2. *Negotiating and Communicating about Identity Within Multi-Ethnic/ Multi-Racial Families*

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The U. S. has historically been a country consumed with race and perpetuating a racial hierarchy fueling a false binary regarding the perception of superiority of whites and inferiority of all other racial/ethnic groups. This binary is fueled by racist ideologies entrenched in everyday interactions across diverse relational contexts. One such context is the family. Many life lessons are learned through familial relationships, and such is the case when it comes to race, racism, and racial identities (Odenweller & Harris, 2018). The family is the first interpersonal network with whom we come into contact. They are also the individuals from whom we learn our lessons about who we are as individuals, a family unit, and a society. These lessons are oftentimes inherently complex, and they become even more so when racial, ethnic, and cultural differences exist within the family (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Much like interracial, multiracial, interethnic, and multiethnic individuals, families comprised of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds also learn and are taught life lessons designed to foster fulfilling individual, familial, and/or communal identities. Indeed, these relationships are similar to same-race relationships in that they experience tensions; however, little is known about the communicative processes involved in how these families engage in communication during one's identity development (Manning, 2006). Thus, it is the goal of this chapter to provide an overview of current literature on family communication as it occurs within the multiracial/multiethnic (MR/ME) family.

Scholars who do research on racial identity development from various disciplines are in agreement that identity politics in the U. S. became even more

salient when the government released the 2000 Census (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009; Schlabach, 2013) and with the election and re-election of President Barack Hussein Obama (Logan, 2014). The 2000 Census "caused a national crisis in racial meanings" (Samuels, 2009, p. 93) with the inclusion of a multiracial category designed to account for individuals who do not identify as monoracial or belonging solely to one race or ethnicity. While this potentially gave agency to racially diverse individuals, it also held significance on a societal level regarding the importance of race and ethnicity as a cultural marker. The value of both was compounded nearly a decade later by twice-elected President Barack Obama (Logan, 2014). This historic moment introduced new race politics and involved the articulation of "a set of racialized expectations of nonwhites in exchange for white acceptance and incorporation" (Logan, 2014, p. 125), which introduced to many an alternative ideology to colorblindness. Logan explains that this is a "class-specific discourse of race" pitting the "black poor against the black upwardly mobile," while also separating "good blacks 'like Obama'" from seemingly "more problematic black others" (p. 125). These racial discourses occurring on a national platform have undoubtedly impacted race relations and fueled racial identity politics in very pointed and powerful ways. By extension, they have certainly informed the ways in which people racially identify, thus politicizing racial identities for people from the margins.

This post-racial era in the U. S. (DePouw, 2018) has set the stage for scholars and lay people (i.e., families, children, teachers, counselors) alike to gain a better understanding of racial identity politics and how to best deal with them in everyday life. According to Rockquemore et al. (2009) and Lorenzo-Blanco, Banes, and Delva (2013), mixed race and mixed ethnicity (MR/ME) people are in a precarious and unique position in that they potentially face unique identity issues that are markedly different from those of monoracial individuals. They are sometimes forced to deal with identity politics from parents, extended family, and strangers as well as society at large (Nishi, 2018). While scholars across disciplines have done research on racial identity development for MR/ME people, the research is "deeply fragmented and inconsistent" due to "a lack of connection between theory and empirical work in the area, and the seemingly insurmountable challenge of removing disciplinary blinders" (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 14). Thus, there is a serious need for research on the racial identity development process for MR/ME people. Findings from such efforts will serve to educate people about this process, empower MR/ME in their journey toward self-discovery, and equip scholars and practitioners with the knowledge necessary for providing proper information about and resources for promoting understanding of and

sensitivity towards MR/ME individuals amongst family, friends, classmates, teachers, administrators, and society as a whole.

Indeed, there is a growing body of research on racial identity development, and what is pointedly missing is the role that communication plays in that process (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009). Important contributions have been made regarding understanding of how family members, classmates, and society members (Odenweller & Harris, 2018) directly impact MR/ME individuals and their identity journeys. These findings have also revealed the deep-rooted racist and prejudiced attitudes people have towards people of color and those hailing from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. In this chapter, the goal is to provide an overview of the research on family communication and identity negotiation for MR/ME individuals, highlighting specific themes in the literature, while paying particular attention to family communication and attitudes outside of the family and the implications these findings have for scholars and practitioners.

Internal Stressors and Racial Categorization

Rockquemore (1999) and Rockquemore et al. (2009) are regularly cited as scholars leading the charge to better understand racial identity development of MR/ME individuals. Rockquemore, along with other colleagues, has extended the early work of Phinney (1990), essentially setting the golden standard by which to measure the ways in which MR/ME self-identify. She identified four identity options that MR/ME individuals choose to use a scholarly approach to gather information on the experiences of bi- and multiracial related to how they choose to racially identify: (1) singular identity, (2) border identity, (3) protean identity, and (4) transcendent identity. The singular identity option refers to those who choose a monoracial identity or to identify solely with one race (i.e., Black, White, Hispanic). The border identity option is for those who prefer to self-identify as only biracial. The protean identity option involves recognition of a fluid identity and a preference to shift between racial identities according to social context. The transcendent identity option refers to a positionality that extends beyond race. Rather than recognize their racial identities, these individuals believe their identity " 'transcends' racial categorization altogether" and they can "be simply 'human' " (Lou, Lalonde, & Wilson, 2011, p. 83; see Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). MR/ME individuals have choices in how they choose to racially categorize themselves, and research has revealed that they oftentimes are forced to deal with stressors independently from their parents and siblings. We will discuss

later the impact family and non-family members have on the racial identity development process for MR/ME people.

Internal stressors are commonly identified by researchers as effecting how MR/ME individuals self-identify (Samuels, 2009; Schlabach, 2013). Internal stressors can be understood as stressful events related to identity management that create an internal struggle and/or prompt the search for an appropriate label or racial category. In her study on transracial adoptions, Samuels found that MR/ME individuals sometimes have a need for and then seek identity affirmation from others. Participants were individuals who were either Black and White or multiracial (Black, White, and other) and adopted by White parents. They reported the need for "biological mirrors" or family members who bore some resemblance to them. Because their parents were of a different race/ethnicity, the MR/ME child's sense of connection and belonging was missing, which oftentimes lead to "racial resemblance talk" (p. 80). There was a desire to share physical markers with their families, and because their racial/ethnic differences were apparent, MR/ME children were oftentimes struggling with how this marked them as an outsider, being that they were the only person who was unlike the other family members.

Samuels (2009) also highlights how another internal stressor MR/ME children face occurs because "transracial adoptive families and multiracial individuals contradict biological and monocentric race and kinship norms" (p. 83), which means these families go against the norm because the family and the MR/ME adoptee do not share a "single racial identity and heritage" (p. 82). It stands to reason that these different types of stress will have a direct impact on the well-being of the adoptee (Hoffman & Peña, 2013). Schlabach's (2013) work on the well-being of MR/ME adolescents from a nationally representative sample offers insight into the impact of these stressors on their sense of self. She found that some families chose to prioritize and placed greater value on "family-based social capital," or "parental involvement, parent-child relationship quality, and family structure" (p. 155). The result was less connection with one's racial/ethnic identity. The findings also revealed a gender bias whereby White mothers were perceived as being less supportive than mothers from other races/ethnicities and fathers in general. Schlabach (2013) explains that White mothers are:

> more likely to come from households with lower family income, but that they will also experience higher levels of stigma, have more issues with their family of origin, and that their lack of previous experiences with racism will not allow them to help their child navigate racism. (p. 158)

She further notes that MR/ME children with White mothers will have worse wellbeing than those with mothers from other races/ethnicities or children who were monoracial. This was found to be the case especially for those children with Native American fathers and White mothers. The children with White mothers reported seeking social support from their fathers (Schlabach, 2013), which can be assumed to cause tensions and stress within the relationship with each parent and for the child who is also dealing with the frustration of having no support system in place.

Racial categorization is another facet of racial identity development scholars have explored in their efforts to best understand how families communicate about this process (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Lou et al., 2011; Rockquemore, 1999). Racial categorization is a clear theme in the literature and refers to the racial label that is either chosen by an MR/ME individual or assigned to them by others. For example, a woman who is Native American and White chooses to identify as biracial, but extended family members and strangers categorize her race as Native American since they believe her phenotypic features (i.e., skin color, hair, nose) represent her Native American ethnicity. Regardless of the source, racial categorization can be a difficult process for MR/ME individuals, as they are possibly dealing with internal as well as external pressure to identify a certain way. The one-drop rule practiced in the U. S. classified, per se, bi- and multiracial individuals as Black (Butler-Sweet, 2011) because it was deemed inferior to White.

As previously noted, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2009) identified four different identities or racial categories that aptly describe the labels MR/ME individuals typically choose in order to define themselves. These categories reflect a decision-making process for people that is most likely prompted by an interaction, event, or moment of self-reflection that leads the MR/ME individual on a journey towards self-discovery and understanding. While the literature addresses the process, very little attention is given to the actual communication and interpersonal interactions that MR/ME individuals experience and are deemed pivotal to their decision-making. Lou et al. (2011) explain that there is a serious need for research on how "biracial people view their social identities as compatible or oppositional to one another" (p. 80). The "how" in this process speaks to the specific experiences leading them to reconcile the tension(s) surrounding their racial/ethnic identity; however, what is undergirding this inquiry is the role that the actual verbal and nonverbal messages received from orientational others (i.e., family, friends, siblings) and generalized others (i.e., co-workers, strangers, associates) play in prompting identity exploration. Research findings demonstrate that interactions are a vital part of this process, but scholars are failing to illuminate how

communication is at the center of this phenomenon. In other words, MR/ME individuals are having conversations with others and/or receiving nonverbal messages (i.e., disapproving looks, being ignored) that undoubtedly impact how they self-identify.

According to Lou et al. (2011), MR/ME individuals commonly are in the precarious position of having to deal with social identities that are not always "compatible." They tested Rockquemore's (2002) identity model in order to demonstrate the need for a multi-dimensional framework to examine ME as a process. Their findings indicate that communication is, in fact, a critical part of racial identity development for MR/ME individuals and what we are referring to as "external racial appraisals" from orientational and generalized others. Lou et al. (2011) explain that MR/ME individuals receive messages as validating or invalidating their chosen racial categorization. They specifically refer to the "validated border" and "invalidated border" labels as examples of how affirming or disconfirming messages from others are communicated and effect how they define themselves. MR/ME individuals are engaging in interpersonal exchanges that, to varying degrees, cause them to think critically about their decision to identify a certain way. As Butler-Sweet (2011) notes, many MR/ME individuals are subjected to the judgement of others who are unsettled about the MR/ME individual's perceived "racial ambiguity," which oftentimes leads to the MR/ME person being racially misclassified. In short, this cognitive dissonance, or receipt of seemingly contradictory messages, speaks to the prejudices and stereotypes they hold about racial/ethnic group membership as well as their obsession with racial categorization, the latter of which is the result of pervasive social ideologies regarding race and racial hierarchies. Similarly, racial misclassification (Butler-Sweet, 2011) is reflective of stereotypical thinking and (sub)conscious efforts to impose identity politics onto MR/ME people. Both behaviors are examples of verbal and nonverbal messages MR/ME individuals receive that undoubtedly impact how they self-identify as raced beings. As with other MR/ME identity research, the current study and many others fail to label these experiences as communication-centered phenomena.

This is also evidenced in research on MR/ME individuals who have at least one parent that is an immigrant (Waring & Purkayasha, 2017). Most other studies focus on domestic experiences of MR/ME people whose connections are primarily with parents—biological and adoptive—who are U. S. citizens. Waring and Purkayasha introduce an increasingly important issue regarding identity for MR/ME individuals by gathering data from people who have at least one immigrant parent. They recognized an aspect of racial identity development that was largely being ignored by scholars and

broadened the scope of the scholarship by offering insight into the unique experiences of "biracial Americans with immigrant ties" make sense of the complex issue of race relative to "racial superiority and inferiority, racial relations, and racial stereotypes" (p. 615). Moreover, they were interested in the role of family socialization in this identity development process as well. Using the qualitative approach of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the researchers solicited responses from biracial Americas with one Black parent and one White parent, and at least one of the parents is an immigrant. They note that 11 nationalities were represented. Their findings reveal that these MR/ME individuals voice[d] clear understandings of the existent racial hierarchy in the U. S. and its impact on interracial interactions and society as a whole. The major findings were that, for these individuals, it was important to place significance on their ethnic heritage, as that "allows them to avoid [the] social consequences of being (half) white or (half) black" (Waring & Purkayastha, 2017, p. 614). As they note, the reported experiences with racial socialization in general and in relation to family relationships indicate there is indeed a "slipperiness of race" for biracial (BI) Americans. They also offer firsthand evidence that biracial individuals (and their families) have "difficulty discussing race," "struggle to articulate the meaning of race," and "assert specific racial/ethnic identities to circumvent stereotypical connotations of whiteness and blackness" (p. 614).

By including the experiences of an underresearched microculture within the MR/ME community, Waring and Prukayastha (2017) enrich this area of scholarship by demonstrating that people who are not monoracial and identity receive and respond to messages from orientational others, generalized others, and society in markedly different ways. More importantly, BI/MR/ME face more stringent racial identity politics that oftentimes result in them disavowing any connection to a non-White ethnicity, thus either consciously or subconsciously engaging in what we are calling racial distancing (see also Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). We are defining it as the use of verbal and/or nonverbal strategies to avoid affiliation or identification with a race/ethnicity in one's lineage considered to be inferior according to a societal racial hierarchy. Thus, Waring and Prukayastha (2017) offer even more data supporting existing literature arguing that racial identity development for BI/MR/ME individuals is very complex and is subjected to racial socialization processes that problematize identities that are not monoracial.

Parenting Styles and Racial Identity Development

Another area of research on family communication and racial identity development centers around parenting styles among/within interracial couples and MR families (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013; Soliz et al., 2009). Due to space limitations, we highlight two specific articles that we believe offer a nuanced glimpse into the communication that occurs between family members that either intentionally or unintentionally impact how MR/ME may choose to identify. The studies use diverse methodologies, which further demonstrates the richness that lies within the different relational contexts of focus in the area of racial identity development for people from historically marginalized groups.

Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2013) provide evidence that parenting styles are another factor that might impact how MR/ME negotiate their identity development process. Although they did not explicitly refer to communication as we define it in the discipline, it is clear that the exchange of verbal messages between relational partners—in this case, parents and/or children—is perceived as a critical part of this process for the parents, and subsequently MR/ME children. They specifically wanted to understand how the parents decide how to best parent their children, so they gathered data from monoracial families (i. e., African American, Hispanic, and white) and interracial families. Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2013) found that interracial parents experience a negotiation stage when it comes to parenting. This involves a modification of their respective styles in direct response to stereotypes ascribed to their MR/ME children and an effort to shield them from such treatment. The findings also showed that MR/ME children did not feel supported by their parents, felt less cohesion with their mothers, and felt less satisfied with their parent-child relationships. Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2013) attributed these disconnects to gendered parenting expectations and stereotypes that "may lead to higher standards for their mothers" (p. 134). In comparison, MR/ME children felt independent or believed they had freedom, much like their White peers, but they attended more family events (at least twice a month) as did African American and Hispanic peers. These differences might be attributed to cultural differences that are informing the ideals of individualism and collectivism typically associated with White culture, per se, and communities of color respectively. A final finding was that interracial parents exerted less control over their children than African American and Hispanic monoracial children, which Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2013) attribute to cultural differences as well.

Soliz et al. (2009) use a communication-centric approach to understand the interpersonal dynamics of families dealing with this phenomenon. Unlike other scholars, they use theories such as the Communication Accommodation Theory to identify specific communication behaviors that are used within MR/ME families. Supportive communication, self-disclosure, and identity accommodation were of particular interest, which is important given that a different set of communication rules, norms, and behaviors is even more likely when individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds are in a committed relationship. The partners are bringing their personal histories and identities into the relationship, and when children enter the picture, they (ideally) have explicit conversations about how to manage their new identity. In the case of interracial couples and their multiracial families, communication becomes even more vital since they must now negotiate how to parent the child(ren) using a tool set that addresses MR/ME identity and how to best deal with racism, prejudice, and stereotyping.

The findings from their study revealed a direct correlation between supportive communication, self-disclosure, and identity accommodation and relational satisfaction (Soliz et al., 2009). It may be assumed that members of these multiracial families were satisfied with their relationships because emotional intimacy (i.e., closeness) was something everyone worked towards and contributed to. MR/ME families were found to have an ingroup identity as a family due to supportive communication and self-disclosure (Soliz et al., 2009), and "lower levels of perceived group differences" due to supportive communication (p. 829). These findings suggest that families do communicate and have connections with each other, but that does not necessarily mean they will have pointed and productive conversations about race and racial identities (Soliz et al., 2009). Nevertheless, this work sets the foundation for others to design studies where MR/ME families explicitly identify how they cope with external stressors (i.e., prejudice, stereotyping) and make decisions about the racial identity development process for the family, the parents, and the child(ren).

Beyond the Family: Family Communication and Society

As the literature has demonstrated thus far, MR/ME families and individuals have unique challenges when it comes to racial identity development of all its members. Much like monoracial families, there are relational dialectics and tensions that define the members and impact how they communicate with each other (Rogan, Piacentini, & Hopkinson, 2018). What makes the MR/ME family different is that it is dealing with the additional pressure of not

conforming to societal norms of homogeneity, and if they choose to have children, then they possibly are faced with whether or not and how they will help the child(ren) decide how they will racially identify. This process also involves identifying ways to cope with racism, prejudice, and stereotyping, but the literature on the racial identity development process does not account for that. More specifically, it does not address how these individuals or families deal with these stressors in general or when they are coming from trusted and beloved family members and friends.

Samuels (2009) refers to this phenomenon as intrafamilial racism. Her interviews with MR/ME families and children revealed that many parents either ignore or minimize racist behavior from others, which she refers to as "discordant parent-child experiences" (p. 87). This approach was definitely enacted by many participants in response to racially prejudiced extended family members and ongoing intrafamilial racism. These negative attitudes were towards the marriage/relationship or the MR/ME children, and instead of dealing directly with the offending party, parents were more inclined to use a negative management strategy (Samuels, 2009). This is a troubling pattern because it fails to resolve the issues of racism and prejudice for the family. Additionally, the MR/ME child(ren) is failed, so to speak, because they are not equipped with the necessary skills for coping with the negative behaviors of extended family members or society at all. The parents choosing to ignore or minimize the racism their child(ren) will face are contributing to the MR/ME's difficulty managing their identity development and making them underprepared for dealing with the systemic racism that they will inevitably face as a member of a minority group.

According to Waring and Purkayasha (2017), MR/ME children subjected to racism and prejudice on a societal level are very likely to internalize those negative messages, thus negatively impacting their racial identity development process. The same can be said for similar messages received from family members, but the impact might be more profound because of an expectation or assumption of relational intimacy and commitment. The overall wellbeing of the child(ren) and family is at risk (Schlabach, 2013) because the race issues are not being addressed. As Schlabach (2013) notes, MR/ME individuals are already dealing with typical family issues, and when coupled with interracial conflict within the family, societal racial miscategorization, and societal discomfort with racial ambiguity (Butler-Sweet, 2011), this causes MR/ME individuals additional stress and can potentially thwart the racial identity development process; therefore, it is important to consider how family therapy can possibly help interracial couples and MR/ME individuals when they are subjected to these and other stressors (Baptiste, 1984).

The research has shown that the family is an excellent context for understanding how racial identities are formed. This area of research is even more important given the prediction of the U. S. demographics changing such that people of Hispanic descent will be the majority group. There will continue to be increased racial tensions in society related to this shift in the racial landscape of the country, as evidenced by the rise in hate crimes and number of murders of people of color because of police brutality. Not only will interracial partners be subjected to racism, prejudice, and discrimination, but so will their offspring, thus making it imperative that all members of society become educated about the fact that race is a social construct. As such, there will hopefully be a rethinking and challenging of the importance of not imposing racial categories and a racial hierarchy onto MR/ME individuals who do not conform to societal expectations of what it means to racially identify in a certain way.

Implications for Scholars and Practitioners

Understanding how families communicate has significance for both research and real-world contexts. As this chapter has demonstrated, negotiating and communicating about identity within MR/ME families is a phenomenon that is very unique to families where members come from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (Romero, Gonzalez, & Smith, 2015). While other families socialize their members (i.e., children) to understand their monoracial or cultural identities (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008, MR/ME families have a unique task of teasing out how to best assist members in understanding who they are as part of a family that does not conform to societal norms of homogeneity. This process becomes even more complex when we consider the future of the U. S. when it comes to racial groups. It is predicted that people of Hispanic descent will be the majority group by the year 2050. This means that there will be increased interracial/interethnic interactions leading to a rise in interracial/interethnic relationships and MR/ME individuals, thus warranting the need for more research on communication within this relational context. The findings from this research can ultimately lead to the development of models, theories, and counseling practices that facilitate family communication and identity negotiation in very productive and insightful ways.

In order to understand what that might look like, we pose the following questions. How can MR/ME families best help members develop a positive racial identity? What can parents do to embolden their children to have a healthy attitude towards race/ethnicity? What strategies can MR/ME children use to develop a healthy racial identity in the absence of a either

a supportive or encouraging family environment? Moreover, each of these questions directs our attention to the role that communication (i.e., message exchange) plays in racial identify development for MR/ME individuals. The families are most likely engaging in communication with each other that has different levels of relational intimacy; however, what is not understood is the exact verbal and nonverbal messages they receive from family members—both immediate and extended—that either positively or negatively influence how they perceive themselves. Do the parents purposely avoid talking about racial/ethnic identities? If so, why? How might their connection to their own/individual racial identities effect how they guide their children through the racial identity development process? It would also be important to know if, when, and how often they have in-depth conversations about how they define their interracial relationship, and how they plan (or not) to educate their child(ren) about their racial/ethnic heritages and the options they have for identifying however they choose.

Relatedly, research on this process for MR/ME individuals should involve in-depth interviews with the parent(s) and child together to discuss their relationships and identify specific messages communicated between family members that impacted how they all dealt with race (see Romero, Gonzalez, & Smith, 2015). Additionally, narratives might be shared that offer insight into how the family's communication has impacted the parent/child relation into adulthood. While there is the potential for recall to be inaccurate, the experience of group/family interview may encourage the family to reach a turning point in their relationship where they commit to and discuss how to have more healthy communication about all of their identities. These conversations might also include time devoted to identifying strategies for confronting intrafamilial racism (Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff, Wong, & McLean, 2013). As adults, the MR/ME children can use their experiences to offer advice on either how well their parents did in assisting with their racial identity development or what their parents should/could have done differently so they could be a well-adjusted MR/ME person. The interviews could potentially lead to scholars developing communication models illustrating best practices for nurturing a positive racial identity for parents, children, and the family, providing resources designed to further educate all parties on this process. The models could then be used to launch a series of longitudinal studies testing the effectiveness of the strategies and equip interracial families and MR/ME children with the requisite communication skills, knowledge, and resources for the development of positive interracial, monoracial, and MR/ME identities within the context of family.

It is abundantly clear that racial identity development is a much-needed area of research, and with the racial landscape predictably making a marked shift, there is an even greater need to explore how families communicate about the racial identity development process(es) with which they have direct experience. Much of the research has involved persuasive arguments for such an area of scholarly research. Scholars have stressed how racial identity politics have become increasingly salient due to the 2000 Census (Samuels, 2009; Schlabach, 2013), the election of President Barack Obama (Logan, 2014), and transracial adoption (Anderson, Rueter, & Lee, 2015; Butler-Sweet, 2011). Thus, it is imperative that communication scholars assume a more active role in positioning the discipline as an important lens through which to better and more accurately understand the identity development process.

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