

The other form of individually-centered racial socialization I call *positive individually-centered* racial socialization. *Positive individually-centered* racial socialization is like *negative individually-centered* racial socialization in that it neither examines nor questions systemic

racism. However, it is unlike *negative individually-centered* racial socialization in that it uplifts the marginalized racial group (possibly in an effort to disrupt cycles of injustice). Under *positive individually-centered* racial socialization, Blackness was framed as a positive thing. This type is exemplified by Grace's experiences of celebrating Blackness, but not learning about systemic racism. In these cases, responsibility for improving race relations is not placed on any one party, therefore *still* absolving racist systems.

Bonilla-Silva posits that colorblindness absolves racist institutions and systems of responsibility, in turn making the need for change less obvious (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). However, I would argue that in addition to colorblind socialization, individually-centered racial socialization makes the need for systemic change less obvious as well. This is to say that even when race *is* discussed, it is possible to disregard systemic racism – by centering individuals rather than systems of oppression. In this research, I observed only individually-centered racial socialization. The participants who were raised with the perspective of Blackness as a restrictor were sent messages that they needed to modify their behavior on account of their Blackness, and not that society was wrong for not accepting their Blackness. Further, the participants who were raised with the perspective of Blackness as something to be celebrated were not taught about the ways in which society might not also celebrate their Blackness. Both individually-centered forms of socialization may lead young Black people to believe that the modification of their behavior and their Blackness is the correct response to a society that does not fully accept them.

Perhaps most participants expressed frustration with the ways in which they were taught about race because they lacked *systemic-centered* racial socialization. I define *systemic-centered* racial socialization as the practice of focusing on systems of oppression as the actors that must change, rather than focusing on ways marginalized groups should modify their behavior so as to

not create friction with those systems. If young Black people were exposed to more *systemic-centered* racial socialization, they might understand American society and systems as the actors that need to change, not themselves. Interestingly, participants discussed more systemic-centered changes in society when asked about how racial identity formation could be more seamless for young Black people. Most responses called for changes in education and media, while only two participants mentioned changes in parenting. This perhaps indicates that participants came to understand the importance of systemic racism on their own, even without explicit messages about it during their childhoods.

Distinctions between Positive and Negative Individually-Centered Racial Socialization

There was a wide range in the extent of positivity or negativity of messages participants received about Blackness from a young age. Participants who received mainly positive messages about Blackness were shocked when they came to understand that society does not attribute much positivity to Blackness. For example, Grace was grateful that her parents raised her to value Blackness because she felt it made her more confident. Nevertheless, her confidence was challenged in a way she hadn't previously understood when she began to enter more white spaces and experienced more microaggressions and racism. This type of upbringing may not make young Black people feel the need to modify their behavior on account of their Blackness (at least in comparison to participants with colorblind upbringings and non-colorblind upbringings with Blackness as a restrictor), but it still does not provide them with an understanding of racial bias and systemic racism. The remainder of the participants received negative messages about Blackness, either explicitly (in the cases of non-colorblind: Blackness as a restrictor) or implicitly from society (in the cases of colorblind upbringings). In the cases of

non-colorblind upbringings with Blackness as a restrictor, participants were directly told about the ways in which they should modify their behavior and their Blackness – Jayden was told to behave a certain way around police and Tess was told to behave in a way that would not confirm stereotypes about Black people. Will and Mia, who had colorblind upbringings, learned through the media they consumed and the racist experiences they had that Blackness was not favored in society, and therefore modified their behavior in order to more closely align themselves with whiteness. These findings are extremely important in understanding the implications of the messages we explicitly and implicitly send to young Black people.

Limitations

This study included Black participants from various places across the country; however, there were some limitations. The small sample size of this study (N=8), largely due to the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, hindered my findings because I was unable to observe more general trends on this subject. The small sample of participants who identified their upbringings as colorblind (N=3) did not allow me to make a great deal of observations about young Black people who were raised with a colorblind ideology. Additionally, all the participants of this study were college students, and therefore, the perspectives of young adults who are not currently students are missing in this research. Despite these limitations, this study provided a great deal of insight on the topic of colorblind upbringings and the racial identity formation of young Black people.

Implications for Further Research

There is a need for more research on the implications of mainstream socialization, individually-based racial socialization, and systemically-based racial socialization on young Black people and young people of color. Additionally, an exploration into the racial identity formations of Black people younger than those interviewed here, particularly those who grew up alongside the Black Lives Matter movement, would shed a great deal of light on this topic. The movement is so salient in society, that it would undoubtedly become a fixture of mainstream socialization. It would be interesting to examine how an increase in discussions about race (specifically about the Black Lives Matter movement) may be impacting young Black people in their racial identity formation. An analysis of the parenting strategies of parents of color would also shed much needed light on this topic. There likely exist generational differences between parents and their children and how they conceptualize race, and it would be interesting to conduct research that explores those differences and the ways they help or hurt young people's racial identity formation.

Conclusion

This research provides insight on the topic of racial socialization by analyzing the personal narratives of Black young adults. There is a salient need for systemic-centered racial socialization, because other forms of racial socialization (colorblind socialization and individually-centered racial socialization) harm Black youth by either explicitly or implicitly sending them messages that they must change in order to comply with mainstream society. While the ultimate goal is to dismantle systems of oppression – perhaps beginning with the methods proposed by participants – an important step along that journey is ensuring that young Black people understand that they are not the problem.

Works Cited

- Apfelbaum, Evan P., et al. "Racial Color Blindness." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2012, pp. 205–209., doi: 10.1177/0963721411434980.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Brown, T. N. (2003). Critical Race Theory Speaks to the Sociology of Mental Health: Mental Health Problems Produced by Racial Stratification. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 44(3), 292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519780>
- Burton, L. M., Bonilla-Silva, E., Ray, V., Buckelew, R., & Freeman, E. H. (2010). Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 440–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00712.x>
- Cross Jr, W. E. (1995). The Psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross model. *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (p. 93–122). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Hughes, M., Kiecolt, K. J., Keith, V. M., & Demo, D. H. (2015). "Racial Identity and Well-Being among African Americans." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 78(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272514554043>
- Hughes, D., Rodriguez, J., Smith, E. P., Johnson, D. J., Stevenson, H. C., & Spicer, P. (2006). Parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(5), 747-770. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747
- Katz, P. A., & Kofkin, J. A. (1997). "Race, Gender, and Young Children." *Developmental Psychopathology: Perspectives on adjustment, risk, and disorder* (p. 51–74). Cambridge University Press.

- Mchale, S. M., Crouter, A. C., Kim, J., Burton, L. M., Davis, K. D., Dotterer, A. M., & Swanson, D. P. (2006). Mothers' and Fathers' Racial Socialization in African American Families: Implications for Youth. *Child Development, 77*(5), 1387-1402. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00942.x
- McLeod, S. A. (2019, October 24). "Social Identity Theory." *Simply Psychology*.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>
- Nunnally, S. C. (2010). Learning Race, Socializing Blackness: A Cross-Generational Analysis of Black Americans' Racial Socialization Processes. *Du Bois Review, 7*(1), 185-217.
doi:10.1017/S1742058X10000159
- Phinney, J. S., & Chavira, V. (1995). Parental Ethnic Socialization and Adolescent Coping With Problems Related to Ethnicity. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 5*(1), 31-53.
doi:10.1207/s15327795jra0501_2
- Wijeyesinghe, C., & Jackson, B. W. (Eds.). (2012). New perspectives on racial identity formation: Integrating emerging frameworks. *NYU Press*.
- Winkler, E. N. (2009). Children are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race. *PACE, 3*:1., 1-8.
- Winkler, E. N. (2012). *Learning race, learning place: Shaping identities and ideas in childhood*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Appendix A

1. How do you racially categorize yourself?
2. How do people typically racially categorize you?
3. Where did you grow up? How long have you lived there? Did you grow up in an area where the majority population was of the race that you identify with?
4. Do you remember discussing race in school settings from a young age, in elementary school?
5. From what you can remember, at a young age, did your family regularly and/or specifically discuss race and racial issues?
6. Would you say that as a child (elementary school age) adults shied away from discussing racial issues with you?
7. In what ways, if any, do you feel that racial categories and labels have had an impact on your personal identity?
8. In what ways, if any, have racial categories negatively impacted you?
9. Do you remember any specific instances of people around you engaging in colorblind racism, particularly when you were younger? For example, phrases such as “everyone is the same, race is not important in this situation, etc.?”
10. Do you remember the moment when you first realized that racial categories carried significance and was not simply about skin color? Or when you first realized that you might be treated differently because of your race? Could you tell me about that story/experience, including the setting, your age at the time, and the context of the situation?

11. How do you think colorblind messages in your life played a role in this experience, if at all?
12. Overall, would you say it was a shocking or jarring realization?
13. In what ways – if any – did you attempt to come to terms with this realization? Overall, how did you navigate your racial identity development?
14. How does your experience/understanding of race before that time compare to your experience now?
15. Do you feel as though you have taken steps or made developments to get where you are today in terms of your racial identity? Can you explain any difficulties you encountered in that process?
16. Looking back, how do you feel about this experience? Can you think of any ways it impacted you outside of that moment, specifically regarding how you understand/understood your racial identity and how the world around you perceived that identity?
17. In your case, was Blackness framed through the lens of whiteness? As “other”?
 - a. Why do you think that is?
 - b. How do you think that can change?
18. Do you think any changes in your life could have the potential to make such realizations less traumatizing? In other words, what do you think, in your experience, would have made this transition in personal identity formation more seamless?