

1-1-2008

The making of a middlerace: The social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black White biracial identity

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THE MAKING OF A MIDDLECLASS: THE SOCIAL POLITICS
SURROUNDING BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES
AND BLACK-WHITE BIRACIAL IDENTITY

MANNA

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The Making of a Middlerace: The Social Politics Surrounding

Black-White Interracial Marriages and Black White Biracial Identity

(TITLE)

BY

Yoftahe K. Manna

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Arts in Communication Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2008

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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The Making of a Middlerace: The Social Politics Surrounding Black-White
Interracial Marriages and Black-White Biracial Identity

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Abstract

In an attempt to uncover the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity, this thesis investigates outsiders' and insiders' perspectives on the issues. Black and White participants of the study reported positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriage, while they reported negative attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. No statistically significant differences were found between Blacks and Whites in attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity. No statistically significant differences were found between men and women, either. The insiders' reports, however, contradicted these findings. Both Black-White interracial couple and Black-White biracial adult participants of this study reported that society's (Blacks' and Whites') attitudes toward them were negative. Findings are discussed and ideas for future studies forwarded.

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Running Head: MAKING A MIDDLELACE

The Making of a Middlerace: The Social Politics Surrounding Black-White

Interracial Marriages and Black-White Biracial Identity

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FOREWORD

Race, having no biological basis and no reality outside the consensus on “popular perception,” has implications that affect everyone—positively or negatively. It may serve as a border between groups and affect or even determine those groups’ burdens and opportunities. The fact that racial distinctions are “ideological and slippery” does not make our recognition of them less true (DaCosta, 2007). The U.S. society still has racial borders, which make most citizens live, work, and socialize with others of the same race (Childs, 2005). Many individuals who “belong to minority racial groups” have complained of negative stereotypes, discrimination and ensuing difficulties because of their “racial identity.”

Race, therefore, though socially constructed, has been at the center of social politics. In some systems, members of the same immediate family may be designated as belonging to different races depending on their socioeconomic status (Hirschfeld, 1995). This illustrates that race has no biological or any objective reality; but it has a paradoxical social reality. Society decides how, and how many, races are formed. The emergence of “multiracials” as a social category in the U.S. shows how society makes racial groups (DaCosta, 2007). The racial boundaries society creates in turn govern society. Being White is associated with a certain set of majority assumptions, pressures, and rights; whereas being Black is associated with other benefits and burdens (Foeman & Nance, 2002). “Each category has implications regarding each individual’s ‘place’” (p. 241). It determines a group’s “natural role and profile,” and members’ personal as well as professional options.

Interracial marriage is a major shakeup and challenge to the historically and socially segregated U.S. society’s norms. Those who intermarry—both individually

and as a couple—and their children tend to be exposed to unique experiences. The social politics surrounding interracial marriages and their product—biracial offspring—intensifies when those intermarried are Black and White. Disapproval of Black-White intermarriages not only affects those who marry interracially but also their children, families, communities and society as a whole. How much society benefits from them depends on how much they are understood. They, thus, need to be investigated closely.

The “unique position,” as well as its implications to the insiders and outsiders alike, is either misunderstood or poorly understood in the American society. Therefore, investigating society’s attitudes towards the intermarried and their children as well as the experiences of interracial couples and biracial individuals can contribute to a better understanding of the rapidly increasing interracial marriages and biracial population in the U.S. It can also minimize the stigma interracial families face. This study is intended to contribute toward that end.

Intercultural and/or interracial marriages are more complicated “because both partners come to the relationship equipped with a different set of rules, different values, habits, and viewpoints, different ways of relating to one another, and different ways of resolving their differences” (Cools, 2006, p. 263). This novelty, however, is not the only challenge intermarried couples have to face. They may also have to face pressures from one or both of their social groups and from their immediate as well as extended families. Research in this area, thus, helps to understand the essence and the strength of “societal forces acting on partners who challenge endogamy rules.” (Roer-Strier & Ezra, 2006, p. 41).

Black-White interracial couples exist on the color-line in society—in the “borderland” between Blacks and Whites (Childs, 2005). Their experiences and their

interaction with community enable us to understand contemporary race relations. This study investigates the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity in the U.S. It also provides information with which to increase understanding among the interracially married, their children, and society.

Communication is “*a transactional process in which individuals create, share, and regulate meaning* (emphasis in original)” (Segrin & Flora, 2005, p. 15).

Communication thus contributes in creating and shaping social reality. This makes the symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives—arguing primarily that reality is subjective—helpful in investigating the social politics surrounding both interracial marriages and biracial identity. The challenges faced by interracial couples and their children, and the social politics surrounding such couples and individuals is a result of symbolic interaction and the ensuing social construction of reality and can be understood from such a view point. I base my study on these perspectives and theories.

The study has five chapters and three major components. The first chapter presents a comprehensive review of extant literature on (Black-White) interracial marriages and (Black-White) biracial identity. The second chapter, the quantitative component of the study, focuses on society’s (Blacks’ and Whites’) attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity. It is based on survey data collected using a questionnaire on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity.

The third and fourth chapters investigate the inside perspective on Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity. The third chapter focuses on the experiences and feelings of Black-White married interracial couples. It is based on in-depth interviews with Black-White

interracial couples. The fourth chapter focuses on the experiences of Black-White biracial individuals and is based on in-depth interviews with Black-White biracial adults. The fifth and final chapter provides a general analysis and discussion of the preceding three chapters.

Even though communication certainly affects both the intermarried couples along with their children, and the cultures and society surrounding them, the peculiarities of the ways in which it affects each interracial family, and each culture and society cannot be predicted beforehand. Thus, the study uses the grounded theory approach in interpreting, analyzing and explaining the experiences of the interracial couples and biracial individuals. Grounded theory serves the purpose of this study since it emphasizes the link between data and the categories into which the data are coded, and since it argues that possible ways of explaining the issue under study keep being shaped until the end of the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218).

Even though the study discusses the three components—chapters 2-through-4 of the study—separately, it also provides a comprehensive analysis of those three components—the fifth chapter. Linking the findings of each component by way of a general discussion and/or conclusion, the fifth chapter tries to present a whole picture of the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity.

Each chapter addresses its own questions. The study, however, addresses the following major questions:

1. What are society's (Blacks' and Whites') attitudes towards Black-White interracial marriages?

2. What are society's (Blacks' and Whites') attitudes towards Black-White biracial identity?
3. How do Black-White interracial couples describe their interaction with society (Blacks and Whites)?
4. How do Black-White biracial individuals describe their interaction with society (Blacks and Whites)?

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Race, even though it does not have any biological basis and even though it does not have any reality outside the consensus on “popular perception,” has implications that affect everyone—positively or negatively. The valence is likely to depend on the particular context. Race can serve as a border between social groups and affect or even determine those groups’ burdens and opportunities. The fact that racial distinctions are “ideological and slippery” does not make our recognition of them less true (DaCosta, 2007). The U.S. society still has racial borders, which make most citizens live, work, and socialize with others of the same race (Childs, 2005). Many individuals who belong to minority racial groups have complained of negative stereotypes, discrimination and ensuing difficulties because of their racial identity.

Race has long been at the center of social politics. In some race systems, states Hirschfeld (1995), members of the same immediate family may be designated as belonging to different races depending on their socioeconomic status. This illustrates that race has no biological or any objective reality; but it has a paradoxical social reality. Society decides how, and how many, races are formed. The emergence of “multiracials” as a social category in the U.S. shows how society crafts racial groups (DaCosta, 2007).

The racial boundaries society creates in turn govern society. Foeman and Nance (2002) argue that being White is associated with a certain set of majority assumptions, pressures, and rights; whereas being Black is associated with other

benefits and burdens. "Each category has implications regarding each individual's 'place'" (p. 241). They also contend that racial "place" determines how each racial group is treated in society. It determines a group's "natural role and profile," and members' personal as well as professional options.

Interracial marriage is a major shakeup and challenge to the historically and socially segregated U.S. society's norms. It thus exposes those who intermarry to a unique experience both as individuals and as a couple. It entails a feeling of "being different" for those who are married interracially as well as the surrounding people, communities and society. Intermarriages challenge the status quo. The American society has had a history of resistance to interracial marriages.

The social politics surrounding interracial marriages and their product—biracial offspring—intensify when those intermarried are Black and White. Black and White interracial marriages tend to be the most controversial of interracial or intergroup marriages. Their disapproval not only affects those who marry interracially but also their children, families, communities and society as a whole. Even though such marriages may have implications to all these parties, their implications don't necessarily have to be negative. How much society benefits from them depends on how much they are understood. Thus, they need to be investigated closely.

Because the unique position as well as its implications to the insiders and outsiders alike are either misunderstood or poorly understood in the American society, investigating society's attitudes towards the intermarried and their children as well as the experiences of interracial couples and biracial individuals can contribute to a better understanding of the rapidly increasing interracial marriages and biracial population in the U.S. A better understanding, in turn, can help to minimize the

stigma interracial couples and biracial children face because of their marriage choices and racial backgrounds. This study is intended to contribute toward that end.

Intercultural and/or interracial marriages are more complicated “because both partners come to the relationship equipped with a different set of rules, different values, habits, and viewpoints, different ways of relating to one another, and different ways of resolving their differences” (Cools, 2006, p. 263). Even though any marriage is a serious game, intercultural marriage is more complicated since the partners come equipped with different rules—different values, habits and viewpoints, ways of relating to others, and strategies for negotiating differences (Romano, 1997). Black-White interracial marriages may not be much different other intergroup marriages since the two racial groups tend to have somewhat varying perspectives on life. This novelty, however, is not the only challenge intermarried couples have to face. They may also have to face pressures from one or both of the social groups they come from and from their immediate as well as extended families. Research in this area helps to understand the essence and the strength of “societal forces acting on partners who challenge endogamy rules.” (Roer-Strier & Ezra, 2006, p. 41). Many researchers have undertaken study in the area of cross-racial or cross-cultural marriages and they emphasize the challenges such marriages posit and the “problems” they cause to families and society. Some researchers even link intermarriage with high rates of divorce and family conflicts (Roer-Strier & Ezra).

Black-White interracial couples exist on the color-line in society—in the “borderland” between Blacks and Whites (Childs, 2005). Therefore, their experiences and their interaction with community enable us to understand contemporary race relations. This paper investigates the social dynamics surrounding Black-White

interracial marriages as well as children born to such unions in the U.S. It is also fosters understanding among the interracially married, their children, and society.

Black-White Interracial Marriages

Interracial marriages are rarely if ever welcomed by the U.S. society. Unions between Blacks and Whites, however, have received the greatest opposition on both social and institutional levels (La Taillade, 1999). This may have resulted from efforts to preserve the privileges and power presumed by White racial status and to preserve cultural integrity. Black-White couples often attract racialized responses from both Blacks and Whites (Childs, 2005).

As racism is prevalent in all levels of American society, and is ingrained in the experience of all persons of African descent in this country, argues La Taillade (1999), Black-White interracial couples experience unique difficulties that same-race couples don't. Such intermarriages also challenge racist thinking and stratification.

Opposition to Black-White interracial marriages is not limited to strangers, though. Families have an interesting role in the opposition to Black-White relationships (Childs, 2005), for Black and White families generally want to remain monoracial. Black-White intermarriages have, however, had a long history.

Black-White Intermarriages: Historical Backgrounds

Relationships are inevitable as long as there is contact. Historically, Black-White romantic relationships have existed since colonial times although they have been perceived as cultural taboo (Porterfield, 1978). People of mixed descent have been part of the American society since its inception (DaCosta, 2007). Black-White marriages have also had a long history in the United States. Marriages between Blacks and Whites existed in the U.S. soon after Africans were first brought to this continent in the 17th century (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Such marriages were short lived, though.

Black-White intermarriages were soon outlawed—with the first anti-miscegenation law passed in 1664 to curtail sexual relationships between White women and enslaved Black men. State as well as social sanctions placed on interracial marriages and dating made them not only illegal but also morally wrong (Dunleavy, 2004).

Subsequent legislation—the “one-drop rule”—was passed to decide the racial designation as well as freedom status of the children born to Black and White parents. This legislation indicated that any child with “as little as a drop of African blood” was African [Black] (La Taillade, 1999). The sexual practice of White women was thus regulated (Almonte & Desmond, 1992) to preserve this socially constructed racial designation and categorization. Anti-miscegenation laws have thus played an integral role in defining racial identity and enforcing the ensuing racial hierarchy (Almonte & Desmond, 1992; Moran, 2001). Ironically, liaisons between Black women and White men were supported as long as they did not lead to intermarriage and, potentially, inheritance of property and resources (Hooks, 1981).

Various techniques were implemented to supplement the anti-miscegenation laws and to segregate the two racial groups—Blacks and Whites. Following the Emancipation Act and the subsequent unregulated social contact between Blacks and Whites, other means, “such as lynching, castration, and ostracization were utilized to instill fear in those interested in pursuing an interrelationship, particularly among the southern states” (La Taillade, 1999, p. 3).

Moreover, images of Black men and women, and White women were constructed to supplement legal sanctions with socially enforced segregation. White women were presented as having the “cult of true womanhood,” encompassing virtue, modesty, sexual purity, innocence, and submissiveness (Hooks, 1981). Black men were presented as perpetrators of sexual assault (specifically against White women),

whereas Black women were portrayed as sexually loose, animalistic and “unfeminine,” due to their supposed uncontrollable sexual nature and forced participation in labor. “Scientific” research supporting these constructs and lending “biologically”-based proof for the persecution and enslavement of persons of African descent was also conducted (Almonte & Desmond, 1992; La Taillade, 1999). This enforced the control of resources by Whites and the ideology of White supremacy (Hooks).

Even though the social and legal restrictions served to deter Black-White intermarriage, Americans’ attitudes towards Black-White intermarriage have changed significantly over the past four decades following the rejection of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967. Results from Gallup Poll surveys of Black and White Americans conducted after the rejection of the anti-miscegenation laws reflect this change in attitudes towards Black-White interracial marriages (Almonte & Desmond, 1992; Root, 1996). Both African Americans and European Americans have shown increased approval of Black-White interracial marriages with more Americans (48%) approving, while fewer (42%) disapproved, of such intermarriages for the first time in 1991 (Root, 1996). African Americans have long had considerably more favorable attitude toward Black-White intermarriages. The significant shift in attitudes towards Black-White intermarriages in 1972, from 1968—when 72% disapproved, was in large part due to a favorable shift in Whites’ attitudes (Root). Nonetheless, Black-White intermarriages are far from being completely understood and accepted.

The rates of interracial marriages in the U.S. even imply that Black-White intermarriages might be the least tolerated ones. African Americans [Blacks] have had the lowest rates of interracial marriage compared to all other ethnic groups in the U.S. (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995a). Yet, the number of interracial marriages for

Blacks has risen dramatically since 1970 (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). This has resulted in a 500% increase in Black-White (African-American/European-American) biracial births (Root, 1996). Blacks also differ from other racial groups in that, unlike all the other racial groups, fewer Black women than Black men intermarry (La Taillade, 1999). At any rate, La Taillade argues that Black women are intermarrying at increasing rates. Overall interracial marriages are increasing in number, as well.

Interracial Marriages on the Rise

The power and impact racial and cultural values have on an individual indicates how strong group influences—such as racial and cultural influences—can be on an individual. It also implies how novel breaking a group's (racial or cultural) norms is. Interracial marriage is one of the major ways by which a racial group's members can drift from the norms of their respective racial and/or cultural groups. And, it seems like more people are daring to do so.

Despite all the challenges to intergroup marriage and a history of strong resistance to Black-White interracial marriages, such marriages have been increasing in number. Intergroup marriages have occurred throughout history, but they used to be limited to the nobility and the highest social classes (Piper, 1997). Following the abolishment of the anti-miscegenation laws—laws prohibiting racial mixing—in 1967, interracial marriages have increased in number in the United States (Childs, 2005; DaCosta, 2007; Foeman & Nance, 1999; Garcia, 2006; Jean, 1998; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Kennedy, 2003; Lee, 1988; McFadden, 2001; Piper, 1997; Root, 2001; Roy & Hamilton, 1997; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Nationally, 5.7% of the 54.5 million married couples—7.4% when Hispanic/Latino origin is included—are of different racial backgrounds (Simmons & O'Connell, 2003). This trend is expected to continue

(DaCosta, 2007) with the decline of the social stigma toward interracial unions (Brown, 1995) and high levels of contact among races (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000).

There is an increase not only in number of interracial marriages but also in their social acceptability. However, Black-White interracial marriages occur more infrequently (DaCosta, 2007; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). The 2001 population report on America's family and living arrangements indicates that interracial marriage rates among Asians and Pacific Islanders (680,000) is nearly double that of Blacks (363,000; Fields & Casper, 2001, as cited in Dunleavy, 2004). According to a more recent research, intermarriage between Blacks and Whites, though it still remains a tiny portion of all interracial marriages, has been increasing rapidly (Roth, 2005).

The increase in intermarriages has challenged the American society not only in that it crosses the lines society has drawn between and among racial groups but also because it leads to the increase in number of individuals who "do not fit" anywhere in society's exclusive racial categorization. It is the path to the making of a *middlerace* and thus challenges society's conceptions of race and racial categories. The population of multiracial children in the US has increased from 500,000 in 1970 to more than 6.8 million in 2000 (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001; see also DaCosta, 2007; McFadden, 2001). This increase in the number of individuals with multiple racial backgrounds has raised the question of understanding where these individuals fit in society's preexisting racial categories (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). An attempt to maintain status quo, resistance to interracial marriages is very rife. So, what motivates people to intermarry against all odds?

Intermarriage Motivations

Foeman and Nance (2002) argue that for an interracial couple, attraction is both an interpersonal and cultural experience. They state that as the couple works

through their interpersonal attraction, they must simultaneously address social frames for their attraction and determine how to “come out of the closet” to their significant others.

There have been varying explanations given for people’s motivations to marry interracially or interculturally. Early psychological writings were psychoanalytic in nature and thus attached individual motives for intermarriage to existing pathology (La Taillade, 1999). Buttny (1987) states that individuals intermarry because of feelings of personal rejection from their own groups. They find comfort through identifying and relating with similarly marginalized members of other groups (Fujino, 1992, as cited in La Taillade). Other “deviant” motives including rebellion against parental authority, “neurotic” self-hatred or racial self-hatred, and a desire to marry for control or revenge as a way of expressing hostility have also been proposed (La Taillade). Yet, marginality has been conceived of as both an explanation for and a consequence of intermarriage (Buttny).

Little attention has been given to positive motives—such as love—as a reason for intermarriage (La Taillade, 1999). Yet, even though the negative motives may move some to intermarry, those motives are no different, or frequent, from the reasons that may motivate some to marry even within their own group. The pathological motivations for marriage may thus be equally potential reasons for marriage of within as well as out group marriages.

The majority of literature on patterns of intermarriage has been guided by larger theoretical constructs, such as status exchange theories (La Taillade, 1999) and the heterogeneity propositions (Blau, 1977; Blau, et. al., 1982; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995a). Status exchange theories have been used intensively to explain White women and Black men unions. These theories hold that White women in White

women-Black men unions trade their “high caste racial” status for the social and economic benefits of marriage with higher socioeconomic class, though lower racial status, Black men (La Taillade). The Black men, on the other hand, would trade their socioeconomic advantages for a higher racial status of a White wife. A similar explanation was not given to Black women-White men unions presuming such intermarriages were implausible (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan). The explanation proposed in the status exchange theories has not been successful empirically mainly since it failed to account for marriages between Black women and White men which were more frequent than marriages between Black men and White women in the south prior to 1960 (La Taillade). Most of the studies on exchange theories focus on the exchange of racial status for another attribute—physical attractiveness or socioeconomic status, for instance—ignoring other potential “resources” that can be exchanged.

Blau (1977) proposed a sociological theory based on the concept of physical proximity, or propinquity, between individuals. Propinquity has been found to affect liking or attraction through repeated exposure to previously neutral stimuli (Saegert, Swap, & Zajonc, 1973), and through the probability of having shared interests, values, and attitudes by being in comparable, physically proximate settings, such as work, school, or recreation (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950). Intermarriage for people within a particular geographic location has thus been presumed to be inversely related to group size but directly related to a particular area’s heterogeneity in terms of various attributes such as ethnicity, race, and nationality. Imbalance in sex ratios of ethnic minority groups is also believed to contribute to an increase in intermarriage. This proposition has been supported with research on interethnic dating (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995b). La Taillade (1999), however, argues that the combination of

factors that contribute to intermarriage extends beyond numerical ratios. Not only availability of mates, but also availability of “economically attractive” individuals can be what affects the sex ratio (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan). The heterogeneity theory has thus been only a mixed success (La Taillade).

The intermarried may also have their own stories of what motivates them to intermarry. Buttny (1987) has for instance found that intermarried American men and Filipino women reported romantic love as the predominant motive for their marriage.

Challenges, Discrimination, and Stereotypes

The fact that interracial attraction is an interpersonal as well as a cultural experience makes it harder for those interracially involved. It is not surprising for people who are exposed to “other” races to be attracted to members of the “other” races. For in an integrated society, people of all races have opportunities to observe images of beauty in all racial groups (Foeman & Nance, 2002). Expressing that attraction openly, however, may be socially more risky. “Publicly acting on interracial attraction is riskier still” (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 239). Thus, a high percentage of college students who become involved in interracial relationships don’t inform their parents (Korolewicz & Korolewicz, 1985). In the initial stage, each partner is in a continual process of deciding when, to whom, and how to break the news to outsiders (Foeman & Nance).

Though interracial marriage has been legal, and thus not subject to legally sanctioned institutional discrimination, in the U.S. for over four decades, interracial couples continue to be subjected to less overt forms of discrimination (Almonte & Desmond, 1992; La Taillade, 1999). It seems that more Americans approve of interracial marriages than do disapprove. Extant research, however, shows that such marriages are still far from being (fully) understood and accepted. Interracial couples

are more likely, for instance, to experience covert discrimination (Root, 1990) whereas Black-White interracial couples are likely to experience more negative public reactions (La Taillade).

Such negative reactions come from strangers as well as from family members, though (La Taillade, 1999). Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995b) found that White women who dated interracially were most likely to report disapproval from family members. Root (1992) argues that multiracial children and their interracially married parents may face increased rejection by extended family members who may fear having a person of a different racial background in their family. Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1990) also report that interracially married African Americans are likely to be geographically distant from their families of origin and to relocate to environments more tolerant of such marriages. This may, however, be disadvantageous in a way since it fosters feelings of isolation and lack of social support. It is not uncommon to experience both support and opposition from loved ones when confronted with marriage across the racial divide (McFadden, 2001).

The prevalence of a certain interracial marriage can give an insight into the degree and level of approval or disapproval such an interracial marriage has. The rarity of Black-White interracial marriages is, therefore, an indicator of the continual social stigmatization attached to these relationships (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002). Interracially married Black-White couples may still be experiencing the same challenges that have been part of such relationships for decades. Porterfield (1982, p. 17, as quoted in La Taillade, 1999) states, "No other mixture touches off such widespread condemnation as [B]lack-[W]hite mixing."

Discrimination against Black-White interracial couples has long been part of the dynamics of Black-White interracial marriages. It has been a manifestation of the

social politics surrounding such marriages in the decades where legally-sanctioned discrimination is no longer existent. Many Black-White interracial couples still report experiencing overt, not only covert, discrimination. Black-White couples have, for example, reported experiencing racist treatment in the form of stares, comments, refusal of service, or overt hostility while attempting to participate in family leisure activities, which made them settle into home-based leisure activities (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; see also Childs, 2005).

Interracial couples also need to be aware of the challenges their children might face and the adjustment they need to make to being identified as "others" (McFadden, 2001). Children of multiracial families face many struggles in their daily lives and at school, where they commonly experience the social isolation of not belonging to a defined group (Steel & Valentine, 1995).

Cultural and experiential differences can challenge a multiracial couple (Rosenblatt, 1999). They can also be challenged by issues that challenge same-race couples. Yet, the greatest challenge appears to be that created by racism in the United States (Rosenblatt). Since intermarriage is considered to be a violation of the norms to endogamy, intermarried individuals may feel like they need to justify their marriage (Buttny, 1987). As the following section implies, interracial couples do not perceive more internal challenges, but more external challenges, than same-race couples.

Interracial Marriages: Pathological?

Comparing interracial (Black-White), Black, and White couples, La Taille (1999) found that interracial couples were as satisfied and adjusted in their relationships as couples whose partners share the same racial and ethnic backgrounds. La Taille states that an inspection of the means for the three couple types on measures of relationship satisfaction and adjustment suggested that couples were in

the happy and non-distressed range. All the couple types also reported that they were more likely to utilize constructive communication behaviors and less likely to engage in negative or destructive communication patterns. These results resonate with previous findings and imply the role communication can play in marital adjustment and satisfaction. La Taillade contends that the findings suggest that clinical and theoretical assumptions predicting inevitable unhappiness and distress in interracial relationships may be unfounded.

Unlike the perspectives of outsiders, interracial couples perceive their union as normal and even as advantageous. They view the unique configuration of their families as a source of strength and as an opportunity that enables them to see through the eyes of 'Others' (Foeman & Nance, 2002). At any rate, interracial marriages have yet to earn public understanding and acceptance.

Attitudes Toward, and Acceptance of, Interracial Marriages

Race seems to be a factor in making decisions and choices as well as in forming attitudes. Race can be a factor in friendships, for instance. In a certain research, both men and women reported that race made a difference in determining friendships and romantic relationships with women reporting more negative prejudicial attitudes toward interracial relationships than men (Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbride, 1994). In this research, Blacks indicated that they had more friendships with people of other races than did Whites whereas Whites indicated a higher degree of negativity and prejudicial attitudes toward those of other races than did Blacks. Perceptions of family acceptance of interracial relationships and romantic relationships were also negative.

Davidson and Schneider (1992) found that Blacks have more favorable attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships. Todd, McKinney, Harris,

Chadderton, and Small (1992) found that more Blacks than Whites believe that interracial relationships are unacceptable to Whites. They also found that men, the young, and European Americans (Whites) had more positive attitudes toward interracial dating than did women, the old, and African Americans (Blacks).

Even though the level varies, resistance to intermarriage is rife. The increase in number of interracial marriages, therefore, cannot be taken to be a necessary and sufficient indicator of their acceptance in society. The extent to which intermarriages and intergroup intimacies are accepted in a society is a function of multiple cultural parameters within which these dynamics occur (McFadden & Moore, 2001). Culture dictates how individuals within that culture feel and behave toward a certain phenomenon, for culture is stored in human beings in the form of the beliefs, attitudes and values they hold (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). McFadden and Moore state that culture influences our perceptions, communication, and correspondent behaviors regarding acceptable intergroup and intragroup contact. As a result the social stigmas associated with Black-White interracial marriages still exist long after the rejection of the anti-miscegenation laws (Dunleavy, 2004). An end to anti-miscegenation laws does not imply absence of barriers to Black-White interracial marriages.

One embodiment of culture is race or ethnicity. "In America," writes Dunleavy (2004), "race matters—the color line is very apparent when it comes to interracial marriage" (p. 22). Political structures as well as socialization have guided, among other things, society's attitudes regarding appropriate romantic relationships. A manifestation of this, Black-White intermarriages cause problems associated with racist attitudes and perceived relational inappropriateness (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). Blacks intermarry far less than any other non-White

racial group (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990) which could be a result of the strong resistance.

Society's attitudes toward intermarriage and social support to the intermarried have a lot of significance to interracial couples. Family and friends, as well as members of their community, may have an impact on interracial marriage and on interracial couples by being supportive or unsupportive of the interracial marriage. Zebroski (1999; see also Buttny, 1987) argues that although interracial couples may seem independent of their community, they are still part of their communities. Zebroski further states that there are everyday necessities of living that necessitate some level of interdependence with the society, which may intensify when the interracial couple happens to have children. A tolerant environment is thus advantageous not only for the formation of interracial relationships (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995b), but also for day-to-day survival (Zebroski). Research, however, has found that there could be mixed-reactions towards interracial couples from their communities (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995).

Even though interracial couples experience racial discrimination in secondary group settings (Zebroski, 1999), they may have a tendency to actively seek supportive social situations and avoid those situations which are not (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). This strategy helps them to reduce the amount of negative reactions they receive from society (Zebroski).

Extant research suggests a pattern in the reactions Black-White interracial couples receive which depends on the race and sex of those who hold the attitudes toward the intermarriage (and on the make-up of the intermarried couple in terms of sex and race). Black women have, for instance, been found to most frequently resent Black man-White woman interracial couples (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). The researchers

speculate that the reaction of Black women could be because of the fact that for about five decades prior to the research was conducted there had been more single women than single men in the Black community. The fact that interracial marriage involving Black men decreases the pool of Black men whose economic power makes them viable partners could also be another factor. Paset and Taylor (1991) also found that White women had more favorable attitudes than Black women toward intermarriage of men of their own race. White women were also found to have more favorable attitudes toward intermarriage involving White women. According to Paset and Taylor, Black women might perceive interracial marriage—regardless of the sex and race combination—as more threatening to their personal as well as racial interests than do White women. Contrary to this, however, Dickson (1993) reported that African American (Black) women were least threatened by interracial pairing and have become more involved in relationships with European American (White) males. Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) have two explanations for the mixed findings: First, they speculate that Black women may resent interracial marriages between Black men and White women because it places them at a relational disadvantage due to the lack of available Black men. Second, they think Black women who recognize this rising trend in interracial marriages are becoming increasingly open to interracial relationships themselves for that very same reason.

Zebroski (1999) surveyed Black-White interracially married people on their perception of support and opposition from their everyday casual contacts. Zebroski reported that the majority of the interracially married individuals (43%) perceived all racial/gender categories (Blacks/Whites-men/women) to be equally supportive of their marriage. The participants also perceived White men (28%) to be most opposed to their marriage closely followed by Black women (27%) and Black men (25%). Only

11% of White women were perceived to be opposed to the interracial marriages. Zebroski reports a certain pattern when the gender/race composition of the intermarried was considered: respondents felt that people who were of the same gender and race as themselves or their spouse tended to be most supportive of their relationship during casual interactions; whereas people who were of the same race but different gender—of themselves and their spouse—tended to be most opposed to their relationship. Zebroski's findings contradict Paset and Taylor's (1991) and Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) findings of Black women as the most opposed to interracial marriages. White men were not also found to be most opposed to interracial marriages when the racial/gender compositions were considered. Zebroski thus suggests that not only race but also gender/sex was important in the measurement of attitudes toward intermarriage among members of society.

Reactions from family and friends to interracial marriages may also not be as gloomy as some research indicates. La Taillade (1999) found that interracial couples did not experience more negativity or isolation from their family and friends and were as satisfied with their current support as same-race couples. Even though previous research (e.g. Welborn, 1994, as cited in La Taillade) contradicted this finding, La Taillade (sampling couples who have been committed for approximately 11 years) speculates the discrepancy in the findings could be attributed to the fact that previous comparative research among couple types sampled engaged and recently married couples. In the early stages of a relationship, family members tend to be more protective and concerned when a new person is introduced to the family (Falicov, 1995). Family members' roles and influence, however, shift through time from protection and concern to decreased involvement, and to support. La Taillade contends that family members' ability to accept of a different racial background in the

case of an interracial marriage may be related to their own racial and ethnic identity development as well as experiences. Studying interracial couples and their families, for instance, Root (1996) found that family members became more accepting of the different-race partner and the relationship over time.

The level of acceptance of interracial marriages also varies depending on the race of the family (Dunleavy, 2004). Porterfield (1982, as cited in La Taillade, 1999) reported that Black husbands' families tended to accept or just tolerate the marriage between the interracial couple sooner than the wives' White relatives and friends. Porterfield (1978) also found that White families rejected the interracial Black-White marriages of the participants even after the couple had been married for between one-to-four years. Black families, on the other hand, were more receptive to their children's interracial marriages and most of the family members who initially opposed the marriage gradually accepted it. Kouri and Laswell (1993) also found that even though very few Black families rejected the Black-White interracial marriages of their children, the majority of them accepted the marriage either immediately or over time. White families, on the other hand, were more resistant. The majority of them rejected the marriage while those who accepted it took longer to do so.

Society's reactions toward interracial couples were found to be negative suggesting interracial couples may have rough relationships with non-family members and with society at large. Interracial couples were found to be more likely to experience covert discrimination than their same-race counterparts (La Taillade, 1999). About 90% of the males and females in interracial relationships reported experiencing covert discrimination though interracial couples were not more likely than same-race couples to report experiencing institutional or overt discrimination. This finding, speculates La Taillade, could be a manifestation of an increasing

acceptance of interracial unions following the rejection of anti-miscegenation laws.

La Taillade also found that for interracial couples, satisfaction with their current support was inversely related to negative forms of communication behaviors.

Yet, society's attitudes towards intermarriages affect interracial families' experiences. They thus need to be investigated. Dunleavy (2004) argues that opposition and negative affect mark current research on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriage. "A critical element in this opposition is the differential cultural values that drive both Blacks' and Whites' attitudes toward interracial marriage" (p. 24). Dunleavy suggests that an examination of how values impact attitudes toward interracial Black-White interracial marriage can explain the nature of those attitudes.

Both Blacks and Whites seem to be resistant to interracial marriages for essentially one reason: an urge to preserve the (a dimension of the) status quo. White opponents tend to believe in a hierarchy of races, viewing intermarriage as a disgrace to White families, a betrayal of racial purity and of Protestant work ethic values. Black opponents, on the other hand, tend to view intermarriage as betrayal of the Black identity and fear negative repercussions (physical or verbal) from the White majority (Davidson & Schneider, 1992).

For people obsessed with the social significance of race, interracial relationships are considered a threat to the racial social order (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). For others, it is a positive interpersonal experience and is thus welcomed. Three general proposals have been forwarded by researchers concerning Black-White interracial couples and their negative interaction with society. These are described as follows in Root (1990): 1. Interracial couples are more likely to face rejection or alienation because of their being in an interracial relationship; 2. Such rejection is likely to cause psychological stress for the individuals in interracial relationships; and

3. The negative reactions from the social networks will adversely affect relationship satisfaction and lead to relationship conflict, which would in turn be a source of severe stress for the interracial couple.

La Taillade (1999) found that acceptance of each other within a relationship was an important factor for interracial as well as same-race couples. Males' and females' ability to accept their partners' positive and negative behaviors was positively related to their satisfaction with the relationship, while it was inversely related to their reports of negative and destructive communication patterns. Moreover, La Taillade found that for the interracial couples, males' and females' acceptances of the other partner were predictive of their partners' as well as their own satisfaction with the relationship, and positively related to utilization of constructive communication behaviors. This may imply, La Taillade states, that individuals in interracial relationships are particularly attuned to their partners' acceptance rather than support from the outside world. Attitudes toward biracial individuals (biracial identity) do not seem any different than attitudes toward the interracial marriages of which they are a product.

Attitudes Toward Biracial Identity

Attitudes about race or ethnicity are fundamental to healthy psychological functioning for people whose ethnic groups are poorly represented and are the object of societal denigration (Phinney, 1990). This makes understanding society's attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages as well as Black-White biracial individuals an important step in harmonizing the relationships between the two races, and among the two races as well as among Blacks, Whites and the middlerace.

Throughout history, no interracial union has been more controversial than the pairing of African American (Black) and European American (White) individuals

(Chesley & Wagner, 2003). It is not unreasonable to assume that their children are likely to have a difficult experience too. Yet, literature on adults' attitudes towards biracial individuals is limited.

The little research on the issue shows that attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals have not been positive in the U.S. Both Black and White monoracials have been found to have a preference for same-race peers, for instance (Chesley & Wagner, 2003). This similarity selection bias presents a problem for biracial children in that very few of their peers, if at all, can be similar in racial backgrounds. They may thus feel excluded and marginalized. This may also force them into denying a part of their racial backgrounds. Because Black and White monoracials often segregate themselves, the biracial individuals might conclude that they must identify with one racial group (Chesley & Wagner).

The social politics surrounding biracial identity is intricate and complicated. Research has found that there are many factors that play a role in making the experiences of a biracial individual unique even from those of other biracial individuals. These factors might include the gender of the biracial child; and the nature, length, and quality of peer relationships among other things. Investigating adults' attitudes toward multiracial children, Chesley and Wagner (2003) found that their respondents rated the multiracial child with friends of the respondent's race as having lower social acceptance than multiracial children with friends of a different race. European American individuals saw a multiracial individual with African American friends as having greater peer acceptance than a multiracial child with European American friends, whereas African American individuals saw a multiracial child with European American friends as being more socially accepted than a multiracial child with African American friends. This implies that the monoracial

individuals (both Blacks and Whites) may perceive the biracial individuals as “different” and exclude them.

Black-White Interracial Marriages: Implications

Interracial marriages influence the intermarried as well as their environment—including their children, families, communities and society. They challenge society’s ways and styles of living. They also challenge society’s norms. “In a world where race is treated as an important and largely impenetrable boundary,” writes Dunleavy (2004, p. 35), “interracial relationships defy rigid categorization, thus making issues of racial identity and prejudice difficult to negotiate.” Childs (2005) notes that Black-White intermarriages represent far greater racial transgressions than other ethnic and “racial” group combinations. “These marriages may be small in number, but their significance is socially and politically great, serving as an indicator of the state of relations between [B]lacks and [W]hites” (p. 4).

Black-White couples are usually taken to be a sign that racial borders no longer exist (Childs, 2005). Childs, however, argues that Black-White couples enable us to see how racial borders still do exist. Even though it is more subtle and more difficult to see, opposition to Black-White marriages still exists.

Childs (2005) states that interracial couples create multiracial families not only creating interracial families of their own but also changing the racial dynamic of their families of origin. Interracial couples are a facilitator in the expression and exposition of hidden stereotypical and prejudicial ideals in society. Black-White couples, for instance, represent an occasion for families to express their ideas and prejudices about race and sex (Childs).

Increased intermarriages and increased numbers of multiracial individuals have been seen as a sign of a blending of races and fading of color lines (DaCosta,

2007). The collective organization and identification of "multiracials," however, may to the contrary signal the formation of other new group boundaries.

Since interracial marriages have a lot of significance not only to the intermarried but also to society as a whole, negative attitudes toward interracial marriages can have severe and manifold consequences. Familial relationships within interracial families are severely affected by such attitudes since racist views negatively impact both the family's identity and their patterns of interaction (Dunleavy, 2004; Hegar, 1994; Solsberry, 1994). This exposes many Black-White couples to social isolation from family, friends, and society because of existent prejudicial attitudes (Hibbler & Shiner, 2002). South and Messner (1986; see also Dunleavy) argue that the breakdown of prejudice and discrimination against interracial marriages through education and discussion may lead to greater success of interracial marriages.

Black-White couples have reported that familial relationships are threatened or severed because of prejudicial attitudes toward interracial marriages (Hegar, 1994; Solsberry, 1994). Interracial families' social support networks can be limited affecting physical, emotional, and financial well being of the interracial families because of the interracial couple's/family's withdrawal from unsupportive friends and family (Hibbler & Shiner, 2002). This may result in isolation from possible sources of help to the interracial family. Left with minimal supportive ties, the Black-White couples learned to develop better coping skills to defend themselves from the prejudicial family influences, though this served to increase relational intimacy and bond them closer together (Hibbler & Shiner). The extensive social isolation from family and friends will, however, despite the bonding attained as a couple, consequently lead to higher levels of dissatisfaction within the marriage (Hibbler & Shiner).

The coping mechanisms interracial couples can turn to when prejudiced and discriminated against can have farther-reaching implications, though. The social isolation experienced by the interracial couples can lead to inability to keep a healthy lifestyle and can impact one's overall long-term quality of life (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002). The interracial couples in the study avoided certain situations, activities, and people whose racist actions or beliefs impeded daily, including leisure activities.

Racial Identity and Black-White Biracial Individuals

Our first blueprint for social interaction comes from our family of origin (Foeman & Nance, 1999). To a large extent, this blueprint is based on culture (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Cultural as well as racial values, therefore, have a great role to play in shaping people's identity and in guiding their behavior.

"Identity development is the fundamental task of establishing a coherent life plan in modern western society" (Reich, Ramos, & Jaipal, 2000, p. 153). Among other things, a well-formed identity specifies limits and potentialities of social relationships, and provides a sense of belonging in one's society (Baumeister, 1986; Reich et al.). Communication has a big role to play in how identity is formed and manipulated, as well as on how it affects individuals and interaction, since identity is basically a result of symbolic interaction and social construction.

Symbolic interactionists following the lead of G. H. Mead in 1962 theorize identity as a system of self-relevant knowledge anchored in role relationships (Reich et al., 2000). Identifying with a collective, therefore, extends the boundaries of the self as social norms, values, and ideologies are internalized and appropriated as one's own. By aligning one's self with a social group, one may feel kinship with an entire population of others without necessarily having personal relationships with them

(Brewer, 1991; Reich et al.). Value commitments provide an “ideological setting,” or background against which identity issues are framed and acted upon.

Identities are the meanings that individuals acquire through social interactions and as such are crucial to understanding a person’s sense of him or herself (Herman, 2004; McCall & Simons, 1996; Stryker, 1980). Ethnic identity crucially shapes self-identity and exists as a master status, one that dominates all others when judging the self (Stephan, 1992). The socially constructed signifiers and categories, such as race, can thus have deep implications not only on how society “understands” and perceives an individual but also on how one perceives oneself.

The power and impact racial and cultural values have on an individual indicate how strong group influences—such as racial and cultural influences—can be on an individual. It also implies how novel breaking a group’s (racial or cultural) norms are. Interracial marriage is one of the major ways by which a racial group’s members can drift from the norms of racial and/or cultural groups resulting in a “hard-to-categorize” group.

Intergroup marriages have occurred throughout history, but they used to be limited to the nobility and the highest social classes (Piper, 1997). Following the abolishment of the anti-miscegenation laws—laws prohibiting racial mixing—in 1967 interracial marriages have increased in number in the United States (Foeman & Nance, 1999; Garcia, 2006; Jean, 1998; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Kennedy, 2003; Lee, 1988; Piper; Root, 2001; Roy & Hamilton, 1997; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). As a result, the number of individuals with multiple racial backgrounds (biracial and multiracial individuals) has also increased dramatically (Brunsma, 2005; Chesley & Wagner, 2003; Herman, 2004; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie; Qian, 2004; Root, 1996; Roth, 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). In the 1970’s one in 100 children was born to parents of

different racial backgrounds; thirty years later, that ratio grew to one in 19 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1999). This trend is expected to continue (DaCosta, 2007) with the decline of the social stigma toward interracial unions (Brown, 1995) and high levels of contact among races (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). The population of multiracial children in the US has increased from 500,000 in 1970 to more than 6.8 million in 2000 (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001). This increase in the number of individuals with multiple racial backgrounds has raised the question of understanding where these individuals fit in society's preexisting racial categories (Shih & Sanchez).

Biracial and multiracial individuals defy society's traditional notions and assumptions about race because they cannot be easily placed into any of society's preexisting racial categories (Spickard, 1992). Society basically conceptualizes race as mutually exclusive. This raises more challenges for multiracial individuals beyond what their monoracial counterparts face (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). Since multiracial individuals are not easy to classify in either of the preexisting racial categories—neither the monoracial majority nor the monoracial minority—they face rejection from both the majority and the minority groups (Root, 1992). The difficulty of categorizing biracial and multiracial individuals into society's preexisting categories also leads to a great deal of controversy about how they define themselves (Shih et al., 2007). The argument for recognition of a multiracial category in national census by some multiracials is a part of the controversy (Gaskins, 1999).

The absence of a preexisting category for them in society's predefined categorization—displayed most explicitly in various forms—leaves biracials and multiracials confused about where they belong in terms of racial communities. This confusion, argue Shih et al. (2007), has forced multiracial individuals to come up with their own answers for the question of racial identity and racial category. "They have

to grapple with questions surrounding race that many monoracial individuals, both from majority and minority groups, have had answered for them by society” (Shih et al., 2007, p. 125).

Race doesn't exist outside of the social world (Shih et al., 2007). Race basically is a social construction (Gaskins, 1999; Harris & Sim, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Spickard, 1992) and there is no evidence supporting the myth that race is biologically based (Shih et al.). Race, therefore, has no biological and genetic grounds. Race, and racial categorization, is a result of social processes and is deeply rooted, though subjective. Rockquemore and Brunnsma state that race is not fixed, rigid, or codifiable. It is not mutually exclusive, nor is it deterministic. As a socially constructed reality, race has changed, and continues to change, over time (Rockquemore & Brunnsma). A thorough understanding of its roots and its implications can thus help in changing society's racial assumptions and perceptions for the better. Since they have been at the core of the misconception of race as well as the controversy about racial identity, understanding biracial and multiracial individuals goes a long way in this respect.

Scholars have indicated that there is greater discrepancy in terms of traits and abilities within racial groups than between racial groups (Harris & Sim, 2002). There is no single characteristic that belongs exclusively to individuals in one racial group and not to any individuals in another racial group (Goodman, 2000). While multiracial individuals, when they try to uncover the basis of society's racial categories, may come to realize that those categories are arbitrary, subjective, meaningless in any biological sense (Shih et al., 2007), and that they are only a result of social construction (Spickard, 1992), not everyone can realize that. Its realization may also come through and after painful experiences.

Even though race doesn't have any biological basis, it plays a great role in our social world and defines people's experiences and opportunities (Goodman, 2000; Zack, 1995). It has considerable implications in an individual's life. Through their interaction with significant others and society as a whole, children internalize the appraisals of others and begin to regard themselves in ways consistent with their perception of these evaluations (Chesley & Wagner, 2003; Cooley, 1902; Harter, 1999). "Race continues to be simultaneously a biological fallacy and a social reality that defines the distribution of resources and our everyday interactions" (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, p. 115). Moreover, attitudes about race or ethnicity are fundamental to healthy psychological functioning for people whose ethnic groups are poorly represented and are the object of societal denigration (Gillem et al., 2001; Phinney, 1990).

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) identify three models of racial identities for Black-White biracial individuals. The most common one—the border identity—is based on "inbetweenness." Individuals adopting this model consider themselves to be neither Black nor White and incorporate both Black and White categories into a unique hybrid. Individuals adopting the protean identity identify themselves simultaneously in both Black and White racial communities and their identity changes depending on social and cultural contexts. Those who adopt a transcendent identity, on the other hand, decline to recognize themselves as members of any racial category perceiving race as a false categorization of humanity. These individuals would say that they belong to the "human race." Roth (2005) states that these three identity models are also true for the ways interracial families identify and socialize their biracial children. Racial identity for multiracial individuals is "a moving target"—it

changes over time and across contexts (Herman, 2004). Studying racial identity among multiracials is thus a challenging process.

Implications of Biracial Identity

Having a biracial or multiracial identity challenges American society's (mutually exclusive) traditional notions about race and racial categories (Brunsma, 2005; Ramirez, 1996; Shih, et al., 2007). This forces multiracial families to contend with difficulties related to lack of social recognition (Nakashima, 1996) such as disapproval from extended family, exclusion from neighborhood and community (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993), discrimination and social isolation (Brown, 1995; Gaskins, 1999) the level of which may differ based on skin tone (Espino & Franz, 2002; Gomez, 2000; Herman, 2004; Hill, 2000).

Biracial people often face questions of identity and belonging (Fatimilehin, 1999) coupled with pressure to identify with a single aspect of their racial backgrounds (Chesley & Wagner, 2003). This may be most pronounced in those people with one African-American and one Caucasian parent (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). Interracial marriage between African-Americans (Blacks) and Caucasians (Whites) is the least common and most negatively stigmatized interracial union (Fears & Dean, 2001, as cited in Kelch-Oliver & Leslie). Given their dual heritages and the social stigma associated with their parents' relationship, questions of and racial identity can be complex for Black-White biracial individuals (Bowles, 1993).

A conflict between biracial and multiracial individuals' self-definition and the definition society imposes on them is one of the earliest challenges they face (Nakashima, 1992). Multiracial individuals may classify themselves as one race but they may be seen by others as another race (Qian, 2004). Discrimination is another

challenge individuals with multiple racial heritages have to face. Biracial individuals face discrimination from society as well as from the minority community within the larger society (Comas-Diaz, 1996; Root, 1996). Individuals with Asian/White heritage in the US, states Root, experience discrimination both from the White majority and from the Asian community. Until recently, individuals of part-Japanese or part-Chinese ancestry had to identify as non-Asian since the Asian community would not accept them (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). "As a result of this double rejection, multiracial individuals receive many messages from society about who they are not but few messages about who they are" (Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 573). This may cause biracial and multiracial individuals to feel very isolated.

Reflecting the challenges and problems biracial and multiracial individuals as well as interracial families have to put up with, the majority of research investigating the psychological consequences of having multiple racial backgrounds has emphasized the negative effects associated with those challenges and problems (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Research has particularly focused on the difficulty biracials and multiracials face in defining their racial identity. Identity is believed to develop through a process of negotiation in which individuals reconcile their own self-concepts with the expectations of those around them (Newsome, 2001; Shih & Sanchez). The discrepancy between self-concept and society's concept about biracials results in an identity confusion. This identity confusion is believed to lead to negative psychological outcomes including lower self-esteem, lower academic performance, and poor peer relations (Shih & Sanchez). This could, however, be a self fulfilling prophecy. A possible consequence of the tension between biracials' self-concept on the one hand and society's perception of them on the other is that biracials and multiracials may feel marginalized and be more prone to the development of a

“marginal personality,” characterized by traits such as moodiness, hypersensitivity, irritability, low self-confidence, self-hate, insecurity, and defensiveness (Piskacek & Golub, 1973; Shih & Sanchez; Stonequist, 1937). Such predictions and conclusions echo societal perceptions and attitudes, and taint biracial and multiracial identities.

Individuals with multiple racial backgrounds are expected to justify their racial identity choices and their self-concepts. Multiracial individuals need to justify their identity choices to themselves as well as to society (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This is something monoracials may not have to go through since society rarely disagrees with their racial identity choices, which conform to society’s either/or categorization. Multiracial children are usually exposed to conflicting messages (regarding their identity, their community, and humanity) from their parents and from the community. These conflicting messages can be a source of tension for the children (Shih & Sanchez).

Similar conflicts, however, are not uncommon even within multiracial families since not all parents of multiracial children are unified in their perception of their children (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). If the parents’ perception is not unified, the child’s sense of self is weakened (Piskacek & Golub, 1973; Shih & Sanchez).

Multiracial individuals also face the challenge of finding racially similar role models to guide them in understanding their racial identity (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Shih & Sanchez suggest that society’s difficulty in dealing with multiracials who challenge rigid notions of racial categories contributes to the perpetual invisibility of the multiracial community. Unlike monoracial individuals, multiracials enter the world without immediate parental role models for their multiracial identities since they do not share exactly the same racial identity as either one of their parents (Shih & Sanchez). They are also likely to have difficulty

finding peers with similar racial backgrounds (Renn, 2000; Williams, 1996) and face ridicule and name-calling from their monoracial peers and friends (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie).

The position of biracials thus makes them feel marginal. Some express desire for a cultural identity they could claim as their very own (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). Integrating two cultural standards and values—in terms of physical attractiveness, for instance—is also a challenge.

Psychologists' approaches toward studying and understanding the psychological impact of having biracial and multiracial backgrounds have resonated with the racial politics of the time (Root, 1996). Earlier theories on biracial and/or multiracial identity viewed biracial or multiracial heritage as problematic (Thornton & Gates, 1996) and predicted negative outcomes from having multiple racial backgrounds (Johnson 1992; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The extreme negative views on biracial and multiracial identity have, however, been changing signaling, hopefully, a better understanding of biracials and multiracials. Contemporary work on biracial identity has taken a more positive approach (Shih & Sanchez).

Researchers' approach in studying biracial and multiracial identity can be categorized into three (Thornton & Wason, 1995). The first approach is the problem approach. The earliest scholars used the "marginal man" model (Park, 1928, 1931; Shih and Sanchez, 2005; Stonequist, 1937). The marginal man represented the perception that a biracial was caught between two cultures but was actually not a member of either world—thus having a dual minority status (Shih & Sanchez). Many biracials experience a double minority status. They have a minority status within society and a minority status within the minority community, which may not accept them as full members (Johnson, 1992; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Shih & Sanchez).

The “marginal man,” therefore, has to put up with challenges faced by monoracial minorities and additional difficulties related to being biracial and/or multiracial (Teicher, 1968, as cited in Shih & Sanchez). “Although the burden of the Negro child is recognized as a heavy one, that of the Negro-White child is seen to be even heavier” (Teicher, 1968, p. 250, as quoted in Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

The second approach is the equivalent approach. After 1970, there was a hefty change in researchers’ perspectives in understanding multiracial identity, which reflected the changing climate of racial politics in the US (Root, 1996). This time witnessed the ruling out of anti-miscegenation laws and an increase in racial pride following the civil rights movement (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). It also witnessed an increase in the number of researchers with multiple racial heritages who were studying biracial identity (Root). This manifests the added dimension and understanding an inside perspective on the issue affords. Researchers, thus, began to take a more positive, optimistic, and sensitive viewpoint (Collins, 2000; Thornton & Gates, 1996). In the comparative or equivalent approach (Collins; Thornton & Gates), researchers assumed that monoracials and multiracials were equivalent to monoracials (Shih & Sanchez). This approach, even though it may be better than the problem approach—for it does not preconceive the biracial individual as the “marginal man,” it was still a simplification of the experiences of biracials and multiracials. It could not fully depict multiracials’ experience as they tried to figure out their racial identity (Shih & Sanchez).

The third approach is the variant approach. This approach, which is the most recent, provides a new framework for understanding biracial identity and views multiracial identity as a unique category separate from monoracial category (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

All these models argue that biracial and multiracial individuals, at some stage, feel great tension and conflict about their racial identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). At that stage the biracial and multiracial individuals might feel forced to choose from among their multiple racial backgrounds. The tension and conflict individuals with multiple racial heritages experience is a manifestation of society's pressure on those individuals. There is an inconsistent patrilineal tendency, for instance, to identify biracial children with the race of their father (Qian, 2004). There also is a tendency to identify biracial individuals with the minority parent's race even though the one-drop rule seems to work more for Black-White biracial individuals (Qian). Brown (1995) found that most of the multiracial young adults he interviewed classified themselves as African American (Black) in public while they identified themselves as multiracial in private. Brown argues that this indicates that multiracial (Black-White biracial) individuals face societal pressure to negate their European American (White) heritage.

Biracial and multiracial individuals, therefore, experience many challenges throughout their life stages and the challenges may keep them from finally accepting, appreciating, integrating, and valuing all parts of their racial identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Society's misperception of biracials, then, not only keeps society from understanding those individuals but also leaves the biracial/multiracial individuals themselves in confusion about their own racial heritages.

Developing a positive racial identity is thus more difficult and more confusing for multiracial individuals than for monoracial individuals (Kich, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Multiracials encounter problems that monoracials do not face in the process of racial identity development (Herring, 1995). Biracial individuals have an additional burden of either choosing a single racial identity—thus denying the other—or challenging and overlooking society's norms of racial categorization.

When racial identity and self-concept are difficult for biracial people, it is because of the tension between the two racial components of the self (Gillem et al., 2001; Root, 1990). This tension reflects the tension in the greater society between those two components (Gillem, et al.). This implies that the atmosphere and environment they are in affects biracial individuals and their self-concept.

Role of Environment and Social Support for Biracial Individuals

Because of the multiple pressures they face, biracial and multiracial individuals formulate their racial identities in response to their physical looks, socialization, and others' perceptions of them (O'Hearn, 1998). An individual's social environment clearly has an impact on racial classification and on an individual's racial identification, regardless of appearance or personal preference (Herman, 2004). Parents play an important role in their children's formation of racial identity (Qian, 2004; Roth, 2005). They can do this in many different ways, including by choosing a place to live, a school for their children to go to, and a culture in which to raise their children. The messages about race parents send to their children, which are indicated in the racial label parents give their children, are also very important in the children's development of racial identities. "How families view and identify their children influences their self-identification, either directly or by providing them with the tools to challenge racial assumptions elsewhere" (Roth, 2005, pp. 40-41). Parents, thus, have a role that influences almost all the other factors affecting racial identity. Racial identity instilled by parents also provides a solid foundation that shapes the future identities of (biracial and) multiracial individuals (Qian).

The lack of role models—including parents who can serve as role models in terms of racial identity—and lack of peers with similar racial identity diminishes the social support biracial individuals can get to face and overcome their challenges.

Relating to others often provides social support and simplifies the challenges one has to encounter when growing up (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Biracial individuals with supportive families master identity tasks successfully (Katz, 1996; Stevenson, 1995). Researchers have also suggested that communities having larger multiracial populations and more interracial families are more supportive environments for the psychological adjustment of multiracials (Pinderhughes, 1995). Racial identity choices of biracial adults are influenced by skin color as well as by the individuals' assumptions about how others perceive their appearance (Herman, 2004).

Even though they caution about concluding from inconsistent studies, Shih and Sanchez (2005) stated that, in the qualitative studies they reviewed, social attitudes toward interracial relationships seemed to have effect on multiracial individuals' psychological adjustment. Some of the heightened risk for developing psychological problems in children of cross-racial, cross-ethnic, or cross-religious marriages is attributed to the response of the community and of significant others to an intergroup marriage. Johnson and Nagoshi (1986), for instance, in their study in Hawaii—an environment/culture relatively tolerant and accepting of cultural diversity—found that children of cross-ethnic marriages were not much different from children of within-ethnic marriages. It is also seen to be a result of psychological problems of parents and increased conflict in mixed marriages.

Studies conducted more recently, report Shih and Sanchez (2005), tended to find more evidence of social acceptance and improved peer relationships; whereas studies conducted before the past decade tended to find a great deal of social rejection and isolation. Shih and Sanchez speculate that the trends may reflect either of two things: the impact that changing social attitudes toward race relations may have on the experiences of multiracial individuals and the focus researchers take; or an increase in

the number of studies conducted in the past decade that have been carried out on nonclinical individuals, who may experience more social acceptance than individuals from clinical samples.

The qualitative and quantitative studies Shih and Sanchez (2005) reviewed (a total of 42 studies)—in what they called the first comprehensive review of both the theoretical and empirical work on the psychological adjustment of multiracial individuals—have “little evidence” that multiracials experience poor outcomes in terms of their racial identity development. Yet, Sanchez and Shih (2004, as cited in Shih & Sanchez) reported that multiracial individuals show low public racial regard but high private racial regard—the opposite pattern of that of monoracial individuals. This suggests that identity development and the relationship multiracial individuals have with their racial identity differs from the relationship monoracial individuals have with their racial identity (Shih & Sanchez). Therefore, individuals with multiple racial backgrounds have to be understood in a different perspective, which acknowledges their multiple racial heritages.

Not only do pressures from the outside, family and community, tend to tell biracial individuals how to racially identify themselves, but society also tends to push them into denying one of their racial heritages. In a qualitative study, Kelch-Oliver and Leslie (2006) found that six of their nine female participants—who had all been through some racial identity conflict during adolescence—identified themselves as Black though they didn't think of themselves as Black until they were faced with racial discrimination or prejudice that “forced them” to be aware of their Blackness.

A stronger connection to a particular racial group may also result from exposure to aspects of that group's culture or heritage, which may result from contact with extended family members, bringing about a positive association with that group

(Roth, 2005). This racial identification is a result of the cultural connection the individual has with the group. Roth calls this a cultural conformity model of identity. It may also follow from parents' decisions to live in areas with high concentration of one racial group if the parents feel more attachment to that group's culture or identity. The parents' decisions, therefore, affect not only a child's birth as biracial but also continue to influence a child's psychological development and ideas of race and his or her racial identity by how they socialize their children.

Their "disadvantaged" position may help biracial and multiracial individuals to develop not only a better understanding of race and its social foundations but also more tolerance of "others." Shih et al. (2007) found that multiracial individuals—who reported that their parents deemphasized race more than their monoracial counterparts—saw race as less a barrier among people than the monoracial individuals. The multiracials reported feeling more comfortable developing intimate relationships with a person of a different racial background. They also reported less belief in the idea that race could biologically determine personality or ability.

Overall a supportive and accepting environment helps biracial individuals to overcome their challenges and strengthens them. Research with nonclinical samples has offered positive portrayals of biracial youngsters as self-confident, creative, and well adjusted when raised with a supportive family and social network, and when they are raised in a supportive neighborhood and go to integrated schools (Gibbs & Hines, 1992).

Social Politics Surrounding Interracial Marriages

Interracial marriage—or any interracial relationship for that matter—is thought of as a collective issue (an issue of society) more than any other marriage or relationship is. Individuals involved in interracial marriage and interracial

relationships are evaluated as representatives of their respective "racial communities." This fact makes interracial relationship an intricate one and builds social politics around such a relationship. Coming out of a closet for an interracial couple can thus trigger intense scrutiny. This, according to Foeman and Nance (2002), makes not only the relationship itself but also its disclosure a continual process of dilemma compelling the interracially involved individuals, at least in the first stage, to keep their relationship a secret.

This happens since disclosing an interracial relationship tends to come with its consequences. Foeman and Nance (2002) found that a partner who chooses to "come out" may risk being described as "an Oreo" (a Black person who "thinks s/he is White") or a "wigger" (a White person who "thinks s/he is Black") and thus labeled an outsider or traitor. According to Foeman and Nance, the pressure interracially involved individuals face at the attraction phase "can try even the most attracted partners' commitments to pursue the relationship" (p. 240).

It is not unusual for the social politics surrounding race to be reflected within the relationship of a Black-White interracial couple. Since the partners are likely to have different prior experiences in society, their views are likely to vary. Foeman and Nance (2002) state that Whites are more likely to experience the world as a fair or safe place, and thus to not only encourage their Black partners to "relax about race" but also see them as paranoid. This can lead into the Black partner's role of "carrying the burden of race" even within the context of the interracial relationship. The outside pressures on interracial partners may also cause feelings of guilt and resentment. They can even make them question if there is "something wrong" that led to their decision to intermarry. The following paragraph illustrates the social politics surrounding race:

The determination of racial categories is thus an intensely political process...the census's racial classification reflects prevailing conceptions of race, establishes boundaries by which one's racial 'identity' can be understood, determines the allocation of resources, and frames diverse political issues and conflicts (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 3).

The opposition to interracial marriages, argues Childs (2005), shows one of the central sociopolitical oppositional reactions to intermarriage: "the threatened outcome of the mixing of the races, a blurring and confusing of racial groups in society" (p. 137). One of the problems with the discrimination interracial couples and families face is its subtlety, which makes it harder to combat it. Many people, for instance, say that they personally have nothing against interracial marriage but they still admit that "society in general" discriminates (Almonte & Desmond, 1992).

As indicated earlier, the social politics surrounding interracial marriages—including (dis)approval, stereotypes and discrimination associated with such marriages, and social reactions toward such marriages—is largely a manifestation of the relationship and dynamics between the racial groups to which the involved individuals belong. Attitudes toward, as well as subsequent behavior targeting, interracial couples stems mainly from intergroup attitudes (Dunleavy, 2004). Social values are central to, and may underlie, such intergroup attitudes (Dunleavy; Wyman & Snyder, 1997). The distance and social segregation that still prevails between Blacks and Whites may be what shapes attitudes toward marriages between members of those two racial groups. In the U.S., Blacks and Whites continue to be the two racial groups with the greatest social distance, spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Perceptions of interracial incompatibility vary as a function of interracial combination (Dunleavy).

Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) found that interracial couples involving an African American (Black) were perceived as less compatible than interracial marriages involving an Asian American. They also found that European American respondents found it more difficult to imagine themselves married to an African American than to an Asian American. The social politics surrounding interracial marriages affects the offspring of such marriages as well.

Social Politics Surrounding Biracial Identity

Classification schemes have attempted to divide and conquer diversity and difference in the social structure while preserving White privilege (Brunsma, 2005). Yet, these classification schemes are only socially legitimized modes of identification (Bourdieu, 2001). "Race" has evolved out of a historical need to create a hierarchy that would maintain the status quo of White supremacy and privilege in the United States (Gillem, et al., 2001). Thus, even though it may be easy to assume that the boundaries of racial categories are fixed, those boundaries are always changing and shifting (Roth, 2005; Shih, et al., 2007). Helms (1995, p. 181) writes:

Racial identity theory evolves out of the tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical and ... cultural construction ... racial classifications are assumed to be not biological realities, but rather sociopolitical and economic conveniences, membership in which is determined by socially defined inclusion criteria.

Intermarriage results in various identity options for biracial and multiracial offspring (Roth, 2005). It may allow assimilation into either the majority or the minority racial group of the parents or can result in the creation of a new racial identity that is neither one nor the other (Root, 1996; Roth; Thornton & Gates, 1996). Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) found that Black-White biracial individuals can

identify themselves in multiple different ways based on various contexts. They can identify themselves in one of the following ways: 1. as biracial, 2. as Black, 3. as Black, White and biracial depending on the interpersonal context, (Because both racial groups want to secure the biracial individual's loyalty, multiracial individuals reduce cognitive dissonance by self-identifying differently depending on context (Root, 1997).) 4. as transcendent of racial identity, and 5. as White. These strategies are, however, not unique to Black-White biracial individuals (Brunsma, 2005).

Racial identity for biracials, how they racially identify or understand themselves, has been found to be linked to social class. The higher one's social class, the less likely he or she is to relate to minority identity (Daniel, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Racial composition of social networks also influences how biracials identify themselves (Herman, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma). So do family structural variables, such as racial/gender nexus (Harris & Sim, 2002; Herman). Appearance and phenotype are also a major factor (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). There are, however, complex interrelationships that determine how these factors come to affect racial identification (Brunsma, 2005; Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004).

Black-White biracial children are the second most prevalent, following Hispanic-White children, in the U.S. (Brunsma, 2005). Yet, this does not mean Black-White interracial marriages are as prevalent. The high number of Black-White biracial children could be, says Brunsma, due to the fact that there are Black-White interracial unions that may be overlooked when studying Black-White interracial marriages. Many of the interracial relationships don't culminate in marriage (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). This could be a manifestation of the strong opposition to such marriages.

Nevertheless, Black-White interracial families lead the challenge against the notion of race as exclusive (Roth, 2005). A selection of anything other than the singular Black identity by Black-White biracial individuals is a move away from the one-drop rule. Because the one-drop rule—or the social norm of hypodescent—assigns a mixed-race person to the group with the lowest social value (Herman, 2004). A rejection of the norms of racial classification and an acceptance of interracial identities as viable options, which may result from parents' higher education (Roth), is an example. Yet, the lack of social validation for a multiracial self-classification can lead to anxiety, doubt, and an inconsistent view of self; and poses developmental challenges to biracial individuals (Chesley & Wagner, 2003; Hershel, 1995).

How a biracial child is identified racially, especially by the parents, may be a reflection of the social structure of the American society. Roth (2005) argues that there is what she calls the "patrilineal identity transmission." Roth argues that the very fact that a child adopts his or her father's surname in the United States suggests a patrilineal influence in matters of identity that may also shape the passing on of racial identity.

The social politics surrounding biracial identity, especially Black-White biracial identity, is what sustains the one-drop rule, though. Roth (2005) states the following about the current status of the one-drop rule:

The one-drop rule may have weakened, so that people with any amount of Black blood are no longer necessarily considered Black, but children with Black and White parents still face unique racial barriers. Embracing interracial identities is simply a new way around the barriers, rather than a sign that they have been dismantled (p. 64).

Biracial people demonstrate internalized oppression if they reject either part of their heritage (Root, 1990). Adopting a monoracial identity, which is usually dictated by society, can lead to guilt and feelings of disloyalty.

Until 2000—when the option “multiracial” was included in the Census—individuals with multiple racial ancestry were forced to choose between/among their component identities on the census form (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Multiracial groups have insisted that choosing a single [predetermined] racial identity compels biracial and multiracial individuals to reject the other parts of themselves (Gaskins, 1999) and does not even accurately reflect the true racial make-up of the nation (Holmes, 1997, as cited in Shih & Sanchez). Despite steps taken to introduce a multiracial category in national census forms, society still considers race to be mutually exclusive (Haney-Lopez, 1996; Qian, 2004; Roth, 2005) and forces biracial individuals not only to choose one of their racial heritages but also which one of them to choose (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). The increase in interracial marriage and the ensuing multiracial population, however, have challenged views of race as exclusive (Roth).

Unlike what previous research suggests, Black-White biracial individuals are not more accepted by the Black community (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). Kelch-Oliver and Leslie put hostility and lack of acceptance of biracial individuals by some members of the Black community into historical perspective. They (citing Bowles, 1993; see also DaCosta, 2007) state that over 75% of the people defined as African-American have some White ancestry due to either voluntary racial mixing or the prevalence of the rape of Black women by White men since slavery. Many African-Americans, therefore, are confused about and hostile to biracialness believing biracial people today are no different than their ancestors or relatives (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie).

Daniel (1996) describes the politics surrounding Black-White biracial identity from the perspective of some non-accepting members of the Black community as follows:

Some African-Americans take biracial identity as a personal attack because they feel society presents biracial people as a new phenomenon, which disregards the long history of slavery and forced racial mixture. Furthermore, some believe biracial people are trying to deny their Black heritage and escape the societal stigma attached to Blackness by claiming biracial identity (p. 71).

Social Stigma

Interracial couples as well as their biracial children are socially stigmatized for their interracial relationships and racial backgrounds respectively. Race is understood as a "tribal stigma" that "can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family," which plays into the added concern expressed about the biracial children interracial unions can produce (Goffman, 1963).

Both Blacks and Whites are stigmatized by their respective racial communities when they are involved in an interracial relationship. Whites involved in interracial relationships with Blacks are considered "less White" and seen as tainting their White family whereas their Black partners are considered "not Black enough" and seen as leaving their blackness behind (Childs, 2005). "Ultimately, [B]lack-[W]hite couples and biracial children are forced to exist somewhere in between" (p.138). This stigma is what leads to the making of a middlerace, which unfortunately is not always (fully) accepted by either of the two races. Therefore, the fact that interracial couples have the legal right to marry today does not imply that everyone approves of such a marriage (Almonte & Desmond, 1992). For the social stigmas associated with Black-White interracial marriages still exist long after the rejection of the anti-miscegenation

laws (Dunleavy, 2004). Communication has a role in both the creation of the race-related stigma and in rectifying this problem.

Role of Communication

Segrin and Flora (2005) define communication as “*a transactional process in which individuals create, share, and regulate meaning* (emphasis in original)” (p. 15). Communication plays a great role in creating and crystallizing social realities. It is the tool of social construction of realities and not only creates but can intensify racial divides and boundaries among races in society. It thus can redefine social realities and change them for the better. It has the potential to play a constructive and healing role in interracial marriages. Ingroup talk has a bonding effect for members of that group (Foeman & Nance, 2002). It excludes those labeled “outgroups.” With ingroup members, verbal communication is used to promote group solidarity and cohesion; whereas outgroup communication may be more formal and restricted due to communicator apprehension and stereotyping (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). Such a talk builds and maintains culture (Foeman & Nance; Kochman, 1981) and creates a common reality (Foeman & Nance).

Society establishes interracial marriages as deviant by providing them a different name along with all the accompanying connotations and prejudices. “Just as race is a social construction, interracial couples, or rather the idea of couples being interracial (different from the norm of same-race couples) is also a social construction” (Childs, 2005, p. 10). And the existing images of interracial couples as well as others’ responses shape the self-identities and relationships of interracial couples.

Healing communication has, however, the potential to heal the rift between the intermarried and the wider community. “Communication between family members

and Black-White couples can be viewed as opportunities for interpersonal persuasive influence whereby discussions could focus on affirming the interracial marriage union” (Dunleavy, 2004, p. 22). The interracial couple can initiate discussions meant to highlight and underscore the benefits of interracial marriage while dismissing misperceptions, misconceptions and racist attitudes toward such marriages. They can that way convince family members to view interracial marriages positively and be supportive by acknowledging and sustaining the relationships. Interracial couples can respond to family’s and/or friends’ negative reactions by identifying the functional basis for the attitude (the reason behind it) and making attempts to target those reasons, for instance (Dunleavy; Katz, 1960).

The assumptions of racial “place” and associated rights and burdens in society may need to be discussed by interracial couples, which can be challenging. Foeman and Nance (2002) state that interracial partners need to explain their basic assumptions to a “paradoxically unfamiliar and intimate Other” (p. 241). Interracial partners thus need to develop sensitivity to sometimes unpleasant different views from the other.

Foeman and Nance (2002) also emphasize the importance of communication in the development and enhancement of an interracial relationship. They state that if interracial partners have strong reservations, their relationship may not survive. A range of issues which are related to status and culture, for instance, need to be discussed and resolved.

The major issue in the dynamics of interracial families/couples seems to be the interaction between community and the interracial families/couples rather than within the family/couple itself. It seems from the literature reviewed that the most challenging forces surrounding an interracial family or couple and the social politics

surrounding an interracial family is a result of the pull and push forces among the couple/family and the two (or maybe more) races to which the interracially involved individuals belong. Communication has as big a role to play in rectifying the difficulties interracial families face within society as it plays in creating and crystallizing the misconceptions on which prejudices and stereotypes are based. "Communication shapes and reshapes the relationship between couple and culture" (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 238).

Interracially involved individuals are likely to face and sustain a lot of pressure from family, friends, and community in the attraction phase. At this phase of the relationship, "communication will shape how, in the social context, the couple will frame and articulate their attraction to one another" (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 240). An interracial couple's communication choices at the early stage are very significant. The course of their entire relationship depends on this stage. Two very important sensitivity themes at this stage are, according to Foeman and Nance, sensitivity to status differences between the partners' racial groups; and sensitivity to partners' loyalties to these groups.

Interracial couples need to coordinate their perspectives and experiences in order to be able to enhance their relationship. They have to "weave their two disparate stories into one fabric" (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 243). Communication plays an integral role here. Communication also plays a great role between the interracial couple and their social system(s). Even though avoiding difficult situations or insulating oneself is one of the strategies interracial couples can employ, negotiating is another alternative when the difficult circumstances cannot be avoided (Foeman & Nance).

Foeman and Nance (2002) argue that for an interracial couple, a healthy life together can be achieved through rethinking and reframing of "restrictive and inaccurate" descriptions of interracial couples. The reframing of perceptions can be accomplished through communication.

Foeman and Nance (2002) contend that the stories of interracial couples define them while their metaphors sustain them. Communication also enables them to challenge the negative frames projected by others. "Having traveled their own unique road, successful interracial couples are in a position to share their experience with the culture at large" (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 247). For when couples emerge with effective stories, strategies, and perspectives, they may get the courage to share their views. Foeman and Nance state that an interracial couple must manage many competing images: within their own minds, with each other, and with the outside world.

Foeman and Nance (1999, 2002) describe four communication stages for interracial couples: The first stage, awareness, which exposes the couple to social images of race, may create pressure on the couple. Here, the couple should present messages that counteract the uncomfortable frames that society uses to describe interracial couples and their motivations. In the second stage, coping, the interracial couple's communication must be used to either insulate and protect them from others when necessary or to negotiate situations as their communication skills as well as their ability to discern and manage challenges improve. In the third stage, identity emergence, the couple begins to develop a vocabulary and perspective to help them and others reconstitute the images of race and interracial couples in the current social construction. In this stage, interracial couples "are challenged to communicate creatively lest they reinforce the same old caste system based on race and color that

has damaged so many already” (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 248). In the fourth and final stage, maintenance, the couples need to see their vision through for a lifetime. “Their communication can become a natural part of how they present themselves and how others speak about them” (p. 248).

Nash (1995) suggests that communication is the key to a wholesome development in interracial families. Fletcher-Stephens (1998, as cited in McFadden, 2001) also states that biracial children will experience less core identity conflict and will be able to mediate social marginality as interracial couples continue to create and present a balanced view of their family. Successful negotiation of social relationship challenges is a matter of communication (Segrin, 2006).

Interracial couples with children can help them develop a healthy attitude toward life and themselves through healthy communication; or at least make sure that they don’t misguide their children with dysfunctional communication. Certain patterns of family communication can have an amazingly far-reaching and long lasting influence on people’s attitudes (Segrin, 2006).

According to Childs (2005), the negative responses to and images of interracial relationships are based on a dominant discourse or a racial ideology which portrays interracial couples and relationships as deviant. This misguided discourse has to be challenged and reconstituted through communication. The adoption of the term “multiracial” by activists, argues DaCosta (2007), is a group-building device. It is also part of the activists attempt to convince others to perceive multiracials in the way activists perceive them.

Communication can play a more constructive role in solving the challenges and problems that are faced by multiracial families, which are basically a result of communication. Even families that accept their biracial members (grandchildren) tend

to mishandle the biracial identity (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). Those families refused to discuss biracial identity and behaved as if society was color-blind. This may imply that biracial identity/heritage is abnormal and should be hidden as much as possible. It also reduces the role communication can play in helping the biracial individuals face and overcome challenges. It may also cause frustration for the biracial individuals by setting unrealistic expectations of color-blindness. The biracial individuals can also be forced to think of themselves and their parents' union as "taboo." This is reflected in Kelch-Oliver and Leslie's study. The women in this study—most of whom came from families where one side of the family had several interracial marriages—saw their family members' intermarriage as abnormal or as "a sign that something was wrong with that family" (Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006, p. 67).

Biracialism is not all disadvantages, though. It has its own advantages as well. Their unique position allows biracial individuals to realize that the distinctions between and among racial groups are only a creation of society. Shih et al. (2007) propose that a heightened awareness of race as a social construction among multiracial individuals arises from the unique experiences they often encounter during their upbringing. Such experiences play a role in biracial and multiracial individuals' struggles to define their racial identity and make them question society's beliefs about racial distinctions. "Multiracial individuals are often raised in settings where individuals from different racial backgrounds coexist peacefully" (Shih, et al., 2007, p. 126). On top of that, many parents of biracial and multiracial children downplay the importance of race as a means of social stratification.

Research Importance

Intercultural marriage provides a frame through which to see the impact of culture on the development, maintenance, and change in interpersonal relationships

(Buttny, 1987). Human beings are inherently “social animals,” and their sense of well-being is very much linked with the nature and quality of their personal relationships (Segrin, 2006). Understanding and contributing to a broad understanding of those relationships may contribute to their, and thus to society’s, well-being. Because of their rare occurrence and their uniqueness from other interracial relationships, the issue of Black-White relationships as well as the views of Blacks and Whites about these relationships need to be studied separately from other interracial relationships (Childs, 2005).

Childs (2005) suggests that interracial relationships be studied not only by looking at the couples themselves, but also by how the couples along with their children are accepted and understood by their relatives, neighbors, communities, and society. “In essence, the ways that interracial couples are socially constructed within society mirrors the social construction of race and racial groups” (Childs, 2005, p. 6).

Kennedy (2003) contends that interracial couples make meaning out of their experiences in available interpretive frameworks and often inescapable rules of race relations in this country. Listening to their stories can thus give an insight into their world and afford an understanding of the dynamics of their experiences in society. It also shows the impact of existing social scripts in interpreting their experiences.

As biracial and multiracial individuals become more prevalent in society, understanding their experiences becomes increasingly important. Education has an important influence on understandings of race, especially as it applies to “confronting norms of racial classification” (Roth, 2005, p. 42). However, research concerning biracial people is scarce in the scholarly literature (Herman, 2004; Kelch-Oliver & Leslie, 2006). This situation has sustained the misunderstanding concerning race and racial identity in general, and biracial identity in particular. Even though the discourse

about multiracialism seems to increase, the misunderstanding of race and biracials is reflected in the still prevalent issues of racism. The discourse has shifted to highly personal and political discussions of multiraciality and the role and meaning of racial categories; the role race and process of racialization play in the lives of Americans as well as the racial inequalities present primarily in U.S. institutions, however, have not decreased (Blau, 2004). Brunnsma (2005) argues, "The United States remains a racially divided and unequal society" (p. 1132). The little research that exists in the area of multiracialism, on the other hand, happens to be equivocal in terms of its findings (Herman, 2004).

Biracial individuals, however, both want and deserve to be heard, understood, and accepted. Many multiracial individuals resent and find it confusing to be classified as a member of a single race group but have nonetheless experienced and internalized the categories in which they are placed by society (Gaskins, 1999).

No matter how much it is investigated, the issue of biracialism or multiracialism is far from being (fully) understood. Shih and Sanchez's (2005) review of literature in the area asserts this. A survey of the qualitative studies on racial identity development revealed mixed results for the degree to which multiracial individuals experienced difficulty with their racial identity (Shih & Sanchez). Nineteen of the studies they reviewed suggested that multiracial individuals predominantly felt positively about their multiracial identity and felt comfortable dealing with issues related to their racial identity. Fourteen of the studies they reviewed suggested negative experiences related to multiracial individuals' ability to define and develop their racial identity. Shih and Sanchez also found that, among the studies they reviewed, those which sampled clinical populations tended to find negative outcomes.

The stereotypes and discrimination surrounding Black-White biracial identity—and any biracial identity, for that matter—are a result of ignorance and misunderstanding. Shih, et al. (2007) argue that the emphasis of race as a social construction and the de-emphasis of the assumed biological basis of race may diminish the impact of race-based stereotypes. “Believing that race is a social construction allows individuals, including multiracial individuals, to undermine the supposed validity of many race-based stereotypes” (Shih, et al., 2007, p. 126).

Undermining the biological basis of racial categories people believe in eventually demolishes the foundation upon which many race-based stereotypes rest. Such a transformation may lead individuals to realize that race is “less informative” about individuals’ innate characteristics and traits and maybe to identify less strongly with their racial identity (Shih, et al., 2007). This could, in turn, lead to harmonization of relationships among the races and to an understanding of biracial and multiracial individuals as well as biracial and multiracial identities. Rejecting the “biological basis” of race could also lessen biracial and multiracial individuals’ identification with the stereotyped identities and lessen the impact of the stereotypes people face because of their racial backgrounds.

Though they may be unrealistic, stereotypes have been found to impact their targets in significant and profound ways. Stereotypes, based on their valence, may boost or impair performance of those individuals whom they are targeted at (Shih, et al., 2007). The less salient racial identity is for an individual, the less impactful the stereotypes become. Shih, et al. found that de-emphasizing the biological basis and emphasizing the social construction of race reduces stereotype threat susceptibility. Having a better perspective at, and understanding of, racial concepts and their foundations can thus help reduce racial stereotypes and discriminations while

empowering the biracials and multiracials to confront those challenges and hardships in their social environment (Shih, et al.). “By emphasizing the fact that race is a biologically meaningless dimension along which to categorize people, multiracial individuals are also able to undermine the validity of many of the social stereotypes and stigma associated with race” (pp. 132-133). Education and encouraging people to be thoughtful about issues of race may be an important tool in the fight against the negative consequences of racism and prejudice. Looking at the issue of biracial identity and the social politics surrounding it closely, I hope and believe, contributes toward that end. It is my intention to bring the three voices—society’s, interracial couples’, as well as biracial children’s—together in this research and to investigate them, informed mainly by symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, for a broader and better understanding of the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity.

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism

Communication is “*a transactional process in which individuals create, share, and regulate meaning*” (Segrin & Flora, 2005, p. 15). Communication contributes in creating and shaping social reality. This makes the symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives—arguing primarily that reality is subjective—helpful in investigating the social politics surrounding both interracial marriages and biracial identity. I base my study on these perspectives and theories.

Symbolic interaction (SI) theory is based on George Herbert Mead’s theoretical tenets. The theory is intended to explain the way humans create, react to, and redefine the shared, symbolic meanings in their social environment (Segrin & Flora, 2005).

Mead regarded symbols as the foundation of both personal and social life (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980; Wood, 2000). Symbols develop in the context of social acts and they function in the process of completing those acts (Stryker). Symbolic interactionism argues that words and nonverbals are the primary symbols to which humans assign meaning, and that meaning is intersubjective in that it requires shared symbols and interpretations. It also holds that meanings are heavily influenced by perceptions (self- and others' perceptions). In other words, the theory emphasizes individuals' perceptions and the intersubjectivity shared by people.

Symbolic interactionists hold that both society and person are abstractions from ongoing social interactions and that "selves" and "society" have no reality apart from each other or outside the interpersonal interactions from which they derive (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). The key concepts of symbolic interactionism which help explain how symbols work in shaping and reshaping reality include mind, self, and role-taking. These concepts help to describe and explain the ideals behind the theory and the way(s) in which reality is (re)created.

Mind is the ability to use symbols that have common social meanings (Wood, 2000, p. 97). This ability to use symbols is what enables people to share ideas and to communicate about those ideas, rather than simply to behave toward one another as animals do (Blumer, 1969; Wood). Self, on the other hand, is the ability to reflect on ourselves from the perspective of others (Wood, 2000, p. 98). Symbolic interactionism holds that both mind and self do not exist at birth; rather they are developed through interaction with others. "The self is an emergent [social structure] from social interaction" (Stryker, 1980, p. 37). The self is essentially a social structure, which can be an object to itself and which arises in social experience (Blumer; Stryker). The self exists in the activity and process of viewing oneself reflexively

from the perspectives and standpoints of others. Developing a “self,” thus, involves looking through others’ eyes. This enables individuals to view themselves as an object. The implication of this argument is that a human being can be the object of one’s own actions and can act toward oneself as one might act toward others (Blumer).

The argument also indicates that our perceptions of both ourselves and our environment can be influenced by others’ perceptions. “The views of us that others communicate are the basis of our initial meanings for ourselves—our understanding of who we are” (Wood, 2000, p. 98). We learn to see ourselves in the mirror of others’ eyes. Thus, our perceptions of how others see and perceive us are lenses through which we perceive ourselves. “We learn to see ourselves in terms of the labels others apply to us. Those labels shape our self-concepts and behaviors” (Wood, 2000, p. 98).

Others’ perceptions of us can, therefore, work as self-fulfilling prophecies since how others perceive us may be so powerful that their perceptions dictate our perceptions of ourselves and thus how we live our lives (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). Whether others’ perceptions of us are realistic and reasonable or not, they can influence our self-perceptions and our self-perceptions can, in turn, influence how we live our lives—how we behave.

Mead saw two complementary parts of the self: the “I” and the “ME.” This conceptualization implies that humans have the distinctive ability to be both the subjects and the objects of their experiences (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980; Wood, 2000). “We can both act and observe ourselves in the process of acting” (Wood, 2000, p. 98). Wood describes the distinctions between the “I” and the “ME” as follows:

The “I” is impulsive, creative, spontaneous, and generally unburdened by social rules and restrictions. Thus, the I is the source both of creative genius

and individuality and of criminal and immoral behavior. The ME is the socially conscious part of the self who reflects on the I's impulses and actions. The ME is analytical, evaluative, and, above all, aware of social conventions, rules, and expectations (p. 98).

The ME—the socially aware part of the self—consists of the perspectives of others. “As we interact with others, we come to understand the meanings they attach to situations, behaviors, people, ideas, values, and so forth” (Wood, 200, p. 99). Consequently, we take the perspectives of others inside ourselves, which become our (for the ME part of us) own perspectives on the world. How we believe others do and will perceive us, therefore, influences and shapes our own perceptions of ourselves. Anticipated responses with respect to oneself become part of the ME part of the self (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). The ME part of the self “is the equivalent of social roles which are the organized attitudes or expectations of others incorporated into the self” (Stryker, 1980, p. 38). The “I,” on the other hand, represents the responses and reactions of the person to the structured attitudes of others.

Symbolic interactionists argue that our meanings for things reflect the perspectives of both particular others—individuals significant to us, e.g. family—and the generalized other—a social group, community, or society as a whole. Therefore, the perceptions of both a particular other and the generalized other influence our perceptions of ourselves and our world. The perspectives we internalize can include rules, roles and attitudes shared by members of society (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980).

Internalizing others' perspectives, however, is not an instant event. It rather is a process (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). The process of internalizing others' perspectives and viewing experiences from their perspectives is called role taking (Wood, 2000, p. 99). Role taking is, thus, the course by which persons learn how

others locate them and how others expect them to behave (Stryker). This leads to shaping our own perceptions of and expectations from ourselves. Taking the standpoint of others—role taking—which is also described as anticipating others' responses/reactions on the basis of common participation in a communication process, is the process through which the self is built (Stryker, 1980, pp. 37-38). The influencing and shaping of perceptions does not have to be one-way, though. "Mutual role-taking is the *sine qua non* of communication and effective symbolic interaction" (Blumer, 1969, p. 10).

Therefore, how and how much our perceptions are influenced by others' perceptions of us and our environment is a result of our interpretations of others' perceptions. Individuals are interpretive beings and they construct their actions through a process of personal interpretations (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). Therefore, though others' perspectives can have a strong influence on how we perceive and behave, others' perspectives are not determinant factors. "Their interpretations of others' perspectives—not those perspectives themselves—guide individuals' meanings and choices of how to communicate in particular situations" (Wood, 2000, p. 99). Symbolic interaction holds that "social action is lodged in acting individuals who fit their respective lines of action to one another through a process of interpretation; group action is the collective action of such individuals" (Blumer, 1969, p. 84).

Symbolic interactionism has three basic premises or themes (Blumer, 1969, p. 2; West & Turner, 2000, p. 74-79): The first premise holds that human beings act toward things—everything the human being may note in his world from objects to other human beings—on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. This theme has three assumptions: (a) humans act toward others on the basis of the

meaning those others have for them, (b) meaning is created in interaction between people, and (c) meaning is modified through an interpretive process.

The second premise/theme holds that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows (Blumer, 1969). It has two assumptions: (a) individuals develop self-concepts through their interaction with others, and (b) these self-concepts provide an important motive for behavior.

And, the third premise holds that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969). This third premise/theme deals with the relationship between individuals and society. It has two assumptions: (a) people and groups are influenced by cultural and social processes, and (b) social structure is worked out through social interaction.

Symbolic interaction is a diverse collection of theories including social construction (Klein & White, 1996; White & Klein, 2002). Social construction being a part of symbolic interaction explains co-construction of meaning (Segrin & Flora, 2005). It emphasizes that meaning exists in the practice of communication and interaction between people. Thus, even though people have many shared meanings, symbolic meaning is constantly being modified in interaction.

“SI highlights that meaning is dynamic and subjective, and understandings are worked out as family members interact with one another and with society” (Segrin & Flora, 2005, p. 37). Identity, according to symbolic interactionists, is a system of self-relevant knowledge anchored in role relationships (Reich, Raimos, & Jaipal, 2000). Sense of identity, including racial identity and interracial relationship, is, thus, a result of interaction in a society. Omi and Winant (1994) state that it is only in a society

where race is a fundamentally important dimension of social organization and cultural meaning that the idea of an interracial couple acquires its social meaning.

The sense of identity and perception of reality people have, on the other hand, is continuously being (re)shaped through subsequent interactions. From a critical theory's perspective Delgado (1995, p. xiv) argues, "Our social world, with its rules, practices and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories and silence." A better reconstruction of the world is thus not only possible but also leads to a better situation.

Interracial couples are generally perceived to be different from same-race couples (Childs, 2005). Childs states that in the U.S., such couples have been portrayed as deviant, unnatural, pathological, exotic and sexual. Their biracial children are also affected by the prejudices society has about race and racial background(s). Even the labels "interracial" and "biracial" tell us something about society's expectations and ideas. Stryker (1980) attests to this possibility:

Defining a situation involves naming aspects of the non-human environment; it also involves a process of naming others and naming oneself. ... Attaching a positional label to person leads to expected behaviors from that person and to behavior toward that person premised on expectations—assigned "roles" (p. 57).

Such perceptions and expectations, in turn, influence an individual's perceptions, understanding, and behavior. "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). Subsequent interactions work on (re)defining and (re)shaping reality. "It is in the interaction that takes place that social structure itself is fundamentally changed, modified, elaborated on, or reaffirmed" (Stryker, 1980, p. 52).

The challenges faced by interracial couples and their biracial/multiracial children, and the social politics surrounding such couples and individuals is a result of symbolic interaction and the ensuing social construction of reality and can, thus, be fruitfully understood from such a view point.

CHAPTER TWO

ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE
AND BLACK-WHITE BIRACIAL IDENTITY*Introduction*

Society's attitudes toward intermarriages and social support for the intermarried have a lot of significance to interracial couples. Family and friends, as well as members of their community, may have an impact on interracial marriages and on biracial individuals by being supportive or unsupportive of the interracial marriages and interracial families. No matter how independent interracial couples may seem of their community, they are still part of their communities (Zebroski, 1999).

Race seems to be a factor in making decisions and choices as well as in forming attitudes. Blacks have been found to have more friendships with people of other races than did Whites and Whites have been found to have a higher degree of negativity and prejudicial attitudes toward those of other races than did Blacks (Mills et al., 1994). Davidson and Schneider (1992) found that Blacks have more favorable attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships.

At any rate, the social stigmas associated with Black-White interracial marriages still exist long after the rejection of the anti-miscegenation laws (Dunleavy, 2004). An end to anti-miscegenation laws does not imply absence of barriers to Black-White interracial marriages. Black-White intermarriages cause problems associated with racist attitudes and perceived relational inappropriateness (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001).

Extant research suggests a pattern in the reactions Black-White interracial couples receive which depends on the race and sex of those who hold the attitudes toward the intermarriage (and on the make-up of the intermarried couple in terms of sex and race). Black women have, for instance, been found to most frequently resent Black man-White woman interracial couples (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Paset and Taylor (1991) also found that White women had more favorable attitudes than Black women toward intermarriage of men of their own race. White women were also found to have more favorable attitudes toward intermarriage involving White women. According to Paset and Taylor, Black women might perceive interracial marriage—regardless of the sex and race combination—as more threatening to their personal as well as racial interests than do White women. Contrary to this, however, Dickson (1993) reported that African American (Black) women were least threatened by interracial pairing and have become more involved in relationships with European American (White) males. Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) have two explanations for the mixed findings: First, they speculate that Black women may resent interracial marriages between Black men and White women because it places them at a relational disadvantage due to the lack of available Black men. Second, they think Black women who recognize this rising trend in interracial marriages are becoming increasingly open to interracial relationships themselves for that very same reason.

Zebroski (1999) surveyed Black-White interracially married people on their perception of support and opposition from their everyday casual contacts. Zebroski reports a certain pattern when the gender/race composition of the intermarried was considered: respondents felt that people who were of the same gender and race as themselves or their spouse tended to be most supportive of their relationship during

casual interactions; whereas people who were of the same race but different gender—of themselves and their spouse—tended to be most opposed to their relationship. Zebroski's findings contradict Paset and Taylor's (1991) and Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) findings of Black women as the most opposed to interracial marriages. Despite the contradiction in the findings about the trends, interracial couples (and especially for Black-White interracial couples) still face resistance and discrimination from society (La Taillade, 1999). Throughout history, no interracial union has been more controversial than the pairing of African American (Black) and European American (White) individuals (Chesley & Wagner, 2003).

The discrimination and challenges interracial couples face also affect their children. Both Black and White monoracials have been found to have a preference for same-race peers, for instance (Chesley & Wagner, 2003). Biracial and multiracial individuals defy society's traditional notions and assumptions about race because they cannot be easily placed into any of society's preexisting racial categories (Spickard, 1992). Society basically conceptualizes race as mutually exclusive. This raises more challenges for multiracial individuals beyond what their monoracial counterparts face (Shih et al., 2007). Since multiracial individuals are not easy to classify in either of the preexisting racial categories—neither the monoracial majority nor the monoracial minority—they face rejection from both the majority and the minority groups (Root, 1992).

This chapter investigates social attitudes (the attitudes of Blacks and Whites specifically) toward Black-White interracial marriages, and Black-White biracial individuals or Black-White biracial identity. To investigate these issues, the chapter addresses the following questions:

1. What are society's (Blacks' and Whites') attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages?
2. Is there a difference in men's and women's attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages?
3. Is there a difference in Blacks' and Whites' attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages?
4. What are society's (Blacks' and Whites') attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity?
5. Is there a difference in men's and women's attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity?
6. Is there a difference in Blacks' and Whites' attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity?

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 320 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Eastern Illinois University. Twenty five participants were excluded from further analysis because they either did not complete the survey (they left a few questions unanswered) or they were neither Black nor White (they racially identified themselves as "Other"). The rest of the participants were 133 (45.1%) men and 169 (54.9%) women. All the participants were adults (18 or older). One-hundred-and-eight or 36.6% were freshman, 92 or 31.2% were sophomores, 60 or 20.3% were juniors, 27 or 9.2% were seniors, and 8 or 2.7% were graduate students. The participants were 51 or 17.3% Blacks and 244 or 82.7% Whites. Since the intention was to investigate the attitudes of Blacks and Whites toward Black-White interracial

marriages and Black-White biracial identity, those who racially identified themselves as "Other" were excluded from further analysis.

College students are an interesting and useful part of the population to sample for this type of study since they are young adults in the midst of exploring alternative lifestyles and dating experiences (Frazier & Easterly, 1990, as cited in Dunleavy, 2004). Dunleavy also states that college students may have better defined, though implicit, theories regarding interracial marriage because of their potential exposure to diversity and the possibility to refine their attitudes toward and expectations about marriage.

Procedure

Data were gathered on campus by distributing questionnaires on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity/individuals and letting the participants fill their answers into provided scantron sheets themselves. Participation in the study was voluntary. Surveys were distributed in general education or core classes in the Communication Studies Department. Students in some of the classes/sections were offered extra credit for participating, no incentive was offered to the rest of the participants. Participants were debriefed of the voluntary nature of their participation and the purpose of the study. They were then given consent forms to read and sign. After they read and signed the consent forms, they were asked to fill out the surveys.

Attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity were obtained by having participants complete a 35-item questionnaire (See Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of four demographic questions, eight items pertaining to participants' attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages (Dunleavy, 2004), and 23 items pertaining to participants' attitudes toward Black-

White biracial identity/individuals (Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001). These previously tested instruments were used for better reliability and validity.

The items on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages were rated on a 7-point semantic differential scale where 1 indicated very unfavorable attitudes and 7 indicated very favorable attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriage. Internal consistency for scores on the items was very good ($\alpha = .90$). The eight semantic differentials used were: good/bad, rewarding/punishing, acceptable/unacceptable, respectful/disrespectful, harmful/beneficial, intolerable/tolerable, satisfactory/unsatisfactory, and offensive/pleasant.

The items on participants' attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity were rated on a 5-point scale bounded by the poles of 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree), where 1 indicated very unfavorable attitudes and 5 indicated very favorable attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity. Internal consistency for the items was very good ($\alpha = .89$). The 23 randomly ordered items on attitudes toward Black-White biracial identity made up four constructs: Self-esteem (six items), multiracial heritage (four items), psychological adjustment (10 items), and multiracial identity (three items). Analyses of the participants' attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity were drawn from the responses. Results are reported below.

Results

Attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages

To answer the first research question, to assess society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages, frequencies were computed. Participants of the study reported positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.22$). The mean score was greater than 3.5 on a 7-point scale for all the eight

items ($M > 5.0$ for seven of the items measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages). The participants also reported very positive attitudes (scored mean greater than 5.5) toward Black-White interracial marriages on three of the eight items measuring attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages. The mean scores for all the items were as follows: Good/bad ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.48$), rewarding/punishing ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.47$), acceptable/unacceptable ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.47$), respectful/disrespectful ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.52$), harmful/beneficial ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.73$), intolerable/tolerable ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.74$), satisfactory/unsatisfactory ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.50$), and offensive/pleasant ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.75$). The greater the mean, the more positive participants' attitudes were toward Black-White interracial marriages.

To answer the second and third research questions, to assess the roles of sex and race on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages respectively, an ANOVA test was run. No significant effect was found for sex, $F_{(1, 269)} = 1.14$, $p = .29$. Women scored higher mean than men on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.20$ for men, and $M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.20$ for women). However, this difference was not statistically significant at the .05 significance level. Women scored higher means on all the eight items making up the construct attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Nonetheless, none of those differences was statistically significant.

No significant effect was found for race, either, $F_{(1, 269)} = .08$, $p = .78$. Blacks scored a slightly higher mean than Whites on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.08$ for Blacks, and $M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.23$ for Whites). This difference was not statistically significant at the .05 significance level, though. Blacks scored higher means on six of the eight items making up the attitudes toward Black-

White interracial marriages scale. But only one of these differences was statistically significant at the .05 significance level. Whites scored higher means on two of the eight items. The differences were not statistically significant at the .05 significance level, however. A slightly insignificant difference was found for one of these two items. The mean for Blacks for the semantic differential item "Good/Bad" was 5.89 ($SD = 1.40$), whereas the mean for Whites was 5.38 ($SD = 1.47$). This difference was statistically significant at the .05 significance level, $F_{(1, 269)} = 4.97, p = .03$.

No statistically significant interaction effect between sex and race was found on attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages, $F_{(1, 269)} = .88, p = .35$. White women scored the highest mean ($M = 5.47, SD = 1.22$) followed by Black women ($M = 5.35, SD = 1.07$) and Black men ($M = 5.32, SD = 1.12$). White men scored the lowest mean ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.21$). These differences, however, were not statistically significant at the .05 significance level. A statistically significant interaction effect between sex and race was found for the item "Offensive/pleasant," $F_{(1, 269)} = 3.89, p = .05$. Black men scored the highest mean ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.86$) followed by White women ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.73$) and Black women ($M = 4.85, SD = 2.01$). White men scored the lowest mean ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.65$). These distinctions were statistically significant at the .05 significance level.

Attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity

To answer the fourth research question, to assess social attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity, frequencies were computed. Participants of the study reported negative attitudes on all the four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. The mean for all the four constructs was less than 3.0 on a 5-point scale. The higher the mean, the more positive the attitude. The four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity

were: Self-esteem ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.63$), multiracial heritage ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.62$) psychological adjustment ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.57$), and multiracial identity ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.76$).

To answer the fifth and sixth questions, to assess the effect of sex and race on attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals, an ANOVA was run. No statistically significant difference was found between men and women on any of the four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. Men scored higher means on all four constructs (self-esteem means: 2.81 ($SD = 0.62$) and 2.72 ($SD = 0.63$) for men and women respectively; multiracial heritage means: 2.72 ($SD = 0.59$) and 2.61 ($SD = 0.62$) for men and women respectively; psychological adjustment means: 2.60 ($SD = 0.54$) and 2.46 ($SD = 0.58$) for men and women respectively, and multiracial identity means: 2.52 ($SD = 0.74$) and 2.30 ($SD = 0.72$) for men and women respectively). None of these differences was statistically significant, even though the difference for the construct "multiracial identity" was slightly insignificant, $F_{(1, 269)} = 3.17$, $p = .08$.

There was no statistically significant effect for race on all four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals, either. Blacks scored higher means on all four constructs than Whites. Nonetheless, the differences were not statistically significant at the .05 significance level.

There were no statistically significant interaction effects for race and sex on attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. Black men scored the highest mean for self-esteem ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.68$) followed by White men ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.61$) and White women ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.63$). Black women scored the lowest mean ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.60$). Black men scored the highest mean for multiracial heritage as well ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.58$) followed by Black women ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.64$), White men

($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.60$), and White women ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.61$). Black men scored the highest mean for psychological adjustment ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.51$) followed by White men ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.54$), Black women ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.55$), and White women ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.59$). Black men scored the highest mean for multiracial identity ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.76$), followed by White men ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.74$), Black women ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.73$) and White women ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.72$). None of these differences was statistically significant, though. And, all the groups—Black men, Black women, White men and White women—had negative attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals ($M < 3.0$).

Discussion

The participants of this study reported positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. They scored high on the means leaning towards the positive/affirmative term making up each of the eight semantic differentials measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Their description of Black-White interracial marriages leans towards 'good, rewarding, acceptable, respectful, beneficial, tolerable, satisfactory and pleasant' as opposed to 'bad, punishing, unacceptable, disrespectful, harmful, intolerable, unsatisfactory, and offensive' respectively.

The participants, however, reported negative attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals on all the four constructs measuring attitudes toward biracial individuals. In other words, the participants believe Black-White biracial individuals have poor self-esteem, weak multiracial heritage, difficulty adjusting psychologically, and weak multiracial identity.

The positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages the participants reported contradict previous literature (e.g. Childs, 2005; Hibbler &

Shinew, 2002; LaTaillade, 1999; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). There can be multiple reasons for this. Taking it at face value, it might suggest a change (an improvement) in social attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Blacks and Whites might have become more accepting of Black-White interracial marriages.

The negative attitudes the participants reported toward Black-White biracial individuals, however, challenges this explanation. If the participants had positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages, one would expect them to have more or less similar, and thus positive, attitudes toward their biracial offspring. This, however, was not the case in the current study. Participants reported negative attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. Even though this does not disprove the former explanation, it begs and warrants alternative explanations.

Another possible explanation is that participants may have concealed their true feelings and attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Since the section on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages was a semantic differential scale, it might have been easier for participants to reflect on their prejudices and negative attitudes leading to their concealing their true feelings and reporting positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. It is also possible that other factors which the instrument could not measure might be playing a part. Since multiple factors can play a role in shaping an individual's attitudes toward interracial marriages (McFadden & Moore, 2001), the participants' previous experiences—including their exposure to the other race, the composition of their friends' and sensitivity to racism—might be playing a role in influencing their attitudes (or how they portray their attitudes).

No statistically significant difference was found between men's and women's attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Even though women scored

higher means on the attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages as well as on each of the eight items measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages, the differences were not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant difference between men's and women's attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals, either. Though men score higher on all four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals—self-esteem, multiracial heritage, psychological adjustment, and multiracial identity, the differences were not statistically significant.

There was no statistically significant difference between Blacks and Whites in attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. There was also no statistically significant difference between Blacks and Whites in attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. There were no significant differences between the races in all four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals/identity. There, however, was a statistically significant difference between Blacks and Whites in one of the items measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. Blacks scored higher mean on the semantic differential item "good/bad," indicating Blacks had more positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages than Whites. Blacks scored higher means on five other items measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and on all four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. Whites scored higher means on two items measuring attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. However, none of these differences were statistically significant. No statistically significant interaction effects were found for sex and race on seven of the eight items measuring attitudes toward Black-White marriages. A statistically significant effect of race and sex was found for one of the items—"offensive/pleasant." Black men reported more positive

attitudes (scored the highest) on this item, followed by White women, Black women and White men. No statistically significant interaction effects of race and sex were found for all four constructs measuring attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals.

The study had some limitations. The fact that the survey could not measure factors that can affect an individual's attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity—such as an individual's past experiences and exposure to racial diversity—is one limitation. A related limitation is that the survey did not address the reasons why the participants hold the attitudes they have toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals. The survey did not measure the participants' values, for instance. Including items (and constructs) that can address these issues would help to come up with a better understanding in the future.

The survey also did not account for race and sex combinations of Black-White interracial marriages (Black man-White woman, Black woman-White man) and the effects these might have on participants' attitudes. An attempt to address this can also help to strengthen future studies on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals/identity.

This chapter presents outsiders' (Blacks' and Whites') perspectives on and attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals. To examine the insiders' perspective the following two chapters investigate the perspectives of Black-White interracial couples and Black-White biracial individuals respectively. Chapter 3 investigates the experiences and perspectives of Black-White interracial couples. Chapter 4 investigates the experiences and perspectives of Black-White biracial adults. The final chapter—

chapter 5—discusses the three chapters to provide a comprehensive look of the issues the three chapters address.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL POLITICS SURROUNDING BLACK-WHITE
INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES*Introduction*

Interracial marriages are considered an oddity in the American society. The social politics surrounding race and racial relations seems more visible if the intermarried happen to be Black and White. Given the extreme disapproval of Black-White intermarriages and the historical antagonism between the two races—Blacks and Whites—Black-White interracial marriages continue to be considered a major trespassing across the racial boundary. The ongoing resistance and disapproval of Black-White interracial marriages, which is basically a result of misunderstanding and misconceptions about the (in)validity of racial assumptions, puts Black-White interracial couples in a unique position and makes their experiences matchless.

Because the unique position as well as its implication to the insiders is misunderstood at worst and poorly understood at best in the American society, investigating the experiences of Black-White interracial couples can contribute to a better understanding of such couples in the U.S. and thereby minimize the stigma they face for their marriage choices. This chapter investigates the experiences of Black-White interracial couples in the racially charged American society. It presents insiders'—Black-White interracial couples'—perspectives on Black-White interracial marriage.

To understand the experiences and perceptions or views of Black-White interracial couples, the chapter addresses the following major questions:

1. How do Black-White interracial couples conceptualize race and racial identification?
2. How do/would Black-White interracial couples racially identify their children?
3. What challenges, if any, do Black-White interracial couples face?
4. Do Black-White interracial couples (families) face any discrimination? If yes, what does it look like?
5. How do Black-White interracial couples describe social attitudes toward Black-White interracial couples (families)?
6. Is race discussed in Black-White interracial families? And what are the implications of whether it is discussed or not?

Method

Participants for this study were three Black-White interracial couples—six interracial married Black and White individuals. Two of the couples are marriages between a Black man and a White woman whereas one is a marriage between a Black woman and a White man. I used purposive (snow ball) sampling technique to recruit Black-White interracial couples to participate in my study. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was offered. The couples have been married for two-and-half, 11, and 38 years respectively. The participants range from 28 to 60 years in age. All of the participants identified themselves as either Black or White (and their marriage as a Black-White interracial marriage). All the participants have had some college level education. Two of the couples are from Illinois (from Charleston and Chicago area) and one is from Massachusetts (Boston).

I explained the purpose of the study and that participation in the study was voluntary. I asked the participants to read and sign a consent form and then

conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with each of them (See appendix B for interview grid). Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' conveniences. A couple was interviewed at their home, another at the home of the man's family, and the third on campus. Interviews lasted from 51 minutes to two hours and 13 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. I depended on grounded theory in interpreting and analyzing the data, and I was informed by the symbolic interactionism and social constructionism theories in explaining the experiences of the interracial couples. Grounded theory serves the purpose of this study since it emphasizes the link between data and the categories into which the data are coded, and since it argues that possible ways of explaining the issue under study keep being shaped until the end of the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). I used a symbolic interactionist/social constructionist perspective in explaining my findings since the issue at the center of the study is race, which is a social construction. This perspective was explained in more detail earlier in the literature review.

I read the transcriptions of the interviews (a total of 165 pages) twice to have a general understanding of the Black-White interracial couples' perspectives. Then I read the transcriptions a third time coding them with some words/phrases that would help me organize the information into related groups. I assigned the participants pseudonyms to protect their privacy. I analyzed the information organized into groups to come up with themes that would lead to an understanding and a description of the interracial couples' experiences and feelings as they perceive and describe them.

Findings

The lessons I could learn from the Black-White interracial couples' responses and stories are presented under 16 themes formulated and derived from my multiple readings of the transcriptions of the interviews. The themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, I believe presenting them the way I have affords an opportunity to look at the issues surrounding Black-White interracial marriage from multiple and essential angles—multiple angles that would give a better picture of the interracial couples' experiences and feelings.

The interracial couples are Brad and Susan, 30 and 28 respectively, who have been married for two-and-half years from the Chicago area; and Alex and Jennifer, 45 and 40 respectively, who have been married for 11 years from Charleston; both intermarriages between a Black man and a White woman. The third couple is Thomas and Nicole, both 60, from Boston, Massachusetts. They have been married for almost 38 years and are a marriage between a Black woman and a White man. The themes derived from the interview transcriptions are: "Just another marriage;" "We are possible because of love;" family's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriage and relationship with the interracial couple; social attitudes toward and society's relationship with Black-White interracial families; "Human;" "We have differences but not racial ones;" "God-centered;" "No challenges, but..." advantages and disadvantages; comfort zone; role of communication; "Support matters;" upbringing and environment; "Better covered;" race talk; and "What we mean."

"Just another marriage."

This theme presents the interracial couples' description of their marriage. The interracial couples describe their marriage as "just another marriage" with good and

bad times, with “ups and downs,” nonetheless happy, dependable and strong. They are “just like husband and wife” in their marriage.

Thomas, a 60-year-old White man who has been married to a Black woman for almost 38 years, is a father of five children and has seven grandchildren. He says, “The relationship is fine.” Thomas does not see “any kind of uniqueness” to his interracial marriage:

I mean, people, everybody I can say argue, divorce, they get married or remarried whatever. Uh so, I don't think there is any kind of uniqueness to it (interracial marriage). So, we kind of relate; just like a male female kind of thing. Uh yeah it's I, it's, you know, relationships have their ups and downs, but I don't really think that it would be any different [if our marriage was same-race].

His wife Nicole agrees. Nicole says her marriage has “the same issues” as any other marriage. It just makes her think broader. Nicole says:

Uh, I think we have the same issues [as a within-race marriage]. I think people have the same issues. I just think that uh, I think a little bit more my, the box in which I'm thinking in is a little bit bigger. ... I have to think broader.

The interracial couples also describe their marriage as good and dependable. Susan, 28 a White woman has been married to a Black man for almost three years and has a two-month-old child. She says her marriage is “very safe. I feel very safe in it, uh I feel that it is very dependable uh, and, you know, before our relationship I never experienced that.”

Alex also does not think their marriage would be any better if he and his wife were the same race. He says, “Uh I think we've got a pretty good marriage. I don't

think if she were different color or if I were of different color, it would make it any better. Uh no, I don't see it that way."

Alex's wife Jennifer says, "Our marriage is great. It's improved over the years, it's gotten better and stronger and we've been through some trials and things, not necessarily race-related. But, we've gone through some pretty rough times and I feel like it's a very strong marriage." She says being in an interracial marriage does not make their marriage any different in terms of the challenges they have to face.

Jennifer says:

I don't think our challenges are much different than the challenges of any other married couple in this day and age, uh you know. Making sure your household runs smoothly not only financially but you got your children that you got to take care of, and the challenges that we have in such a society, I just feel like our challenges are the same.

Thomas thinks interracial marriages are misrepresented in society. He says, "I think really, I think people meld it out a lot towards, I don't really see a lot of stress on it there at all.

The interracial couples thus consider their marriage as any other marriage—albeit misunderstood and considered "dysfunctional" or "wrong" by society, including some of the intermarried individuals' family members at times as themes that follow indicate—with similar challenges and benefits.

"We are possible because of love."

This theme presents the interracial couples' view about love's role in their marriage. The interracial couples see love play a great role in their marriage. They say it's not only the reason why they married but also it's the reason why their marriage survives.

Susan describes how she and her husband Brad met and says love is what keeps them together. She says:

I was actually his supervisor at the job. So, I was his supervisor and he was a counselor. So, you know, first we just met and we worked together; but being the younger workers in the organization, we kind of hang out with other people; uh just because I was new to the community, and they would show me where to go, you know, we go out to dinner as a group. Uh he just clicked to me. ... I mean, he's just genuine, and caring, and that's just something that really attracted me to him. ... I know that I love him a lot, and it's just that that keeps us together.

Jennifer says she married her husband because he was the right man for her. She says he was "as a man everything I needed in a husband. He was my partner, my soul mate, my completion, it was obvious. So, I'd been ridiculous to not marry him. It'd have been miserable for the rest of my life."

Alex says love precedes race. "I just wanted to marry somebody that loved me; that was all that was to me," he says, "I guess them being White or being Black never really came into my scope things." Susan says, "I don't think it's of color, it's more of the intimacy that you share." Brad reiterates Alex and Susan saying that the thought of his relationship being interracial never crossed his mind, including when he dated interracially before he got married. He says:

I loved them [the women he dated and married] and they loved me, I think that really was all that mattered. Uh uh, you know, unconditional love. Uh, you know, the things that I am lacking, you know, I will look for those things in my mate. You know, because I think that's what makes you one, you know,

where you would grow strong. And so I think in [my wife] I think I saw a lot of things, you know, that I really admire.

Brad describes his wife as "caring and selfless" the exact qualities he'd look for in a spouse. He says, "When I think of being married and then having kids that is definitely the kind of person that you want to be with."

Thomas says love made the unexpected happen. He says:

It was like an alien concept to me. I mean it was like a leap, you know, for people to think of me marrying a Black woman being from where I was from, [it was unthinkable]. But at some point you realize, you know, it's basically, you know, you and your wife are the most important thing. ... And I knew that [my wife] loved me and I loved her and she was a very uh special kind of person.

The participants say love is the only reason that brought them together. They also say that love is the glue that sticks them together. They say they are possible because of unconditional love.

Family's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriage and relationship with the interracial couple.

Here the interracial couples describe the attitudes of their families and their in-laws towards their marriage in particular and Black-White interracial marriages in general. They also describe their relationships with their families and their in-laws.

Two of the Black participants say race was not an issue for their immediate and extended family members. The third says he does not have siblings and his parents had passed by the time he got married. He says, all of his extended family members except for one aunt had a positive attitude towards his marriage. All the

White participants say their families were either not accepting, overwhelmed or shocked by their marriage at first.

Nicole says, "Race was not an issue (for my family). But race was definitely an issue on [my husband's] side." She says her husband's parents "were shocked" when they saw her. She says except for one of his brothers, everyone in her husband's family initially opposed their relationship and their marriage.

Thomas says some of his family members were not involved in the wedding. He says, "They chose not to be involved in the wedding. Uh my parents were kind of like overwhelmed by it. But, you know, they, they went to the wedding." For Nicole things were different. She says, "When I decided to marry [my husband], all of my sisters were bride's maids. So, uh it was uh, you know, they were fine, they were fine with it."

Jennifer says even though her parents are accepting of different cultures, they were "taken aback" when she brought her husband home. She says, "But they were very accepting, so I think in a short action." Susan also says her family were "taken aback" by her marriage. She, however, says her father was the only one she had "multiple conversations with." She says, "But I think it was not of disapproval but more of, 'Make sure that you're comfortable.'" These concerns, she says, were shared by her mother. Jennifer tells more of the story:

I didn't tell mom and dad that [my husband] was black because it didn't dawn on me to tell them. So, my sisters had told them ahead of time and I know they said when they first met him, they were glad my sisters had told them ahead of time, otherwise they might have been a little more shocked when he came to the door. Uh but they didn't, you know, they got over it.

Nicole says that her in-laws eventually accepted their marriage although it took her mother-in-law a little longer to accept it. She says, "I would say it took many years for [my mother-in-law] to realize I'm not going anywhere, I'm gonna be (nice), I'm here and that's when she decided to start being nice, and started being nice."

Thomas says having children helped his parents to accept their marriage though "it took some getting used to for my mother." Nicole agrees. "They loved the children," she says, "Children have a way of breaking down barriers, you know, and they loved the children."

Alex says he does not have brothers and sisters and his parents had passed by the time he got married: my mother's sister said, when I got married she said, "Why didn't you come and tell us? We could have found you a really nice girl."

No matter what their attitude at the beginning, the families of the interracially married seem to forge better relationships with the interracial couple through time. Brad says he and his wife have a "great relationship" with his family who are "definitely happy for us." He also says they have good relations with his wife's family though they don't see them as much because they don't live close to them. He says his wife's mother has loved him "unconditionally." He also says her father and step-mother love them "in their own way":

I believe they really love us and care for us, but they do it kind of in their own way. They are really not as much uh in our lives as her mother and step-father uh, you know, who knows why, you know, we do see them and we see them, you know, we visit them have a good time. You know, that's all well and good; and uh they definitely try to support us anyway they can, that sort of thing. But, you know, again we are not as close to them as we are with her mother and step-father, you know, for whatever reason.

His wife Susan says she gets to see her parents only three to four times a year because they live far away (she lives around Chicago and her parents in South Dakota) but she says she thinks she and her husband would be related to her parents in a different way. She says:

I feel like he's [her husband] very close, that they spend a lot more quality family time together. Uh like, let's say this weekend, we decided to come here [at her in-law's] and spend the weekend, you know, just hang out even though we live like 20-30 minutes from here. Uh and that's probably nothing we would do at home; we would just kind of come for the day and live at night. So, I think more intimate in regards to the closeness that they share.

Jennifer says that at this point both her husband's (extended) family and her family have accepted them and have forged a good relationship. She says:

Uh I feel that his family has accepted me. ... Uh and I think that they will accept me and love me as long as I'm good to their Alex. So, as long as I'm on his good side, uh I will be on their good side. So, they love me, they accept me. Uh and I, I feel I will, you know, I can say all of my family loves [my husband] uh my brothers have asked [my husband] to breakfast and done things and made an attempt to get to know him and include him and everything and we've traveled together with my family.

Jennifer says they have good relations with both sides even though they visit her family more often just because they live closer. "Whenever we visited [my husband's family], they have been very kind to me," she says, "I'm family in this family."

The stories of the interracial couples indicate that the Black families were more accepting of their marriages at the beginning whereas the White families were

more resisting. Yet, the White families eventually accepted their marriages and were closer to them. Going beyond the color line and getting to know the person “for who they really are” seems to have helped in healing their relationships. Therefore, the major obstacle seems to be misunderstanding which results from misconception. The misconception that interracial marriages cannot work seems to display itself in the concern, “Are you sure you want to and can do this?” The two older couples—who have been married for 38 and 11 years respectively—also say that having children played a role in drawing the hesitant families closer to the interracial couple.

Social attitudes toward and society's relationship with Black-White interracial families.

This theme presents the participants' descriptions of society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages based on their experiences as interracial couples. It also presents their descriptions of the relationships they have with different segments of society.

The participants say their friends are accepting of their interracial marriage. Brad says he has Black and White friends who are “a hundred percent accepting” of his wife and his family. His wife Susan says her friends—whom she says have experiences of living in bigger cities—were open about her marriage. Though Jennifer and Alex say they do not socialize much, all the participants say the friends they have are accepting of their marriages.

The acceptance they get from their friends, however, does not seem to extend to acquaintances and casual contacts. Brad says there are Blacks and Whites who are still prejudiced and racist, though there also are Blacks and Whites who are accepting and who: will see people as people not color. ... but they, you know, they still don't necessarily agree with, you know, the biracial dating or marriage and all of that, okay.

So that's kind of the middle of the road and you have people who really, that's all they see is people. So, you will be Black, blue or whatever, if you love each other and you are happy, they don't have an issue with that. So, I think you can go from, you know, "we hate you" kind of thing because you are black or because you are white to kind of middle of the road to people who are just kind of like, "Hey, that's their life. Whatever makes them happy," kind of thing.

Jennifer also agrees that not everyone in society reacts the same way to Black-White interracial marriages. She says:

Uh, I think there are a lot of people who don't care, but I still think there's a group of people who think it's wrong [for a variety of reasons]. I think there's a group of people who think it's wrong biblically, which I think is incorrect. I think there is some that still think it's wrong uh because they still have that bigoted attitude that runs back to the slave days and, and the early 50's and 40's and has a white supremacy attitude. I think there still is that group that still exists. Uh I think there's a part of society that thinks, "It's okay for them. But not for me or for my family."

Nicole's experience is not much different. She says, "I run into Black women who dismiss my ideas because I'm not Black enough. ... I've run into black women who won't have anything to do with me once they find out that I'm [married to a white man]." She also says that she has run into Black women who are indifferent about her interracial marriage.

Jennifer says that people "get so taken aback" or "shocked" when they see an interracial couple. Alex says that there's a lot of discrimination and racism everywhere though there may be a difference as to how and how much they are displayed.

Nicole says society's reaction and attitude towards a Black-White interracial marriage may differ depending on what race the husband is and what race the wife is. Being a Black woman married to White man, she feels a minority even among the interracial marriages. Her husband, Thomas, says society is tolerant of their marriage. Yet, he shares his wife's feeling of being a minority among interracial marriages:

I uh I think the society is very tolerant of it. ... Uh I doubt, you could walk down the street here and I doubt you get a second glance, only because it's we're the odd couple, I'm the White male with the Black female, which is I think a minority in those mixed relationships, that's the only reason why you're gonna get a second glance.

Jennifer relates a story about her experience soon after she got married to Alex. The story showcases the dilemmas and difficulties interracially married couples face because of society's tendency to draw a line between the two races—and practically between the two interracially married individuals. Jennifer says:

We went to South Carolina. We were on our honeymoon. My husband was very into reggae, we asked this friend about going to this reggae bar. Uh her comment was it was very dark in that bar. And I thought that was an odd statement because all bars were dark. I didn't realize she was implying to the clientele being all Black. Uhm it took me a few times to, "Oh, okay."

Uh when we got there, and again I wasn't supposed to, reggae is supposed to be in very good feeling, very upbeat, very, you know, love and peace and if it's reggae, that's just very upbeat. Uh and so, usually when you listen to reggae music or go to reggae bars, that's the feeling you get, everybody is very upbeat. But, when we went and when we sat, we didn't feel much love because—and the problem—many people, there were some stares,

there were some hates, feelings and pouring at the waters and we didn't feel welcome. I didn't feel welcome.

Jennifer says she and her husband had to leave since they didn't feel comfortable. Her husband Alex also recalls the experience and says they had to leave to avoid the tension.

The interracial couples say they constantly feel they are being assessed by society. Susan says she feels being assessed when she goes to different places—such as restaurants—with her husband, Brad. She says, “You see like they are, ‘Oh, okay. Black and White, are they married? Are they dating? Are they friends?’” Susan thinks those reactions might have to do with ignorance and bad experiences. She says, “Maybe they are uneducated, maybe something happened to them or their friends.” Jennifer also says she has similar feelings. She describes similar feelings, albeit in a different setting—an “all Black” church—as follows:

Uh, I felt like I was being observed, like I was being not judged but they were assessing. They were watching to see how I was going to react, how I was going to behave, how I was going to accept or uh, so that was like I was being observed and assessed. And so I felt like I had to, not I didn't have to be a different person, but I definitely felt like I had to put on my best behavior and make sure that I didn't do anything that could be considered offensive because I didn't want to upset anybody.

Susan says that even friends and acquaintances assess and investigate their marriage, at least at first. She says, “They are investigative, they're looking to see what, how that relationship is working.”

Alex says society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriage is that of tolerance at best. He says, “I think it's [society's attitude towards Black-White

interracial marriages] tolerance. Uh I think they tolerate it. I don't, like I said, I don't think it's an acceptance." Brad says society could go from accepting into not accepting Black-White interracial relationships. Yet, he thinks the majority are not accepting of it. He says, "I would still say it is a greater number of people who are not accepting of it and don't condone it than the people that do." Susan says, "Unfortunately, not everybody is accepting of it." The interracial couples say they were not "naïve" to the fact that society might not accept their marriage. They all say they were also somehow reminded about it by people they are close to. Brad says:

She [the pastor they saw for marriage counseling] said something along the lines of, "You know how, kind of, society, you know, looks upon, you know, interracial marriages, and are you okay with that?" That sort of thing. And, you know, of course we said, you know, we were perfectly fine with it. But, you know, I think that was one of the first times somebody actually just kind of outright addressed it. ... I definitely am not naïve to the fact that there are a lot of people that aren't accepting of us and what we do—Black and White.

The interracial couples see some trend in the reactions they get from Blacks and Whites and from men and women. The White women say they get more negative reactions from Black women. Susan says Black women:

look at me like, "Oh," you know like, "Are you really having this man that should be like meant to his own background and have a girlfriend of his own color?" So sometimes I feel like they give me that like "You intruded. You took him from, you know, our culture." So sometimes I do experience that with the younger Black females, you know, like this single females that are around.

Jennifer says there aren't many Black people around where she lives. But, she had similar experiences when dating another Black man and she says her experiences among the few Blacks in her town are not much different. She describes her experience while dating a Black man as follows:

There were Black women who were angry with me for wanting to date a Black man, telling me to just date one of my own and leave theirs alone. There were, when, there were Black women who were mad at the Black man I was with because he chose a White woman over a Black woman.

Alex, Jennifer's husband, says there were similar reactions in the "all Black" reggae bar in South Carolina. He says, "There were four young, Black ladies sitting at the table that had all kinds of rude things to say because uh things like, 'We're not good enough for him,' 'Why is she with him?' on and on." Alex says those reactions in South Carolina are not an exception. He says, "There in South Carolina and it's that way anywhere."

Brad also thinks that Black women are less accepting of their marriage. Jennifer says, "There's a certain belief system behind it: either the White woman is stealing the Black man or the Black man is selling out in him leaving his race behind."

For Thomas the experience is different. He thinks Black men are less accepting of his marriage than Black women. Being a White man married to a Black woman, he says:

I think the uh it's easier; it would be easier to be accepted by the Black females more so than the [Black] males. ... I found the Black females much more accepting uh overall than the [Black] males. ... That's been my experience.

Thomas's wife, Jennifer, says there are Black men who say she is not as Black as they are and therefore her opinions are not as important as theirs for marrying a White man. The White men, on the other hand, she says, "are not as guarded" when they find out that she's married to a White man.

Nonetheless, all the participants think Blacks are more accepting of Black-White interracial marriages than Whites. Alex says:

I would say on the whole that Black families are more accepting. Uh I think Black families, they try to point out the pitfalls. They try to point out the hurts that are gonna come because of this. Uh they are gonna say, "You know how people are gonna look at you, you know how people are gonna look at your kids" That type of thing. ... "But, you are still one of us. Because, you are not one of them." So, you know, I would say, culturally I would say, Black people are more accepting. "We're gonna love you anyway."

Susan says she feels she is more accepted by the Black community when they know she is married to a Black man. She says, "I think I am more accepted than if it is a random White person in the street, you know, they consider, 'Well, she is accepted by him, then she's accepted by us.'" The experience holds true for Thomas:

With Black people, they are much more willing to engage you when they find [out] you're married to a Black woman, you know, it's kind of like I'm an honorary Black person. So, I find it that the Black people are much more friendlier (sic) to me because they hear that I'm married to a Black woman. That has been my experience there.

Susan, Nicole, Brad and Thomas think that overall Blacks are more accepting of Black-White interracial marriages. Thomas says, "Well, I would think black people generally are much more accepting of it. Uh white people uh a lot of them kind of

value their whiteness, you know.” Jennifer says the picture might change in a community like hers—a predominantly White community. She says:

Uh I'd just say in this community that the Blacks are less accepting of our relationship. Uh and that's because there is not as many Blacks. So, there's probably just as many Whites who aren't as accepting either but because there's more whites that you run into you'll find more acceptance from White people.

Jennifer says, “I think [White] men are less accepting of the relationship than [White] women.” She thinks pride might be the reason. She says, “I think it's a pride thing. I think that there's a pride in the White male that wants to know why a White man would choose a Black man over a White man, and I think it's a pride thing.”

Nicole also thinks that it is the past experience that brings about a difference on how Blacks and Whites react to a Black-White interracial marriage. She says, “The Black race has had a lot of uh traumas put upon it. So, the tolerance level, people of color's tolerance level is much higher I think.” Jennifer's self-reflection seems to support this.

Jennifer says, “When I married [my husband], I was ignorant about racism and bigotry because it wasn't a part of my family and it wasn't a part of my life.”

All the participants say that older people are less accepting of their relationships. Jennifer says that the younger kids, like high school and college students are all accepting. Susan also says that older people—both Blacks and Whites—are “more cautious” of an interracial relationship while younger people are accepting. Jennifer explains why the young might be more accepting:

I'm just saying that's the uh the belief system that they [the young] are being brought up with [is very liberal] and that's one of the reasons they are more accepting. It's being lumped into that: “It's a life style choice.” And that's one

of the reasons it's okay. Their initial reactions may, however, not be filled with surprise and "shock." Susan says that college-age kids—the people she works with—are shocked when they first find out that she is in an interracial marriage. But, their reaction [after a while] is, "That's really cool."

The interracial couples believe society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriage is changing. Brad thinks that people are being "a little bit more educated" which makes them more accepting of interracial relationships and less engaged in "preaching" hate. He says:

I think people get older, they become a little bit more educated uh they become more accepting, you know, I think because I think a child really has to be taught how to be prejudiced or how to be racist or you know that "We don't like Black people" or "we don't like White people." You don't come out of the womb like that and so I think [as they] have become more educated, they stop preaching this hate and they will let their children make their own decisions; whether to be accepting or not to be accepting. ... I think over the years, they are becoming more educated and uh accepting uh that's why society is changing.

Jennifer says the fact that children are being raised in a more liberal environment, where everything is acceptable and "cool" is helping them to be more accepting of interracial marriages. Yet, society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages is a source of concern. The couples believe the majority of society is not accepting of their marriages. Brad says that over half of society is still "not accepting" of interracial marriages and not "so upfront" about it. Alex agrees that things look better in society today but questions whether the change we see is genuine. He also says the pace of change is not that much:

There's a lot of things better [in society today] but I think a lot of things are uh better-covered. I think it's probably the easiest way to say it, uh, I think better-covered. I don't think people feel any differently; they just don't say it. I guess I can't say any differently but not as much as I would think. I thought things would change more than they have.

The participants' accounts show that society's attitude toward Black-White interracial marriages is far from being positive. As Alex puts it, society's reaction seems to be "tolerance" rather than acceptance. There is still the feeling that interracial marriages are "against the norm" even among the young—who according to the participants are more accepting and liberal. The misunderstanding and misconception about Black-White interracial relationships, thus, still persists. Social attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages are not consistent either. People's standpoints might be playing a role on how people view Black-White interracial marriages. Griffin (2006) defines a standpoint as "a place from which to view the world around us" (p. 482). People may thus have different attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages depending on their position and their viewpoint (Griffin; Wood, 2000). The difference in attitude toward the interracial marriages between friends and acquaintances or strangers, between Blacks and Whites, as well as between men and women the participants allude to might be a result of their varying standpoints.

"Human"

This theme presents the interracial couples' views about race and its value/validity to them as they describe it. The interracial couples say race is not an issue for them. They say they believe all humans are equal and thus don't think of their marriage as interracial.

Brad says he didn't think of his marriage and his wife in terms of race. "It just kind of came where, you know, you dated people uh and I mean somewhere along in dating you know whether or not this person could possibly be a marriage [partner for you]," he says, "In my world I saw people as people."

Susan reiterates her husband's view. She says:

I honestly don't think about it [race] at all. Like when I look at [my husband], I don't think of him as a Black man. But I think of him as my husband. ... But in my eyes he's not Black or White; but I'm, like, he is a good, solid man.

Jennifer says she did not date race; she "dated men." She says she had dated men from different races but race for her was not a factor. She says, "I guess I didn't have to think about it, I didn't think about whether I was dating somebody of an outside race." She believes her upbringing did not let her think about race when dating and marrying:

That was the way we were raised. We just, you know, red and yellow and Black and White, they are precious in his sight. And that was just [instilled] in us that people were people. So, when it came to deciding whether or not I would marry my husband, there just wasn't, he was a person. He was a man. ... I don't look at us as an interracial couple unless people point that out. He's just my husband, he's the man that God put in my life and we have a family.

Alex says that "he's tired of" racial labels. He says that he sees people and hopes that others will see him that way:

So whenever I speak to people, I want to try to erase the color line for them, so they say, you know, "Alex is one of my friends." I don't want them to say, "Well, yeah, I got a Black friend." What does that mean you got a Black friend?

You break down all your friends into, 'I got a Black friend, I got a White friend, I got uh this?' No, I just want to be your friend, you know, if I am your friend? But, I live in my fantasy world. I know that it is the way it is.

Susan, Nicole and Thomas also say they see people as people and believe that everyone is equal. Alex says he would love to see people be "jus themselves" and to be judged by their actions rather than by the color of their skin.

Brad says he never saw his friends as Black, White or Hispanic and he says his child will be just that, his child:

Me myself, you know, it is gonna be my child, you know, I mean going back deep and, you know, growing up my friends, you know that sort of thing, I never saw them as a color, you know, as my White friend or my Black friend or my Hispanic friend. They had names, you know. That's how we'll look at our child, you know, as our child—that's it, you know. I won't put them in a category.

The interracial couples say they want to and do look beyond race and racial categories. They believe race is defined as skin color in the American society but do not want to buy into it. They say they want to see one race: "the human race."

"We have differences but not racial ones."

This theme presents the interracial couples take on their (racial) differences and the impact of those differences on their marriage. The participants say there are some differences between them and their spouses but those differences, they say, are not racial. Brad says that his wife and him have some differences since they "were raised obviously in different homes, different families." He says that his wife is "very organized" whereas he has "a laid back personality." He explains their differences further:

I can get upset and that sort of thing but I think I am the kind of the passive aggressive type in certain situations. Uh I am more of a thinker. I like to think things out, you know, maybe before I say something; whereas [my wife] is quick to let you know how she feels that sort of thing. ... Uh [my wife] likes to talk a lot more than I do, which is fine, you know, I, I talk when I have something to say, you know.

Susan also says that Brad and she are different in terms of the roles their families expect them to play since she is the oldest child whereas he is the youngest. She says her family would see her as “this person that sets the examples for the other siblings.” She maintains that they do not have a lot of differences.

Nicole says the differences she and her husband, Thomas, had were class-based not race-based. And she thinks those differences might have been a challenge. She says:

Uh I think it might have been easier for me, if I were gonna marry outside of my race to marry somebody that came from the same class, because we'd have the same values, we'd have the same values like I thought music was very important; he was like, “Well, why do the kids need to take it?” you know, I thought education was really important, I mean, now he's learned all of that but, that's where our clash came from.

The participants also mention some examples that can exemplify differences between the White race and the Black race. They do not think they are because of the race; but they think they are based on the cultures of the two races. They are hesitant to attribute them fully to their races. Brad says he was raised to interact with people a certain way. He says he would have to be asked for his opinions if he's to offer them. He also says he was raised to be “respectful when communicating with other people”

especially elders. He says, "I am not perfect, I am not saying, you know, I don't always do uh, I am not, you know, I make mistakes but. So I don't know that I can attribute to her upbringing and being Caucasian to the way she acts now."

Alex relates a story based on an experience to describe some such differences:

My wife and I went to quote and quote all Black church in [this town]. And my son was just uh, I don't think he was two yet. So, he went in and sat down and every time the preacher or some of the ladies would say "Amen" my son, he would say "Amen." Where these old Black ladies were sitting in front, and my wife there she was sitting in behind him and they would turn around and look at her and looked that little boy, and he was just smiling, the biggest smile, you know. And so one of them turned around and reached back and got him. It made my wife as nervous as could be; somebody had snatched at that little boy.

Alex says the old woman was doing what is typical to the Black community—embracing children regardless of whose son or daughter they were. Yet, that was strange to his wife. Susan implies that Blacks might be closer to one another than Whites. She compares her family and that of her spouse and says:

In comparison to my husband, now that I have been around them for almost three years, I feel like, and I don't know if it is a racial thing or just his family, but I feel like he's very close, that they spend a lot more quality family time together. Uh like, let's say this weekend, we decided to come here [at her in-law's] and spend the weekend, you know, just hang out even though we live like 20-30 minutes from here. Uh and that's probably nothing we would do at home; we would just kind of come for the day and live at night. So, I think more intimate in regards to the closeness that they share.

The difference Jennifer attributes to race, albeit cautiously, is volume:

The biggest difference, I would say, is uh volume. He's (her husband) loud. And my family were (sic) very quiet and reserved. And I was raised in a Catholic church and the Catholic Church when you entered the church, you sat quietly, and it was, you didn't speak to one another. And my husband was raised in a Baptist Church ... and people are greeting one another, and slapping each other in the back, and walking around and children are running and I that's the biggest difference, I think. And so my children are loud, and when I say loud, I don't even know how to describe that, voistrous, alive. But that could be family too. I hate to attribute that to race; because there are families that are more boisterous than others.

Yet, Jennifer further describes the difference by focusing on her experiences in family reunions on both sides:

Discovering differences when being Black and White in the marriage; going to his family reunions and him going to my family reunions is a very big difference, uh and we can joke about it. His family reunions are loud and ... a little more lively uh than my White, German, Irish aunts and uncles. Going to his, they are playing guitars, and they are drinking and playing basketball and they are having a good time and my side is more sitting around the table and maybe visiting and playing cards.

Alex says another racial difference between him and his wife is their sensitivity to racism. He says, "She never had to see it that way and lots of White people, they just don't get it, they never had to face it."

The participants say, if there were any differences that challenged them, they were based on anything but race. Nicole says the most challenging factors were class and religious differences:

The doubt in my relationship didn't come around the race factor, it came around the cultural piece and it came around uh the class piece. Uh we are two different [classes], we, I am Black, middle class; [my husband] is White lower class and that's where the conflict came. It didn't come in the race part, it came in the class.

Thomas explains how their differences were not racial. He says the differences were a result of culture and personality:

No. no, no race. Just the culture. Uh you know, she, she, personality. Nothing really racial. Uh, because the racial identity is, you know, it's just part of who you are. I mean, she's a very religious person so, that's not confined in her race. Uh she's a great cook, that's not confined (in) her race. She uh collects things and holds on too long and all kind of people do that. She is sometimes kind of scattered and disorganized, no everyone does that. But no, I couldn't really see anything uh with her pertaining to her Blackness that I could identify, other than her having to do her hair a lot. Uh that's it.

Alex says even if there may be some cultural differences, the most challenging things surrounding Black-White interracial relationships are things that are "strange" to the two races or "cultures." He says, "There are some cultural differences, some food differences, but they are, you know, so those are small. But there are things that come up that are just strange, I guess, to both cultures. [Hate and discrimination]."

Even though the participants say most of the differences they see between them and their spouses are not related to race, even the ones that some of them

attribute to race are differences in terms of interpreting certain things. They would be more cultural than racial. Some of the participants mention differences that are related to the interpretation of interaction (appropriateness in interaction) and space, for instance. These differences are highlighted when the participants speak about differences in “volume,” “respect,” and “closeness.” Even the difference in “sensitivity to racism” Alex mentions is related to experiences. Alex says that the White partner in a Black White interracial marriage—hence his wife—experiences racism for the first time after their marriage and thus is both oblivious to and more stunned by them at first.

“God-centered”

This theme presents the participants’ views about religion’s role in their marriage. Religion and God are major issues for all the participants. They mention religion and God as an issue of concern before their marriage when there happens to be a difference in their faith; but more importantly, they say religion plays a major role in keeping their marriage going. Brad explains how religion keeps their marriage strong. “Neither of us has been married before, so it is challenging at times. But uh, you know, I think having God at the center, you know, definitely helps in those tough times,” he says. “Because, you know, if you don’t have God in your relationship it’s, nowadays, it is an extreme challenge.” Jennifer says religion has led them through tough times, as well. “[My husband] is a Godly man, so it’s [their marriage] very God-based. He’s a Godly man and Christ is a big part of it [their marriage],” she says, “and that’s a huge part of our uh, the reason that we’ve been able to do everything we’ve done and stay together through everything we’ve done.”

Alex reiterates his wife Jennifer. He says:

Especially my family, that, that, it's a God thing, not a color thing. That helps me a whole lot more, I think, than a lot of other families, Black, White, Asian whatever is having a center thing and that thing for me would be Christ. So, that's my biggest thing. ... I think the biggest thing for us is a Christ-centered relationship. That's what makes it right, you know. And I can't imagine if you are two black people married together and Christ is not the head of that relationship, how it would be real, real good.

For Brad religion is also one of the factors in selecting his friends. He says having friends with similar faith and belief helped him from having "issues" with them. He says:

But I think the people that I stay close with are the people that I had things in common with in not just the interracial thing but you know likes and dislikes, you know, there was God in their lives, went to church. So, you know nine times out of ten those kind of people are not gonna have issues with, you know, racism and that sort of thing and be in prejudice; because if God is in their life, then they see people as people because God created everyone.

Religion also can be one of the challenging factors in deciding for marriage. Thomas says it was a challenge for him and his wife, Nicole, since she was protestant and he was Catholic, "and what do you raise the kids as there?" Thomas says this might have been their biggest challenge. "Uh and that was I think one of the biggest obstacles which had nothing to do with race, but that was coming from two different religions," he says, "I think that was, I think, the biggest issue we had more so than anything racial was the religious one."

Susan, Jennifer and Nicole also say religion was an issue raised with their family members when they decided to marry their spouses. They say many members,

even those who did not have issues with race, had questions and concerns about religion.

"No challenges, but..."

This theme presents the interracial couples' descriptions of the challenges they face because of their decision to intermarry. The interracial couples tend to downplay the challenges they face. They tend to say they face no challenges for being married interracially. Yet, the details of their stories tell otherwise.

Jennifer says she has no challenges. Yet, she says people are "shocked" when they find out (or see) she is married to a Black man, which is "amusing" to her:

I don't feel we've had challenges. Uh I get amused walking into a room when people see my husband and see their reaction, and not realizing I've been married to a Black man, even and he's unique-looking anyway even for a Black man, he's unique-looking. So, I always think it's funny when people get so taken aback maybe or shocked, I think that's the word here, a lot of people are shocked when they see interracial people or multiracial.

Thomas says he does not see any challenges. Yet he admits that he faces racism. "Obviously you're gonna run into some knuckle heads which are bold racist," he says. "Uh I guess that would be it; but clearly the two of you are strong enough to deal with that and the decision to be together in the first place, uh I would think."

Brad says they haven't had a lot of issues which were bold and "to the face." Yet, he says society looks at, and treats, interracial couples differently:

Uh I mean I will be naïve to say that I don't or we won't uh and you know again, you know, some things are, it can be nonverbal. You know, people can treat [my wife] differently at work because of that. ... You know, you may notice people kind of looking at you a little longer than normal. You may

notice uh, you know, people kind of looking at you in displeasure that sort of thing, you know. But thank God we really haven't had a whole lot of issues, you know, that were kind of in your face kind of things, you know, people saying things or, you know, whatever.

Thomas says nobody has "challenged" him or been "confrontational" to him. However, he says, "People would say something to [my wife] some comment uh but, you know, that was [rare]." Susan says they always need to be "cautious." She says, "We are always cautious of where we are. ... I mean but I think everybody has to be; but we are maybe a little extra[cautious]." Brad says they have been challenged in subtle ways but seems to overlook them. He also says he's cautious and does what he can to avoid those challenges:

[It doesn't mean] people didn't make comments that sort of things, you know, negatively uh because, you know, people are gonna say whatever they like and that's fine. ... I am not naïve of that (some people's intention and tendency to draw lines between the races) as well, you know, there are certain areas where I would not take my wife or my child just because I don't feel comfortable there. Uh and that's both, you know, can be Black or White areas that where people, you know things have happened whatever, uh and that's you know, just me, you know, using some wisdom, you know, not taking, you know, put my family in harm or in danger uh because there are some ignorant individuals out there.

Susan sees their caution paying back. She says, "I've never gotten a negative reaction, probably because we do stay in close quarters of family and friends and people that know about our background, so it wouldn't be shocking to them as we walked in and we're Black and White."

Jennifer says the challenges she faces are not much different from what any marriage would face. She says, "I don't think our challenges are much different than the challenge of any other married couple in this day and age." Brad says marriage is a challenge. Yet, he says, there may be a little more challenges that interracially married couples face since their relationship violates the norm:

Uh so, thinking of marriage in itself was definitely a challenge for me.

Something unknown. And then I think, you know, being interracially, you know, married or married so to speak, you know again, that's probably just a little bit, you know, more of a challenge. Because uh marriage itself is unknown but I think when, when, when it is a White and a Black couple, or Black and White or whatever and you know that it goes against the norm. It is not necessarily 100% acceptable. Uh you know that you are in for a big, a bigger challenge than you would if you had been married inside your own race.

Brad emphasizes the need for preparation and deep thought when deciding to marry interracially. He says:

You have to uh be careful, you know, you have to do your research. ... You got to make sure your family is comfortable. I mean that's, you know, it is definitely, I would say it's a compounded challenge to uh marry, you know, inside [outside] your race, definitely. And I think now that we have been married for two-and-half years, which is not a long time. You know, I think the thinking I had was correct. But like I said we've been blessed and fortunate not to have had any really uh bad experiences so to speak, and you know if I had to do it all over again, I would.

Thomas seems to acknowledge these “more challenges” when he talks about the preparations one needs to do before going into an interracial marriage. He thinks, however, that the challenges are exaggerated:

I think, it's, if you're gonna do something like that it's good to come into it with your eyes wide open, and knowing that you're gonna run into some obstacles somewhere uh and there's a lot of things you've to deal with, I guess, uh too. But no I couldn't really, really see it as, I mean, people say things, you know, I don't really see this much of a problem.

Thomas believes that people are somehow prepared for the marriage when they enter an interracial marriage. He thinks their independent personality can help them:

I think people who do this thing (interracial marriage), they are kind of a little more individual. I would, not knowing much about it; but I would speculate that uh that you'd have to be, like I say, fairly comfortable with who you are and what your relationship is gonna be before you do something like this, I would think.

Alex too sees the extra challenges to an interracial couple. He tells about his advice to a Black friend who was about to marry interracially:

About six or seven years ago, maybe it's been ten years ago I saw her and she was in a relationship with a White guy. And I said, I want to tell you something and I said, “There's no tougher relationship.” I said, “Relationships are hard anyway.” I said, “But, be prepared. There are things that come along in your relationship that wouldn't come along in your relationship if you were married to another Black man. Or if he was married to a White female.”

Brad says his main concern was feeling comfortable among other family members. He says, "You want to feel comfortable. You don't want to feel like an outcast; you want to feel like a part of the family. You want to feel welcome."

Thomas's comments imply that the interracial couples are tolerant of the challenges they face, which can be why they downplay them. It also indicates that society—and its anti-interracial relationship discourse—has convinced them to expect extreme challenges and reactions. Thomas says, "But, we've had it pretty easy; really to speak of, you know, really not been any, nobody is breaking our windows, or driving us out of town whatever. I think, I think, uh it's been regular kind of relationship."

Stereotypes make up some of the challenges the interracial couples face. Brad says there are some stereotypes against interracially married couples:

With Black males I think ... [one stereotype is] "When they are successful, instead of marrying a Black woman they marry a White woman; and that's kind of their trophy," or that sort of thing, which is totally ignorant. Uh another stereotype, you know, White women are taking the Black men away from the Black women. Again, ignorance.

Jennifer tells more such stereotypes, which she says depend on whether the man is White and the woman Black, or the man is Black and the woman White:

I think the stereotypes are different. Uh I think Black females (are stereotyped as) being more domineering. So, a White man married to a Black woman is "probably more submissive," I think is the stereotype. In the relationship like ours the Black man is thought to be dominant, the White female is submissive. Uh I think there's a stereotype that there is often domestic violence in those relationships. I think there's stereotype that the White person wants to be

Black, that they have some desire to discover an African heritage. Uh “there have to be some commonalities or like they wouldn’t be married to one another,” you know. “There have to be some common interests.”... I think that they uh a Black woman marrying a white man, I think, the stereotype is the Black woman has been hurt or jilted by a Black man so she’s rejecting her Black race. Uh I think that might even be the thing for the Black man, that he’s rejecting and wants to be White. I know that’s a big one too, he wants to fit in the White society.

Even though these stereotypes, like any other stereotype, are misguided assumptions, they may have far-reaching implications. Jennifer says they may stifle opportunities of getting to know one another. She says:

A stereotype is an assumption, and as soon as you assume that you know something that closes the door to you actually learning about that person. So the implications there are is that there are people who are not getting to know these couples for who they are because they’ve already made a decision as to why they got married or their personality uh because they got married.

The discrimination interracial couples have to face can also be related to, if not a result of, the stereotypes. Jennifer relates an “eye-opening” event where she and her husband had to face discrimination as an interracial couple:

When I married [my husband], I was ignorant about racism and bigotry because it wasn’t a part of my family and it wasn’t a part of my life. ... When we first went to [this town], we were shown several houses by a rental uh office here in town and uh we had done all the credentials and all the financials and all that kind of stuff. We had good credit and we were making good money and we were rejected for any of the houses that we had looked at

and they couldn't give us a reason. And I was (confuse) and couldn't figure out (why) and decided something bad must have been about our credit and my husband was finally, "Maybe we should ask somebody, it might be me which is the problem." So, those have been eye-opening for me.

Thomas says that his wife is discriminated against for marrying him. He says her opinions are not heard at work and she is not considered capable of representing the Black voice. She is not considered "Black enough." He says being married to him "negates her Blackness amongst some Black people there." His wife, Nicole, reiterates, "I run into black women who dismiss my ideas because I'm not black enough. Okay. But all that tells me is that they're very insecure." Nicole and Thomas have had an experience similar to that of Jennifer and Alex's when trying to sell a house. Thomas says:

We were selling a house once by ourselves, and the first house we owned ... uh and [my wife] noticed, because I think it was, we were asking a decent, good price for it, and [my wife] picked up that a lot of times when the people came through they didn't think the house was worth that much because they only saw her and they thought this was some Black person trying to get rich or something; but yet when I was showing by myself, I never got any of that.

The interracial couples are not short of such discriminatory encounters.

Jennifer says people's reactions made her feel unwelcome in an "all Black" reggae place where people are supposed to be "relaxed and upbeat." She says:

But, when we [she and her husband] went and when we sat, we didn't feel much love because ... there were some stares, there were some hates, cold feelings and pouring at the waters and we didn't feel welcome, I didn't feel welcome. He (her husband) didn't feel comfortable. He didn't. So, there was a

dark—not that I'm talking about the color of the people—there was a dark feeling. There was a very dark mood. And I don't know if that mood lightened after we left or that was the mood that remained in that bar, but that's how we felt when we were there.

Society not only stereotypes interracial couples a certain way; but some may also be disappointed that the couples did not “live upto their stereotypical expectations.” Thomas says some “regular couples” are not happy for them. He says:

We've been at this long time, like I said, almost 38 years. Uh that's a long time, and people [he refers as “regular couples”] sometimes get mad because we're still married and they are not kind of thing, you know, and I say, “Look, it's not the ideal relationship. We can fight. Uh, you know, we've our ups and downs, have been separated, you know, things happen.”

Despite all the stereotypes and discrimination they face, the interracial couples are mostly passive when dealing with people who are stereotypical and discriminatory actions. They try to ignore rather than confront them. Brad says ignoring such actions saves one from further problems and from “stooping” to the level of the perpetrators of the discrimination and stereotypes:

I think probably the best uh reaction is not to react at all. You know, not to kind of stoop to the level of ignorance. You know, I really hope to never have to be in [such] a situation, you know, but if it comes I think to stoop to that level of, you know, ignorance kind of would make me no better than the person who was spilling the hate or ignorance or that sort of things. So I may not, I really think that uh I wouldn't really have a reaction so to speak. I would probably just ignore them and try to go on with, you know, whatever I was doing uh, you know, I don't think I that would even have a reaction. I mean

nowadays because people are crazy to, I mean you know, there is so much, you know, countless acts of violence really for no reason. So I don't think I would react to kind of put my family in any kind of situation, you know, just to yell back ignorances with somebody. ... We don't [deal with the stereotypes and discriminations], you know. It is, if people choose to be ignorant and say ignorant things and feel that way, that's totally up to them. But we are not gonna stoop to their level and be ignorant right along with them.

Thomas also says he prefers to avoid people who are stereotypical and discriminatory. He says if anyone "doesn't love his wife" and don't accept their relationship—if anyone "has a problem with it"—he had nothing to do with them, and he'd just "cut them loose." So, his major way of dealing with the challenges he faces might be avoiding those who cause or highlight to him the challenges. His wife Nicole is not much different on this. She says she is happy with the fact that she can easily tell if someone has negative attitude towards her because of either her race or her interracial marriage. She says that saves her from "investing time" and energy on anyone only to find out that she cannot have a genuine and respectful relationship with them. That, for Nicole, is a "divine, little blessing."

All the participants are not that optimistic about the future. They wonder if society's attitudes toward, and stereotypes and discrimination against interracial families will ever be eliminated. This uncertainty can be part of why they resort into avoiding and ignoring rather than engaging stereotypical and discriminatory people. "I really don't know, you know, what the remedy is. Because again, those kind of thoughts and feelings are something that's been, you know, a kind of uh instilled into individuals from early ages," says Brad, "I think it would take a lot, to be honest, to

change somebody's mindset." All seem to agree. They don't see the change they want coming anytime soon. Thomas says he doesn't think these issues will be resolved "until we're all one group of brown people at some point in the distant future."

Advantages and disadvantages

This theme presents the advantages and disadvantages of interracial marriage as the interracial couples see them. The interracial couples say their marriage comes with its burdens and privileges. An interracial marriage has both advantages and disadvantages.

Brad says that his position as an interracially married individual makes him more aware of differences—and thus a better person—than stereotypical and discriminating people, which is why he wouldn't "react" to people who make negative comments. He says, "I think to stoop to that level of, you know, ignorance kind of would make me no better than the person who was spilling the hate or ignorance or that sort of things." He says the advantages he, his wife, and his child(ren) have are that they "are able to be exposed to two different cultures, uh to learn history from two different sides of the coin. Uh I think the more you know, the smarter you are. Uh the more life experiences you have, the more you learn. I think uh that's always an advantage."

Susan says that their awareness of the probable misunderstandings between the two races is an advantage in that it enables them to solve issues even before they arise. The additional obstacles they face as an interracial couple, she says, make them more open to discussion:

I think because we are aware of it, uh we have even more better communication uh, willingness to talk about things maybe more than a non-

interracial couple due to the fact that we have a few more obstacles; because we know like some people don't approve of it, some people have issues with it.

Thomas says his marriage makes him open to a variety of people. He says, "I feel comfortable around all kinds of people except the language barrier. ... I can relate to different groups." He says being exposed to different cultures and different things and meeting a lot of different people is one advantage. His wife, Nicole, sees the same advantage. "I am cross-cultural," she says, "I get along with everybody." Nicole also finds being married to someone from the White race "empowers me in many ways to, I'm not fearful of Whites, whereas sometimes people of color don't want to say because of generational fears, I don't have that. I say anything." Susan says she would be more comfortable than somebody with "less diversity in their lives" walking into an environment with people from both the two races.

The fact that he's following his heart is another advantage for Thomas. He says "being happy with who you're with," and "knowing you're with somebody you love and you care about" is an advantage. Thomas implies that this is a hard-earned benefit. He says, "I mean obviously, you've to be strong to make that kind of decision." Jennifer sees a similar advantage. She says:

I guess an advantage is just being a testimony to, to our belief system, uh being a walking, talking testimony there that, in my opinion, race doesn't [matter]. Yes, I recognize race and cultural differences. ... We recognize the differences but that doesn't uh create a superiority or a hierarchy of any kind. It's just differences. ... Now that we are where we are uh in our Christian walk, I can look and see that we are a testimony, that we can use that as a testimony.

Alex implies that their awareness of the challenges they face makes their marriage stronger by drawing them closer to one another. He says:

I guess I could say the biggest advantage is this: Uh you better love each other. Because, people on the outside they don't love you. They don't uh, they tolerate it (interracial marriage). ... We know that what we have is each other and that's what we turn to is each other. Uh because you could, well it's, well Black people say, "We don't like you because you're married to a White girl." White people say, "We don't like you because you're married to a Black man." ... What you have to turn to is each other, most of the time.

Susan also sees some advantages for their biracial children. She says:

The advantage [for our children] would be, would be they could be whatever they wanted, you know. If they want to check White, they could be White; if they want to check other, they could be other, if they want to check Black, they check Black. Uh so the edge is and I look at some of [my husband's] friends that have become my friends. There's educational advantages, you know, scholarships.

Though the participants say interracial marriage has the previously described advantages, they also say that those advantages come at a cost. The other side of the coin—the disadvantage, says Nicole, is "that people judge you inappropriately. You get judged inappropriately." The interracial couples say if you are in such a relationship, you've got to be strong and comfortable with who you are with.

Otherwise, "it's gonna be handful," says Thomas. "Obviously you're gonna run into some knuckle heads which are bold racist." Susan sees the same disadvantage. "You will always have those people that are gonna look at you a little differently," she says, "You need to be a little extra cautious of where you are at, you know, because some people may not approve of it; may treat you differently."

These disadvantages cause the interracial couples some discomfort because they feel restricted in some ways. Susan says, "Uh just you can't go into a Black community and expect me to not have extra challenges and vice versa for [my husband], like you can't go into a White community and feel like there won't be challenges." Alex agrees that some disadvantages accompany a Black-White interracial marriage. Yet, he says it is the White side that shoulders more disadvantages and confusion since those may be new experiences for the White individual:

I guess disadvantage is because hurt comes along. Uh especially, I would say for the White side, wife side is because maybe someone says something or doesn't call, or doesn't treat you the same way, maybe you can't figure out a reason why, and maybe it's presumptuous to say, "Well, that's because I have a Black husband." But when you can't come up with anything else, maybe that's the reason. And, like I said, most White people they don't get that. "Why would that make any difference?" "Well, it's because they're Black." ... The White side just, they never had to experience it.

Despite the challenges they face, the interracial couples worry more about the disadvantages their children do, or have to face. Jennifer explains:

I am seeing disadvantages for our children and things that they have to go through. So, that's the biggest disadvantage; [It] is having to watch our children maneuver and try to figure out where they fit and who they are. I see the challenges being more for our children than for us as adults. ... I think for the most part, it's not the couple that suffers any problems, it's the children that suffer the problems [resulting from society's negative attitudes].

Alex says, "I do wonder about my children and uh because I hear that business of 'Where do we fit in?'" Brad agrees and highlights the interracial couples' role. He says the biggest disadvantage their children have to face is the question about identity. He says their children's interactions with monoracial children can be tough unless the interracial couples prepare their children for that:

Some little kids are rude. And so, you know, when questions come up or "Are you White?" or "Are you Black?" and that sort of thing, you know, I think unless the (biracial) child is educated and understands, you know, where they come from and how they got there, I think that can be a confusing time and I think that can be a challenging time. And that's where we as parents come in and kind of, you know, teach them and let them know, you know, how they came about, uh that those things don't matter. "All that matters is that your mother and I love each other, we had you and you are here and you are a human being." You know? "You don't have to put yourself in a category."

Putting their children into racial categories is, therefore, a dilemma for the interracial couples. They would like to avoid that; but they know society demands it. Brad says, "I know that society views like, kind of like a biracial child as one or the other races. So in our case, they would be considered Black." Brad, however, does not want to say his children will be either Black or White. He says he does not want to "put them in categories. But I understand that society does." Susan says she thinks about the race question and speaks forms children might need to fill as a discomfoting example:

Uh I always thought about when I have a child, you know, it seems like they always say, "Check are you Black or Caucasian?" You know like, "What are you?" like "Are you Asian? Are you Indian?" You've these little boxes to

check. And I am always like, "What would my child be?" You know, because they are none of these. They are not gonna be in "other," you know, that's just goofy.

This dilemma compounds when the interracial couples talk about how they'd (want their children to) respond to a question about the children's race. Alex says he tells his children to put down Black—which is how society would view them—"Because there are advantages, especially today." Thomas also says he tells his children to say they are Black and tells them that that's how society views them. He says, "Oh I'd say they're Black. Their mother is Black, you know, and I can't say these are White kids. And see them; you can see they are not pale like me. So, I would tell the kids that's how they decide what you are."

Jennifer says she tells her children to mark "other" in forms since she doesn't want them to deny a part of them. But, she says it's not easy. Jennifer:

Uh but I see them struggle as to where they fit in because people want to know, "What are you? Are you Black? Are you White?" And some days my older children will say, "Well, I'm Black." And I say, "Well then you're denying your mother. Your biological mother is White. So, how can you say that you're Black? You just are who you are." But they just want an identity. They want identity.

Alex says this question is a major dilemma for their adult children. He says, "Someday they want to be more Black, they want to be more Black than they are White; someday they want to be more White than Black."

The interracial couples, however, agree that the choices provided in such forms do not describe what their children "really are." They believe their children's

racial identity is inclusive not exclusive like the options in the forms, which is the source of a dilemma for them. Thomas says:

Well, you know the kids, it was hard to explain to the kids when, when they are in school and you would have to, uh people would have them check off what they are and there was no box for really what they are. And I would have to explain to them which was very awkward that even though they are half-White, society will always consider them Black, uh because there is no like "mixed-race" box or there wasn't at the time, and uh and it was hard because it made it sound like, "White" was something special, you know what I'm saying? Like, "Oh you all will never be really White like me honey," you know, I mean, it's very hard to explain to a child of like six years old. You know, and because it wasn't us who was doing it. It was outside that was doing it, that wanted to categorize them. ... You just want to make sure the kid understands it in the right sense without feeling slighted.

Most of the interracial couples, therefore, prefer—though this is not their first choice—the "other" box for their children until they are old enough to make a decision about it. Brad says:

Well, I mean in those forms they usually have the other box; uh so I mean I would check the other to be honest, you know. and I guess when the child gets older hopefully we have done a good job of educating them so they understand that they are not Black or White, they are biracial, so they'd be intelligent enough to check their, the right box.

Susan thinks the same. She says she would choose "other" for her children's race in forms—which to her would mean "undeclared"—just to avoid denying one or

the other of the children's racial backgrounds. Susan also hopes that the dilemma will be resolved by the inclusion of an inclusive category in the forms:

I mean honestly, until it is their time to choose, I will probably do just other. Just because I don't want to put them in a box of one or the other: because they aren't one or the other. They are actually both, you know. And I would be like, when she is old enough, when our daughter is old enough to make a decision, she can decide; and if she, you know, whatever she decides to do, we'll support her and I don't think it would be dismayed to one side or the other. Uh and by then may be there will be a "multicultural" box, instead of "other." But I feel until she is old enough at this point to make her own decision, you know, just saying 'undeclared' I guess per se would probably be my choice.

Yet, Susan would compromise and adopt society's categorization of her child(ren) if that seems to benefit the children. She, like Alex, says she would encourage them to mark what benefits them at the circumstance at hand:

I don't think they are either White or Black. And when I think, I mean, what is the application for? You know, is it for getting into a White type of organization? Okay what's your advantage? You're gonna be white? Then check White. If it is an advantage for you to be in a Black category because the organization is more accepting or more pushed towards that background, hey she's got, at this point she's got two ways to work it.

The interracial parents have another concern. They feel that the discrimination they face might take its toll on their biracial children, as well. They thus try to prepare them for that possibility. "With my children, uh I try to tell them plain truth," says Alex, "I mean there are going to be people who are going to look them and dismiss

them before they get an opportunity to present who they are.” Nicole says things get to be more difficult for their children though what their educational level is and what they do also plays a role in determining “the level of discrimination and racism” biracial individuals are exposed to. Thomas says the boys might face more pressure than the girls to pick and fit in the Black racial group. He says:

But the boys ... have more pressure on them from the Black males in the schools, because [one of my sons] for example did very well in school. But the Black kids would put pressure on him. They ask him, you know, because when he would ask questions in the class, they would accuse him of trying to be White—acting smart or whatever—so as a result the peer group is more important to teenagers than their parents, they were gonna act, so they had to act out a lot more, to act “Black” for troublesome or be misbehavior whatever at their expense.

The interracial couples hope things will change—or continue to change—so that their children do not experience these difficulties. Jennifer sums it up saying, “And that’s why I think it’s so important to our biracial children that change continue to happen so that they don’t experience so much of what, not just Black people, but there are a lot of people in our society experience because of their differences.”

The interracial couples are more aware of differences and the advantages and disadvantages of “being different.” They also understand and embrace differences much better than those who are not exposed to and are not aware of differences. Yet, they face disadvantages—the major of which is seeing and/or imagining their children go through an “identity confusion and dilemma” resulting from society’s conceptualization of racial categories as mutually exclusive—for their differences.

Comfort zone

This theme presents the interracial couples tendency to try and stay within their comfort zones. The interracially married couples—probably as a result of the discrimination, challenges and disadvantages their marriage attracts; and probably as a (partial) explanation for their claims that they do not have a lot of challenges—opt to stay within their comfort zones. Their stories showcase the efforts they put into making sure they stay within their comfort zones as much as possible. As can be seen below, the interracial couples try their best to stay within their comfort zone in almost every sense of the phrase.

The interracial couples, for instance, are sensitive about where they can and cannot go. Jennifer says that because they know there are people with negative attitudes toward interracial marriages and because discrimination “happen(s),” they have to know where to go and where not to go. Brad explains further:

Uh again, like I said, I mean not, I know uh there are some individuals that are totally against it (Black-White interracial marriage), you know. They think, you know, Black men need to be with Black women and, you know, White women are stealing Black men and, you know, all of that mess. You know, I mean, I know that’s there. I have heard it, that sort of thing. Again, you know, sometimes people say [feel] something and say another, you know. I am not naïve of that as well, you know.

There are certain areas where I would not take my wife or my child just because I don’t feel comfortable there. Uh and that’s both, you know, can be Black or White areas that where people, you know things have happened whatever. Uh and that’s you know, just me, you know, using some wisdom, you know, not taking, you know, put my family in harm or in danger uh

because there are some ignorant individuals out there. ... So, we definitely stay, you know, where everything is safe; well, at least where we know things are safe or different.

Brad describes some of the areas he wouldn't feel comfortable taking his family to:

You know, you think some of the lower income housing areas; ... and some of the maybe the nicer areas ..., where it is just really wealthy people are, you know, they may like to keep things the way they are. ... I guess, you know, just areas where that you know interracial relations are not acceptable or not accepted uh, you know, or where it is not acceptable for necessarily White people to be in the area or feel comfortable in the area; and in my case not acceptable for Black people because then you know definitely, you know interracial couples aren't accepted in those areas.

Nicole says she would not feel comfortable living in segregated areas. She says, "I don't think I'd like living in an all White environment just like I don't think I'd like living in an all Black environment. I like living amongst a mixture of people." Nicole says when she's in company of only one of the two races—Blacks and Whites—she has a lot of explaining to do and she also feels some responsibility to represent the race which is not there. Therefore, being in company of "a mixture of people" is a relief. She says, "That's why I like to be in a mixture because other people are doing the talking and I don't feel like I have to do for both."

The couples are not only cautious of but may also avoid situations once they find out that they are potentially confrontational or if they are filled with tension.

Alex's story affords such an example:

We went into [an "all Black" reggae club in South Carolina], [my wife] was the only White person in the place. And so, I told her, I said, "You sit at the bar and I will sit behind you." Because, there was tension when she came in. and of course there were four young, Black ladies sitting at the table that had all kinds of rude things to say. Because uh things like, "We're not good enough for him." "Why is she with him?" on and on. So I told my wife, "Drink your drink, let's get out of here." Because I don't want to have any problems. I have always been that way, I don't want to have problems. I don't like confrontation. So we left.

The interracial couples are also selective in terms of choosing who they befriend. They say they are close to people only when they are accepting of their choices and decisions, and when they are less likely to be racist. Brad says:

I was pretty selective of my friends growing up and uh like I said uh two of my buddies are in interracial marriages now. ... But I think the people that I stay close with are the people that I had things in common with in not just the interracial thing but you know likes and dislikes, you know, there was God in their lives, went to church. So, you know nine times out of ten those kind of people are not gonna have issues with, you know, racism and that sort of thing and be in prejudice because if God is in their life, then they see people as people because God created everyone. And so I think that is a big reason why I haven't had those issues.

Nicole does not see any point in wasting time with people who do not accept her for who she is or who do not accept her marriage. She says:

If someone doesn't like you because of who you're married to, or someone doesn't like you because of the color of your skin, those people are flawed and

just given time in a relationship with them you will personally find the flaws, I don't have to invest time in that.

Nicole uses a metaphor to explain her position:

Well, I say that what you do is just you continue working on your own relationship and I say that in many ways you kind of keep out of the company, it's like you don't want to go, you go to the mountains that have fresh, delicious spring water, you don't go to mountains that produce poisonous waters you know. You don't go to mountains of poisonous waters to gather your water. You go to mountains that have delicious, fresh water and that's where you get your water.

Thomas is quick to distance himself from people who do not accept his marriage. "Uh well, you kind of learn right away who your friends are. You know, the people who can't deal with it, you know, I really have no use from," he says, "Everyone loves [my wife], everyone loves [my wife]. Anyone who doesn't like her, I had nothing to do with them. I would just cut them lose."

Jennifer reiterates Brad, Nicole and Thomas. She says:

Uh well, friends wise, if they aren't accepting of it (her marriage), they probably wouldn't be my friends because I don't, we don't hang out with many intolerant people in that area (interracial relationships). So, if that's there was going to have a problem, I wouldn't surround myself with it, and my husband wouldn't surround himself with it, we wouldn't definitely subject our children to be surrounded with people that were intolerant of our relationship.

The interracially married, however, may also be selective as to what part of their experiences they focus on, and thus what part of their experiences they remember. Susan, for instance, says she doesn't see a lot of discrimination because

she does “not pay attention” to it. Jennifer’s say she might overlook her challenges. She says, “I haven’t had anybody; Oh gosh, I can’t even remember, I think I have one person, a colleague, another teacher disturbed, I can’t remember now it’s just so vague, I guess because I just dismiss it, who had a bit of a hard time with my husband being Black.”

The stories of the interracial couples show that they are very selective, and thus do their best to make sure they stay within their comfort zones. They are selective in terms of plays they live in and they go to or frequent; they are selective in terms of people they are close to; they are also selective in terms of the experiences they emphasize on and pay attention to—thus the stories they remember and tell.

Role of communication

This theme presents the interracial couples’ description of the role communication plays in their marriage. It also presents their description of what role communication can have in any marriage in general and in an interracial marriage in particular.

Brad says communication is one of the key factors that make his marriage work. He says:

Uh I think communication is something that is very key in a marriage and I would say I am becoming a better communicator. Uh, you know, [my wife] is she is very expressive and she is very uh I can say organized with her thoughts and everything. So, I think she is great communicator and I think uh that makes our relationship work well.

“I’m becoming a better communicator,” says Brad implying that communication in their marriage might not have been as smooth from the get go, and that it took some work to make it better. Brad says:

Well, I think it definitely, in the beginning of our marriage [it was not the same]. You know if you grow up twenty-some years a certain way, you are raised a certain way, you know, I think there are certain verbal and nonverbal communications that you learn. And so in the marriage, you know, things can easily be misunderstood or uh, you know, mistaken, you know, which can lead to arguments, misunderstanding. So, I think in a marriage, that's why communication is important; because I can say something a certain way and, you know, my wife can take it a certain way. You know, be it negative or positive and vice versa. You know, there's some, we were raised obviously in different homes, different families.

Unless discussed between the marital partners, the differences in communication styles and ways resulting from being "raised in different homes" can lead to misunderstanding. It takes some "learning" to overcome it. Jennifer relates her experience:

Uh his tolerance level for noise is different than mine. So, I get, and I get frustrated and upset and tell people to be quiet and sit down. Sometimes, I'm learning; sometimes I think he's angry or upset when he's not. He says he's just excited or if he's quite across, I will say, "You're shouting." And he will say, "No, I'm not shouting. I'm just telling you." but, I have learned to look for other signs, not only just the level of his voice to read what his emotions are. So, that would have to be the biggest one (difference): misinterpreting the volume of the voice.

To avoid potential misunderstandings and to identify differences (and similarities) in preferences as well as communicative styles, therefore, openness between marriage partners is important. Brad says:

So, you know, in a marriage it is important to communicate, you know, if your feelings got hurt, why they got hurt uh and so that doesn't happen again; because I mean it is, you know, when you are married, it is for life. So that's huge, you know. Being so it is like everybody has their pet peeves kind of thing. ... That's where the communication comes in to let somebody know why, you know, "I don't like this," or "Because it hurts my feelings," or "I'd appreciate it if you do that," or, you know, "talk to me this way." That sort of things. I think that's where the communication comes in uh a lot. And it can be verbal or nonverbal. It doesn't always have to be talk. It can be look, it can be look.

Brad emphasizes the importance of communication not only in an interracial marriage but also in any marriage. Brad says a typical mistake in marriage would be:

Uh just to not communicate. To assume, uh to make assumptions about what the other person would think. Uhm communication definitely goes two ways, you know, it's not one person talking one person listening. It's, you know, both people, you know, listening and understanding and sharing and I think coming up with some kind of conclusion. Uh, uh I think also to understand that nobody is perfect. So, you know, we made this, you know, sometimes it is okay to agree to disagree. Sometimes somebody has to give in, you know, it is not always about who is right.

The interracial couples depend on communicative clues to read and understand others' reactions to their marriage. They may also use it to "announce" the seriousness of their relationship. Susan says:

I think at church people are, you know, because we went there very often, they were like, "Oh, oh, he has a White girlfriend." Uh I guess the feeling it gave to

me was, it kind of made me at the beginning like, "Well, I have to be around him more," for like people to know, like, and communicate to be open to people if they are asking questions, how or what we are up to, to let them know that yeah we do have fun; that it's not about Black and White; we communicate, we love each other. So, uh even people that were close to him, I would just, you know, make sure to put the extra effort to let them know that we were beyond that.

Society also consistently communicates with (to) the interracially married couples. The negative messages society harbors and sends seem to influence, though subconsciously, the interracial couple's communication as well. Susan says, "And, you know, sometimes I am like, 'Wow, that's really crazy,' you know, 'We are a mixed couple and we are making it.'" Society's messages that interracial marriages are doomed to fail seems to have some effect in Susan's story. Remnants of society's misguided attitudes prevail in Thomas's story as well. Speaking of the disadvantages and challenges related to his interracial marriage, Thomas says, they have had it "pretty easy." He says, "Nobody is breaking our windows, or driving us out of town whatever. I think, I think, uh it's been regular kind of relationship." Thomas also refers to same-race couples as "regular couples." Thomas's comments resonate with society's assumption that interracial marriages are somehow "irregular." He also seems to heed society's one-drop rule when talking about he would identify his children racially. He says:

Oh I'd say they're Black. Their mother is Black, you know, and I can't say these are White kids. And see them, you can see they are not pale like me. So, I would tell the kids that's how they decide what you are.

Nicole's story has similar marks. She says:

The thought of marrying somebody interracially uh didn't, it didn't, that wasn't scary. I don't know why, probably it should have been, but it wasn't. ... I do know women uh Black women who liked White men, who have stopped themselves before they liked them even more. And didn't go out with them even though they wanted to, because they knew it would just create a lot of havoc in their families.

While the interracial couples say how big a role communication can and does play in their marriage, and what dire consequences the absence of (quality) communication can have on their marriage, the stories they tell imply that society's misguided attitudes are sometimes reflected in the interracial couple's statements. Their stories thus reveal the mixed roles communication can play in an interracial relationship. They also show the power and depth of society's misguided assumptions and messages about and to interracial marriages.

"Support matters"

This theme presents the (social) support the interracial couples get in going through the challenges and difficulties they face in relation to their interracial relationship.

Brad says that his family members have been supportive to him and his wife. He also says the fact that most of their friends are in interracial relationships helps. "I think we're there to support one another," he says. Brad says his parents are his greatest genuine support:

My parents are my greatest supporters uh and, you know, always have good advice uh, you know, and since my wife and I have been married, they look at her as one of their own. You know, they care for her just like they do my sister and my brother; uh and it's real, it's genuine.

Yet, Brad says the advice his wife and him get from his parents has more to do with having a good marriage and being good parents. Because his parents are not—or have never been in an interracial marriage—they do not have the experience of what it looks like to be in one. He says:

Well, you know, I mean again, you know, we are a young relatively married couple. So, I would say the support that we get from our family, you know, I mean our parents definitely, is just how to be a good wife, how to be a good husband, how to be a good father, what does it look like. ... Uh so, I mean, that's the support that we've received, you know. ... Obviously, neither of them is in interracial marriage, you know, so that kind of, you know, advice they don't really have for us because they haven't had those experiences. but, you know, I think at the same time, they are able to kind of give us advice on, on, you know, certain things whether it's, you know, like I said, you know, what areas to be in or not to be in, you know. ... But not so much, you know, from experience.

Thomas says his wife's parents were very supportive in their marriage. He says, "I think it helps when you have a family near the children." Nicole gives an example of how her parent's helped in their marriage:

I remember we were at a low plate and I don't even remember what it was about and I called my parents and I said, "This is the last. I'm out of this marriage now..." and my parents, both my parents came up and sat and talked with [my husband] and I for like two hours and when they left, you know, they gave us a thousand dollars to help us out, you know. So, uh it, yeah the relationship [with her parents] was one of trying to support and help out. And I,

when any of my kids were born, my mom took all my other kids and kept them for like two weeks, you know. I mean they were supportive.

Nicole says her husband's parents were also eventually supportive. She says even though they were not supportive at first, they eventually accepted their marriage and became supportive. She says, "I'd say a few years into the marriage they realized we were, "What's the point?" So, they changed around and became a little bit more supportive."

People in interracial and/or intercultural relationships—like Brad and Susan's friends—might thus be able to provide the experience-based support to the interracial couples. Having interracial couples around, therefore, helps. Even though he says they do not "really need any support," Thomas says they sometimes socialize with some interracial or intercultural families and groups. He says there was a group which they socialized with that tried to bring cross-culturally adopted children and multiracials together to help them interact with each other. "They [the group] wanted to try to get other mixed race people so the kids [cross-culturally adopted children], you know, can interact more [with] different people," says Thomas. "We would go there just socially kind of like, you know, as a picnic kind of thing."

Thomas also says they had an intercultural couple family friends. He says their children used to hang out together. Thomas says that was not a "need" but they have had some interracial and intercultural families they interact with. He says:

Sometimes the kids would hang out together. But it was just a social thing. In terms of supporting them, no. We would, we're fairly independent group of people, I think. Because I don't think you go in this kind of relationship worrying about, "What am I gonna do next? I need to call up," you know, "Billy or ask him how to deal with this or that kind of thing." I think people

who do this thing, they are kind of a little more individual, I would, not knowing much about it, but I would speculate that uh that you'd have to be, like I say, fairly comfortable with who you are and what your relationship is gonna be before you do something like this, I would think.

Nicole says she discusses her experiences with other interracially married friends. She says this helps her to "affirm what you are thinking." It enables her to see if others in the same/a similar position have the same experiences and feelings about the challenges interracial couples face. "It just means, 'Yeah, I get it,'" she says.

The interracial couples, however, say they do not always get support from others. Thomas says some same-race couples—"regular couples"—"were not happy" with the fact that Thomas and Nicole were still married while the same-race couples were not. The majority of the messages the interracial couples (and families) get from society tell them how an oddity their marriage is and how it cannot work. Nicole says, "They (her in-laws) concerned themselves with why it wouldn't work instead of supporting to make sure it did." The social support (material, informational, or emotional) the interracial couples get from family and friends, however, helps them to overcome those messages of failure.

Upbringing and environment

This theme focuses on the role of environment and upbringing in terms of how accepting of or open to diversity and differences one will be. The couples say exposure to and acceptance of diversity play a big role in breeding a positive attitude.

Brad says he was exposed to diversity starting early in life—starting from second grade. He says, "I was very multicultural, everyone from, you know, Indian students to biracial students to ourselves African American students to Hispanic students." He says he was around all the different races and cultures. "I haven't been,

you know, specifically with one different culture.” Brad says this influenced his habits later on when he went to college where the tendency was to hang out with your own race. He says, “I had mixed friends, uh I didn’t particularly take the one culture or race ‘cause that’s not how I was raised and I wasn’t used to that. I kind of hanged out with everybody and that was what was comfortable for me.”

His wife, Susan grew up in a small, predominantly White town. She says she did not have any exposure to the different races in early life. She says:

I wasn’t exposed to diversity at all until actually after college when I went to Oklahoma. ... Well, I didn’t know any interracial couples; nor did I, honestly I didn’t even speak to anyone of any other background really until I was about 22, when I moved to Oklahoma, just because the diversity wasn’t there.

Alex says he was not exposed to diversity either. He says he went to a predominantly White school where there were about 1% Blacks. But Alex says he joined the military at 18 and has been to many different places around the world which gave him much more exposure. His wife, Jennifer, has also been to many places that gave her exposure to different cultures, though she grew up in a predominantly White town. Jennifer says she didn’t know interracial couples before getting married, though she had dated cross-racially. She also says she doesn’t know many interracial couples now. Alex—whose first marriage was interracial—says he did not know interracial couples before getting married, though he knows few now. Brad says he knew a few interracial couples prior to his marriage.

Thomas and his wife Nicole know “a lot of” interracial and/or intercultural couples. Thomas, however, says he didn’t know married interracial couples before he got married. He says he grew up amongst all White people. “I never really knew any, saw any [interracial couples], to speak of,” he says.

Nicole says she doesn't think she knew interracial couples before getting married. "But I do know this much," she says, "that I was raised by parents who really believed that we were all equal." She has ten brothers and sisters and all of them are intermarried. She says, "Some [of my brothers and sisters] married outside their culture, and some married outside their race." However, she knows quite a few intermarried couples now whom she didn't know "before I was dating" Thomas. She says, "We do have quite a few friends which are interracial friends but I have oh I guess I do know quite a few friends that are interracially, Black and White marriage, and I do have a lot of interculturally married friends, lots."

The interracial couples believe that their upbringing had a lot to do with their being accepting of diversity. Nicole says it must have a bearing on her marriage choice:

I think that on some level that decision (the decision to intermarry) was made by my parents to teach us to be accepting of everybody. Because there is no way you can raise 11 kids and have them all marry interracially or interculturally and you not be doing a good job.

Jennifer sees here upbringing playing a role in her marriage decision too. She believes it helped her to see people as people and thus not to think about race when choosing a marriage partner. She says:

My family was very open, and culturally aware and very uh my parents were very much about opening their homes to all peoples and having an understanding of different cultures. ... That was the way we were raised. We just, you know, red and yellow and Black and White, they are precious in his sight. And that was just [instilled] into us that people were people. So, when it

came to deciding whether or not I would marry my husband, there just wasn't, he was a person. He was a man.

Jennifer maintains that the biggest influence is family. She says the influence of parents and family has the power to not only neutralize but also to supersede other influences. She says:

I'm gonna say that the biggest influence [in shaping an individual's attitude] is family. It's parenting and it's the way that you're raised is the things that you are taught in your home and that gives, that is also a religious background. ... So, I'm gonna say family something that is very important and parenting even more so than neighborhood. So, if a person is surrounded by the belief system that people are people then it's going to be, that's the way it's gonna be, that people are people.

Brad also sees his upbringing instilling a positive attitude in him. He says he's always been open to and accepting of diversity. He says:

I mean I, you know, obviously I am one who, growing up I never saw people for their color. Uh the way you act is different thing, you know. If you yourself uh, you know, had, seem to have hate or don't like me just because of my color, uh I have an issue with that. But, you know, I see people as people; I always have uh and always will. Uh so I am definitely one of the people who say, "Whatever makes a person happy regardless of their skin and their mate's skin." It doesn't matter to me. ... I suppose that was, kind of I think stuck with me. But you know my family, my extended family have always been accepting of whatever culture people are. As long as they were nice, so to speak.

Brad believes people's disapproval of interracial marriage may have to do with their upbringing. He says:

Maybe they were raised in the home where that wasn't acceptable. ... I think because I think a child really has to be taught how to be prejudiced or how to be racist or you know that "We don't like Black people," or "We don't like White people." You don't come out of the womb like that.

The interracial couples, therefore, believe attitudes toward and acceptance or disapproval of interracial marriage might have more to do with upbringing rather than neighborhood or school diversity. They agree that environment plays a role in shaping people's attitudes; but they don't believe it is the determinant or the most important factor.

Brad sees their marriage as an example of this. Even though he has always been exposed to diversity, his wife, Susan, was not exposed to diversity until after college. Yet, they are intermarried. Thus, even though their environment and exposure might have played a role in how they view things, their differences in terms of exposure to diversity—different races and cultures—did not keep them from marrying interracially. Brad, however, says it is not easy to single out the impact of environment's role. He says for some, it might have stronger impacts:

It's kind of a catch 22 because in some other instances, if you have individuals that grow up in certain areas and are not exposed and they never are exposed, they are ignorant, you know, they don't know anything outside their [own race]. So, but then, they may still be open to other people or not. So, it's kind of catch 22, I think.

Alex says neither Blacks nor Whites can claim to be prejudice free, because "we are prejudiced by where we live." The interracial couples also say that they have

fewer challenges because of the areas they live in. They all say that the areas they live in are less hostile to interracial marriages than others, which minimizes their challenges and the discrimination (at least, the overt discrimination) they are exposed to. Thomas's comments provide a typical example of how the couples see their respective environments:

But this part is very different than the world, Cambridge is very, very different place than anywhere else you ma go. Much more open minded, yeah accepting, open-minded. Liberal. ... I can't talk about anywhere else but this is a very liberal area here.

The interracial couples are so aware of the influence environment can have on the acceptance of their marriage that they are selective of places they live in and places they go to. This tendency is described under the theme "comfort zone" earlier. Nonetheless, the couples are selective and prefer to live in a racially mixed environment. Nicole says:

I think it's really also important where you live, when you are uh, you, when you are two couples [interracial couples]. I think it'd probably be best to live [in the borderlands]. ... I tend to believe that all border towns have more compatibility factors happening, you know, because they have to live side by side so they figure out how they do it. That's where you want to live.

Both environment and upbringing play a role in shaping an individual's attitude and their openness to diversity. Yet, the most important factor is upbringing. Even though it may not eliminate misguided beliefs and attitudes the environment fosters, a positive upbringing has the power and tendency to help people overcome those negative attitudes.

"Better covered."

This theme has to do with the interracial couples' perceptions of how society reacts to (Black-White) interracial marriages. The participants say even though society's attitudes and reactions toward Black-White interracial marriages (and families) seem to be changing, those changes are only superficial. Brad says society's apparent acceptance of interracial marriages can be only pretension and it may also be easy to see through at times. He says:

[We haven't had any problems] as of yet, you know, but you never know. I know people sometimes may think things, can [say] all kind of say things and feel a different way, you know. And I, I may be able to detect that at times, you know. ... I would say the majority of them [society] fall probably with not, not so much accepting of interracial and biracial relations and; but they are not open about it. They are not just upfront about it, you know what I am saying? But they may feel like that deep down; but they don't really voice their opinion because they know it seems like nowadays that is not what's politically correct, you know what I am saying?

Alex sees that tendency too. He says that no matter how people feel, no matter how much they hate you for your skin color, they "are not going to say that, they are not gonna say that to you. Uh they are not gonna say that to your children, not bold and upfront like that." He describes the possible reasons behind the pretension as follows:

Because now there's repercussions and people are afraid to say how they feel or what they feel. So, if I say something, if they say something to you and it may be a true feeling, they may say, "Well, that's not politically correct." Or, "That's derogatory." Or, They are afraid they are gonna get sued, or [harmed].

Thomas says White people may tend to exhibit that tendency more lest they be seen as racist. He says:

I mean, I think White people will be a little more sensitive to not being respectful to them [minorities], they'd be afraid to be seen as a racist. Nobody wants to be seen as a racist, so, uh I don't think, I don't think, they may not want anything to do with them but, I mean, you can kind of pick that up easily.

That same fear or concern might also be getting in the way of discussions about race. Nicole says people don't want to talk about race, "because they don't want to be labeled racist; they don't want to offend anybody." People, therefore, place restrictions on when, where and how they discuss race. Nicole says, "You've to have discussions in race. I mean, I think people privately do. I think it's a public area that they don't discuss."

Alex describes the superficiality of society's positive attitude toward and acceptance of Black-White interracial marriages (and families). He says:

There's a lot of things better but I think a lot of things are uh better-covered. I think it's probably the easiest way to say it, uh, I think better-covered. I don't think people feel any differently; they just don't say it. I guess I can't say any differently but not as much as I would think. I thought things would change more than they have. ... People in the city, they go, "Oh we're tolerant. We're tolerant." Not really. You're just not telling your true feeling. You are not tolerant, and you're not accepting. And there is a difference between tolerance and acceptance, and I would rather you be accepting of me than you be tolerant of me.

The improvement of society's attitude toward (Black-White) interracial marriage seems to be more of a pretension than a genuine reconsideration of

misguided attitudes. The reaction, thus, seems much of tolerance as Alex puts it than that of acceptance. The shift in reaction toward interracial marriages that is not based on understanding but on fear of repercussions is likely to translate overt into covert discrimination and not solve the root of the problem.

Race talk

This theme describes how much the participants discuss race in their family and whether they think race should be discussed in interracial families as well as in society. The participants say they discuss race with their partners and children; yet, not in depth. Brad says his wife and him did not talk much about race before they got married. He says:

You know, we didn't go in detail really. We know we loved each other; uh, you know. We knew the possibility [of race being an issue], but we didn't really go into a whole lot of detail talking about this. We didn't really want to dwell in the negative as much as the positive.

Brad says that his wife and him talk about people and cultures in general but implies that they do not do it that much. He says, "I would say we do, but I don't know what capacity."

Discussions about race and issues related to race seem to come up in the interracial families when the couples face challenges because of their interracial marriage. Thomas says they discuss race "only when I'm trying to point things out to [my wife]." He says she faces different challenges including that her comments are ignored at work. He says her being married to him "negates her Blackness amongst some Black people there." Otherwise, says Thomas, they do not discuss race a lot:

But yeah, we don't really discuss it as much there. Except like that she, when we notice when we're selling the house, she will say, "Look, you need to be

here when these people come, not my Black ass. I don't want to be here and I don't want to hear any of their crap." I'll say, "Okay, alright whatever. I will hang out and look."

Nicole also says she and her husband talk about race and racism when they are faced with challenges including when she is discriminated against at work or when her children face certain challenges—mainly at school—because of their race. But, she also says she discusses it with her White colleagues who teach Black students. She says she advises them on how to deal with their students. Nicole, unlike Thomas, believes she and her husband discuss race frequently though she believes it is not discussed that often by others. She says:

We just are, I mean, I don't think race is something that we don't discuss. We uh, you know, but I do, but I will say that race is something that a lot of people don't like to discuss; they don't like to discuss it. ... Because they don't feel comfortable and especially uh they don't feel comfortable; they just don't, they do not feel comfortable around uh because they don't want to be labeled racist; they don't want to offend anybody.

Alex says that they sometimes talk about race in their family. "Yeah, not any, not anything in depth," says Alex, "But there are things that come up." His wife, Jennifer, offers an example:

Uh we talked about it [discrimination they faced in an "all Black reggae club" in South Carolina]. We walked out and I was in awe, and, you know, I said, "I can't believe that people are this way." And he's, you know, I am always kind of shocked that people act or react that way. And he's just, "Yeah, well that's how it's and you've to learn where to go and not to go."

Nicole says communication in relationship—including about race—pays back. She says that their communication with her husband, including about race, has changed over time. “I think over the years we got more comfortable talking about everything and race is part of it.” She says, “It doesn’t make sense to make limits on any conversation in a relationship to me.”

Nicole says race should be discussed. She speaks about how different her marriage would have been had they put restrictions on discussions about race. She says, “there probably wouldn’t have been a lot of conversations, there would not have been clarity around issues and uh, you know, I mean there’s just, a lot of situations [that require discussion about race].”

Race though should be discussed not only in an interracial relationship, but also by society. The participants believe race should be discussed; yet, they are cautious about it. Susan says discussion about race “open[s] the gates and, you know, it becomes a better functioning world. You know, when we talk about things, when we talk about the challenges, when we talk about things that are real, uh, you know, it’s just (important) above all things.” Jennifer also thinks that race should be discussed “because it’s around us every single day.” Brad says it is good to talk about race but we should be careful not to solidify stereotypes and racial “ignorance.” He says:

I think if we are talking about race in terms of educating ourselves and so we better understand a race, I think that’s definitely uh what’s needed is to be educated so you don’t make assumptions and you don’t prejudge people uh and because I think prejudice and racism in and of itself is just a level of ignorance and then you act upon and speak about. Uh so in those terms, I agree.

Jennifer too is cautious about when and how race should be discussed. Jennifer explains her concerns as follows:

I think they [society] should talk about it when it comes up, when it becomes an issue. I don't think it should be made an issue, and I think that is the problem if you start discussing race with a child before the child even knows what race what concept is, then you're gonna have an issue. ... It should be talked about when it is an issue but it shouldn't be made an issue of. ... If a person's race is going to create a cultural misunderstanding, then that has to be, it has to be discussed. ... But if race isn't going to, if race difference isn't going to create a cultural misunderstanding, then there's no need to discuss it.... it's called education, it's not even a discussion. You educate people of cultural differences so miscommunications don't happen.

Alex also says it is good to discuss race as long as we do not turn the discussion into an argument. He says, "I think it'd be a good thing if they'd discuss race; if, if they'd discuss it in a manner that's not hateful, that's not uh 'I'm better than you are. Uh your people are this, your people are that.' No, that's not discussion to me. That's argument."

The strategy of the interracial couples when it comes to discussing race—like their strategy of dealing with challenges discussed earlier—seems to be avoidance. They do not discuss race very often; they do not raise race unless it is highlighted by abrupt events, which are most likely negative. The lack of discussion and communication about race might thus make it more difficult for them to deal with challenges they face since they are likely to stay unprepared (or at least not as prepared as they could be) for such challenges. Nonetheless, all the interracially married participants believe that race should be discussed. They believe that

discussion about race is lacking but at the same time are concerned that discussions about race may trigger more tension. Their conditional discussions about race—"We discuss race when events warrant such a discussion"—seems a reflection of this concern.

"What we mean."

This theme discusses what the interracially married participants believe are the implications of (Black-White) interracial marriages and their increase in number in the US. Brad cannot say why exactly interracial marriages are increasing in number in the US. He, nonetheless, believes the reason can be one or both of two possible alternatives:

I would say that the statistics are always showing that one of two things [is happening]: either society is increasing towards being more acceptable and/or people are just living their lives the way they want to regardless of what society is saying. Uh, you know, they want to be happy. So, they just Black, White or purple, they're being, you know, are gonna be with that person regardless, and I think that's probably, you know, more than the latter [former] what's going on. People are living for themselves and not necessarily on what others might say even if it is their family.

Alex seems to support Brad's explanation, albeit indirectly. He focuses on isolation from society for making that decision and thus implies lack of acceptance. He also says that society's response is tolerance at best. Alex, thus, says their marriage has a major implication for them. It means that all they can depend on is each other. He says:

Uh you better love each other. Because, people on the outside they don't love you. They don't uh, they tolerate it. Uh so, I think of nothing else. We know

that what we have is each other and that's what we turn to is each other. Uh because you could, well it's, well Black people say, "We don't like you because you're married to a White girl." White people say, "We don't like you because you're married to a Black man." So, I guess for me anyway, we've each other and that's fine with me.

The interracial couples, however, see and hope there is a relationship between acceptance by society and the increase in number of interracial marriages. Susan thinks the increase in the number of interracial marriages can lead to (further) acceptance by society. She says:

I feel like they [society, especially the young] are forced to accept it because there's so much diversity, because our generation and we really are mixing it up and looking beyond color. I feel, looking for quality; I feel, friendships, you know, husband-wife relationship is more quality more than to say, "What is it? Is it White or is it Black?" ... You know, you are gonna have those people that aren't accepting and maybe pose a little hostility towards it, but I think as a whole we can work more together, we can get beyond that.

The interracial couples emphasize the need to look beyond color. Yet, they are not all that optimistic about what the (near) future holds. "I don't think you're ever gonna have a color blind society for a long way because ... it becomes a defining thing for a lot of people, especially I think more so non-Whites," says Thomas. "I don't think it will [ever] be resolved until we're all one group of brown people at some point in the distant future."

Nicole too expects some change. She, however, does not see a point beyond racial conflict and tension; but she says interracial couples should not bother

themselves with the racial tensions. She does not see either interracial marriages or racial tensions winning over the other. She says:

I mean, you're always gonna have interracial relationships and there's always gonna be conflict. ... So, you're always gonna have a certain amount of conflict. It is not upon the people that are marrying to worry about the conflict. The, the concept of love is divine, and divine has the power to persevere. ... [But the increase in the number of interracial marriages] really should make things better; but you know we are in America which is about politicizing and polarizing people sometimes.

The interracially married participants are pessimistic at worst and skeptical at best about racial relations and race issues. Jennifer is not certain where we might be going from here. She says there are two possibilities; one of them more likely than the other:

Well, I think one of two things will happen, either or is happening. One: there's going to be uh uh a broader acceptance [of Black-White interracial marriages]. That might mean that there's a blending of the cultures and finally an acceptance of the human race. Or it's going to create a larger divide. It's going to create a larger hatred, and that's a scary thing, I'm sorry, I know. But I think there's only one of the two things. ... Oh because we're part of the human race, I really see the uglier side happening more than the kind side happening.

Her husband, Alex, is not optimistic either. Even though he does not say things can get worse, he cannot say they are going to get better either. "I don't think we will ever completely get through it [the race issue]," says Alex, "I really don't

know what to tell you on how we could change it or if we ever will. Uh I don't see it . . . in my life[time], I don't."

Alex knows one thing for sure. To be able to solve the race issue, both sides need to do more and transform the tolerance that might exist into acceptance. He says:

Uh so, I don't, I don't have the, I don't see where the, where either side is gonna get it. Unless more people are willing to see how the other half lives, I don't see it changing. Uh and uh I keep coming back to it but that's only how I really can think about, the tolerance, uh people have tolerance, but there are some things that you are not supposed to be tolerant of. Uh interracial [relationships is one of them], that's uh, there should be an acceptance there as people—I still keep coming back to the people issue—but right now, 2008, it's still a tolerance issue. . . . So, I don't know what we're gonna do to change it, or [if we] will ever change it.

At any rate, the interracial couples hope their marriages and their children provide hope for reconciliation among the races. Alex hopes the interracial couples and their biracial children serve as a bridge between the races. He says, "As there becomes more of them, I hope they don't pick and choose which side of the street they "belong." I hope they get to walk on both sides of the street." He also says it is gratifying to see his different looking grandsons (from his daughters who are married to a Black man and to a White man) accept each other as cousins and symbolize unity. He says:

[The one] is as White as White can be and [the other], he's as Black as he can be and it's just great, you know. And it's so cool 'cause they're just cousins, that's all. They just love each other; that's cool. So, I think, you know,

hopefully that will rub off into our society a little bit. I hope, I hope. I pray that's what happens.

Even though the interracial couples hope that the increase in number of Black-White interracial marriages is both a result of society's acceptance of interracial relationships and hope for racial reconciliation and understanding, they are not certain. They seem to believe that the increase in the number of interracial marriages may have to do with the ones that are being intermarried—"they are just making their own choice regardless"—rather than with society's acceptance of such relationships. As discussed even earlier under the "better covered" theme, society's reaction seems to be tolerance rather than acceptance. Thus, the intermarried are not optimistic about the implications of their intermarriages to society in general and the two racial groups—Blacks and Whites—in particular.

Discussion

The Black-White interracial couples do not see their marriages as unique although they realize that society does. They say their marriage is just another marriage with its "ups and downs." Yet, they realize that it is usually "downs and downs" when viewed by society.

The interracial couples say that family members (and friends) are generally more accepting of their interracial marriages than the rest of society. They say even the family members who oppose their marriage at the beginning eventually accept it and even become supportive. Generally, they say Blacks are more accepting of the Black-White interracial marriages than Whites, though the trend of acceptance and non-acceptance tends to be more complicated. People of the same race but different sex as the interracially married are less accepting of the interracial marriages than people of the same race and same sex as the interracially married. In a Black man,

White woman marriage, for instance, Black women and White men tend to be less accepting than Black men and White women. Even though reports on this have been contradictory, some researchers have found similar pattern (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Zebroski, 1999).

The stories of the interracial couples, nonetheless, show that Black-White interracial couples are still not accepted (Childs, 2005; Dunleavy, 2004; Hibbler & Shinnew, 2002; La Taillade, 1999). The participants say that society's (and imply that even family's) reaction to their marriage is one of tolerance rather than acceptance. Thus, the increase in the number of (Black-White) interracial marriages may not be necessarily an indication of increase of the acceptance of interracial marriages since multiple factors play a role (McFadden & Moore, 2001) though it has been considered a sign of a decrease in the social stigma toward interracial unions (Brown, 1995). Society's disapproval of Black-White interracial marriages is highlighted in the stereotypes against such intermarriages which the interracial couples report. The stereotypes suggest some abnormality centered around "hating one's identity." These belief systems assume that the interracially married are somehow "abnormal." These presumptions discourage embracing differences as beauty and label them (at least implicitly) right and wrong and thus hinder mutual understanding. The stereotypes, if left unaddressed, are likely to lead to discrimination and accompanying mistreatments. People's standpoints might be playing a role on how people view Black-White interracial marriages. Griffin (2006) defines a standpoint as "a place from which to view the world around us" (p. 482). Social attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages are not consistent, though. People may have different attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages depending on their position and their viewpoint (Griffin; Wood, 2000). The participants say that friends and Blacks are more

accepting of their marriages than strangers and Whites respectively, for instance. The difference in attitude toward the interracial marriages between friends and acquaintances or strangers, between Blacks and Whites, as well as between men and women (which might depend on the race and sex combination of an interracial marriage) the participants allude to might be a result of their varying standpoints. Friends' proximity to the interracially married may be playing a role in making them understand the interracial couples more and better, for instance. Blacks' lower social position may also be playing a role in making them understand and accept the interracial couples more. For our social groups can shape our experiences, knowledge, and understanding, as well as our communication with ourselves and others (Griffin; Wood)

Whether they openly admit it or not, the interracial couples face many challenges—mainly covert discrimination (Childs, 2005; La Taillade, 1999, Root, 1990). They are marginalized by both Blacks and Whites (Buttney, 1987). The interracially married say that they are told, verbally or nonverbally, that “they are not loved,” or are “less Black or less White,” because they are married to the “other” and thus become a double-minority since they have difficulty relating to either group. Reich et al. (2000) contend that being able to relate with a social group [a racial group] makes one feel affinity with an entire population of others without the existence of personal relationships with them. The interracially married along with their children don't seem to have this opportunity—at least not as much as monoracial families do. Yet, the main concern of the interracial couples is about their children who are likely to (or do) face more challenges.

The interracial couples say environment and upbringing make a lot of difference even within the realm of tolerating interracial marriages. They allude to

this fact when they talk about their decision to intermarry (or to not consider race as a factor when choosing a marriage partner), the places they live in and their tolerance to interracial marriages, as well as the places they feel or do not feel comfortable going to or living in. The interracial couples say they do not see color but humans. Society's conceptualization, however, seems to influence and dictate them as exemplified by how they want to and how they, at least at times, racially identify their children.

The interracial couples would normally use what Rockquemore and Brunσμα (2002) call the border identity to racially identify their children. This model (one of three mentioned by Rockquemore and Brunσμα) is based on "inbetweenness." Individuals adopting this model consider themselves to be neither Black nor White and incorporate both Black and White categories into a unique hybrid. The interracial couple participants of this study also say their children are not either Black or White but have both "in them" and they are biracial. Intermarriage results in various identity options for biracial and multiracial offspring (Roth, 2005). It may allow assimilation into either the majority or the minority racial group of the parents or can result in the creation of a new racial identity that is neither one nor the other (Root, 1996; Roth; Thornton & Gates, 1996). The participants of this study prefer a new racial identity—the biracial identity—which is neither Black nor White for their children. Society's conceptualization of race as mutually exclusive and the one-drop rule, however, do not give them the freedom that would enable them to do that. The one-drop rule—or the social norm of hypodescent—assigns a mixed-race person to the group with the lowest social value (Herman, 2004). The interracial couples say they do or would mark the Black race for their children for a variety of reasons ranging from "that's how society perceives them" to "we do not want them to lose the benefits they can get as minorities"—such as scholarship opportunities, for example.

The findings of this study show that communication plays a major role in marginalizing the interracial couples and their children from the two races. It also plays a role (through support from family members and friends) in helping the biracial individuals get through the challenges they face. Social support is important in helping interracial couples go through their challenges (Zebroski, 1999) which could be why interracial couples avoid unsupportive situations and environments (Rosenblatt, et al., 1999; Zebroski). More importantly, the findings show that communication can play an even greater role in alleviating the problems surrounding interracial families and race. The findings demonstrate that the social realities that are at the core of the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages (and families) are a result of symbolic interaction and social construction in the interaction between society and the interracial families. The interracial couples would, as explained earlier, normally identify their children as their children and as "human beings," for instance. Yet, because of the messages they get from society through forms, for example, they realize that society wants to identify them as "race." In certain instances, the interracial couples have also to identify their children in terms of the racial category society assigns them. This, in turn, strengthens the value society attributes to "race" and shapes the experiences and social realities of the interracial couples and their children.

Communication can thus play a role to redefine the social realities, to challenge stereotypes, and to foster understanding and acceptance of interracial marriages and families. Communication that might have helped in alleviating the situation is lacking, whereas unhelpful communication—the type that would encourage stereotypes and discrimination, for example, at least in the form of silence—is not in short supply. The interracial couples' strategies in dealing with the

stereotypes and discrimination they face seems to be mainly avoidance. The misguided discourses that shape the reality that we hope to change should, however, be faced, neutralized and eventually substituted with a positive discourse that can lead to racial harmony and understanding.

Even though their stories showcase the challenges the interracial couples face, they tend to conceal them as discussed under the theme “No challenges, but...” Downplaying the challenges they face seems to be one strategy by which the interracial couples in this study deal with the difficulties they face.

The interracial couples' accounts basically indicate that the couples do not discuss race unless it is triggered by certain events—mostly negative experiences by members of the interracial families. This can be another area in which the interracial married try to stay within their comfort zones in addition to choosing carefully places they live in and go to, and friends who are most likely to be accepting of their marriages. It appears that race is “better left untouched” unless situations make it difficult to avoid race talk. This tendency may have a bearing on the interracial couples' strategy of avoidance to deal with stereotypes and discrimination. Worse yet, if race is “better left untouched,” it is very unlikely that race will be discussed exhaustively even when raised in relation to some (unfortunate) events. Such inexhaustive and limited discussions, in turn, are unlikely to address the main issue leading to racial stratification, segregation (physical, psychological, and/or emotional), tension and confrontation, as well as misunderstanding. They are much less likely to solve the problem—the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriage, for instance. Silence in its various forms—not talking about race, staying within one's comfort zones, avoiding confrontation, etc., therefore, seems to be a major factor in

the social politics surrounding (Black-White) interracial marriages. It is a deep-rooted problem and cannot be solved with shallow discussions.

The study has a few limitations. The small sample size is one drawback. Even though the in-depth interviews afford detailed data, gathering information from more participants would have provided an even richer data. The participants mention the importance of environment in—among other things—determining the experiences of the interracial couples and families. Yet, the participants of this study were from different places. Although three of them either live or have lived in the Charleston area, they have been living in different places for some time, at least since their marriage. Studying the experiences of interracial couples who live in the same area, or at least more of them from each area represented—though not practical for this study—would afford a better understanding of the influence of environment in the experiences of Black-White interracial couples and families. The participants of this study were also of different age groups. Though it is not apparent in this study, age and the length of time they have been married might also have a bearing on their experiences and perceptions. Focusing on the same age group or including more of each age group might have helped to enrich the study. These are some considerations future studies can make.

The racial dilemma the interracial couples face and exhibit when telling their children's race—especially in terms of how they would answer a race question in forms on behalf of their children—showcases that these parents may be between a rock and a hard place. They do not want their children misidentified as either one or the other of their (at least) two racial backgrounds. Yet, they do not want their children to face more challenges and/or disadvantages (in the sense of “missing the opportunities” they may get, for example) by disobeying and breaking society's

norms—the one-drop rule. The couples seem to face a tension between psychological and material benefit. The psychological benefit-material benefit tension seems to come into play since they would have felt better (psychological benefit/satisfaction) if they could identify their children as “human” or at least “biracial,” but they (and their children) would lose the material benefits they could get by labeling their children in line with society’s norms.

The findings also suggest the presence of at least two dialectical tensions in relation to discussion about race. Even though the interracial couples see the need to communicate about “everything” including race in relationships and especially in marriage, they also try to do their best to limit talks about race in their interracial families. The fact that they discuss race only when it “becomes an issue”—when negative experiences prompt its discussion—suggests the presence of such a tendency.

The interracial couples also say it is important to discuss race as a society since it is “with us everyday.” Yet, they fear that talks about race might reinforce the stereotypes and stiffen the racial tension. It would be good to investigate these and other possible dialectical tensions in Black-White interracial marriages and the strategies used to deal with them in the future.

The interracial couples seem to face a silence-communication dialectical tension: they believe race should be discussed but, at the same time, fear that discussions about race might be counterproductive and stiffen racial tensions. The dialectical theory/perspective may help to understand and explain such dialectics the interracial couples face. The dialectical theory is concerned with the “complex ways in which persons-in-relationship use communication to manage the naturally opposing forces that impinge on their relationship at any given time” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 199). Avoidance seems to be the major strategy the interracial couples employ. Yet,

further investigation based on the dialectical theory of relationships is warranted. For the theory is based on a dialectical perspective on social life—"a belief that social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3).

Conducting the study with focus groups, instead of individual interviews (only), might have also helped to enrich the data somehow. Having interracial couples who have been married for different lengths of time share their experiences in a focus group might have shown the possible differences in experiences and thus in how they perceive and explain them. It might have also motivated the participants to discuss their experiences in more detail, in addition to serving as a reminder of some of their experiences as others talk about similar experiences. Therefore, including (using) focus groups to investigate the experiences of interracial couples should also be considered in the future.

Social support and especially supportive communication among interracial couples seems to be minimal. Investigating the type, extent and role of social support (supportive) communication among interracial couples is also another possibility for future studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

MIDDLERACE: THE SOCIAL POLITICS SURROUNDING BLACK-WHITE
BIRACIAL IDENTITY.*Introduction*

The social politics surrounding race intensifies and its implications deepen when the individual(s) in question happen to “fit nowhere” in terms of the preexisting mutually exclusive social constructs of race in a particular society. Given the extreme disapproval of Black-White intermarriages and the historical antagonism between the two races—Blacks and Whites—individuals born to one Black (African American) and one White (European American) parent represent such an “awkward” position. The difficulty of “fitting such an individual into” existing racial categories, which is basically a result of misunderstanding and misconception about the (in)validity of racial assumptions, adds to the intricacies of the social politics surrounding the middlerace—Black-White biracial individuals. It also makes their experience unique.

Because the unique position as well as its implication to the insider is either misunderstood or poorly understood in the American society, investigating the experiences of biracial individuals can contribute to a better understanding of the rapidly increasing biracial population in the U.S. and thereby minimize the stigma they face for their racial backgrounds. This chapter investigates the experiences of Black-White biracial individuals in the racially charged American society. It presents insiders’—Black-White biracial individuals’—perspective on biracial identity.

To understand the experiences and perceptions or views of Black-White biracial individuals, the chapter addresses the following major questions:

7. How do Black-White biracial individuals conceptualize race and racial identification?
8. How do Black-White biracial individuals racially identify themselves?
9. What factors play a major role in Black-White biracial individuals' self-concept and racial self-identification?
10. What challenges, if any, do Black-White biracial individuals face?
11. How do Black-White biracial individuals describe society's attitudes towards Black-white biracial individuals?
12. Is race/biracialism discussed in families (immediate or extended) with Black-White biracial children? And what are the implications?

Method

Participants for this study were three Black-White biracial adults. Two of them are women and the third is a man. I used purposive (snow ball) sampling technique to recruit Black-White biracial adults to participate in my study. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was offered. The male participant of my study was a 20-year-old man and the women were 23 and 25. All of the participants identified themselves as Black-White biracial individuals born to a Black father and a White mother. The two women are siblings. All the participants are either university students or graduates. The man is a sophomore student. One of the women is a graduate student and the other graduated recently with a master's degree.

I explained the purpose of the study and that participation in the study was voluntary. I asked the participants to read and sign a consent form and then conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with each of them (See appendix C for interview grid). Interviews were conducted at the interviewees'

conveniences. Two of them were conducted on campus. The third was conducted in the interviewee's office. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. They were recorded and transcribed. I depended on grounded theory in interpreting, and analyzing the data and I was informed by symbolic interactionism and social constructionism theories to explain the experiences of the biracial individuals. Grounded theory serves the purpose of this study since it emphasizes the link between data and the categories into which the data are coded, and since it argues that possible ways of explaining the issue under study keep being shaped until the end of the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). I used a symbolic interactionist (social constructionist) perspective in explaining my findings since the issue at the center of the study is race, which is a social construction. This perspective was explained in detail earlier in the literature review.

I read the transcriptions of the interviews (a total of 70 pages) twice to have a general understanding of the Black-White biracial individuals' perspectives. Then I read the transcriptions a third time coding them with some phrases that would help me organize the information into related groups (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I assigned the participants pseudonyms to protect their privacy. I analyzed the information organized into groups to come up with themes that would lead to an understanding and a description of the biracial individuals' experiences and feelings as they perceive and describe them.

Findings

The lessons I could learn from the Black-White biracial participants' responses and stories are presented in ten themes formulated and derived from my multiple readings, and codings of the interview transcriptions followed by grouping of related

ideas into themes. The themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, I believe presenting them the way I have affords an opportunity to look at the issues surrounding Black-White biracial identity from multiple and essential angles. The ten themes are: Racial identity; challenges, advantages, and disadvantages; attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriage; attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals; “support matters;” environment’s role; middlerace; role of communication; race talk; and “my box.”

Racial identity

This theme revolves around conceptions of race. It covers how the participants identify themselves racially, how others—including their parents/family—perceive them, and how they define race. Each of the participants identified themselves as Black-White biracial individuals. They also say the racial label they are most comfortable with is ‘biracial.’ Yet, if one looks deeper into their racial background, they have more races than the two “in them”—as they put it. Two of the participants said they have also Indian ‘in them’ whereas the third said he had Mexican ‘in him.’ One of the participants, Jamie, actually argues, “It’s only about what you prefer to identify with. ... [Otherwise] everyone is mixed with stuff.”

All the participants stated that their parents have the same racial labels for them—biracial. Chris, 20, says, “My parents say I am biracial just Mexican, Black and White. Both of them say that.” Angela, 23, and Jamie, 25, who are siblings also state that both of their parents wanted them to embrace their biracial identity.

The biracial individuals tell similar stories about how they respond to questions about race in various questionnaires. Chris says that he will mark either ‘other’ or ‘Black/African American.’ “I don’t put just, just Caucasian,” he said. “I am most of the times ‘other.’” Jamie says she marks ‘other’ if that option is available. If

not, she says, she marks both Black and White. If questionnaires are “very adamant” about marking just one, however, she marks “Black.”

The participants’ stories show that they are comfortable with their racial identity. All say that they are biracial and that they wouldn’t change it. The racial label they choose—biracial—they say, is also the one their parents as well as their extended family would choose, or even chose for them when they had to respond on their behalf. Chris describes his situation as follows:

I wouldn’t rather be White or I wouldn’t rather be Black or rather be Mexican. I like, biracial is fine with me. It seems fine with others that are around me. ... My parents always said I’m biracial. Yeah, they knew. My dad was fine with saying, telling me, my mom was fine with telling me. There was no problem at home.

Jamie echoes Chris. “I love being mixed,” she says. “I’d rather be mixed than anything else in the world.”

The fact that their parents agreed about the participants’ biracial identity and the fact that they gave them a consistent message about it seems to have helped. Chris and Jamie believe the positive messages they got from their parents and the positive feelings they developed about their racial identity early in life helped them. Jamie says she was proud to be biracial:

I would hold his [her father’s] hand and I wanted people to know that I was his daughter. Because I felt that maybe people didn’t know that I was his daughter. But I thought that it was really cool that peop, that I was, you know, and I was very proud that he was my dad. Then, you know, I just hold his hand and it was like I would always hold his hand to make sure that everybody knew that he was my dad, you know. And uh it was funny because like sometimes I’d go

places with my mom and like people wouldn't necessarily think that I was her daughter or, you know, or the same thing would happen and I would be like, you know, wanted people to know that that's my mom. It is weird but it's like I was, I was very proud of, of being biracial.

Chris also says he always felt biracial and he always thought that the races were equal. He says his parents also helped him in building that idea. Chris says:

I have always led myself to believe that I'm biracial not and not one race is better than the other. My parents also made sure that I was thinking, uh I didn't, I wasn't saying I would rather be White or I would rather be Black, and I still say that. I mean, I was this way for a reason.

Even though the three participants of the study said they were comfortable with their racial identity at this stage, not everyone was comfortable at an earlier age. Chris and Jamie say they were not confused with their racial identity even when they were younger. Angela tells a different story:

Like when I was younger, uh I think I was more, a little bit confused. I probably, I would say I was maybe five or so—in kind, my kindergarten age—but I remember like if I would go places with my dad, sometimes in my head I would think, "Oh they are not gonna think I am his kid," or something, you know.

Angela says she didn't think people would believe her father was her father because she did not look like him. Angela reports her struggle with and her acceptance of her racial identity later as follows:

So I think, you know, when I was a kid, I kind of thought that and then as I grew up a little bit more, I would say like in elementary school, I didn't want my friends to see my dad 'cause I thought, "Oh they are not gonna believe he

is my daddy there,” or something like that. But then when I got older like I accepted, you know, I was like happy of what my race was, I guess. I would say that’s like junior high, high school, and I was more comfortable and I understood like what, like who I was racially and everything. So I think at that age, like junior high, I became uh what’s the word, I was just happy about who I was, you know. I had a positive self-identity of myself and everything.

Accepting both of one’s racial heritages helps biracial individuals to become comfortable with their racial identity. Jamie says that biracial individuals should embrace both of their racial heritages. She also states her reason:

You are what you are and if you deny part of who you are, you are robbing yourself of your cultural identity, and I think that, that, I think sometimes that’s where mixed people get mixed up. You know, they start trying to fit into one group or fit into the other group and you have to embrace who you are.

The participants had similar definitions for race. They say race is people’s way of life and culture. They say it is based on how people are brought up. Chris’s statement captures the participants’ views. “Race to me uh, I’d say it’s a culture, Black or African American, the race of African Americans is just how they are brought up,” he says. “Race seems like more culture thing to me uh every body has their own culture, then I think it’s more a culture thing.”

Both Angela and Jamie agree. Actually, all the participants use the terms “race” and “culture” interchangeably. Yet, they tend to use the word “culture” more frequently than the word “race” when referring to race. All the participants say despite the differences in appearance they see among people from different races, they do not believe that race is biological. Chris says, “The only [physical] difference I see [among different races] is, yeah, the skin color.”

Even though the participants describe themselves as biracial individuals, others do not always perceive them as such. People the biracial individuals come across have varying assumptions about the biracial individuals' racial identity. White is rarely, if at all, one of those assumptions. Angela says people think that she was Arab, Mexican, Porto Rican, or Black. Chris and Jamie say they are usually perceived as Black. Chris says:

They were assuming I was Black because like, like, again my skin color. But actually I think now as people first meet me they say, "Are you mixed?"

Because my hair isn't like a Black person's hair, my skin color is light.

People thus tend to have various assumptions about biracial individuals' race. There may be a long list of what people might say when guessing what a biracial individual's race is, but biracial/mixed and White rarely make it in the list. This showcases the discrepancy in how the biracial individuals perceive themselves and how strangers—who do not know about the biracial individuals racial background—perceive them. However, this may only be a beginning of the social politics surrounding the biracial identity since even those who know the racial background of biracial individuals may not agree with the racial labels biracials choose for themselves.

Challenges, advantages, and disadvantages

This theme covers the challenges Black-White biracial individuals face, and the advantages and disadvantages of being biracial as the participants see them. Not many people seem to agree with the biracial individuals about their racial identity. The biracial individuals, however, not only acknowledge it but also see positive things in that identity. Being biracial, they say, has some advantages. Chris says, "I just joke around and say, 'I get the best part of both worlds,' or whatever, you know, both the

White world and Black world.” Chris further describes the advantages of being able to relate with both Blacks and Whites, from his experience as an adolescent and as a young adult, as follows:

For a White girl, knowing that I’m not completely Black, but then again for a Black girl knowing that I’m not completely White. Uh I don’t, I haven’t had, I mean there’s no girls fighting over me; but I haven’t had one say you should date your own race or Black girls, or another say you should date just White girls.

Angela says being biracial helps one to be less judgmental of others. She says a biracial individual’s ability to relate to and understand both Blacks and Whites helps the biracial individual to treat people better. Angela says:

Because we [biracial individuals] just don’t discriminate—discriminate against others, which some people who grow up in homes where it is one culture and the neighborhood where it is only one type of, you know, race and everything (do). So they don’t really get to experience everything, you know, of the other cultures.

Jamie also sees the same advantage. “Because you are mixed, you can identify with, you can relate to, various cultures and other people don’t have that [opportunity],” she says. “[Others] seemed kind of confined to one culture and I was thankful that I was born mixed. I love being mixed.”

Jamie says letting people know her racial identity improves her interaction with them. She believes revealing her biracial identity to Blacks and Whites earns her a better treatment. She says:

I feel like people, after finding out that I am mixed, they treat me better than before. So, I don’t know. May be they are intrigued by the mixed culture or

whatever, which I think a lot of people are. But uh, but yeah I feel like people treat me better after they find out that I am mixed.

Jamie speculates why people might treat her better after finding out her racial identity. Taking Whites as an example, she says:

I think they think that I am Black before I tell them that I am mixed. And then after I tell them that I am mixed, I feel people do treat me better. It's like [I'm] closer to them or they can relate more to me or that maybe I am not—it sounds so bad—maybe I am not all Black.

People's perceptions of the biracial individuals as a Black can also be, at times, an advantage. "I mean, in our society, it kind of plays in my favor sometimes," says Jamie. "Because people have categorized me as a minority." Jamie is referring here to opportunities—she even mentions scholarship opportunities—she can get as a minority.

The participants tend to downplay the challenges they face as Black-White biracial individuals. When asked directly about it, they all deny having come across any challenges even though they at times say other Black-White biracial individuals have experienced some challenges—a reason for the participants to expect to face some challenges in the future. Yet, their statements about their actual experiences and their interactions with Blacks and Whites seem to say otherwise. Chris, for instance, says he has not seen any challenges so far. "Uh, I haven't seen any challenges with myself. ... I'm not saying that I won't see any, but not that I can think of. I haven't seen any yet," he says.

Angela, recalling her biracial friends' experience, says calling names, particularly African American derogatory names is one of the challenges Black-White biracial individuals face around White people. Chris also, when relating his

experiences, says he has faced similar challenges. Yet he says that now that he has grown up, he knows how to handle them better. He says, "When I was younger, it just seemed uncomfortable because I was a little kid and I really didn't know any difference."

Such challenges do not come from Whites only, though. Angela says Blacks are not always nice to her, either. "I think they [Blacks] don't know what race I am. So they just uh, I don't know, it's kind of like they are more aggressive or something, and they are not as accepting," she says, "I guess, until you really become their friend or something."

Jamie said being perceived as a Black individual, and thus as a minority, can sometimes "play in her favor." The tendency to perceive biracial individuals as minorities is, however, not always beneficial. Jamie says another disadvantage is, thus, "dealing with people's preconceived notions." She describes the negative consequences as follows:

I mean, people have negative perceptions of people that are minorities. They treat them differently. You have to work way harder to even show yourself worthy among other people that aren't even as qualified, or as intelligent, or as educated; and it is frustrating.

Jamie says she usually doesn't pay attention to those preconceived notions.

She, however, says that it bothers her in certain situations. She says:

But, what does bother me is when I am in professional situations or academic situations and people second-guess my abilities, second-guess my intelligence, uh and I have to constantly prove myself, and that's, and it's hard. ... But just because I'm a minority or whatever they see me as, they just group me in this, you know, like I am unintelligent or I am uneducated or uh then somehow less

of a human being, and I have had plenty situations like that uh in work related things but also in academic situations.

There also is a downside to the ability of a biracial individual to relate to both the Black and the White racial groups. Jamie says she can be treated as an outsider by both Blacks and Whites since she is not either Black enough or White enough. Angela also says being an outsider to both races, which leads to a lack of a group to freely associate with, is a disadvantage to biracials. However, this very disadvantage could be what leads to what the biracial individuals describe as a major advantage: being open to diverse cultures and races, and being accepting of them.

Even though stereotypes are common in society, there aren't many stereotypes specifically targeting biracial individuals that the participants mention. However, biracial individuals are not free from stereotypes at all. The most common stereotype all the participants mention is that Black-White biracial individuals pretend to be White—and thus superior to Blacks—and dress and talk White. Chris says, "I mean, if I'm stereotyped, then it's saying, 'Oh you're White because you dress like a White guy.'" Angela and Jamie also say they have heard comments such as, "Oh, you are talking White," or "You are too proud," from Blacks.

The biracial individuals also at times share the stereotypes against Blacks since they are usually considered Black by Whites. Jamie says some of the stereotypes she can think of are common to minorities. She mentions the view that they are bad with credits and says this is a generalization even though it may have some truth to it—"in certain cases." Jamie says, "And as bad as it sounds, most stereotypes come from some truth, you know. There is some truth at the core of the stereotypes uh. But, I think the problem comes in when you group everybody into those stereotypes."

Jamie believes most of the stereotypes and discrimination may be based on historical factors. She says:

Well, I think a lot of it comes from the things people experience in their own lives. I mean, maybe pains or hurt maybe that have come from maybe a certain race of people, or, you know, not from the whole race but from a few individuals in that race, and then people construct their ideas about people in that race.

Jamie also says families may have a role in instilling such perceptions in their children. "Also with the influence from their family. I mean, if your parents are always saying that these people are horrible, blah, blah, blah, I mean, they will curse them in this and the other," she says, "you are gonna have those ideas in your mind about them."

Attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriage

This theme covers the biracial individuals' attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and their perceptions of society's—Blacks' and Whites'—attitudes towards such marriages. The participants of this study have a positive attitude toward Black-White interracial relationships and marriages. They think there's "nothing wrong" with interracial marriages. They also think there may be some advantages to such marriages. Chris says:

I'm perfectly fine with it. I don't see any problem with it at all. Just like a regular relationship. I wouldn't say specifically 'do it.' I mean, obviously go for which you want. But if they (the person you love) happen to be of another race, then it is not that they don't fit at all. ... I think you experience more as the other race you are dating. You get to experience their culture and they get to experience yours. But, I don't see any problem with it at all.

Angela and Jamie do not differ from Chris in their attitudes towards Black-White interracial marriage. Angela says, "I think it's a good thing. I think people should be more accepting of it. Because it doesn't really matter, I mean, what race they [the person you marry] are. Because it's so like the same. There's all still humans and everything."

Jamie says race:

shouldn't be the determining factor. It shouldn't be in the discussion, I mean, of course you will have, if it is a biracial marriage, I mean you will have to be at least aware of the fact that you probably will have some opposition. There will be people that don't like it, whatever, and you have to be prepared for that. But, I mean, but as long as you're confident in who you are, and in your love for each other, I don't think that race should have very much to do with it. But it sometimes does.

The participants of this study, however, do not think society—Blacks and Whites—share their attitude towards Black-White interracial marriage. Even though they believe society's attitude is changing for the better, they still think there is a long way to go. Chris says:

It is not as bad as it was. I mean, I think it's, I think there's a lot more becoming more accepting—the Whites and Blacks. But I don't know, the White families, it's the same, I think they [Blacks and Whites] both feel the same way about them [interracial relationships]. ... They both didn't want it to happen. ... Whites with a daughter dating a Black man and then the Blacks with their son dating a White daughter, but I think [now] it's perfectly fine, not perfect, but I think it's okay.

Jamie believes attitudes towards Black-White interracial marriage may vary among both Blacks and Whites. She says:

Uh but I think it depends on the group of people that you are dealing with. There may be a group of Black people that think there should be no biracial [interracial] relationship. There's still people that think that, you know. Then there are, I think, a lot of people are moving towards acceptance, you know. As far as the White culture, I think it would just depend to just what group of people you are dealing with, you know. Because you're gonna have people that still hold some of the older beliefs and are, you know, have, are racist, you know. But that comes from both sides. You're gonna have Black people that are the same way uh and that look negatively upon biracial [interracial] relationships and you will have people that are accepting of it.

The participants talk about their parents' experience as an example of how objectionable Black-White interracial marriages can be not only to society—Blacks and Whites—but also to family members. Chris says, “My mom's mom didn't like my father at first. So, he wasn't allowed around her [his mother] for a little bit, but then she [his grandmother] just got used to it.”

Jamie says her parents had a similar experience:

Uh well, the funny thing is my grandparents on my mom's side, they were uh I don't think they were extremely accepting of like biracial [interracial] uh couples and things like that back in the 60's or whatever it was. But, the funny thing is they had four kids and two of them, two of their daughters married Black men and they have, now they have, let's see, seven grandchildren who are mixed and great grand children who are mixed. Uh and they are very accepting of it now.

The objection was, however, not restricted to family. Jamie says neighbors of her White grandparents did not even tolerate seeing Black men around a White neighborhood and in her grandparents' house. Jamie says:

Yeah, they [her parents] had some issues. I mean, there were times, like one time uh, one time somebody called the police on my dad and my uncle because they were walking into my grandparents' house. And the neighbor called the police and said, "There is two Black men walking into the house."

Angela also relates the objection her parents had to face from her father's side: I think like when my parents first got married, her, her, my dad's brother was against it. I know a lot of my dad's friends, they didn't think, you know, it was a good idea to marry my mom and everything. But really uh in the end, you know, they see it as a very good fit, you know.

Jamie—Angela's older sister—says the objection her parents had to face was from both sides and it had deeper implications. "Uh my parents eloped. They didn't get married in a church and stuff like that and if you'd ask my dad, he would say it's because nobody supported their marriage back then," she says. "My mom came against a lot of opposition too just because she had mixed kids, you know."

The participants believe objection to Black-White interracial marriage is a reflection of historical factors and an extension of the segregation of races. They also say things are not as bad as they were. Chris says the reason behind the objection to Black-White interracial marriage can be:

Uh, just people's generations like the parents, how they were brought up, uh parents, parents now uh nowadays they are becoming more interracial. But earlier I think it was just the one race dating one race. So they kind of didn't

like their children to be like [in an interracial relationship] uh, but I think, I think it's changed now a lot.

Angela (whose uncle—her father's brother—was against their parents' relationship at the beginning) says her uncle's objection to her parents' relationship might have been because of his previous experience with the White (her mother's) race. She says, "I think all his previous experience obviously must have been negative towards that race and everything."

The participants not only think that attitudes towards interracial marriages are improving, but they also expect attitudes to improve more. The biracial individuals say they believe the increase in interracial marriages and in the number of biracial individuals is helping to change Blacks' and Whites' attitudes towards Black-White interracial marriage for the better. Jamie says:

Hopefully, when people start realizing that the climate in America, the demographic in America is changing, I mean, they are going to have to, at least, start to figure out how to deal with the other cultures and work well with them and be accepting of them.

Chris also hails the increase in interracial marriages. He says, "I think it is helping a lot. I mean, I don't see the problem with it at all. You still gonna have some people who, that disagree with it but I think it's, I think it's a good thing."

Angela thinks that the increase in the number of interracial marriages will help to make them more acceptable. She also thinks it may make it difficult for people to have negative attitudes against such marriages and towards racially different people. She says:

I think that people will be uh more open to everyone; and it's like people can't really, I mean, discriminate really against some race because there will be

multiple races [a lot of multiracials] or something. So, I think it will be good because it just opens the door for people to not really see color.

Chris relates a story to show that, nonetheless, both Blacks and Whites are opposed to Black-White interracial relationships, though implicitly:

I had a friend's mom. She is Caucasian and she dated a Black man and the Black guy's parents didn't let her dating him, or want him dating her just [because of] the fact that, they didn't really say it directly but indirectly it was because she was White. But, I mean it goes through both [ways]. White parents probably won't want their daughter dating a Black man. The same thing goes for Black parents not letting, not wanting their son dating a White woman. So, it is not just the White families that are against the whole interracial thing.

Attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals

In this theme, the biracial individuals' perceptions of society's (Blacks' and Whites' including their extended families) attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals are presented. Despite all the challenges the biracial individuals face, some of which are mentioned earlier, the participants say their extended families' and society's attitudes towards biracial individuals are positive. Chris says even though his grandparents from his father's and his mother's side may not have the same attitudes, they are both accepting of biracial individuals:

Uh, well, my dad's side, my dad's side, my grandmother is really accepting.

Uh, but my mom's side a little bit more conservative about it. But, it's nothing, it just seems that way, it's not, I know, I know it's not like that, but they are not as accepting as, it doesn't seem like they are as accepting as my dad's side.

He describes the difference in his grandparents' (his father's and his mother's sides) attitudes towards him and his relationship with both sides:

Just my dad's side, my grandmother being so open about things and welcoming when we go to their house. But, my grandmother—my mom's side—it's more like just sit where you are when you walk in the house and stuff, nothing, nothing that makes you feel over comfortable. It was, again it was when I was younger, but now that I got older and stuff it's, uh it's changed. It's changed for a good, it's changed for the better thing, I mean now it's not like that. I'm older so they treat me as a young adult. So it's not, it's not you know walk in the house and sit where you are.

Chris believes that his grandparents—from his mother's side—changed their attitude towards him as he got older. He says, "I think they changed. I think they just got more comfortable with it and accepted the fact that I am not going anywhere." Chris's response, however, seems more of an attempt to save his grandparents' face. It can also be a strategy to deal with negative attitudes by just overlooking them.

Jamie, on the other hand, says biracials are adorable. She says:

I think a lot of people like biracial kids. I don't know, because they have a different look to them. They're not like, I don't know, usually they look different and they, I don't know, they're mixture. Sometimes it's hard to figure them out. They're unique, you know. So I think people are attracted to that in a positive way.

Jamie also thinks that biracial children make people change their negative attitudes towards interracial relationships. "Even people that start out like being racist and stuff like that, I think a lot of times when kids come, I mean, they don't take it out on the kids usually," she says, "I mean, I don't know, I always get the sense that

biracial people are well accepted and, and people are attracted to them because of their uniqueness.”

The participants say they think society—both Blacks and Whites—are accepting to biracial individuals. Again their stories challenge that. Even though the biracial individuals say they are treated fine by both Blacks and Whites, their stories speak otherwise. Chris says:

So when I come into contact with a White person, uh sometimes I think it'd be, sometimes it is like they are thinking like just to say 'hi' or something but not wanting to know anything else. But if you start to talk to somebody, well, if I start talking to somebody or White girl or White guy, then, then at some half-way, I think, they become more interested than if I said I was just Black. I don't know why that is, but maybe it's just because their parents brought them up like that. But, it is harder sometimes.

Jamie also says there may be negative comments she has to hear every now and then. She says the most hurtful comments she has received come from Whites. She says:

I think I have been hurt more by White people because of the comments that have been made and it's not even, not always has been “Oh I don't like you just because you are Black,” or negative things like explicit negative things. But sometimes it's just things that are underlined like little comments here and there that sting.

The biracial individuals believe society's attitude towards Black-White biracial individuals is improving. They also think the negative attitudes are based on preconceived notions. Jamie says:

I just think there's, sometimes there is an attitude that kind of follows people, you know. And until they know you, until you prove them, until you prove yourself to them, you know, they have this notion about you that that's not going to be changed unless you prove them otherwise. Like, it's like guilty until proven innocent or something like backwards.

Nonetheless, the participants report that they have good relationships with Blacks and Whites. Jamie thinks her position as a biracial individual enables her to relate to both Blacks and Whites better. She says:

I think I have a very good relationship with both [Blacks and Whites]. Uh like I said, I think I, usually I just use my, I guess, just being biracial I use that to my advantage almost all times, you know. Uh and I think we all do this. We kind of change masks, you know, and adapt to situations that I think I have very keen understanding of how to do that successfully probably because I have had exposure to both sides and have been able to really relate with, with both sides, you know, with Whites and Blacks. And so I know, I know what mask to put on when I am in certain situations. But that's not saying I change who I am. It's just saying that I act appropriately for the situations that I am in.

"Support matters."

This theme encompasses the role support plays in helping biracial individuals to deal with the challenges they face and the consequences of its absence. The participants of the study say the support that they get—even though it seems minimal—is what helps them to embrace both their racial heritages and to be “happy with who they are.” They also think lack of such support, which could be offered through verbal and nonverbal means, may leave some biracial individuals confused about their racial identity.

The participants say their parents had a big role in helping them embrace their racial identity and accept themselves. All the participants describe their relationship with their parents as “very close.” Chris says both his parents were very involved in his life and schooling, and that helps him to develop positive ideas about himself and about others. He says that his parents “also made sure that I was thinking, uh I didn’t, I wasn’t saying I would rather be White or I would rather be Black, and I still say that, I mean, I was this way for a reason.”

Angela also says that she and her siblings had a “really close relationship.” Angela says, “I think they were really involved in my life and in my brothers and sister.” Her sister, Jamie, says her close relationship with her parents helped her to accept and “be proud” of her identity. She also says that she gets some support from her family when faced with some challenges. Jamie thinks lack of such a good relationship with parents and the accompanying guidance can have negative effects. Jamie says:

[I get some support] from my family, you know. If I do share an experience that’s, you know, bothered me whatever, you know, sometimes I do get support from them, you know. You know, they may say, “Oh Jamie ... you will be fine and this is, they just don’t know you.”

Even though Jamie says the support she gets from her family, and the discussion she has with them about race, may be minimal, she still thinks her close relationship with them makes a difference. Many biracial individuals may not get that support, she says. Jamie says, “But I think too many kids get confused probably because they have, maybe their parents just don’t know how to help them understand themselves or understand that they are mixed.” Angela also says her siblings and her

used to get some help from their father at least in terms of preparing them for challenges that they might face. She says:

I think my dad really worked [hard] at making sure that we were comfortable with who we were. ... Eh I think when I grew up, my dad did say, you know, "You are, you do have African American in you. There will be discrimination. ... It may or may not happen. But it's there."

Jamie thinks a lot is missing in terms of support for biracial individuals. She says biracial individuals need help to understand themselves and to defend themselves.

She says:

If people are trying to define you the negative way, for you to be able to stay up, "Well, that's not actually who I am about. That's not who I am and nothing that you can say or do is going to change that." You know, I don't think we have people that are standing up for themselves or being leaders in that way. People aren't necessarily being raised to do that. They are kind of, sometimes are not even being raised to [do that]. Media is raising them or whatever society is raising them, and their parents aren't really doing a good job or whatever.

Angela, who said she was not as comfortable with her racial identity when she was younger, says:

Later on I just became like I became more proud of who I was and everything because I think actually I looked up to my siblings like our three older brothers and my older sister and, you know, I, you know, saw how they were and they didn't care, you know, what anyone thought [of] them or anything. They were proud of who they were. So, I think that helped me to uh build a positive image of myself and everything, an identity.

All the participants thus emphasize the role support from parents and other family members can have in helping them understand and accept themselves. They say the absence of such a supportive family may have severe consequences including confusion about one's identity to a biracial individual.

Environment's role

Environment's role in shaping a biracial individual's self-image is another theme that runs across the participants' stories and one which is linked to the previous theme. Chris describes the environmental factors that make a biracial individual feel comfortable with his or her racial identity as follows:

I think it's more family and where they are. Uh I think it's if you're down south [in Chicago] and [you are] biracial, then it would be a little more intimidating and then your location, where you live and go to school. But, if the family raised you to be, know that you are biracial, then I think you will be more comfortable telling people [that you are biracial]. That's how I was brought up. My neighborhood [was] mostly, mostly White. But the schools I went to were really diverse. [And] I have a few biracial friends.

Jamie who say she grew up in a multiple-race neighborhood, which also included "a good amount" of biracial children says:

But I think I didn't have as much of a struggle with my identity growing up. Because not only was I, you know, I have these five of us kids so around people all the time, a lot of our friends were mixed. We were in, my parents moved specifically to an area that had a lot of biracial families and so my best friend was mixed and a lot of my friends growing up were mixed.

Environment, however, goes beyond affecting and shaping how the biracial individuals view themselves and how they respond to challenges. Environment has

also a role to play in shaping how others treat biracial individuals. "I just think it depends on how you are raised and the environment that you are in," Jamie says, "and your openness and willingness to really see each person as they are and not like and not for who you think they are or who you expect them to be, you know."

Middlerace

This theme which is highlighted almost throughout the participants' stories focuses on how the Black-White biracial individuals are marginalized by both Blacks and Whites. It hints at how the pull and (mainly) push forces from Blacks and Whites work in making the Black-White biracial individuals a middlerace.

The participants do not think that biracials are as stereotyped as single-race individuals. Yet, the one stereotype they report is a double-edged sword, which plays a major role in the making of a middlerace. Biracial individuals, they say, are told that they "dress or talk White." This comment, which basically comes from Blacks, tells the Black-White biracial individuals that they are not Black because they don't fit in—they don't "dress or talk Black." At the same time, however, that same comment tells them or "reminds" them that they are not White since the message is that they are pretending to be White and "better than Blacks."

The essence of such a message seems to be, "You do not belong anywhere," in a society where one is expected to fit in one of society's predetermined racial categories that overlook biracial individuals.

Chris says, when responding to questions about race in various questionnaires he is "most of the time 'other'." Jamie also says 'other' is the answer she looks for in forms if she cannot mark both Black and White. The response "other" is neither of the two races—Black and White. It is not a 'both/and' answer, either. It thus leaves the biracial individual an outsider to the two races "in that individual." It implies that the

individual is none of the choices—which usually would include both Black and White—and thus contributes in creating the middlerace.

The sense of being an outsider to both the Black and the White races, and thus a middlerace, is further described by Chris's dilemma when younger. He says he did not feel free "to like" either a Black or a White girl when he was in eighth grade. He said it made him think that he would have had a better chance of freely "liking" a girl if he were not biracial. "It didn't make me feel like I wanna be Black or I wanna be White, though." This dilemma showcases the difficulty biracial individuals have integrating in a society with predetermined racial categories that put biracial individuals nowhere.

In many ways biracial individuals are told to pick one of their racial backgrounds. They, however, are not welcomed by either the Black or the White groups as "full members." Jamie says mixed people are a lot of times told that they "should pick just one or the other. You should relate to the White people or relate to the Black people." She also mentions how the two racial groups—Blacks and Whites might react to a biracial individual. She says the difficulties can come both ways. Jamie says her problem is:

not being accepted in the Black culture because I'm not Black enough or not being accepted in the White culture because I am not White enough, you know. So, in a way it is a kind of like there is no place of belonging for mixed people. The biracial individuals seem to lean towards the minority—Black—race by which they are not accepted, either. Angela tells about her experience with Blacks:

I would say like well, for instance, I think on campus I think most African Americans usually nod or say hi to one another and things like that. Well, I remember when I first came, if people they didn't know me, they wouldn't do

anything like that. So like if they don't know what race I am, uh but, you know, if I knew them, you know, they would say hi and things like that or whatever. So I think that's the most thing like, you know, they don't think you are one of them or something. So they just don't acknowledge you or something like that.

Angela, who says she has the same number of Black and White friends though she had more Black friends before she went to college, also says that both Blacks and Whites don't think that she is linked to them until she says so—"until you tell them your racial identity."

The dilemma of not belonging anywhere for biracial individuals is a daily experience. It's hard for them to join groups that are usually divided by race. Angela says:

Sometimes I think like if I wanted to join like uh like a sorority or something, sometimes I don't feel comfortable. I think they would be accepting. But I just don't like it that a lot of them are either one or either race, you know, like either White sorority or Latino sorority or Black sorority. I think, you know, it should just, I don't know, I just don't like that. But I think that will be a disadvantage because, you know, there is not a lot of things that are always for biracial people and anything is only for a certain race not like for multiracial or something, you know.

This dilemma has far-reaching implications for biracial individuals. The biracial individuals are left in between because of the dilemma of choosing, or associating more with either Blacks or Whites. Angela says joining a mainly Black or a mainly White sorority would create wrong impressions. "I think there should be a better mix of individuals and stuff," Angela says, "And I guess that could be just

difficult thinking which one you want to choose and then if you did choose one, well everyone think that's the race that you, you know, associate with more."

Jamie reiterates the sense of lack of belongingness a biracial individual experiences. She says:

You know, you don't, you can't say "Oh I am White. I am just gonna hang out with these people and this is who I am going to relate to." Because at some point you are not, you don't fit in that group. And the same thing with the other side. I mean, if you are hanging on around Black people and try to relate to Black people, at some point they are gonna say, "Uh you are just not the same. You are not like us." Then so, you kind of are a little box like you don't fit in anywhere.

This dilemma could lead to a discomfort for biracial individuals. Jamie says, "I think a lot of mixed people may have some identity issue because they think, 'Well, I don't fit in with the White people and I don't fit in with the Black people.'"

Jamie also speaks about an event on campus. She talks about what a certain White student said when she asked a group of students what race they thought she was. Jamie tells her story like this:

You know, they are all throwing their ideas and the guy was in there and goes "You know, when I first met you, I thought you were White because you are hanging out with, you know, so and so and so" like the people around the room. He said "I thought you were White because you are hanging out with them [Whites]." And then he said, and this is the funny part, and then he said, "And then, later, one day I was on campus and I saw you talking to a bunch of Black people, and then I realized that you were Black." That is exactly what he said and I was like, "Huh actually, I am mixed. But uh okay."

But it was funny because it was, his perception of me was solely based on association, you know. Who, who I was hanging out with at the time and, but then when he saw me with Black people, I mean at first he said, "I thought you were White." But when he saw me with Black people he realized, he said "I realized that you are Black."

This anecdote implies that Whites may think that biracial individuals would be "in their right place" and more accepted when they are with Blacks. However, the most common stereotype against Black-White biracial individuals—"You dress/talk White"—hints that this assumption is not true.

Whites also call biracial individuals 'African American derogatory names' to tell them that they do not belong in the White race. Angela says, "They [Whites] start calling names, you know, like African American derogatory names and things like that." Black-White biracial individuals are thus consistently told by both Blacks and Whites that they are outsiders. This leaves them marginalized from both Blacks and Whites and looking for a space in between.

Role of communication

This theme highlights the role communication plays in shaping people's—and especially the biracial individuals'—ideas and perceptions and to alleviate problems surrounding racial identity. The participants tell their stories of how they are led to believe or at least accept certain things even though they do not think they are true.

The participants of the study, as explained above, say they are biracial and also say that they are comfortable with their racial identity. They are, however, always told that they are only –"a part" of who they are. "The hard thing about it is that most people, even though I'm mixed and I am probably more White than anything, any one

other race, people usually view me as Black,” Jamie says. “I’m treated like I’m Black most of the time.”

The impact this message has on Jamie can be seen in how she responds to questions about race in various forms. Jamie would prefer to have a biracial or multiracial option in questionnaires. However, virtually no questionnaires/forms provide that option. She thus says if questionnaires are “very adamant” about marking just one box and if they do not have an ‘other’ option, she marks Black.

The biracial individuals—who also have White “in them”—are also told that they are a minority. This might make them consider themselves a minority. Jamie, who defines minority as a non-White and considers herself a minority, says:

Uh, I guess I define minority as non-White and I would, it’s not that I am not White because I have white in me, but I feel that in most situations I am viewed as non-White. And so, and I am treated that way.

This indicates that the one-drop rule is still in practice. Jamie says:

So, I mean, so I consider myself minority. I can’t, it’s easier, it’s easier for people to see me as Black than to see me as White. Nobody will look at me and say “Oh you are White.” You know, I mean, they don’t see me that way. So, so yeah I consider myself minority.

Angela’s comment shows the same tendency, only in a different way. She says, “They [people she comes across, especially Whites] will think I was Mexican, or, or they just thought I was White, which is kind of weird. Because sometimes people never think that.”

Angela says people think she was anything from Arab to Mexican to Puerto Rican—which were actually not “in her”—which did not seem to surprise her as

much as when people thought she was White. This seems an impact of the one-drop rule, which treats everyone who is not complete White as a non-White.

Communication can also play a role in establishing and passing down stereotypes across generations. Jamie says:

[Stereotypes develop] also with the influence from their family. I mean, if your parents are always saying that these people are horrible, blah, blah, blah, I mean, they will curse them in this and the other, you are gonna have those ideas in your mind about them.

The messages biracial individuals get about their racial identity and which tell them “their abnormality” also seem to have unnoticed impacts. Jamie seems to indirectly state the negative messages she gets. Jamie says, “It is weird but it’s like I was, I was very proud of, of being biracial.”

It was and is a good thing for her to feel comfortable about her racial identity. She even acknowledges it throughout her talk. Yet the outsiders’ views seem to influence her so much that she says it may be “weird” that she was proud of her racial identity.

Communication can, however, play a positive role and contribute in helping biracial individuals to accept themselves and to be accepted by society. Angela says her silence must have worked against her when she was younger whereas her opening up and raising questions must have helped her build a positive self-image. She says:

I think uh as a kid I don’t think I was very clear and I just didn’t talk, I guess, with my mom, I didn’t ask questions maybe I just should have asked earlier. And later on I just became like I became more proud of who I was and everything because I think actually I looked up to my siblings like our three older brothers and my older sister and, you know, I, you know, saw how they

were and they didn't care, you know, what anyone thought [of] them or anything; they were proud of who they were. So, I think that helped me to uh build a positive image of myself and everything, an identity.

Jamie says the main problem surrounding the issue of race is there because "not everybody agrees that that's what's going on. A lot of people don't wanna admit that they have these prejudices. They don't wanna admit uh or they're, or they don't even see that they have them." Communication can thus help to bring the issue to light. Once acknowledged then, the problem can be easier to solve. Jamie thinks the problem can be alleviated if "we can encourage people to be more considerate of other people and be responsible and respectful with other people, and be responsible, I mean responsible of their actions, you know, and making the right decisions with that."

Angela hints that the problem of stereotypes could be because of lack of the needed communication. Angela speculates about the reason behind stereotypes and discrimination against biracial individuals. She says, "I just think that people are just probably scared of what they don't know and they don't know different culture or something like that. They [are] just too scared of it, so they just try to fight against it."

Helping people to know about different races and cultures can enable them to respect 'others' and accept diverse cultures and races. Communication, therefore, is both at the center of the problem and the solution. It plays a role in shaping and solidifying the negative images and stereotypes; it can also play a role in replacing them with positive ones.

Race talk

This theme includes description of discussions, if they occur, about race and racial identity in the families of the participants, and the participants' ideas as to

whether race should be discussed. The participants said race is either not discussed at all or not discussed very often and very well in their extended families. Jamie says that race may be discussed among her siblings at home but not in the extended family. She says discussions—if they occur—will be in response to some offensive experience one of them has had. Such discussions, she says, are rare though she maintains all of her siblings have the same positive view about race.

Even though the participants said they were—at least at this stage—accepted by their extended families, racial identity (biracial identity) is not discussed very much in those families. Nonetheless, the biracial individuals believe that a good discussion about not only racial identity but also about the idea of race can help everyone to be accepting of different “cultures”/races. They also maintain that such a discussion can help biracial individuals to be comfortable with and to embrace their racial identity. The minimal discussions about race the participants mention are among members of their immediate family. Angela says as she got older her father talked to his children about being accepting of “other cultures” and told them about possible challenges they might face.

Angela says she was confused about her racial identity and did not have the courage to embrace her racial identity when she was younger because she did not ask questions she had and because she did not discuss race at home. She says:

I just I think I was, when I was a kid, I was just shy and sometimes scared. So I just didn't say what I wanted to. So I think that was probably the reason why [I was confused about my racial identity].

All the participants are for “good discussions” about race. They say we need to talk about race in a positive and educational way. Jamie suggests that discussions

about race should be meant to bring us back to our senses and to help us go through a self inventory. She says:

I think if we are gonna talk about race, we need to talk about uh, "Okay there may be stereotypes, there may be truth to stereotypes, but how do you deal with that and are you going to be prejudiced? Are you going to treat people uh with this negative stigma or whatever? These negative preconceived notions about them before you even know them, you know?" And I think if we are gonna talk about race, we have to start talking about that. We have to start talking about how people just, how people need to change the way that they treat other people.

Jamie says such a discussion can help to alleviate the problem about race since self-reflection can get us closer to solving the problem. Jamie says:

[We should discuss race in a positive way, because the solution is] I think it's just a matter of people realizing the, the damage that they do by giving into those stereotypes and treating people as if they were just like everyone else and not taking the time to get to know them.

Angela also thinks that the problem—racism—will be there as long as we do not acknowledge it, face it and discuss it in a positive way. "It's like we're always gonna see each other's color or, you know, what kind of race they are," Angela says. "So, it, why must we just ignore it and walk over? I think we need to discuss and educate people, you know."

"My box"

This theme describes the rebellion the biracial participants show when feeling forms/questionnaires with a question about their race and their frustration about the absence of a box for them in such questions. The participants said they usually mark

either 'other' or both Black and White in questionnaires even if they are instructed to mark one. Jamie says if they are "very adamant" about marking just one, she marks Black. Angela says she marks both Black and White anyway, whereas Chris says he may sometimes mark Black. However, none of them likes being dictated to mark just one. Jamie says marking just one box—either Black or White—does not represent her:

So, it's unfair, it's unfortunate, I don't like it and I hate when forms say mark one or the other because I don't view myself as Black or as White I view myself as mixed and so it upsets me, you know. I wish they would change that, and some places have but a lot of places still have ways to go with that.

Marking 'other' is not the best option Jamie can think of. Yet, sometimes she does not even get that option. Jamie says:

It's [her race] not exclusive, it's inclusive. And so it offends me, I think, when I find a questionnaire and they don't even have an 'other' even though I don't want to be considered an 'other,' I'd rather they have a space that says biracial or something like that, but they don't, most places don't. So, it's just frustrating because people assume that you want to be put in one box or the other, or that's all there is to you and I don't think that's fair to my own identity.

All the participants say questionnaires and forms with questions about race should have a box for biracial and multiracial individuals like them. They say a 'multiracial' option can be pretty comprehensive even though they would prefer 'biracial' to it. They all say forms should have a box for them. Jamie: says even the option 'other' is offensive even though it is better than having to mark either Black or White. She says:

Nobody likes to mark 'other.' But it is better than having to mark one or the other. It's my personal opinion. But I don't like to mark other because it doesn't, it is not defining at all. It is more upsetting than anything. Because it's kind of, "Oh, you guys are not important enough for us to put a box there for you," you know. And "We can just put you in this box or in this box. It doesn't matter to us that you actually [have] more to you than that." ... So, yeah they need to change that.

Angela indicates her overlooking to follow instructions that tell her to mark just one of the two racial labels—Black and White—is her way of showing her frustration. "Usually [I] put, I actually mark both African American and Caucasian. Uh that's the most time, that's what I do most times," she says, "Sometimes even if they say only mark one, I just mark both anyways. So, they should have a box."

Discussion

All of the participants of this study identify themselves as Black-White biracial individuals even though there may be more than just the Black and White races "in them." They all seem comfortable with their biracial identity, at least at this stage and age. All of them believe support from their immediate families and the diverse environment they grew up in—neighborhood and school—helped them to develop a positive sense of their biracial identity.

The participants' stories show that they face many challenges because of their racial backgrounds that send different negative messages to them. The major role such negative messages play is to marginalize the Black-White biracial individuals from both the Black and White races. The messages tell the biracial individuals that they are "outsiders" to both the Black and the White races and thus play a role in the making of a middlerace in between. Reich et al. (2000) contend that being able to

relate with a social group [a racial group] makes one feel affinity with an entire population of others without the existence of personal relationships with them. The fact that Black-White biracial individuals are “told” by both Blacks and Whites that they are outsiders thus leaves them in-between.

The racial identity model that would describe best the participants’ racial self-identification seems to be what Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) call the border identity. This model (one of three mentioned by Rockquemore and Brunnsma) is based on “inbetweenness.” Individuals adopting this model consider themselves to be neither Black nor White and incorporate both Black and White categories into a unique hybrid. The participants of this study also say they are not either of their two “component races” but have both “in them” and they are biracial. Intermarriage results in various identity options for biracial and multiracial offspring (Roth, 2005). It may allow assimilation into either the majority or the minority racial group of the parents or can result in the creation of a new racial identity that is neither one nor the other (Root, 1996; Roth; Thornton & Gates, 1996). The participants of this study prefer the creation of a new racial identity—the biracial identity—which is neither Black nor White. However, they also take other options when situations demand flexibility. Many multiracial individuals resent and find it confusing to be classified as a member of a single race group but have nonetheless experienced and internalized the categories in which they are placed by society (Gaskins, 1999). Participants of this study also either say they consider themselves a minority or Black, or are surprised to be thought of as White because they are usually considered Black.

Society’s and especially Whites’ racial identification of the biracial participants shows that the one-drop rule is still practiced since race is still perceived

as mutually exclusive. The one-drop rule—or the social norm of hypodescent—assigns a mixed-race person to the group with the lowest social value (Herman, 2004).

The findings of this study show that communication plays a major role in marginalizing the biracial individuals from the two races. It also plays a role (through support from family members) in helping the biracial individuals get through the challenges they face. More importantly, the findings show that communication can play a great role in alleviating the problems surrounding race. The findings demonstrate that the social realities that are at the core of the social politics surrounding Black-White biracial identity are a result of symbolic interaction and social construction in the interaction between society and the biracial individuals as well as their interracial families. Communication can thus play a role to redefine the social realities and foster understanding and acceptance of the middlerace.

Even though their stories showcase the challenges the biracial individuals face, they tend to conceal them—they do not admit them when asked directly. Downplaying the challenges they face seems to be one strategy in which the biracial participants in this study deal with the difficulties they face. It can also be their attempt at saving faces of their family and/or their component races.

The small sample size of this study is a major limitation. Even though I had contacted about 20 individuals who showed willingness to take part in the study, I was actually able to interview just three of them. Five of the rest biracial individuals who had said they would participate actually had even set appointments with me and did not show up. The participant pool may thus have been restricted not only in quantity but also in quality. Those who did not take part in the study—especially those who had gone to the extent of making appointments for interview—may have

shied away because of some experiences that could have added to the depth of the study.

Conducting the study with more and thus more diverse (in terms of experiences) Black-White biracial participants would help to understand the experience of biracial individuals better. Looking into strategies interracial individuals employ (some hinted in this study) to deal with challenges they might face would also contribute in that endeavor.

The participants of this study seemed to face some dialectical tensions. They admit having had some rough experiences with both Whites and Blacks. Yet, when they talk about them they also make excuses for Blacks and Whites—"maybe they (Blacks or Whites) do not know what race I am," is one excuse they give. This, however, seems to reflect dialectical tensions biracial individuals may have because of their relationship to the races they have been mistreated or excluded by. The biracial individuals seem to face a belongingness-alienation tension. They belong to both the Black and the White racial groups because they have both "Black and White in them." Nonetheless, they concurrently feel alienated by both Blacks and Whites because of how they treat them—considering them outsiders.

The racial dilemma the biracial individuals face and exhibit when telling their race—especially in terms of how they would answer a race question in forms—suggests the presence of a dialectical tension. They would rather identify themselves as "biracial" if not "human," which would "describe them better." However, they do not want to face more challenges and/or disadvantages (in the sense of "missing the opportunities" they may get such as scholarships, for example) by disobeying and breaking society's norms—the one-drop rule. The biracial participants seem to face a tension between psychological and material benefit. The psychological benefit-

material benefit tension seems to come into play since they would have felt better (psychological benefit/satisfaction) if they could identify themselves as “human” or at least “biracial,” but they would lose the material benefits they could get by labeling themselves in line with society’s norms.

The findings also suggest the presence of at least two dialectical tensions in relation to discussion about race. Even though the biracials see the need to discuss race, they also fear that (irresponsible) discussions about race can reinforce racial stereotypes and create more challenges to them. It would be good to investigate these and other possible dialectical tensions Black-White biracial individuals might face and the strategies they use to deal with them in the future.

The Black-White biracial individuals seem to face a silence-communication dialectical tension: they believe race should be discussed but, at the same time, fear that discussions about race might be counterproductive and stiffen racial tensions. The dialectical theory/perspective may help to understand and explain such dialectical tensions biracial individuals face. The dialectical theory is concerned with the “complex ways in which persons-in-relationship use communication to manage the naturally opposing forces that impinge on their relationship at any given time” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 199). Avoidance seems to be the major strategy the biracials employ. Yet, further investigation based on the dialectical theory of relationships is warranted. For the theory is based on a dialectical perspective on social life—“a belief that social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3). Examining these and other potential dialectical tensions Black-White biracial individuals can face would be a good area to investigate in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL DISCUSSION: THE SOCIAL POLITICS SURROUNDING
BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES AND BLACK-WHITE BIRACIAL
IDENTITY.*Introduction*

The preceding three chapters discuss the perspectives and experiences of society (Blacks and Whites specifically), Black-White interracial couples and Black-White biracial adults respectively. Chapter 2 presents and discusses outsiders' perspectives about and attitudes toward both Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals or identity. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the experiences of Black-White interracial couples and Black-White biracial adults respectively. To give a more complete picture and understanding of the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity, this chapter discusses the major issues prevailing through the outsiders' and the insiders' perspectives.

The preceding three chapters indicate that Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals are far from being (fully) understood and accepted by both Blacks and Whites. The social stigmas associated with Black-White interracial marriages still exist long after the rejection of the anti-miscegenation laws (Dunleavy, 2004). So do the social stigmas associated with Black-White biracial identity. Because of the negative attitudes toward them (Chesley & Wagner, 2003) and their interracial families, Black-White biracial individuals are excluded by both Blacks and Whites. Even though there can be distinctions among people as to how

they perceive and treat Black-White interracial couples and Black-White biracial individuals as would be expected (Rosenblatt et al., 1995), social attitudes toward Black-White interracial couples and their biracial offspring are generally negative. The negative attitudes toward Black-White interracial families also make their experiences uniquely challenging.

Race has strong value in society—both Blacks and Whites—leading to preference to keep the status quo in terms of racial relations. For people obsessed with the social significance of race, interracial relationships are considered a threat to the racial social order (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). Black-White interracial marriages and families thus are not accepted and seem to be considered an “abnormity.” Challenges for interracial families are still rife (Childs, 2005). The findings of the preceding three studies show that Black-White interracial families are still excluded by both Blacks and Whites, and that the one-drop rule—along with the burdens, stereotypes and discriminations it exposes the biracial individuals and the interracial families to—is still practiced, whether consciously or not, to identify biracial individuals.

Black and White participants of the first study—chapter 2—reported positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. On the semantic differential “attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages” scale, participants scored higher means suggesting positive attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages. In other words, the participants—Blacks and Whites alike—said they would describe Black-White interracial marriages more as ‘good, rewarding, acceptable, respectful, beneficial, tolerable, satisfactory and pleasant’ than they would describe them as ‘bad, punishing, unacceptable, disrespectful, harmful, intolerable, unsatisfactory, and offensive’ respectively.

Nonetheless, the positive attitudes participants reported toward Black-White interracial couples did not, as one would expect, extend to their attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals. The participants reported negative attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals on all the four constructs measuring attitudes toward biracial individuals. In other words, the participants believe Black-White biracial individuals have poor self-esteem, weak multiracial heritage, difficulty adjusting psychologically, and weak multiracial identity. The contradictions in the participants' attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and their attitudes toward Black-White biracial individuals make their reports of positive attitude toward the interracial marriages questionable.

The insiders' reports challenge that further. Both the Black-White interracial couples (chapter 3) and the Black-White biracial adults (chapter 4) report that society's attitudes toward Black-White interracial families are negative. Even though they do not admit it when asked directly or say society's attitude toward interracial families is changing for the better, they tell stories that manifest society's negative attitudes toward them.

The interracial couples, for instance, say their marriage is "just another marriage," but at the same time say that society perceives their marriages as dysfunctional and odd. Even though the interracial couples see some differences in peoples' reactions to their marriages, they report resistance to and disapproval of their marriages by both Blacks and Whites. They say family and friends tend to be more accepting of their marriages than acquaintances and strangers, and Blacks tend to be more accepting of their marriages than Whites. Generally though, the stories of the interracial couples show that Black-White interracial couples are still not accepted (Childs, 2005; Dunleavy, 2004; Hibbler & Shinnew, 2002; La Taillade, 1999). They

are marginalized by both Blacks and Whites (Buttney, 1987). The interracially married say that they are told, verbally or nonverbally, that "they are not loved," or are "less Black or less White," because they are married to the "other" and thus become a double-minority since they have difficulty relating to either group. According to symbolic interactionism, these sorts of messages and labels suggest different or unusual sets of expectations both in terms of what society expects from the interracially married and what society expects to offer them (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). The participants also say that society's (and imply that even family's) reaction to their marriage is, at best, one of tolerance rather than acceptance.

The biracial participants' stories also show that they face many challenges because of their racial backgrounds that send different negative messages to them. The major role such negative messages play is to marginalize the Black-White biracial individuals from both the Black and White races. The messages tell the biracial individuals that they are "outsiders" to both the Black and the White races and thus play a role in the making of a middlerace in between Black and White.

Stereotypes seem to display the negative attitudes toward and misunderstanding of Black-White interracial families. Society's disapproval of Black-White interracial marriages is highlighted in the stereotypes against such intermarriages which the interracial couples report. The stereotypes suggest some abnormality centered around "hating one's identity." These belief systems assume that the interracially married are somehow "abnormal." These presumptions discourage embracing differences as beauty and label them (at least implicitly) right and wrong and thus hinder mutual understanding. "Attaching a positional label to person leads to expected behaviors from that person and to behavior toward that person premised on expectations—assigned 'roles'" (Stryker, 1980, p. 57). The one

stereotype against Black-White biracial individuals the participants report also marginalizes the biracial individuals from both Blacks and Whites. The biracials say they are told, mainly by Blacks, that they “act or dress White.” This stereotype concurrently alienates the Black-White biracial individuals from both Blacks and Whites. The stereotypes also lead to discrimination and accompanying mistreatments. The symbols and gestures communicated to the interracially married and the biracial individuals, thus, influence them and shape their reality (Blumer, 1969; Stryker).

Sex and race were not found to have a role (did not make statistically significant difference) on people’s attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals. The insiders, however, see a difference in how different groups of people perceive and treat them. Even though social attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages are not consistent, the Black-White interracial couples in this study report some trends. The participants say that friends and Blacks are more accepting of their marriages than strangers and Whites respectively, for instance. The biracial individuals also report the same experiences. People’s standpoints might be playing a role on how people view Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals. A standpoint as a place where we are located and from which we view the world around us (Griffin, 2006; Wood, 2000). People may have different attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals or identity depending on their position and their viewpoint (Griffin; Wood). The difference in attitudes toward the interracial marriages and biracial individuals between friends and acquaintances or strangers, between Blacks and Whites, as well as between men and women (for the interracial couples, which might depend on the race and sex combination of an interracial marriage) the participants allude to might be a result of their varying standpoints

(Griffin; Wood). Friends' proximity to the interracially married or the biracial individuals may be playing a role in making them understand the interracial couples or the biracial individuals more and better, for instance. Blacks' lower social position may also be playing a role in making them understand and accept the interracial couples and biracial individuals more. For our social groups can shape our experiences, knowledge, and understanding, as well as our communication with ourselves and others (Wood). "Standpoint theory claims that the social groups within which we are located powerfully shape what we experience and know as well as how we understand and communicate with ourselves, others, and the world" (Wood, 2000, p. 219).

The accounts/perspectives of the insiders—the Black-White interracial couples and the Black-White biracial individuals—seem to be more complete than those of the outsiders—the Blacks and Whites surveyed. The information gathered from the interracial couples and the biracial individuals was detailed as it was gathered from in-depth interviews whereas the information gathered from the surveys was limited. The interracially married (especially the Whites) also imply this when they say the White partner in the interracial marriages was oblivious to racism and accompanying discrimination until they got married interracially. "This theory claims that the social, material, and symbolic circumstances of a social group shape the standpoints of members of that group" (Wood, 2000, p. 220). The standpoint theory also maintains that groups in positions of lesser power in a society have more comprehensive, more accurate views of social life than do groups that occupy higher positions in the social hierarchy (Wood).

The way society treats interracial families affects them in many different ways. The messages the Black-White interracial couples and the Black-White biracial

individuals get from society (Blacks and Whites specifically) shape their experiences and reality. "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). The impact society's messages have is manifested in racial identification of Black-White biracial individuals, for instance. The interracial couples would normally use what Rockquemore and Brunzma (2002) call the border identity to racially identify their children. The biracial individuals would also use the same model. This model (one of three mentioned by Rockquemore and Brunzma) is based on "inbetweenness." Individuals adopting this model consider themselves to be neither Black nor White and incorporate both Black and White categories into a unique hybrid. The interracial couples as well as the biracial participants of this study also say the Black-White biracial individuals are not either Black or White but have both "in them" and they are biracial.

The interracial couples and the biracial individuals, thus, prefer a new racial identity—the biracial identity—which is neither Black nor White for the Black-White biracial individuals. Society's conceptualization of race as mutually exclusive and the one-drop rule, however, do not give them the freedom that would enable them to do that. The one-drop rule—or the social norm of hypodescent—assigns a mixed-race person to the group with the lowest social value (Herman, 2004). Both the interracial couples and the biracial individuals indicate that they, at times, have to follow society's way of identifying biracial individuals. The symbolic interactionism theory argues that our perceptions of how others see and perceive us are lenses through which we perceive ourselves (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). Many multiracial individuals resent and find it confusing to be classified as a member of a single race group but have nonetheless experienced and internalized the categories in which they

are placed by society (Gaskins, 1999). How others perceive us may be so powerful that their perceptions dictate our perceptions of ourselves and thus how we live our lives (Blumer; Stryker). The biracial participants of this study either say they consider themselves a minority or Black, or are surprised to be thought of as White because they are usually considered Black.

The stereotypes and discrimination—and thus the ensuing challenges—Black-White interracial families face and the ways their experiences and realities are shaped and influenced negatively are all a result of the interaction between the interracial families and society. Communication, and the messages that are exchanged between Black-White interracial families and society, thus, play a major role in creating and maintaining the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity. “It is in the interaction that takes place that social structure itself is fundamentally changed, modified, elaborated on, or reaffirmed” (Stryker, 1980, p. 52). “Social structure creates social persons who (re)create social structure who ... ad infinitum” (p. 53).

Role of Communication

The findings of this study show that communication plays a major role in marginalizing the interracial couples and their children from the two races—Blacks and Whites. It also plays a role (through support from family members and friends) in helping the interracial couples and the biracial individuals get through the challenges they face. Yet, communication seems to be doing more in creating the interracial families' negative experiences since both the interracial couples and the biracial individuals report a lot of discrimination and stereotypes whereas the support they get is minimal. Communication seems to be one-way (with society sending the messages that describe interracial families as abnormal).

The findings, however, show that communication can play a great(er) role in alleviating the problems surrounding interracial families and race. The findings demonstrate that the social realities that are at the core of the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages as well as Black-White biracial identity are a result of symbolic interaction and social construction in the interaction between society and the interracial families. Stryker (1980) argues:

Defining a situation involves naming aspects of the non-human environment; it also involves a process of naming others and naming oneself. ... Attaching a positional label to person leads to expected behaviors from that person and to behavior toward that person premised on expectations—assigned “roles” (p. 57).

The apparently (mostly) one-way nature of communication between interracial families and society strengthens the value society attributes to “race,” and (re)creates and maintains the experiences and social realities of the interracial couples and their children. “It is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life” (Blumer, 1969, p. 19).

Communication can thus play a role to redefine the social realities, to challenge stereotypes, and to foster understanding and acceptance of interracial marriages and biracial individuals. The major strategy both the interracial couples and the biracial individuals employ in dealing with the challenges they face is avoidance. Downplaying the challenges they face seems to be one strategy by which the interracial couples and biracial individuals in this study deal with the difficulties they face. The discourses that describe interracial families as “abnormal” and that shape the challenging reality they find themselves in is not challenged. It could, however, be faced, neutralized and eventually substituted with a positive discourse that can lead to

racial harmony and understanding. This seems to be happening since the interracial families' (major) strategy in dealing with the challenges they face is avoidance. Society sends negative messages—verbally or nonverbally—about interracial marriages and biracial identity. The interracially married and the biracial individuals, however, do not reciprocate with messages that can help in countering the messages society sends about them. The interracial families' avoidance is, thus, helping in maintaining the misguided messages about them and the ensuing difficulties that they face. Communication, nonetheless, holds the potential to tackle these issues. Stryker (1980) states:

Interactions with others serve to validate or challenge definitions. They are vehicles of conflict among competing definitions, and are structured by such further definitions as emerge from the interactions themselves. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to conceptualize such interaction as involving a "battle"—sometimes relatively benign and sometimes not—over whose and which definitions are to prevail as the basis for future interaction (p. 57).

The interracial couples' and biracial individuals' accounts basically indicate that interracial families do not discuss race unless it is triggered by certain events—mostly negative experiences faced by members of the interracial families. Because interracial families, and especially the interracial couples, prefer to stay within their comfort zones, race is "better left untouched" unless situations make it difficult to avoid race talk. This tendency may have a bearing on the interracial couples' and the biracial individuals' strategy of avoidance to deal with stereotypes and discrimination. This strategy can, however, have negative consequences. This seems to manifest itself in letting stereotypes stand unchallenged. Silence in its various forms—not talking about race, staying within one's comfort zones, avoiding confrontation, etc., therefore,

seems to be a major factor in the social politics surrounding (Black-White) interracial marriages and biracial identity. The issue of race and interracial families is a deep-rooted problem and needs to be discussed exhaustively both within the interracial families and in society at large to solve it. For "leaving race untouched" can sustain, as it is, the misguided discourse that's already circulating to either make interracial marriages and families look abnormal or to make racism look nonexistent.

The interracial couples and the biracial individuals recognize the need to discuss race both as an interracial family and as a society. Yet, they face some dilemmas surrounding the discussion of race. These dilemmas related to discussing race are some of the dialectical tensions the interracial couples and biracial individuals seem to face (discussed in the previous two chapters). The interracial couples and the biracial individuals believe race should be discussed. At the same time, however, they fear discussions about race can have negative consequences of strengthening stereotypes and thus making their challenges even tougher.

Conclusion and Ideas for Future Studies

Discussing the findings of the preceding three chapters and the major issues that resonate across the chapters helps to get a more complete picture about the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity. The study, however, has some limitations. The participants of the quantitative component (chapter 2) and the qualitative components (chapters 3 and 4) were not all from the same area. Even though all the biracial individuals and three of the interracially married individuals either live or have lived in the same area the participants of the quantitative study go to school, the other three interracially married individuals were not from the same area. Since environment can shape interracial families' experiences (as alluded to by the interracial couples), conducting the study

with all participants from the same area would have provided a better understanding of the issue. Therefore, studying the issue with participants from the same area should be attempted for future studies. The discussion that follows highlights the limitations of each section (chapter) of the thesis and forwards some suggestions for future studies.

The quantitative component of the study (chapter 2) has some limitations. The fact that the survey could not measure factors that can affect an individual's attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity—such as an individual's past experiences and exposure to racial diversity—is one limitation. A related limitation is that the survey did not address the reasons why the participants hold the attitudes they have toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals. The survey did not measure the participants' values, for instance. Including items (and constructs) that can address these issues would help to come up with a better understanding in the future.

The survey also did not account for race and sex combinations of Black-White interracial marriages (Black man-White woman, Black woman-White man) and the effects these might have on participants' attitudes. An attempt to address this can also help to strengthen future studies on attitudes toward Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial individuals/identity.

The qualitative components of the study (chapters 3 and 4) have also a few limitations. The small sample size—of both interracial couples and biracial adults—is one drawback. Even though the in-depth interviews afford detailed data, gathering information from more participants would have provided even richer data. The participants mention the importance of environment in—among other things—determining the experiences of interracial couples and families. Yet, the interracially

married participants of this study were from different places. Although three of them either live or have lived in the Charleston area, they have been living in different places for some time, at least since their marriage. Studying the experiences of interracial couples who live in the same area, or at least more of them from each area represented—though it was not practical for this study—would afford a better understanding of the influence of environment in the experiences of Black-White interracial couples and families. The interracially married participants of this study were also of different age groups. Though it is not apparent in this study, age and the length of time they have been married might also have a bearing on their experiences and perceptions. Focusing on the same age group or including more of each age group might have helped to enrich the study. These are some considerations future studies can make.

The participant pool of biracial adults could also be enriched. Even though I had contacted about 20 individuals who showed willingness to take part in the study, I was actually able to interview just three of them. Five of the rest biracial individuals who had said they would participate actually had even set appointments with me and did not show up. The participant pool may thus have been restricted not only in quantity but also in quality. Those who did not take part in the study—especially those who had gone to the extent of making appointments for interview—may have shied away because of some experiences that could have added to the depth of the study. Conducting the study with more and thus more diverse (in terms of experiences) Black-White biracial participants would help to understand the experience of biracial individuals better.

The dilemma the interracial couples and the biracial adults face and exhibit when telling the biracial individuals' race—especially in terms of how they think

questions about racial identity in forms should be answered for biracial individuals— showcases that the interracial couples and the biracial adults may be between a rock and a hard place. They do not want to see biracial individuals misidentified as either one or the other of their (at least) two racial backgrounds. Yet, they do not want biracials to face more challenges and/or disadvantages (in the sense of “missing the opportunities” they may get, for example) by disobeying and breaking society’s norms—the one-drop rule. The interracial couples and biracial individuals seem to face a tension between psychological and material benefits. The psychological benefit-material benefit tension seems to come into play since they would have felt better (psychological benefit/satisfaction) if they could identify biracials as “human” or at least “biracial,” but the multiracial families (and especially the biracial children) would lose the material benefits they could get by following society’s norms and labels.

The biracial participants of this study also seemed to face another dialectical tension. They admit having had some rough experiences with both Whites and Blacks. Yet, when they talk about them they also make excuses for Blacks and Whites— “maybe they (Blacks or Whites) do not know what race I am,” is one excuse they give. This, however, seems to reflect dialectical tensions biracial individuals may have because of their relationship to the races they have been mistreated or excluded by. The biracial individuals seem to face a belongingness-alienation tension. They belong to both the Black and the White racial groups because they have both “Black and White in them.” Nonetheless, they concurrently feel alienated by both Blacks and Whites because of how they treat them—considering them outsiders.

The findings also suggest the presence of dialectical tensions in relation to discussion about race. The interracial couples and biracial adults seem to face a

silence-communication dialectical tension: they believe race should be discussed but, at the same time, fear that discussions about race might be counterproductive and stiffen racial tensions. The dialectical theory/perspective may help to understand and explain such dialectics the interracial couples and biracial individuals face. The dialectical theory is concerned with the “complex ways in which persons-in-relationship use communication to manage the naturally opposing forces that impinge on their relationship at any given time” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 199). It would be good to investigate these and other possible dialectical tensions Black-White interracial couples and biracial adults face, and the strategies used to deal with them in the future.

Conducting the study with focus groups, instead of individual interviews (only), might have also helped to enrich the data. Having interracial couples who have been married for different lengths of time and biracial individuals of different age groups share their experiences in a focus group might have shown the possible differences in experiences and thus in how they perceive and explain them. It might have also motivated the participants to discuss their experiences in more detail, in addition to serving as a reminder of some of their experiences as others talk about similar experiences. Therefore, including (using) focus groups to investigate the experiences of interracial couples and biracial individuals should be considered in the future.

Social support and especially supportive communication among interracial couples and biracial individuals seems to be minimal. Investigating the type, extent and role of social support (supportive communication) among interracial couples is also another possibility for future studies. Focus groups may be helpful in observing and investigating supportive communication. Including interracial couple and biracial

adult participants from the same families would also be good to pursue to understand the dynamics of interracial families.

The three studies in this thesis attempt to uncover the misunderstanding(s) surrounding and sustaining the social politics surrounding Black-White interracial marriages and Black-White biracial identity in particular and race in general. The hope is that such a conversation will lead to substituting the misunderstanding with an understanding and the misguided discourse with a healthy communication about race relations and interracial intimacies. Hopefully, this research will encourage further investigation of and discussion about these issues.

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APPENDIX A

Black-White Interracial Marriage and Biracial Identity Attitude Questionnaire.

Demographic information:

1. What is your race?

- A. Black B. White C. Other

2. What is your sex?

- A. Male B. Female

3. Which one of the following describes you best?

- A. Freshman B. Sophomore C. Junior D. Senior E. Graduate student

4. Which age group do you belong to?

- A. 18-21 B. 22 and above

Instructions I: Below are potential descriptions of Black-White (African-American/European-American) interracial marriage. Please read through the descriptions carefully. Then, fill in the circle on your answer sheet for the response which best represents your feelings regarding *Black-White (African-American/European-American) interracial marriage*. Make sure the numbers on the answer sheet and this questionnaire correspond. The descriptions refer to your general attitudes toward Black-White (African-American/European-American) interracial marriage.

Black-White interracial marriages are:

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| 5. good | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | bad |
| 6. rewarding | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | punishing |
| 7. acceptable | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | unacceptable |
| 8. respectful | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | disrespectful |
| 9. harmful | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | beneficial |

10. intolerable A B C D E F G tolerable
11. satisfactory A B C D E F G unsatisfactory
12. offensive A B C D E F G pleasant

Instructions II: Below are statements about Black-White biracial individuals (individuals with an African-American and a European-American parent). Please read through the descriptions carefully. Then, fill in the circle on your answer sheet for the response which best represents your feelings and perceptions regarding *Black-White biracial individuals (individuals with an African-American and a European-American parent)*. Make sure the numbers on the answer sheet and this questionnaire correspond. The descriptions refer to your general perceptions about Black-White biracial individuals.

Please use the following scale for each item/statement:

Strongly agree A B C D E Strongly disagree

Black-White biracial individuals:

13. Have a positive image of self.
14. Have difficulty discussing their racial background with others.
15. Are leaders in school.
16. Have difficulty adjusting to adulthood.
17. Identify with the racial heritage of each parent.
18. Are confused concerning their racial identity.
19. Feel awkward in social situations.
20. Are popular with peers of the opposite sex.
21. Enjoy participating in the cultural celebrations of both parents' racial heritages.
22. Benefit from having parents of different racial backgrounds.

23. Think that other peers are better than they are.
24. Prefer to follow the cultural practices of only one parent.
25. Are confused by differing cultural traditions of their parents.
26. Are respected by their peers and classmates.
27. Resent being the offspring of parents from different racial backgrounds.
28. Have a good relationship with both parents.
29. Feel ashamed of their mixed racial heritage.
30. Will graduate from high school and attend college.
31. Are proud of their multiracial identity.
32. Are satisfied with their physical appearance.
33. Possess a multiracial identity that is based on each parent's race.
34. Benefit from learning the customs of both parents' racial backgrounds.
35. Will grow up to be successful adults.

APPENDIX B

Interview Grid 1:

1. How would you describe your racial/cultural background, and that of your spouse?
2. When and how did you and your spouse meet? How long have you been married?
3. Did you know Black-White interracial couples before you got married? Do you know now?
4. When did you think you could be married interracially?
5. Do you have children? If yes, how many and what ages? What do they do?
6. How would you describe your marriage?
7. How would you describe the difference(s) between you and your spouse? How does (do) your difference(s) affect your relationship?
8. What challenges do you face because of your decision to intermarry (as an individual and as a couple)? What do you do to overcome those challenges?
9. How would you describe your immediate and extended family's attitude towards Black-White interracial marriage?
10. How would you describe society's attitude towards Black-White interracial marriage? Towards Black-White biracial individuals?
11. How much do you know about your culture/tradition/racial background and that of your spouse?
12. How would you describe your relationship with Blacks and Whites (your racial community and your spouse's racial community)?
13. What are the advantages of being intermarried? What are the disadvantages of being intermarried?

14. What are the implications of your decision to intermarry to your kids? What race do you think your kids (will) belong to?
15. What is race?
16. How would you describe your feelings and thoughts about Black-White interracial marriage since the youngest age you can remember? What do you think influenced and influences your feelings and thoughts about interracial marriage?
17. Have you ever faced/do you face any discrimination because of your marriage choice? If yes, what kind of discrimination and from whom? Why do you think that happens? How do you deal with it?
18. Are there any stereotypes towards Black-White interracial couples (and Black-White biracial individuals)? If yes, what? What is their implication? How do you deal with them?
19. How would you describe the racial composition of your close(est) friends?
20. How would you describe your friends'/parents'/neighbors' attitude towards interracial marriage/ your marriage?
21. How would you describe your relationship with your parents and your spouse's parents?
22. Among everyday casual contacts what type of people do you think have positive/negative attitudes towards interracial marriage (and biracial individuals)?
23. What are the implications of Black-White intermarriage to Blacks and Whites, and to society?
24. Did/does having kids affect/change others' attitudes toward/ acceptance of (your) interracial marriage?
25. What are the most annoying questions/comments you get from people?

APPENDIX C

Interview Grid 2:

1. What is your race?
2. What is your parents' race/racial background?
3. What challenges do you face because of your racial background?
4. How would you describe your extended family's (grandparents') attitude towards biracial kids?
5. How would you describe society's attitude towards Black-White biracial individuals?
6. How much do you know about the culture/tradition/racial background of both of your parents?
7. How would you describe your relationship with the races of both your father and your mother?
8. What are the advantages of being biracial?
9. What are the disadvantages of being biracial?
10. What is race?
11. How would you describe your feelings and thoughts about your identity [racial identity] since the youngest age you can remember?
12. What do you think influenced and influences your feelings and thoughts about your identity?
13. Have you ever faced/do you face any discrimination because of your racial background? If yes, what kind of discrimination and from whom? Why do you think that happens? And how do you deal with it?

14. Are there any stereotypes towards Black-White biracial individuals? If yes, what?
And what are the implications of society's stereotypes about/discriminations against Black-White biracial individuals?
15. How would you describe the racial composition of your close(est) friends?
16. Your thoughts about interracial (Black-White) marriage?
17. Which or what racial group do your friends, peers, classmates, neighbors, teachers ...say you belong to?
18. How would you describe your grandparents'/neighbors' attitude towards interracial marriage/ your parents' marriage?
19. When and how did you notice that your family was different/that your parents were of different race?
20. Do you get any kind of support that helps you deal with challenges you face because of your racial background? If yes, what and from whom?
21. Among everyday casual contacts what type of people do you think have positive/negative attitudes towards biracial individuals?
22. What are the most annoying questions/comments you get from people?