2008

What Can We Learn about White Privilege and Racism from the Experiences of White Mothers Parenting Biracial Children?

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46129-7
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-46129-7

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by

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BSc (Honours) Psychology, Acadia University, 2006

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts Degree in Community Psychology

Wilfrid Laurier University

2008

Abstract

Despite progress in the movement toward anti-racism, racism remains a problem in Canada. While the presence of racism and the problem of racism are recognized by Canadian society, there is still a long way to go before racism and white privilege are eliminated. In the present study, I apply Community Psychology values to the examination of an as-yet relatively unexamined minority population: white mothers of biracial children. Guided by epistemological views that place my research within the critical and social constructivist research paradigms, I explore my research question, "How can the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children inform us about white privilege and racism?", using a grounded theory analysis of self-reported experiences of six white mothers living in Greater Waterloo Region, in Ontario, Canada. My informants participated in semi-structured individual and small group interviews and completed a photographic journaling project. While all the mothers were united by their common experience of being white women parenting biracial children, they represented a diverse range of socioeconomic classes and family compositions, and were parenting children whose fathers came from several ethnic backgrounds. Through my analysis of my informants' stories, I identified a new perspective of the "experience of racism" in society. In addition, my findings led to the development of a theoretical framework that merges white privilege and racism into inseparable entities and fosters critical understanding of how racism is perpetuated in Canadian society. Recommendations for additional contributions to the anti-racism movement are suggested.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of countless amazing and wonderful people—far more than can possibly all be named; please know that even if your name is not mentioned here, your support has meant a lot to me. Thank you to each and every one of you.

Thank you, Dr. Terry Mitchell, for seeing value in my research ideas, supporting me in following my passion, embracing my desire to enter unfamiliar territory, and guiding me throughout this entire process. To each of my informants, thank you for allowing me to learn from you. By sharing your stories with me you have helped move us one step closer to anti-racism. Thank you, Dr. Colleen Loomis and Dr. Scot Evans, for guiding and supporting my research, and serving on my committee. To Julian Hasford, a special thank you: your perspective was invaluable to the development of my thesis.

Thank you, Mom, and Kate, for helping me and supporting me in so many ways. I cannot even begin to sum up all you have done for me. Thank you to my friends and family (Carolyn, Brian, and Laura, in particular) near and far, for both your moral and material support. And last, but certainly not least, thank you Kiara, my daughter, for being my inspiration and my driving force.

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Introduction

My Research

Despite significant advances toward human rights and equality (see Canadian Heritage, 2008), racism remains a problem in Canadian society. Research studies (e.g., Zamudio & Rios, 2006) indicate that while blatant racism is not as common as it once was, racism is still very common across the world and throughout Canada (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2004). Race privilege, and more specifically in Canada, white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), is inextricably linked with racism.

Some Canadians believe that racism is no longer a problem in Canada (e.g., Clarke, 2008), and those who recognize the existence of racism may not realize the extent to which interracial families experience racial discrimination. With whiteness comes the privilege of white status (Race Traitor, 1993). Individuals who are not white often experience racialized social interactions where their skin colour and racial heritage influence their environments (Lorde, 1984; Nopper, n.d.). In contrast, individuals who are white experience social interactions where their whiteness is normalized (Collins, 2000; Dyer, 2005; Thompson, 1999).

White mothers parenting biracial children are uniquely positioned to serve as a vehicle for exploring racism and white privilege. White mothers who make the choice to parent children who may be perceived as non-white by society voluntarily enter complex racial situations. Each white mother of biracial children experiences the world from a perspective that is distinct and uniquely hers. However, I believe from my own experiences, from talking to other white mothers of biracial children,

and from my literature review, that there are commonalities experienced across white mothering relationships of biracial children that we can learn from.

White people may grow up unaware of their own white privilege and the presence of racism in Canadian society. I believe that the experience of parenting biracial children can help us develop an increased awareness of white privilege and racism. I also believe that through the experience of parenting biracial children, white mothers may develop an increased awareness of white privilege and racism. In this thesis, I explore how the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children can increase our understanding of white privilege and racism.

My Standpoint

Positioning Myself in Relation to My Research

When I first began considering potential research topics, I was a young, white, lone mother of an eighteen month old biracial black-white daughter. Dr. Mark Pancer, a Community Psychology professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, listened as I explored my various research interests and advised: "Choose what you are passionate about." As I absorbed these words, I realized that my research would be connected to my own personal life.

As a white mother of a biracial daughter, while my friends and family were supportive, I felt isolated. I felt that those around me did not truly understand what I was experiencing as I navigated questions and comments about my daughter's skin colour, hair type, and heritage. As I reflected on my experiences, I decided that I wanted to better understand the world in which interracial families live. While white mothers raising biracial children are not a new phenomenon, this unique parenting

situation is still comparatively uncommon, even in today's multicultural Canadian society. Other mothers parenting biracial children may feel isolated and confused, just as I did and still sometimes do, as they parent children who differ in biologically minuscule, yet socially monumental, ways from them.

Before I began dating interracially, I was not aware of how much Canadian society is racialized. Upon entering an interracial relationship, I began to develop a basic understanding of the role that race and skin colour play in social interactions. I also began to recognize the implications of dating an individual who was not white, as I witnessed subtle but obvious behavioural changes amongst people who began to treat me differently once they realized that I was dating a man whose skin was a different colour from mine.

While my experiences in interracial relationships were an important first step in my awareness of the role that race plays in society, it wasn't until I became pregnant with my daughter, and then became a white mother to a visibly biracial child, that I began to realize just how conscious we are of race in Canada. When out in public with friends who were not white, strangers assumed that my friends, not me, were my child's mother or father, and asked my friends, not me, questions about my daughter. On different occasions, strangers made the assumption that friends and acquaintances of mine who were, variously, Chinese-Canadian, South Asian Indian, South Asian Indian-Canadian, and black/multiracial West Indian, were my daughter's biological parents or relatives rather than me.

Race not only affected the way others interacted with me and my daughter; it also affected the way I approached parenting. For example, when I was exploring

potential names for my daughter, I struggled with finding a name that would accurately reflect who she was. I did not want to choose either a stereotypical white European name or a stereotypical black African-Canadian name that would negate her biracial heritage. In the end, I discovered my daughter's name while reading a journal article for an undergraduate university class. When I researched it, I learned the name "Kiara" had roots in Africa, with various black African communities claiming it as theirs, and "Kiara" also had roots in Ireland (a part of my ancestry), with various white Irish groups claiming it as theirs. The name seemed perfect to me: it acknowledged my daughter's diverse heritage. While I found the simple process of naming my child difficult, at the time I did not yet recognize how deeply my struggles were connected to race.

However, what I did recognize was the fact that I was not black. I perceived, through glares and comments I noticed from some black women who saw me walking hand-in-hand with my black partner, that I had to be careful not to give the impression to others (of any racial background) that I felt I had the right to personally transmit black culture to my child. My daughter might be perceived by others as black (as she is visibly non-white), but I worried about making life harder for her through actions that might make others feel I was trying to be something I was not. I was not conscious of the process of increased racialization I was going through at the time as I became more concerned about racial issues, but I was aware of the uncomfortable feelings stirring inside me as I began to realize just how complex the world was in which I was raising my daughter. Over time, my worries have become less restrictive, as I have begun to reclaim my own identity as a human being and

realize that I am myself and my daughter is herself. What is truly important is not the colour of her skin or my skin. What are truly important are the richness of our lives and the sense of being perfect just as we are, skin colour, gender, dis/abilities and all.

Race has also affected my family. My father, a sales professional and proud grandfather, once exchanged photographs with a potential client who was another proud grandfather. Both my father and this man shared common history as they both have blue-eyed blonde-haired children, but when my father shared his photograph of my daughter, the other man immediately stood up and asked my father to leave the building. While there was no explicit statement that this incident was due to racism, my father felt stunned as he began to register the fact that he had most likely just experienced racism.

My situation and my daughter's situation may be different from those of other white mothers of biracial children. As a lone mother, I raised my daughter in a white-dominated environment for the first eighteen months of her life: we lived with my white mother in a predominantly white community in Atlantic Canada. When my daughter was a year and a half old, we moved to Ontario. My daughter's black African grandmother and grandfather now lived an hour away, and we were able to begin establishing a relationship with them, as well as my daughter's paternal aunts. Over time, my daughter's exposure to diversity, in many different forms, has increased.

In addition to my perspectives as a white mother, a young mother, a lone mother, a mother of a biracial daughter, and a female Masters student, I also have a dis/ability. I have a serious hearing loss in both ears, which certainly affects how I

view the world. I believe that in addition to having the very basic effect of influencing my direct interactions with people, because of my altered hearing and my altered speech, my hearing loss has also played a role in my tendency to seek out diverse and heterogeneous social networks. Instead of serving as an isolating factor, my dis/ability has served as a bridging factor. I have been an outsider, and many of my friends have also been outsiders for a variety of reasons, but together we form a diverse and accepting community.

I believe my status as a person with a "hidden" dis/ability has also increased my ability to empathize with and understand the experiences of individuals who are not white. My dis/ability is not immediately apparent to individuals who see me walking down the street or who interact with me only through email. However, when I open my mouth to speak, my "deaf accent" is revealed, or when individuals realize that I am reading their lips, my dis/ability is revealed. My status as a person with a hidden dis/ability has placed me in situations where I have observed noticeable, discriminatory shifts in some people's behaviour as they realize I have a dis/ability. I experience marginalization daily as a result of my dis/ability; I believe that my lived experience as a person with a dis/ability positively influences my ability to relate to the experiences of individuals who are negatively racialized and who may also regularly experience marginalization.

My hearing loss also slightly influenced the research process throughout my study. Interviews took place in person, not over the phone, because I read lips. Interviews were video recorded in addition to audio recorded for ease of transcription review, and transcription was provided by a third-party transcriber. I do not believe

that my hearing loss hindered my research in any way. It simply required small adjustments in the basic research process itself.

Conducting Research within Community Psychology

As a Masters student in Community Psychology, in addition to being driven to conduct research that is of personal importance to me, I am also motivated by my values as a Community Psychology researcher. Community Psychologists work to foster positive social change and holistically healthy and sustainable community environments. Within the domain of Community Psychology, my research is guided by six principles and values: social justice; respect for diversity; commitment, caring and compassion; self-determination; participation; and accountability (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; "What is Community Psychology?", n.d.).

Racism is a daunting social problem that is devoid of easy solutions. Racism and white privilege are social systems that are not fully understood by Canadian society. Not only do we not fully understand how and why racism and race privilege continue to oppress Canadians and human beings throughout the world, but we also do not fully understand how to shed our communities of the continuing burden of racism.

Community Psychology is a discipline that allows me to critically examine racism from a unique perspective that enables me to adhere to my values and respond to the complexity of racism. I am able to work toward social justice by seeking to understand, through my research, why social *in*justice occurs. I am able to foster the self-determination of my informants by ensuring that their voices are heard and respected. I am able to foster the participation of a relatively ignored population by

exploring racism and white privilege through the eyes of a very specific group of women. By critically examining racism and white privilege, I am able to promote accountability for the role we, as white people, play in perpetuating racism. However, I seek to balance this accountability with commitment, caring, and compassion. My informants showed courage in agreeing to participate in research about such a provocative topic as racism. We must recognize the accountability they have shown in taking ownership for their experiences and in working to help move our society toward anti-racism. Likewise, it is essential that I remain conscious of my own responsibility to hold myself personally accountable for the roles I assume in society.

My Epistemological Views

This study was a qualitative research study. Flick, von Kardoff, and Steinke (2004) say, "The epistemological principle of qualitative research is the understanding of complex relationships rather than explanation by isolation of a single relation, such as 'cause-and-effect'" (p. 8). I believe that white privilege and racism are complex social systems that must be explored in qualitative depth in order to be more thoroughly understood. Epistemologically, I position myself within the critical and social constructivist research paradigms.

The critical research paradigm is value-oriented, with dominant values of self-determination and participation, community and inclusion, social justice and accountability to oppressed groups, and reflexivity (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). In keeping with the critical paradigm, my research gives voice to a relatively invisible population through qualitative research methods. Nelson and Prilleltensky capture the anti-racist goals of my research when they say, "The standpoint of critical research is

explicitly anti-racist and focuses on oppression and power imbalances between people of different backgrounds" (p. 279). In keeping with the critical research paradigm, my research study was conducted with a relatively homogenous group of white women who nevertheless represented a very diverse range of interracial parenting situations. This informant population allowed me to critically explore the nuances of white privilege and racism across a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

Like the critical paradigm, the social constructivist paradigm requires a focus on understanding *why* people experience the world the way they do. In the social constructivist paradigm, there is a recognition that human experiences are socially constructed and are experienced individually (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005). It is impossible to understand racism and white privilege without recognizing that these systems and concepts are socially constructed. Conducting research from a social constructivist perspective allows me to gather rich, in-depth data, while at the same time recognizing that even people of similar backgrounds have diverse viewpoints and their perspectives are developed out of personal, unique experiences. Ontologically, I believe in the subjectivity of reality. There are multiple realities: every individual perceives reality from a unique and situated perspective. However, through understanding the social realities of multiple individuals, a shared understanding of social processes can be developed.

From a research perspective, there are three main reasons why I chose to focus specifically on white mothers' experiences with their biracial children. First, the qualitative nature of my research design necessitated that I restrict my sample to a small and relatively homogeneous group of participants. It is possible that men and

women may have very different experiences in biracial parenting. My research is not meant to be generalizeable across all white parents of biracial children, but rather is intended to capture detailed subjective experiences of a small group of white *mothers* parenting biracial children, to help contribute to an understanding of what racism and white privilege mean in Canada.

The second reason I chose to focus on white mothers rather than fathers is that mothers may have pronounced racialized experiences due to the compounding effects of multiple marginalization, wherein the mothers already experience the world from a uniquely female perspective and they experience parenting children from a female perspective in a world where being female commonly means lower status (hooks, 1993; Lorde, 1984). bell hooks (1993) points out that we live "in a sexist society, where mothers are often blamed for any problem that arises with children" (p. 35). Mothers who face potential criticism from oppressive outsiders experience increased stress in parenting; they must *prove* they are good mothers. Focusing exclusively on mothers facilitated my adequately examining my informants' multi-faceted experiences.

Additionally, I chose to focus on white mothers parenting biracial children instead of *all* mothers parenting biracial children because I was specifically interested in understanding the interplay between racism and *white privilege*. All mothers who are involved in complex racial situations, regardless of racial background, are sources of invaluable information about racism; however, limiting my research to mothers who were white allowed me to examine white privilege in greater depth.

Labels and Language

I struggled with language and labels as I worked on this thesis. It is important that I make transparent my own understanding of labels and languages, and why I chose to use the terminology I have chosen for my research.

Race

Before I present my research on racial issues, I must be clear about what I understand "race" itself to be. There are a number of definitions and theories about race, ranging from those that claim indisputable genetic or biological differences based on race to those that claim race simply does not exist at all (Murji & Solomos, 2005; Wade, 2004; Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 2005). While I believe that in an ideal world, there should only be one race if any – the human race – I recognize that in today's society "race" exists as a real social construct with real effects. Accordingly, I adopt Bonilla-Silva's (2003) approach to race. Bonilla-Silva's definition of race…

> …acknowledges that race, as other social categories such as class and gender, is constructed but insists that it has a *social* reality. This means that after race—or class or gender—is created, it produces real effects on the actors racialized as 'black' or 'white'. (p. 9)

This approach to race is widely supported by researchers (e.g., Weiss & Fullerton, 2005; Yancey, 2007), and fits well within the critical and social constructivist research paradigms.

Race has not always existed. Race, as a concept that differentiates between people on the basis of skin colour and physical features, emerged throughout the sixteenth century and remains entrenched in social systems today (Marks, 2001). For

as long as race has existed, anti-racists who disputed the credibility of racial classification systems have also existed (Marks, 2001).

There is no valid scientific basis underlying racial classifications. In 1952, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a statement on the "Nature of Race and Race Differences":

> There is no evidence for the existence of so-called "pure races." (...) In regard to race mixture, the evidence points to the fact that human hybridization has been going on for an indefinite but considerable amount of time. Indeed, one of the processes of race formation and race extinction or absorption is by means of hybridization between races. (p. 14)

There is growing evidence that skin colour really is only skin deep, and is no more biologically significant in today's society than eye colour or hair colour. Scientific research indicates that the earliest ancestors of today's human beings lived on the continent of Africa (Jablonski & Chaplin, 2000). Over time, our ancestors migrated across the globe. Different evolutionary traits emerged as our ancestors' bodies adapted to the geographic demands of their physical environments (Jablonski & Chaplin). Many traits that are stereotypically associated with race, such as sickle cell anaemia which is commonly associated with people who are perceived as black, are actually evolutionary adaptations to geographic environments. Sickle cell anaemia, for example, is a genetic defence response that protects carriers of sickle cell anaemia from malaria (Nagel, 2001). Sickle cell anaemia is common amongst any population that has historically lived in malaria-inflicted regions, including many populations that are not socially perceived as black. Likewise, our different skin colours appear to be primarily due to evolutionary adaptation to differing levels of ultraviolet rays and vitamin B availability from the sun and food sources across the world (Jablonski &

Chaplin). While skin colour does indeed vary amongst populations across the globe, it cannot be used to predict much more than simply what geographic region ancestors lived in.

However, while skin colour is only skin deep, race can be used to predict real social effects, as a result of social factors that have produced real, damaging effects on racialized individuals. For example, there are certain health problems, including diabetes and heart disease, that are more common amongst black individuals (Duster, 2005). However, just as skin colour is more directly linked to physical environment than to biological differences, racially-linked health problems are more directly linked to social environment than to biological differences (Duster, 2005). Accordingly, socioeconomic class may be a far more accurate predictor of one's likelihood to develop diabetes than race is. This issue is compounded by the fact that racism influences socioeconomic class (Duster, 2005).

Throughout my thesis, I make the conscious choice to explicitly describe my informants' biracial children's physical appearances. I do this with the recognition that skin tone and physical features influence how my informants' children are racially categorized and racialized. While these physical descriptors may seem crude, they have real social meaning and social consequences for my informants and their children.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a term that has been used – and misused – in a number of different contexts to refer to race, and to refer to other elements of a person's background, besides race. Statistics Canada uses ethnicity as an identifier, because ethnicity

describes a person's entire, overarching background, including origin or ancestry, race, and identity (Statistics Canada, 2002). One of my close friends, when I ask her to describe her ethnicity, describes herself to me as West Indian and Roman Catholic (R. John., personal communication, 2008). While she is perceived by Canadian society as black, she does not identify as black, and feels being identified as black does not fully describe her West Indian heritage: my friend's grandparents and great grandparents actually belonged to multiple racial groups.

Ethnicity is not directly interchangeable with race. A person asked to describe their ethnicity might choose to identify solely with a racial background, or might instead identify with many other elements of identity that are unrelated to race.

Visible Minority

I consciously choose not to use the term "visible minority" in my thesis. Canada is one of the only countries in the world that uses the term visible minority to talk about race (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). While visible minority, when interpreted literally, can refer to any individual who visibly appears different from the majority, be it a result of dis/ability, gender, age, or race, the reality is that the term visible minority is used to describe people who are perceived to be racially different from the racial majority. In Canada, the term visible minority is specifically used as a demographic category by Statistics Canada to describe any person "other than Aboriginals, who [is] non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (2006). By using white as a reference point, visible minority, as used within Canada, reinforces white privilege and racism.

Biracial, Multiracial, and Interracial

Throughout my thesis, I sometimes alternate between the terms "multiracial" and "biracial" when I describe individuals. For the purpose of this thesis, biracial individuals are people who are assumed to have only two racial combinations in their backgrounds. Multiracial individuals are people who are assumed to have two or more (i.e., multiple) racial combinations in their backgrounds, and can include biracial people. These terms are also sometimes mistakenly interchanged with the term "interracial". Interracial refers to the connection across races: a white mother parenting a biracial child engages in interracial parenting; a white person who is romantically involved with a black person engages in an interracial relationship; however, a child who has a white parent and a black parent is a biracial or multiracial child, not an interracial child. These labels are, of course, completely subjective, since "race" itself is socially constructed.

Racialization

There is no clear consensus around the meaning and application of the term "racialization" (Murji & Solomos, 2005). For the purpose of this thesis, I define racialization as a social process by which people consciously and unconsciously reinforce the notion of races, their own race, and supposed race differences (Alexander, 2004). Racialization is not always a conscious process for those who are racialized. White people, for example, are racialized into a white identity often without full awareness that they are being rendered "white" by society. Racialization can occur in many ways and is precipitated by social interactions wherein people learn that race matters and attach social meaning to race.

Even when race is not the explicit subject of social interactions, people may still be racialized through their social interactions. For example, individuals who are observant of the North American music scene will witness that some music genres are dominated by black artists and other genres are dominated by white artists. While individuals may not consciously examine racial elements in these social environments, they may begin to associate racial elements with social meaning, thus undergoing racialization.

Negative racialization, wherein individuals learn that their own skin colour and racial heritage "others" them from other racial groups, can have very negative consequences, not only for those who are negatively racialized by society, but also society as a whole, as the consequences of negative racialization affect every member of society. People who are not white are typically racialized in Canadian society, as they recognize that people who are white at the very least may have different lived experiences from them, and at worst may oppress them (Collins, 2001; Nopper, n.d.).

However, people who are white may live their lives without recognizing that people who are not white have different, less privileged, experiences in Canada because of their skin colour (Nopper). People who are white, living in Canada, still experience racialization in a different way, in that they will likely develop an awareness that there are people living in the world who belong to different races, but they are not as likely to recognize the degree to which race is attached to social access. Racism can be perpetuated both by people who are heavily racialized and people who are less racialized in Canadian society.

For the purpose of this thesis, to minimize language confusion, as I discuss the racialization (or teaching of racial difference) of the biracial children in my study, I refer to this as "negative racialization". When I refer to race awareness in the context of positive identity development, where the focus is more on pride in familial heritage than on awareness of racial differences, I refer to this "positive racial identity development". I recognize that other researchers may use both of these terms differently and interpret them differently than I do.

My Own Use of Labels

In order to do research with white mothers of biracial children, I must apply labels and definitions to my research population. I recognize that racial labels and classifications perpetuate racism and white privilege. However, in addition, ignoring the real social implications of race by refusing to acknowledge racial labels and classifications can also perpetuate racism and white privilege. Open, honest dialogue about racism and white privilege necessitates acknowledgement of racial labels and clarity in usage of racial terms.

Perhaps in large part because of my experiences growing up with a dis/ability, I have a strong dislike for labels. While yes, I have a dis/ability, I am a single mother, I am a young mother, and I am female, I do not believe that I can or should be pigeonholed by any of these descriptors. I dislike classifying people and grouping people into categories; I believe every individual is unique and should be embraced with the understanding that all of their characteristics combine to make up a vibrant, beautiful person.

However, human beings seek out connections and commonalities (Carlson, 1987). My own standpoint reveals how isolated I sometimes feel with my perception that those around me do not understand what I am experiencing because they do not share the factors that are creating my experiences. My experiences have led me to a very specific research population for my Masters thesis – white mothers of biracial children – that I believe shares common experiences. Labels help us to identify commonalities. While I am aware of how limiting and insufficient labelling is, I do use labels to identify my population, including labels such as: "white", "mother", and "biracial".

Therefore, while within the context of my thesis, I consciously adopt the use of "white" as a reference point, this is done specifically because my thesis explicitly examines white privilege and racism from the perspective of white women. My decision to use white as a reference point was arrived at after careful contemplation. Using white as a comparison point can perpetuate white privilege and white power. Labelling a person "non-white" by using "white" as a reference point can "encourage… avoidance of acceptance of the Black [or other non-white] part of the child's heritage and offer… nothing affirmative" (Pinderhughes, 1995, p. 84). Within the context of my research, however, I believe labelling a person "non-white" helps illuminate the impact of whiteness, or perceived whiteness, on a person's experiences.

I identify a person as white when they have two biological white-identified parents and appear phenotypically white. My informants, whom I label as mothers, are women who are the biological female parents of their children. In my study, my

informants' children are considered biracial if they have a mother who identifies as white and a father who does not identify as white.

When referring to other researchers' work, I adopt whichever terms they use. When quoting their writing, if they capitalize a word I would not capitalize, I leave the word capitalized as they intended. However, I intentionally choose not to capitalize the racial words "black" and "white" in my thesis. Identifiers that are capitalized typically refer to an identity, whereas identifiers that not capitalized typically refer to a descriptor. For example, as a person with a serious bilateral hearing loss, I am classified as "deaf"; however, I do not consider myself a member of the "Deaf" community, which identifies as a collective entity as a result of their shared Deaf identity. Likewise, my abovementioned friend who recognizes that in Canada she is perceived as a black woman does not think of herself as Black; instead, she thinks of herself as West Indian, which she feels is a more accurate identifier of who she is than the descriptor of black.

I struggled as I tried to decide what racial terms would be most appropriate to use in my research. Ultimately, I opted for a balance between conventional terms and politically correct terms. In this thesis, when I introduce my informants' backgrounds and their children's and partners' backgrounds, I describe (a) their socially constructed racial identifier and (b) their family's geographic identifier. I opt to initially acknowledge both race and geographic identifier in recognition that overall ethnic identity is significant to my informants and their families.

I adopt the socially constructed racial identifiers of: "white", "black", "South Asian", and "East Asian". I use geographic identifiers of continents and/or countries

of origin, depending on how my informants indicate their partners identify. For example, where black individuals are identified to me as "Jamaican-Canadian", I then introduce their backgrounds as "black Jamaican-Canadian". However, when I refer to individuals' racial backgrounds subsequently, I refer only to their socially constructed racial identifier, as the focus of my thesis is on race, not ethnicity.

Additionally, I wish to acknowledge my failure to use the same standards of racial identification for my white informants. This was a source of discomfort to me. While a few of my informants mentioned parts of their ethnic background to me in passing (e.g., Mennonite), I do not identify my informants as "white European-descent" or "white Irish-descent", for example, because my informants seemed to identify solely as white Canadians. Twine (2006) and O'Donoghue (2004) suggest that lack of ethnic identity may be due to homogeneity in childhood environments, which results in lack of ethnic socialization. I recognize that this is a troubling double-standard: my informants' partners, many of whom grew up in Canada and have very limited knowledge of their geographic cultural backgrounds, did not identify solely as black Canadians. I do not fully understand why my white informants are able to exist independently of their ancestors' geographic origins and their non-white partners and families remain tied to their ancestors' geographic origins. However, I believe that this is related to white privilege.

While I focused on white mothers for my research, the races of my informants' biracial children's fathers were not restricted to any particular race; however, all of the biological fathers are labelled by society as being non-white, and they do not appear phenotypically white. Six fathers of my informants' children were

identified to me as black, and one was identified to me as Asian[1]. At least one of the fathers has multiple racial heritages, but was identified to me as black and is perceived as black within Canadian society.

Research Context

Canada is becoming increasingly multicultural. The proportion of newcomer and non-white Canadian families is steadily rising (Statistics Canada, 2005). In 2001, 19% of all Ontarians (approximately 2,150,000 people) identified as non-white (using Statistics Canada's "visible minority" label and excluding Aboriginal Canadians) (Statistics Canada, 2001). Included within this 19% were approximately 42,000 people (or 2% of all non-white Ontarians) who declared multiple racial backgrounds (Ibid). With a decrease in overt societal opposition to interracial unions, coupled with increased numbers of non-white Canadians, increasing numbers of interracial relationships and multiracial offspring are a logical outcome.

Alongside the growth in the number of interracial unions, there has also been an increase in research conducted on multiracial offspring and interracial couples. While there are a range of opinions regarding the wellbeing and outcomes of multiracial individuals, there is a general consensus among researchers that the complex racial histories of multiracial individuals lead to more complex processes of identity development throughout their lives.

While the rate of interracial unions is steadily increasing, interracial families still constitute a relatively small percentage of Canadians and are not a readily

[1] Six mothers participated in my research study; one mother is divorced from her older child's father and has a second child with her current partner (for a total of seven fathers).

accessible research population. As well, interracial families may be reluctant to allow outsiders to witness the complexity of their family relationships and personal experiences; as with any type of research or information, recipients of the information could distort it to suit their purposes and, for example, argue that interracial relationships and interracial parenting are not in people's best interests. Because interracial families are not easily accessible, a researcher who is interested in working with members of interracial families must be strongly motivated and have reasonable entry points to gain access to interracial families. Indeed, one of my informants told me that she was uncertain about my research at first. However, once she understood that I too was a white mother of a biracial child, she was comfortable with participating in my research. A researcher who is determined to work with a less accessible population likely holds a personal interest in the research topic, as I do.

Literature Review

Because race has historically been socially constructed as a tool for race oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Collins, 2001; Nopper, n.d.), it is not surprising that the vast majority of research on interracial unions, interracial parenting, and multiracial or biracial individuals focuses on understanding risk factors, sources of oppression, coping mechanisms, and outcomes of individuals who are members of interracial families. My research goes beyond trying to understand individual experiences and outcomes to trying to understand the socially constructed systems of racism and white privilege through an exploration of individual experiences. I begin my literature review with a discussion of current knowledge about racism and white privilege and conclude with an exploration of findings from previous research on interracial and multiracial experiences.

Racism

Racism is a complex social system that has oppressed people throughout the world for centuries (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Murji & Solomos, 2005; Pataki, 2004). Audre Lorde (1984) defines racism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 115). In today's society, racism is so heavily engrained within social structures that this right to dominance is, I believe, implicitly reinforced even without conscious racist beliefs.

Within white-dominated communities, racism has historically imposed incredible hardships and injustices on people who are not white (see Lorde, 1984). Racism has been heavily integrated into social systems; in the past, racism was legal and demanded by many governments across the world. Racism still is overtly

practiced in some countries. Racism has led to unimaginable acts of violence, to the murder and genocide of millions (and perhaps cumulatively billions) of human beings across the world. Overt racism continues to this day in many communities throughout the world, but is officially outlawed in Canada: racial discrimination can be challenged in Canadian courts, and violence motivated by racial hatred is punished with increased penalties (Canadian Heritage, 2008).

Racism is a malicious social act that is typically examined with the understanding that non-white individuals are the targets of racism. As my research explores the experiences of *white* women parenting biracial children, I feel it is important to clarify my understanding of racism as it relates specifically to my research population, which, in itself, does not fit into the non-white racial categorizations typically associated with experiencing racism. When I talk about the experience of racism, I do so with the understanding that the direct embodied experience of racism, wherein a person is constantly vulnerable to and subjected to racial prejudice specifically because of her own skin colour and/or perceived racial heritage, is different than when a person who holds racial power and race privilege is subjected to racial prejudice because of her racial affiliations and connections. Lorde (1984) describes, in a series of essays published in *Sister Outsider,* her experiences growing up as a black female and her awareness of black females in her community and country experiencing racial discrimination and violence because of their perceived racial differences. Lorde was aware that for no other reason than skin colour, black women, men, and children were victims of murder.

As a person who is marked by her own skin colour, a woman who is not white has absolutely no way to escape or avoid racism. In contrast, while white mothers of biracial children may experience racism (for example, being denied service in a store) because of their racial affiliations, they still do not have the same direct embodied experience of racism that women who are not white may have. While white mothers of biracial children cannot fully escape racism, as they are forever tied, through their parenting, to their children who have non-white heritages, white mothers are still protected by their whiteness and their white privilege from experiencing racism in the way that non-white individuals may. In the context of my research, when I talk about my white informants experiencing racism, I wish to clarify my awareness that these experiences of racism are different from non-white individuals' experiences of racism.

In the context of racism committed against individuals who are non-white, a great deal of research has explored the prevalence of different types of racism in today's society. Despite the perception that racism has decreased in severity over the past several decades, racism is still widely prevalent. Thirty-five percent of Canadians who are not white report experiencing racism in the past five years (Statistics Canada, 2002). Professors Zamudio and Rios (2006) had 60 student-researchers attending a university class called "Social Problems" record all incidents of racism they witnessed over the term. Out of 60 journals, 951 entries describing incidences of racism were written. Racism manifests in many different ways in society.

Traditional racist acts, such as racial slurs, remain shockingly common (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). However, in today's society, the majority of racist speech

appears to occur in private conversation (Gillem et al., 2001; Zamudio & Rios). Racism in today's society has become extremely subtle (Quillian, 2008). Subtle racism includes such acts as avoiding interactions with people of different races and making assumptions about people on the basis of their skin colour. Another common form of racism is liberal racism, which essentially involves denying that racism exists (Zamudio & Rios). Liberal racism can also include tokenism, with statements such as, "some of my best friends are [insert racial group]" (Zamudio & Rios, p. 496). Some individuals also respond to equal opportunity initiatives with liberal racism.

In addition to traditional racist acts and liberal racist acts, racialized individuals must also face institutional racism (Miller & Garran, 2007; Murji, 2007). Institutional racism is insidiously pervasive and so deeply rooted in society that identifying and targeting it for elimination is difficult. Socioeconomic disparities between white populations and non-white populations are perpetrated and maintained by institutional racism which has historically removed economic and development opportunities from people who are not white, and resulted in decades and centuries of differential social privilege.

White Privilege

Rothenberg (2005) says of white privilege, "*White privilege is the other side of racism*" (p.1). While this exploration of white privilege as the corollary to racism emerges in the literature on white privilege, it is rarely discussed explicitly in explorations that focus on racism specifically. The normalization of whiteness is indicative of the power that has been accorded the white race. Says Dyer (2005),

> The invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white (which is to say dominant) discourse is of a piece with its ubiquity... Research...repeatedly shows that in Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race. (p. 11)

Whiteness as a "non-raced" racial experience is perpetuated by white privilege.McIntosh (1988) describes white privilege as being maintained through life-long implicit schooling that teaches white people to "think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'. (p. 4)"

White privilege is reinforced by racism and by existing social structures that ensure that persons who are not white are made aware of their racial background regularly, whereas white persons are able to exist in a race-neutral environment (McIntosh, 1988; see also collection of essays in P.S. Rothenberg, 2005). This neutralization of whiteness that comes with white privilege is troubling, because the term "neutral" implies social normalization, consequently implying that non-white space is abnormal.

Being aware of white privilege will not automatically abolish racism in Canadian society. However, being aware of white privilege allows for critical examination of how racial systems lead people who are perceived as white to have different experiences from people who are not perceived as white in Canada.

In addition to a theoretical understanding of white privilege, Jennings' (2006) transracial adoption research also informs my study. Jennings explored how white mothers parenting non-white children can inform us about white privilege. Adoptive parents' and potential adoptive parents' feelings toward and comfort with adopting and parenting children of other races were examined. Jennings examined the mothers' and potential mothers' mostly unrecognized feelings of white privilege and internalized racism. Several of her informants had adopted monoracial and biracial non-white children, after realizing they would not be able to adopt white children. Many of Jennings' informants struggled with accepting the idea of adopting a child who was not white, because of both personal racism and fears of experiencing racism. The majority of the mothers who adopted non-white children ignored their children's racial backgrounds. Says Jennings, "These women approached adoption from a position of White privilege; that is, they treated Whiteness as an empty category and framed parenting as a 'race neutral' practice" (p. 573). The remaining small group of mothers took an anti-racist approach to parenting.

Definitions and understandings of white privilege may vary. However, pivotal to the experience of white privilege is the notion that being perceived as white allows one to live life free of barriers based on skin colour and physical appearance. In my study, I explore white mother's understandings and experiences of white privilege – its presence and its absence in various social contexts. I examine the social positioning of being a white mother of a biracial child.

Interracial Unions and Interracial Parenting

Individuals of different racial backgrounds who enter into interracial relationships may have unique experiences connected to race. Until the mid-to-late twentieth century, interracial unions in North America were largely persecuted, and research typically examined interracial relationships from a negative perspective (e.g., Reuter, 1969).

In light of the persecution interracial couples have faced throughout history, it is not surprising that interracial couples experience complex social processes, and often report experiencing negative consequences in response to their unions (Childs, 2002). Families of individuals who enter interracial unions may be supportive or may distance themselves from the couples (Childs). Familial opposition to interracial unions can come as a surprise to interracial couples who have never realized family members harbour racist beliefs. Additionally, it is important to recognize that racism toward interracial couples does not manifest solely in white individuals; racism may be directed toward couples from both white and non-white family members, friends, and strangers (Childs).

When interracial couples progress to building interracial families and parenting biracial and multiracial children, complex social processes continue to affect the parents. In addition to the usual parenting obligations common across all parents regardless of race, parents of biracial and multiracial children must provide their children with protective and supportive environments, and must educate their biracial and multiracial children about racism (Gibbs, 2003; O'Donoghue, 2004; Pinderhughes, 1995; Twine, 2006).

However, before parents can adequately educate their children about racism and protect their children from racism, it is necessary that they first examine their own personal racism and white privilege (Pinderhughes, 1995). "Examining their own self-esteem and self-concept issues, identifying their own personal racism, the racism of others, institutional racism per se, and understanding how it impacts their lives become mandatory activities for parents" of biracial children (Pinderhughes, p. 90). When parents are supportive of their children, and acknowledge their children's complex social experiences due to race, and openly encourage pride in their children's multiple racial backgrounds, their adult biracial and multiracial children report feeling confident, comfortable, and content with their racial heritages (Gibbs, 2003; Jourdan, 2006; Pinderhughes).

Multiracial Individuals

Multiracial people experience complex identity development processes that are different from monoracial white and non-white people (Collins, 2000; Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001; Herman, 2004; Jourdan, 2006; Kerwin, et al., 1993; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Rockquemore, 1998; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Root, 1998; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004; Williams & Thornton, 1998). Biracial individuals quickly learn that race matters and has potentially negative social implications, even if their families emphasize pride in racial heritages (Williams & Thornton). Similarly to their parents, multiracial adults report experiencing racism from individuals who represent a variety of racial backgrounds (i.e., multiracial individuals may experience racism not only from white individuals, but also from non-white individuals) (Jourdan; Miville et al.; Root).

Black heritage appears to be most influential in predicting whether biracial and multiracial people are likely to experience racism (Herman).

Biracial and multiracial people who live in white-dominated communities are more likely to adopt their white parents' white identity or a multiracial identity, while people who live in diverse communities are more likely to adopt their non-white parents' identities (Herman, 2004; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Rockquemore, 1998; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Root, 1998). The occurrence of biracial and multiracial individuals "passing" for white (and minimizing their non-white racial heritage) appears to happen more often in white dominated environments (Phinney & Alipuria; Twine, 1997). Biracial individuals risk being rejected or excluded by monoracial non-white peers if they integrate with the white community and do not culturally identify as a member of their non-white cultural group heritage. Additionally, biracial individuals who do not adopt a monoracial identity may feel excluded by members of both of their racial backgrounds (Collins, 2000).

White Mothers Parenting Biracial Children

O'Donoghue (2004) and Twine (2006) are two researchers who have explicitly explored the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial black-white children. Both researchers sought to understand how the women viewed themselves within the context of their interracial families and in society-at-large.

The researchers found that the majority of the white mothers had grown up without a clear sense of any racial or ethnic identity (O'Donoghue, 2004; Twine, 2006). One reason for this lack of racial identity may have been the homogeneity of their childhood environments, which were almost exclusively white. Because of this

lack of ethnic socialization growing up, the mothers did not feel they had a culture of their own to pass on to their children. Indeed, most of the mothers focused on providing their children with the tools to develop a black identity, which they felt was more valuable to their children. Critical to the development of a black culture in their social environments was the involvement of their black husbands and relatives.

None of the women were aware of race and of racial differences growing up (O'Donoghue, 2004; Twine, 2006). They believed their parents were not racist; however, these colour-blind attitudes were tested when they entered their interracial relationships and many were rejected by their white families. Indeed, it was only upon making the decision to date a non-white man, and later on to marry him, that they began to recognize the significance of their whiteness. While many of the mothers indicated that they had become more aware of the role that race played in society, they did not believe that their own personal identities had changed at all. Despite creating a home environment that fostered black identity development in their children, they did not feel that they were any less white. To the contrary, some mothers indicated they felt whiter, as they had become more aware of their whiteness.

All of the white mothers were more aware of racial injustice, as a result of their interracial relationships and their mothering of biracial children (O'Donoghue, 2004; Twine, 2006). However, this increased awareness did not have a consistent effect across all mothers. Some mothers interviewed by O'Donoghue had experienced racism, yet still refused to acknowledge the role race played in society, suggesting instead that class was the overriding factor, not race. Indeed Twine's case study also supported the dominance of class, not race, in race relations, as black relatives of a

black father discussed their opposition to the interracial marriage as an opposition to a mismatch in class, not race. Other mothers, having experienced racism, responded by rejecting the notion of race altogether, and refused to label themselves as white or their children as biracial or black, saying this process was only intended to reproduce divisive classifications intended to keep white people superior to non-whites. Other women were secure in their own white identities, but aware of the negative actions of other whites and avoided being grouped with race-focused white individuals.

The Present Study

The above literature review illustrates the complex social positioning and experiences of interracial couples, biracial children, and white parents of biracial children. Interracial couples may face challenges with family, society at large, and even with each other. Biracial children may receive mixed messages from society, from their peers, and/or from their parents. Parents approach biracial parenting with a wide range of strategies and some choose to ignore race altogether. Nonetheless, white privilege and racism undeniably play a part of the lives of biracial individuals, as well as their parents and families.

My literature review indicates that minimal research has been conducted with white parents of biracial children. While O'Donoghue (2004) and Twine's (2006) studies about the experiences of white mothers of biracial children have enhanced my understanding of the world I live in and the world that my biracial daughter lives in, there are still many unknowns. In the present study, I critically examine white privilege and racism from the unique perspectives of Canadian, Ontarian, white mothers of biracial children. Similarly to O'Donoghue and Twine, I examine the experiences of white mothers of biracial children. However, my research focus differs in that my goal is to understand the socially constructed systems of racism and white privilege *through* my examination of the mothers' experiences, as opposed to understanding how the mothers are impacted by their experiences.

In my study, I examine subjective experiences of white privilege and racism among multiple white mothers of biracial children. Similar to Twine's (2006) mixed methods study, where she utilized a combination of individual interviews,

photographic elicitation interviews, and photographic documentation of social surroundings, I explore the mothers' experiences in in-depth detail, using multiple methods.

Past research on interracial unions and multiracial people has largely focused on black-white unions similar to my own lived experience. However, I believe experiences of white privilege, racism, and racialization are common to all white mothers of biracial children, regardless of their children's fathers' specific racial backgrounds. Historical tensions between Asian and white populations may increase the complexity of an Asian-white interracial family's experiences, just as historical tensions between black and white populations may. As a result, I chose not to restrict families' eligibility for my study to only one specific racialized population. Nevertheless, the majority of the mothers who volunteered for my study were parenting children who were biracial black-white.

My study was designed to explore the lived experiences of white mothers of biracial children, with a specific research focus on white privilege and racism, as understood through the experience of being a white mother parenting a biracial child. I used qualitative methods to explore how white mothers of biracial children experienced white privilege and racism. My main research question is: **How can the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children inform us about white privilege and racism?**

Methodology

My study was entirely qualitative in design. This qualitative focus emerged from my epistemological views that reality is best examined from a social constructivist paradigm. I chose a qualitative design because while virtually all of my undergraduate university training was in quantitative research, and quantitative data allows the researcher to make concrete statements about experiences, quantitative research does not allow researchers to explore the lived, subjective realities of their informants. Banyard and Miller (1998) define qualitative research as that...

> ...which eschews the traditional positivist belief in an objective reality that can only be understood through detached scientific inquiry. According to this view, qualitative methods are consistent with, and reflective of, a social constructivist position, in which reality is best understood by studying the ways in which people perceive, experience, and make sense of, the events in their lives. (p. 487)

Conducting research from a social constructivist perspective allowed me gather rich, in-depth data, while at the same time recognizing that even people of similar backgrounds have diverse viewpoints and unique perspectives.

My research is not participatory action research; however, I have integrated active and interactive participatory components into my study. I believe that instead of approaching people as potential subjects or participants to be studied, they should be approached as equals who can co-construct knowledge and advance understanding. Accordingly, I incorporated a photographic journaling project into my research study. I also engaged my informants in a member check process to increase their ownership of their reports in the transcript data.

Research Relationship

A critical focus on race oppression and power imbalances, all the while recognizing the subjectivity of experiences, requires a trusting relationship between the researcher and the researched. My own personal experiences as a white mother of a biracial daughter motivated me to conduct the present research study exploring other white mothers' experiences parenting biracial children. I made the assumption that this connection between myself and my informants would help facilitate knowledge transfer. I anticipated that our shared status in society as white mothers of biracial children would enhance trust. I hoped that my insider perspective would encourage partial and perhaps augmented understanding of the information my informants shared with me.

I sought to engage my informants in a non-hierarchical relationship. Discussing racism and white privilege is logically uncomfortable. Talking about interracial families and interracial parenting, too, might have been awkward and uncomfortable for my informants. As such, I sought to establish a conversation between equals. On initiation of our relationship, I made my informants fully aware of my position as a white mother of a biracial daughter.

I assumed that my shared status as a white mother of a biracial child would give me "insider" access to my research population. However, Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhamad (2001) caution that insider/outsider status cannot be clearly delineated. I must not assume that my position as a white mother of a biracial child fully guaranteed me insider status. My other positions as a woman with a dis/ability, a young woman, a highly educated 23 year old, and a single

mother, to name but a few of my other roles in society, may have served to augment my insider status, or alternatively may have increased my outsider status, reducing bonds between me and my informants.

Merriam et al. (2001) warn that I cannot assume my status as a white mother of a biracial daughter gave me the authority to determine what "the truth" is. Likewise, I had had to be careful not to present my informants' stories as definitive realities, nor to give one story more validation than another. The researchers say, "Every researcher struggles with representing the 'truth' of their findings as well as allowing the 'voices' of their participants to be heard" (p. 414).

Merriam et al. (2001) stress that positionality is a complex, dynamic factor in researcher-participant relationships and should never be taken for granted. My varied positions may have potentially augmented my understanding of one informant's stories, and interfered with my understanding of another informant's stories. As a result, it was critical that I integrate self-reflexivity on my relationship with my informants throughout the entire research process.

To monitor how I was affected by and experienced the research process, I wrote field notes following interviews, and memos when reflecting on and analyzing the data collected. I also immersed myself in the research process, as if I were an informant, by completing the individual interview questions myself, by engaging in the photographic journaling project myself, and by exploring how my own personal feelings and experiences related to the dialogue of the informants at the small group interviews. These methods allowed me to monitor not only how I interacted with my research informants and responded to them, but also how they too might have

experienced the research process. I approached my relationships with my informants with transparency and honesty. I emphasized to my informants that the goal of my research was to understand their experiences and their realities. My goal was to hear their stories and share their stories. Their knowledge, their expertise, and their dialogue were invaluable in helping me to understand racism.

Methods

Recruitment

I recruited my informants using word-of-mouth and snowball technique. I personally knew two of the informants through work relationships established prior to my initiation of the study. A third informant was a neighbour of a friend of mine; my friend approached the neighbour and asked her if she would be interested in participating in my study. I also sent an open request, via email, to many of my friends and acquaintances, asking if they would consider mentioning my study to any women they knew, whom they thought met my inclusion criteria. One friend, a graduate of the Community Psychology program, put me in touch with the fourth informant. My fifth and sixth informants were referred to me by earlier informants, who knew them. I emailed all potential informants an information package containing my proposed research, proposed methods, and a consent form (see Appendices A and B).

Informants

Six white mothers of biracial children, living in Greater Waterloo Region, participated in my study. My inclusion criterion for whether a woman was white was her having two biological parents whom she identified as white. My measurement of whether a woman was a parent to a biracial child was her identifying her child/ren as having a non-white biological father. I did not explicitly state these criteria to my potential informants; instead, I simply told them that I was looking for white mothers of biracial children. All of the mothers fit my criteria without screening being required.

Not only did I learn about my informants' experiences with regards to racism and white privilege throughout my interviews, but I also learned about my informants themselves. In addition to the data I collected specifically about racial issues, I also learned about what my informants' family lives were like, and about my informants' attitudes toward life and parenting. Before I present my findings, I feel it is important to present my informants, to contextualize my findings and my conclusions. Below I have provided a brief summary of each informants' background.

Pseudonyms have been used for all my informants and their family members. Wherever possible, the informants selected the pseudonyms themselves.

Maggie

Maggie is a 34 year old, university-educated, white woman who is married to Andy, a black man of Caribbean descent. Andy was born in Canada to parents who immigrated to Canada from Barbados. Maggie and Andy have two biracial children: Kayla, who is seven years old, and Marcus, who is three years old. Kayla has very light brown skin and dark, wavy hair, while her brother Marcus has darker brown skin and tighter curls.

Maggie directly addresses white privilege and racism throughout her interviews. Maggie's awareness of her own white privilege has developed through her personal experiences of racism, through witnessing her partner experience racism, and through her recognition that her children are being racialized in their social interactions. Maggie and her partner try to provide a neutral home environment for their children where race does not matter. However, Maggie's daughter Kayla began demonstrating awareness of race just around the time of my research study. Maggie is

determined to shield her children from racism and is struggling with her realization that no matter what she does, her children are beginning to realize that race matters in Canadian society.

Jessika

Jessika is a 33 year old, university-educated, white woman who is a single mother to a nine month old daughter, Tenzin. Tenzin's father is an Asian Tibetan refugee, who left Tibet for Northern India. Jessika met her daughter's father while living in Northern India. Although Jessika maintains contact with Tenzin's father through email, Tenzin does not know her father at this time. Jessika's awareness of white privilege has been mediated by her spiritual and cultural approach to life. Jessika focuses on culture and geography much more than race when considering her daughter's social positioning. Tenzin's physical features more closely resemble Jessika's features than Tenzin's father's features. In large part because Tenzin's biracial heritage is not visibly evident, Jessika and Tenzin have not had much exposure to racism, and racism is not currently a part of their lived reality. Jessika is somewhat aware of her own white privilege and wonders how white privilege will affect her daughter. However, Jessika's primary focus when she considers her daughter's heritage is on ensuring that Tenzin grows up with a knowledge of, and appreciation of, her Tibetan cultural heritage, including her father's native language, customs, and religious beliefs.

Peggy

Peggy is a 37 year old, university-educated, white woman who is a single mother to eleven year old biracial twin children: her daughter Lisa and her son Kyle.

Peggy was married to her children's father, a black man of Caribbean descent, for several years; they divorced when their children were young. Lisa and Kyle's father was born in England to Jamaican parents and immigrated to Canada as a young child. Lisa and Kyle have regular contact with their father. Peggy explicitly addresses white privilege and racism throughout her interviews. She is aware that her children are affected daily by race. Peggy regularly sensitizes her children and adults she interacts with to the ways in which racism is perpetuated, in large part because of her desire to reduce the degree to which her children experience judgmental and racist social environments. Peggy's twin children physically appear very different: Kyle has dark brown skin, and identifies as black, while Lisa has light brown skin and is able to exist in a relatively neutral racial space in comparison to her brother. Lisa and Kyle's physical appearances, combined with the socioeconomic and multicultural make up of the neighbourhood they live in, have exposed Peggy and her children to a number of racializing experiences.

Leah

Leah is a 34 year old white woman who is a lone mother to an eight month old biracial daughter, Sara, and a seven year old biracial daughter, Meg. Leah was married to Meg's father, a man of Caribbean descent, for several years and they separated when Leah was young. Meg's father immigrated to Canada from Jamaica when he was a child. Leah is currently in a committed relationship with Sara's father, a black man who immigrated to Canada from Bequia. Meg and Sara have regular contact with their fathers. Both Meg and Sara have light brown skin and blondish-brown wavy hair. Leah has experienced racism both as a result of dating interracially

and being a white mother of biracial children. Leah focuses primarily on her own personal experiences with racism. She is somewhat aware of white privilege and the role that her whiteness has played in protecting her from the damaging effects of racism that she has observed in her romantic partners. Leah's two daughters' biracial heritage has not been immediately identifiable in their physical appearances. Both of Leah's daughters have blondish-brown curly hair, and their skin is a light golden-tan colour. Leah's older daughter has acquired more of her father's features with age. Perhaps as a result of her children's ambiguous physical features, Leah has not observed her children experiencing racism. However, like Maggie's daughter, Leah's older daughter, Meg, is aware of race and has expressed to Leah her feelings of being different from other children.

Gwyn

Gwyn is a 30 year old white woman who is married to Neil, a black man who immigrated to Canada from Ghana. Gwyn and Neil have four children: their biracial daughter, Linda, who is two years old, and Neil's three black African children from a previous relationship in Ghana: Nadia, Todd, and Wayne. Linda physically resembles her mother more closely than her siblings and her father. She has light brown skin and loose curly brown hair that is dreadlocked. Gwyn's understanding of white privilege and racism are mediated by her experiences as a white partner to a black man from Africa man who practices Rastafarianism, and as a white mother to three black African-born children, in addition to her experiences as a white mother to a biracial Canadian-born child. Gwyn focuses more on culture than race in her daily social interactions. Gwyn's partner has strong cultural roots from Ghana and actively shares

his cultural heritage with his children and other people he interacts with. Gwyn is very focused on ensuring that all of her children grow up with a strong appreciation of their cultural heritage. In large part because Gwyn's three eldest children are of direct African descent and are perceived as black, Gwyn also focuses on ensuring that all of her children grow up with a sense of pride in their racial heritage. Gwyn's children have not yet experienced, or reported to her, racism. Gwyn and her partner, however, have experienced racism directly connected to their interracial relationship.

Hope

Hope is a 37 year old, university-educated, white woman who is a single mother to a seven year old son, Moussa. Moussa's father is a black man whom Hope met while living in Mali. Moussa has some contact with his father through telephone calls, but has not yet met his father in person. Similar to Jessika, Hope's understanding of white privilege and race has been mediated by her spiritual and cultural approaches to life. Hope identifies more as a global citizen than as a Canadian citizen, and as a member of the human race than as a member of a social racial group. Hope has travelled to over 27 different countries around the world and spent the decade prior to Moussa's birth living in many different cultural environments. She is aware of white privilege and racism, initially as a result of her university studies. Hope acknowledges that her son has been racialized in spite of her own global views. Moussa's physical features more closely resemble his father's features than Hope's features. Because Moussa is perceived by society as black, Hope has sought to ensure that he is exposed to diversity and receives affirmation that he is

perfect just as he is. However, Hope resists acknowledging the role that white privilege and racism play in her life and her son's life.

Additional Informant Demographics

In understanding my informants' experiences and potentially comparing their experiences to those of other mothers, it should also be noted that all of my informants grew up in Ontario, Canada, in homogenous white families, with white parents. Three of my informants were raised in upper-middle socioeconomic class homes, and three were raised in lower-middle socioeconomic class homes. Four of my informants have travelled extensively around the world. All but one of my informants were university educated. All of my informants are employed and are raising their children in lower-middle socioeconomic class homes. All of my informants have regular, amicable contact with their parents, and their parents have grandparent relationships with the children.

As well, each of my informants' children's fathers came from unique ethnic backgrounds. Six of the fathers were black and African descent or Caribbean descent, and one father was Asian, of Tibetan descent. Fathers' countries of birth ranged from Tibet to Mali to Ghana to England to Bequia to Jamaica to Canada. Two of the fathers have never been to Canada and have never met their children. Other fathers immigrated to Canada at various points in their lives ranging from early childhood to as recently as just a few years ago. One father was born in Canada to parents who had immigrated to Canada. The fathers were raised in a wide range of family environments, including single parent homes, dual parent homes, extended family homes, and group homes. Some of the fathers' parents have had contact with their

grandchildren. At the time of the interviews, two sets of paternal grandparents were involved in their grandchildren's lives.

Individual Interviews

I conducted an in-depth, semi-structured, individual interview with each informant at the start of our research relationship. The individual interviews were audio recorded and video recorded. One informant also contacted me, two months following her first interview, for a follow up interview. This mother's initial interview lasted about one hour, and her follow up interview lasted thirty minutes. While the follow up interview allowed my informant to share additional knowledge with me that was not obtained at the mother's first interview, this informant was also the sole woman who was unable to attend the small group interviews. All other informants had additional opportunities to share their further developed knowledge with me when they participated in the concluding small group interviews. The remaining five individual interviews lasted between one hour and three and a half hours.

Conducting individual interviews allowed me to develop rich, detailed understandings of the subjective experiences of my informants. Rubin and Rubin (1995, as cited in Dilley, 2004) say, "Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out the way others feel and think about their worlds. Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate" (p.1). Through open conversation, the mothers were able to reveal details that were important to them but that I might not have immediately recognized as important.

The individual interviews were held in quiet, private locations chosen by the mothers. Five of my informants invited me into their homes to interview them, and

one invited me to her workplace for her interview. One mother's son and husband were home during her interview, although for the most part they were otherwise occupied throughout the interview time. Another mother's children and husband were home during her interview, which took place very late at night; however, her husband was occupied with putting the children to sleep during the interview. Two mothers' infant daughters were present during their interviews and played and napped throughout.

I began the interviews by sharing my standpoint. By sharing my standpoint, I was able to remind my informants that I was coming from a perspective similar to theirs, as a white mother of a biracial child. I then ensured that my informants understood that the research study was broken down into three phases: an interview, a photographic journaling project, and a small group interview. I reminded my informants that they were free to withdraw from the research process at any time.

I used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) to help focus the dialogue around racism and white privilege. My goals, through the interview process, were to learn whether, and how, white mothers were aware of white privilege and racism, and to explore how interracial families' experiences could shed light on white privilege and racism. I encouraged my informants to talk about both their past and present experiences parenting their children. I also tried to elicit reports from my informants about whether they experienced a shift in their understanding of racial issues and racism, and what factors influenced this transition.

Photographic Journaling

Following their individual interviews, the mothers were each given a disposable camera and a journal (Appendices D to F). I asked my informants to reflect on the interview process, the things discussed during the interview, and to consider things in their visual environments that told stories about their lived experiences around racialization, racism, and white privilege. The mothers were able to take up to 27 photographs, and were asked to write a brief explanation of their photographs in their journals. The photographic journaling project was used as a process step, which first engaged my informants in thinking about racism and white privilege following the individual interviews as they took photographs, and second resulted in the production of photographs which were used as discussion prompts for the concluding small group interviews.

The original study design called for only photographs from the journaling project to be used for discussion at the small group interviews; however, two of the mothers were unable to complete the journaling project prior to the small group interviews due to other commitments, and one of the mothers reported feeling limited in her freedom to take photographs due to her social boundaries (e.g., she wanted to take a photograph of her children's school concert to show how diverse their peer group was, but did not feel comfortable doing so). The two mothers who were unable to complete their photography prior to the group interviews brought photographs and objects from their homes to the group interviews instead. The mother who was unable to take as many photographs as she desired, also brought additional photographs and objects to supplement the photographs she had taken. My photographic journaling

method was informed and inspired by Photovoice, a participatory action photographic research technique that distributes power over the research process between the researcher and the participant-researcher (Wang, 2005). Photovoice is based on three key goals: (1) enabling people to record and reflect their community's strengths and problems; (2) promoting dialogue about important issues through group discussion and photographs; and (3) engaging policymakers. While the photographic component of my research was similar to Photovoice, I do not call it Photovoice, because it did not follow the exact methods outlined by the creators of Photovoice.

Small Group Interviews

I held two small group interviews with my informants. Three informants came together for the first small group interview, and two other informants attended the second small group interview. The sixth informant was scheduled to attend the second small group interview, but cancelled due to illness. I offered to provide child care to all informants; however, all declined. Both informants at the second interview brought their infant daughters to the interview. The interviews were held on a Friday evening and the following Saturday afternoon. The interviews lasted 3 hours and 2 hours, respectively. Both small group interviews took place in the same conference room at Wilfrid Laurier University. The small group interviews were audio recorded only. While I initially intended to video record the small group interviews as well, I chose not to video record them due to budget constraints.

Pinderhughes (1995) offers support for my inclusion of small group interviews in my research study. Open discussions among parents of biracial children

have been shown to have a therapeutic effect on parents (Hill & Peltzer, 1982). Says Pinderhughes,

> ...Members could share their own beliefs and experiences concerning racism, and begin to deal with it. Especially for White parents, this [therapeutic] format was deemed more helpful in developing an awareness of their personal racial attitudes which could affect their children in negative ways. (Hill & Peltzer, 1982, as cited in Pinderhughes, 1995, p. 90)

Group discussions have also been identified as a valuable photographic journaling technique that facilitates community building and idea development (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006). I attempted to foster idea development by using photographs from the photographic journaling as discussion prompts for the small group interviews.

The informants who were able to complete their photographic journaling prior to the small group interviews were asked to select out key photographs from their journaling projects and present them to the group. Some of my informants also brought additional items to the group interviews, including custom-designed calendars of family photographs, magazines, and a bracelet. I engaged my informants in loosely structured dialogue about the photographs and other visual objects (Appendix G). The goals of the small group interviews were to engage in collective discussion over photographic representations of individual realities, and also to explore whether there were similarities or dissimilarities across the informants' experiences. I used a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate the discussion; however, I must acknowledge that many of the mothers were very excited at the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences parenting their biracial children, and I adjusted the group interview format to allow the mothers to talk. At times, I did

not interject any comments for several minutes; the mothers carried the discussion on their own. Other times, the mothers demonstrated their own critical examination of racism and white privilege by asking each other questions about their experiences.

Strengths and Limitations

It is the nature of qualitative research that outcomes cannot be predicted the way they can with quantitative research due to the human element of it (Charmaz, 2006). For example, a quantitative research studying exploring racism and white privilege might implement a survey tool with close-ended questions, where responses do not require much interpretation. However, when informants are given the opportunity to share what they want to share, accurately interpreting responses is a more difficult, complex process.

This study evolved slightly throughout its course. In my original study design, I intended to use the photographs and journal entries collected through the photographic journaling project as data to be analyzed. However, once I collected my informants' photographs and journal entries, I realized that there were additional implications of photographic journaling that I had not fully considered prior to the study. I believe that the photographic journaling project had the desired effect of further engaging my informants in critically thinking about racism and white privilege. Indeed, some of my informants reported struggling with taking photographs, because they could not find visual representations of racial issues in their surroundings. This struggle in itself illustrates the perplexing invisibility of racism that makes it so difficult to identify and abolish. In addition to my informants' struggles with the photographic journaling project, I struggled with analyzing the

photographs. While many of the photographs beautifully illustrated my informants' struggles with racial issues (e.g., Jessika produced a photograph of her daughter playing with a photograph of Jessika's extended, all-white, family and talked at the small group interview about her concern about how white-dominated Tenzin's family environment was), I found myself facing ethical concerns with regards to interpreting the photographs and to reporting them. In many instances, my interpretation of the photographs' meaning was different from that of what my informants' wrote in their journals.

While my differing interpretations did not trouble me in my analysis of my transcript data, they did in my analysis of photographic data, because the photographs were the explicit products of my informants. They were taken with specific intents and messages attached. In addition, several of the photographs revealed identifying details about my informants' children. While my informants gave consent for these photographs to be used and published in my thesis, my value of self-determination led to my decision not to publish the photographs, as ultimately, I felt the mothers' children should all be able to give full and informed consent to having their faces revealed, and this was not possible due to their ages. As a result, I made the decision not to use the photographs and journal entries gathered through the photographic journaling project as data.

My original study design also called for one focus group to be held with all of the mothers, not two small group interviews. However, due to scheduling difficulties, I decided that it would be less stressful for me and my informants if I split the group into two. This division of the informants inadvertently led to my informants being

grouped into unusually homogenous sets. For example, all of the mothers who participated in my Friday small group interview were parenting sons who were perceived as black, and who further adopted additional black-stereotyped characteristics such as dreadlocks. Likewise, both of the mothers who participated in my Saturday small group interview were parenting infant daughters who were perceived as white.

An additional element emerged out of the small group interviews that I did not originally anticipate. In my original study design, I envisioned the individual interviews exploring racism and white privilege at a surface level, the time spent on photographic journaling allowing my informants to reflect further on racism and white privilege, and then the small group interviews hopefully supporting the emergence of more developed ideas and thoughts about their experiences with white privilege and racism. Where more developed articulations of white privilege and racism surfaced in the small group interviews, I present this data in my findings instead of the earlier, less developed articulations. However, the majority of the conversation during small group interviews was information that already been reported to me that my informants repeated for the benefit of their peers. As a result, data from the small group interviews is largely invisible in my findings. The small group interviews ultimately evolved into much more of a community building dimension than I originally anticipated. This was an unexpected but very much welcomed development. My informants spoke of their happiness in being able to talk openly in a friendship environment with other women who would not judge them for their words and experiences.

Qualitative Rigour

Because qualitative research is far more subjective than quantitative research, in that the researcher's perspective can skew the data at the collection phase, at the analysis and interpretation phase, and at the presentation phase, it is essential to establish safeguards that ensure that qualitative rigour is maintained. I have mentioned a few of the safeguards I used in other sections of this thesis, where appropriate. As an insider to my research population, self-reflexivity was critical to ensuring that my understanding of my research question was not unreasonably biased. However, it is important that I acknowledge that my own biases from having personally experienced white motherhood to a biracial child certainly did influence the research process. Because I have, for example, experienced the sensation of being glared at by people who I perceived took issue with my interracial parenting, I quickly noticed that most of my informants also reported similar situations.

I implemented member checks, to ensure that my transcript data was accurate. To ensure that I was aware of how my own thoughts and feelings affected my research, at the data collection and interpretation phases in particular, I kept a journal throughout the research process, I wrote memos as I analyzed my data in NVivo, and I engaged in an ongoing informal peer review, where I discussed my general thoughts and feelings about my data and my findings (while respecting my informants' rights to confidentiality). I also reviewed my findings multiple times and asked peers to read my findings as well, to monitor the accuracy of my data display (i.e., to make sure that what I was saying the data meant was really reflected in the data I presented in my findings).

Ethical Issues and Confidentiality

Race, racism, and white privilege are difficult topics to talk about. Indeed, reflexivity and examination of white privilege and racism are difficult processes to undergo. I had multiple safeguards in place to minimize potential for harm. All potential informants were fully informed of the purpose of my research project and participation requirements before they consented to participating in my study. They were made aware of the contextual background of my project (e.g., my focus on white mothers of biracial children, my standpoint, etc.) and my focus on white privilege and racial awareness. All informants signed a consent form (Appendix B) prior to participating in my research. A debriefing form (Appendix I) was given to all informants upon completion of my research.

The set up of the research methods were intended to be as equalizing as possible: my informants chose the interview locations and times, and were able to control and adjust their degree of involvement in the process (e.g., for the photographic journaling project, one informant took 27 photographs, and one took 3 photographs). In all phases of the project, informants were made aware that they were in control of their participation. They could choose not to answer questions or to request that I reframe questions. Once the dialogue was transcribed, it was member-checked with the informants and they were able to clarify their words if they felt their transcribed comments did not accurately reflect what they intended to say. Informants were in complete control of their photographic journaling. They could choose to keep photographs private that they did not feel comfortable sharing.

The process of dialoguing itself might have been difficult for my informants. The women who participated in my study might have reluctant to talk openly about the true extent of their experiences and feelings regarding racism and white privilege. bell hooks (1993), a black feminist scholar and activist, says:

> Among poor and working-class black people the impetus to dissimulate is usually connected with the desire to cover up realities that are regarded as "shameful." Many of us were raised to be (sic) believe that we should never speak publicly about our private lives, because the public world was powerful enough to use such information against us. ...Yet, again, we hold onto these strategies even when they are not connected to our survival and undermine our wellbeing. Telling the truth about one's life is not simply about naming the "bad" things, exposing horrors. It is also about being able to speak openly and honestly about feelings, about a variety of experiences. (p. 27)

Similar to hooks' statement, white mothers of biracial children too might desire to withhold the truth about their realities as a way of maintaining power in their social interactions. Projecting an image of security and confidence may also serve as a protective mechanism to ensure their families are free from judgment by outsiders. I hoped that open honest dialogue in a safe environment would be experienced by my informants as an empowering process.

Indeed, throughout the course of my research, I received conflicting information from some informants that caused me to personally question whether important details were being omitted from statements made. However, I reconciled this with a reminder to myself that truth is socially constructed and subjective. My informants determine what their perception of the truth is.

To ensure that my informants felt safe in sharing their experiences, they were given full anonymity, to the extent possible, in this thesis. Pseudonyms were used in the place of names throughout my data. In the context of my small group interviews,

though, my informants were not anonymous to each other. However, the amount of personal information they chose to share at the small group interviews was left up to them. I did not reference personal comments made in interviews during the group interviews. The women knew each other's faces and first names, and several of the women, it turned out, already knew each other through various activities outside of my research.

There were four forms of raw data gathered through my research project – interviews on video tape, interviews on audio tape, photographs, and written comments about the photographs. A third party, Jeanne Whitehead, was contracted to transcribe my interviews. Informants were made aware of the recording mechanisms and were aware that a third party would have access to the data. The third party transcriber was required to sign a confidentiality form (see Appendix H). The video recording was done to ensure that I would be able to double check the accuracy of the transcripts and also to ensure that if my transcriber was unable to hear parts of the interview, that I could complete the transcripts by lip reading what had been said. While I did view the video tapes to ensure the recordings had worked, I did not wind up having to use them for the intended purposes. My informants themselves took the photographs and wrote their journal entries. All data collected through interviews and photographic journaling were kept in a secure location, and remain stored in my thesis supervisor's lab.

Analysis

I used the grounded theory approach pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to guide my data collection and data analysis. Grounded theory analysis views data without preconceived hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss; Charmaz, 2006). While I did indeed have an overall assumption guiding my research – I believed that the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children could increase our understanding of racism and white privilege – I did not have a specific hypothesis about racism or white privilege that I was trying to prove. Instead, my goal was simply to *increase understanding of racism and white privilege* through exploration of my informants' dialogues.

I began my analysis by reading my informants' transcripts in the order in which their interviews took place. I re-read each transcript several times. My informants' interviews were transcribed in the order in which they occurred, and transcription began while I was still interviewing informants. The process of reviewing my transcripts and interview recordings following interviews allowed me to adjust my responses and questions to the mothers.

Immediately following my interviews, I wrote a general summary of what I remembered from each interview. After reading the transcripts, I refined these summaries to ensure that I had thoroughly understood the overall picture of each of my informants' lived experiences. This process of summarizing the data allowed me to keep the overall context of my informants' stories and experiences in mind as I began coding their dialogue.

I began coding using manual incident-to-incident coding (Charmaz, 2006). I printed off all of my transcripts and worked through each example and incident by hand, initially categorizing incidents based on how the transcripts fit with my research question (e.g., "racism", "racialization", and "white privilege"), and then moving to a more open, receptive level of coding where I developed short summary codes for each incident regardless of whether it explicitly fit with my research question. This step allowed me to identify additional factors that explained the mothers' experiences, including themes such as "culture" and "family involvement".

Following manual coding, I uploaded all of the transcripts into NVivo, and began to tag the transcripts using free nodes and tree nodes, based on the codes that I had developed. This dual process of coding manually on paper and then again in NVivo helped me to check my assumptions and my choices of codes. By initially coding the transcripts openly at the same level twice, I identified several codes were better described in another way. For example, I initially coded a mother's description of her observations of black youth experiencing racism on a bus as "witnessing racism"; however, when I re-read her dialogue and transferred the code into NVivo, I realized that her dialogue was better described by the code of "questioning racism", because her statement was not merely about observing racism, but rather was about observing racism and *analyzing* what she had seen.

This dual process of coding also allowed me to critically examine how my own experiences influenced my understanding of the data. When I initially went through my transcripts and coded only based on my explicit research question, I restricted my understanding of the data to exclusively that which I immediately

perceived as being part of the answer to my research question. I failed to code some experiences and statements that I perceived as irrelevant to the research question. I quickly coded experiences and statements that resembled my own experiences and thoughts, because I recognized them immediately. By returning to my transcripts a second time and manually developing open, summary codes for each incident, I was able to identify sections where my assumptions had led me to initially overlook valuable data. When I moved from coding on paper to coding on the computer, in NVivo, I underwent another level of checking my assumptions, as I re-read codes that had initially made sense to me and realized that there were other codes that would better describe the incidents. As I entered my initial codes into NVivo, I realized that I had manually developed hundreds of slightly variable codes, many of which described similar experiences and concepts. Using the tree node function, I was able to group these codes under more focused headings.

Once my initial codes were grouped in NVivo under focused headings, I moved to focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). I identified the most significant and frequent codes from my initial coding phase and returned to my transcripts once more to re-code the dialogues. In the initial coding phase, I often applied multiple codes to the same incident. Once I moved to the focused coding phase, I had to decide not only which initial codes had the most meaning with regards to my research question, but also which *one* code best described any one incident.

As I broke the data down into the focused codes, I began to map out how the codes related to each other. I am a visual person, so I developed maps in PowerPoint and used an online idea mapping tool called MindMeister (www.mindmeister.com) to

organize codes and ideas according to how they answered my research question. In visually mapping out the codes, I developed a theoretical understanding of the ways in which my informants experienced racism and white privilege, and how racism and white privilege interrelated.

Because the small group interviews took place with three and two informants, respectively, the majority of the comments made throughout the small group interview transcripts were easily identifiable. As a result, I was able to identify specifically who voiced all quotations in my findings.

Findings

Preface

Before I present my findings, I would like to acknowledge the context in which the interviews took place. Race is a provocative topic; talking about racism, racialization, and white privilege was certainly uncomfortable at times, for both me and my informants. Indeed, several of my informants spoke of their desire to live in a world where race was not an issue. Because sometimes what is not said is more telling than what is actually said, there are times when my comments on what the mothers have said (or not said) about racism may seem to reach beyond what the informants themselves would have said about a given situation. I feel this is justified in that attention needs to be drawn to inconsistencies.

As a white mother of a biracial child, I had some insight into what the experiences of my informants might be like. Many of my informants' comments and examples of experiences they had had resembled my own experiences. However, I was surprised and saddened by some of the stories the mothers told me. Several of my informants spoke of feeling pain and disbelief as they and their loved ones experienced marginalization because of the colour of their skin, and/or because of their interracial family status. One of my informants cried as she spoke of her feelings of helplessness and dismay as she watched her child begin to recognize what race means in Canadian society; another informant acknowledged she would never truly be able to understand, nor prevent, what her children were experiencing. Some of my informants explicitly stated that they personally could never know exactly what it would feel like to live a racialized experience day in and day out. However, because

the mothers who participated in my research had the unique position in society of experiencing social interactions from multiple perspectives – that of a white woman existing in a supposedly neutral space independent of race, and that of a member of a racialized pair or group through their parenting and romantic relationships – my informants appeared to have an increased understanding racism as a result of the process of shifting from racialized to non-racialized experiences day in and day out.

While my informants' stories did indeed highlight the injustices of race, racism, and white privilege, I feel it is also important to stress the thread of hope that I saw across all the mothers who welcomed me into their worlds. Each and every one of these mothers seems to have consciously chosen to embrace diversity in their worldviews. As white women, they could have chosen to remain entrenched in a society of white privilege. Instead, they became friends and partners with people who were not white, some travelled the world, and all opened their minds to the experiences of people who had lived different realities from theirs. These women have not just embraced diversity; they have also contributed to diversity through the process of parenting biracial children and having interracial families.

I urge the reader to remember, as well, that the oldest of my informants' children were eleven years old at the time of these interviews, and the youngest were under a year old. These stories are not stories of the past, but stories of the present.

Themes

My informants' stories revealed that racism remains a problem in today's society. At this point, I would like to acknowledge that there are elements regarding the complexity of race oppression that surfaced in my informants' report but that I have not reported in my findings. In particular, the interplay between race, culture, and ethnicity arose several times throughout my informants' stories.

I pay particular attention to the language my informants use, what they say and what they do not say. Some of the mothers repeatedly rejected race as a factor in their or their children's experiences, choosing instead to identify issues as related to culture rather than race. While cultural differences may be just as fraught with tension as racial differences, the very act of rejecting the label of racism is possible only to someone with race privilege, someone who does not directly experience racism on a regular basis. Additionally, unspoken assumptions about what is appropriate and fair in terms of social interactions as they relate to racism may be as powerful as, or even more powerful than, conscious awareness of racism and white privilege. For example, most informants expressed surprise and disappointment, or even horror, at experiencing racism directed toward themselves or their children. A black mother, who had grown up experiencing racism herself, would not have been shocked that her children (biracial or not) had the same experience. Many of my informants consciously chose to involve themselves in racially diverse environments, and their idealism in wishing racism did not exist is laudable; however, those who choose to ignore the issue, particularly as it relates to their biracial children, unconsciously perpetuate racism.

Parenting Experiences with Racialization

In addition to my informants' overall understandings of and experiences of white privilege and racism, each of the mothers reports experiencing racism and/or racializing events as a result of parenting biracial children. In this section of my findings, I report the mothers' experiences with white privilege, racism, and racialization as they specifically relate to their children.

Negative racialization.

Interracial families face negative racialization that is complicated by racial mixtures that make it even more difficult for Canadian society to classify members of these families (Spickard, 2001). Non-white genetic heritage renders biracial children vulnerable to negative racialization and racism. Each of my informants reports experiencing racism and/or racializing events while parenting their biracial children. White mothers can both indirectly and directly experience white privilege and racism through parenting their biracial children. For example, my informants report times when they have experienced racism and racializing moments specifically because of the presence of their children. In other situations, my informants report witnessing their children being racialized. In still other situations, my informants report struggling as they try to protect their children from negative racialization.

I identified four key aspect of racialization in my informants' stories. The first is how the mothers approach positive racial awareness, within their homes and family environments. The second is how my informants' children are negatively racialized outside of their homes. The third is how my informants respond to balance negative racialization pressures on their children outside the home with development of a

positive racial identity within the home. An additional element of biracial children "passing" as white also emerged throughout the mothers' stories.

Racial identity development within home and family environments.

All of my informants acknowledge their children's multiple racial and cultural heritages. All of the mothers seek to ensure that their child/ren develop positive identities within their home environments. All of my informants talk about exposing their children to diversity through their extended family and friend relationships, and about working to promote a sense of pride in their children's heritages. However, each mother approaches affirmation of her child/ren's racial identities from a different perspective.

Maggie is careful to ensure that her children are exposed to both sides of their family. She expresses happiness that her partner's parents are actively involved in her children's lives. Maggie's children, Kayla and Marcus, have regular contact with both their black grandparents and their white grandparents. Maggie also consciously chooses who her children interact with.

> We have always been really big on promoting who they interact with. We have several mixed families, a variety of mixes. Like, we have friends who she met in preschool with a black mom and a white dad. Andy has a friend he grew up with, white dad, black mom. We're friends with them and they have a kid. ...We frame it in terms of families. With Kayla, since she was small, I have taught her that families come in all shapes and sizes. They can consist of just a mom, a mom and dad, just a dad, could be grammas, could be white, could be black, could be all different colours. What defines your family is who you love. (*Maggie*)

Maggie describes trying to teach her children that everybody is different and perfect just as they are. However, Maggie resists raising awareness of race in her children. She consciously avoids using labels in her language, and challenges her children

when they use labels. Maggie and Andy's family members also try to limit their use of labels, particularly race labels, around Kayla and Marcus, because Maggie has sensitized them to racializing behaviour. Maggie avoids making race an issue with her children, because she does not want them to have to identify as white or black, even though she recognizes that society will likely push her children to develop racial identities.

Like Maggie, Peggy is very aware of how her interactions with her children affect their process of racialization. However, where Maggie's daughter was not aware of race at a young age, Peggy's children have been aware of race for many years. Peggy is perhaps the most direct of all my informants in her approach to her children's identity development. Peggy initially did not consciously seek to foster a positive racial identity in her children; race issues have simply come up naturally throughout their childhood. Peggy's twin children, Kyle and Lisa, physically appear very different, and are perceived by society as being of two separate races – black and white. From a very young age, Peggy's children focused on their colour differences.

> My son has always identified himself as being black. My daughter, when she was younger, identified herself as being white. And that's when they got into the conversations, "No, I'm not black, I'm whitish brown..." ...They would actually call each other names. He would call her like "caramel-baby" or something. She would identify with being whitish-brown and he was brownish-white. ... There were times that she would say stuff to him about him being brown and the way she would say it would make it derogatory.
>
> (*Peggy*)

Peggy has had to respond to her children's derogatory comments toward each other. In large part because her children are aware of their colour differences and their heritage, and ask questions about their background, Peggy regularly educates them

about black history. While Peggy is a white single mother, her children are being raised in a family that normalizes interracial relationships. Lisa and Kyle's father is remarried to a white woman, and their father's father is also remarried to a white woman. While Peggy's children are aware of racial differences, and have struggled with understanding the implications of their different appearances throughout their childhood, Kyle and Lisa do not express concern over racial diversity within their home environments.

Gwyn is the most active of all my informants in promoting her children's black, African heritage. However, Gwyn's three oldest children – Nadia, Todd, and Wayne – lived in their native country of Ghana for several years prior to coming to Canada. Likewise, their father, Neil, immigrated Canada fairly recently. Gwyn is determined to ensure that her oldest children do not lose their pride and security in their African heritage and culture, and that her youngest daughter, her biracial daughter Linda, knows and values her paternal heritage as much as her older siblings. Linda's positive racial identity development within her home is largely influenced by her siblings and her father.

While Linda physically resembles her mother more closely than her father, Linda's hair has been in dreadlocks from a young age; Linda's father dreadlocks all of the children's hair in recognition of his Rastafarian faith, at his children's request. All of Gwyn and Neil's children take part in African cultural events in the local community, and Gwyn and her partner have organized an African drum and dance circle with some other African friends, to teach African drum and dance to their children. Gwyn is also conscious of their home environment: she keeps books and

magazines that promote or focus on black and/or African culture readily available to her children. Within Gwyn and Neil's home, African cultural identity and black racial identity are heavily normalized. Nevertheless, Gwyn's biracial daughter is very young, and has not yet expressed an awareness of the unique makeup of her family, and her own biracial status.

Jessika, Leah, and Hope all express a concern about their ability to teach their children about their paternal heritage. This may be largely due to their family make up: Tenzin's and Moussa's fathers live in other countries and are not at all involved in their lives, and Meg's and Sara's fathers live in other cities and are fairly removed from their lives. In contrast, Maggie is married to her children's father, and they have ready access to their father and their grandparents; likewise, Gwyn is married to her children's father. While Peggy acknowledges that she and her children's father cannot really teach their children much about their Caribbean heritage (Kyle and Lisa's father was born to Jamaican parents but grew up in Canada and does not promote his Jamaican roots to his children), she is comfortable teaching them about their black heritage.

Jessika is much more consciously focused on exposing her daughter to her paternal cultural heritage rather than race. This is likely largely influenced by Tenzin's physical appearance: Tenzin physically appears quite white. Where Gwyn is easily able to expose her children to their paternal cultural heritage because she is married to their father and he is eager to pass along his roots to them, Jessika feels more limited in her ability to teach her daughter about her Tibetan heritage. Jessika and Tenzin's situation is unique, as well, because Tibet is currently embroiled in

complex socio-political tension; as a result, Tibetans have been dispersed throughout the world, and there are essentially two Tibetan cultures: the refugee Tibetan culture and the native Tibetan culture. There is a small Tibetan population in Canada; however, Jessika has actively sought out access to Tibetans living in Canada. For example, Jessika has developed a friendship with a Tibetan monk in Toronto, who knew Tenzin's father in Northern India, and has offered to teach Tenzin about her Tibetan heritage.

Jessika's daughter is still very young, and Jessika is still working out her approach to promoting Tenzin's biracial heritage. Jessika seeks to affirm Tenzin's identity. She says: "I've had a lot of questions as a mother around the language I use, because I think this could really shape how she embraces her identity. I don't want her to feel she is fragmented." Jessika finds herself naturally drawn to diversity in relationships and friendships, and similar to Maggie's approach, Jessika affirms diversity by exposing Tenzin to a wide range of diverse families and individuals.

Hope consciously promotes diversity in her home environment. Hope's educational background is in Global Education, and she seeks to help her son, Moussa, develop his identity as a part of a global community. Hope is very aware that her son feels different from those around him and seeks out connections for him that normalize his racial and cultural background. Moussa physically resembles his father very closely in appearance, and is very aware that he looks different from the rest of his family members. When Moussa was three years old, he told his mother that he wished his skin were white.

> We were sitting at the table… and he said, "I just want to be like everybody else." And I thought to myself, I think I know what he's getting at. But I didn't want to assume. I thought maybe it was just me putting this on him. As a three year old it could mean anything. So I wanted to give that the benefit of the doubt. And we weren't talking about anything that would necessarily mean it was about skin color or culture. Then I said, "What do you mean?" …He looked at his hands and he looked at mine and I thought, "No. I'm not projecting this." I said, "Do you wish you had the same skin color as mama?" And he said, "Yeah." I thought to myself, "Wow, we've never brought this up." (*Hope*)

Hope feels that she cannot teach Moussa a lot about his Malian heritage, because she is not from Mali. Moussa has not expressed a lot of interest in knowing about his cultural heritage yet. However, Hope seeks to promote Moussa's healthy identity by exposing him to a variety of racial and cultural images and environments. Hope has friends who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and she takes Moussa to a variety of cultural events in the community. Hope also tries to ensure that Moussa is not the only child in his educational environments who is white; she consciously placed him in his current school and classroom with the knowledge that there was another biracial child there as well. Hope recently considered moving to Brazil with Moussa. Interracial families are much more common in Brazil than in Canada, and Moussa's physical appearance is very similar to many Brazilians. Hope and Moussa spent a summer in Brazil. Said Hope, "One of the main things I wanted him to experience that was not being a minority. And he so fit in there everyone thought he was Brazilian." However, Moussa identifies as a Canadian citizen, and is very attached to his Canadian roots and his Canadian home. Moussa has a close bond with Hope's mother. Moussa was aware that his mother was considering the move and told her he wanted to go back to Canada to be closer to his grandmother.

Leah largely avoids addressing race with her children. However, Leah's avoidance of racial issues with her children is not a conscious choice like Maggie's. Instead, Leah's avoidance may come from a place partially of feeling like she cannot provide much guidance about race to her children, and partially of feeling like it is not an issue. Leah places images of diversity throughout her home, and has friends from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Leah says that she feels her older daughter, Meg, identifies as white. Meg does not have contact with her father's family, and he is essentially the only black person she interacts with. Meg's father, however, has only white friends and dates only white women. Leah's home environment is also predominantly white.

> I feel that perhaps because Meg has been surrounded by me and my family so much more that she sees herself as a white child. A white child as opposed to a biracial child. Ideally it shouldn't matter. I just see that most times if given the choice she will always choose white. (*Leah*)

Leah talks about her attempts to expose her daughter to both sides of her heritage and her feelings of frustration at how hard it is.

Negative racialization outside the home.

Regardless of how my informants address race their children within their homes, the reality is that society negatively racializes their children: even the mothers whose children were very young describe times when their children have been racialized by society, subtly or overtly.

Maggie's daughter, Kayla, was initially racialized in her kindergarten classroom, when the children were drawing and colouring pictures of themselves. A classmate handed Kayla a beige crayon and told her that she should use the beige

crayon. In grade two, however, Kayla's racialization changed. Kayla attends a private school and is in a classroom of nine children. Kayla's classroom is unusually diverse and she and her eight classmates represent a wide range of heritages: four children are not white, and the remaining children in the classroom are white.

> So two weeks ago she comes home and she says, "Uh, Dad, not to insult you, but [my classmate] says you're black." We kinda take this in stride and keep it casual and Andy goes, "Oh, well what colour is [your classmate]?" Because he is as brown as Andy for sure. If we are talking shades of brown, right? And she says, "Well he says he's brown." And what that says to me, alarm bells-wise-- I have no issue with her calling Chuck black. It has never come into our family, those issues. It is what it is. But the alarm, for me, Chuck is clearly not black-coloured. But the alarm for me, [the boy] labelled him black because that's what he decided his culture is, but also made it sound like to be brown is better. Because black was "an insult". Regardless of what the child said, she heard and read the subtle message. She doesn't even know she got it, but she did. (*Maggie*)

At the age of seven, Maggie's daughter was beginning to recognize that race was very important in Canadian society. Kayla did not fully understand why race was important, but she knew it mattered. Maggie expresses her frustration that her values within her home are being counteracted outside of the home.

Hope's son, Moussa, has experienced a number of racializing moments throughout his childhood. Hope speaks with a hint of bemusement and a hint of annoyance of the frequency with which people ask to take Moussa's picture.

> ...People [often] want to take a picture of Moussa as the token child. ...I don't ever know that it's exactly that. But I will get that sense. He will be one of the only few mixed faces and it just seems that he is asked abnormally often. If there are 100 children, in so many places that we go, they will want to take a photo of him. And I always feel like, "Yes, he's beautiful" But whenever I have a stranger asking to take a picture, I really feel...I always wonder if he were a child with white skin, would they be asking as much? And I have a feeling, "No." (*Hope*)

While Moussa has not expressed awareness of this particular situation, Hope has noticed him beginning to register people's reactions to his skin colour. Hope describes being in a tanning salon one day, and the receptionist telling Moussa that he didn't need to get a tan because his skin was perfect "... because you have the skin color that we all wish we had." While the receptionist did not seem to have racist intentions motivating her comment, Hope noticed her son react to the comment.

Jessika's daughter is very young and has not experienced many racializing moments. However, Jessika and Tenzin have experienced some situations where Tenzin's racial background was focused on. Jessika describes three situations where she revealed Tenzin's Tibetan heritage to Tibetan individuals and received two very different responses. When Jessika revealed to a Tibetan monk in Toronto that Tenzin had a Tibetan father, the monk responded positively and offered to be a Tibetan link for Tenzin. On another occasion, when Jessika revealed Tenzin's heritage to the Dalai Lama, who was visiting Ontario, he too responded positively. However, once, when Jessika took her daughter to a Tibetan restaurant the owner responded positively to Tenzin's heritage, but the owner's employees, who were also Tibetan, did not.

> We visited our Tibetan friend in his restaurant in Peterborough and he scooped her up and took her into the kitchen and said "Here is a half Tibetan baby," and they were all straight faced and, "She's not Tibetan, no way."
> (*Jessika*)

Jessika worries about her daughter being marginalized because of her background. She worries that Tenzin will experience exclusion from Tibetan communities and also from white communities. Tenzin's physical features are ambiguous and while some people comment that she looks "different", many do not have any idea as to what her

racial background is. Jessika has been asked if Tenzin is half native. At this point, Tenzin's racial heritage is not obvious, and Tenzin may be able to choose whether or not to reveal her heritage.

Because of their colour differences, Peggy's children Kyle and Lisa have experienced racializing questions from the time they were very little. When Peggy's children were babies, she would go for walks at a mall and received questions from strangers.

> ...Because they are twins, as babies I would be walking around Fairview Park Mall on my maternity leave and older folks would come and say "Oh, are you babysitting, dear?" "Nooo." "Oh. Well, they can't both be yours." "They are. In fact they're twins." And they were horrified by the fact that these two babies were both mine and how could they possibly be twins. One's black.
> (*Peggy*)

Even as the children grew older, the questions continued. Kyle and Lisa received comments from their classmates and friends.

> "Are you guys sure? How can you be twins? You don't look alike. Kyle's brown." So they would see that the difference in the twins' skin tones. They couldn't figure out how they could be siblings, let alone twins.
> (*Peggy*)

Indeed, Kyle and Lisa quickly became aware that not only were their skin colours different from each other, but that they also received different treatment as a result of their skin colours. Peggy describes watching as her son repeatedly experienced racism and racial slurs and her daughter did not. "And then I get frustrated with my daughter because she feels she doesn't have to worry about [racial issues] because she's lighter. And a girl." Both Kyle and Lisa seem confident in their racial heritage in spite of the racial issues they have faced, but Peggy wonders how their identities will evolve as they grow older.

Fostering positive racial identity development in children.

Indeed, a key concern expressed by most of my informants is the question of how to help their children navigate racialization and racism. A few of the mothers' children have expressed a desire to be different than they are.

For the first seven years of Maggie's daughter Kayla's life, Maggie avoided addressing race with her daughter. During our interviews, Maggie spoke, with disbelief, about her daughter's desire to have white skin: "...She looks in the mirror and says, 'I wish I had light skin.' ... And I said, 'Why?' And she said, 'I just think it's prettier.'" Kayla has repeated this desire on multiple occasions. Maggie broke down in tears as she talked about trying to respond to her daughter's statement.

> ...My priority for now, for sure, is her identity. That formulation of who she is and where she fits because I see that [discomfort with her skin colour] starting. And that makes me uneasy and breaks my heart. ...Because she said -- "Am I wrong..." And I said to her, "I just want you to take away that we are equal. Nobody is less because of the tone of their skin." And she said, "Does that make me wrong for thinking lighter skin is prettier?" (*Maggie*)

No matter what Maggie said to her daughter, there simply was no easy and no right answer. Kayla's recent questioning of her identity surprised, saddened, and activated Maggie: whereas before Maggie avoided racializing her children, Maggie is now trying to figure out how to promote Kayla's sense of pride in who she is.

Hope's son Moussa had expressed a similar desire to be white at a very young age, and again, just recently, also at the age of seven, was reporting discomfort to Hope about his skin colour, now that his classmates didn't want to play with him. However, Hope did not respond to Moussa's comments with the same sense of fear that Maggie felt.

> ...In the beginning I didn't talk about it with Moussa because I just wanted him to have the sense of being a being. A person. Even male or female we didn't talk much about that. He was just a child. I guess the pro of that is that we don't really get bogged down by these conflicts because it's kind of like a karmic thing. We don't feed into it and we don't get it back. But I think that there's also the reality. Which will change as he grows. Because in a way, he doesn't have a solid identity. I didn't want him to get put into a box early on but as he grows he's going to need to develop a kind of identity and that could be a bit of a challenge for him. ...It's a concern. I don't want it to be a struggle for him, you know. But I know it has to be his own doing. And I guess I will just be present to it... (*Hope*)

Hope approaches life from a very spiritual perspective and believes that things unfold as they are meant to unfold. Hope tries to expose Moussa to a variety of situations that affirm that he is wonderful as he is, and trusts that he will make his way through any potentially negative racializing experiences. This perspective has led Hope to respond in a very different way from Maggie to very similar situations. Where Hope expresses acceptance of her son's racializing experiences, such as children not wanting to play with him, as she trusts that he will cope, Maggie expresses anxiety about her daughter's racializing experiences.

Like Meg and Moussa, Leah's older daughter, Meg, who is also seven years old, has expressed a desire to be different from how she presently is:

> One thing she has said right out loud: she has wished her hair was straight. ...This is coming from school. She feels she looks too different. She has also expressed that she's not the same as the black girls. She's the only person with hair like she has. Because the black girls have thicker hair that they can braid. So on more than one occasion she has wished that her hair was straight. Minimally, because it's hard to deal with. Maximally, because it makes her look different. (*Leah*)

Like Hope, Leah does not express much concern over her daughter's feelings of difference. However, Leah is actively responding to her daughter's concerns: she is

continually working with her daughter to try and develop a system of hair care that will work for Meg's hair.

Gwyn and Jessika's children have not expressed racial concerns so far in the mothers' parenting journeys. However, Gwyn and Jessika are both very conscious of the possibility that their children may be negatively racialized by society. Gwyn and Jessika actively promote their children's exposure to their paternal cultural heritages. Jessika worries that, because her daughter looks white, she may face rejection from the Tibetan community. Jessika also worries that her daughter may face rejection from the white community too, if she embraces her Tibetan heritage.

Gwyn and Peggy both discuss trying to protect their children from being stereotyped. Both of the mothers had run into situations where their children were dressing stereotypically "black" or trying to act stereotypically "black" and felt obligated to step in. Gwyn's son, Todd, innocently wanted to wear a bandana to school, as he and his father both wore them at home. Gwyn worried about the potentially negative social perceptions the bandana might lead to, and simply told her son that just as he could not wear a hat at school, he could not wear a bandana. She was not prepared to explain to him about the social implications at that time. Peggy's son, Kyle, had participated in a group fight that was classified as pre-gang activity by the police. Peggy sat her son down and explained the social dynamics to Kyle.

> So I had to talk to him about gangs and we have gangs in our neighbourhood… But also explaining to my son that this is something he is going to have to keep in mind, as a young black man, growing up. And he just looked at me and said, "Mommy, why would they think that… they don't know me? That's not fair." (*Peggy*)

White DNA and passing: The choice to reveal.

The troubling notion of neutrality emerges out of a number of the mothers' stories. Some of the mothers passed their white privilege on to their children through genetic inheritance: While Moussa and Kyle, and Gwyn's three African children, cannot escape the social implications of their dark brown skin colour, Meg, Sara, Tenzin, Lisa, and Linda united by a common factor: their light brown or white skin colour allows them to "pass" for white if they choose to.

Gwyn, likely because the rest of her family is black, never mentions this future possibility for her daughter. However, she does mention that Linda could easily pass as her brother's white daughter, because both Gwyn's brother and Gwyn's daughter Linda had curly brown hair. Gwyn acknowledges the implications of passing, however, when talking about the difference in appearance between Linda and Linda's father. Gwyn mentions a fear she had, that she had never revealed to her partner. When their biracial daughter was first born, Gwyn was secretly worried that if Neil was out for a walk alone with Linda, he might be challenged and questioned about where he had gotten the white baby from. This worry highlights the valid possibility that Linda can choose to dissociate from the rest of her black/interracial family and identify as white if she wishes to.

Jessika recognizes that her daughter's whiteness will likely make her life much easier than had Tenzin inherited more of her father's features. Jessika speaks of having the choice to reveal her daughter's background to strangers. Leah says how her older daughter's neutral features make social interactions easier.

> Everybody loves Meg because she is really a pretty child. She's gorgeous. Model type gorgeous. I think she is disarming because she is not typically really black featured. ...A lot of people just thought, "Maybe she's Italian." ...She didn't look typically black... She was more neutral. ...And people would say it, "Oh, I love her hair so much." Or people would say, "Oh, where did she get her curly hair from?" (*Leah*)

For the children whose features more closely resemble their white mothers' than their black fathers', the parents and children have more control in determining how the children are perceived by society.

However, for the children whose physical appearances more closely resembled their father's than their mother's, this choice to reveal is slightly different, although still a choice. Hope speaks of being asked by many people whether her son Moussa was adopted. Maggie reports being far more aware of her interracial family status when she is in public with her partner and her children; however, when she is in public alone with her children, she does not feel like they stand out as much. Maggie is not sure why she feels this way, but I believe that it may be connected to her choice to reveal. When Maggie is alone in public with her children, people may assume, as they do with Hope, that Maggie's children are adopted. When Maggie is in public with her partner and children, people are more likely to assume that they are an interracial family and the children are a product of an interracial union. Maggie's discomfort with having her interracial family status revealed may be connected to her fears of having her children exposed to the racism she and her partner felt. It is also possible her feelings may be linked to deeper concerns about her own loss of personal status as a white person.

Peggy's children's experience was slightly different, partially because of their social positioning as twins, and partially because of their social environment. Peggy's children have experienced both sides of the coin, so to speak, in the context of revealing their racial background. Because Kyle and Lisa live in a multicultural neighbourhood and attend a multicultural school, their physical appearance is not uncommon.

> One couldn't just assume that looser curls and medium complexion means you have a white mother. Now it could mean you are Ethiopian, or it could mean you are from one of the other cultures that doesn't have very dark skin and a very tight afro. (*Peggy*)

Where Kyle and Lisa might have been easily identifiable as biracial in past decades, it may be harder for some people to assume what their backgrounds are in today's Canadian society. Peggy also acknowledges that because her children are twins, and look so different, people make a variety of different assumptions about them. Some people assume that her twins are not even related, while others recognize that if they are twins, and one looks white and one looks black, they are likely biracial. However, Kyle and Lisa illustrate the profound impact that being perceived as white has on biracial children. While Kyle has learned, at a young age, that the world is not fair and that he must constantly be aware of how his actions, as a black person, are perceived, Lisa has largely escaped this.

Leah and Peggy also highlight an additional component of their abilities to choose to reveal their children's biracial heritage. When my informants go about their lives independently of their children, their status as white mothers to biracial children is not immediately apparent. This invisible racialized position has led to them being

placed in situations where they have had the option of whether or not to reveal their children's heritage. Leah describes an incident at a former workplace where she listened with discomfort as her coworkers told each other racist jokes about black people. After a few jokes had been laughed at, Leah spoke up and mentioned that her daughter's father was black; her co-workers were embarrassed and apologetic. Peggy describes an incident at her current workplace. This experience took place entirely over the telephone and was based on the assumption by the caller that Peggy was white. Peggy works for a non-profit organization that provides funding for a wide variety of community initiatives. A black woman representing a local group called Peggy to try to get funding for a scholarship for black youth. The scholarship did not fit into any of Peggy's organization's approved funding targets, and she explained to the caller that they were unable to support the initiative. The caller called Peggy back shortly afterwards.

> She was quite upset … that we as an organization didn't understand where she was coming from. And I was almost in tears on the phone, and I said, "With all due respect, please do not assume that as an organization we don't care, or that I as an individual don't know what you are talking about. I would hate for my son, who by the way is a black youth, to have to go through any of those things. And I want the best education for him, as well. All that aside, it still does not fit with our funding criteria." (*Peggy*)

Like Leah, Peggy challenged an unspoken assumption about race and revealed that while she was not black, she was parenting a child who identified as black. Peggy recognizes that her choice to reveal her status changed her relationship with the caller in a positive way. Leah, however, has not perceived positive impacts from her choices to reveal. Leah perceives that she was racialized, and her co-workers thought of her differently once she revealed her interracial parenting status.

> I just wanted them to be aware, "Hey, this is my life." And at the same time I felt, "They have labelled me." I always feel it always comes with a label. I have become the other white. The one who has abandoned her race.
>
> (*Leah*)

Interestingly, Leah's perception of loss of white privilege is focused entirely on the revealing that she has had relationships with black men. When she reveals her daughters' biracial heritage, the focus is that their fathers are black, not that her children are biracial. This may be tied to Maggie's increased awareness when she is in public with her partner and their children. It seems likely that revealing that their children are the result of interracial unions with black men simultaneously reveals that the mothers chose to partner with men who others may perceive as being lower in the socially constructed racial hierarchy.

The pervasiveness of white privilege and racism is evident throughout my informants' stories. Every single social interaction that my white informants, their biracial children, and their non-white partners experience is influenced by white privilege, regardless of whether they explicitly recognize it. Racialization, as a mechanism that both normalizes and neutralizes the white experience and "others" the non-white experience has also affected my informants' lives. These two elements – white privilege and racialization – reinforce and maintain racism.

White Privilege

Whiteness exists because socially constructed races exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Race Traitor, 1993). Without whiteness, white privilege would not exist (Race Traitor). Each of my informants experience white privilege and benefit from white privilege. In addition, each of my informants' children and partners are also affected

by white privilege. Regardless of the degrees to which the mothers recognize their own white privilege and acknowledge it, white privilege affects my informants' parenting relationships with their children.

All of my informants acknowledge that white privilege exists, although they vary in the degree to which they explicitly address my questions around white privilege. Most of my informants indicated to me that they understand what white privilege is, through their references to how their experiences differ from people who are not white, but only a few explicitly defined the concept of white privilege to some degree. Hope clearly states her understanding of the white privilege:

> I never recognized that what I had had anywhere along the way was privilege because of skin colour. I was pretty ignorant to that because my world was so homogenous. I would say, in a lot of ways, I look at it as white un-privilege. Because that neutral space is such an ignorant space to grow up in.
>
> (*Hope*)

Hope's description of whiteness as a "neutral space" is a critical element of white privilege. Through being perceived as white in a society where the majority of the population and most of the authority figures (in school, in business, and in government) are white, white people are able to exist without acknowledging or considering our own skin colour. Indeed, I personally had never considered my own whiteness until I began dating interracially. I only began to understand the concept of white privilege through my university studies, and am still developing my understanding of white privilege.

Shifting from a space of neutrality to a space where we actively consider our own skin colour in our daily interactions increases the complexity of social

interactions. Gwyn addresses the discomfort that awareness of white privilege can provoke, saying:

> As far as white privilege, man, that's a huge can of worms. It's something that I think, because as a white majority here, we kind of sweep it under the carpet. We really don't wanna be aware of it. *(Gwyn)*

White privilege is an uncomfortable concept to absorb. Realizing that we, as white people, are responsible for perpetuating racism through a dominance over non-white populations that has become deeply engrained in our social systems is an extremely uncomfortable realization. I struggled with this realization throughout my Masters research, as I attempted to assume personal responsibility for my role in perpetuating white privilege and racism, but resisted assuming responsibility for the racist, oppressive actions of white people as a group. Many of my informants also seem to struggle with their understandings of white privilege: they recognize the concept and existence of white privilege, but are hesitant to explore in depth the extent to which their lives are mediated by their white privilege. It may be difficult for my informants to acknowledge the role they play in perpetuating the racism their loved ones experience.

Gwyn's concept of the "white majority" as a part of "white privilege" is repeated by other mothers as well. The notion of white majority was true of my informants' communities over the past several centuries. The reality, however, is that Ontario's demographic distribution is changing: individuals who are perceived as white will likely no longer be the majority in Ontario within the next several decades. Instead, continued "white privilege" may be better described with the descriptor of "white power", which is used by Peggy.

White power.

Peggy is the only one of my informants who talks about consciously educating those around her about white privilege. She mentions circulating McIntosh's (1988) "Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege" around her workplace for her co-workers to read. Peggy repeatedly rephrases "white privilege" into "white power and white privilege". Peggy recently had to address an issue of white power at her children's (Kyle and Lisa's) school.

Several of the children at Kyle and Lisa's school had been involved in a group fight in the schoolyard, including Kyle. A police officer and social worker called an assembly meeting of all the children in the school.

> It was a little black boy at the front... who was smirking at this whole thing... [The police officer]... said, "If I have to come back to this school again, I'm going to kick somebody's ass." I had to go in and sit them down with the principal and said, "Okay people, it doesn't help when the officer is saying 'If I have to come back because of this kind of behaviour again, I'll kick some ass.'" Okay. White man in uniform. Power. And [the officer] said, "I just felt like I needed to shock [the boy] into reality." *(Peggy)*

Peggy's response to the police officer's actions is not at all unusual for her, as she regularly occupies the role of an advocate parent, educating her children, her children's father, and others about social perceptions, equality, and fairness. However, when Peggy went beyond expressing that "kicking ass" was not just inappropriate, to explaining to the authority figures that a white police officer threatening violence against children who are not white is especially problematic, Peggy helped sensitize the adults to the realities of white power, white privilege, and racism. Peggy's active role in educating others about white privilege is unique. None

of the other mothers report being comparably assertive in raising awareness of white privilege (although all do report raising awareness of racism).

Other mothers have also expressed their discomfort about white privilege to other adults, but they have not gone further in helping adults to understand why white privilege is a problem. Jessika, for example, talks about challenging a friend when he expressed a preference for white individuals.

> A friend... who helps me out a lot with [Tenzin], he's half Chinese. And he has said very blatantly, he's only attracted to white people. And for me, "I don't ever want to hear you say that around her. ...I don't know what that is for you." *(Jessika)*

Jessika later speaks about her determination not to allow her daughter to be exposed to such views. She suggests that if her friend is unable to refrain from making comments like the above-described comment, she will not invite him into her home anymore. However, while Jessika made it clear to her friend that it is not acceptable to her for him to express a preference for white people, she does not report explaining to him how his comment perpetuates white privilege and racism, the way Peggy did in response to the school incident.

Challenging white privilege and raising awareness of how white privilege is perpetuated may be difficult for my informants. Abolishment of white privilege requires abolishment of the personal benefits that we, as white people, receive as a result of our white skin colour. If my informants work toward eliminating white privilege, they risk losing the status associated with their whiteness.

Several of the mothers acknowledge that white privilege makes their lives easier as white people, and as parents of biracial children. Peggy reports that her

ability to advocate for her children in situations like the school incident may be enhanced by her status as a white person. As a white person, she is able to respond to situations without worrying that her race might negatively charge the interactions.

> I am… a white person, dealing with white administrators and white teachers, so I see myself represented in the people to whom I'm speaking and I feel I can come from a place of knowledge and strength as opposed to what may be perceived as purely emotional reactions. *(Peggy)*

Indeed, for Peggy, being white and consciously aware of her white privilege may even positively charge her interactions, because she is aware of the benefits of being white. Additionally, Peggy's advocacy does not seem to be aimed so much toward eliminating white privilege as toward simply raising awareness of white privilege. Peggy's challenging of the police officer could have been interpreted by the authorities simply as a reminder that racism was being perpetuated through the police officer's actions. Peggy's advocacy was not likely perceived by the school authorities as an attack on their whiteness; as a result, she was protected from potential negative consequences that could result from overtly working to dismantle white privilege.

White shields.

Several of the mothers also talk about the safety that they feel as a result of their whiteness. Whiteness serves as a shield that will protect them, not only from racism, but also from negative consequences if they resist racism. Being white affords a sense of personal security that mothers perceive is not as available to individuals who are not white. Maggie speaks of her outrage that her husband is repeatedly subjected to racism and unable to fight it, because fighting racism might render him vulnerable. She, on the other hand, is able to challenge racism when she experiences

it, and frequently does challenge it. People who are not white, living in Canada, may not have the same degree of freedom to escape the social implications of their skin colour. Peggy says,

> [If you were a black woman] would you even go [to challenge the school authorities]? If you know that the people who are in power are talking this way to your kids? I probably would be too scared to go. "What's going to happen?" "Will it come back and they treat my child worse?" I don't know that kind of fear. In terms of expecting anyone to treat my children any differently. *(Peggy)*

Maggie and Peggy demonstrate an awareness that resisting oppression could lead to renewed oppression: if a person who is not white fights against racism, they may risk experiencing even more racism. However, as white people, the mothers do not fear experiencing increased racism. In addition, my informants do not perceive the possibility that their personal resistance against racism could trigger negative consequences for their loved ones. This may be because their loved ones are also shielded from racism through an extension of the mothers' white privilege, or it may be because the mothers are ignorant to this possibility that their white privilege could be reduced as a consequence of resisting racism.

Maggie has a close relationship with her husband's family, and has become aware of the differences in her level of freedom in social interactions compared to some of her relatives. For example, Maggie describes observing a black relative who is very careful to ensure that her daughter's hair is braided tightly and that her daughter is dressed "decked to the nines all the time". Maggie speaks of refusing to do the same with her daughter, instead choosing to grow her daughter's hair out loose

and allowing her children to wear sweatpants and casual clothes that make them most comfortable.

I asked Maggie if this attention to detail that she observed in her relatives might have anything to do with racism. Maggie acknowledged her relative's actions were likely tied to racism and white privilege. If her relative is not careful about her child's appearance, an untidy appearance might:

> ...Just [allow white people to] confirm what all of the racism and everything else against thrown at them says. ...That's conditioning that has come down from wanting to keep up to the base minimal that you can. To try to draw less attention. (*Maggie*)

Maggie's white privilege, on the other hand, shields her from social judgment if she does not closely follow social conventions such as dressing her child up or braiding her hair to make it look tidy. While her black relatives have expressed displeasure to Maggie that she chose not to braid her daughter's hair when she was young, Maggie does not fear negative consequences to her actions.

Leah does not support the concept of white shielding in her own personal experiences. Where Peggy and Maggie perceive that they are protected by their own white privilege, Leah describes several incidences where she feels stripped of her white privilege. She talks about being made to feel "less than" because of her choice to date interracially. Other factors, such as socioeconomic class, may play a role in white shielding. As a high school graduate working in a relatively low paying field, compared to the jobs a number of my university-educated informants have, Leah's white shield may be missing a buffer that the other mothers have. I, too, find that I do not perceive my whiteness protecting me much in my fight against racism. However,

like Leah, I may be missing buffers that augment my white shield. For example, my age and my dis/ability could contribute to my feelings of altered white privilege.

White escape.

White privilege not only affords the mothers safety from racism, it also allows my informants freedom to manipulate their own environments and their children's environments to reduce exposure to racism. Hope describes recognizing her ability to escape, as she travelled to, and lived in, countries where she, as a white person, was a minority.

> And then I started experiencing racism from the other side. ...I recognized that it was easier for me to take because I didn't live there. ...If it got to be too much I could go home. Where I fit in. (*Hope*)

This notion of being able to leave racialized situations is an important element of white privilege. Hope, as a white woman, could choose to return to a place of privilege, where she would not be marginalized because of the colour of her skin. Indeed, many of my informants' experiences of racism occurred not within white majority environments, but within communities and settings where they, as white people, could escape back to a place of power.

Maggie describes her ability to control situations that might be negatively racialized, to protect her children and her partner.

> We absolutely avoid situations where there is a possibility of [racism] happening. ...My family's well being is of the utmost importance to me, so if we have to avoid such situations... We just won't go. (*Maggie*)

This ability to pick and choose whether or not to initiate social interactions and limit exposure to racism is not an option that is readily available to mothers who are not white. Not only is it not an option, but avoidance of racism can reinforce the

oppressive power that racism has over people who are not white. Maggie's partner resists Maggie's attempts to protect him from being exposed to racism.

White frustration and entitlement.

Several of my informants talk about their frustrations with having to acknowledge race and skin colour at all. Only a few voice their recognition that this experience is a daily reality for many individuals who are not white.

Maggie talks about feeling frustrated that her daughter was being labelled brown by a classmate when her daughter had skin almost as light as her own: the classmate had observed Kayla's father, Andy, picking her up from school and paired Kayla with her father. Maggie perceives her frustration as a resistance against labelling, specifically racial labelling. Maggie repeatedly emphasizes that being black should not be perceived as a bad thing.

> I am always aware. I am always really careful. ...You know, because I never want her to feel like her background is a bad thing, or that the fact that we are noticeable is not okay. [Or] that she has a white mom and a black dad is not okay. I want her to be proud of the fact that this is who we are as a family.
> (*Maggie*)

Maggie's refusal to accept her daughter being labelled brown or black may run deeper than a fear of racial discrimination. It is possible that Maggie does not want her daughter labelled as black because she wants to spare her daughter the pain that her partner has experienced from racism. However, I believe Maggie's resistance is more closely linked to Maggie's white privilege. In Canadian society, being black is not as a good as being white. Indeed, Maggie reports that she believes her daughter's black grandparents are glad Kayla's skin colour is so light: "Not that they would love a darker child any less but I think they were thinking in terms of their

experience. They're thinking they will have an easier time." Around the time of my interviewing Maggie, her daughter began to wish that she had white skin. Maggie was devastated by her daughter's comments, and sought support from her partner, Andy. One night, Andy said to Maggie: "I've gotta be honest. I'm glad they're light skinned. They're gonna have an easier time, and that's just the way it is."

Peggy's children, Kyle and Lisa, have dealt with labels from the time they were born. Because Lisa's skin is so light, Peggy, Kyle, and Lisa have had to address the children's racial backgrounds from early infancy. Peggy talks with frustration about Lisa's ability to distance herself from racial issues. While Lisa has observed her twin brother being the target of racial slurs on multiple occasions, and recognizes the hurt it causes Kyle, she doesn't seem to own her own black heritage. Peggy says, "I think she was aware that she was a little aware that she was getting away without those kinds of comments." In fact, Lisa not only got away without being the recipient of racism, Lisa began perpetuating racism: she made derogatory comments to her brother about his skin colour.

> And I said, "Well why is it okay to say it to your brother? You know that is part of you, too. Just because he sucked up all the colour when the two of you were growing in there. It's part of who you are. So if you are making fun of someone because of that you are making fun of yourself. So is that the right feeling?" I just don't know if she will get it. *(Peggy)*

In contrast to Maggie's frustrations that her daughter is being forced by society to acknowledge her black heritage, Peggy voices frustration that her daughter is able to avoid, and perhaps ignore, her black heritage because of her light skin colour. These differing sources of frustration may be linked to differing attitudes about white privilege. Maggie seems to feel frustrated that her biracial children may lose their

white privilege; Peggy seems to feel frustrated that her biracial daughter's white privilege may perpetuate white privilege and racism toward her son and other black people.

While Maggie and Peggy express their frustrations with having to acknowledge race, other mothers simply choose not to acknowledge their children's negative racialization. Throughout the course of our interviews, they would redirect questions about race into culture, or they would shift the focus from their children's racial identity, to their children's father's race. As well, the comment, "Well, that really hasn't come up," was voiced by a number of the women when I asked about their children's racialization, and their children's experiences of racism. I see clear evidence of negative racialization across each of my informants' stories, and recognize a number of instances where children's experiences of racism have been reframed as racially uncomfortable experiences, or where children's experiences of racism were not voiced as examples of racism, but slipped out throughout the course of our interviews. For example, when I asked Hope about whether her seven year old son Moussa had experienced racism or racialization, she simply said, "He just started speaking of it really," and then moved on to talk about a number of experiences where Moussa expressed an awareness of racial differences or had been singled out because of his appearance. After some time, Hope mentioned that Moussa did not want to go back to school because, he reported, "Some of the kids don't want to play with me because of my skin colour."

Regardless of how much the mothers manipulate their children's environments, the reality is that each of my informants is white, and each of my

informants' children has a racial heritage that is not just white. The presence of another race in their heritage influences their children's lives in ways that white mothers can never truly understand.

> [My children] won't necessarily feel I get it. And they will be right. They will be absolutely right. Yes. And I don't get that. I never will get that completely because I can't. It's not my experience. And it's not fair for me to assume I get it. I've had some experiences but that's nothing compared to what it would be like living it. (*Maggie*)

Maggie's recognition that her white experience of racialization and racism cannot be compared to her biracial children's experiences is a critical step in moving toward the elimination of white privilege. As my informants begin to realize the role that white privilege plays in perpetuating racism, they may become more aware of how their own white privilege is tied into the tangled web of racism that their children face.

Racism

White mothers of biracial children may not be able to truly understand how racism is experienced by individuals who are not white, but each of my informants demonstrates some degree of understanding of racism. Before I present my findings on racism, I must recognize that racism, as a socially constructed concept, is inextricably intertwined with perception. Regardless of whether or not racism is intentionally perpetrated, if racism is felt or experienced by an individual, then it is real to that individual. The experience of racism is a personal experience that involves multiple dimensions of perception. For example, recipients of racism may perceive racism where perpetrators do not intend racism, or recipients may be unaware that racism is directed toward them. Racism can occur within the context of well-intentioned comments and can even be perpetuated by the unconscious actions of

very young children. As I present these findings, I first wish to acknowledge that I may have interpreted some experiences as racist when the mothers themselves did not. Likewise, my informants might have labelled some experiences as racist when I personally interpreted them differently.

Realizing racism exists.

Each of my informants no doubt started out their lives completely unaware that racism existed. At different points in their lives, the mothers began to develop an understanding of racism. Some mothers were exposed to racism in childhood, while other mothers were adults before they became aware of racism. Says Maggie:

> When I got into this relationship I believed that we were all the same. This is Canada. There's no such thing as racism. We've come too far for this. Whereas now I am very, very aware of just how much racism there is. However subtle. Or however bold. (*Maggie*)

This concept of, "We've come too far for this" is voiced by Hope's mother as well. Hope describes an experience where she came out of a university class that had focused on racism, got into the car with her mother, and when she told her mother about what she'd learned that day about racism, her mother said: "There's no racism in Canada anymore."

Many of my informants spoke of the process by which they were educated about racism. Maggie's education took place through being bombarded with racist experiences from the moment she started dating interracially. Peggy was close friends with black people from the Caribbean from childhood-on and watched with growing discomfort and disgust as she recognized that her black friends and classmates were being treated differently from white people. Leah spent several years dating a black

man who had left South Africa during Apartheid. Largely as a result of his lived experiences, her boyfriend was very vocal about racism. Gwyn described dating a black man whose relatives lived in a dangerous neighbourhood in Toronto, and beginning to recognize the devastating effects racism had had on his family. Hope talked about a black boyfriend she dated in university who spoke to her many times about racism.

While most of my informants had significant encounters with people who educated them about the existence of racism, many still did not fully grasp racism. Some would come to have a deeper understanding of racism over time, while others did not show much understanding of racism even throughout the course of our interviews.

Understanding racism.

A few of my informants chose not to address racism in depth throughout their interviews. However, of the mothers who spoke in depth about racism, a few describe going through a process of questioning their understanding of racism. Peggy, for example, describes watching black acquaintances rebel against "white culture" but not fully accepting the reasons she heard.

> I struggled sometimes. I agree that there are distinct differences –that you have probably been treated differently consistently because of the colour of your skin, but there's also that piece of responsibility for your own actions that needs to take place that I sometimes felt they were trying to avoid. And blaming it on the fact that they're black. As opposed to taking responsibility for the fact that they were not behaving in the manner that was appropriate for Public Transit at that time. (*Peggy*)

Peggy's statement could be interpreted as perpetuating racism by maximizing personal responsibility of black youth and minimizing social responsibility for their

actions (i.e., the impact that society has had in shaping unfairly persecuted individuals' behaviour). Peggy speaks of many times where she witnessed, or heard about, black youth experiencing discrimination. For example, she mentions her adolescent knowledge that black youth walking downtown late at night would be stopped by the police and questioned about their activities while white youth could spend their nights free of police attention. However, Peggy demonstrates critical awareness and critical questioning of many of her experiences. Peggy describes watching a black man she knew perpetuate the stereotype of black men having multiple children by multiple mothers and not being involved in their children's lives. She witnessed and registered these situations in her mind but resisted using them as confirming facts towards validating the stereotypes. Instead, she questions what factors had influenced the man's behaviour. At the time of our interviews, Peggy was still questioning racism and racialization.

Leah speaks of watching her South African boyfriend perceive racism in virtually every part of his life:

> He would say that even things like sorting your laundry was bullshit. Whites are separate and colors are separate. How did they come up with this? Even something like that— Even to this day I wonder if this is taking it a bit far or if there is something to this. (*Leah*)

Leah shook her head as she remembered her boyfriend's comments. She expresses an awareness that he had experienced unfathomable racism throughout his lifetime, and speaks of her sadness that his experiences with racism had driven him to a state of constant anger and sensitivity. However, like Peggy, Leah also demonstrates a critical questioning of the experience of and perception of racism. My informants' ability to

question the validity of black people's perceptions of racism illustrates their white privilege. As white women, they have not lived a racialized life where racism has been a constant reality.

Maggie, Leah, Peggy, and Gwyn each voice their frustrations with recognizing the impact of racism on people who are not white. However, none of these women acknowledge that their reactions to racism come from the safety zone of white privilege; that they may feel in some way superior to both their partners and those who racialize them. Maggie reports feeling sad that her husband and family have been conditioned to accept racism. Peggy reports having felt a sense of obligation in the past to personally make up for her partners' experiences of racism by nurturing them and staying in unhealthy relationships. Gwyn describes her shock at meeting a young black nephew of her boyfriend's who she realized had never experienced affection the way she had. Leah describes an experience where her boyfriend rejected the neighbourhood she had been living in, and they moved.

> I lived in Toronto in this nice neighbourhood. ...with old buildings. And he hated being there; he found that it was a racist neighbourhood. We moved... into this house which was a nasty... That's when I started questioning things. "Why is this better?" I asked shortly after that. I remember I went back [after we left that house] to get some things of mine and new tenants were there and they were drug dealers. Black guys who were drug dealers. That's when I realized how much our culture affects our lives. They feel more comfortable being with drug dealers rather than living in a decent neighbourhood.
>
> (*Leah*)

Leah's recognition of her ex-boyfriend's desire to live in a black neighbourhood demonstrates that she has some understanding of the impact of racism on his sense of security. However, Leah does not seem to fully grasp what white privilege and racism has done to her ex-boyfriend. The reality is not that he was more comfortable living

with drug dealers; the reality is that he felt more comfortable living beside black neighbours, even unsafe ones—drug dealers, than among white neighbours. Leah's ex-boyfriend felt unsafe in a "safe" (white) community and safe in an "unsafe" (black) community. In white-dominated communities, like the "nice neighbourhood" that Leah formerly lived in, Leah was able to live a non-racialized, neutral life, but her ex-boyfriend felt racialized. In black-dominated communities, like the "nasty" area, her ex-boyfriend may have been able to exist free from the burdens of daily racialization and white privilege.

The mothers vary in the degree to which they express their understanding of racism. My informants' understanding of racism seems to be tied to the degree to which they have been personally exposed to it. It is important to note that in most of the reported instances of racism, the women do not perceive racism as being directed at they themselves, even when they and their partners equally share the experience of racism. The mothers demonstrate an increased awareness of the struggles faced by racialized people who are not white in Canada; however, more thoroughly understand racism, I believe my informants must see themselves as the subject of it, rather than the immune bystander who is upset by the event.

Experiencing racism.

An additional layer of understanding racism emerged when the mothers began to personally experience racism. Hope describes naively trying to reframe racism to a university boyfriend who was not white.

> ...I remember him specifically saying how he wanted to move to the U.S. ...Somewhere where there were lots of black neighbourhoods. He said, "I'm just sick of always standing out. Always receiving the racism." At that point I was still coming from a perspective of not really understanding what it felt like to be in those shoes. I was saying, "But it's such a great learning opportunity for everybody and you have to just be strong in who you are." I didn't understand how one could feel so deflated by having to deal with that every day. (*Hope*)

Several years later, when Hope had begun to experience racialization and racism as a result of being a white mother to a biracial child, she empathized with her ex-boyfriend's experiences: "...That old boyfriend, I got the opportunity to walk in his shoes." Hope was one step closer to understanding Leah's ex-boyfriend's and her own ex-boyfriend's positions of feeling racialized and unsafe.

Maggie experienced overt racism several times as she initiated her relationship with her children's father. Shortly after Maggie and Andy began dating, they attended a family Christmas party where Maggie's uncle pointedly offered every adult, including her, a drink, except her boyfriend. Another time, Maggie experienced uncontrollable bleeding following a surgical procedure; Maggie's boyfriend was rushing her to the emergency room and accidentally made an illegal left turn. A police officer pulled them over, ignored their protests that she needed to go to the emergency room immediately, and kept them waiting over 30 minutes while he sat behind them in his cruiser. A couple years later, Maggie experienced complications with her first pregnancy and was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. Her partner followed behind in his own car, and when he arrived at the hospital was refused entrance. —The nurses did not believe that he could be Maggie's partner. On another

occasion, Maggie and her partner and children were the only family members of a large extended family not invited to a cousin's wedding.

The intensity and frequency with which Maggie and her family have experienced racism has decreased somewhat over the ten years Maggie and Andy have been together. However, the shock and anger that Maggie has felt with each racist experience has not faded. Before dating interracially, Maggie had never realized racism still existed. Upon becoming a member of a racialized pair, and racialized family, Maggie became all too aware of racism. Maggie says, though, that even though she has experienced racism, she is still protected from racism by her white privilege. Describing her experience of not being invited to her cousin's wedding, Maggie says:

> It broke my heart when we weren't invited. Because that wasn't against me. That was against him and the kids. And that breaks my heart. And it breaks my heart to think anyone could feel that way towards them. When you think about that, it just kills you. That was enough to send me into a fit of rage because of my protectiveness... (*Maggie*)

Maggie distances herself from her family's experiences of racism. Throughout each of Maggie's experiences of racism, she perceives that racism is directed at her partner or children, but not at her. However, while she interprets racism as being directed at her partner or children, not her, she still feels the impact of racism. There is the unspoken assumption here that Maggie's own white privilege is not diminished; that it is her partner and children who are being rejected, not her. Maggie assumes she is immune to racist events, that she hasn't lost any of her own power. It does not seem to occur to her that she may have become marginalized as well.

Leah has also experienced racism many times. The majority of Leah's experiences with racism have been more subtle than Maggie's. Leah acknowledges many times where she has questioned whether racist acts just occurred or not. She recalls her family distancing themselves from her as she began to date interracially. Leah speaks of feeling ashamed of her interracial relationships and hiding them from others because she feared judgment. Leah describes living in a building where the landlords would come out and harass the black man she was dating when he came to visit; this was something they never did to any of the white men she dated. On another occasion, Leah boarded a city bus with her daughter, and a misunderstanding over her bus pass quickly turned into an altercation where the black Caribbean-descent bus driver accused her of assaulting him and called the transit officials and city police. Leah believes that the bus driver amplified the situation because he recognized that her daughter was biracial.

Peggy has experienced racism on multiple dimensions. Peggy is the only informant who reported being largely surrounded by black peers from a young age. As a result, Peggy was often isolated as one of the only white girls in her peer group. Peggy not only witnessed her black acquaintances experiencing racism, she also had uncomfortable experiences as a member of her friendship circle, where she was told, when challenging comments her friends made about white people, that she "didn't count" as a white person, and that she wasn't "really white". Peggy perceives these comments of "not really white" as an unfair dismissal of her whiteness; however, these comments could also be perceived as an enhancement of Peggy's whiteness: it is not that Peggy is "not even white" but rather that Peggy is "better than white".

Peggy's isolation as a white person surrounded by black people continued after her marriage to her ex-husband. On one occasion, he decided to go to a party with friends but told her she could not come:

> He said, "Oh, I don't think that would be a good idea." And I said, "I don't understand why not." And he said, well he said, "So-and-so doesn't like white women. She gives me a hard time all the time because I'm married to a white woman." So he left me alone and he went. And I thought, I would never even think about accepting an invitation to someone's house who didn't want my spouse present because of the colour of their skin. It never would have even crossed my mind. (*Peggy*)

On another occasion, Peggy and her husband went to a Caribbean restaurant that they regularly ate at, and were served by a new waitress who had never met Peggy. The waitress, who was black, never once looked at Peggy, never spoke to Peggy, and even when Peggy ordered and paid for the meal, the waitress's responses and return of change were given to Peggy's husband. Peggy stated that this experience helped her to understand what it might feel like to be a person who was not white.

Later, after Peggy's children were born, she experienced numerous cases of disbelief, where strangers would question her about her children's racial origins, and express their disbelief that she could possibly be the mother to both of her twin children. Peggy's daughter looked white as a baby and Peggy's son looked black as a baby. Peggy reports frequent questions of, "Are you babysitting?" and perceives looks of disapproval, whispering, and frowns by strangers who overheard her saying "Mommy" as she held her son. While Peggy recognizes that these experiences were examples of racism, like Maggie, she distances herself from the experiences in her description of the events. Where Leah perceives racism as a direct assault on her own

white privilege, many of the other mothers describe racism as focused on their children or partners.

Gwyn has experienced racism primarily from the perspective of a conscientious bystander, and learner. As a child, Gwyn had an experience where she recognized that she could use racism to hurt another child. However, she knew that this was wrong, and her mother reminded her that it was unacceptable.

> ...There was a black boy in my class... He would make fun of me all the time... And he would tease me. All the time. I was just so frustrated and there were a lot of times I wanted to have a comeback. I wanted to say something rude to him. I would think of racist comments, thinking that maybe this would impact him. And I never did. I had quite a few talks with my mom about how to deal with this guy. I never did say anything that was racist, but it felt like an option for me. To let him know how painfully he was treating me. Could I do that? Would I say that? Should I say that?
> (*Gwyn*)

A couple years later, Gwyn and her family went to Ireland. They boarded in a house with an Irish family, and one day Gwyn went in to town with the Irish mother and daughter. Gwyn was talking to them about differences she saw between Canada and Ireland, and mentioned that she hadn't seen many black people in Ireland. The mother expressed disbelief that Gwyn would ever consider marrying a black person, and disbelief that Gwyn's parents would allow that to happen.

> So later on when my brothers and I had gone to bed the parents invited my parents to have a drink with them. So they had a couple drinks and the woman turned to my mom and started laughing and said, "Your daughter said the funniest thing. She said you wouldn't have a problem if she married someone of a different race or culture." My mom said, "Well, why would I have a problem?" (*Gwyn*)

Gwyn's parents, for the most part, actively expressed openness, acceptance, and appreciation of diversity. However, Gwyn remembers an occasion where a man came

into her parents' store and committed an indecent act. He was caught by an employee and fled the store without punishment. Afterwards, Gwyn and her mother were talking about the incident with couple who were friends of her mother's. They asked what the man looked like. Gwyn's mother reported not being sure, but that she understood he had very dark skin and might have been South East Asian or black. The woman turned to Gwyn's mother and said, "You have to tell me exactly what he looks like because my daughter dates black men!" At the time, Gwyn and her mother were very upset with what had happened in the store, and did not realize how racist the comment was, until later. Gwyn reports later thinking,

> Oh my god! I can't believe she said that! That there were so few black people here that her daughter must've dated most of them. So therefore she would have probably dated this guy. Or what she's saying – that all black men were like this? (*Gwyn*)

It wasn't until Gwyn left Canada and entered communities where she was a minority, as a white person, that she directly experienced racism.

Gwyn reports experiencing two instances of direct racism while in Africa, where she received anger because of the colour of her skin. In the first situation, Gwyn accidentally bumped into an African woman who was carrying fruit on her head. The woman said to Gwyn, "You, white lady. You go home." Gwyn speaks of feeling that had she been black, she believes the woman probably would have said something more like "Hey bitch, why did you do that?" In the second situation, Gwyn had multiple encounters with an African man who spoke with hatred of both white people and Canadian people. Gwyn also reports a visit to New York City, where she perceives that she was not welcome in a Caribbean restaurant she went to. However,

she acknowledges that she wasn't sure whether this was about race, or just "a New York attitude".

The most direct racism Gwyn has experienced has been through her partner's experiences, and her experiences with her partner. Gwyn's partner is Rastafarian. The Rastafarian movement is very Afrocentric, and largely rejects white culture. Gwyn reports a number of her partner's Rastafarian friends from Ghana shunning him after his marriage to Gwyn. She also reports a time, shortly after he moved to Canada, when they both, along with their biracial daughter, tried to visit some Rastafarian stores in Toronto. Gwyn's partner experienced comradeship if he went in alone, but was shunned if Gwyn and their daughter went in with him. Gwyn reports another occasion, prior to their youngest daughter's birth, where her partner experienced racism but did not know how to respond. Gwyn and her partner were scheduled for a midwife appointment, and he had been given permission to take the afternoon off work.

> ...And he had told me to come into the workplace, so he would know I was there. So I went in and met a couple of the guys that he worked with. He had spoken really highly of these guys. And the next day one of them said, "So, I guess you like white pussy, eh?" *(Gwyn)*

Hope resists talking about racism. Her experiences of racism seem to be limited primarily to her travels overseas. Hope mentions that she feels Jamaica is one country where she really began to understand what racism might feel like to people who were not white. Hope recognizes that her white privilege protected her from feeling true racism, because unlike people who were not white, she could easily escape racism by returning home to a place of white privilege. Perhaps because of

Hope's understanding that her white privilege protects her from racism, she does not perceive racism as happening regularly to her. Hope does, however, describe her feelings of complete loss of power and self-determination in Africa, when Moussa's father's aunt began to express hostility toward her once her pregnancy was revealed. The aunt refused to speak to Hope, Moussa's father warned Hope not to eat the aunt's food as it might be poisoned, and Moussa's father had to take Hope to places to purify, because his aunt had performed rituals against Hope

In Canada, Hope speaks briefly of feeling unwelcome in some restaurants and at some events that she has gone to with her son. Hope's feelings of not being welcome and not having any control over her environment demonstrate that she has some awareness of the impacts of racism. However, Hope's white privilege seems to minimize the impacts of racism on her sense of wellbeing.

Each of my informants was able to list their experiences with racism to me. While this reflects the fact that they had indeed experienced racism on many occasions, the reality is that many people who are not white, living in Canada, might have difficulty creating a list of their experiences of racism: there would likely be far too many to count. While my informants have been exposed to racism as a result of their interracial relationships and interracial parenting, their white privilege shields them from experiencing the world from the racialized perspective of a person who is not white.

Discussion

Race matters. In Canadian society, despite significant progress in reducing racism throughout the past several decades, race still matters. People who are white commonly perceive that racism is no longer an issue in Canada (e.g., Clarke, 2008). However, as recently as 2003, 35% of all Canadians who were not white and who were not Aboriginal reported experiencing discrimination within the past five years because of their racial background (Statistics Canada, 2003). It is clear from my findings that racism is insidiously pervasive. Indeed, racism is so pervasive that even my white informants who recognize that racism is unacceptable, and who desperately want to protect their biracial children from racism, perpetuate racism. The reality is that we all, in one way or another, seem to perpetuate racism. Not only do we each individually have a role to play in perpetuating racism, but racism is also deeply (and subtly) engrained in virtually every aspect of Canadian society.

Socially Constructing Race and Racism

In order to fully understand how racism is perpetuated, we must first understand exactly what racism is. In the argument against racism, it is often stated that there is no such thing as biological races; there is only one race: the human race. However, I wish to return here to my understanding of race as described in my introduction to this thesis: race is a socially constructed concept that has a very real impact on human beings (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). This socially constructed concept of race is based upon visible differences in a genuine biological trait: skin colour. It is important to acknowledge that skin colour, just like eye colour, is a real physical trait;

but like eye colour, skin colour in itself does not determine anything else about a person.

The problem arises when social meaning is attached to skin colour. When skin colour is reconstructed into the social concept of race and meaning and worth are attached to skin colour, racism emerges. Racism does not occur only between people who identify as white and people who identify as non-white; racism can occur between any race (or racial identity) and even within racial groups. Throughout Canada, racism occurs at all levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) ecological model.

In order to effect real social change, social experiences must be understood at four key ecological levels: individual, micro-system, meso-system, and macro-system. My informants' stories reveal the very real social impact race and racism has had on their lives and their family members' lives. At the micro-level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, race has an impact on daily interactions between family members and within social networks. At the meso-level, the impact of race is again apparent throughout my informants' stories in their work environments and their children's school environments. At the macro-level, social norms and policies affect my informants' lives. We have to ask, for example, why Statistics Canada requests people identify themselves as a "visible minority". While the data compiled this way provides important impetus for recognizing the disparate needs of non-white peoples, the terms itself is racist and exclusionary. Why do people have to define themselves in a way that is both negative and only has meaning within a "white majority" context?

Racialization is the process by which people become aware of races and their own race (Alexander, 2004). People who are not white are commonly racialized in Canadian society, as they recognize that people who are white at the very least have different lived experiences from them, and at worst oppress them (Nopper, n.d.). People who are not white may also become racialized as they recognize their racial backgrounds influence their access to meso-system social environments such as school and work, and also how they are affected by macro-system social policies. Many of my informants became racialized as they began to realize how race affected their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Some of my informants' children had racializing experiences that made them acutely aware of how important their skin colour and other people's skin colours are in Canadian society.

White privilege reinforces racialization and racism, by maintaining differential experiences between people who are white and people who are not white. Whiteness is not only constructed as a more privileged experience in Canada, it is also positively charged. In Canada there are more benefits attached to being white than to belonging to any other race (Nopper, n.d.; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Benefits attached to whiteness not only emerge in individual social interactions at the individual and micro-levels of the ecological system, but also at the broader social levels. For example, Canadian social policies are based on the "white experience" in Canada, and access to power in workplaces, schools, and other meso-level environments is more readily available to individuals who are white.

The notion of whiteness as a neutral space emerged several times throughout my review of past research and my informants' comments. This suggestion of white

space as a neutral space has extremely problematic connotations, as it implies some sort of normative impartiality or objectivity. Not only is whiteness positively charged, non-whiteness is also negatively charged. Despite the fact that skin colour has nothing to do with people's intellect and moral character, my findings illustrate the uncomfortable reality that my informants perceive that being non-white is not as desirable as being white.

Supersession of Race

My findings illustrate how powerful race is as a socially constructed concept. Regardless of all other social factors influencing my informants' lives, having family members who have racial backgrounds that are not white still influences the lives of my informants and their loved ones. Regardless of how my informants approach race in their homes, race still matters. Regardless of my informants' socioeconomic backgrounds, race still matters. Some of my informants have experienced incredible class privilege, travelling throughout the world multiple times, and some have not travelled outside their home city. Some of my informants' children attend private schools, and some of their children attend public schools. Yet race still influences their lived experiences. Neither my informants' white privilege nor their various levels of class privilege prevent them, their partners, or their children from experiencing racism.

Each of my informants parents her child/ren in a different way. Each of the mothers has a different viewpoint on how her child/ren's racial identity development should be guided. And still, regardless of how my informants choose to address race in their homes, their children quickly recognize, at a young age, that race matters in

Canadian society. Regardless of how much my informants promote the value of their children's paternal heritages, their children begin to recognize that in Canada having white skin is preferable to having skin that is not white.

Not only does race matter, but race matters differentially to Canadians, depending on skin colour. While my white informants have experienced overt, subtle, and implicit racism as a result of their interracial unions and their interracial parenting, white privilege has shielded my informants from feeling the full impact of racism. In addition, my informants do not report their children whose biracial backgrounds are less easily physically identifiable experiencing marginalization to the same degree that those children who visibly have non-white heritage do.

Just as racism is insidiously pervasive, white privilege is also insidiously pervasive. White privilege not only influences the ways in which racism is directed at my informants, it also influences the ways in which racism is understood by and experienced by my informants. My informants perceive that racism is directed at them because of their family compositions and relationship choices, but most of my informants do not perceive that their own status in society as white women may be reduced because of their relationships with their partners and their children. However, my informants do recognize that their children's lives are forever affected because of their fathers' skin colours. Their children are not rescued from racism by their mothers' whiteness. Instead, having genetic heritage within them that is not white means these children will almost certainly face racism in some proportion to the degree to which people perceive them as non-white. White privilege protects my

informants and all white Canadians from fully comprehending racism. Non-white heritage, on the other hand, renders Canadians vulnerable to racism.

While my informants and their children experience racism today, it is possible that some day in the future, racism can be eliminated. However, in order to eliminate racism in Canada, white privilege must also be eliminated. White privilege is a social system that perpetuates racism, and racism is a social system that cannot exist without race privilege, including white privilege. If we can move society to a point where power and privilege are not attached to skin colour, then it may be possible to detach oppression from skin colour (Race Traitor, 1993).

Before white privilege and racism can be abolished, we must first understand how racism and white privilege are perpetuated within Canadian society. Before I began my Masters research, I knew that racism and white privilege existed. However, I did not recognize the degree to which my understanding of these systems was lacking. I discovered my own lack of understanding of racism and white privilege as I tried to understand my informants' dialogue. I struggled to reconcile how women who voiced views that racism was unacceptable could still perpetuate racism.

Racism in Action

When I began my Masters thesis, I initially understood my exploration of white women's experiences with racism to be about their experiences as parents experiencing, through an extension of their relationships with their children, their children's experiences of racism. At that time, while I was aware of instances where white individuals had experienced racism from non-white individuals in communities that I had lived in (e.g., a white university student unknowingly sat in a "black

section" of study cubicles at the university library where I completed my undergraduate studies and was subjected to heckling and derogatory comments from black students), I expected my learning from my Masters research to be focused more on mothers' awareness of their children experiencing racism.

Over the past year, throughout interviews with my informants, I identified a far more complex system of racism than I had realized existed prior to my research. My understanding of racism as it was experienced by and reported by my informants was further supported by my own experiences parenting my daughter.

From my informants' stories, I have identified at least five ways that racism can be experienced. The first is what I label the "*direct embodied* experience of racism". A person who has a direct embodied experience of racism experiences racial prejudice targeted directly at them because of the colour of their own skin and/or because of their own perceived racial background. For example, a number of my informants describe entering "black" restaurants or stores and being refused service, ignored, and treated with hostility. My informants also report their non-white partners experiencing overt and subtle racism, and their non-white biracial children experiencing racism. These are all examples of direct embodied experiences of racism.

While my informants reported some personal examples of direct embodied experiences of racism, I found that their whiteness largely protected them from experiencing racism because of the colour of their own skin. However, through their experiences as parents of biracial children and partners to non-white people, these women somehow had a much closer experience of racism than most white people do.

The second variation of the experience of racism is what I label the "*direct parental* experience of racism". While one step removed from the embodied experience in that in this case a person may avoid racism by hiding their racial affiliations (depending on circumstance), a person who has a direct parental experience of racism experiences racial prejudice targeted directly at them because of racial dimensions within their parental relationship with their child/ren. A person who faces direct parental experiences of racism does not have the freedom to escape racism. In the context of this thesis, a white mother of a biracial child can really only "escape" racism by severing her parenting relationship with her child and placing her child up for adoption. An example of the direct parental experience of racism is when my informants perceive that they are treated differently than they were previously, once individuals discover they have biracial children. While conducting my research, I had multiple experiences that I perceived as direct parental experiences of racism.

The third experience of racism is what I label the "*direct associated* experience of racism". A person who has a direct associated experience of racism experiences racial prejudice targeted directly at them because of racial dimensions within their non-parental close relationships (e.g., spouses). In contrast to the two aforementioned types of experiences of racism, individuals who experience racism in this context have the freedom to escape racism. They may choose to end their relationship if the racism becomes more than they feel they can handle. An example of the direct associated experience of racism is when an informant reports that her black partner is barred from the emergency room, as she experiences a pregnancy crisis. This informant's partner experienced a direct embodied experience of racism

as the nurses refused to believe he could be the father of his white partner's unborn child; however, my informant also experienced a direct associated experience of racism as she was denied support and companionship from her partner as a result of the nurses' refusal to let him be with her while they simultaneously allowed other men who were in monoracial relationships in to support their partners.

A fourth experience of racism is what I label an "*associated* experience of racism". A person who has an indirect experience of racism experiences racial prejudice because of more distant racial connections. An example is my own father's experience of being kicked out of an office when he reveals his daughter looks non-white. This experience is one more step removed from the abovementioned experiences of racism, in that individuals who are not in racially charged parenting or romantic relationships can drastically reduce their risk of experiencing racism by choosing not to reveal their racial connections or by choosing to not even have racial connections.

A fifth experience of racism is what I label the "witnessing of racism". A person who witnesses racism is aware that racial prejudice is occurring around them, but does not feel it directed specifically at them. For example, one of my informants reports that her daughter has informed her that her son (her daughter's twin brother) has been called racial slurs. In this case, while racism is experienced by the mother's loved one – her son – it is targeted at him, not at her. The mother may experience hurt and angst as a result of the suffering her child whom she is supposed to protect is experiencing, but the racial prejudice is still directed away from the mother.

Opening the Dialogue on Racism and White Privilege

It is critical to recognize that racism is not solely perpetuated through individual actions. Racism is a product of many different elements at all levels of the ecological model. If racism was solely rooted in individual actions, then racism could be abolished by changing the thoughts and actions of individuals. In actuality, racism is not rooted solely in individual actions but rather is manifest throughout virtually every aspect of society. Canadian society, however, is composed of individuals, including the six women who participated in my study. While my research took place at the individual level, my research question, "How can the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children inform us about white privilege and racism?", seeks to understand the larger social systems of racism and white privilege through the data I have gathered from these six individual women.

How can we explain why and how racism affects the lives of my informants and their families? How can we explain why and how my anti-racist informants still perpetuate racism despite their desires to the contrary? My informants' understanding of and approaches to racism and white privilege vary widely. My informants are very different in how they live their lives and parent their children, and yet they are united in that they believe racism is wrong. All of my informants address white privilege to some degree; however, none of my informants fully acknowledge that white privilege is part of the problem—that unexamined white privilege, in itself, perpetuates racism. I believe that my informants' understanding of white privilege and racism is representative of many Canadians. It is difficult to understand and recognize how racism and white privilege are so deeply engrained within Canadian society.

In attempting to understand how my informants can be anti-racist overall and yet still perpetuate white privilege and racism, I realized that a person's worth (including their values, ethics, and beliefs) must be separated from particular actions, and particular experiences from their values. A parallel analogy comes from parenting: it is not appropriate for me to place judgment on my daughter when she is misbehaving and tell her that she is bad. Doing so accomplishes nothing positive; doing so only teaches her that she, as a person, is not valued. Instead, when my child misbehaves, I do not tell her she is bad; I tell her that her actions are wrong, and I explain why. I believe this same approach is essential for furthering anti-racism. We must recognize the value of all persons, and respect this as we challenge racism, by separating actions from worth.

A person who is anti-racist may challenge racism through specific actions and thoughts. However, on other occasions they may still perpetuate racism. But, if they genuinely believe that racism is wrong and seek to eliminate white privilege and racism, then they, as a person, can be anti-racist. In addition to separating a person's actions from their values, it is also critical to recognize the role that society, as a whole, plays in individuals' actions. For example, a number of my informants talked about recognizing internal racist thoughts that they knew were wrong, but that had become engrained in their consciousness through a lifetime of social conditioning. In addition, in Canada, I, my informants, and other white people, are systemically conditioned and trained to maintain our own white privilege. For example, one of the mothers in my study openly challenged the language and attitude of a police officer investigating an incident at her son's school, while consciously recognizing that her

white privilege gave her protection from repercussions that a non-white mother might have to face had she done the same thing. However, while this mother perceived her advocacy as being about white privilege, I suspected that her advocacy was received by others as being about racism far more than about race privilege.

This small yet very important detail of separating personal worth from actions is critical to opening up the dialogue on racism and white privilege. Honest dialogue about racism and white privilege cannot occur without safety for the learners. My findings illustrate that while racism may be deliberate in many cases, it can also emerge out of even well-intentioned statements. In order to eliminate racism, we must first help members of Canadian society to understand what racism is and how racism and white privilege are perpetuated. Not only must we educate ourselves and those around us about why racism is wrong and unacceptable; but we also must raise awareness of *why racism still exists*. If society fully understands what racism is, what racism does and why it is unacceptable, and how racism is perpetuated, then ignorance can no longer be an excuse for perpetuating racism. If Canadians fully understand how racism is perpetuated at all levels of the ecological model, then Canadians can begin to work to fully abolish racism.

However, raising awareness about such a provocative topic like racism requires safety for the learners. In order to ensure that people are able to let down their protective guards and open their minds to understanding racism and white privilege, it is essential to frame the discussion of racism and white privilege in a way that separates actions that perpetuate racism and white privilege from individual people, whose intentions may in fact be anti-racist. Before we can abolish racism, we

must shift the dialogue about racism from racism as a personal character trait or race trait (i.e., "people who are white are racist") to a socially constructed and maintained construct and social reality (i.e., "people who are white perpetuate racism"). We must acknowledge and recognize that racism is a social behaviour, not necessarily a personal trait.

In addition to separating specific actions from a person's worth, it is critical to recognize that racism and white privilege are perpetuated in many different ways. Actions that perpetuate racism can range from justifying racism to implicitly reinforcing racism. Likewise, anti-racist actions can range from resisting racism to actively fighting racism.

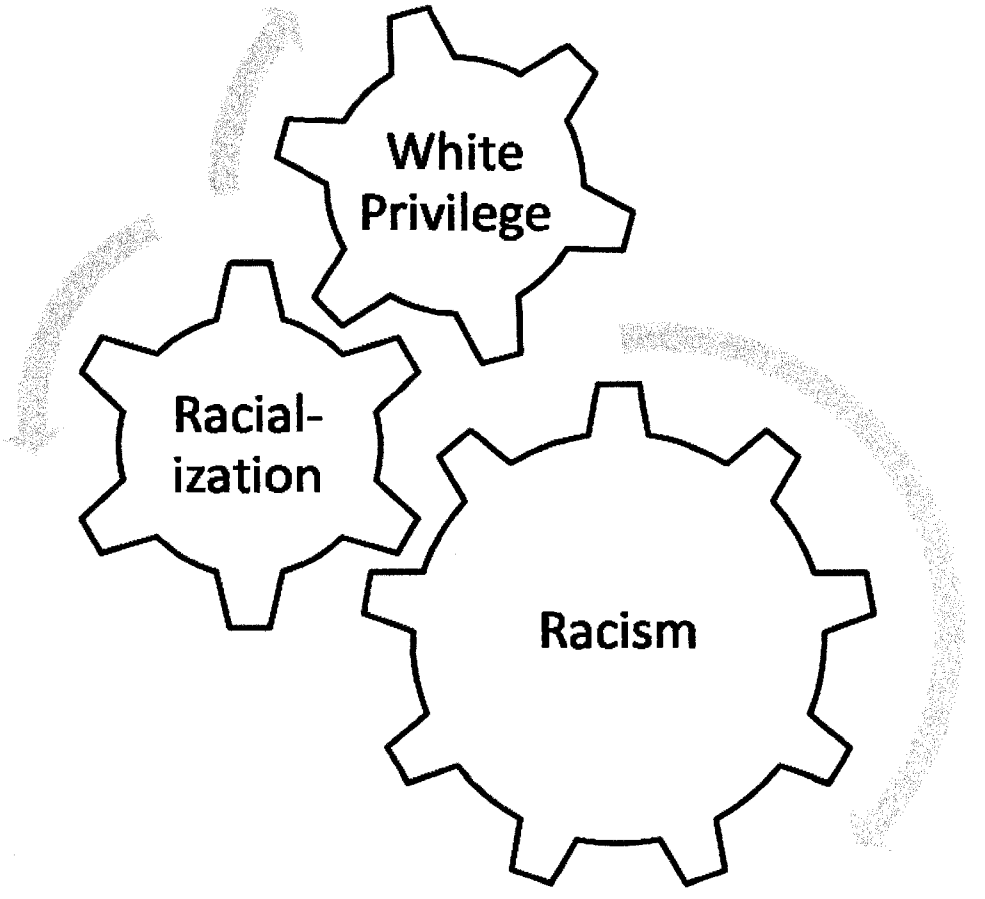
A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Racism and White Privilege

At this point, I would like to present a theoretical framework for understanding the systems of racism and white privilege. By consciously considering how social experiences, actions, and thoughts perpetuate racism, we can begin to understand how, even though we may believe we are anti-racist, we still perpetuate racism. Three key interrelated theoretical developments emerge out of my exploration of my informants' experiences.

First, in seeking to understand the complexity of my informants' experiences, I recognized that white privilege, racialization, and racism are inextricably intertwined (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

White Privilege, Racialization, and Racism Intertwined



White privilege, racialization, and racism each interact in complex ways to perpetuate race oppression. I believe that my informants' separation of white privilege and racism is representative of most Canadians' understanding of these two concepts. Current research and social change movements typically separate white privilege and racism, and approach the concepts as two separate entities. While white privilege is often explored in literature in the context of its connection to racism (e.g., McIntosh, 1988), racism is predominantly explored in literature independently of white

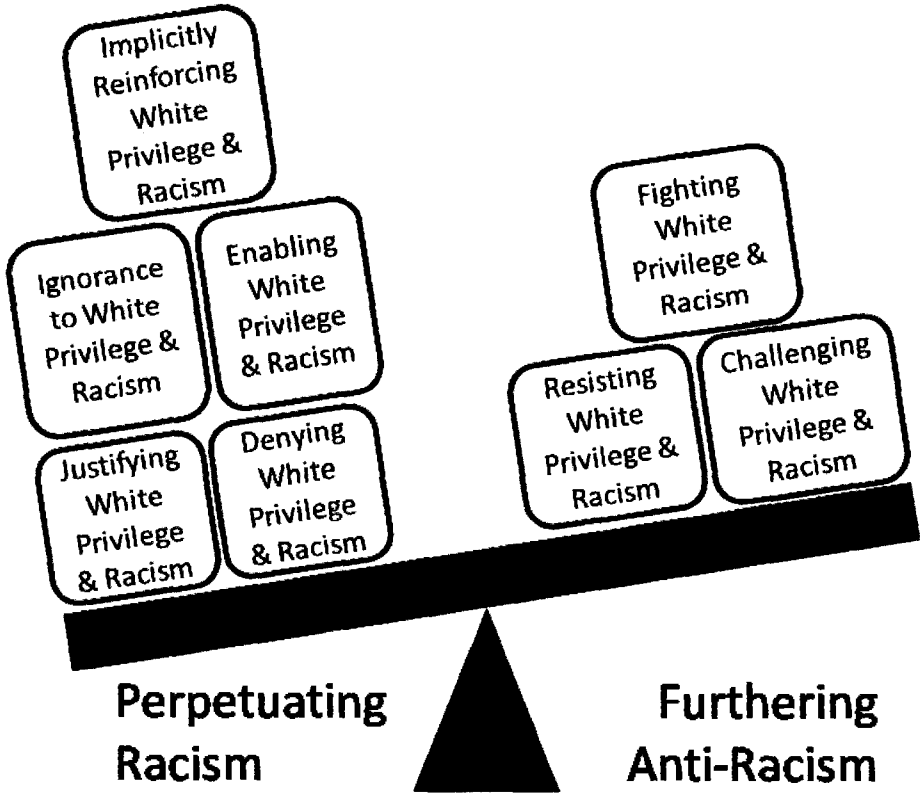
privilege. I suggest that this approach is flawed. Race oppression is a complex, socially constructed system that cannot be successfully fully tackled and abolished without fully understanding and addressing the ways in which the mechanisms of white privilege and racism interact. I propose that white privilege and racism should be studied and understood as *paired* mechanisms. Abolishing racism requires the concurrent abolishment of race privilege, as race privilege maintains racism. Therefore, the movement toward abolishing racism is limited if our understanding of race (and white) privilege and racism is restricted to their independent and separate existence. I suggest that if racism is to be abolished, a shift toward understanding white privilege and racism as paired social mechanisms is necessary (see Figure 2).

When I shifted my understanding of white privilege and racism from that of two separate entities to an inseparable pair of social mechanisms, I realized that not only is racism extraordinarily complex, it is also insidiously pervasive. Despite significant progress toward anti- racism (e.g., overt racial discrimination is now illegal in Canada), racism continues to be perpetuated in many ways (see Figure 2).

The second theoretical concept that emerges out of my research occurs in my development of an informal measurement analogy of the degree to which racism is perpetuated versus the degree to which anti-racism is fostered. In seeking to understand my informants' experiences, I recognized at least five ways racism is perpetuated: justification of white privilege and racism; denial of white privilege and racism; ignorance to white privilege and racism; enablement of white privilege and racism; and implicit reinforcement of white privilege and racism.

Figure 2.

Measuring Racism and White Privilege Together



Alongside these ways in which racism is perpetuated, I also recognized three key ways in which anti-racism is fostered: resistance to of white privilege and racism; challenging white privilege and racism; and fighting white privilege and racism. There are, of course, additional and/or other ways of describing how racism is perpetuated in Canadian society and how anti-racism is fostered in Canadian society, but for the purposes of this study I have focused on these five as those most relevant to my informants' experiences.

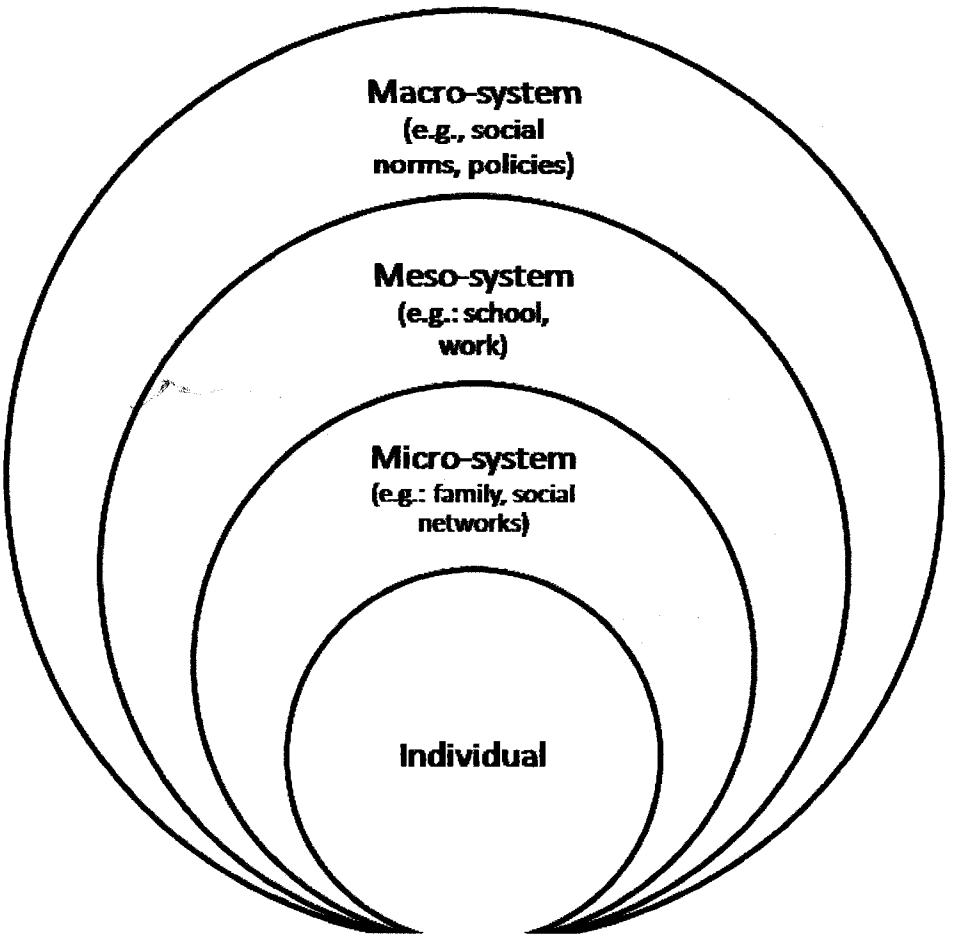
The key point that I wish to re-emphasize in my breakdown of how racism is perpetuated and anti-racism is fostered is the critical pairing of white privilege and racism. If we erase white privilege from this model, the movement toward abolishing racism can inaccurately be perceived as being far more advanced than I believe it really is. In pairing white privilege and racism, it becomes clear that we still have a long way to go before we can abolish racism from Canadian society. In my present research, I discovered that while my informants try to avoid perpetuating overt racism, the majority of my informants were unaware of how their white privilege was connected to their life experiences and implicit in their perceptions of racism. I believe that before racism can be abolished, we must increase our society's recognition of how closely and insidiously intertwined white privilege and racism are. In order to abolish racism, Canadian society must not only challenge and fight racism, but also white privilege. While I believe that the majority of Canadians would support the abolishment of racism, I suspect that we are not yet at a place of understanding racism and white privilege where the majority of Canadians would support the abolishment of white privilege.

In order to abolish racism and white privilege, the ways in which racism is perpetuated and anti-racism is fostered must be understood within the ecological context of Canadian society (see Figure 3) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Just as it is impossible to separate racism and race privilege, it is also impossible to abolish racism without recognizing how it is perpetuated at each and every all of the levels of Canadian social ecology. I propose that our understanding of the paired mechanisms

of racism and white privilege should be carefully examined at each level of the ecological system (see Figure 4).

Figure 3.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model

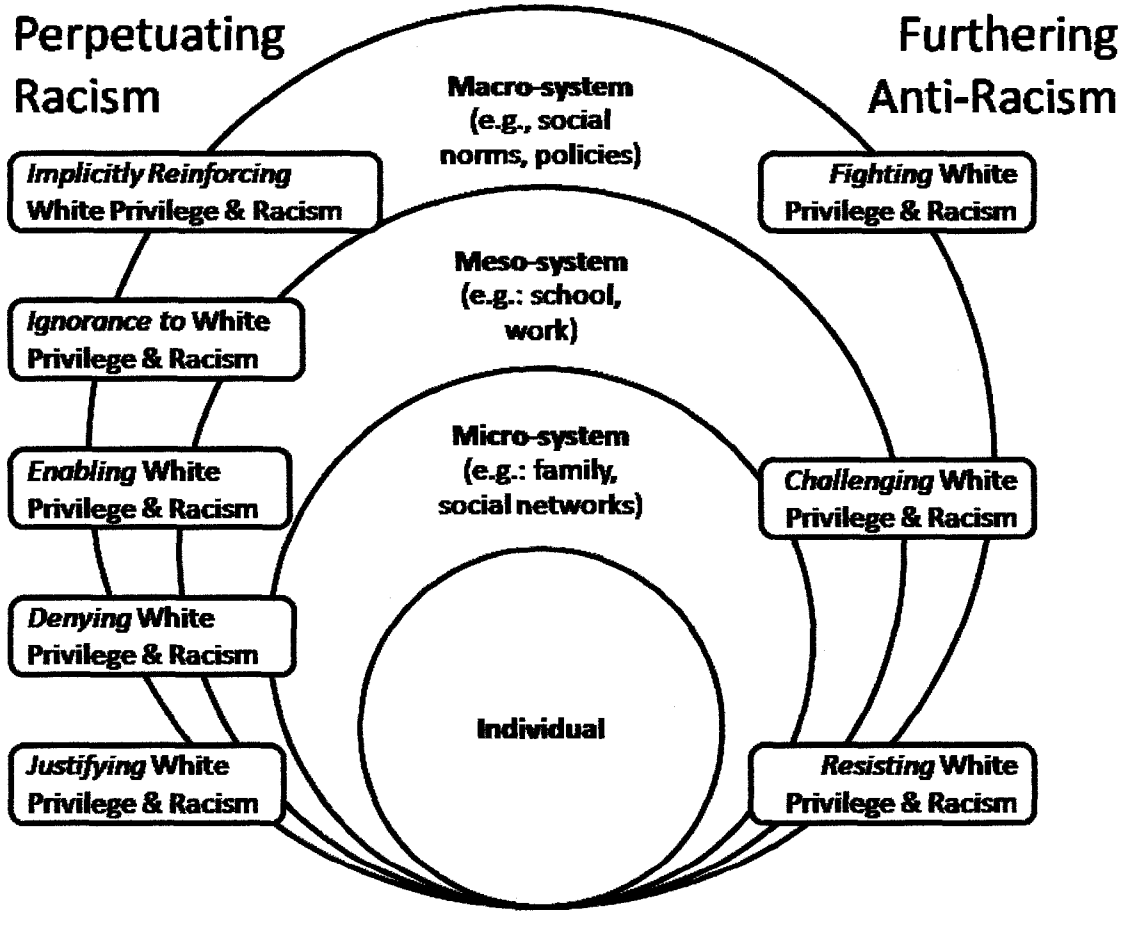


My breakdown of the ways in which racism is perpetuated and anti-racism is furthered can be placed within the ecological context in two key ways. First, it is important to critically examine how each of the ways of perpetuating racism and furthering anti-racism may happen within each level. When considering how each of the ways in which racism in perpetuated at the *individual level* of ecological model, examples are easily arrived at. At the individual level, a person might deny that white

privilege plays any role in his or her desire to live in more white dominated (and 'coincidentally' often middle- to upper-class) neighbourhoods, as illustrated by Leah's understanding of why her South African ex-boyfriend preferred to live in more dangerous black neighbourhoods over safer (as perceived by Leah) white neighbourhoods.

Figure 4.

Examining Racism and White Privilege Using the Ecological Model



One of the dilemmas of white privilege and racism is that these paired social mechanisms are not only so pervasive that they really are interwoven into virtually every aspect of Canadian society, but also that present day race privilege and racism often occur in such subtle ways that once we move beyond the individual level of the ecological system, it becomes increasingly difficult to explicitly identify examples of white privilege and racism. However, while identifying how racism is perpetuated at the larger levels of the ecological system is more complex, examples of white privilege and racism are still conceptually fairly easy to identify. Throughout my findings, many examples emerged of racism and white privilege at the micro- family and relational level of the ecological model, through my informants' reports of family struggles with racism. At the meso- level, Peggy's story of the caller who perceived Peggy's organization as a white-dominated organization and therefore structurally insensitive to the needs of non-white groups, serves as an illustration of how white privilege may be implicitly reinforced.

While my informants did not explicitly address the macro-system level of the ecological model, racism continues to be perpetuated even at the most overarching level of Canadian society. As I described in my introduction, government standardized terms such as "visible minority" explicitly reinforce and enable white privilege and racism. Our political leaders implicitly reinforce white privilege and racism through failure to address differential access to post-secondary education based on race, and the concomitant continuing disproportionate representation of non-white racial groups living below the poverty line in Canada.

Not only is it important to critically examine how the ways in which racism is perpetuated occur at each level of the ecological system, it is also important to consider how different levels of society interact and contribute to the perpetuation of racism. For example, the colour-blind hiring or affirmative action practices that occur at many Canadian workplaces are not only an example of how white privilege and racism may be both either denied and enabled at the meso-system level, but also such practices may serve to reinforce society's ignorance to white privilege and racism. While equitable hiring practices may be disdained by some white Canadians who feel they are being excluded from hiring on the basis of their white skin colour, such policies can also raise awareness of the differential access to education and employment that people who are not white experience.

Abolishment of racism must occur at all levels of the ecological model. Each method of furthering anti-racism must occur at each level of the ecological model. For example, the Canadian government fights racism through its funding of research studies on racism and through its implementation of the Employment Equity Act (Department of Justice, 1995). However, when considering Canadian social policies from a *paired* approach of white privilege and racism, it could be argued that explicitly reinforcing white privilege through the current Statistics Canada definition of "visibility minority" negates some of the anti-racist impact of our federal government's other work against racism.

Resisting, challenging, and fighting racism can occur within each ecological level. In addition, there are interrelations between each element of perpetuating racism or furthering anti-racism and the ecological levels (see Figure 4). For example,

resisting white privilege and racism is largely a personal act that is necessary at the individual level if we are to abolish racism from Canadian society. Individuals must be willing to recognize and question how their own thoughts and actions perpetuate racism and further anti-racism. Likewise, Canada as a whole must be willing to challenge both white privilege and racism as instances that perpetuate racism are recognized in social environments. For example, when an Ontario government employee was caught discriminating in a hiring process against a black man in Toronto on the basis of his perceived racial heritage, not only did the man challenge and fight her actions, but he was also supported in his fight for justice by newspaper agencies and politicians (Diebel, 2007). In order to completely abolish white privilege and racism, the fight against white privilege and racism must be supported at the broadest levels of society. Social norms, social beliefs, and social policies be changed so that not just racism but also race privilege are reduced, eliminated, and rendered unacceptable.

Implications for Community Psychology

The above theoretical framework illustrates how racism and white privilege are inextricably linked, and how racism is perpetuated across all levels of society. As we seek to move Canadian society closer to social justice, and ultimately eliminating unjust oppression of all communities (including, for example, gender oppression, class oppression, dis/ability oppression, etc.), we must also continue to work to eliminate race oppression. We must remember that we all, regardless of our racial backgrounds, have a role to play in fighting racism. While there is a general understanding, throughout Canada, that racism is wrong, a thorough understanding is

still lacking, by all, or most, people living in Canada, of how racism is perpetuated and how race oppression can be abolished.

I developed this framework with the intention of using it not only as an awareness-raising tool amongst Community Psychologists and anti-racism activists, but also with the intention of it being used as a model by which we can examine our society, and all the different social mechanisms within our society, across all ecological levels, that perpetuate racism. Before we can eliminate a problem, we must first recognize the problem, and find the source – the root causes – of the problem. This theoretical framework is intended to be used as a tool that can ultimately help Canadians identify further ways to abolish racism.

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) describe the concept of "depowering" in the context of reducing the power of the researcher in the research relationship, as a way to better distribute equality and reduce power imbalances. In the context of moving forward with the above theoretical framework as Community Psychology practitioners, depowering is relevant not just in research relationships, but all relationships and social interactions, for Community Psychologists who hold white privilege. A conscious awareness of our own white privilege as white individuals and a continuing examination of how our whiteness influences every experience in our lives is essential. Rothenberg (2005) suggests that in addition to conscious depowering in everyday situations, the privilege of having white privilege can be used in present-day situations to work toward long-term depowerment. Says Rothenberg, "The first step toward dismantling the system of privilege that operates

in this society is to name it, and the second is for those of us who can to use our privileges to speak out against the system of privilege as a whole."

Strengths and Limitations of this Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework is exactly that: a theory. This theory has emerged out of my exploration of the experiences and stories of a very small group of people living in Canada, and is based on only one aspect of racial diversity. My research contributes to the understanding of racism and white privilege, and I hope also to the understanding of how to abolish race oppression. There still remains much to be accomplished in understanding racism and *actively* abolishing racism.

The present theoretical framework explores one specific aspect of racism: *how* racism is perpetuated. The anti-racism movement requires an understanding not just of how racism is perpetuated but how to abolish racism. This theoretical framework offers two new unique and essential contributions to the anti-racism movement: 1) the pairing of white privilege and racism, and 2) the identification of perpetuating acts across all levels of the ecological system. However, this theoretical framework does not delve as deeply into how anti-racism can be furthered. For example, fostering positive racial identity was a theme that emerged in my findings about parenting experiences; fostering healthy racial identity development is surely one essential component in the movement toward the abolishment of racism.

Strengths and Limitations of the Overall Research Study

The qualitative nature of my research study and the variable nature of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) meant that my analysis, findings, and conclusions were largely dependent on my own subjective understanding of the data collected.

My informants' data was variable. The qualitative, semi-structured nature of my interviews meant that the depth of the information resultant was largely dependent on my informants' own understanding of racism and white privilege. For example, a few of my informants avoided talking about racism for the most part, and one actually completed my study without ever speaking the word "racism". In other cases, informants were very open about their own personal experiences, but resisted talking in depth about their children's experiences; however, this may have been due to the ages of all of the children, who were between the ages of 8 months and 11 years old.

I believe this variability in the data enhanced the quality of the data rather than detracting from it. By seeking to understand all of the "pieces of the puzzle" as surfaced through my informants diverse and varying ways of addressing racism and white privilege, I was able to develop a conceptual understanding of racism and white privilege that might have been much more limited had my informants been more homogenous in their responses to the questions.

My present research focused on a very large conceptual problem – race oppression – using a very narrow methodological approach: qualitative interviews with six white women parenting biracial children. Racism is a problem that affects people worldwide. My informants represented only a very small, and unusual, subset of those who are affected by racism. I recognize that my informants' experiences are likely very different from the majority of human beings who face racism, and indeed, several of my informants acknowledged that their experiences as white women were simply not directly comparable to the experiences of individuals who are not white. However, my informants' positionality of being balanced between "white" and "non-

white" worlds gives them an opportunity to understand the social realities of both people who are white and people who are not white in ways that people who live in only one social reality might not understand.

This study focused not on gathering data that could be extrapolated to all individuals affected by racism, but rather on gathering data that could be explored in-depth to contribute information to our understanding of racism and white privilege. My sample size of only six women is extremely small in comparison to most quantitative and mixed-methods studies on racism; however, by focusing exclusively on the experiences of this small group of women, I was able to develop a theoretical framework for understanding racism that may be examined and tested in additional, future research settings.

In addition to the development of a theoretical framework that can be used in the anti-racism movement, there are additional benefits that may have resulted as a consequence of my research. My informants were, in general, highly educated and socially-aware people. The mothers may have developed a better understanding of racism and white privilege as a result of participating in my research. This increased understanding could potentially spur some of my informants to become more actively involved in the anti-racism movement at many different levels of the ecological model. Regardless of whether my informants work toward broader social change, their recognition and understanding of racism could help my informants in turn help their children understand and cope with racism as it occurs. Not only does the potential exist for my informants to be better equipped for educating their own children about racism, but the potential also exists for my informants to better educate

their families and friends about racism. While these smaller scale implications will not solve the problem of racism altogether, they do contribute to the larger anti-racism movement as a whole.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present theoretical framework can be used in future research to explore racism further. Community Psychologists, other academics and researchers concerned with racism, and anti-racism activists could – and I hope will – use the above framework to explore the interrelations between racism and race privilege, as well as how racism and anti-racism are furthered throughout the ecological model.

This theoretical framework, while based on *individual* experiences of racism and white privilege, is intended to be used to explore *racism* and *race privilege* in the broader social context of Canada, and perhaps the world. There are several possible applications of my framework, depending on the perspectives and intentions of researchers who adopt it.

In future research, the present framework, as developed through my interviews with six women, could be examined using a larger group of white mothers of biracial, who represent parenting relationships across Canada. White mothers' experiences parenting biracial children may be very different, depending on what part of Canada they live in. My informants represented a fairly highly educated, socially advantaged group of mothers who live in mid-sized urban cities. Mothers who have grown up in and continue to live in poverty, and mothers who have grown up in and continue to live in wealth, may have very different experiences from my informants. Likewise, mothers who are raising their children in smaller, more isolated

communities throughout Canada may also have very different experiences. The perspectives of many more white mothers parenting biracial children could be explored to examine how their lived experiences fit into the present theoretical framework.

Parents are the basis of this theoretical framework. However, my parents were restricted to a very specific population – white biological mothers of biracial children. Future research could examine how additional social factors influence the perceptions of racism amongst parents of biracial children. White adoptive mothers, for example, may have additional, or different experiences that mediate how their families experience racism. Families with fathers involved may have different experiences from families where fathers are not involved. While my informants represented a number of family scenarios, the small sample size for this study does not allow me to extract information about such differences.

Understanding the present theoretical framework through the perspectives of parents other than white mothers would be invaluable in further understanding racism and race privilege. For example, the present design could be expanded to include non-white mothers from a variety of racial backgrounds, and fathers who are white and non-white, who are parenting biracial children. Non-white mothers might perceive white privilege very differently; their biracial children, for example, could experience more race privilege than the mothers do. Non-white men and women have very different experiences with racialization and racism. Additionally, this framework could be tested from other racial perspectives, such as monoracial white and non-white families, and biracial adults and children.

There are countless possibilities for future research on race oppression. It is impossible to list all of the possibilities. Additional suggestions for future research include: exploring the concept of "passing for white" as it occurs in today's modern society; exploring how other social factors affect the importance of race in people's lives; and exploring protective factors that make people less likely to experience racism. However, there is one critical point that I wish to emphasize when suggesting possibilities for future research: we must not look just at the "how" but rather at the **"why"** of race oppression. We know racism happens. We know racism hurts. We know racism is wrong. While understanding how people experience racism and how people cope with racism is valuable, I suggest that for true abolishment of racism to happen, we must move toward understanding how to move our society to a point where race privilege and racism are absolutely, positively unacceptable in every human being's mind.

Closing

Learning from My Informants' Positionality

White Canadian mothers of biracial children experience the world from a unique perspective. On the one hand, they benefit from the white privilege that they were born into and have held all their lives. On the other hand, they are inextricably tied to the racialized world of people who are not white in Canada through their experiences parenting biracial children. White privilege does not protect my informants from experiencing racism in society. White mothers are uniquely placed to be able to recognize the differential impact that skin colour has on people's lived experiences. Yet, despite their love for their children and their partners, and their recognition of the damaging effects of racism on their children and partners, white mothers of biracial children still unconsciously and consciously perpetuate racism.

My six informants took a brave step in opening their lives to me and allowing me to examine their understanding of racism and white privilege. Through their very act of volunteering to participate in my thesis research, they have contributed to the fight against racism and the movement toward anti-racism. However, my informants cannot be held responsible for societal change. My informants' experiences and the experiences of their children serve as a lens through which I was able to examine the lived realities of race, racialization, racism, and white privilege in today's society.

Toward Progress

At this point, I would like to return to why I chose to explore racism and white privilege through the experiences of white mothers parenting biracial children, for my Masters thesis research. While I have understood since childhood that racism and

inequality existed throughout the world, racism was not something that was "real" to me until I began to experience it personally. Through my experiences in interracial relationships, close interracial friendships, and being a mother to a biracial child, I began to realize how pervasive and damaging racism was and is.

Racism hurts. Racism oppresses. Racism makes the world an unfair place to live in. Why should we have to live in a world where 11 year old Kyle learns that he will be judged because of the colour of his skin and says to his mom Peggy, "Mommy, why would they think that... they don't know me? *That's not fair.*" Why should we have to live in a world where 3 year old Moussa wishes he had white skin? The truth is we do not have to live in a world where racism exists. However, the reality is that profound social change must happen if we are to abolish racism. The first step in social change lies within ourselves.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Wilfrid Laurier University

Recruitment Letter

Biracial parenting:
Exploring white privilege, racism, and racialization
among white mothers raising biracial children

[Insert Date]

Dear [Insert Name]

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the lived experiences of white mothers of biracial children. Shannon Cushing, a second year Masters student in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, is exploring how the experiences of white mothers of biracial children can inform about white privilege, racism, and racialization. It is recognized that every mother's experiences are unique and that your experiences may be very different from other mothers' experiences.

Shannon Cushing is herself a white mother of a biracial African-Canadian daughter. Shannon is from Atlantic Canada, and her daughter's father is from Cameroon, Africa. Shannon's own experiences parenting her daughter have led her to wonder what the experiences of other white mothers of biracial children are like.

This research study consists of three stages: an initial interview, a photographic journaling project, and a concluding focus group. If you choose to participate in this study, your involvement will require 4 to 12 hours of your time over the course of approximately one month. You may also choose to remain involved throughout the data analysis and results processes, where you will be invited to review your transcripts and the analysis of data to help ensure the information collected and conclusions drawn are accurate.

Attached to this letter is an informed consent statement, and Shannon's contact information. If you are interested in participating in this study, please read and sign the consent statement and contact Shannon Cushing.

Regards,

Shannon Cushing

Appendix B

Consent Form

Wilfrid Laurier University

Informed Consent Statement

Biracial parenting: Exploring white privilege, racism, and racialization among white mothers raising biracial children

Principle Investigator: Shannon Cushing, MA Candidate, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2312 • E-mail: shancush@yahoo.ca

Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell, Associate Professor, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2052 • E-mail: tmitchel@wlu.ca

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how white mothers' experiences parenting biracial children may inform society about white privilege, racism, and racialization.

The principle investigator, Shannon Cushing, is a Masters student in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is also a white mother of a biracial child and has both a personal and an academic interest in understanding how racial issues are experienced by diverse families.

This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Department of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

INFORMATION

A total of five women, including you, will be participating in this study.

This study will take approximately one month for you to complete. Over the course of the one month, you will spend somewhere between 4 to 12 hours participating in research. This time variability will depend on the length of your interview, the focus group, and on how much time you spend engaging in your photographic project. There are three stages to this study: (1) initial interview, (2) photographic journaling project, (3) concluding focus group. At the beginning of your participation in this study, you may choose to divulge your address to Shannon Cushing, so that materials can be delivered to your home, or you may choose to have the materials dropped off at an alternate location.

At the beginning of the study, you will participate in an in-person interview with Shannon Cushing. The interview will be audio-taped and video-taped. The interview may run between 2 to 4 hours in length, but no longer than 4 hours.

Informant's Initials _____

At the end of the interview, you will be given a disposable camera and a journal. For the two weeks immediately following your interview, you will be asked to take photographs that help communicate your lived experiences parenting your children, with a focus on experiences and/or feelings related to race. When you take a photograph, you will be asked to write down in your journal accompanying thoughts, reflection, or an explanation about the photograph.

After two weeks have passed, Shannon Cushing will pick up your camera and journal, develop the photographs, and then meet with you for approximately 30 minutes to review your photographs and journal entries. At this point, you will have an opportunity to decide if there are photographs you prefer not to have included in the research study. You will be asked to select out two photographs that have particularly significant meaning to you. At this time, you will also be asked for permission to use photographs containing identifying details. You can choose to keep these photographs private if you wish. The researcher will give you duplicate hard copies of all the photographs.

Once all five women have completed the photography project, the researcher will meet with you and the other four women together for a 2 to 4 hour focus group. At the focus group, all informants will have an opportunity to discuss the photographs they selected and explore common experiences and feelings around white privilege, racism, and racialization. The focus group will be audio-taped and video-taped.

RECORDING PROCEDURES & CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will keep all participant information anonymous. In the reporting of this study, you will be referred to by an alias. During the interview and the focus group, you may use your first name or your alias. By participating in the focus group, you and other the informants agree to keep everything said in the focus group by other individuals confidential; however, the researcher cannot ensure that all focus group participants will maintain confidentiality.

Your interview and the focus group will be audio-taped and video-taped. Audio tapes will be coded to protect your identity, and the audio data will be transcribed by Jeanne Whitehead, a third party contracted by Shannon Cushing. Jeanne Whitehead will sign a confidentiality agreement, and will have no continued access to data following completion of transcription. In addition, they will only have access to audio tapes, not video tapes, and thus will not be able to visually identify you. Only Shannon Cushing, and her thesis advisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell, will have access to the video tapes. The video data will be used by the researcher, who is hard of hearing, to verify the information recorded in the transcripts. You will be given a copy of all transcriptions of statements made by you, to review and validate. If you feel there is inaccurate information that needs correcting, or information you wish to remove, you will be given an opportunity to do so.

Informant's Initials _____

The researcher, Shannon Cushing, controls access to the audio tapes, video tapes, and transcripts. Her thesis advisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell, also has access to data. Wherever possible, identifying details will be omitted from any write-ups, publications, and materials that result from this research. However, because you belong to a unique and small population (white mothers of biracial children), individuals who know you may be able to recognize you in the research results. You will be given the opportunity to review transcripts and results prior to analysis and prior to publication. If you identify information that you feel may threaten your privacy, you can choose to have it removed from the reporting. If the researcher feels quotations and/or photographs selected for her thesis and other dissemination projects may be identifiable, she will consult with you for additional review and permission.

The audio tapes and video tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Shannon Cushing's office. All transcripts will be kept on Shannon Cushing's computer and will be password protected. Following completion of this thesis research, all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet under Dr. Terry Mitchell's domain.

Raw data will be destroyed by December 31, 2010, after the research thesis and other dissemination projects have been completed.

RISKS

Your children may be racialized as a result of your participation in this study; you may become more aware of their racial background and the impact their racial background has on their lives. You may experience regret over revealing personal information to the interviewer. The process of participating in the study may cause you to become more aware of white privilege, racism, and racialization. This awareness may have negative consequences such as sadness and/or anger. You may become more acutely aware of past/present/future discrimination experienced by you or family members, which may cause personal distress. You may become more acutely aware of how you interact with family members and other individuals, as you reflect on the themes of white privilege, racism, and racialization. You may find yourself consciously or unconsciously adjusting your personal behaviour and actions as a result of the knowledge gained during your participation. During the photographic project, you may experience uncomfortable interactions with other individuals as you attempt to explain why you are taking photographs.

Throughout the course of this study, you will have the opportunity to explore your feelings around white privilege, racism, and racialization, specifically with consideration to your relationships with your children. Racialization, or increased awareness of racial identity, can have a positive or a negative effect on individuals. While Canada is considered to be a multicultural country, this multiculturalism does not negate the impact that racialization can have on individuals. Your children, as a result of their visible minority parentage, may face racialization in everyday society. It is hoped that your participation and increased awareness of racialization will help you to understand the role that racial identity plays in your parenting journey.

Informant's Initials _____

You will be given a short script that you may choose to use when asked what you are doing by others. You will also be given a consent form to use if you wish to take photographs of people. You will be given the opportunity to member check all data collected by the researcher. You will also be asked to approve any quotes used in the final thesis and other dissemination products. You will be given the freedom to withdraw photographs that you do not want the researcher to use in her research. You are able to choose which photographs are used for discussion during the focus group.

If you experience distress as a result of participating in this study, you may wish to contact: Catholic Family Counselling Centre, info@cfcc.ca, 400 Queen Street South, Kitchener, ON, N2G 1W7, (519) 743-6333, or K-W Counselling Services, info@kwcounselling.com, 480 Charles Street East, Kitchener, ON, N2G 4K5, (519) 884-7000.

BENEFITS

Potential benefits to you

1. You may experience increased confidence and security in roles as mother to a biracial child, a partner to a visible minority man, and a head of a family that potentially has different experiences from all-white families.
2. You may experience increased confidence in your understanding of your children's experiences and status in society.
3. You may experience decreased feelings of isolation as you are given an opportunity to talk, in a safe and secure environment, about your experiences and feelings as a result of being a white mother of a visible minority child.
4. You may experience increased feelings of community, friendship, and support, as a result of interacting with the researcher and fellow informants.
5. You may develop increased knowledge and awareness as a result of talking with the researcher and fellow informants.

Potential benefits to research community

1. This research explores white privilege, racism, and racialization from a new perspective. An understanding of how race impacts the lives of people who are not personally visible minority will help increase understandings of white privilege, racism, and racialization.
2. This research explores biracial parenting from the perspective of mothers. An understanding of how white women experience mothering visible minority children will contribute to the understanding of visible minority mother-child relationships, majority race mother-child relationships, and biological, adoptive, and foster transracial mother-child relationships.
3. This research explores the impact of dialectical interactions on informants' and the researcher's understanding and knowledge of white privilege, racism, and racialization. A contribution to feminist discourse analysis theory, a contribution to dialogue on researcher relationships, and a contribution to participatory action research theory are anticipated.

Informant's Initials _____

Potential benefits to society at large

1. White privilege, racism, and racialization remain very significant social issues despite great advances in human rights over the years. A better understanding and awareness of the impact of race on individual people's lives will help society become even more cognizant and aware of culture, racism, and discrimination in Canada.
2. Understanding diversity is extremely important, especially as Canada becomes increasingly diverse. This research will increase understanding of the experience of diverse families. This research will also highlight the experience of an invisible population that may be profoundly affected by diversity: white mothers of visible minority children.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Shannon Cushing, at Department of Psychology, Science Building, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3C5, shancush@yahoo.ca and 519-884-0710 x2312. You may choose to contact Shannon Cushing's thesis advisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell, at 519-884-0710 x2052 or tmitchel@wlu.ca if you wish. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as an informant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, x2468.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research study will initially be disseminated in the researcher's thesis publication. You will have an opportunity to review and/or collaborate in the production of future dissemination materials beyond the thesis. You may choose to participate in the research study but decline at a later date to have your data used in additional dissemination projects.

The researcher will mail or deliver in person to you a copy of your transcribed statements, as well as any analysis that has been conducted. At the end of this research project, you will also receive a summary report containing a synopsis of the final thesis. You will be able to access the full thesis document at Wilfrid Laurier University Library. The thesis results will be published in Spring/Summer 2008.

Informant's Initials _____

CONSENT

1. I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Informant's signature_____Date _____

2. I agree to have quotes gathered in this study used for publication. I understand that all quotes will be reviewed with me prior to publication. If I am not comfortable with a specific quote being used, I can ask the researcher not to publish the quote.

Informant's signature_____Date _____

3. I agree to have my photographs analyzed and reproduced in the researcher's final thesis publication and summary report. I understand that any photographs that may contain potentially identifiable information will be reviewed with me and I will be asked for explicit consent if these photographs are chosen for dissemination.

Informant's signature_____Date _____

4. I understand that any personal and non-personal information shared by and/or statements made by myself or others during the course of the focus group may not be disclosed to or shared with anyone other than the five informants and the one researcher present at the focus group.

Informant's signature_____Date _____

Investigator's signature_____ Date _____

Appendix C

Individual Interview Guide

I would like you to reflect on your awareness of white privilege, racism, and racialization throughout your life experiences.

I will start by giving you my personal definitions of white privilege, racism, and racialization. White privilege refers to often seemingly invisible privileges and advantages that are connected to a person's fair skin colour. White privilege is reinforced by racism and by existing social structures that ensure that visible minority persons are reminded of their racial background regularly, whereas white persons are able to exist in a race-neutral environment. Racism is prejudice or discrimination based on perceived racial differences, and may take place between two people of different races, or even amongst people of the same race. Racialization is the process by which an individual becomes consciously aware of the roles their own race and the races of others play in social interactions.

I would like you to talk to me about three stages of your life today:

1. Growing up white
2. Being in an interracial relationship
3. Becoming/being a parent of a biracial child

At each of these stages in your life, what were your experiences of:

1. White privilege?
2. Racism?
3. Racialization?

Further questions:

1. What does it mean to you to be a white mother of a biracial (visible minority) child?
2. Describe times when you have been made aware of your child's racial backgrounds.
3. In what ways, if any, has your child experienced racialization and/or racism?
4. In what ways have your experiences parenting a biracial child informed your understanding of white privilege and racism in our society?

In closing, what advice would you give to other mothers raising biracial children?

Thank you.

Appendix D

Photographic Journaling Project Instructions

Duration: 2 weeks from [start date] to [end date]

Purpose: To photograph visual things in your environment that have significant meaning to you in your biracial parenting journey. These photographs could be of things that are present or are not present. Please include (but do not limit yourself to) images that reflect your (or your child or children's) experiences of white privilege, racism, and racialization.

Important: These photographs are your private possessions. At the end of the 2 weeks, you will be asked to share your photographs with the researcher, Shannon Cushing. However, if there are photographs you wish to keep private, you have the right to do so.

Guidelines:

- You may wish to take photographs of individuals that communicate a story but still leave them unidentifiable. For example, a photograph of your child(ren) playing in a sandbox without their face showing, but with their hair and skin colour still visible.

- Always ask human beings for verbal assent before photographing them, their children, or identifiable possessions, such as a car with a visible license plate.

- If you photograph an adult, you should give them an information letter (enclosed in your journal).

- If you photograph a child, you should ask them for verbal assent and give their guardian an information letter (enclosed in your journal).

- If a visual stimulus evokes an emotional reaction in you, which you are not sure how to talk about in words, take a photograph of it anyway and give yourself time to think about what it meant to you.

- Take as many photographs as you want! Better to have lots of photographs to pick out a few important ones from, than to have too few photographs to pick out important ones from.

Examples:

- You might photograph a dresser, mantle, or side table, which is covered with family photographs, and write a brief explanation about your family and the nature of the photographs.

- You might photograph a billboard advertising depicting a family, and write a brief explanation about how you react to it. (E.g., "I often see billboards depicting an entire visible minority family together, smiling happily, or an entire white family together, smiling happily. I find myself noticing these. I feel glad that our society is more accepting of diversity; however I am reminded of interviews I have read where biracial individuals comment that they never see an interracial family on TV. I don't think I've ever seen an interracial family on a billboard either."

- You might photograph your children playing (with children of the same or other racial backgrounds) and talk about your emotions and thoughts around your children's experiences of race.

Appendix E

Photographic Journaling Project Journal Format

Page 1 of journal

Biracial parenting:
Exploring white privilege, racism, and racialization
among white mothers raising biracial children

Thank you for your contribution to this research study! You have just completed an interview with me, where you talked about your experiences parenting your children. You were asked a number of questions around racial issues. In particular, you were asked to reflect on your experiences with and perceptions of white privilege, racism, and racialization.

Now begins the second phase of the research. You now have a disposable camera and this journal.

For the next two weeks, from today [insert date] to [end date], I would like you to reflect on the interview process and discussion. Think about your experiences of white privilege, racism, and racialization (both the presence of and absence of) as you parent your children.

Look at your lived environment and the things that you see happening around you. Take photographs of things/activities/events in your lived environment that communicate or relate to your experiences.

For example, when my daughter was a newborn, I remember feeling a strong sense of satisfaction when buying diapers and seeing on the boxes a picture of a light brown skinned curly haired baby that very closely resembled my daughter. While I may not be able to articulate exactly why this meant a lot to me, I do know that it was significant to me that a child that physically resembled my child was being used in media advertising. As a research informant, I could choose to take a photograph of this diaper box and write this down.

I will contact you periodically over the next two weeks to remind you about this project.

On [insert end date], I will pick up your camera and journal, develop your photographs, and compile your photographic journaling project. I will then bring your compiled project back to you and ask you to select 2 significant photographs. At this time, you will have the opportunity to withdraw any photographs if you are uncomfortable with my using them. At this time, you will also be asked to provide explicit consent to the use of any photographs containing identifying information.

The next 27 pages of the journal

Photo # [insert #]

This photo is of:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Why I took this photo:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F

Photographic Journaling Project Information Letter

I am participating in a research study conducted by Shannon Cushing from Wilfrid Laurier University. Shannon is a second year Masters student in Community Psychology, exploring the experiences of white mothers of biracial children. For part of the research study, I have been asked to take photographs of things in my environment that communicate what my life is like, or that relate to my lived experiences.

Contact information for Shannon Cushing and her supervisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell, is given below.

Principle Investigator: Shannon Cushing, MA Candidate, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2312 • E-mail: shancush@yahoo.ca

Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell, Associate Professor, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2052 • E-mail: tmitchel@wlu.ca

Appendix G

Small Group Interview Guide

Preliminary

- What was it like taking photographs for this project?
- How did you feel?
- During our interviews, we talked a bit about white privilege, racism, and racialization. Did you find yourself thinking of these as you used your camera?

Main Phase

- What photographs did you decide to share today?
- Any first thoughts as you look through these ten photographs on the table today?
- I'd like to go through each of these photographs with you as a group. We'll select a photograph, ask the photographer to tell us a bit about why you took it and what it meant to you, and then open up to the group and get your thoughts on the photographs.
- "What does this mean to you?"
- <After informant shares her story> Any comments from others? How do you relate to this photograph and [insert name]'s story?

Closing

- How did this photographic journaling project affect you?
- How do you feel about what we talked about today?
- Do you find yourself more aware of white privilege, racism, and racialization after today's discussion?
- Now that you have gone through an interview, a photographic journaling project, and a focus group, how are you feeling?
- Has this project affected you?

Appendix H

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Wilfrid Laurier University

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Biracial parenting:
Exploring white privilege, racism, and racialization
among white mothers raising biracial children

Principle Investigator: Shannon Cushing, MA Candidate, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2312 • E-mail: shancush@yahoo.ca

Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell, Associate Professor, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2052 • E-mail: tmitchel@wlu.ca

I, Jeanne Whitehead, understand that any and all information contained within the audio tapes for this research is private and confidential, and is to be used only for the purpose of Shannon Cushing's research. Any personal and non-personal information shared by and/or statements made by informants during the course of the research and captured on these audio tapes may not be disclosed to or shared with anyone other than Shannon Cushing and her thesis advisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell.

Transcriber's signature_____ Date _____

Investigator's signature_____ Date _____

Appendix I

Debriefing Form

Wilfrid Laurier University

Debriefing Statement

Biracial parenting:
Exploring white privilege, racism, and racialization
among white mothers raising biracial children

Principle Investigator: Shannon Cushing, MA Candidate, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2312 • E-mail: shancush@yahoo.ca

Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell, Associate Professor, Community Psychology
Phone: (519) 884-0710 x2052 • E-mail: tmitchel@wlu.ca

You have just participated in a research study exploring how white mothers' experiences parenting biracial children inform society about white privilege, racism, and racialization.

You went through three stages of research: (1) an interview, (2) a photographic journaling project, and (3) a focus group.

You shared valued information with the researcher, Shannon Cushing.

Your participation in this research does not have to come to an end today. Shannon will be back in touch with you once all the information is transcribed to ask you to review your interview and focus group discussions to make sure your experiences were accurately recorded. Shannon will also share her analysis with you and a final summary report. You will be able to access Shannon's thesis at the Wilfrid Laurier University Library. Shannon will also be in touch with you to explore the possibility of creating additional materials, such as a book, a media article, and other methods of sharing this important information with as many people as possible.

If you experience distress as a result of participating in this study, you may wish to contact: Catholic Family Counselling Centre, info@cfcc.ca, 400 Queen Street South, Kitchener, ON, N2G 1W7, (519) 743-6333, or K-W Counselling Services, info@kwcounselling.com, 480 Charles Street East, Kitchener, ON, N2G 4K5, (519) 884-7000.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Shannon Cushing, at Department of Psychology, Science Building, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3C5, shancush@yahoo.ca and 519-884-0710 x2312. You may choose to contact Shannon Cushing's thesis advisor, Dr. Terry Mitchell, at 519-884-0710 x2052 or tmitchel@wlu.ca if you wish. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in the consent form, or your rights as an informant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, x2468.