Normal Families Facing Unique Challenges:

The Psychosocial Functioning of Multiracial Couples, Parents and Children

Joshua Wilt
Northwestern University

The number of interracial couples in the United States has increased rapidly since anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1967. Early stereotypes conceptualized interracial couples as pathological, highlighting the importance of research addressing the psychosocial functioning of these couples and multiracial families. This article provides a summary of research on the psychosocial functioning of interracial couples, multiracial children, and parent-child relationships in multiracial families. Results across these domains suggest that multiracial families are not pathological but rather that they are normal families faced with unique challenges. Counseling options to support multiracial families navigate such challenges are discussed. Themes emerging from research on the psychosocial functioning of multiracial families are identified and avenues for future research are suggested.

Keywords: Multiracial families, interracial couples, parent-child relations, racial identity

CROSS

My old man's a White old man

And my old mother's Black.

If ever I cursed my White old man

I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my Black old mother

And wished she were in hell,

I'm sorry for that

And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a big fine house

My ma died in a shack.

I wonder where I'm gonna die,

Being neither White nor Black!

—Langston Hughes (1926)

Langston Hughes eloquently described the tension and uncertainty that may be present in the life of a multiracial family. When Hughes wrote this poem, in 1925, interracial partnerships were largely taboo in the United States, both legally and socially. Anti-miscegenation laws restricted interracial marriages, and discrimination against interracial couples was common, ranging from negative media portrayals and being shunned by other family members to violence, in extreme cases (Solsberry, 1994). When anti-miscegenation laws were repealed by the Loving v. Virginia decision of June 12, 1967, a drastic increase in interracial

marriages began; this increase has resulted in a growing number of multiracial children in the United States. The percentage of interracial unions has risen from 0.1% of marriages in 1970 to close to 3% currently (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006), with the latest estimates of the number of multiracial children at approximately 2.7 million (Wardle, 2007). These numbers likely underestimate the actual number of multiracial families and children, as many people conceal their racial identities in order to avoid discrimination (Brunsma, 2005). Indeed, the U. S. Census did not allow people to identify themselves as more than one race until the 2000 Census.

In spite of how widespread interracial marriage has become, a multiracial family continues to face many of the problems that were present before interracial unions were legal (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009; Wardle, 1992). Many interracial couples have been denied options in real estate and have been subjected to profiling by the police (Wardle, 1992). They also face a wide range of institutional prejudices that govern privileges such as credit-worthiness and may result in negative or unfair portrayals by the media; institutional prejudice may also place undue value on selective educational experiences or qualifications in establishing promotion criteria in jobs and schools (Rosenblatt, 1999). Currently, multiracial families experience decreased access to medical and dental care, perhaps contributing to the relatively low percentage of multiracial children (40%) determined to be in excellent health by the National Survey of Children's Health (Flores & Tomany-Korman, 2008). Even after interracial marriages were made legal, interracial couples have been denied marriage licenses on the basis of a stereotype that conceptualizes interracial families as pathological (Kennedy, 2003). In the past, they were rejected on the basis of being formed for superficial reasons (Brayboy, 1966). Criticism of interracial marriages has continued to perpetuate the notion that the marriages and the individuals in such unions are unstable (Foeman & Nance, 1999). It has even been suggested that individuals in interracial marriages are psychologically disturbed (Hullum, 1982; Lehrman, 1967; Spaights & Dixon, 1984).

Author's Note:

Joshua Wilt, Department of Psychology, Northwestern University
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joshua Wilt,
Department of Psychology, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60201.
Contact: joshuawilt2008@u.northwestern.edu

The birth rate within interracial marriages is estimated to be 26 times higher than in non-interracial marriages (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001), making the problems facing these families more and more relevant. The First Family of the United States is, for the first time, an interracial family, which may usher issues facing such families into the spotlight as never before.

Research has begun to take a keen interest in how these families are similar to and different from families of the same race, but relatively little is known about the psychosocial adjustment of multiracial families and children compared to their monoracial counterparts (McClurg, 2004). Although some promising lines of research have emerged, they have yet to be reviewed and integrated. The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of this research, identifying common themes and suggesting avenues for further research. The topics of psychosocial functioning, and psychological health, are particularly important for research on multiracial families because of the insidious notion pervading early conceptualizations that such families are pathological (Korgen, 2010).

Interracial Couples

Interracial couples face pressures such as the stares and anger of strangers and even rejection by their own racial groups; this may be particularly salient for Black-White marriages, as social discrimination against such couples may be especially harsh (Yancey, 2007). Only recently has research taken an objective approach to discovering how and when these couples form and how they function (Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007; Herring, 1992; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).

In comparison to same race couples, people entering interracial unions are slightly older and more likely to have been married previously (Solsberry, 1994). The most common marriages across races are between Asian-Americans and Whites; over 40% of Chinese-Americans and nearly 60% of Japanese-Americans born in the United States marry interracially (McFadden, 2001). There are also certain geographical areas of the country where interracial marriage is more common. The rate of interracial marriages is more common among Hawaiians, with 46% involving members of different racial groups (McFadden, 2001), possibly due to the generally integrated and tolerant environment that Hawaii presents as well as the limited and isolated dating pool and large percentage of minorities in the population (Solsberry, 1994).

The discrimination an interracial couple faces penetrates into family life. In a qualitative interview study of 10 Black-White couples conducted by Killian (2001), interracial couples revealed that immediate and distant family members objected to the marriage on the grounds of racial purity and that the marriage hurts family tradition and the couple themselves. Lewandowksi and Jackson (2001) showed that some family members even go so far as to refuse to recognize the couple's union and try to sabotage the interracial couple's relationship. In response to open-ended questions, interracial couples reported being highly concerned with understanding and resolving issues relating to their family of origin (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). One of the factors that predicted resolution of conflict was the birth of the couple's first child; families were more likely to come together after the birth of a child than beforehand (Byrd & Garwick, 2006).

Research suggests that in addition to opposition from family members, interracial couples are perceived negatively by society as a whole. Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) had European American undergraduates read descriptions of couples made up of different races and then had participants give their views on different aspects of the couple. Results suggested that couples were perceived differently according to their racial composition; whereas White-Asian American couples were perceived as slightly negative, White-Black couples were seen as highly unfavorable. Negative perceptions also varied according to the race of each member in the couple. Whites were perceived as less likely to succeed, whereas Blacks and Asian-Americans were accused of "selling out." This type of discrimination does not go unnoticed by the couple, as couples list transcending racial prejudice, especially in their own community, as one of their primary goals (Byrd & Garwick, 2006). In addition, minority members of the interracial couple might be most affected by discrimination, as the Black spouse in a Black-White interracial marriage is typically more aware of instances of discrimination (Killian, 2001).

It is important to examine whether discrimination is harmful to the interracial couple's relationship given that interracial couples report more problems in their marital relationships than same race couples (Herring, 1992; Steil et al., 2009), and a higher rate of interracial marriages end in divorce (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Troy et al., 2006). However, Leslie and Letiecq (2004) found interracial couples' ratings of marital satisfaction were not predicted by the amount of discrimination each member of the couple perceived or the strength of the couple's social support system. Rather, the primary factor influencing marital satisfaction was a strong sense of racial identity, defined in this particular study as knowledge about the history of one's race and positive views about one's race. Racial identity was an especially strong predictor for Black individuals in an interracial relationship. These findings suggest that positive personal factors might be able to compensate for the discrimination and possible lack of familial support facing interracial couples.

Aspects of the marital relationship itself may also influence marital satisfaction. Forry et al. (2007) found that members of Black-White interracial marriages who perceived the relationship to be more unfair in regards to household chores, childcare, decision-making, sexual relationships, and financial contributions were less satisfied with their marriages. These findings raise the possibility that the discrepancy in satisfaction between same-race and interracial marriages may be explained in part by differences in perceived fairness of the relationship. It will continue to be important to investigate the difference in marital satisfaction observed between same-race and interracial couples. As research moves forward, investigators must be careful to avoid attributing differences in marital satisfaction solely to racial differences.

Research has also revealed positive characteristics of interracial couples. Interracial couples see themselves as normal and as no more troubled than other couples (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). One study found that non-married interracial couples in college were more satisfied with their relationships than non-married same race couples (Troy et al., 2006); additionally, there were no differences in conflict among interracial and same-race couples in this study. Given the importance of these findings,

future research may examine whether they generalize outside of a college sample and look for potential explanations. Recently, instead of viewing interracial couples as deficient, a resilience perspective on interracial marriages suggests that interracial couples may have unique strengths (Chan & Washington, 1998). These strengths include, but are not limited to, more social connections, maturity generated from overcoming adversity, and distancing themselves from negative environments and hostility. The resilience perspective offers hope for interracial couples that their families will be successful, especially for those hoping to raise children in a healthy environment. It also emphasizes that discrimination may lead to interracial couples growing stronger by increasing commitment to each other and thereby forming a more stable bond.

Multiracial Children and Adolescents

Similar to interracial couples, early stereotypes about multiracial children characterized them as pathological (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris,1993). They were considered more likely to experience psychological problems and deviant behavior (Gibbs, 1988). For example, it has been suggested that multiracial children are more likely to experience isolation, shame, and depression (Bowles, 1993) and act out in family and school settings (Johnson, 1992). Advances in research on multiracial children are dispelling this common misconception; although multiracial children face special challenges, they are also likely to ultimately have a positive childhood (Cooney & Radina, 2000).

Early theory and research about multiracial children might have encouraged the perpetuation of the negative stereotype. Gibbs (1988) hypothesized that multiracial children, especially in adolescence, were likely to face a variety of difficulties that might hinder their psychological well-being. Among the potential difficulties considered most problematic were a divided sense of racial identity, social marginality, confusion about sexual identification, and pressure to be more like one parent than another. In order to cope with these challenges, it was thought that multiracial children would be highly prone to relying on unhealthy defense mechanisms such as conformity, repression, and over-involvement in activities (Gibbs, 1988).

Support for the notion of the "troubled" multiracial adolescent was found in early research in the context of psychotherapy. Research suggested that multiracial children referred for counseling had problems in achieving an integrated identity, as they were more likely to identify with their minority parent and experience confusion about their sexual identity (Herring, 1992). Other problems were also observed, as research suggested multiracial children were likely to have academic deficiencies and behave in deviant ways (Johnson, 1992). Herring (1992) hypothesized that these troubles were related to three main questions pertinent to the identity development of multiracial children struggled ("Who am I?"; "Where do I fit?"; and "Who should I have sex with?").

The view of the multiracial child as troubled was informed by the aforementioned studies conducted in clinical settings as well as studies comparing the psychological health of multiracial children to White children (Cooney & Radina, 2000). However, such studies may not be optimal for evaluating the psychological

health of multiracial children. It could reasonably be argued that children of any racial group who undergo counseling should be expected to present a variety of deficits in psychological health. A minority group might be more appropriate for comparison because multiracial children, like many minorities, face discrimination in their everyday lives.

Research carried out on multiracial children in non-clinical settings has been successful in identifying the stressors facing multiracial children. Discrimination is encountered at all stages in a multiracial child's development (McFadden, 2001). As a result, multiracial children face considerable challenges in their daily lives. Indeed, survey research conducted in a school setting has suggested that school-age multiracial children have more difficulties with peer acceptance and feel pressured to choose a single racial identity (Nishimura & Bol, 1997). However, in an informal interview setting, the typical multiracial child did not feel marginalized or alienated, and most were even comfortable talking about their race and racial issues (Kerwin et al., 1993). School counselors concurred that multiracial children did not seem specially disadvantaged; instead, their concerns were similar to most of their peers (Nishimura & Bol, 1997).

The most comprehensive study in a school setting assessing the functioning of multiracial children found some evidence that multiracial children do have more problems in certain areas (Cooney & Radina, 2000). Compared to single-race minorities, a higher percentage of multiracial children had seen school counselors for emotional or behavioral problems, were held back, and had been delinquent in school. Conversely, relative to single-race minorities, most multiracial children had good relationships with their teachers, decent grades, and did not use drugs. Similar findings were also observed in a different, non-clinical population of multiracial adolescents, as a study by Beal, Ausiello, and Perrin (2001) revealed that multiracial adolescents were more likely to use marijuana than other adolescents but no more likely to use tobacco or alcohol.

Racial Identity

The research reviewed thus far suggests that the pressure that multiracial children feel to form a racial identity is an emergent theme in research conducted in both clinical and non-clinical settings. As such, researchers have investigated the processes by which multiracial children come to understand their mixed racial heritage (Jacobs, 1992; Kerwin et al., 1993; Renn, 2008; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2009; Wardle, 1992).

Very early in life, children are able to classify people into groups according to the color of their skin and group themselves by the color they most closely resemble (Wardle, 1992). Naturally, multiracial children want to label themselves, yet they have a relatively difficult time doing so (Jacobs, 1992; Renn, 2008). In an attempt to find a universal label for multiracial children and to help eliminate ambiguity, research has shown that most multiracial children are comfortable with the label of "brown" between the ages of two and seven (Wardle, 1992). However, the pressure to label oneself in multiracial children increases throughout middle childhood and peaks in adolescence (Kerwin et al., 1993). Moreover, a simple color label such as "brown" is not sufficient

to deal with the complex nature of understanding one's place in society (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Therefore, throughout childhood and into adolescence, multiracial children struggle to form a coherent racial identity.

The formation of racial identity is thought to begin when children start to understand that one's color influences the groups to which they belong, which is thought to occur between the ages of 3 and 7 (Jacobs, 1992; Rockquemore et al., 2009). At this time, the child is still unaware that he or she will remain the same color and does not evaluate others on the basis of color. As children's understanding of color becomes more nuanced, they begin to realize that that one's color will remain the same and carries certain implications (Kerwin et al., 1993; Renn, 2008). For example, a child in this stage knows that Blacks face more discrimination than Whites. The formation of a mature racial identity is characterized by the knowledge that one's group is determined by their parents' social class and not color alone (Wardles, 1992). Individuals with a strong sense of racial identity are able to incorporate their racial heritage into their self-concepts (Shih & Sanchez, 2009).

The achievement of a stable and positive racial identity is associated with positive psychological health outcomes for children, adolescents, and adults, such as less anxiety and depression, higher positive affect and life-satisfaction, and better ability to cope with racism (Kerwin et al., 1993; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). As such, it may behoove parents of multiracial children to teach their children about their racial heritage at a very young age, keeping in mind the developmental level of the child.

Parent-Child Relations in Multiracial Families

Because most parents of multiracial children are not multiracial themselves, the feeling that they do not understand what their children are going through can become especially worrisome (McClurg, 2004). Underscoring the importance of quality parent-child relationships in multiracial families, it has been found that the quality of such relationships, especially between the mother and child, are predictive of psychosocial risk (Rosnati & Marta, 1997). Thus, a strong sense of understanding and communication between parents and children may be particularly important for multiracial families .

Communicating a racial identity to a multiracial child is a difficult task for a parent (Jackson, 2009). Research suggests that multiracial children are constantly experimenting with racial identity from as young as 2 and 3 years old (Wardle, 1992). From age 3 to 7, multiracial children bombard their parents with questions about racial identity; these questions may confuse parents because children present changing views about what constitutes their own racial identity (Wardle, 1992). As children move into adolescence, they may become increasingly confused about racial identification partly due to a lack exposure to other multiracial children (Wardle, 1992).

Generally, parents come to one of three conclusions with regards to how racial identity should be conveyed to children: teach the majority identity, teach the minority identity, or teach that identity does not matter (Kerwin et al., 1993). The tendency of parents is to classify their multiracial children as a minority or Black; however the label of "biracial" has become increasingly common (Brunsma, 1995; Rockquemore et al., 2009).

Many times, parents disagree about what to teach multiracial children about their heritage. Indeed, in an interview study of 10 pairs of Black-White married couples, most parents of multiracial children cited frequent arguments over this issue (Killian, 2001). Unfortunately, those same couples also reported that these arguments often led them to refrain from discussing important racial issues, such as social class and discrimination. With all of the turmoil between parents arising from how to convey a racial identity, children hear mixed messages, ranging from denial of racial issues to demeaning comments about different races (Gibbs, 1988).

It has been hypothesized that parents of multiracial children might be overprotective due to the many different ways in which discrimination can touch the life of a multiracial child, from peer insults to extended family objections (Herring, 1992; Johnson, 1992). In qualitative interviews, parents of multiracial children noted that a main concern is to prepare their children for the many challenges awaiting them in life (Kerwin et al., 1993). Results from a study comparing 22 multiracial adolescents to 22 White adolescents also supported the idea that parents of multiracial children might be especially protective, as multiracial adolescents rated their parents as higher in restrictive parenting (Cauce et al., 1992). This study also found many similarities between parenting styles of multiracial and White parents. Each group had similar levels of nurturance and conflict, family cohesion, and a strong emphasis on religion. These findings are especially important given that multiracial families have a dysfunctional stigma attached to them; they suggest that multiracial families are not pathological, but rather that they are normal and similar to other families.

In summary, the findings of an open-ended interview study are illustrative of multiracial family interactions (Byrd & Garwick, 2006). Parents described themselves as unprepared to parent a multiracial child, especially about the issue of conveying a multiracial identity. They also expressed a strong desire for guidebooks to be written on this subject.

What can Parents do?

Research is accumulating to identify the most important tasks of parenting a multiracial child, such as passing on a strong racial or ethnic identity to a multiracial child is vital (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Highlighting the importance of the task of conveying ethnic identity is the finding that, across many ethnicities, strong ethnic identity serves as a protective factor against feelings of anxiety and inferiority and promotes a healthy sense of self-esteem (Kerwin et al., 1993; Smith & Sylva, 2011).

Different methods have been suggested for how parents can convey an ethnic identity most clearly. Miller and Miller (1990) proposed that parents of a multiracial child should parent like the multiracial child is Black based on the rationale that people outside of the family will perceive the child as Black. However, doing this would deny the child knowledge and understanding of at least one parent's background and experiences and would ignore the fact that not all multiracial children have phenotypical features that would be generally categorized as Black. This could potentially have the deleterious consequence of leading the child to identify more with one parent and against another or cause guilt over neglecting one side of their heritage. A more general approach that

may circumvent this problem is to try to maintain open lines of communication and a non-defensive attitude (Bradshaw, 1992). Complicating matters of communication is the common lack of physical resemblance between multiracial children and their parents (Wardle, 1992), making it harder for children to identify with their parents (McClurg, 2004).

Ideas for how to prepare multiracial children for discrimination range from very broad measures, such as finding a multicultural community in which to live (Kerwin et al., 1993), to more specific techniques, such as teaching children to be aware that racism might increase upon the transition from elementary to middle school (Rosenblatt, 1999). Parents with lower socioeconomic status may face financial and time constraints, possibly making it more difficult for them to enact these strategies (Korgen, 2006). However, it has been shown that children from lower economic conditions can overcome these pecuniary hardships if parents are dedicated to giving the child love, support, and techniques to deal with adversity (Bradshaw, 1992; Smith & Sylva, 2011).

Parents of a multiracial child might need to be particularly vigilant during the adolescent years. During this time, the search for an identity is most intense, awareness of racism is increasing (Jackson, 2010), and the challenge of establishing a sexual identity is beginning (McClurg, 2004). In adolescence, parents are encouraged to pay a great deal of attention to the task of fostering autonomy and a sense of pride, two internal factors that could be important in dealing with external pressures and criticisms (Kerwin et al., 1993). These characteristics may be better instilled in children by conveying warmth and sensitivity as well as actively engaging with the child's learning activities (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002). Sometimes the pressures facing a multiracial adolescent become overwhelming for the multiracial family; in these cases, counseling may be a beneficial option.

Counseling for the Multiracial Family

Multiracial families have the option of seeking outside help when problems become too hard for the family alone to handle. Being aware of various aspects of the typical multiracial family can help counselors to improve their clients' chances for positive therapeutic outcomes.

When it comes to multiracial children, it is important for counselors to realize that ethnic identity might be at the root of problems, but by no means is this necessarily the case (Gibbs, 1988). When ethnic identity is a problem, the multiracial child is likely to feel excluded from each of his/her parents' racial groups (AhnAllen, Suyemoto, & Carter, 2006). In these cases, counselors may encourage discussion about feelings pertaining to multiracial status, and they could try to involve both parents in the counseling process as much as possible, as these methods are suggested to foster a child's sense of self-esteem (Herring, 1992).

Mixed feelings related to clashing religions and customs may also contribute to difficulties in forging a strong racial identity (Kenney & Lee, 2006). In these instances, specific tools can help, including creating family trees focusing on "mixing," encouraging discussion about individual differences and variety, teaching the strengths of multiculturalism, and talking about the ways in which people are all the same may be useful for reconciling conflicting

feelings about one's different racial backgrounds (Kenney & Lee, 2006). To encourage a safe environment for talking about these sensitive issues, research suggests that it can be helpful for counselors to maintain a positive attitude, refrain from negative language, and avoid labeling according to stereotypes (Wardle, 1992).

Developing a strong alliance with family members is predictive of positive outcomes in counseling; however, in the case of multiracial families, this might be difficult (Solsberry, 1994). Interviews with interracial couples revealed that they were skeptical about the racial attitudes of a counselor because it was thought that in disputes the counselor might side with the parent of the same race as the counselor (Killian, 2001). As a result, counselors may benefit from examining their own attitudes toward different races in order to unearth biases that could harm the therapeutic relationship. Counselors may also need to curtail the tendency to assume the multiracial family's problems are due to race, while also remaining open to this possibility (Killian, 2001). When race is a problem, counselors can take measures such as assessing parental attitudes toward their own race and the other parent's race, and encouraging parents to talk about their respective racial histories as it pertains to family functioning, especially with respect to the parent-child relationship (Gibbs, 1988). An encouraging finding is that counselors believe they are meeting the needs of multiracial children and their parents (Nishimura & Bol, 1997). Nonetheless, improvements to therapeutic techniques and quantitative assessment of therapeutic techniques may be appropriate areas of focus for future research.

The Future of Multiracial Families and Opportunities for Further Research

Interracial marriages are expected to make up 21% of all marriages in the United States by the year 2050; thus, the number of multiracial children will continue to increase at a very rapid rate (McFadden, 2001). Unfortunately, acceptance of multiracial families is not keeping pace, which could lead to increased racial conflicts in the near future (Kenney & Lee, 2006).

Research findings suggest that multiracial families, in contrast to their stereotype, are not pathological. Rather, they are normal families that face some specific challenges. A challenge for future research is to expand this understanding across a variety of different areas.

Research on multiracial families could benefit from going beyond interviews, to more representative samples, and to more varied environmental contexts. A large part of the research on multiracial families is done using qualitative interview methods (Kerwin et al., 1993; Killian, 2001). Although this is a good place to start collecting information, this information might be subject to a social desirability bias. More objective studies are needed in the future to test whether the concerns reported in interviews manifest themselves in daily life. In addition, interview studies that have been conducted were mostly with Black-White couples. A more representative sample of interracial couples is needed in the future. It may be particularly important to extend research to investigating multiracial families based on adoption, as such families could function differently and face challenges that are different from those

faced by multiracial families based on interracial couples. Samuels (2009; 2010) has recently reported qualitative interview data that has the potential to lay the groundwork for research describing the experience of multiracial families based on adoption. Research in schools focusing on multiracial children has been conducted mostly in high status schools (Beal et al., 2001). Because many multiracial children live in poor areas, research in these schools is needed to assess the more typical experience of a multiracial school-age child (Beal et al., 2001). Research could also begin determining the effects of racism in different contexts for more varied groups of multiracial families. The effects and experience of racism might be different in a location where the prevalence of the particular mixed race couple is rare (e.g., a White-Black couple in Missisippi; Frey, 2003) versus a location where the mixed race couple is more common (e.g., a Hispanic-White couple in New Mexico; Rosenblatt, 1999); thus, these differences need to be examined.

More research is needed in the areas of multiracial identity, family functioning, and parenting style in multiracial families. Because a strong multiracial identity is one of the strongest predictors of healthy functioning for multiracial children, it is important to determine more specifically how a healthy multiracial identity develops (Renn, 2008). The ongoing functioning of multiracial families and interracial couples has received little attention, as most research has been done using public record archives. Troy and colleagues (2006) took a step in the direction of assessing ongoing functioning by examining the relationship dynamics of unmarried interracial couples in a college setting. Extending this research to married couples in the future could benefit overall understanding of family dynamics. Research on parenting styles of multiracial couples (Miller & Miller, 1990) is only just beginning to get underway; the only study to investigate this topic (O'Donoghue, 2006) found that White mothers of Black/White interracial adolescents emphasized African-American culture to the exclusion of focusing on an ethnicity germane to the mother. Studies aimed at determining the different parenting styles of interracial couples are needed in the future to determine whether the authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive style of parenting is preferred for interracial couples. Also, research could examine whether there are differences in parenting styles between couples consisting of different races, and according to the gender of each spouse. For example, it may be that "White mother-Black father" parents have a different preferred parenting style than "Hispanic mother-Japanese father" parents.

Finally, the resilience perspective (Chan & Washington, 1998) offers a fresh direction for conducting future research and also an optimistic outlook for multiracial families. As mentioned earlier, the resilience perspective hypothesizes that multiracial couples will be especially stable and close-knit because they must come together in the face of heightened adversity. This perspective is largely untested and therefore presents avenues for further research. Given the discrimination faced by same-sex couples (Lauster & Easterbrook, 2011), it may be particularly important to extend research focusing on the resilience perspective to interracial same-sex couples and their children.

Conclusion

In brief, the number of multiracial families is increasing at a rapid rate. As such, researchers and counselors alike need to be responsive to the needs of multiracial children, as well as the needs of their parents. The stereotypes that surround these children and their parents and the prejudice from many different sources against these populations make this task difficult. However, with a commitment on the family's part to a healthy parent-child relationship, and with assistance of dedicated counseling when needed, multiracial families can become better equipped to deal with adversity, foster healthy racial identity development, and live healthier lives.

References

AhnAllen, J. M., Suyemoto, K. L., & Carter, A. S. (2006). Relationship between physical appearance, sense of belonging and exclusion, and racial/ethnic self-identification among multiracial Japanese European Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology,* 12(4), 673-686. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.12.4.673

Beal, A. C., Ausiello, J., & Perrin, J. M. (2001). Social influences on health risk behaviors among minority middle school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health,* 28, 474-480. doi:10.1016/S1054-139X(01)00194-X

Bowles, D. D. (1993). Bi-racial identity: Children born to African-American and White couples. *Clinical Social Work Journal,* 21(4), 417-428.

Bradshaw, C. K. (1992). Beauty and the beast: On racial ambiguity. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America (pp. 77-90).* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Brayboy, T. L. (1966). Interracial sexuality as an expression of neurotic conflict. *Journal of Sex Research, 2(3),* 179-184.

Brunsma, D. L. (2005). Interracial families and the racial identification of mixed-race children: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. *Social Forces, 84,* 1131-1157.

Byrd, M. M., & Garwick, A. W. (2006). Family identity: Black-White interracial family health experience. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 12, 22-37.

Cauce, A. M., Hiraga, Y., Mason, C., Aguilar, T, Ordonez, N., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Between a rock and a hard place: Social adjustment of biracial youth. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America (pp. 207-222).* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Chan, A. Y., & Washington, E. (1998). Factors promoting marital resilience among interracial couples. In H. I. McCubbin, E. A. Thompson, A. I. Thompson, & J. E. Fromer (Eds.), *Resiliency in Native American and immigrant families (pp. 71-92).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cooney, T. M., & Radina, M. E. (2000). Adjustment problems in adolescence: Are biracial kids at risk? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 70, 433-444.

Flores, G., & Tomany-Korman, S. C. (2008). Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Medical and Dental Health, Access to Care, and Use of Services in US Children. *Pediatrics,* 121(2), e286-e298. doi: 10.1542/peds.2007-1243

Foeman, A. K., & Nance, T. (1999). From miscegenation to multiculturalism: Perceptions and stages of interracial relationship development. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(4), 540-557.

Forry, N. D., Leslie, L. A., & Letiecq, B. L. (2007). Marital quality in interracial relationships: The role of sex role ideology and perceived fairness. *Journal of Family Issues,* 28(12), 1538-1552. doi: 10.1177/0192513X07304466

Frey, W.H. 2003. Rainbow nation: Mixed-race marriages among states. Santa Monica, CA: Milkin Institute Review.

Gibbs, J. T. (1998). Biracial adolescents. In J. T. Gibbs, L. N. Huang, & Associates (Eds.), *Children of color: Psychological interventions with culturally diverse youth (pp. 305-332)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Grolnick, W. S., & Gurland, S. T. (2002). Mothering: Retrospect and prospect. In J. P. McHale & W. S. Grolnick (Eds.), *Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of families* (pp. 5–33). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Herring, R. D. (1992). Biracial children: An increasing concern for elementary and middle school counselors. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling,* 27, 123-130.

Hughes, L. (1926). *The weary blues*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

Hullum, E. (1982, July). Black and White and wed all over. *Missions* USA, 67-69.

Jackson, K. F. (2009). Beyond race: Examining the facets of multiracial identity through a life-span developmental lens. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work: Innovation in Theory, Research & Practice*, 18(4), 293-310.

Jackson, K. F. (2010). Living the multiracial experience: Shifting racial expressions, resisting race, and seeking community. Qualitative Social Work. Advance online publication, doi: 10.1177/1473325010375646

Jacobs, J. H. (1992). Identity development in biracial children. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 190-206). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Johnson, D. J. (1992). Developmental pathways: Toward an ecological theoretical formulation of race identity in Black-White biracial children. In M. P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 37-49). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kennedy, R. (2003). Racial conflict and the parenting of children: A survey of competing approaches. *In Interracial intimacies: Sex, marriage, intimacy, and adoption* (pp. 367- 401). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Kenney, K. R., & Lee, C. C. (2006). Counseling Multiracial Individuals and Families Multicultural issues in counseling: *New approaches to diversity (3rd. ed.)*. (pp. 251-266). Alexandria, VA US: American Counseling Association.

Kerwin, C., Ponterotto, J. G., Jackson, B. L., & Harris, A. (1993). Racial identity in biracial children: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* 40, 221-231. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.40.2.221

Killian, K. D. (2001). Reconstituting racial histories and identities: The narratives of interracial couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy,* 27, 27-42.

Korgen, K. O. (2010). *Multiracial Americans and social class: The influence of social class on racial identity.* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Lauster, N., & Easterbrook, A. (2011). No room for new families? A field experiment measuring rental discrimination against same-sex couples and single parents. *Social Problems,* 58(3), 389-409. doi: 10.1525/sp.2011.58.3.389

Lehrman, S. R. (1967). Psychopathology in mixed marriages. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly,* 36, 67-82.

Leslie, L. A., & Letiecq, B. L. (2004). Marital quality of African American and White partners in interracial couples. *Personal Relationships,* 11, 559-574. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00098.x

Lewandowski, D. A., & Jackson, L. A. (2001). Perceptions of interracial couples: Prejudice at the dyadic level. *Journal of Black Psychology,* 27, 288-303. doi: 10.1177/0095798401027003003

Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

McClurg, L. (2004). Biracial youth and their parents: Counseling considerations for family therapists. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families,* 12, 170-173. doi: 10.1177/1066480703261977

McFadden, J. (2001). Intercultural marriage and family: Beyond the racial divide. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 9, 39-42. doi: 10.1177/1066480701091008

Miller, R. L., & Miller, B. (1990). Mothering the biracial child: Bridging the gaps between African-American and White parenting styles. *Women & Therapy*, 10, 169-179.

Nishimura, N. J., & Bol, L. (1997). School counselors' perceptions of the counseling needs of biracial children in an urban educational setting. *Research in the Schools,* 4, 17-23.

O' Donoghue, M. (2006). White Mothers Negotiating Race and Ethnicity in the Mothering of Biracial, Black-White Adolescents. *Journal of Ethnic And Cultural Diversity in Social Work,* 14(3), 125-156.

Renn, K. A. (2008). Research on biracial and multiracial identity development: Overview and synthesis. *New Directions for Student Services,* 2008(123), 13-21. doi: 10.1002/ss.282

Rockquemore, K. A., Brunsma, D. L., & Delgado, D. J. (2009). Racing to theory or retheorizing race? Understanding the struggle to build a multiracial identity theory. *Journal of Social Issues,* 65(1), 13-34. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01585.x

Rosenblatt, P. C. (1999). Biracial families. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *Parenting and child development in "nontraditional" families* (pp. 263-278). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum

Rosnati, R., & Marta, E. (1997). Parent–child relationships as a protective factor in preventing adolescents' psychosocial risk in inter-racial adoptive and non-adoptive families. *Journal of Adolescence*, 20, 617-631. doi:10.1006/jado.1997.0115

Samuels, G. M. (2009). "Being raised by White people": Navigating racial difference among adopted multiracial adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 71(1), 80-94. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00581.x

Samuels, G. M. (2010). Building kinship and community: Relational processes of bicultural identity among adult multiracial adoptees. *Family Process,* 49(1), 26-42. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01306.x

Shih, M., & Sanchez, D. T. (2009). When race becomes even more complex: Toward understanding the landscape of multiracial identity and experiences. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(1), 1-11. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01584.x

Smith, T. B., & Silva, L. (2011). Ethnic identity and personal well-being of people of color: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(1), 42-60. doi:10.1037/a0021528

Soliz, J., Thorson, A. R., & Rittenour, C. E. (2009). Communicative correlates of satisfaction, family identity, and group salience in multiracial/ethnic families. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 71(4), 819-832. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00637.x

Solsberry, P. W. (1994). Interracial couples in the United States of America: Implications for mental health counseling. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 16, 304-307.

Spaights, E., & Dixon, H. E. (1984). Socio-psychological dynamics in pathological Black–White romantic alliances. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 11(3), 132-138.

Steil, J. M., Rothman, A. M., Harris, L. E., Kim, G. S., Steil, J. P., & Chin, J. L. (2009). Interracial marriage: Current perspectives and unanswered challenges *Diversity in mind and in action, Vol 1: Multiple faces of identity*. (pp. 47-60). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.

Troy, A. B., Lewis-Smith, J., & Laurenceau, J. (2006). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships: The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,* 23, 65-80. doi: 10.1177/0265407506060178

Wardle, F. (1992). Supporting biracial children in the school setting. *Education & Treatment of Children,* 15, 163-172.

Wardle, F. (2007). Multiracial children in child development textbooks. Early *Childhood Education Journal,* 35(3), 253-259. doi: 10.1007/s10643-007-0157-8

Yancy, G. (2007). Experiencing racism: Differences in the experiences of Whites married to Blacks and non-Black racial minorities. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* 38(2), 197-213.