Gray Matter: The Roles of Race, Gender, and Racialized Gender Ideologies in the Management of Racial Difference in Heterosexual Black/White Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

One of the common beliefs in American society is that interracial couples transcend race. It is a curious belief considering that there is not a parallel logic that heterosexual couples transcend sexism. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 55 members of heterosexual Black/White intimate couples, I have investigated the internal dynamics involved in maintaining a relationship across race in our racially stratified society in three areas of these couples' lives: public interactions, racial discussions, and childrearing. Most literature about interracial couples looks at race as the main determinant of the experience of these couples as a unit and as individuals. However, I argue that race, gender and racialized gender ideologies interact to shape how members of heterosexual Black/White intimate couples perceive certain social situations and their options for negotiating social norms and issues. Not only has the intersection of race and gender been under-theorized in research on interracial couples, racialized gender ideologies have been virtually absent. In particular, these racialized ideologies of gender result in situational privilege at different times for Black women and Black men, thus nuancing our understanding of how racism operates.

To Grandpa, Granny and all the others who came before me.
Without your hard work and sacrifice, I would not be where I am today.
For all the opportunities you were not given: this degree is for you.

Kuwe Gogo nakubo bonke okhoho bami.
Leziqu engizitholayo ezenu ngoba nina aniwatholanga
amathuba ofunduda imfundo ephakeme.
Ngiyanibonga ngoba bengingeke ngiphumelele ngaphandle
komsebensi wenu nezikhwepha zenu.

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The running header shows "Page | i"

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Literature Review: Interracial Intimacy in America

Race is a lived illusion, but it's one that causes massive suffering for others.

- *Charles Johnson, Ph.D., S. Wilson and Grace M. Pollock Professor for Excellence in English at the University of Washington (Seattle)*

Introduction

Utilizing data that I obtained from interviews with 60 members of heterosexual Black/White interracial couples, for my dissertation I investigated relationship maintenance strategies employed by members of these couples and the impact of race and gender identities. Of the research that has been conducted on interracial couples, most has not interrogated racial dynamics *within* these relationships and even less has penetrated deeply into how gender interacts within these dynamics. While many people have the belief that members of interracial relationships have managed to transcend race by marrying someone of a different race, this seems to be a simplistic notion when one considers the polarizing racial socialization in America is so effective that even oppressed racial groups internalize negative stereotypes about their race. Furthermore, there is not a parallel logic that heterosexual couples transcend sexism and patriarchy – why would we expect a different outcome from something similarly deeply entrenched in our society like race? Members of these couples enter these relationships with conscious and subconscious notions about different racial groups, including their own and their partner's, and, additionally, they may encounter negative or unusual reactions to their relationship or their multi-racial family that may challenge, support, or change these views. Moreover, racial socialization does not cease when one becomes an adult – we are continually under the influence of this process in our daily interactions and the consumption of various forms

of media. Through looking at the unique nexus point of Black/White interracial couples, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the permeability and power of racial socialization and if and how gender has a bearing on this social phenomenon.

As will be demonstrated in my dissertation, the influence and interaction of race and gender impacts how members of these couples negotiate racial difference as individuals and as a unit in a multitude of ways, including individual "ways of seeing" to social management strategies. By "racial difference" I refer to the way in which Whites and Blacks are constructed differently – and often antithetically to one another – by society and, thus, occupying dissimilar embodied experiences. Using the lens of intersectional theory to focus on the public and intra-relationship spheres of these interracial couples, I ask three primary questions in my dissertation: within the relationship dynamic, how does race and gender effect how one discusses racial difference and handles conflict? How do Blacks and Whites with disparate racial orientations maintain their relationship, and does race and gender have a bearing on what strategies are utilized to manage this? How does gender hegemony interact with race to influence what management strategies are perceived as feasible? To answer these questions, I examined three areas of in the lives of these couples: the management of negative public interactions, intra-relational communication regarding the topic of race, and childrearing.

Adding to the body of literature about how interracial couples manage public interactions, I argue that racialized notions of masculinity and femininity influence how couples manage negative public interactions. Not only do socialized notions of gender influence how members of these couples interpret and perceive the actions and comments of others, but it also shapes their ideas of how they can appropriately respond. In general, for White men, I found that maintaining or reasserting White masculinity was a method of managing these situations,

whereas, in general, for Black men, Black women and White women, they found themselves attempting to manage these situations despite limitations imposed by racialized gender ideologies.

Nuancing Steinbugler's concept of "racework," I argue that racialized gender ideologies influence how members of these couples navigate conversations of an educational nature about race. In my study, Black partners were usually on the educating side of these conversations, and these ideologies served as resources for them in managing resistance from their partners. Gender created a certain level of situational privilege for Black women, where they felt more comfortable directly challenging their partners, whereas Black men were more likely to engage in minimizing behaviors or employ "moderate Blackness." For White partners, these ideologies gave them frameworks for understanding these conversations, which at times resulted in them viewing these conversations quite differently from their partners. In general, White partners spoke of these conversations in more positive terms: White men focused on their personal growth in understanding Black culture and race, and White women spoke more of the racial consensus they had with their partners.

Then turning the lens onto childrearing, I analyze the conversations members of these couples have about racial issues that arise with raising biracial children. With the focus being more on the Black partners in this particular chapter, I argue that race interacts with gender in a way that creates a situational advantage for Black women and a disadvantage for Black men – a notable contrast to conversations involving racial education. While Black women's perspectives and concerns are treated with more acceptance by their White partners when it comes to childrearing, Black men faced more resistance from their partners, with often resulted in them compromising or finding alternative ways to accomplish their childrearing goals. This chapter

reveals the importance of researchers placing more focus not on just how women – particularly White women – manage childrearing biracial children but how men also navigate this.

Before continuing onto my research methods and my research findings, I will first lay the groundwork of the literature about interracial relationships that spans the disciplines of history, sociology and psychology. After covering the historical relations between Blacks and Whites in the United States, I continue onto the quantitative social science research about the prevalence of Black/White relationships in the current era and the characteristics of those who are in these relationships. I close the chapter with the qualitative research of the experiential data of those in these relationships – from public interactions to intra-relational dynamics.

Brief Overview of America and Race in Black & White

The United States is known for having a particularly fraught history with race relations that has been embedded in its foundation from the beginning of the colonies. While the construction and meaning of race has repeatedly changed over time, America has primarily adhered to a racial hierarchy where Whites have been at the top and Blacks have been at the bottom (Song 2006). Although various lines have been drawn in regards to marriage between Whites and non-Whites marriages between Blacks and Whites have been considered the most taboo and parlous, due to Blacks being constructed as almost antithetical to Whites and being placed at the opposite end of this hierarchy. The core issue of some of the most contentious times in our racial history, at least according to the White dominant voice, was the fear of "race mixing" and "White racial purity," and, throughout our history, thousands of Black people have died and many more were injured and terrorized as a result (Rosen 2009; Higginbotham Jr. and Kopytoff 2000). However, despite the many racial barriers that have been erected repeatedly – such as in the forms of slavery and Jim Crow -- Blacks have made many strides on the road to

civil liberty and equality. Although intimate relationships between Blacks and Whites have existed for centuries in our country, the marriage rate between the two groups has dramatically increased since the 1967 *Loving* decision as more and more Blacks find themselves living next door to Whites, growing up and even going to school with them. However, the past is never entirely the past, and the members of interracial couples have to exist and manage their relationships within a larger white supremacist society whose current core institutions and understandings of race, gender, and class have been built under a racist framework (Rodriguez 2001). To say that these relationships transcend race, as many argue, is not only simplistic but also naïve. Before we can really discuss that lived experiences of these couples and how they are shaped by race and gender, we must first discuss the ontology of the racial and gender inequality in which they are embedded within.

Black-White Sexual Relations in the U.S.: Taboo Yet Mundane
The Historical Foundations of Black-White Sexual Relations

Interracial relationships have been a part of the American fabric from the beginning of colonization. Indentured servants crossed racial lines in their relationships (Smith and Hattery 2009, Gullickson 2006, Gaines Jr. and Leaver 2002) and, in the years of slavery, interracial relations occurred in consensual and non-consensual contexts, most notably between Black female slaves and White male masters (Kennedy 2003, Kalmijn 1993, Pascoe 2009). Almost every known female slave narrative from the 1800s either references the threat of rape or the act of rape (Hine 1994). The majority of sexual relations between Blacks and Whites in early America and the antebellum South were sexual assaults, mostly notoriously that of Black female slaves by their White male masters and other White men, the latter of which was sometimes through the trade of "fancy girls," light-complexioned enslaved women and girls who were bought and sold as concubines (Kennedy 2003, Rothman 1998). Furthermore, enslaved women

could not expect legal recourse against these men due to Black women being constructed as

"lascivious" and their legal classification as property – only their masters could use the court of

law to prosecute White men who raped his slaves/property without his permission (White 1999,

Higginbotham and Kopytoff 2000). Just because slavery came to an end in 1865 did not mean

that sexual violence at the hands of White men did. As Collins (2000) explains,

> [E]mancipation and the gaining of individual rights ushered in a new series of
> vulnerabilities because such women lacked the so-called protection provided by
> elite White men. No longer the property of a *few* White men, African-American
> women became sexually available to *all* White men. As free women who
> belonged to nobody except themselves and in a climate of violence that meted out
> severe consequences for their either defending themselves or soliciting Black
> male protection, Black women could be raped. (p. 65)

Furthermore, during slavery and after the Civil War, White men also sought Black women out as

concubines or mistresses with one of the most famous instances being the Quadroon Balls in

New Orleans, which were at their height during the 1800s (Guillory 1999).

While Emancipation failed to diminish the prevalence of the dominant form of sexual

relations between Black women and White men – sexual assault – it did alter the ways in which

Black men were viewed in the larger society in regards to White women. Whereas during the

time of slavery, some White male slaveowners felt comfortable to have Black male slaves work

inside their homes, during the Reconstruction, Black men began to be viewed as uncontrollable,

rapacious "savages" who have been let loose upon society and, most importantly, onto "pure"

White women by Emancipation (Frederickson 1971). This initiated a prolonged, blood-stained

era in American history where thousands of Black men were lynched under the pretense of either

making advances at White women or raping them (Wells 1996, Tolney and Beck 1995). For

example, while members of the Ku Klux Klan were killing Black men in the name of "white

purity and honor," many of them were also raping Black women as a means of racialized

violence and domestic terrorism (Rosen 2009). These methods of terrorism would continue well into the 20th century, including the sexual assault of many Black female domestic workers (Nash 2005, Collins 2005). Black men who travelled to states where they could marry their white fiancées were also dealing with legal charges of "white slavery" or kidnapping under the Mann Act, with the most famous example of this being boxer Jack Johnson in 1912 (Moran 2001, Mumford 1997). Additionally, many Black men in the South were put to death for allegedly raping White women, but there has not been a male defendant of any race sentenced to death for raping a Black woman (McGuffey 2010). In 1960, for the first time, a White man in Mississippi was sentenced to death for raping an African-American girl yet the man's sentence was changed to life in prison with possibility of parole at the judge's insistence (McGuire 2010).

Since Early America, there have been Blacks and Whites who have cohabitated and, in some cases, have had children. These relations have ranged from concubinage to marriage, and in some communities they faced acceptance while in others they endured harassment. According to Gullickson (2006), "Historical evidence suggests that local white communities were surprisingly tolerant of interracial unions b/t white and free blacks in the antebellum period, despite legal prohibitions in many areas" (291). David Isaacs, a White Jewish man, and Nancy West, a free Black woman, lived, by all appearances, as a husband and wife would in Virginia in the 1820s (Higginbotham & Kopytoff 2000, Rothman 1998). They maintained a household together, raised children, and ran several successful businesses, despite being brought into court several times by their community members (one time was under the charge of "fornication"). Furthermore, they did not live too far from another Black/White interracial couple in the same community. Although legislation banning Black–White interracial marriage was enacted as early as the mid-1600s (Roberts 1994), and interracial marriage was uncommon prior to the

Reconstruction, anti-miscegenation laws were not always enforced prior to the Civil War (Hodes 1999, Rothman 1998). However, after the war, under the guise of protecting "racial purity," the enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws increased dramatically throughout the country (Martyn 1979). According to Gullickson (2006), "After emancipation, miscegenation threatened an emerging biracial order that demanded an end to interracial sex and its ambiguous product." By the early 20th century, interracial sexual relations between blacks and whites were at their lowest point. Not every state had an anti-miscegenation law but, of those that did, while some included prohibitions against Whites marrying Latinos or Asians -- depending on the region of the country -- everyone explicitly stated a prohibition against marriage between Blacks and Whites, thus reinforcing this particular relationship combination as the ultimate taboo (Kennedy 2003). For those states that did not have these laws, Blacks and Whites were able to marry despite facing harassment in many of their communities. Until the 1960s, Black female/White male marriages exceeded those of White female/Black male marriages, which is likely due to the discriminate nature in the U.S. of treating Black male/White female relationships more severely (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995).

However, these legal barriers were about to come to an end in 1967 when Richard and Mildred Loving, a Black woman and White man who married in Washington, D.C. but wanted to live with their family in their home state of Virginia, choose to fight Virginia's anti-miscegenation law in the Supreme Court. Other cases had preceded *Loving v. Virginia,* including the unsuccessful *Pace v. State* (1883), where the Supreme Court sided with an Alabama statute that forbid sexual relations between Blacks and Whites and imposed a greater penalty for these interracial relations, and the successful *McLaughlin v. Florida* (1964), where the Court struck down part of Florida's anti-miscegenation law regarding the cohabitation of unmarried persons

of the opposite sex and of different races. As a result, *McLaughlin v. Florida* overturned *Pace v. State* and laid part of the ground work for the *Loving* case, which found anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment. However, Southern states were slow to officially overturn these laws and remove them from their books, with Alabama being the last state to do so in 2000 (Hansen 2001). To many, this monumental court decision was to burgeon a new era of progressive race relations in America, while to others this spelled disaster. What neither group understood was that both of these interpretations of this verdict were over-simplified, and, instead, what we found was a new chapter in race relations where many of the old concerns and fears about race mixing remained and morphed into eventual "colorblind" language, and many of their couples found themselves still swimming against the – albeit weakened -- tide.

Contemporary Black-White Sexual Relations: A Move towards Legitimate Relationships

While sociologists such as DuBois and Merton conducted research on interracial couples prior to the *Loving* verdict (DuBois [1899] (1996), Merton 1941), the proscription against these relationships made this research difficult due to the paucity of couples and, more than likely, a reluctance to make themselves vulnerable to further scrutiny. However, research dramatically increased over the decades following the verdict as the numbers of married interracial couples increased.

Within the almost 50 years since the *Loving v. Virginia* ruling, interracial relationships have steadily increased from 1% in 1970 to approximately 7% in 2010 (Qian 2005, Lofquist et al. 2010). In 2010 alone, interracial marriage made up 15% of new marriages (Wang 2012), which was the highest number since the end of anti-miscegenation laws. Nonetheless, these relationships remain relatively rare. Black/White marriages are the least common pairing of interracial relationships, and, more specifically, Black female/White male relationships are one

of the least common heterosexual interracial pairings (Qian 1997; Lewis, Jr. and Yancey 1995;

Qian 2005). In addition, whites have the lowest rate of interracial marriage at 4%, and African

Americans having the second lowest rate at 9% (Lofquist et al. 2010).

Who is More Likely to Intermarry?

While quantitative sociologists and demographers have been interested in how interracial

marriage patterns have changed within the last century, to a much larger extent they are

interested in the question of the predictors of who is likely to enter an interracial marriage. Since

quantitative sociologists do not ask the reciprocal question of why people do not enter these

relationships, this focus in some ways appears to pathologize those who enter these relationships.

However, it is a reasonable question to ask due to the fact that these relationships are still a rarity

and, as I will discuss shortly, are more likely to result in harassment. One of the stronger

indicators of a likelihood of racial exogamy, or marrying outside of one's race, is education.

College-educated men and women are more likely to marry someone of another race (Qian 2005,

Moran 2003). Although residential segregation (Dawkins 2005), institutional racism (Murji

2007), and discrimination are more common for Blacks when compared to other racial

minorities, college-educated racial minorities are more likely to live in integrated communities

and work in alongside Whites in white-collar jobs (Qian 2005). This, in turn, can result in co-

workers, friends, or fellow students of different races being seen as a potential dating and/or

marriage partner (Moran 2003). However, when it comes to educational status, White women are

more likely to marry a Black man with a higher socioeconomic status – or "marry up" -- than

when they marry White men, while Black women are more likely to marry down whether they

marry White men or within their own race (Kalmijn 1993, Blackwell and Lichter 2000).

However, Black women are still more likely to marry up when pairing with a White man

compared to a Black man. Younger generations (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995) and those

with interracial friendship groups (Jacobson and Johnson 2006) are more likely to have a partner

of a different race. Moreover, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, interracial married and

unmarried-and-cohabitating couples reside more the western region of the U.S. at 11% and 21%,

respectively (Lofquist et al. 2010). There is evidence that interracial couples are more likely to

cohabitate than marry when compared to same-race couples, which could be due to disapproval

from family and friends (Qian 2005). Evidence also points to a higher concentration of these

couples in urban areas (Cready and Saenz 1997). Religion also seems to play a role in the

likelihood of racial exogamy as Yancey (2002) found that Catholics are significantly less likely

to marry interracially compared to non-Catholics, which could be explained by the fact that

American Catholicism is situated more around specific racial or ethnic groups (Froehle and

Gautier 2000, Morris 1997).

   With respect to nativity, within the Black race in America, native-born Blacks are more

likely to interracially marry than immigrant Blacks (Batson, Qian and Lichter 2006). However,

Black men, regardless of whether they are native- or foreign-born, are more likely to marry

outside their race than Black women (Kalmijn 1993). In contrast, according to Qian (1999),

immigrant Whites are more likely to marry interracially than native-born Whites, and, White

men who emigrated to the United States as children prior to 1984 were 136% more like to marry

Black women. This pattern is the same for immigrant White women, in regards to marrying

Black men, but the effect is smaller. Furthermore, younger generations of immigrant Whites

have higher patterns of out-marriage.

   Despite an increase in interactions with Whites, especially for middle-class Blacks, as I

will explain next, these relationships still maintain a level of taboo. As Osuji (2011) explains,

> In addition, interacting in close proximity to members of another ethnic
> population does not in and of itself lead to the demise of these boundaries. In fact,

ethno– racial distinctions can exist because of cross – boundary interactions, including interracial marriage. For this reason, interracial marriage would not necessarily lead to a diminishing of racial boundaries. (p. 24)

What are the Experiences of Interracial Couples in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries?
Public Interactions: Navigating the Circles of Family, Friends, Co-workers, and Strangers

In spite of the fact that it's been almost half a century since interracial marriages were

legal through the U.S. and, according to a 2013 USA Today/Gallup Poll (Newport 2013), 84% of

Whites and 96% of Blacks say they approve of interracial marital unions, it is still not unusual

for interracial couples to encounter hostility and racism in public interactions (Craig-Henderson

2011; Troy, Lewis-Smith and Laurenceau 2006). A relatively recent example of this on the

national stage was the controversy that resulted from the airing of a Cheerios commercial

featuring a Black father, a White mother, and their biracial daughter in 2013 (Elliot 2013).[1]

Members of these couples report negative reactions in various arenas of their lives, including at

school, work, during interactions with family members and friends, and when doing quotidian

tasks in their everyday lives. While members of these couples learn to be prepared to anticipate

hostility, many still voice being caught off guard at the occasional unpredictability of others

reactions (Mtshali 2013). Members of Black/White heterosexual interracial couples encounter

more "visceral" experiences of racism than other interracial heterosexual couples (Herring and

Amissah 1997; Lewis, Jr. and Yancey 1995; Yancey 2002). They report encountering stares

(Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990), mistreatment from coworkers (Troy, Lewis-Smith and

Laurenceau 2006), and verbal harassment and threats (Killian 2003). McNamara et al. (1999)

found that couples also reported having property vandalized, as well as receiving hate mail and

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[1] While there was a significant amount of positive response, the vitriolic racist response was so strong that YouTube, the website that was featuring the advertisement, had to block comments. (Elliott, Stuart. 2013. "Vitriol Online for Cheerios Ad With Interracial Family." *The New York Times,* June 1. Retrieved November 6, 2013 (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/business/media/cheerios-ad-with-interracial-family-brings-out-internet-hate.html?_r=0).)

obscene phone calls. Members of these couples, like individual minorities, can face institutional

discrimination, including housing and education discrimination (Dalmage 2000). Furthermore,

they may lack support from family members and friends and, in some cases, be faced with direct

resistance with can sometimes be met with social ties being diminished upon marriage (Miller,

Olson and Fazio 2004; Killian 2001). Black male/White female and Black female/White male

couples have reported hostility from Black women and Black men, respectively (Osuji 2001,

Hildebrandt 2002). White men and women in relationships with Black partners report being

"startled into awareness of race" (Datzman and Gardner 2000), and Black partners report

noticing racist incidences more and tend to discuss them in more detail than their White partners

(Killian 2003). However, despite this, Troy, Lewis-Smith and Laurenceau (2006) found that

those in interracial pairings reported no significant difference in relationship satisfaction than

same-race couples. However, they did not control for type of interracial relationship, and the

self-reporting bias of couples who tend to insist that their relationships are the same as same-race

couples must be taken into account (Karis 2003).

Women in Black/White relationships describe encountering more experiences of

discrimination and harassment than men (Miller, Olson, and Fazio 2004). When alone with their

children, they received more questions, stares, and confrontations (Hildebrandt 2003, Mtshali

2013). In her research on White women in relationships with Black men, Frankenberg (1993)

discusses the women experiencing "rebound racism," where they are experiencing racism due to

their intimate association with a Black husband and biracial children. Frankenberg (1993:112)

argues that this is a unique phenomenon since "the impact is neither identical to nor merely a

weaker version of the original impact [from the racism her partner experiences]: is qualitatively

new." Frankenberg's work begs the question as to whether this concept be extended to White

men in relationships with Black women, or does male privilege mitigate this possibility? In their

study, Bratter and Eschbach (2006) found that White women also report experiencing elevated

stress within these relationships, which they argue can be partially explained by the

socioeconomic disadvantages they experience within their partnership. On the other hand, they

found that distress for Black women and men in these relationships is the same as for Blacks in

endogamous relationships. When Black men and White women tend to make less in the U.S.

than White men (U.S. Department of Labor 2011), it can be understood why this would be a

factor in their relationship that members of White male/Black female relationships may not

discuss. However, it is difficult to determine if White male socioeconomic privilege can entirely

compensate for Black female socioeconomic disadvantage as, on average, Black women make

less money than all three aforementioned groups. Black women also report being concerned

about managing stereotypes about Black women who are in relationships with White men. As

Hildebrandt (2002:237) describes, "Seen by other blacks as 'snotty and superior' or politically

ambiguous, these women described themselves as navigating racial 'no man's land' until those

stereotypes could be overcome."

On the other hand, Black men report managing more overly negative encounters when

with their partners than compared to White men with Black women (Steinbugler 2012). White

men, in contrast, have been found in some studies to report to be unconcerned about other

people's opinions of their relationship and/or believing that they did not encounter discrimination

(Dalmage 2000, Mtshali 2013). However, White men have also reported directly and indirectly

informing others, particularly in the workplace, as to the race of their partner. Examples of this

would include placing a photo of their partner or family on their desk (Hildebrandt 2002) or

bringing up the race of their partner in conversation (Mtshali 2013).

Couples also sometimes receive more seemingly positive reactions, such as people explicitly voicing their approval of interracial relationships, such as others, usually strangers telling the couple that their relationships is a "great thing" or how "proud" they are of the couple (Steinbugler 2009, Mtshali 2013). However, these reactions can be problematic for many reasons, one of which being that they seem to fetishize these couples as a solution to complex and long-standing societal racial problems. In addition, just like people who react in a hostile way to these couples, these reactions also publicly point to the unusualness of these couples.

On average, divorce rates for interracial couples are higher than intraracial couples (Bramlett and Mosher 2002, Gaines and Ickes 1997), which seems to contradict the findings of Troy, Lewis-Smith and Laurenceau (2006) that interracial and intra-racial couples report similar relationship satisfaction. However, Troy et al. (2006) used a younger-aged sample, which could have a bearing on their findings. Community support, including that of friends and family, is a strong indicator of relationship outcomes (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult and Gaines 1997; Shibazaki and Brennan 1998), and, therefore, it would not be surprising that these marriages are more likely to dissolve than same-race marriages. However, it must also be taken into account that, on average, Blacks have a relatively high rate of divorce (Teachman, Tedrow, and Crowder 2000), and interracial marriages are more likely to be second marriages, which are more likely to disintegrate (Gaines and Liu 2000, Martin and Bumpass 1989).

As can be expected, members of these couples often develop stigma management strategies to deal with the various types and sources of discrimination. While their models differ quite a bit, Killian (2003) and Datzman and Gardner (2003) found that these couples employ strategies of active vocal resistance and "restricting [their] itinerary." Other strategies include making sure that they go out in public as a group, "educating the public" (Datzman and Gardner

2003) anddisassociating with one another, as well as resisting negative stereotypes by behaving

with the intent of making a positive impression when in public places (Killian 2003).

Furthermore, although not documented as a model of stigma management, Childs (2005a) and

Mtshali (2013) found that some members of these relationships employ online interracial couples

and multiracial family support communities for support. More research in this area is still

needed, however, since a consensus has yet to be reached as to how the majority of these couples

manage these public situations.

Societal Reactions: Is It Simply Racism or Something More Complex?

Overall, White opposition to interracial relationships in the post-*Loving* era has

diminished and, when discussed, is usually done so in terms that are typical in this "colorblind"

era of race (Bonilla-Silva 2010). In her study of White college students, Childs (2005a) found

that White students often talked about Whites and Blacks as being inherently different and a lack

of attraction to Blacks as being an uncontrollable matter of preference, similar to a preference for

blondes or a dislike of redheads. Also, concerns over potential children are often voiced,

specifically that the children will not be fully accepted by Whites nor Blacks and will be

confused about their racial identity (Laszloffy and Rockquemore 2003). In addition, gender does

play a role in how Whites view those in Black/White interracial relationships and their reactions

to them. White women overwhelming report more "white border patrolling," or Whites policing

interracial relationships, than White men (Dalmage 2000). A more explicit effort to control

White women in these relationships may point to a continued concern over White women as

gatekeepers of "racial purity."

Members of Black/White interracial couples also describe "black border patrolling."

Motivations for Black resistance to interracial relationships differ significantly to Whites, and,

like with Whites, gender plays a role in not only how some Blacks view interracial relationships

but also how Blacks in those relationships are symbolically "read" by other Blacks. In a White

supremacist country with a history of marginalizing and devaluing people, Blacks in intimate

relationships with Whites may be viewed as idolizing Whites, being self-hating, and, therefore,

of being disloyal to the Black race (Moran 2003). However, some scholars have found that in

some cases Black women with White men do not have their racial loyalty questioned as much as

Black men with White women (Childs 2005a, Craig-Henderson 2011). The majority of literature

on the views of Blacks in regards to interracial relationships is primarily focused on the opinions

of Black women on Black male/White female relationships (Childs 2005b, Crowder and Tolnay

2000). According to several studies, Black women overwhelmingly disapprove of interracial

relationships more than Black men (Childs 2005b, Craig-Henderson 2009). There are two issues

that are unique to Black women and can explain this disapproval. First, the historical ways in

which Black women were constructed in regards to White men differed drastically from how

Black men were constructed in regards to White women after the Civil War. Black women have

endured sexual assault at the hands of White men for centuries in America, and for some Black

women, the choice to not have a relationship with a White man may be an empowering one

(Kaba 2012). Going a step further, Craig-Henderson (2011) argues,

> that in order for an African American woman (who is aware of America's
> historical treatment of the collectivity of Black women) to be involved in an
> interracial relationship (particularly with a White man) she needs to consciously
> and decisively choose to be in an interracial relationship. The African American
> woman who is informed and aware of America's history does not just find herself
> in an interracial relationship as a matter of happenstance. (p. 79)

However, for Black men, White women have been constructed as "untouchable," as the most

pure of women, and as being a "prize" only for White men. For some Black men, the ability to

be able to date and marrying White women with (relatively) no fear of the violence that Black

men of generations past have incurred may be an empowering one for them as well.

Moreover, while Black people have historically been constructed as "primal," "animalistic," and "unattractive" within the last few decades, Black men have been elevated to the status of sex symbol while Black women still perceive themselves as being devalued (Childs 2005a, Collins 2005). In recent decades, a lot of attention has been brought to the "plight" of single Black women in mass media and entertainment. With systemic issues like mass incarceration of Black men and fewer Black men completing college than Black women, Black women, particularly college-educated Black women, who want to marry a Black man may find their marriage pool to be shallower than women of other races, such as White women. For some Black women, seeing a Black man with a White woman is a reminder of their devaluation and their being left behind in the dating/marriage market.

Black men have expressed feeling pressure to date within their race (Childs 2005a), and Black men in relationships with White women frequently discuss facing harassment and disapproval from Black women (Hildebrandt 2002, Osuji 2001). Osuji (2001) found that while Black female/White male couples discussed similar reactions from Black men, Black men and White women focus on these situations much more. Black male disapproval of White male/Black female relationships may also be compounded by the realities of high unemployment and low educational attainment that Black men face and that can impact the construction of their masculinity by themselves and others. As Dalmage (2000) elaborates,

> Thus, when black men see a black woman with a white man, they may be reminded of the numerous ways in which the white supremacist system has denied them opportunities. The privilege and power granted to whites, particularly to white males, is paraded in front of them; and they see the black women in these relationships as complicit with the oppressor. (p. 58-9)

Some members of society, regardless of race, may object to these relationships due to the saliency of race in our societal structure and a relationship that seems to challenge that notion. As Childs (2005a) postulates,

> The institution of marriage is part of the broader structural configuration of society and is the main social area for an individual's self-realization…[some object to] individuals from different 'racial' groups redefining themselves apart from their racial identities. (p. 156)

Managing Intra-relationship Dynamics in a World of Black and White

There is not much research on the intra-relationship dynamics of interracial couples, and most of the research that does exist are in the fields of psychology and communication. However, recently sociologists are beginning to take an interest in this area. In some ways, it is peculiar that the aspects of these relationships are so grossly under-researched. Although mainstream rhetoric on interracial relationships beckons them as an indicator and a catalyst for social change and racial equality (Song 2009, Qian and Lichter 2007), interracial relationships and the people within them are embedded within a larger, complex social system of white supremacy and racial oppression that members of these couples have been raised and socialized within. Just as research has shown that heterosexual couples do not overcome patriarchy through their relationships (Hochschild 2012, Chen et al. 2009), and nor does society necessarily expects them to, there illogically seems to be a belief that a similar process can be done with interracial relationships and racism. Albeit, it must also be said that understanding intra-relationship dynamics, regardless of the races of the individuals involved, can be a complex phenomenon to capture by researchers.

From doing a meta-analysis of research on interracial relationships, Foeman and Nance (1999) developed four stages of development for these relationships: 1) racial awareness (the development or heightening of a race consciousness), 2) coping (with social definitions of race), 3) identity emergence (viewing racial obstacles as not things to overcome but as a "source of strength"), and 4) maintenance, which is an ongoing process of maintaining their relationship and managing issues as they come along. However, the empirical evidence on this is not clear, and the impact of gender has not been thoroughly investigated.

To date, the most exhaustive research on this issue has been done by Steinbugler (2012) where she studied the intra-relationship dynamics of Black/White gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. She argues that interracial couples conduct "racework", which are "the routine actions and strategies through which individuals maintain close relationships across lines of racial stratification" (xiv). She continues on to describe four types of racework: navigating racial homogeneity, visibility management, emotional labor, and boundary work. People's social groups and neighborhoods in America are still drastically segregated, and this can put people in interracial relationships in positions where one member of the couple is the only person of their race a social setting (i.e. the Black partner being the only Black person at a predominantly White party or in a predominantly White neighborhood). Furthermore, this would also mean that they may be the only Black/White interracial couple in social settings as well. For situations like this, couples must manage this racial homogeneity by deciding what environments are most comfortable for each partner, such as moving into a racially diverse neighborhood. However, it is difficult to be able avoid homogenous racial settings consistently, and Steinbugler found that both Black and White partners discussed experiencing "race fatigue," or emotionally exhaustion at being racially conspicuous or encountering racism.

In regards to visibility management, members of these couples report experiencing hypervisibility and/or invisibility and may mitigate the level of visibility through diminishing or utilizing public display of affection. In her research on emotional labor, couples were found to use three types of emotional labor to manage discrimination – the use of humor, avoidance of discussing the issue, and racial silence, which is "the absence of racework between partners for whom racial difference is *not* a salient aspect of their intimate relationship" (99). Lastly, couples conducted boundary work in the construction of their racial identities and in the construction

intimacy, where members of these couples erected symbolic boundaries between them, their

partner, and/or their relationship and stereotypical ideas about Blacks, Whites, and interracial

couples. Examples of these include constructing oneself (or one's partner) as being an exception

within their race or, in regards to the construction of the relationship, embracing the ideology of

"colorblind intimacy." With my focus being on her work around emotional labor, the effect of

gender – and, of course, its interaction with race – leaves some remaining questions. How does

gender and race have an effect on how one discusses racial difference and handles conflict?

Raising Biracial Children in a Racially Divided World

Although acceptance of interracial couples is increasing and there seems to be an arguable

societal fascination with multiracial people, interracial couples still face some resistance to their

relationship, which those in opposition often based upon the potential children produced by the

union. The most common charge being that they will be "confused" (Frankenberg 1993), which

often has an undertone of an essentialism of race. According to Laszloffy and Rockquemore

(2009), this is not necessarily an issue if children have been racially socialized by their parents to

feel comfortable talking about race and develop an understanding of the realities of race and

racism in America. Additionally, Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2013) found that biracial children who

did not have conversations about race with their parents struggled with their identity. In their

study of British parents with different racial or faith backgrounds, Edwards et al. (2010) found

there are three main discursive methods that had regarding conversations about these

backgrounds with their children: 1) open individualized, 2) mix collective, and 3) single

collective. Open individualized involving promoting children to "think beyond ethnic, racial and

faith categories," which they found predominantly among middle class parents (p.954). Mix

collective incorporates both aspects of children's identities, while single collective focuses

primarily on one identity. Hildebrandt (2002) found similar patterns of approaches to racial

identity in studying Black/White families in the U.S. More specific to race and class, she found a single identity (usually "Black") was more common among upper middle-class parents, especially when it came to upper middle class Black American mothers. They viewed this racial categorization as a way to prepare their children for racism, and they were more likely to intentionally live in Black neighborhoods. Middle- or working-class parents were more likely to prefer for their children to identify as "biracial" and discussed this decision in terms resistance of the American racial structure.

The concept of the multiracial person as vacillated throughout American history – from the concept of the "mulatto" in the 1800s to the term of the "biracial" person in recent history. While many states, worried about Black people attempting to pass as White, struggled to figure out how to best manage these fears by going as far as to try to quantify the level of Black ancestry with terms like "quadroon" and "octoroon" (Cruz and Berson 2001, Kennedy 2012), "mulatto" has been the most commonly used term in U.S. history. In fact, the U.S. Census considered it an official race from 1850 until 1920[2]; the dropping of the term from the Census was a reflection of the strengthening of the concept of the "one-drop rule" (Hickman 1996). The concept of bi- or multiracial racial identity gained momentum in the late 20th century, culminating with the 2000 U.S. Census introducing the "mark one or more" (MOOM) option as a result of advocacy of White mothers of multiracial children and their MOOM social movement the 1990s (Williams 2006). While many see interracial relationships and multiracial individuals as blurring and breaking down racial boundaries, Osuji (2011) argues instead a new racial category may be forming: that of the "biracial".

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[2] Pew Research Center has a great historical interactive on how the U.S. Census has handled the category of race from 1790 to the present with images of original documents.
http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/interactives/multiracial-timeline/

Mothers are typically seen as being responsible for imparting an understanding of culture and traditions (Lorenzo-Blanco et al. 2013, Twine 2004), and there is no exception when it comes to race and raising biracial children. Twine found that with White British mothers of Black/White children were expected to pass on the ethnic cultural traditions of the father's side even in situations where the father's family felt that the mother was ill-equipped to do so. Furthermore, Hildebrandt (2002) found that the race and class of the mother was a strong indicator of racial identity preferences for their children, and Waring (2013) found that parents' expectations about potential issues involved in raising biracial children are influenced by their experience of discrimination as they grew up.

Conclusion

The goals of my research are adding to the literature an understanding as to how gender and racialized gender ideologies play a role in the experiences of these couples in the domains of the public and private – more specifically, in public interactions, intra-relational discussions about race, and in the area of childrearing. Not only would this nuance our understanding of the dynamics within these couples but it would also broaden our understanding of intersectionality. Before starting to delve into my data in Chapter 3, I first explain my research methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter 2
Mapping Intimate Interracial Interactions:
Research Methodology & Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

In order to understand how Black/White heterosexual interracial couples negotiate race within the borders of their relationship – from their conceptions of the impact of race on their relationship to the ways race inserts itself into the quotidian, mundane tasks in their lives – I engaged in in-depth interviews with people within these relationships. Interviews "can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world" (McCracken 1988:9), and, as a result, it is the best way to gain insights into their perspectives and embodied experiences of members of these couples. Fortunately, many people across the country opened up their lives – and schedules – to allow to me to do so, and, in this chapter, I explain the theoretical, empirical, logistical and ethical considerations I made when formulating my research design. After explaining how I tailored interview-based research methods to my particular research questions, I will then explain how I composed my research sample and how characteristics of this group may affect my findings. Next, I review the conceptual and theoretical frameworks I used in my formulating my research design and analysis. After detailing how I reviewed my research data, I then conclude this chapter with a discussion of the methodological issues I managed in my research.

Research Design

In order to gain data on the inner workings of these relationships, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 members of heterosexual Black-White couples located throughout the United States in two phases. The first being from October 2011 through February 2012 as a part of my master's thesis research, and the second phase being from July 2014 through January

2016. Since regional cultures can have a bearing on people experience social interactions and their ways of interpreting these interactions, I did not confine my study to any particular area of the United States in order to gain a variety of perspectives and experiences. Participants had to be in a relationship consistently for a year, which was done in an attempt to filter out people who may be "experimenting" by dating interracially (Qian 2005) and/or casually dating someone of another race. People who are casually dating may be more likely avoid conversations involving sensitive topics, such as race, either because it is early in their relationship and they want to avoid conflict (Brehm et al. 2002) or because coming to an understanding on these issues may not be necessary for a short-term commitment.

Sampling & Recruitment Methods

Due to the rarity (Qian 2005, Qian and Lichter 2011) and stigmatization (Childs 2005a, Yancey 2002) of interracial couples, I employed a variety of recruitment methods in order to increase the likelihood of obtaining participants around the country, and ultimately used snowball sampling, community flyers, posts on social media (Facebook, Twitter groups, website blogs, website forums), and dispersing e-mails to my social network. Snowball sampling, which is a nonprobability form of sampling that involves research participants identifying others who may be eligible to participate in the study, can be particularly helpful when trying to obtain respondents from populations that may be difficult to penetrate (Patton 2015). Like any method of sampling, though, there are potential drawbacks, such as those with fewer social contacts may be underrepresented (Salkind 2010). However, participants obtained by these means represent a minority of my sample (see Table 4 in Appendix A.4 for more information).

Outside of snowball sampling, I used a variety of solicitations to obtain participants around the country and created a website (which is now deleted) to refer people to for more information. Since interracial couples are in higher concentrations in metropolitan areas (Cready

and Saenz 1997, Livingston 2017), I placed community flyers in Boston and New York City at places such as public libraries, community health centers, street lights, coffee shops, convenience stores, and bookstores. To obtain people from other parts of the country, I found mining my social network and snowball sampling to be the most effective. While I did try utilizing social media by posting participant solicitations on groups focused on parenthood and family life, in general, as well as on interracial couples, these were not as beneficial as the assistance I found from research participants and people in my social network. While most of my social media group postings were ignored or met with resistance (i.e. "Race isn't real – the only real race is the human race"), I received a significant amount of response from people in my social network posting information about my study on their Facebook pages or e-mailing friends and family about my study. Additionally, thanks to one of the research participants, I accidentally stumbled into an online community of Black women who wrote about their experiences in an interracial couple or multi-racial family on weblogs. Many of these women posted information about my study and, from there, many of their readers posted that information on other weblogs and social media outlets. Furthermore, after every interview, I sent participants a thank you e-mail with my contact information and a brief summary of my research summary that I suggested they send along to anyone that may be eligible, if they felt comfortable doing so.

Once I was contacted by a potential participant, I attempted to schedule a time where I could have an introductory phone conversation with them, which served two main purposes. First, it gave me a chance to ensure that participants met the study's eligibility criteria, and, secondly, it gave me an opportunity to establish rapport with them. In our society, discussions about race are often considered taboo or undesirable (Sollors 2000, Bonilla-Silva 2007), and intimate relationships are often relegated to the private realm of people's lives. As a result, I

predicted that some people may be suspicious, nervous, or uncertain about what my research

study held in store for them. Some may find it awkward or unsettling to just meet someone and

immediately answer questions about their relationships that could seem invasive. Therefore, I felt

that establishing rapport before the interview was conducted as crucial. During these

conversations, which were usually no more than 15 minutes, I explained who I was, what the

study was about, why I was interested in pursuing this topic, and what the finished product

would be. In addition to ensuring their eligibility, I also explained the format of the interview and

their rights as a research participant. Throughout the conversation, I encouraged them to ask

questions and, when all the information had been relayed and they had asked all their questions, I

asked them again if they were still interested in the study. These conversations usually occurred

anywhere from days or weeks before the actual interview. In situations where both members of a

couple were being interviewed, I often did this early introductory conversation with only one

partner (usually the female partner), although I occasionally was able to have both members of

the couple present during the conversation. In the case that I was only able to have the

conversation with one member of the couple, I made time directly before the interview began to

give a quick introduction and allow them time to ask questions. After the early introductory

conversation, I sent an interview scheduling e-mail to the participant, as well as the consent form

for them to review. Furthermore, at the start of the interview for all of my participants, I

reviewed the consent form again and gave them time to ask any questions that they may have

still had.

The Interview: Settings & Interview Script

For participants who lived in the Northeast, I conducted their interviews in person since

they were physically accessible, and they were able to choose where they felt comfortable doing

the interview. For participants in the remainder of the country, interviews were done either by

phone or Skype, a voice-over-internet protocol (VOIP) program, by their choosing. While I

originally was trying to ensure that interviews were done either in person or through Skype (due

to the capability of video) so I could observe expressions and body language, I had to relinquish

this plan since some participants were either uncomfortable with the technology, would not be in

a place where they could utilize it during the time of the interview, or had an unstable internet

connection. (For more information on the breakdown of participants by interview method, see

Appendix A.4.)

Participants were interviewed individually once and, when possible, I tried to interview

both members of a couple. My goal in interviewing participants individually is that members of

these relationships may be more candid and forthcoming about issues that may be uncomfortable

to discuss with their partner present. Interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and,

additionally, notes were taken to document body language or other physical artifacts of

importance. The duration of interviews ranged from 41 to 122 minutes with the mean interview

time being 82 minutes and the mode being 94 minutes. Interview length depended upon the

amount of information and detail participants chose to communicate during their interview.

Three participants had their interview split up into two or, in one case, three sessions due to time

constraints in their schedule.

In developing the interview script, I intentionally formulated my questions to be broad

enough in order to not assert any particular assumptions about how race may have operated

within a participant's relationship, including the possibility that race may have been insignificant

to them. Furthermore, it was important for me not to impose any particular definition of

"Whiteness" or "Blackness" since there are multiple ways "to be" White or Black and the fact

that participants' ideas of these concepts could be data for me within itself. When it came to the

type of questions that I asked, I tried to anticipate various situations where race could impact

interactions, whether that was between the two members of the couple or their interactions as a

unit and individually with others' ideas or opinions about their interraciality. However, this also

means that I may have accidentally omitted realms of their lives where race could have an impact

and, thus, my data may not have been exhaustive of the many possible areas where racial

difference had to be managed.

The research questions I was attempting to answer from my interviews involve the

interactions within the confines of the relationship, childrearing, and interactions with others in

public spaces. Therefore, I shaped the interview script (see Appendix B) in order to tap into these

spaces of their lives. However, before delving into these topics, I designed the script to

strategically ease participants into some of the potentially challenging questions, especially for

those who are not comfortable talking about race or, specifically, viewing their relationship in

terms of race. For the majority of participants, after a few minutes of "small talk", the interview

commenced with demographic questions (for my first phase of interviews, some answered those

questions in advance via e-mail to potentially save time during the interview), followed by

questions about their early life, upbringing, and dating history. The questions in the latter

categories also served for me to ascertain the "social geography" (Frankenberg 1993) of the

beginning of their lives, which may have been helpful for me to contextualize later responses in

the interview involving relationships, race, gender, and class. Interestingly, during these

questions, I often found participants theorizing themselves – unprompted – as to how their

upbringing and early dating experiences influenced their decision to date or marry interracially.

I followed that section with questions about the participant's dating history as it pertained

to race and how they met their partner. The dating history question starts to transition

participants to later questions that connect their current romantic relationship to race while still trying to keep the subject matter relatively lighter. More importantly, it gives me an understanding if race has consciously factored into their dating and, if so, how. For instance, some participants discussed never dating outside of their race before meeting their current partner and often proceeded on their own to explain what issues, thoughts or feelings were introduced because of interraciality factor. The question about how they met their current partner provided foundational information about their relationship and served as a natural transition into deeper questions about their relationship. An unplanned benefit was that for participants who were still a bit uncomfortable during the interview, it gave them a chance to reminisce and reflect about their partner and their relationship and often put participants in a pleasant mood.

At this point in the interview the script decidedly focused on questions that were trying to document and disentangle how couples managed their racial differences. These questions were sub-divided into several general sections: friends and family; public interactions with strangers, acquaintances, and co-workers; children, and, in some cases, current events. Questions about interactions with others, including friends and family, were asked with the goal of obtaining examples of situations where race may be an issue and discovering how participants managed these situations individually and as a couple. After a few interviews, I began to run into situations where some participants reported that there were few to no issues with others regarding their relationship. In the United States, race shapes everything from government policies (Provine 2011, Treitler 2013) to assumptions people make about strangers (Quillian and Pager 2001). While their responses positive to hear, it is for this reason that I found myself believing there could still be other ways that racial difference could factor into these relationships that I was not considering. It is important to note that I was not necessarily looking

for all participants to report that race had a bearing on different aspects of their relationship –

however, I did think it was important to be thoroughly in my questioning in an attempt to not

leave "any stone unturned." Probing further, I began to try following up these types of responses

by asking if the participant and their partner ever talked about race. It was a pretty broad question

that resulted in some participants interpreting the question as being about, as one put it,

"philosophical debates about race" and, as result, I was still receiving negating answers

(although a few, in fact, did have those types of conversations). Utilizing my own "experiential

knowledge" (Holstein and Gubrium 2004), I began to regularly probe further at these successive

repeatedly negating answers by asking if they ever discussed race as it pertained to current or

social events and found most participants had, even those who reported that they did not talk

about race or have any negative social interactions with other people. I also found that this

question often triggered other situations where race did have a bearing on an interaction often

within the relationship outside of talking about current events. It was as if relaying an example of

conversations about these topics broadened their concept of how racial differences could have a

bearing on dynamics within the relationship. For example, a participant sharing with me a

disagreement they had about the relevance of race to a news story would cause them to then

remember a separate conversation they had about implicit racial discrimination.

The next series of questions focused on how children related to their relationship, with

the focus being on actual children, if applicable, and for couples without children, questions

about hypothetical children, if they planned to have them. Furthermore, participants who were

parenting children from another relationship with their current partner were asked about their

current children and any possible future children with their partner. The purpose of my questions

in this section was to extract further understandings that the role racial difference can play in

child-rearing, racial identification, and participants' relationship not only with their partner but with others, such as extended family members and strangers.

Questions towards the end of the interview were intentionally broader than the majority of questions in the rest of the interview in order to gain a variety of answers from participants. If there was still time during the interview, I asked participants how they believed the experiences of heterosexual Black-White relationships compared to other heterosexual interracial relationships, and if they thought differently about race after being in an interracial relationship. The former question gave participants an opportunity to report aspects of their experience that I may have failed to inquire about and a way to share their opinions on how race and gender operate in U.S. society. The latter question was to gauge if they felt that they had acquired different perspectives or knowledge about race due to their experiences in their relationship and, if so, what experiences or factors may have resulted in this.

If I found myself running out of time, I would skip the previous section and move to my concluding question, which involved asking participants for further interview question suggestions. My initial decision to include this question was based on my belief that in many ways participants were good informants in more ways than one – not only could they provide answers to my questions but their embodied experiences within their relationships may lead them to ask questions themselves that had not occurred to me. Unintentionally, it also gave some participants an opportunity to mention topics or feelings they had about interracial relationships or race in our country that did not have an opportunity to be shared during the interview.

Sample Description

Before I explain the demographics of my sample, I want to take a moment to address the topic of racial classification in my study. During interviews, I let participants self-identify racially (which, interestingly, often resulted in most Whites and first- or second-generation

Blacks further discussing their ethnic background without my prompting), but, for simplicity, I categorized them into "Black" and "White", with the exception for those who were biracial. For my study, people who are categorized as "Black" are of predominantly African-descent, including those who identified as "African-American", "Afro-Caribbean" or, more with more country-specific origins, like "Nigerian-American." "Whites" are those who identified as having predominantly Anglo or European or Middle Eastern ancestry ("The White Population: 2000"). For participants who were immigrants or the first of their family born in the U.S., I specified when referring to them in the following chapters. I did so not only to highlight the ethnic diversity in my sample – and, in particular, resist the invisibility of Black diversity in this country – but because these identities and cultures of origin can have a bearing on the types of experiences participants have, as well as how they interpret them. In my usage of these racial categories I am not attempting to essentialize race, but, while these racial categories are social constructions, they have material and psychological consequences for people in our society – from how others perceive them to life outcomes (Thomas et al. 2008, Solorzano et al. 2000).

For my study, I had every intention of splitting my sample equally between members of Black women/White men couples and White women/Black men couples. However, due to a number of factors, which I will explain further below, I was unable to do so. Of my 55 participants in my sample, Black women comprise the largest portion with 21 people. White men are the second highest at 15, followed by White women at 11 and Black men at 8. (See Appendix A for charts of sample demographic information.) Most of the participants in my sample are married (37), and 35 people have children. My sample is comprised of members of 21 couples, or 42 people, therefore leaving only 13 people who participated without their partner, the majority of which who are Black women (8). Of the 21 couples, 13 are Black women/White

men couples and 8 are White women/Black men couples, resulting in an overrepresentation of the former. While part of this overrepresentation can be explained by the fact that my master's thesis research was focused exclusively on members of Black women/White men couples, the 8 of the 13 couples actually came from my second participant recruitment phase where I was looking for both types of heterosexual Black/White couples. Some Black women that I interviewed during my first phase of data collection expressed appreciation and excitement that someone was interested in learning about the type of couple they were in, often citing a lack of visibility and representation of these couples in the media and in public. A few of them even went as far as to express disappointment when I later informed them that I was planning to broaden my study demographic to include Black men and White women, usually arguing that there was enough discussion and information in the media on these couples. Therefore, in my case, Black women may have been uniquely motivated to participate in this study, and, since they usually were the ones to contact me first, they often communicated to me that they would convince their partners to participate as well.

Black men/White women couples were more difficult for me to obtain, and I found that White women often mentioned trying to convince their partners to participate to no avail. (Women were usually the first ones to contact me about participating in the study.) However, in the end, White women were almost as effective as Black women in recruiting their partners in the study. My difficulty in recruiting this group could be partially due to "over-exposure" of these couples. Historically, existence of the Black man/White woman couple has been taboo, resulting in them being heavily scrutinized historically and in present day. They may be reluctant to draw attention to themselves and have a researcher who is asking questions about "racial difference" analyze their relationship in a way that may continue to "other" them from same-race

relationships. (For more on positionality, see "Methodological Issues" section.) Furthermore, men may less willing to participant in an uncompensated interview that involves talking about their intimate relationships, which, can potentially involve a certain level of vulnerability with a stranger (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001).

Age & Cohort Effect

Participant ages ranged from 25 to 67, with the median being 38 years. The majority of the sample was born in the post-Civil Rights era and is comprised of the generational cohorts of Generation X (born 1965-1980) and the Millennials (1981-1996), with 21 people and 23 people, respectively (Dimock 2018). The remaining 11 are Baby Boomers (1946-1964). Generational cohort is one of many factors that may influence how participants discuss and view race in general and, more specifically, in regard to their relationship. While there are factors that alter the shared "coming-of-age" for these cohorts, as well as their perceptions of understandings of the world, the strongest line of demarcation is between the Baby Boomers and the subsequent generations.

For those eldest members of my sample who were born in the U.S., many of them came of age at a time where segregation was still the norm in many parts of the U.S. and interracial relationships were either illegal or highly taboo (depending on the state). In many ways, they were a dangerous venture, as was evidenced by the brutal murder of Emmett Till, who was killed after being falsely accused of making advances at a White woman (Pérez-Peña 2017). Generation X and Millennials came of age in the post-Civil Rights Era, and they were more likely than previous generations to live and work in integrated communities. They also came of age in the era of "colorblind racism" – a more implicit form of racism where "whites rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and black' imputed cultural limitations" while denying the realities of systemic

racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). They do not have the same memories of segregation as their parents

and grandparents do and, in many ways, are still growing at a time where the largest portion of

Americans in history have said to support interracial relationships (Newport 2013), and Barack

Obama, who is a child of an Kenyan man and a White American woman, was elected president

of the United States.

There are a multitude of ways that a participant's membership in a generational cohort

can have a bearing on their perspectives on race and its significance (or insignificance), how they

interpret social interactions with others, their expectations of family members regarding their

relationship, and how they view the effect of race within their relationship. Participants who

came of age during the "colorblind" era may be more likely to espouse colorblind rhetoric or

may be less likely to view possessing certain ideologies about race as being tied to one's racial

identity. For example, although Baby Boomers only make up 20% of my sample, they were more

likely to express futility at attempting to come to a consensus with their partner on racial issues

or even having racial discussions due to believing that their racial differences – including their

upbringing, life outlook and experiences – were too divergent and, thus, their racial

understandings were immutable. Conversely, Generation X and Millennial participants were

more likely to enter into racial discussions with the assumption that they could come to a

common understanding. Additionally, these cohort differences may not only effect participants'

relationships to the concept of race but also to intimate relationships as well. Generational

differences about gender roles may affect how couples handle conflicts regarding race, as well as

their management of racial reactions.

Relationship Duration & Life Cycle Effect

Relationship duration ranged from 1 year to 36 years, with the median being 8 years. This

rich range has given me the ability to looks at the experiences and perceptions of members of

these couples at different phases in their relationship (dating, cohabitation, engagement, marriage, children, and retirement) and how different issues can come up according to the phase. The types of discussions that occur and how these discussions are executed may be different for a couple who is in the early stages in their relationship, as opposed to a couple who has been together for a decade and has children. I was also fortunate to be able to interview three couples who had been together for three decades or longer, giving me an interesting look into how their experiences have changed not only within their relationship as they enter different phases of the life course, but also how the societal change in the perception of these couples has affected their social interactions with others and their own relationship.

The majority of participants reside in the Northeast (51% of sample or 28 people) and in urban areas. The majority of my sample is college-educated, with 78% (or 43 people) having obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, almost half of those people have obtained a graduate degree, making them 36% of my sample (20 people). (See Appendix A for detailed charts.) While some research has found correlations between educational status and the likelihood to be in an interracial relationship (Yancey 2002, Qian 1997), it is not conclusive as other studies have found no correlation. I consider the majority of my sample to be middle-class based upon their educational status and occupation.

Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks
Theoretical Frameworks
Intersectional Theory

Due to my focus on the interaction of race and gender in the lives of my participants, I am employing intersectional theory, which argues that race, class, and gender simultaneously interact as a "matrix of domination" that results in a system of inequality that is institutional, symbolic, and individual (McCall 2014; Collins 1993; Walby, Armstrong and Strid 2012). These

categories of difference are "fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being

created by dynamics of power" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013:795) and are interdependent

in that they are symbiotically shaped by one another (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 237). Based

on this theory, it could be argued that the experiences of interracial couples within and "with

out" their relationship are affected by the intersection of race, class and gender to culminate in a

unique experience for each member of these relationships. Furthermore, this would result in a

different cumulative experience for various configurations of interracial couples.

Intersectional theory was developed primarily by Black female scholars and was borne

out of an absence of the critique and critical understanding of the experiences of Black women in

areas such as feminist theory, critical race studies, and queer theory. As Crenshaw (1989)

explains,

> I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are
> both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black
> men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white
> women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black
> men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination -- the combined effects of
> practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And
> sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race
> and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (p. 149)

In recent decades, intersectional theory has moved from focusing primarily on Black women to

being applied to understanding the lived experiences of other multiply-marginalized populations.

Due to the origins of this theoretical orientation, the relatively little analysis and deconstruction

of whiteness, particularly white masculinity, is an understandable outcome. However, I argue

that since these categories of difference are mutually constituted by one another (Crenshaw

1991), sociologists can gain a better understanding of the experiences of multiply-marginalized

populations by understanding the experiences of those who are multiply-privilege, especially the

archetype of privilege in our society, which is the White middle/upper-class heterosexual,

cisgender male. Therefore, the inclusion of the analysis of White men's experiences within these

relationships – specifically, being publicly paired with a Black woman, who faces gender and

racial oppression – is meaningful and necessary. In the words of Carbado (2013),

> framing whiteness outside intersectionality legitimizes a broader epistemic
> universe in which the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of
> white people travel invisibly and undisturbed as race-neutral phenomena over and
> against the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of people of
> color. (p. 823-24)

Symbolic Interactionism

Since my data analysis in many ways involves understanding the symbolism of race,

gender and interracial intimacy and their meanings, I will be employing a symbolic interactionist

approach to interpret participants' narratives. As Blumer (1969) explains,

> Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings…the meaning of such
> things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has…these
> meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by
> the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

Social interaction is a plethora of symbols with associated meanings that are within a specific

cultural, historical, and social context that help humans to produce meaning from them. From

when one of these couples walks down the street to some of the verbal exchanges about race that

occur within these relationships – these all are imbued with meanings that are "read" and

interpreted by everyone involved. I will be imposing an intersectional theoretical framework

onto symbolic interactionist methods of analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, since I am

seeking to understand not just how they interpret these interactions but also the social processes

behind them, I found interviews to be the most appropriate medium to achieve these goals.

Conceptual Framework: Racialized Gender Ideologies

For my conceptual framework, I am employing racialized gender ideologies to my

analysis of these couples. Just like race and gender, these ideologies shape everything about our

world from socialization to public policy. However, there has been less of an academic focus on

how hegemonic ideologies surrounding masculinity and femininity can impact how couples

manage these reactions. In the veins of sociological and feminist theories, hegemonic

masculinity and femininity are considered dramaturgical in nature (Goffman 1963, Chafetz 1990,

Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) where "gender is a socially scripted dramatization of the culture's

idealization of feminine and masculine natures" (West and Zimmerman 1987:130). Hegemonic

masculinity -- which is based off heterosexual, cisgender White, middle class ideals – includes

characteristics of independence, assertiveness, dominance, strength, control, rationality, and

autonomy (Kilmartin 1999, West and Zimmerman 1987, Wetherell and Edley 1999) and exists

within a context where manhood is considered something that must be earned and constantly

reclaimed (Quinn 2002, Schwalbe 2005). Hegemonic femininity, which is based off the same

heterosexist, classist and racist ideals, includes the complementary characteristics of

submissiveness, domesticity, "daintiness", and agreeableness (Morris 2007, West and

Zimmerman 1987).

Scholars of color took feminists' dissections of hegemonic gender performance and

nuanced them even further by incorporating racist implications and consequences of these

ideologies. When these ideals of masculinity and femininity do not include people of color, how

do they negotiate them with their sense of self? These ideals of masculinity and femininity are

defined by what they are not supposed to be – poor, gay/lesbian, transgender Black. Throughout

most of the history of the United States, Black men have been defined as lazy, incompetent, in

need of control, and physically strong (while being morally weak), and Black women have been

constructed as unrestrained, angry, argumentative, unchaste, emasculating, and masculine in

character and physique (Collins 2004, Evans and Moore 2018, Lewis 2013). In spite of these

stereotypes, Black people still operate in a world where they – and others – are socialized to see

hegemonic masculinity and femininity as the respectable standard. This can result in complicated

situations where they are caught in between trying to manage racist and sexist stereotypes while

also negotiating these ideals of [White] gender performance (Wingfield 2007). For example,

Wilkins (2012) observed how middle-class Black men invoked the strategy of "moderate

Blackness" to negotiate between avoiding stereotypes of the "angry Black man" and to meet

hegemonic masculine ideals of assertiveness and dominance. However, this tension may not

always result in compromising results. By contrast, Morris (2007) found that young Black

women attempted to resist expectations of hegemonic femininity and redefine the negative

stereotypes of Black femininity as outspoken and un-submissive as positive and empowering

aspects of their identity. It would stand to reason that these obstacles do not cease when one is in

an interracial relationship. Furthermore, are these tensions complicated during public interactions

by the fact of dating someone of a different race and gender who is more likely to match these

ideals of hegemonic masculinity and femininity due to their race and class?[3]

Data Analysis Methodology

Due to my focus on social interaction in my research, I largely applied Glaser and

Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach to qualitative research. It is not necessarily a

methodology but an approach to qualitative analysis that includes theoretical sampling, use of

coding analysis, and views data collection and analysis as interrelated practices (Strauss 1987,

Corbin and Strauss 1990). There were some instances, however, where I did deviate from this

approach, particularly when it comes to sampling and literature. In theoretical sampling,

participants are chosen according to emergent theories and concepts (Charmaz 2006; Glaser

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[3] The majority of my sample participants are middle-class.

1978). Since my research questions were specifically in regards to the dynamics within

Black/White heterosexual intimate couples, I intentionally sought out people within those

relationships, resulting in purposeful sampling.

Secondly, there is a debate between Glaser and the team of Strauss and Corbin about the

role of literature in grounded theory. Glaser (1992) argues that emerging theory should been

developed from the data before consulting with the literature in an attempt to prevent the data

analysis process from being too influenced by the pre-existing literature, thus impeding the

development of theory. In other words, the theory and data of other scholars may bias the

researcher against seeing certain patterns or viewing their data through the theoretical lens of the

work of others. Strauss and Corbin (1990), on the other hand, recommend utilizing the literature

before embarking on the data collection process for a few reasons, such as to develop theoretical

sensitivity and to inspire research questions. Keeping both approaches in mind, I engaged with

the literature in a limited manner in order to assist in constructing my research design and to

somewhat sensitize myself to potential data. However, I largely followed Glaser's approach and

let the data guide me to the pertinent literature. As nascent themes began to emerge from the

data, I would review relevant literature and then analyze the data, looking for ways in which it

corroborated, contradicted or added to existing research. This was a circuitous process where I

would continuously move between consulting the literature and taking that knowledge to further

analyze themes and develop theoretical findings. Additionally, throughout this process, I would

introduce further probing questions into my interviews with participants once I began to see

strong emerging themes.

For my data analysis, I employed inductive-thematic coding, which entails open coding

(initial code extraction), axial coding (connecting initial codes and developing overarching

analytic categories or themes), and selective coding (further analysis of cases that illustrate the emerged themes) (Miles and Huberman 1984, Strauss 1987). The themes were obtained inductively from the participants' narratives and not from a pre-determined list of concepts.

For my thesis research, I had done my coding by hand and since it was successful, I attempted to use this traditional approach again for my dissertation research. However, I quickly found that this approach, which worked well for 20 interviews, was unwieldy for close to 60 interviews. Therefore, I decided to use ATLAS.ti software for my coding – as well as interview transcription, and research memos. ATLAS.ti is qualitative data analysis (QDA) software that allows the researcher to organize and analyze data systematically and in a way that may allow certain connections and findings to be made that may otherwise be difficult to ascertain with large research projects.

After switching to QDA software, I continued with my open coding of my transcripts where I took note of participants' interactions, perceptions, and actions. Over time, my initial descriptive coding became more conceptual as I began to see patterns forming in my interviews. As I moved on to axial coding, I began to organize my codes into "code families," or code groups, in ATLAS.ti that allowed me to see over-arching themes. This, in return, assisted me in moving to the final phase of coding, which is selective coding, where I focused primarily on coding aspects of the interviews that pertained to these themes, as well as refining the coding relevant aspects of previous interviews. ATLAS.ti also allowed me to easily divide interviews into demographic groups, in this case by only gender, by only race, and then by gender and race, which made it easier for me to see patterns that were associated with the categories.

Throughout all of this, I wrote research memos that assisted in extracting themes and developing concepts, and ATLAS.ti has a useful functionality that lets you link memos to codes

or quotations. While the software has the ability to allow the user to create diagrams that are linked to quotations or codes to assist in developing thematic connections and theoretical insights, I found diagramming by hand to be the easiest and most intuitive option for me. The use of diagramming was key for me due to the visual component, which made it easier at times for me to strengthen developing theories and, in some cases, to realize when I was drawing inaccurate conclusions. In addition, while developing my analysis, I sought out negative cases in order to strengthen or modify my conclusions.

Methodological Issues
Positionality

Like with any research study, there are always methodological limitations. When doing interview-based research, one must take into account their positionality, the positionality of the research participants, potential power disparities, and the issues of memory recall (Holostein and Gubrium 2004, DeVault and Gross 2012).I entered this study possessing a number of identities – Black, female, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, Southern US-born-and-raised, multi-ethnic (African-American and South African), doctoral candidate, member of a Black-White interracial couple, etc. – that were not always evident to the participant at the time and the saliency of certain characteristics varied depending on the participant. For most of my participants entering the interview, my gender and race were evident, although I had some during phone interviews who did not know my racial identity and inquired. Depending on the participant, when certain information about my background was disclosed, I could sometimes sense an increased level of comfortability. For example, if an immigrant or a child of immigrants learned that my father was a South African immigrant, I could sometimes hear an increased cheerfulness in their voice as they reacted, and they often followed up with related comments or questions. However, the less evident identities could also result in awkwardness, as it did in a situation where a participant

made some negative comments about Southern Americans. After pausing for a moment, he then said he hoped I was not from "the South" and then proceeded to ask me if I was. While I made it clear that I did not take offense to his comments, I could see that he felt uncomfortable.

An aspect of my identity that I found surprisingly salient for a number of middle-class Blacks I spoke with involving my self-expression as a Black person. When discussing their childhoods or their dating history, a number of these participants mentioned struggling with their conception of their Black identity as someone who was often told they "talked White" or "acted White," or, in some cases, at least struggling to some extent with society's expectations of "Blackness." Some of them even attempted to state their case to me as to why they were still Black despite their self-expressions, interests and/or being in a relationship with a White person. After explaining that I had many similar experiences and still occasionally do, they would get excited and wanted to chat briefly about it.

For Whites, especially in our "colorblind" and "post-racial" era, issues and thoughts on race can be something that is difficult to vocalize or even comprehend, especially when one considers that most Whites operate in a world where they view race as something that only really applies to non-Whites and not to themselves (DiAngelo 2011, Gallagher 2003). However, research (Killian 2012, Frankenberg 2013) on interracial couples show that White members of these couples do have to think about it, at least in their interactions with others, and probably more than Whites in same-race relationships. The same work even suggests that Whites in relationships with Blacks have to endure this more than Whites in relationships with non-Black racial minorities. However, this does not necessarily mean that they spend a significant portion of time thinking about it or developing a complex understanding of it. Furthermore, as a Black woman, White participants in my study may have been more self-conscious about what they said

out of fear that I would be offended and/or consider them racist. By contrast, while Blacks do

share some of the hegemonic, "colorblind" views on race, they tend to be more comfortable

talking about race and more frank in their discussion of it (Bonilla-Silva 2010, Chito Childs

2005).

It is also important to note my positionality as a Black woman as being a potentially

significant factor that has shaped my sample composition. While this may make Black women

and, potentially, White men more comfortable with talking with me, this may have the opposite

effect with Black men and White women due to the stereotype of Black women being against

Black men/White women relationships. Not only has this been discussed quite a bit in the media

in the last decade, but it has also been studied by scholars, including research on Black

men/White women couples who often mention Black women as being a possible antagonistic

threat (Hildebrandt 2002, Childs 2005b). In fact, I even found this sentiment expressed in my

interviews. Towards the beginning of my first recruitment phase, I began to use my picture for

social media solicitations at the suggestion of one of my participants. Her argument was that

there are a lot of "creeps" online and, considering that I was asking to talk to people in these

already-stigmatized couples about their intimate relationship, people may feel more comfortable

if they could put a face to a name. However, I did not do this in any e-mails that I sent out to my

social network or in my flyers. When I started my second phase of recruitment and broadened

my sample to include Black men/White women relationships, I found myself struggling to obtain

these particular participants and, when some people did contact me to indicate their interest, I

struggled in retaining them. I removed my photo from any of my solicitations, but I made the

choice to keep a line that did indicate my positionality. I did so with the hopes that if a potential

participant did discover that I was a Black woman, which they could easily do with a quick

Google search, they may feel more comfortable with the fact that I was also in an interracial relationship with a White man. While this may have been reassuring for some, it may have unconvincing for others.

Interviewer-Participant Power Dynamic

Feminist scholars argue that the relationship between the researcher/interviewer and participant possesses inherent power inequality, with the former having more power (DeVault and Gross 2012). While the participant does volunteer for the study, the researcher determines the questions and walks away from the interview with information about the participant's life that they can use in the way that they see fit. It also cannot be forgotten that this data will be used to write peer-reviewed papers and/or books that can be used to advance one's career or bank account. The participant, on the other hand, supplies information about their thoughts, feelings and life and, while hopefully they walk away from the interview with a positive experience, they nonetheless do not gain any type of material advances from this work.

I attempted to subvert this power dynamic in several ways, while also understanding that there is a limit as to how much this dynamic can be diminished. First and foremost, when conducting my introductory conversations with participants, I explained to them the purpose of my research and what research questions I was seeking to answer. While this sounds like an easy task, it was somewhat awkward for me to begin my first conversation with people I did not know and talk about "racial difference," especially when a significant portion of literature on interracial couples shows that many prefer to ignore or minimize racial differences (Killian 2003, Osuji 2011). However, I felt it was important for participants to be willing to engage only in research that they felt comfortable with and to not possibly feel trust was violated once they realized what the topic was.

I also wanted to combat the inherent unfairness in the one-way interview/data flow process where the participant provides potential access to past intimate moments and their innermost feelings and thoughts. Therefore, the second strategic choice I made was to encourage participants to ask me any questions that they wished in regards to my experiences. I initially offered this at the beginning of the interview so they could ask questions throughout it. However, I began to realize that, in some cases, this could detract time away from my interview protocol and extend the time of the interview. Therefore, I eventually offered this after the interview was completed (in addition to me offering this during our introductory phone conversation). For some participants, this was a particularly exciting opportunity, especially for those who did not know any other interracial couples or, for Black women, who did not know any Black women in relationships with White men. Questions I received often involved my experiences with interacting with in-laws, public social interactions, and any strategies I developed for dealing with negative social interactions.

Conclusion

Lastly, although this is not uncommon, I offered to share my research findings with participants if they were interested. For example, with the M.A. portion of my research, I e-mailed participants a summary of the study sample characteristics, a short list of the study findings, and then explained which findings I chose to focus on for my thesis and why I chose them. Furthermore, I supplied them with a short suggested reading list and told them I would inform them if and when a peer-reviewed paper was published, which I could supply to anyone who requested it. Lastly, since so many of them voluntarily shared photos of themselves with their partners (to my surprise), I felt I should repay the gesture and included a recent wedding photo of myself and my partner. Why this summary seems more intensive than one would expect, it was partially a result of trends I observed from my research sample. A significant

number of them asked questions about what was known about Black-White interracial couples and, more specifically, Black women and White men. (The M.A. sample was exclusively Black women and White men.) Some also asked for books they could read to learn more. I plan to repeat this same communication for my dissertation research as well.

<p style="text-align:center">Chapter 3
*Race, Gender and Heteronormativity in the
Management of Negative Public Interactions*</p>

*The issue is that in certain circumstances the social identity of those an individual
is with can be used as a source of information concerning his own social identity,
the assumption being that he is what the others are.*

- *Erving Goffman, PhD, Stigma: Notes on the Management
of Spoiled Identity (1963)*

Introduction

Sociologists and psychologists have gained a number of insights into the negative social

interactions that Black/White heterosexual couples experience, including the type of reactions

they receive and their chosen responses. In recent years, more research has emerged

interrogating the ways in which race and gender factor into these experiences, but there has yet

to be a focused inquiry into the ways in which ideologies of heteronormative masculinity and

femininity factor into these responses. Most research tends to focus on generalized

understandings of how members of these couples manage these situations, with some attention

given to how race and gender intersect to influence the types of strategies used. However, less

attention has been given to understanding what role men and women's understanding of

masculinity and femininity play in this. Do their understandings about what is gender appropriate

influence how they react to negative comments or stares? How does race interact to further

complicate this? Does it complicate things in similar ways for people of the same race?

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which heteronormative racialized notions of

masculinity and femininity affect the lens through which members of these couples view

negative public interactions and their chosen management methods. How do racialized

heteronormative masculinities and femininities influence the ways in which members of these

couples choose to respond? Do they simply shape the type of responses they utilize, or are they also used as "tools" in understanding and handling of negative public interactions? I argue that the ways in which interracial couples manage negative interactions are not solely determined by the structural oppressive systems of racism and sexism, but also by internalized notions of heteronormative behavior. My findings reveal that the maintenance of masculinity factors into how men negotiate taboos around the interraciality of their relationships, while feminine norms resulted in women utilizing strategies that involved intra-relational work with their partners and individual, internal work. These conceptions of masculinity and femininity not only influence how members of these couples perceive incidences, but they also impact what management strategies they choose to engage in. These racialized gender guides to established boundaries for these strategies, how members of these couples talked about negative public interactions and, in some cases, were transformed into a tool for management.

I begin this examination by looking into how White men emotionally recover from the negative reactions of others by re-asserting their autonomy and individualism and how they use their race and gender privilege as tools to gain control in certain situations. I continue by exploring how Black men maintain their masculinity by engaging in alternative management strategies to provide a sense of protection and safety to their partner, as well as gain control. In comparison to White men, Black men have to contend with racial constraints while attempting to maintain their masculinity. Since femininity is not constructed as something that has to be earned or maintained, women's management strategies were more about the limitations femininity places on public behaviors. I will look at how Black women managed public scrutiny by both engaging in public resistance and methods of avoidance. I then discuss White women's reliance on strategies in the private realm of the relationship, which may give them a way to manage

these scenarios while maintaining White femininity. I close this chapter with some remaining

thoughts on the similarities and differences that arise among members of these couples when

negotiating these interactions.

Literature Review
Interracial Couples, Types of Negative Public Interactions & Management

Although the majority of Americans report approving of interracial marriage (Jones 2011),

members of Black/White interracial couples continue to report negative public interactions,

including stares, comments and, in some cases, violence (Craig-Henderson 2011; Troy, Lewis-

Smith and Laurenceau 2006, Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990, Killian 2003). These types of

negative reactions can occur at times when they least expect them and in virtually all arenas of

their lives, including at school, work, and during interactions with family members and friends.

Considering the variety of negative interactions they may encounter, it is sensible that members

of these couples may employ a variety of strategies to manage these interactions – from ignoring

the actions of others to engaging in intentionally positive impression management (Datzman and

Gardner 2000, Killian 2003, Childs 2005a).

Race, Gender & Negative Public Interactions

Researchers have demonstrated that race and gender have an impact on the types of reactions

that couples receive and how they respond to them. For example, Black partners are more likely

to notice negative reactions (Datzman and Gardner 2000), and women report being

disproportionately impacted by negative interactions (Miller, Olson & Fazio 2004, Twine 2010).

In the workplace, Hildebrandt (2002) found Black men were more likely to conceal the

interraciality of their relationship for fears of repercussions, while White men were the most

open about the race of their partner. While studies are increasingly looking at the influences of

race, gender and class identities, there is little focus on the how heteronormative, racialized

conceptions of masculinity and femininity play in role in how individuals in these relationships negotiate public spaces. However, it would reason that these would shape how members of these relationships think they should respond to others, as well as to their partners during these uncomfortable situations. For instance, in her research on Black/White intimate couples, Steinbugler (2012) found management strategies for negotiating public visibility varied depending on sexual orientation of the couple, as well as the configuration of race and gender. While heteronormativity should not be conflated with heterosexuality, Steinbugler's research indicates how understandings of heterosexuality and homosexuality can shape couples' perceptions of their management options. In what other ways can social interaction management be affected?

Race and gender influence these responses because the construction of these identities is informed by ideologies of what is appropriate or possible behavior for certain people. Within these ideas of what Blackness or Whiteness means or what it means to be a woman or a man lies assumptions of appropriate heterosexual behavior within those identities. Men and women contend with hegemonic masculinity and femininity, respectively – both of which are based upon middle-class, heterosexual ideals of Whiteness and involve characteristics such as independence, strength and control for men and submissiveness, domesticity and agreeableness for women (Wetherell and Edley 1999, Brannon 1976, Johnson 2013). For people of color, in this particular case Black women and men, they must also additionally manage constructions of Black femininity and Black masculinity (Collins 2005), which often involve managing negative stereotypes about Blackness. For instance, this can mean for Black women negotiating between discourse advocating adherence to norms of traditional White femininity, such as docility, and expectations of adherence to the "Black superwoman" ideal. For Black participants, how are

these competing ideologies managed while also contending with taboo of interracial relationships?

Interracial Couples & Negative Public Interactions: A Too Common Occurrence

When I embarked upon my interviews, I had expected to hear from participants about how they negotiated these public incidences together – either preceding the event, in the moment, or afterwards. However, gendered patterns of self-reported reactions to these events developed, where men often spoke of these events in terms of their individual actions in the moment, and women speaking more of discussions with their partners or their individual management strategies. Virtually all participants in my study shared experiences of negative public interactions, with the most frequently cited types being stares, comments, and people being unable to tell that they were a couple – also known as "visual dislocation" (Steinbugler 2012). The only two exceptions were Sam, a 26-year-old White man, and Leslie, a 41-year-old Black woman – although Leslie did point out that while she did not see evidence of it, her husband Joshua does. Participants people did not necessarily manage negative public interactions in consistent ways and often managed situations on a case-by-case basis, and two people within the same relationship may have chosen to respond to the same or similar events in different ways. In the following sections, I will describe the types of situations members of these couples encounter and how their perceptions and responses to these situations are influenced by heteronormative racialized masculinity/femininity. Due to the dually-privileged identity that White men possess, I have intentionally chosen to begin this section with their accounts as a comparison point for other groups to illustrate how significantly not possessing race and/or class privilege can impact the experiences of the negative interactions.

White Men: Recovery through Re-Asserting White Male Masculinity

Compared to Black men, White men were more likely to report encounter stares and

visual dislocation – or invisibility -- of their relationship and less likely to mention comments or

discrimination. White men were more likely to discuss these interactions with surprise and anger

– either during the interview or as their emotional state at the time of the event – and viewed

them as infringing on their sense of agency, an inherent aspect of hegemonic White masculinity.

For these men, these negative interactions put the privileges of White masculinity in

disequilibrium and create insecurity, which they rectified primarily by taking actions that re-

asserted their sense of autonomy and individualism, as well as using their White male privilege

as a tool to take control of situations where they felt the need to manage the prejudices of others.

In other words, White men responded to negative public interactions by engaging in actions that

attempted to restore their masculinity and, as a result, their privilege.

Autonomy and Individualism
Verbal/physical engagement/confrontation

One of the methods White men used to re-assert their autonomy was through verbally and/or

physically responding to the negative reactions of others. Of the nine White men who shared

how they reacted to these situations, seven of them reported directly engaging with others who

commented or stared at them. The type of response White men used tended to mirror the

negative interaction – if someone made a negative comment, they were more likely to respond in

kind, and if someone stared, they talked of staring back. While physical responses tended to be

relatively subtler, they still were effective means to communicate White men's displeasure. An

example of this was when Leslie's husband Joshua, a 41-year-old White educator, saw a Black

man staring at them while they were sitting on the subway:

> *We were on the subway about...maybe a month ago, and...I think I had my arm*
> *around my wife, and there was an African-American man sitting across from me,*
> *staring at me. So, I stare back and then he eventually -- he got off the train. I don't*

know. Does he want to say something to me? Does it bother him that I am, um,
that I am with a woman that looks like him?

For Joshua, he interpreted this situation as an affront to his personal sense of agency and

individuality. To him, the Black man sitting across from him had no right to question – even

silently through staring – his relationship with his wife, regardless of her race. In addition to his

reciprocal staring, he maintained his arm over his wife Leslie an assertion of his "possession" of

his wife – an action that temporarily objectifies her in a silent challenge between two men.

While other participants spoke of physical responses, the majority of White men

discussed verbal responses. Some participants spoke of challenging people who made negative

comments to them or their partner, something that Paul, a 32-year-old White businessman, told

me he has done several times:

> *I've been called an N-word lover. That was an eye-opener. So, I got called that by*
> *a White person, and I took offense to that and I said....this is the 2000s, not*
> *1950....I can date who I want to date. If you're not happy with it, maybe you*
> *should check your married life or your dating life.*

Similar to Joshua, Paul also interpreted this person's comment as a challenge to his personal

choice and right to "date who [he] want[s] to date." What is particularly interesting within this

account from Paul is that that he seemed to have taken more offense to the attempt to restrict his

actions than to the virulent racism embedded within the White man's comment, which is

indicative of the degree to which he found this challenge to his White male agency offensive.

While most White men discussed these actions in terms that spoke to the importance of

autonomy, Paul also drew attention to one of the other purposes these public responses may

provide for White men – a sense of being a protector to their partner:

> *I would actually look at somebody staring at me and be, like, 'What? Do I have a*
> *hair out of place?' I would just make stupid comments that would make them feel*
> *uncomfortable. That's kind of how a cope with those types of comments. I try to do*

> *my best to make my date or whoever it may be at the time, make them feel*
> *comfortable that I got their back.*

Confronting – either verbally or physically – allows White men to recover from situations that may compromise their sense of self as men in potentially multiple ways: gaining a sense of control over the situation, exhibiting strength, and demonstrating to themselves and their partner that they are able to provide protection. All of these functions as means for them to recover from the encroachment of others' tangible disapproval by re-asserting their masculinity to others, as well as themselves.

Expressions of indifference

Another method White men utilized to regain a sense of autonomy and control in these interactions was projecting an image of indifference to the negative behavior of others. While physical and verbal engagement with "offenders" was a means by which White men proved their autonomy externally to others – and internally to themselves – expression of indifference was internal work they did to recover their sense of self. I specifically refer to these actions as "expressions" because most White male participants' statements of indifference were contradicted by other admissions during the interview. While, like many others in my study, they did find these negative interactions to be disconcerting, they were significantly more likely than other groups in the study to state their indifference. By comparison, women in my study were more likely than men to explicitly share that they found these interactions frustrating, hurtful and, at times, confusing, and Black men often minimized their feelings about these encounters. While only four engaged in this, it is a part of the various means White men may use re-assert their autonomy. For 49-year-old Philip, an educator, he explained his lack of concern as coming with age:

> *It might be that I'm 49, and, quite frankly, I don't care if somebody is looking at me when I'm walking down the street, so maybe I don't pay attention to it as much. It could be happening everyday and, honestly, I don't care.*

Others connected it primarily to either their personality or, like Paul, the immorality of others having a problem with the interraciality of their relationship.

> *You know…I usually just laugh it off….I like to kind of confront stuff like that… We all bleed red, and…it should not matter. And I would say that most of my flack came from Black men….I've gotten the comments. My date at the time would get the comments when I'm sitting there, and I just…I just kind of brush it off. You know…I don't know if it's a [regional thing] or a territorial thing. You know, I'm under the impression, you know, it doesn't matter who you are, as long as you're happy, and, unfortunately, some people don't look at it that way…*

In this quote, Paul exemplifies this indifference contradiction by attempting to portray himself as a man who "laugh[s] off" these gestures and does not dwell on them, but then he also states that he likes to "confront" these people (something that was exemplified earlier in this section). He simultaneously reifies his masculinity by portraying himself as one who is indifferent but also is confrontational when challenged by other men, who he describes as being primarily Black. His speculation if these comments are "territorial" also reveals his awareness of the role of masculinity in these scenarios where, once again, Black women are relegated to objects within a dispute over racialized masculinities.

For White men, not only do their race and gender identity guide what they consider to be appropriate ways of responding to the comments and stares of others, but they also influence the goals of their responses. Recovering and re-asserting their sense of masculinity restores their sense of self. The importance of being able to engage in the heteronormative masculinity recovery process during or after these interactions can be seen in how some of these men may feel if they are unable to do so, which Kurt, a 37-year-old administrator, explains below:

> *Sometimes--in the early days when we would get a lot of abuse, uh, because of where I lived, you know, I was...I was a little insecure about, um...about Black*

men and what they thought of it. Um...so I might not of, like, quickly blurted that out to Renee, but, I mean, she definitely knows. That eventually came up. But, yeah, for a while, I was sort of on the defensive, like, kind of, um, assuming we would get looks or get issues. Like, also, there was--Black dudes had no problem, kind of, talking at Renee in right front of me and that was [sighs]...that sucked. So, like, I was, I didn't intimidate these guys at all, and I think they felt they had a free pass to say whatever they would want to to Renee....because I'm just some mild-mannered White guy. What am I gonna do? [slight chuckle]

Kurt references an understanding among men that when they are in public with their partner, that other men will respect their relationship by not making sexual advances or behave aggressively with their partner. In Kurt's eyes, Black men disrespecting this unwritten rule is a reflection upon the worthiness of his masculinity and, as a result, feels emasculating. The importance of racialized masculinities is not lost on Kurt either. By describing himself as powerless, "mild-mannered White guy," he draws upon stereotypes of Black male potency and virility and, by contrast, White male impotency in the face of this. It is also important to note that this unwritten rule among men is in fact a falsehood in many ways, one of the most important being that for most of American history, for Black men, this was not an assumption they could make when it came to White men's regard for Black men's wives and girlfriends.

Being in control
Strategic use of disclosure

White men used their race and gender privileges as tools to attempt to control the content of conversations with others in their lives to prevent anything negative being said about their relationship, in part to psychologically protect themselves. By contrast, other groups either assumed or learned from experience that this is more likely to be ineffective for them. For instance, Dave, a 34-year-old educator, shared with me not only how he shames co-workers into not making racist comments around him, but also how he strategically ascertains who is racist.

I like to not tell people…to find out what they really think. Because I've had people say things to me and show me their true colors…so, um, I've always waited and then…most of the time people are surprised and, um…depends on who

> *it is....At first it was like protectin' myself because I didn't want to have any issues with people, but then after a while it was---I got a little older and a little more confident, I guess, I was kinda doing my own social experiment to see what people would think...there was a guy at work who said some things to me and, uh...it was a little disturbing and, uh...It was before [he found out that Dave's wife was Black]. I forget exactly what he said...and a couple days later I mentioned it [the race of his wife] to him, and he was really embarrassed.*

Dave intentionally and strategically conceals the race of his wife to allow time to determine who around him is racist since if they knew earlier, they would likely conceal it from him. His act of embarrassing or shaming his co-worker enables him to recover from any hurt or anger he felt at his co-worker's previous comments and discourages similar comments from being made in the future. Furthermore, Dave is able to exert control by giving himself time to determine who he can trust and by controlling the commentary of co-workers in his vicinity. What is particularly notable about his disclosure is an absence of any concern that this revelation would have a detrimental effect on him at work, thus allowing him to utilize it as a tool to influence others to monitor their conversations with him in the future.

Jake, a 31-year-old engineer, also discussed taking similar actions by strategically disclosing the race of his wife to control and prevent any possibly racist conversations at the workplace.

> *I work in an environment where there's not a lot of, uh...Black people in the area that I'm working in. It's a high tech company and I feel that there not doing a very good job of recruiting and stuff like that, but that's a separate issue. Because of that, it kind of leads itself to...it could lead itself to comments or, uh, I don't know, either a joke or something like that. So, I feel that with co-workers...it's like I want to tell them. You know, like, and I don't feel like everyone will say something, but just based off of some people's personalities, like they're kind of a jokster or something like that, I want to try to get it out there that, 'Oh, my wife's Black' or something like that...or, even if I have told them, I want to keep reiterating. [laughs]*

As with Dave, Jake did not express any concern about repercussions at work, and while he did acknowledge that it can at times be awkward for him to find a way to mention his wife's race, he

felt it was more important to protect himself from hurtful or offensive statements about the race of his wife and daughter. Furthermore, their actions not only protect them but also give them a sense of protecting their loved ones. What is interesting about Jake and Dave's approaches is the underlying assumption that they can have influence over the action of others, and, according to them, their approaches are in fact effective.

Negative public interactions are fundamentally different for White men than for most others in my study. Their race and gender affect not only how they interpret these situations but also what their management options are, and, due to the way in which White hegemonic masculinity is constructed, these interactions can be perceived as threats to their masculinity. By essentially "doing" White male masculinity, they recoup from these judgmental stares and angry comments. However, at times, their management strategies can engage with Black masculinity and femininity in ways that are troubling and reflect a history of how White masculinity has been framed in response to these other racialized gender identities. While White men identified White and Black people as being problems for them, the fact that White men disproportionately cited Black men as expressing problems with their relationship makes their manner of response more fraught. Comments or stares volleyed back and forth between White men and Black men at times render these interactions as a competition of racialized masculinities over Black womanhood. As will be discussed in the next section, White men were able to respond to Black men's comments in a way that Black men in relationships with White women did not feel they had the ability to do because of their race. Furthermore, while some White men acknowledged possible reasons as to why Black men responded negatively – often citing the social and economic difficulties of being a Black man in America – some of the same men would describe Black men in certain situations in language that explicitly and implicitly referenced aggression, violence, and

entitlement. For most, their complaints about Black male entitlement regarding Black women were disconnected from the history of White male entitlement to Black bodies and specifically that of Black women. Furthermore, in certain situations -- such as when Joshua stares back at a Black man with his arm over Leslie or when Jake uses his wife's race to prevent racist discourse at work -- Black female partners become objects to help White men recover from threats to their identity or to exert control over others. Jake could have stated that he disapproved of racism instead of specifically saying his wife was Black. While White men were doing this in part to symbolically protect their partners – while also protecting themselves – their actions are a continuation of the ways in which Black women have been objectified throughout American history.

Black Man Maneuvering

All of Black male participants discussed negative public interactions, with the most frequent types being comments and various forms of discrimination, such as housing discrimination and poor customer service. For Black men, negative reactions to their relationship were in some ways an extension of their embodied experience as Black men and, for most, that resulted in them not seeing these situations as much as an affront to their sense of masculinity, as White men did. Therefore, negotiating negative social interactions with others involved a delicate balance of maintaining or fulfilling their masculine image within the relationship while maneuvering around racist obstacles that limited their options as Black men in America. This often meant not only having to employ alternative means of preserving masculinity but also, in some cases, adopt alternative goals than White men in my study. They maintained their masculinity within these interactions by focusing on providing protection and safety for their partner, and, at times, taking control of racially sensitive situations when they felt it was needed.

Providing Protection and Safety
Avoiding potential problem situations

Of the seven Black men who shared how they responded to negative interactions, five

discuss tactics of avoidance, such as ignoring stares or removing themselves from potentially

problematic situations. In comparison to White men, they rarely discussed confronting others

during these interactions and found other means of management. For Cedric, a 40-year-old

executive, it is a mindset. He assumes that people are probably reacting negatively to their

relationship, but believes it is up to the people in the relationship to decide if it is worth giving

attention to. Note that while Cedric uses language of indifference, in comparison to White men,

this indifference is not about anger or autonomy but about psychologically coping through

disengagement.

> *It's out there, and if you pay attention to it and make a conscious effort to…look*
> *at other people's reactions, then you will see exactly what you want to see, you*
> *know, whether it's there or not. So, I've always been of the mindset that if I like*
> *you and you like me, damn with what anybody else says. We'll just move on.*

Black men had to be more creative than White men when it came to managing negative

social situations and had to find ways to maneuver around or within situations where direct

engagement – or calling out discrimination and/or racism -- may have resulted in a more difficult

or futile situation. Additionally, responding in a similar, confrontational manner could have been

viewed by others as confirming stereotypes of aggressiveness. One way to handle this was trying

to convince their partners against occupying certain spaces as a couple. Due to their embodied

experience as Black men living in a racist society, they were able to foresee which situations

were potentially an issue. Russell, a 51-year-old mid-level city employee, shared a memory from

early in his relationship with his wife of 19 years, Lillian:

> *When I walked in the door, I sensed immediately there was, um...the cold*
> *shoulder. I don't know how you describe it. You know when somebody doesn't like*
> *you....a look or glance of the waitstaff by, you know, the looks back and forth, I*

> *knew this was not a friendly environment, and, so I sat down and I told Lillian, 'Are you sure you want to go here? Because I think we might want to go someplace else.' [laughs] She said, 'No, no! This place is great!'*

According to Russell, his assessment was unfortunately correct. At this establishment that Lillian had been going to for years and loved, they found themselves at the receiving end of rude behavior, and Lillian literally in tears after realizing they were being discriminated against. According to Lillian, Russell decided they should leave. Russell's attempt to dissuade Lillian from patronizing this restaurant was partially about protecting himself from disrespectful behavior, but it was also about protecting Lillian from it as well. While he may not have explained to Lillian his trepidations because he may not have thought she would have believed him, he may also have chosen not to in order to protect Lillian's feelings about a place that she loved so much. However, when she found herself deeply upset and unsure how to respond to this treatment, he stepped and decided that it was time for them to leave.

Trey, a 36-year-old educator, explained a similar situation that occurred earlier in his relationship with his fiancée Gavriella when she was attempting to look for a new apartment closer to him.

> *I told her if you want to get an apartment and it's in [a predominantly White, middle-to-upper class town], I cannot be around when you try to get the apartment. Anytime you try to get an apartment in any neighborhood that's not [in predominantly Black areas of town], and I'm there, it's gonna, it's gonna...your chances will, like, cut in half. And she was, like, 'Noooo. If that's the case, then I don't want that apartment anyway.' I was, like, [changing into skeptical tone] 'Okay.'*

Like Russell, Trey knew the presence of a Black man with a White woman was going be an issue, and attempted, to no avail, to avoid the situation for Gavriella. Unlike Lillian, the issue at hand was not that Gavriella did not believe him, but she minimized how significant of a problem it would be. For Trey and Russell, since they could not control how others would treat them and

their partners, they tried to use alternate ways to prevent the situation from happening in the first

place, which results in them being able to exert control through avoidance and attempt to protect

their partners. However, as they both found, is an imperfect strategy as it relies on your partner

following your advice.

Removal from fraught situations

As Russell and Lillian's restaurant examples shows, not every situation is as simple to ignore.

Incidences involving violence or the fear of violence were rare in my study, but Black men were

more likely than other groups to discuss having to figure out how to handle violent or potentially

violent situations. Forty-eight-year-old Richard, who works in marketing, was one of the three

Black men who discussed these situations. He recounted how a trip he and his wife Miriam took

to southeast Asia that ended with them deciding to leave the country early:

> *We had a lot of problems….Miriam had stones thrown at her. I'm not sure exactly why, but I'm guess that's because we were a mixed race couple...because I have never heard of anybody else who has that [experience]. I tend to stay away from places where...I could have challenging experiences….We talked about was leaving early, particularly after the second time.*

The situation Richard and Miriam found themselves in is an example of how engaging or

confronting the behavior of others may be not an option. In comparison to White men, for

Richard verbally responding and voicing his right to be with whomever he wants would have

been futile and could have further put their safety at risk. Furthermore, only one White man

shared a situation where he felt a potential threat of violence, and none shared situations that

resulted in actual violence, showing how Black men can have very different circumstances to

navigate. Richard mentioning that one of his strategies is to avoid places where he would "have

challenging experiences" illustrates how for Black men is often easier to try to avoid negative

interactions.

Asserting Control
Maneuvering around situational obstacles

Returning to Trey's account of trying to persuade his fiancé Gavriella to go apartment hunting without him, Trey's prediction of housing discrimination was prescient, and he found himself observing Gavriella receiving poor treatment from real estate agents. Trey felt him simply leaving the situation was not sufficient to cease the discriminatory treatment and decided his best option to help her secure an apartment was to pretend their relationship was a weak friendship.

> *We walk in, and [the real estate agent is] like, 'Is this your friend?' And Gavriella's, like, 'Yes?'...she talked to the real estate person the whole time. [The real estate agent] did not show us around the apartment. Clearly did not want her to live there anymore, even though I made it clear it was just for her. The second place we went to was, um, like near Inman Square, she really loved it, she liked the place. And she thought it was really cool, but -- it was an owner apartment -- the owner did not want to talk to Gavriella....And, so, I was, like, 'Watch this. I'm gonna make it clear that I'm never gonna be around here, and she will sell you this apartment.' And she was, like, 'What?" And I was, like, 'Watch.' So, I go up to her and I go, 'Umm...this is my friend from New York. Like, I don't even come up here....Is it safe here? Like, I'm just drivin' around for the day. Is this the type of neighborhood that she would like because I can't vouch for it? I'll never be around.'...So, the second I said that, it was great. She tried to sell the place. Then I went outside, back to the car. And then they made her an offer.*

Trey's management of this situation exemplifies how some Black men negotiated negative interactions by indirectly engaging with people, as opposed to White men, who were more likely to directly call out people's behavior or engage in more confrontational behavior. Instead, Trey found a way to remedy the situation without the real estate agent being aware of the dissembling that was occurring. By taking control of the situation, quickly finding a way to recover Gavriella's ability to obtain an apartment, and solving a problem that she did not quite know how to handle herself, Trey was able to maintain his sense of masculinity in spite of the situation.

For Black men, negative reactions about interracial nature of their relationship are very similar to negative reactions they have experienced personally as Black men. Since most of their

experiences were not surprising and disarming, they did not frame these situations as a particular

challenge to their Black masculinity and their male privilege. It was particularly notable how less

charged their emotions were during interviews and recounting these experiences, with the anger

that many White men exhibited being largely absent. Some, like Trey and Russell, even used a

tone noting lack of surprise when trying to warn their partners about potential situations

involving discrimination. It could be argued that this is in part because this particular moment in

time is likely the safest for Black men in relationships with White women when one considers

the history of lynching in this country, and this is likely a fact that does not go unacknowledged

by these men. Due to their embodied experience, they enter these relationships with a blueprint

of what to expect, methods of managing these situations, and what they can and cannot do in

these situations because of stereotypes about Black male/White female couples and, more

specifically, Black men. Some of the same stereotypes that some White men in my study

referenced such as Black men as violent and aggressive, are manufactured ideas that are realities

they have to deal with when determining how to best protect their partner – and themselves.

Black Women: Post-Interaction Bonding & Privacy Management

As mentioned earlier, all Black women with the exception of one reported negative public

interactions, of which the most common were stares, racial dislocation, and comments. In

addition, they were more likely to mention multiple types of negative interactions in comparison

to other groups and having to negotiate negative reactions to their relationship when they were

alone in public. Black women often spoke of frequently having to negotiate what they perceived

as violations of privacy and having to determine if and how to best protect themselves and, in

some cases, their children. These violations of privacy sometimes took the form of a White

person asking invasive questions or a Black person wanting them to explain their romantic

choices. Their ways of managing these interactions were reflective of both hegemonic femininity

and Black femininity – for example, like White women, they used post-incident discussions to

cope with negative reactions, but, unlike White women, they were more likely to confront what

viewed as unfair treatment. For Black women, their ways of negotiating negative public

interactions were ultimately about relationship bonding and privacy management.

Relationship Bonding
Finding comfort and safety in post-incident discussions
One of the most common ways Black women dealt with these negative reactions was through

post-incident discussions with their partners, with nine women referencing them. These

discussions became less frequent as the duration of the relationship increased, and, in some

cases, now only occurred when the interaction was exceptional. For most, the purpose of these

conversations seemed to be to foster a sense of closeness with their partner in an attempt to

recover from reactions that made them feel stigmatized or "other-ed." Sometimes this was

achieved with humor and levity that either made fun of the situation or the person who made a

comment or stared, as Lynn, a 25-year-old who works in the field of education, did with a quick

comment after meeting her fiancé's co-workers for the first time:

> *I show up and they're, 'Oh-oh! You're Jess!' You can tell he didn't, like, let them know [my race], but I'm glad he doesn't like them know. But also I'm, like, 'Dag, Tim, you did it to them again?' [laughs] They had no idea.*

Other discussions may be more serious and cathartic in nature, as can be seen in an

example from Renee, a 32-year-old office administrator, about a typical post-incident discussion

she would have with her fiancé Kurt:

> *We were receiving a lot of negative attention, um, mainly, well, mainly from Black men, especially Black homeless men….We were being approached and cussed at and, uh, chased, for lack of a better word and being verbally assaulted. And a lot of people, a lot of the interactions were, um, were pointed directly at me and my failure for not being with a Black man. So, that was a lot of our conversations, where we were like, 'Aww, this is happening, and why do people have to be this way? We've accepted that we love each other and want to be together. Why can't that be enough?' And, yeah, so we've talked about it a lot in that way.*

By engaging in a colorblind, "love conquers all" discourse, Renee attempts to recover from feeling upset by venting, focusing on their love for each other, and love over racial politics. As can be seen through Renee's usage of words like "assault" that these interactions, even if they are verbal in nature, can feel violent and violating.

Self-Defense & Privacy Management
Verbal/physical engagement
In contrast to White women and Black men, Black women were more likely to speak about responding to the negative actions of others, either verbally or just physically (although not as likely as White men). With nine Black women discussing this method of management, it is just as common as post-incident discussions. Renee, who has a White stepfather, recounted a time when she and her fiancé Kurt were walking down the street in a major metropolitan area with their child with them:

> *A [Black] guy came sauntering up and kind of met us head-on and was shouting over [their daughter's] stroller...and he's, like, 'Your mom would be so disappointed if she knew you were with a White man!" And I was, like, 'Hello, idiot! My mom is with a White man.."..We were, like, 'Haha! Got you! Like, you don't have nothin' on us!'*

While Renee admits she does not always choose to respond to people's comments, in this moment, perhaps because she was able to easily think of something to say to this specific comment, she responded to the stranger's shaming comment by attempting to embarrass and shock him by making him feel like his comment was ridiculous. The comment not only serves to help Renee by making her feel superior, thus recovering from the feeling like her family was being verbally attacked by a stranger, but by also, as she stated later, "unifying" her with Kurt.

Many Black women encountered interactions where Black people attempted to hold them accountable for their decision to date or marry a White man, with situations that included them asking these women why they decided to date or marry a White man while making palatable

their disapproval. Other women gave examples of Black men verbally condemning or, like in

Renee's case, scolding them for being with White men when their partner was with them or

when their partner was in the vicinity. A surprising number of them gave examples of Black men

approaching them to speak about the nature of their relationship when their partner went to the

restroom in a restaurant or got up to pay the bill. Tracy, a 22-year-old manager, explained to me

what some of these interactions:

> *They don't say anything when [her fiancé is] around…It's mostly the comments*
> *and the stares….In [the South], they'll wait until he leaves....I had a Black guy tell*
> *me I can always come back home, and I asked, 'What do you mean?'' and he*
> *pointed to his skin….and, I'm like, 'I'm home. I'm good. What's wrong [with*
> *you]?' Or, comments, like, you know, 'if you really want to be satisfied sexually,*
> *you know you have to go back to the brothas'.*

In response to this stranger implying that Black women and men are meant to be together, Tracy

resisted that imposition by essentially stating that "home" – or what type of romantic relationship

she is meant to be involved in – was one that she chose and was no one else's business,

referencing her right to agentic choice. Furthermore, Tracy was not alone in mentioning

comments made by Black men that alluded to Black male sexual prowess, which simultaneously

reduces her relationship with her husband to that of sex – and not love – and essentializes race by

arguing that Black men are the only ones who are physically suitable for Black women. In citing

Black male sexual prowess, it is interesting that these men are using a racist stereotype that was

once used to keep Black men away from White women to persuade Black women to stay away

from White men, or men of any other race for that matter. While Tracy may have responded

because she felt it was important to defend herself and her relationship -- while also, with her

tone, implying to this stranger that his commentary was not welcomed – her example also

highlights how Black women were also more likely than other groups to discuss having to

negotiate negative interactions when they are in public on their own since, while her husband was nearby, this Black man only engaged her once her husband had left her side.

These approaches by Black men when White men are present or nearby are notable because, while there is ample discussion about how Black women dislike interracial relationships in both popular media and sociological literature, there is little discussion about Black men disapproving of Black women dating White men. White men's race and gender privilege may protect them from Black men's comments since Black men may perceive more severe repercussions than they would from addressing Black women, who are considered more approachable not only because of their race but also because of their gender. However, referring to Kurt's earlier recounting of how he feels emasculated when Black men treat his fiancé Renee like this, there may be a more complex dynamic at play here. It is possible, particularly in situations when White men are immediately present, that Black men in fact engage in this partially as an attack on White male privilege. In not recognizing the White men's rights to protect their partner, whether that means from sexual advances or general harassment, these Black men may intentionally be emasculating White men in much the same way that many Black men have felt for centuries in the US when they could not protect Black women or their families from the whims of White men. Black women are not simply rendered as female objects in this interaction, though, since Black men are recognizing Black women's agency in choosing to be in a relationship with a White man and, in their eyes, are holding them accountable for violating expectations of Black female racial loyalty. While the role of the communal nature of Black American culture (Harris and Kalbfleisch 2000) cannot be ignored as a factor in the frequency of Black men's approaches, it is also important to note the nationalistic echoes of these actions – actions which occur at a nexus point of heteronormativity, patriarchy and procreative control of

women (Alexander-Floyd 2007). The gender dynamics involved in these interactions, specifically the ones that involve shaming or scolding as if these men were speaking to a child, speaks to a sexist infantilizing of women and highlights the unique position of Black women. While Black children tend to be "adultified" in American society, Black women may still at times find themselves in situations where they are spoken to in a way that implies they are less capable in making their own decisions and, as a result, have less of a right to make the right choices.

Mental Preparation as Protection of Self
Black women were virtually the only ones in my study to talk about mentally preparing themselves for these interactions as a way to manage them, and this could include actions such as trying to prevent a negative interaction by concealing their relationship or being psychologically prepared for poor treatment. (This is in contrast to Black men, who spoke of expecting negative interactions but did not talk about strategizing for them beforehand.) Black women's experiences in public were notable – many spoke of extreme and offensive comments made to them about their relationship and having to field an expectation of others to answer questions such as "what do you two have in common?" or "how can you be with a White man?" These situations were rare for others in my study, which speaks to how Black women are constructed as more approachable, which made them more vulnerable. As a result, mental preparation in the form of psychological and emotional preparation could make negative experiences relatively more tolerable to endure. For situations where Black women felt no level of psychological preparation would be sufficient, concealing their relationship was a preferred alternative, even while many felt moral hesitations about it. Eight women discussed using this strategy and, for some, it was their main method of negotiating public spaces, while for others it was one of a "tool kit" of tactics.

Negative Public Interaction Strategizing

One way of preparing was to anticipate the social environment, such as people's reactions and decide how to mentally cope. Michelle, a 36-year-old Afro-Caribbean physical therapist, shared her feelings about an upcoming work event and her mental state regarding going to this event with her husband where a certain group of colleagues will be present:

> *And it's the first time that I'm, like, really bringing him into my work environment, you know, and, I'm a little...I wonder if anyone is going to treat me different after they see who's comin' though the door, you know? It's not...It's something I think about, have a little anxiety about....It may affect how someone may be with me afterwards, but, in the end...the time I spend [with those people] is so small.*

Michelle is well-aware that the way in which American society is organized by race extends to romantic relationships, and she tempers the "little anxiety" she has about defying these expectations at her place of employment by focusing on the fact that she spends little time with the people she is most apprehensive about. This quote exemplifies how occupying social spaces for interracial couples can take on a heightened level of thought, scrutiny and, in some cases, stress in a way that same-race, heterosexual couples do not have to be concerned about.

Another method was to not only psychologically prepare but to also recreate a physical strategy, such as Renee has when she and her husband walk in public with their infant daughter:

> *If I can see it coming, if I can see someone looking at us...taking stock of us walking down the street...I'm, like, well, I can tell where this is going. Back track. We're taking a different street....Sometimes I'll make him stand between me and the person who I can tell is trying to get in our business. Sometimes it's about creating a physical barrier.*

As Renee and her fiancé Kurt mentioned earlier in this chapter, most of their negative social interactions involve Black men speaking directly to Renee. Renee attempts to exert some level of control over these interactions by using her fiancé Kurt as a physical shield in hopes of preventing someone from saying anything to her or, if they do, then having Kurt fend them off while she removed herself and their daughter from the situation. Although this tactic is Renee's

idea, it also has the possible effect of making Kurt feel more comfortable in his masculinity by being able to take on the role of protector.

Concealment of Relationship

For some Black women, the easiest way to deal with these interactions is to just conceal the existence of their relationship to varying degrees. Aria, a 29-year-old entrepreneur, had selectively chosen to use this strategy in certain situations, such as through the majority of home-buying process with her husband, and, before she became self-employed, in the workplace. She wanted to make it clear to me that she was not ashamed of her family, but she did not feel it should be a topic of discussion unless it was relevant to something at work. She was alluding to the ways in which people's reactions to interracial relationships and multiracial families garners more inquisitiveness from others in comparison to that of same-race families.

> I always… I keep it on the 'down low' for a while until they see pictures. Then they'll see pictures and that's when they start to question or ask. They'll ask questions or kind of dance lightly around, you know, if my husband is white or is he Hispanic, yadda yadda. There hasn't been any nose turning up at me or anything like that, but there has been some startled [looks], like, they don't know how to process it. [laughs] It's almost like you can see it registering on their face, like they're trying to figure it out, like they're trying to make sense of this. Um…then later that afternoon, then the questions start coming up because they start getting more comfortable with the idea, I guess. That happens about 20% percent of the time…20 or 30% of the time.

While Aria does not entirely choose to hide the racial characteristics of her family, she tries to exert some control over who has access to this information by not mentioning the race of her husband, not casually sharing photos, or, perhaps, not having her husband meet her at work to go to lunch. Although she estimates that people do not react in a way that makes her feel "other-ed" most of the time, these interactions affect her enough emotionally that she tries to limit them. This strategy may also allow her to get to know her co-worker without the existence of her relationship potentially influencing how they view and interact with her professionally.

Fifty-seven-year-old Amber, an artist, expressed her frustration and dismay at the "looks of hostility" and occasional comments she and her husband Ryan encounter, which has resulted in her being always prepared and expecting negative reactions when they are out in public together. In addition to not engaging in public displays of affection, they also use a strategy of disassociation:

> *He does this thing when we go to a bar or restaurant, he always makes me walk in first. So, I walk in first, and he's, like, a few paces behind me. So, you don't really know we're together still until we sit down together. Even now, I'm kind of guarded. We don't usually go out to bars and stuff, like that....If we do, I try to make us act more casual. I don't want people to think we're in this romantic relationship, you know?...We never do public displays of affection.*

For Amber, who relayed how the current gentrification of their neighborhood has correlated with personal experiences of racial hostility, having to also navigate public outings as an identifiable couple is too arduous. In contrast to Aria's strategy, Amber and Ryan have chosen to navigate public situations in concealment, pretending to be strangers or friends. While Amber may not necessarily be able to control when personal experiences of racism happen to her, she is able to exert some control over her exposure to negative reactions to her relationship.

For Black women, managing negative public interactions was primarily about privacy management through managing the inquiries of others and determining how much information to disclose about their relationship, as well as psychological management in the forms of strategizing for negative interactions and seeking a sense of relationship solidarity through post-incident discussions with their partner. Historically, Black women have lived their lives under public scrutiny and, as a result, have not enjoyed the same privacy protections as White women have. Breaking the taboo of loving interracially can come with a stigma that results in others believing they are even less deserving of privacy (Goffman 1963). Furthermore, this heightened scrutiny and harassment results in some Black women engaging in the emotion work of

"bracing" themselves for negative reactions and finding ways to manage their emotions afterwards. While they engaged in intra-relational work with their partner through post-incident discussions, like White women did, the purpose of the conversations were markedly different, with Black women attempting to unify with their partner after feeling stigmatized for their relationship. Additionally, as will be seen later in my dissertation, Black women disproportionately discussed having conversations of an educational nature with their partners about racism, these conversations were largely absent in this domain. While Black men mentioned attempting to warn their partners about potentially racist situations in order to avoid them, Black women rarely discussed doing so, which highlights the gender dynamics in these interactions. A Black woman suggesting to her White male partner that they avoid these situations may imply that their partner would be unable to protect them or control the situation, thus challenging his masculinity.

White Women: Negative Interactions as Lessons in Racial Literacy

All White women expressed experience with negative public interactions, most commonly being racial dislocation and stares**.** While all White women and Black men shared negative interactions, they were more likely to mention just experiencing a single incident or a few types of interactions, such as stares and discrimination. By comparison, Black women were more likely to mention experiencing multiple incidences and types of negative interactions. While Black women used a few different strategies to manage these interactions, White women (five in total) predominantly discussed using post-incident discussions with their partners, with other strategies being in the minority. As a result, unlike Black women, the majority of White women's negative interaction work occurred after the event in the more private realm of their relationship, which may be at least partially explained by the fact that White women were more likely to express uncertainty as to whether a negative interaction was racially motivated or not.

During our interviews, there would sometimes be situations when White women would initially

describe an event as being racially motivated but then express doubt afterwards.

Gaining Knowledge/Understanding of Negative Public Interactions
Deconstructing and analyzing negative public interactions within borders of relationship
The primary purpose of these conversations were to "unpack" or analyze the event with their

partner and, in some cases, trying to determine if something was racially-motivated or how to

have handled an event in the moment or in the future. Earlier in this chapter, Trey, a 36-year-old

educator, recalled when he went apartment hunting with his fiancé Gavriella and experienced

discrimination, which he warned her about beforehand. Gavriella, 32-year-old psychologist,

shared her perspective of the event and how she managed it:

> *On the days I was with Trey [while apartment hunting], I was treated one way,*
> *and on the days I was not with him, [I was being] treated another way, you*
> *know?...I heard him say to the landlord, 'Oh, she's in town. I'm just driving her*
> *around.' And, like...I mean, we had an intense discussion afterwards. I was, like,*
> *please don't ever do that, and he was, like, 'It's how you get an apartment.' Great.*
> *But I do not want to rent from a landlord that when I have you stay over, or when*
> *I add you to the lease, or when your brother and his Mexican girlfriend want to*
> *come over for dinner. [The landlords are] gonna be staring at me. If I don't get*
> *the apartment because the landlord is racist, like, I don't want to live here. And I*
> *don't want you to ever act as if we're anything less than partners to kind of help*
> *further us...I don't want to pretend that you're something else even if it's to benefit*
> *us, unless it's a safety issue.*

Gavriella chose to initiate a discussion afterwards with Trey in order to come to an agreement as

to how to handle similar events in the future. It also presented itself as an opportunity for her to

reiterate how much she cares for Trey, to the extent that she would be willing to forgo some of

the benefits of White privilege when they are in public together as a couple.

These conversations were also vehicles for White women to understand when a negative

reaction is racially-motivated. Jesse, a 34-year-old graduate student, explained that she and her

husband often do not see eye-to-eye about whether events are racially-motivated, regardless of

whether it was an event in the news, like police brutality, or when it is regarding their

experiences in public. She shared an example of this from an interaction she and her husband had at the airport while they were going through security:

> *People tend not to think we're traveling together. Now that we have [their daughter], it's a bit different, but people don't automatically sort of, like, think, 'Oh, they're a couple.' If we're, like, in line together. We had a woman that was, like, um...kind of rude to us when checking IDs recently while flying. And I don't know why, but I felt like there was some sense of, like, I don't know. I felt like it was related to race, perhaps. And, you know, [her husband] was, like, 'Well, you don't really know if it is or not.'*

Jesse used this conversation as an opportunity to process what she just experienced with her husband. After an event of racial dislocation – which is something that Jesse feels is particularly an issue when they are in airports – she was hoping to use the conversation to vent but her husband's different interpretation of the event failed to produce that effect. Furthermore, her use of the qualifier "perhaps" exemplifies how White women were more doubtful of whether events were race-related, and, in Jesse's case, her husband's doubt may have influenced her to be uncertain about her assessment of the event. She was confident in her assessment at the beginning of the quote, but as she started to recount the conversation with her husband, she found herself less confident in if race was an issue.

White women's disengagement during negative social interactions can be explained by being less familiar with the complexity and nuances of racism due to their racial privilege. Even for some of those who have been in relationships with their partner for years and were quite racially literate described themselves as being too shocked by the particular incident to react in the moment. However, these explanations cannot be separated from the socialization and expectations that come with middle class, White femininity. While their uncertainty and confusion may have been genuine, it also allows them to rationalize disengagement and maintain the appearance of proper White femininity not openly expressing anger or "causing a scene."

Even when it came to them describing their response to stares, they were less likely than Black women and White men to say they responded by staring back. This disengagement does not prevent them from feeling upset by the interaction – or, in some cases, upset by their inaction at the time – but post-incident discussions give them ability to process their thoughts and feelings about these incidences in way that is respectable.

Conclusion

For the people in Black/White intimate relationships, scenarios that seem similar on the surface can have significant contextual differences that result in them being read very differently by partners according to racialized heteronormative ideas of gender, which, in turn, can result in particular management strategies. What privileged identities one possesses – if any – has a bearing not only in how others approached these individuals but also in what was at stake for them. While differing race and gender does not preclude members of these couples from sharing common feelings or understandings about these interactions, I am arguing that these identities interact with heteronormativity and present differences that can nuance our understandings of these interactions beyond simple types of management tactics.

Men have some advantages in when it comes to managing negative public interactions, albeit they are not equally distributed. White men are able to engage publicly in challenging and direct ways that Black men and women are less likely to do. While Black men engage in ways that, in general, tend to be less threatening and indirect -- a result of their unique position as privileged in gender but oppressed in race -- they also spoke less frequently of direct comments from others about their relationship in comparison to Black women, as a result of them being constructed as more approachable by strangers. Furthermore, stereotyping of Black men as potentially dangerous and threatening -- regardless of how they actually behave in the moment -- may in fact shield them from to an extent criticism and harassment of others.

Women being more likely to not only utilize the tool of post-incident discussion but to also discuss this during interviews can be explained by women being socialized to cope with issues by inter-relationally processing (Lewis et al. 2013). After all, these women talked about engaging in discussions with their partners – however, men were less likely to talk about using this as a coping mechanism and instead often spoke of their actions in the moment. The degree to which women engaged in this management strategy may also be reflective of the limited, socially acceptable tools women have to manage these negative interactions in the moment, which may particularly be the case for women who were trying to maintain respectability -- instead of yelling or physically intimidating the offender in the moment, they process their feelings and may regain a sense of control by venting and/or analyzing the situation with their partner later. The fact that standing up for oneself is intrinsic to hegemonic masculinity not to hegemonic femininity – especially middle-class femininity – complicates these situations for women. However, these discussions were also used by Black women who "answered back" in the moment, which further stresses the utility some women may find in this.

Black partners were more likely to discuss employing a variety of tactics to minimize the chances of negative interactions, such as avoiding certain spaces and concealing their relationship in an attempt to exert some degree of control over these situations. This may be a consequence of the fact that Black partners tend to notice negative reactions and racism more than White partners (Killian 2003), in addition to that Black partners already endure racism individually on a daily basis. Therefore, they may be seeking a reprieve when they are able to. What is also interesting is that Black men were more likely to use their racial capital/knowledge to attempt to protect themselves and their partners from potentially discriminatory situations, while Black women seldom discussed doing so. A Black woman telling her White male partner

that they should avoid a space because they may be the target of ill treatment may seem like her implying that she does not feel he can protect her, and, as a result, may be a delicate thing to state. In regards to White participants, there does not appear to be much in common in their management strategies, which may be partially explained by how White masculinity and femininity are constructed as almost polar opposites. White men being more likely to challenge others and take control of conversations and White women disengaging from negative interactions is in line with their racialized gender constructions.

My research also speaks to the concept of intersectional situational privilege, which complicates our understandings of identity and privilege. While Black men may have been protected from the frequency and degree that Black women experienced comments, the fact that Black women more often spoke of directly challenging others who made rude comments to them comes with a certain level of empowerment. Instead of having to deny or conceal their true feelings, they were more likely to feel comfortable "calling out" the behavior of others. However, in the many ways that the construction of Black femininity can liberate Black women to be more expressive about when they feel they are being mistreated, them doing so at times can be used by others to confirm stereotypes of the "angry Black woman." It is important to also bear in mind this opportunity to engage in this "liberating" behavior may only be occurring because others feel they have the right to be more blatantly disrespectful to Black women. Within the intersection of sexism and racism, participants find pathways of possibility and restrictive roadblocks.

<p style="text-align: center;">Chapter 4</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">The Role of Gender and Racial Socialization in
Racially Educational Discussions</p>

Introduction

Racial dialogue is often purported in our society as a viable solution to end racism. The line of reasoning is often that if we just talked to one another, we would realize that we are all the same and racism will be eradicated. While researchers have proven this concept as flawed, they often focus primarily on race-related factors to understand what dynamics are involved. Understanding that oppression works as a "matrix of domination" (Collins 1993) where oppressive system interweave to together in complex and intricate ways to support one another, it is imperative to understand how other identity factors, such as racialized masculinity and femininity, can play a role in how these conversations transpire and why they fail to produce the result that so many people desire.

Using heterosexual interracial intimate couples as a nexus point of interrogation of this, in this chapter I explore how heteronormative racialized understandings of masculinity and femininity affect the discussion of race, particularly in regards to conversations that I categorize as "racially educational." I define "racial education" as the ongoing, discursive process of the transfer of knowledge about race, racism, or racial culture from one person to another in order to manage disparate racial orientations. How do racialized heteronormative masculinities and femininities interact with race to influence how members of these couples handle conversations of an educational nature about the subject of race? More specifically, how does it influence their strategies for engaging in these conversations, and how their partner interprets associated actions? Does the intimate nature of the relationship – and its associated "higher stakes"

compared to more casual relationships – influence the effectiveness of these conversations? And, lastly, what insights can be gained from understanding what strategies are effective and which ones are not? I argue that understandings of racialized femininity and masculinity imposes limits on members of these couples during conversations, as well as unique opportunities of managing their partners' reaction. My findings reveal that, for Black partners, hegemonic masculinity/femininity and their racialized counterparts operate as resources for managing resistance from their partners, while also, at times, limiting the expression of their own feelings. In regards to White partners, hegemonic masculinity/femininity gives them a framework for understanding how to measure the progress of these conversations that can result in them viewing the results of these conversations differently than their partners. This research not only nuances the understanding of interracial racial discourse, but it also complicates Steinbugler's research on "racework" by elucidating how these concepts of gender behavior influence the emotional labor involved in these relationships.

After the literature review, I begin this analysis by looking into how Black women navigate these conversations by looking to hegemonic femininity to determine the conceptual limit of these conversations and to Black femininity to manage their partner's racism and sexism. Next, I examine how White women's focus of racial consensus with their partners is influenced by hegemonic femininity. I then show how Black men, in a way similar to Black women, dance between hegemonic masculinity and Black masculinity but with significantly different outcomes. When faced with different racial viewpoints and resistance, Black men were more likely to avoid or reduce conversations, using language of hegemonic masculinity. Black men also looked to Black masculinity to determine the limits of conversations about race with their partners, often dancing around the image of the "angry Black man." The subsequent section on White men

reveals how hegemonic masculinity with its focus on achievement and autonomy can place

barriers to racial literacy. I conclude the chapter with an analysis on the similarities and

differences of the groups.

Literature Review
Racial Discussions Across Racial Divides

The popular narrative in American society that if people of different races came together to talk

about race, racial divides and racism would be eradicated has possibly been influenced by the

"contact hypothesis", which suggests interracial interactions can decrease stereotyping and

increase empathy (McLemore et al. 2001). While there is evidence that interracial interactions

and discussions can be somewhat transformative for Whites (McKinney 2006), interracial

conversations about race can be very different experiences – and, therefore, have different results

-- for Blacks and Whites. Research suggests that Whites may engage in the impression

management to not appear racist, which can result in more focus being put on their actions and

choice of words during these conversations than on the content of the information being shared

by the person of color (Vohs, Baumeister and Ciarocco 2005; Vorauer 2006; Vorauer and

Kumhyr 2001). In a study from Holoien et al. (2015), where they paired Black and White people

together and had them engage in conversations about race, the increased desire for the White

partner to affiliate with their Black partner correlated with a less accurate understanding about

their Black partner's beliefs and statements about race. For Black partners, their White partner's

overestimation of their understanding resulted in them feeling "less cared for…and viewed

partners more negatively" (84). By contrast, during racial conversations, people of color tend to

be less focused on their likeability than wanting respect from Whites (Bergsieker et al. 2010),

and they tend to more accurately predict how the White conversational partner feels during racial

conversations (Pickett et al. 2004).

Furthermore, while these conversations about race may be viewed by Whites as more intellectual in nature, they can take on a more corporeal, embodied meaning for Black partners as they are speaking of their lived experiences (Leonardo & Porter 2010). These conversations involve emotional and educational labor on the part of Black partners that is reflective of a larger pattern in society where at times Blacks operate as "agents of epiphany" (McKinney 2006) by "guiding Whites…into a racial awakening" (DiAngelo and Sensoy 2014). This labor is not without its costs, as Fleming et al. (2012) notes emotional and psychological stress and fatigue that may result from being exposed to racism, deciding whether to confront it, and then addressing it. Essentially acting as "native informants and unpaid sherpas" (Thompson 2004) on Black culture and racism, Evans and Moore (2015) argue that these circumstances result in Black people "carry[ing] the burden of engaging in emotion work that is not equally distributed with their White counterparts" (452).

Some researchers purport that under the right conditions, the contact hypothesis is valid if the people involved are of equal status and in a non-competitive, non-threatening situation where there is a deeper level of intimacy (Farley 2000, McLemore et al. 2001). In theory, interracial intimate relationships would be an excellent setting for the contact hypothesis to work, but other researchers have shown that it is sometimes not the case (Twine and Steinbugler 2006). White partners are primarily the ones who may have racial mindset shifts and, even in some cases, develop racial literacy (Twine 2010), but there are also many cases of that not occurring. Twine found those who were unable to sufficiently analyze "how bodies are racialized and resources are distributed across various familial, occupational, local, and institutional sites" struggled with developing this literacy (112). What factors or characteristics are required for White partners to acquire these foundational skills in the development of racial literacy?

While there has not been much research conducted on how Blacks' experience and management of racism varies based on gender, there has been a few studies to suggest that there is notable variance. Some research suggests that the stereotype of the "angry Black man" can have a formidable influence on middle-class Black men's impression management. For instance, Wilkins (2012) found that middle-class, Black male college students managed feelings about racism while negotiating the stereotype of the "angry Black man" through "moderate blackness", a "racial strategy" that involved a relative detachment from racial politics and restrained, positive emotions. Wingfield (2007) found similar emotional and discursive displays in corporate workplaces where Black men were "much more likely than Black women to downplay or minimize their feelings of irritation or displeasure" of racial discrimination in the workplace (p. 209). In contrast, both researchers found Black women more likely to voice their concerns and frustrations about racism, and, in regards to Wingfield's study, sexism. Similar results have been found in other research (Morris 2007). Changing the context from the workplace and institutions to within the context of an intimate relationship, do these gendered management strategies differ and, if so, how?

Intra-Relationship Race-based Discussions: To Some, A Necessity; To Others, Unnecessary

The majority of participants – 36 out of 55 participants (approximately 66%) -- reported talking about race in one way or another, whether it was about current events or about more philosophical discussions about race. Generally, women and Black participants were more likely to mention the occurrence of racial discussions. Furthermore, women spoke in more detail about the nature of these discussions. Twenty-four participants mentioned conversations involving racial education and, again, Black participants and women disproportionately spoke of these types of discussions. Reasons for not participating in racially education discussions ranged from

partners already being on the same proverbial "page" about race or believing coming to terms about race was futile – some of the latter situations are included in this chapter for insight. Furthermore, the results of these conversations are not consistent – some conversations may result in a common understanding, others may result in disagreements, and some may remain unresolved.

I have excluded racial conversations regarding family members and friends since other factors unique to those situations can influence how members decide to engage in these conversations. For instance, a conversation about a politician's racist comment in the news would more than likely lack the personal connection and emotions involved when discussing a racist comment from a family member. In addition, there were a few rare occasions where White partners educated Black partners about race, which usually occurred in situations where the White partner was Jewish and the Black partner had not had much exposure to Jewish culture or religion, or in situations where the Black partner was an immigrant and did not know much about African-American history or race relations in the United States. Whereas conversations involving Black partners educating where analyzable for markers of racialized femininity and masculinity, these were not found in conversations where White partners were educators, which may be explained in part by the scarcity of these conversations. In the following sections, I will describe the types of racial education conversations members of these couples engage in and how their perceptions and responses to these situations are racialized femininity/masculinity.

Black Women: Educating and Advocating…Within Limits

Out of all the groups in my sample, Black women were the most likely to discuss engaging in discussions about race with their partners and particularly those of an educational nature.[4] More specifically, 80% of Black women – or 12 participants -- who mentioned engaging in racial discussions with their partners also were involved in racial education. In general, the women in my study expressed a desire to be aligned on racial issues with their partners. In contrast to White women, Black women were more likely to stress the importance of verbal communication as a tool in doing so – either by directly communicating that during our interview or through their repeated attempts to use discussions to bridge experiential or ideological gaps. However, the ways in which race interacts with gender – primarily in the social construction of White and Black femininities – often results in the two groups taking different paths to try to get to the same goal. For Black women, it often involves educating their partners and advocating for themselves – and, in some cases, for Black people or Black women, in general. Eleven of the 12 Black women who engaged in these conversations found themselves in the role of educator. This process of "educating and advocating" for Black women involved several strategies: 1) managing partner's racism and sexism and 2) demonstrating sympathy and protection of White male ego.

Assertively Resisting Partner's Racism & Sexism

While the majority of Black women in my study had successful conversations with their partners where they were able to come to an understanding about their different perspectives about race and racism, six out of 11 women who referenced racial education often found themselves having

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[4] Although Black women were disproportionately a larger portion of my sample, when I calculated the number of participants who mentioned discussing race within the four demographic subgroups (Black women, White Women, Black men, White men), Black women had the largest percentage of participants that mentioned discussing race with their partners, with White men coming in second.

to navigate their partner's racism and sexism. However, the construction of Black femininity offers to Black women an avenue of assertive, vocal resistance – in a way, flipping an oppressive stereotype on its head. This puts them in contrast to Black men who, at most, had to navigate just racism and, in regards to Black masculinity, stereotypes of angry Black men as threatening.

One example is Amber, a 57-year-old Black woman who lives in an urban area in the Midwest with her husband Ryan, a 58-year-old White man, and have been together for over three decades, and have 1 adult child. Amber found herself having to learn how to talk to Ryan about race due to difficult experiences she had with racism growing up as one of the first Black families to integrate a White neighborhood in the late 1950s/early 1960s. As a result, she was concerned about if she could trust Ryan to react in a way that would make her feel comfortable when she talked about her experiences with racism. Over the time, she has learned to discuss race more with Ryan. However, she describes Ryan as often reacting with skepticism when she complains about racism.

> *Um...so, basically, I've felt that he had, still has, uh, a little bit uh....blinders on about what happens to Black people on a day-to-day basis. I don't think he really gets that. I don't think he does, so...It's only when he's involved somehow, it's like, 'Oh, now this guy's a racist'. That's what I've been talking about! Well, okay, well, I've been trying to tell you about this, and, uh, maybe you just don't see this as constantly as I do, but you can understand what I'm talking about now. 'Oh, yeah, I guess I can kind of see what you mean.' But I have to keep, to me, I have to keep reminding him that this is something that people go through, whether or male or female. If you're Black in this society, people are constantly doin' stuff....So, it's a...it's just something that he doesn't really have to ever really deal with, and uh...he's gotta be reminded that this is what I have to go through....I get frustrated because he thinks I'm just whining and complaining for no reason, and it's like, no, these are legitimate feelings.*

According to Amber, despite her repeated attempts to explain the racism that she contends with, Ryan only agrees with her when he sees it for himself. Later in our interview, Amber connects his inability to believe her perspective without seeing it for himself as being connected to his

privilege as a White man. As McIntosh (1988) explains, "Whites are taught to see their

perspectives as objective and representative of reality," so when a person of color states

something that is contradictory to how they see the world, they may respond with invalidation

(59). The same can be said when it comes to hegemonic masculinity, where the views of men are

viewed as factual and rational and those of women are viewed as primarily controlled by

emotions. Furthermore, Black women may face further skepticism due to being considered more

likely to be "hypersensitive" due to their race and gender (Killian 2012, Evans and Moore 2015).

Ryan's resistant perspective is compounded in that as Amber tries to explain the double-standard

of treatment she faces because of her race and gender, she finds herself facing a double-standard

with Ryan where her word alone is not sufficient to determine if discrimination has happened –

Ryan has to see it for himself.

As Amber explains later in the interview, during some of the times when Ryan

acknowledges that some of her perspectives on racism are correct, she still feels like he finds a

way to minimize her frustration and anger.

> *He says, 'Well, aren't you used to it?' I'm, like, 'No! I'm not used to it! I still get*
> *mad every single time when somebody says something stupid. It's more annoying*
> *than ever. It's, like, in 2015, I still have to hear this?! I have to see this?*

Ryan implying that Amber should not be that upset about racism if it does occur on a frequent

basis is another method that Ryan uses Amber's oppression against her: he possibly

acknowledges that her viewpoint on her embodied experience is correct, but then he uses the

everyday existence of this discrimination to minimize her feelings about it. Despite the racial

fatigue that Amber experiences during these conversations, she continues to insist to talk to Ryan

about the experience of racial discrimination, thus resisting White denial of the pervasiveness of

racism and the notion that Ryan does not have the ability to understand her embodied experience

as a Black woman.

When 41-year-old Leslie, a Black woman, was laid off from her job a few years ago, she

and her husband of 14 years, Joshua, a 41-year-old White graduate student, expected she would

find another job in due time. However, it has been a lengthier and more difficult process than

either one of them have imagined. During our interview, Leslie expressed her frustrations with

being unemployed for much longer than she expected despite searching diligently for work, and

she has shared these with Joshua. She believes her race and gender are significant factors in her

struggle for employment, but, according to Leslie, Joshua is skeptical. However, she believes he

cannot see it "through the same lens" as her because he is a White male – speaking to their

different racial and gender statuses.

> *I told him, 'You can say I'm wrong, but, um, you know, he's, you're probably not seeing it through the same lens that I'm seeing it because you've never had the same problems that I've had or, at least, the potential problems that I have and, you know, it's not just being White but also being a guy.' [...] I think when people do see me they're probably assuming a certain thing because, you know, you know, I-I'm Black and I'm, uh, somewhat overweight. They probably automatically have a preconceived notion about who I am and, you know, my background, you know, and I'm wondering if they just think I'm barely a high school graduate or something. You know, I guess -- I mean, maybe that's just me being paranoid or something....I-I think, I know he's never gotten that look before. [...] I keep telling him, 'You're never gonna actually know what it's like because you-you've got the White skin, and, uh, you-you got the holy grail. That's what they want.'*

Similar to the situation involving Amber and Ryan, Leslie left this conversation perceiving

Joshua as rejecting her account of the discrimination she has been facing, resulting in her feeling

frustrated and invalidated. Finding employment can be psychologically and emotionally

exhausting process, and while Joshua does secondarily feel the stressful effects of Leslie's

unemployment, it is more difficult for her as it affects her directly, and she feels responsible for

finding employment. Despite Leslie's attempts to resist Joshua's framing of her situation, she

admits that she wonders at times if the problem is in fact with her and paranoia – a message that

women and racial minorities often are presented with when they identify oppression and

discrimination. In other words, Leslie has internalized the skepticism of not only her partner but

also from society-at-large.

Demonstrating "Proper" Femininity through the Protection of White Masculinity
For some Black women in my study, protection of the male ego was important in determining if

and how to proceed in a conversation involving racial education. Of the 11 Black women who

discussed racially educational conversations, five mentioned this, and they tended to be within

the first few years of their relationship. By contrast, the aforementioned assertive approach was

more likely in relationships that had a duration of eight years or more. For instance, Lynn, a 25-

year-old Black woman living in a northeast city, explained her reasoning in not discussing with

her fiancé Rob the differential impact racism has had on his and her brothers' careers:

> *I wouldn't, like, just come out and say, 'Oh, you got that job because you're a*
> *White man,' but, like, I just see my brothers' struggles and I've seen, like, his*
> *struggles and it's like I don't know if he'll ever comprehend that, like, there's*
> *already things already coming at my brothers when they walk in the door, you*
> *know?....I could tell him that and he'll understand that but just, like, being feared*
> *is something that I don't think he'll ever comprehend, so, and I wouldn't even say*
> *it to him because it's just unnecessary, you know? Like, that would just, like,*
> *trying to, like, belittle him or something or say, like, 'Oh, you'll never understand.'*

According to Lynn, in the six years that she and her fiancé Rob have been together, they have not

shied away from talking about race, with conversational topics ranging from the "war on Black

bodies" to the ways in which race and gender shape their everyday, lived experiences. However,

Lynn draws the line at connecting the two together and say anything that may imply that Rob's

race and gender advantaged him in his career. In other words, she is loathed to imply that Rob

has not earned his success. Lynn did not indicate that Rob resisted her perspective on the

influence of those factors in her life when she has shared situations where she has experienced

discrimination. Rob may not feel the impact of sexism and racism on Lynn as a threat to the

validity of his successes. However, within hegemonic masculinity, occupation and achievement

play a large role in men's conceptions of self and manhood, and the situation may be different

when he compares himself to other men, like her brothers. While sympathy being a part of the

construction of hegemonic femininity plays a role in this, Black women being constructed as

"emasculating" may as well. Considering this is not part of the construction of White femininity,

Black women may feel more pressure to defy this stereotype.

Alisha, a 27-year-old Black female beautician, mentioned a similar consideration when it

came to conversation with her boyfriend, 26-year-old tradesman Sam. She shared with me an

example of a conversation that occurred about the 2014 movie "Exodus: Gods and Kings":

> *Recently, I got mad at the whole 'Exodus' movie because, like, why does Christian*
> *Bale have to be Moses? You find the whitest man...to be Moses, like, can't you*
> *find, like, a Brown--I mean, I'm not saying they need to be Black...It was just so,*
> *like, strong in me that, like, [her boyfriend] was right there, and I'm, like, 'Why*
> *does Christian Bale have to be Moses?' You know, um...and then but there's this*
> *weird discomfort in saying that to him because...I don't know, like, it's still a*
> *journey to have that type of, like, transparency with each other. Like, I don't ever*
> *want him to feel, like, bad or I don't know, like, he has to defend somebody or feel*
> *like he has to apologize on behalf of somebody or even that he has to agree with*
> *me.*

In the year-and-a-half that they had been dating, Alisha and Sam had had a number of

conversations about race from topics involving current events to pop culture, and Sam was the

only White partner who took an active role in learning racism after beginning to have racially

educational conversations with their partner. He went even as far as to become involved on a

communal level in anti-racism work. Individuality is not only a core part of hegemonic

masculinity, but also a part of Whiteness since White people are often socialized to not think of

themselves as a part of a racial group or collective (DiAngelo 2011). Despite his active interest

and concern, Alisha found herself still struggling with feeling as if she may be challenging Sam's

individuality and forcing him to feel as if he had to defend the casting choice as a White man.

Many spoke of a type of racial fatigue from having to engage in this emotional and

intellectual labor within their personal life, especially when their partner found it difficult to

understand their perspective and/or if they found themselves having to engage in these types of

conversations often. As 29-year-old Layla, a doctoral student, explained it,

> *[It] can be kind of challenging I think because you also have the expectation that,*
> *oh, this is somebody you're in love with and this is somebody that you like a lot,*
> *so, sometimes, like, if they say certain things that you think is [sic], like, really*
> *bad or kind of ignorant then you get, like, really offended, right? Because you*
> *don't expect somebody who you have a close relationship with would say*
> *something like that even though you know that, like, okay, some people think that*
> *way, you just don't expect your boyfriend to think that way. So, I think, in some*
> *sense, it's, like, what they say kind of hurts you a little more?*

The ways in which Black women are constructed place them in a unique position within

these relationships when it comes to doing this type of racework. While Black women have to

negotiate the larger ideology of hegemonic femininity, they also have to contend with the social

construction of Black femininity. While it is undeniable that this construction is embedded

within racist and sexist beliefs that are oppressive to Black women, there is also an argument to

be made that it can be liberating, to an extent, as well. Although Black women still have to

navigate expectations of protecting masculinity and stereotypes of the emasculating, angry Black

woman, they also have a script for what it looks like to be a woman who also advocates and

speaks up for herself. This results in some of them realizing that it is possible to be assertive and

insistent as Black women, which may be one of the reasons this group was the most likely to

discuss race-based discussions involving conflict. As I discuss in the next section, White

women's different status position – in relation to Black women and, within the context of their

relationship, to Black men – results in a distinctly different way to talking about racial

discussions within their relationships.

White Women & Racial Consensus

In comparison to Black women, five out of ten White women who cited race-related discussions

mentioned racial education, making it less of a reported occurrence for them. The majority of

participants described their conversations as being about learning about Black culture or their

partners sharing their personal interactions with racism. Second most common subject matter

was about race and their children, whether that involved issues at school or how to talk to their

kids about current events involving race. (The topic of childrearing will be covered in chapter 5.

As a result, these conversations will not be discussed in this chapter.) As Cathy, a 41-year-old

White Hispanic stay-at-home mom, explained:

> *If we do talk about it [race] we do so because it might impact our kids. Um...we*
> *do talk about news stories all the time because both us--Cedric listens to NPR in*
> *the morning, and I read all the headlines every morning, and, so, you know, when*
> *stuff happens in the world, we'll talk about it.*

However, White women often describe these conversations as not being educational because

they already shared a common belief system with their partner regarding race. Most of the White

women who said that they rarely discussed race-related topics with their partners attributed it to

having the same beliefs about race and racism as their partner. In other words, the majority of

White women in my study portrayed a "racial consensus" within their relationship. For example,

Trisha, a 38-year-old White Hispanic woman who works in law enforcement, explained that her

husband of 6 years did not understand why people were protesting the police in regards to the

police shootings of Black civilians in the media. Even in this case where her husband held an

opinion that was in the minority of Black people (Horowitz and Livingston 2016), she still

described them as being in agreeance: "We've never disagreed on anything that's come up about

that kind of stuff [race]."

Even in situations where the conversation was more educational, it was rarely ever

described as a disagreement. Forty-seven-year-old Lillian shared with me a conversation that

came up with her husband of 20 years, Richard, earlier in their relationship:

> *I remember him saying -- and this is super-ironic -- but I remember him saying in*
> *Berkeley, in particular, the cops, um, years and years ago, not now, but years*
> *ago, they were super, like, on the lookout for people who were Black or Brown,*
> *and he remembers being pulled over once for no reason at all. He was, like,*
> *drivin' a friend home from, um, a party or something through Berkeley, and he*
> *got pulled over, but he, you know, he was raised in such a way that he, he was*
> *taught how -- I mean, he's always been a polite person. He just a very mild, polite,*
> *sweet, kind man, but he's always been, he's always had manners about him, but*
> *was especially taught to be extra respectful [chuckles] to law enforcement, so he*
> *knew the whole thing about keeping your hands on the driving wheel, saying 'yes,*
> *sir' to a police officer, um...so those, that was something else that he also did*
> *share with me way back when.*

During this conversation, Lillian learned what the experience of being racially profiled was like

for Richard and the type of racial socialization he experienced from his family to prepare him for

what many Black people see an inevitability. Her reaction was one of sympathy – she contrasts

Richard's personality, which she describes as "very mild, polite, sweet, kind", with the type of

dehumanizing treatment he has experienced simply because of his race. Later in the interview,

Lillian explained how much she appreciated him sharing that with her.

Another example was a conversation that Gavriella, a 32-year-old mental health

specialist, had with her fiancé Trey where she sought his advice about a situation regarding race

at work about fears of a co-worker "outing" her relationship:

> *[She's] gonna tell [the two Black women at work] that Trey's Black. She's the*
> *kind of White woman that would think, like, everyone would be, like, 'Cool! Her*
> *fiancé's Black.' And I really don't want these two women at work to know that my*
> *fiancé's Black until they know me…and, like, they can judge me for me….And*
> *Trey was, like, 'You better hope she doesn't tell them before you do.'…I felt so*
> *anxious about it….And Trey was, like, trying to coach me. 'You want her to get to*

know you really quick before she can say [anything] ....You want her to think, like, you're the kind of girl, like, "Oh, she's with a Black dude. I guess that makes sense." As opposed to them thinking, 'Oh, that bitch is with a Black man.'"

In this situation, Gavriella viewed Trey as an expert on how to handle this issue of White woman/Black man relationships when it came to Black women. While she already had an understanding that some Black women disapprove of these relationships – and she stressed during our interview that she understood why they felt that way – she still felt that her fiancé had more knowledge than her that could be beneficial to her navigating what they both viewed as a potentially tricky social situation. This is quite in contrast to some of the examples in the previous section with Leslie and Amber where they felt their partners were questioning their perspective as Black women on racial and gender issues that affected them directly. Where their identity as Black women put their perspective in question, Gavriella viewed Trey's identity as a Black man as a place of knowledge and subject authority – not just because of his gender as a man but also *because* of his race as well.

There are a few possible reasons why White women report very different conversations regarding racial education than Black women. In comparison to Black women, Black men were more likely to describe their partner as being knowledgeable about racism prior to the initiation of the relationship. For example, Trey described Gavriella as being knowledgeable about racism and systematic oppression prior to the beginning of their relationship. In fact, it was an academic area of focus for Gavriella in her doctoral work, and Trey mentioned it as one of the things that he liked about her. Therefore, there may have been less of a need for these conversations. Secondly, White women may have been engaging in a form of relationship impression management, where they were wanting to present their relationship as a unified, virtually conflict-free zone in regards to race. This could be result of women being socialized to perceive

the health of their relationship as being their responsibility, as well as concerns about being perceived as unsympathetic and/or racist. There is also the expectation within hegemonic femininity of women as being caring, sensitive and support to their partners, which, by comparison, is not expected from hegemonic masculinity.

Lastly, there is also the fact that when it comes to race and gender, the "status gap" between White women and Black men is not as large as between Black women and White men. Simplistically speaking, White men are privileged in both race and gender, while Black women are disadvantaged in those categories. By contrast, White women and Black men both possess one privileged identity – race for the former and gender for the latter -- and one disadvantaged identity. In theory, White women possessing one oppressed identity may make them more able to sympathize with their Black male partners about racism. They may not be able to understand exactly what it is like to be Black or a Black man specifically, but they may be able to relate to the stereotypes and difficulties that come with being a member of an oppressed group.

Black men: Reliance on Avoidance and Moderation

Similarly to White women, Black men primarily described their race-related conversations as being about current events, with childrearing being second (latter of which will be discussed in chapter 5). Six of the eight Black men in the study mentioned race-related discussions, and, of those six, three mentioned engaging in racially educational conversations. In regards to other conversations Black men discussed that were of an educational nature, I found two trends among Black men in my study: 1) consciously choosing to avoid or lessen the frequency of conversations of an educational nature with their partner and 2) the usage of "moderate Blackness." While the former involves men who choose to not engage in these conversations, their interviews were insightful as to what factors may discourage some from wanting to have these types of conversations.

Reduction or Avoidance of Racial Education Conversations as being a "Sturdy Oak"

Three Black men either denied engaging in these types of conversations or attempted to reduce

the occurrence of them. Of those three, two were the only Black men in my sample that were in

the Baby Boomer age group (1946-1964), which may explain why their viewpoint was different

that the rest of the Black men in the sample. When Black men discussed their decisions, they

often conceptualized it using language that referenced the "sturdy oak" mentality of emotional

control, self-reliance, and independence (Bannon 1976).

Sixty-seven-year-old Bruce, who describes himself as semi-retired, has been with his

long-term partner Adina, a 61-year-old educator, for over 30 years and have three adult children

together. He explained in great detail throughout our interview of some of the racially

discriminatory situations he had faced since emigrating the United States from a Caribbean

island, which had appeared to have hurt him deeply at times. However, he maintained an aura of

indomitability – explaining how those situations had not defeated him and that they reflected

more upon those people than upon himself. When asked if he shared with Adina some of these

situations he had dealt with, he explained,

> *There's nothing that she can do about it and...comfort, you know, for the comfort-*
> *level? Ah...well, you know, I just have to find, you know, my own comfort....I don't*
> *think no one can...find that for you. You have to find that for yourself and deal*
> *with it.*

On the surface, Bruce's explanation – having to look inwards to oneself to manage adversity –

seems to simply reflect hegemonic masculinity's characteristics of independence and self-

reliance (Kilmartin 1999, Wetherell and Edley 1999). However, it is upon further investigation,

one can find racial elements to his explanation. When asked about discussions involving race

within their household, Bruce maintained that he and Adina did not discuss race, while often

using colorblind language. For example, he explained that he and Adina do not find race to be

"an issue in [their] household" and that they just view each other as people, therefore, there is no

need to discuss race. Adina also stated that they did not discuss race in their household.

However, she mentioned later in the interview that Bruce recently had been attempting to initiate

conversations about police violence against Black men, which had been receiving increased

media coverage around the time of our interview. She explained that she had no interest in

talking about it, framing it as being linked to her adverseness to unpleasant topics:

> *I'm, um, you know, my personality, I don't really get involved in problems. I mean, of course I feel bad about it, but I don't, um...I try to stay away from the news actually....I think that, um...you know, that he's unhappy with other things, ah, so he, um...sort of plugs into that. I mean, this is, you know, a percentage of it. It's not the whole thing....I've heard him several times, um, saying, um, that could happen to our son. You know, that could happen to anybody, um...so he's sort of into...sometimes he's really into victim, and I think he uses that to play that role. [response to me asking how she reacted to him saying that a police shooting could happen to their son] No, I told him not to even say it.*

Adina dismisses Bruce's concern about an issue that he has to negotiate on an experiential level

as a Black man in the United States by saying he is "playing the victim" and characterizing him

several times throughout the interview as being "angry" when discussing this topic – the latter of

which conjures racist stereotypes of the "Angry Black Man" (Collins 2005). In other words, as a

means to counter the discomfort she experiences when talking about racism, she engages in

withdrawal, argumentation (when Bruce relates the topic to their son), and blame in an attempt to

re-establish "white racial equilibrium" (DiAngelo 2011). Adina's avoidance and minimizing of

Bruce's concerns about police violence may partially explain why Bruce stated that one has to

find "comfort" within oneself. In addition, this sentiment from Bruce echoes his tone when he

talked about having to manage discrimination within American society as well – language of

internal strength, weathering adversity, emotional independence for survival. For Bruce, his

language is reflective of Black masculinity more than simply hegemonic masculinity – while the

words are similar to the latter, the larger context in which the language is situated within reveals

that it is a coping mechanism for managing racism and discrimination.

It is also important to address the conflicting information between Bruce and Adina in

regards to the discussion of race in their home. Why would Bruce deny it while Adina detailed

examples of such conversations? Due to the scrutiny that interracial couples have been under

throughout the history of the United States into the present day, and the particularly heightened

scrutiny that Black male-White female couples are under, Bruce was likely trying to project a

particular image about their relationship as being one free from the burdens of race and

transcending it -- a defensive mechanism against dominant societal narratives about race as an

inherently central part of interracial relationships. Considering that Bruce and Adina have been

together for over 3 decades – and both had been in serious interracial relationships previously –

they have noticed this scrutiny and "othering." Furthermore, Adina did acknowledge that she had

to convince Bruce to join the study. This further leads me to believe that Bruce -- in order to

protect himself, Adina, and the image of their relationship within the context of a scrutinizing

study -- likely intentionally employed a colorblind rhetoric for the interview. Bruce could have

feared that the acknowledgement of race playing any role in their relationship may reify

stereotypes or may make their relationship appear problematic.

Larry, who is 57-year-old and currently unemployed, and his wife Mary, a 47-year-old

White office worker, have been together for almost three decades and have two children. They

came from very different worlds when they met – Mary raised by a "racist," overprotective

family in a New England city, and Larry, who grew up between the same city as Mary and a

rural part of the South that ignored the outlawing of Jim Crow. While they do engage in racial

discussions, they described themselves as not having serious or informative conversations about

race. Their conversations typically consisted of what Mary describes as "jokes." She shared an

example with me:

> *I'll say to him, 'How come you can never clean up? How come I come home and they're dishes in the sink'....And he'll say, 'You're the mother. You're the woman of the house.'...He'll say that's traditional. Or he'll throw the Bible at me. And I say, 'Oh, traditional, let's go back to plantation days. Oh, massa, I'm sorry.' Sorry, but we laugh about it, you know?"*

However, they did not engage in substantive or educational conversations about race. As Larry

explains it, there is no purpose in trying to have a constructive conversation about race because

of the different racial positions that he and Mary occupy:

> *No [we don't talk about race], we mostly make comments because...it can't be a discussion. The reason it cannot be a discussion is because we came from two different backgrounds. We grew up two different ways. Um...that's why I could never really have that conversation. I, I...I say things to her that make her mad sometimes...and she'll say things to me that she thinks makes me mad but they don't. [laughs]*

The comments that Larry is referring to towards the end of this quote are the "jokes" that Mary

mentioned earlier – Larry makes similar types of statements as well. The end of this quote from

Larry also references a certain level of strength and/or indifference when he says that while the

racial (and gender-related) statements he makes to her angers her, he is unflappable. He later

credits this to some of the tense and dangerous situations he has found himself in as a Black man

growing up in the rural South and later urban North England in the 1960s and 1970s. In other

words, he has been through so much regarding racism that her comments pale in comparison.

Similar to Bruce, Larry's language reflects hegemonic masculinity in regards to strength and

indifference; however, it is more specific due to the larger racist context in which Larry had to

develop his masculine identity.

Furthermore, Larry's statement reveals a factor that is required for couples embarking on

conversations involving racial education – the belief that they have the ability to come to some

sort of common ground despite occupying different socio-racial positions and racial habitus. If you do not possess this foundational belief, then, as Larry exemplifies, why bother engaging in these conversations? While Larry and Mary's personalities may play a role in how they approach race in their relationship, their age cohort may have a bearing on this as well. The majority of the participants in my study came of age in the "colorblind" era (Bonilla-Silva 2010) as first- or second-generation middle-class people in integrated or predominantly White communities. They were able to see, in some cases from a young age, some of the commonalities that Whites and Blacks can have and were socialized to believe that race did not matter. However, for those in earlier cohorts, who came of age prior to this era, when race was discussed in more explicitly essentialist terms, they may be more likely to view race as a formidable obstacle to a shared racial perspective.

"Moderate Blackness"

The emotion work concept of "moderate Blackness" was also reflected in the actions of two of the three Black men who engaged in racial education, where they displayed more restrained and temperate approaches to conversations regarding race and, in some cases, to racial politics. Fifty-one-year-old Russell explained how he and his wife Lillian, who is 47 years old, are deliberate and careful when talking about race to one another.

> *When we talk about Black or African-American, um, I think we tend to, between each other, use PC statements. If in conversation, um, we're talking, joking, or clowning about, particularly, and this is if we're with other people or just with ourselves....you know the term PC? Politically correct? We're, we're mindful of the words we use, the language, and the context of the language...*

Russell uses this "PC" or "politically correct" approach beyond just when he is trying to explain to Lillian different things regarding African-American culture and history or racism – he also chooses to not use words like "nigger" jokingly because she finds it offensive. It is a restrained

approach to discussing racial politics and history that Russell engages in out of respect for Lillian

and to make conversations that could potentially be awkward or contentious easier to manage.

Thirty-eight-year-old businessman Richard and his wife Miriam, a 44-year-old nonprofit

employee, have been together for 20 years, have one child and live in the suburban western

United States. While it was evident during our interviews that Richard has thought intensely

about race and possesses very complex, nuanced views about it on national and global levels, he

describes himself as one who does not like to discuss it. He often uses words like "unfortunately"

when referring to talking about race within their relationship. If the topic does come up in their

household, he says it is usually Miriam who will bring it up because it either relates to her work

or current events.

> *I don't really focus on race….[Miriam is] more likely to bring it up than me. Me, I just don't, I'm like....She's much more likely, like, for instance, when things are going down in Ferguson and Baltimore, she's much more likely to follow it and be, like, 'Oooh, the drama, the tragedy.' I'm much more likely to be, like, 'Hm. What should we have for dinner tonight?' [laughs]*

Later in the interview, Richard explained that one of the reasons he avoids these conversations,

specifically racially educational ones, is because he is doubtful how much Miriam truly

understands about racism and he is skeptical that he could explain some the complexities of it to

her:

> *I think Miriam is much more, uh...ready to talk about terms of, you know, White privilege and people forced into circumstances to do certain things than I ever am. A lot of the time, I don't even pay attention. I mean, for instance, Miriam was all up in arms about Ferguson and this and that, and I said, you know, it reminds me of Watts. ...I don't think Miriam has any context for that...and I don't know if she doesn't have any context for that because she's...younger or because she doesn't know or whatever. But it's hard for me to just sort of, like, explain what happened to Watts....like, whatever it is, 40 years later, and they have never recovered from burning down their own city...and they never will. Well, they may recover, but they'll all be gentrified out. [laughs]*

It is obvious from Richard's quote above that Miriam does possess a certain level of racial literacy and considers issues like police violence important to her. However, Richard feels like that her understanding is at a relatively rudimentary level, and he is not certain he can explain to her how the recent riots in reaction to police violence operate within a larger sociohistorical context.

In addition, Richard's approach to handling race within his relationship may partially be related to his use of "moderate Blackness" throughout his social life. Richard explained that he lived primarily in a "White world"—every social space from his work to his leisure time was almost exclusively White. Through observation, he has learned there are certain rules to operate in this world smoothly as a person of color. As he explained, "You just have to be careful about it. So, I'm very, very---and you don't wanna be, like, *[laughs]* the Al Sharpton among your friends." According to Richard, a Black person talks about race with White people present and then White people label the person as "'He talks about race.' The guy talked about it once five years ago. I was, like, whoa. [I learned to just] talk about economics and baseball. You never shake [that image] off. Black folks never shake it off. Never. Never."

While Richard does talk about race with Miriam, he and Miriam both stated he rarely does so, or, as in the example from the previous section, he keeps the conversation pretty minimal. During our interview, Richard spent a significant amount of the interview talking about the complexities of race within the United States and on a global level, demonstrating that he has in fact spent a lot of time thinking about race and has nuanced perspectives. He just may see a risk to expressing them, which could be partially reflected in his approach to race and informative racial conversations within his relationship with Miriam as well.

White Men: Hegemonic Masculinity's Focus on Achievement

Of the nine White men who mentioned having race-related discussions in their relationship, eight mentioned racial education. White men were more likely than other groups to discuss how their knowledge of racism and racial awareness had increased since being a part of an interracial relationship. While some of this change was credited to observing the situations they have found their partners in, some also credited it to the conversations they have had with their partner for the duration of the relationship. An example of this would be Sam, who is a 26-years-old tradesman, and who was the only participant in the study who came in with a low level of racial literacy and, out of his own volition, began learning about racism on his own after he started dating and having race-related conversations with his girlfriend Alisha. By comparison, most who entered the relationship with a low level of racial literacy relied on their partner for education. Of these White men who discussed this shift during the interview, some demonstrated during the interview that they had developed a certain level of racial literacy when talking about things such as race and current events or racial issues that arise from raising multiracial children. However, for those who stated they had shifted their views yet demonstrated during their interview that they were in fact struggling with understanding the complexities of racism, there was a distinct tone of hegemonic masculinity, indicating the possibility that the more they adhered to the mental paradigm of hegemonic (read: White) masculinity, the more likely they may have difficulty shifting their perspective on racism and race.

Ryan is a 58-year-old educator and artist who has been married to fellow artist Amber, who was mentioned in the earlier section about Black women. In that section, Amber explained how she has struggled over the years to get Ryan to understand how pervasive racism is and, more specifically, how racism and sexism have impacted her ability to advance in her career. Unprompted, Ryan shared his perspective on the situation during our interview. While Ryan

believes that racism exists and is involved in social justice activism – for instance, Amber spoke

of his activism with social justice organizations and his participation in protests – he was still

trying to reconcile Amber's experience and perspective with how he views the world:

> *[Like Amber,] I've had struggles, too, but I've had a lot of success and economically I get, I make a lot more money, and she'll credit that to some extent to...the choices I've made, but also to the fact that I'm White and I'm a male, and, so, for me it's kinda like, well...I don't discount that. I totally understand. I know that's true, but I also know that my choices have been...I've been much more preserving in putting up with bullshit in order to stay the long haul in situations that I have been in professionally in order to reap the benefits of being somewhere longer, you know what I mean? [...] I don't discount what she's gone through because I totally think that in a lot of the ways there's a lot of validity to what she says about the way that things have gone for her professionally in, in...the, the, the problems that being black and being a woman brings to the table when you're trying to have a professional life, but, on the other side of the coin, I also feel like, relative to -- it's apples and oranges to me in some ways. I'm not discounting that being a White male has been advantageous, but I also think that...what my strategy, so to speak, has also been advantageous, so that's a point of discussion, and race is an issue. It is a factor in it, you know, race and gender actually are factors.*

In a similar vein to Lynn's concerns about implying that her fiancé's Rob's career

success may be due in part to his race and gender, Ryan is uncomfortable connecting being a

White man to his career success. He acknowledges it could be a factor, but then immediately

follows that admission by focusing on explaining how his and Amber's personalities and

hardiness are more consequential, thus implying that the role those identities play is minor at

most. He has the ability to comprehend the existence of these complex systems of oppression but

fails to connect it to his everyday life. As DiAngelo (2011) explains, white people are often

socialized to not think of themselves as a part of a racial group or collective, and, while Ryan has

an easier time processing Amber being a part of a gender and racial collective, it is difficult for

him to accept the ramifications of the fact that he is part of one as well – and one that is on the

beneficiary end of the racial and gender hierarchy. Furthermore, viewing the world through

colorblind lens – even partial ones – allows Whites to view their status in life as one that is earned (Gallagher 2003). While Ryan may know that racism and sexism can affect people's professional and economical outcomes in life, he is resistant to accept the inverse of that, which threatens Ryan's beliefs in individualism: that some people's successes, at least in part, are because of these factors. Furthermore, this would also imply that Ryan's professional achievements are, at least in part, not due to his hard work and have, to some extent, been given to him – something that can challenge his masculinity. Amber and Ryan's impasse speaks to the limitations of these types of conversations, which requires self-reflection and volitional cognitive and behavioral changes. It can be difficult for Whites to acknowledge their discordant racial understandings and, as Churcher (2016) explains, "if an individual solely relies on abstract reasoning or on calling to mind a set of facts to correct for his or her prejudiced perceptions of others we would expect this to have only a marginal effect on deeply-engrained affective attitudes…given that such attitudes demonstrate a lack of responsiveness to rational argumentation" (10).

Thirty-seven-year-old Kurt is engaged to Renee, his 32-year-old girlfriend of approximately 8 years that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. For Renee, since Kurt went to a predominantly Chinese high school, she feels that he should have an understanding of what it is like to be a racial minority. However, she expressed frustration throughout our interview about the many ways she feels like he does not understand how certain comments can be racially insensitive. While Kurt expressed that he felt his knowledge around race has grown, there was evidence during our interview that his racial literacy was rudimentary. For instance, he made several comments throughout our interview where he fetishized Renee's Blackness by associating it with "coolness." In one instance, he explained to me how he was attracted to Renee

by her similar sense of humor and how "cool" she was, which he connected to the fact that she

was a "Black girl." He explained how he was hoping to get "cool points" from Black women at

his job because of his relationship with Renee:

> *I thought, I kind of figured that I would, I would get cool points for being with a Black girl, but I did not get that. And, if anything...it was the other way around [laughs]. I don't think...because I think a lot of, um...Black, a lot of Black people think that Renee is kind of...you know, a traitor to them or she--she--she jumped ship. Not, not necessarily because she's with me, but just because she was, she was raised...in a, you know...in a, in a, in a pretty White way, I don't know, for lack of a better word. So, she, she, she gets along...she's been very, uh, assimilated into White culture, and they...I thought...so, so I think that she gets...I think she gets heat from...from Black people in a more [says something I can't understand] Black community. Um...so, I thought that...[a Black supervisor] hated my guts, and she always hated my guts. [...] I thought it would be a good idea for them to know that I was dating a Black girl, but it backed fired on me.*

In addition to fetishizing Renee's race (and gender), he commodifies it as something that can be

exchanged with other Black women for increased status for him. Furthermore, when Kurt's plan

fails, he can only understand the reason as being Renee being stigmatized by other Black women

for not complying with in-group racial norms – an explanation that virtually removes him from

any involvement or responsibility and then reframes her Blackness as a liability. Similar to

Adina with Bruce, Kurt problematizes Renee's race by laying responsibility for the failure of his

plan on her and is unable to reflect on his actions and situate them within a larger history of

White fetishization and commodification of Black bodies. Furthermore, Kurt's attempt to

"exchange" Renee's race and gender inherently devalues Black women since it implies that he is

magnanimous for being in a committed relationship with her. His interpretation of the event also

"cloaks" his Whiteness in invisibility – where it is visible to him when it appears to be an

advantage and hidden when his plan flounders. Similar to Adina, this interaction shows how

Renee is "raced" to Kurt, where her race carries a permanence that his does not.

Conclusion

Discussing race and having conversations to bridge knowledge or opinion gaps are one of the many ways that interracial couples manage the racial difference within their relationships, and both race and gender have an impact on how these conversations are interpreted and how they transpire. Racialized femininity and masculinity are lenses through which members of these couples not only process information but also how they cope with disparate viewpoints. I have demonstrated how racial identities interact with notions of masculinity and femininity to nuance of understandings of interracial conversations beyond simply how race can impact the outcome of them.

For Black men and women, the tension between hegemonic masculinity/femininity and racialized versions of these gender ideologies is reflected in the balancing act that they generally find themselves in when engaging in racially educational conversations with their partners. Hegemonic gender ideologies – sympathetic, docile womanhood and the "sturdy oak" masculine mentality – were demonstrated by Black women and men, respectively, in different contexts. For Black women, it was to prevent upsetting or hurting their partner by challenging their autonomy and/or achievement. For Black men, it was a coping mechanism to manage the different racial views or racism of their partner. On the other hand, racialized gender ideologies – "sassy" Black womanhood and "angry" Black manhood – resulted in Black female participants harnessing the former to resist racism and sexism and Black male participants avoiding the latter by utilizing "moderate Blackness" to avoid conflict or uncomfortable situations with their partner. This could also at least partially explain why, despite few admissions of racial conflict with their partners, Black men were more likely than Black women to say that they avoided racial educational conversations although the race and gender "status gap" they had with their partners was smaller.

Race also had a bearing on how participants discussed these conversations. Black partners focused more on points of conflict with their partner, and white partners talked more about their positive aspects of these conversations – whether that meant their growth in knowledge for men or racial consensus for White women. This could be an instance of impression management from White partners, but Black men were also more likely to describe their partners as having a certain level of knowledge and awareness of racism. It may also be a consequence of the fact that Black partners were more likely to be the educators – as with trained educators, it may be easier for them to see what understanding or knowledge is missing from their "students" while it is easier for the latter to see how their knowledge how has changed. In addition, hegemonic femininity and masculinity can be seen in this framing from White partners, where White men focused more on achievement and action, and White women focused more on being understanding, supportive, and empathetic.

There are a few caveats to keep in mind in regards to the findings of this chapter. This chapter focuses disproportionately on conflicts regarding racial education. While reflective of the research data, it is important to note that participants may be more likely to remember the areas of contention and heated arguments more than when there was immediate understanding or agreement. However, the findings still add to the research on racework and interracial racial discourse as a solution to individual racial prejudice. It elucidates some of the barriers to relying on discourse – even in situations where there is an intimate connection between people – as the ultimate solution to ending racism.

Twine and Steinbugler (2006) argue that a "sociological imagination" is needed for White partner to obtain racial literacy where

> [t]hey were aware that they belonged to a particular historical moment and
> operated in a larger racial (and regional) structure and were always thus

implicated in the material and social residues of a postcolonial and post-civil rights world in which the forms that racism assumes are in flux and can adapt [authors' emphasis]. (p. 359)

I would also argue that self-reflection and empathy are required as well and that gender ideologies that inhibit this also need to be given attention as well. It is erroneous to conclude that only race and racial difference need to be considered when trying to understand how to dismantle White supremacist ideologies and structures of oppression. As we must be constantly reminded by Collins (1989), there is a "matrix of oppression" – therefore, racist systems of oppressions are also interwoven with other structural types of oppression as well, including gender and sexual orientation.

Chapter 5
Race, Gender, and Situational Privilege/Disadvantage in Childrearing Discussions and Decision-Making

Introduction

The project of raising a human being can be a daunting challenge for any person. However, when the parental figures come from different backgrounds and occupy several disparate embodied experiences, it can present an array of challenges. Researchers have primarily explored how White mothers of children of color manage and negotiate the considerations that come up with parenting a child of color in a racially stratified society. Furthermore, due to the fact that couples comprising of Black women and White men are notably less common than White women and Black men, less attention has been given to the parents of children of those unions. Part of this scarcity is more likely due to the assumption that since Black women are unlikely to find themselves presented with childrearing challenges regarding race since they are Black themselves. However, this is a presumptuous assumption considering that the social meanings attached to biracialness are evolving, and various issues, such as colorism, could present certain challenges to childrearing.

However, there has been little investigation into how members of these couples discuss biracial childrearing and how race and gender impact how they interact within these conversations.

With a focus on the conversations members of these couples have about raising children I explore, in this chapter, how race and gender influence how members of these couples manage and navigate childrearing concerns regarding race. Does race modify gendered expectations regarding childrearing decisions and, if so, how does this manifest? What can this tell us about the racial dynamics of childrearing? I argue that race – specifically Blackness – interacts with gender in the management of race-related childrearing decisions in a way that creates a

situational advantage for Black women and a disadvantage for Black men. My findings reveal that societal conceptions about gendered parental roles results in Black women having more credibility with White men on childrearing decisions regarding race but the opposite result occurs for Black men with White women, which results in them being more likely to compromise or find alternatives to accomplish their childrearing goals. This is in contrast to my chapter on racial education, where Black women's race and gender at times results in White men questioning their authority on racism, and Black men and White women were more likely to have a narrative of consensus and understanding.

My analysis begins with an examination of how Black woman and White men navigate childrearing conversations and show how race and gender interact to result in Black women's views on race and racism to be perceived as more objective and credible by their partners within the context of parenting – which is in contrast to chapter 4 when they were discussing their own experiences or perspectives on racism. This is followed by my section on White women and Black men, where I analyze how Black men's race and gender impacts how they manage their desires for their children's upbringing while navigating their partners' expectations and wishes as mothers. This results in them expressing concerns and frustrations about their partners' perspectives and parenting strategies despite their partners often not reporting any childrearing discrepancies. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the similarities and differences among the groups.

Literature Review: Interracial Parents, Biracial Children & Childrearing

As interracial relationships become more acceptable in American society (Newport 2013, Jones 2011), the population of multiracial individuals continues to grow. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 2.1% of Americans are defined as multiracial – in other words, they chose two or more racial categories for their race (Parker et al. 2015). However, the Pew Research Center disputes

this figure, arguing that when one takes into account the racial identities of individuals' parents

and grandparents', the statistic should be closer to 6.9% (Parker et al 2015). Furthermore, this

population is growing faster than the U.S. population as a whole at three times the rate. The

majority of research pertaining to multiracial people has been focused primarily on their racial

identity and struggles within society's rigid racial hierarchy. Less attention has been given to the

interracial parents involved in their likely upbringing. Considering that the majority of

multiracial adults with Black ancestry report experiencing discrimination (Parker et al. 2015)[5],

many questions arise, including are these individuals prepared for this reality and how does their

upbringing factor how they perceive and manage these interactions?

Most of the research on parents of biracial children and childrearing tend to focus on

White women's capabilities and strategies of raising children who have a White and Black

background, which is probably due to the fact that women tend to be the primary caregivers

(Lorenzo-Blanco et al. 2013) and the assumption that White women may be faced with

challenges raising a child of color. According to research, some White mothers of biracial

children possess a certain level of racial literacy, which can be beneficial in preparing their

children for potential racism and to develop a healthy racial identity (Twine 2010, Twine and

Steinbugler 2006). In addition, the creation of this new relationship between White mother and

child of color can help bring to light the realities of Whiteness and racism (Frankenberg 1993).

In Twine's (1999) ethnographic research on White women raising children of a Black and White

background, she found that while Black partners were sometimes sources of information on

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[5] According Pew, "For multiracial adults with a black background, experiences with discrimination closely mirror those of single-race blacks. Among adults who are black and no other race, 57% say they have received poor service in restaurants or other businesses, identical to the share of biracial black and white adults who say this has happened to them; and 42% of single-race blacks say they have been unfairly stopped by the police, as do 41% of biracial black and white adults." Although unrelated to my research, it was also interesting to note that "mixed-race adults with an Asian background are about as likely to report being discriminated against as are single-race Asians."

Black culture and racism, White women more often found Black female extended family members – grandmothers, aunts, sisters-in-law – as their primary source of this information. While they often faced skepticism from Black family members about their ability to parent children of Black ancestry, there was still an expectation of them to be the primary parent involved in "race training" or racial socialization (29).

While there is significantly less research on Black women and White men in the raising of biracial children, there has been some research done on Black women's childrearing of Black children. The "homespace" is viewed as the primary site for teaching Black children to resist White supremacy and racism (Ward 1996). Black mothers can engage in three types of racial socialization, defined by Edwards and Few-Demo (2016) as the "messages and practices parents use to prepare their children for life as members of their own race and to educate them about intergroup relations with other racial and ethnic groups," in order to prepare their children to engage in the world as Black people. Hughes and Chen (1999) define these methods of racial socialization as the following: 1) cultural socialization, including the teaching of African-American history, culture and heritage, 2) preparation for bias, 3) promotion of mistrust or racial mistrust, and 4) egalitarianism and silence about race. However, the literature on the raising of biracial children leaves a few unanswered questions. How does the type of interracial couple impact how multiracial children are socialized? Although women remain the primary caregivers, men are becoming increasingly involved in the raising of their children (2018). How do men factor into how race-related decisions in childrearing are made? Are there certain topics that are under the purview of mothers and others that are for fathers? How does race factor into how this varies?

Findings & Analysis

The majority of participants mentioned substantive discussions with their partners about hypothetical or actual children. More specifically, this includes 35 participants who have children and 14 who discussed potential children – the only exceptions were six participants who either did not have children or who did not plan on having children. In contrast to same-race couples, these discussions often involved how to manage racial identity, concerns about treatment by others, and other race-specific topics in relation to childrearing. In the following sections, I will describe how members of these couples discussed raising children, and how race and gender influenced how they navigated and managed their concerns. My findings are presented by couple to help illustrate cohesively not only how participants managed these situations individually but also as a unit.

Black Women & White Men: Where Black Femininity Has a Place of Authority

Eighteen Black women and twelve White men (11 couples with both members as study participants) in my study had children, but only a portion (10 Black women and 6 White men) could recall conversations they had with their partner about childrearing. This was particularly the case among participants who had adult children since there had been quite a temporal difference since they were actively involved in childrearing. As with couples involving White women and Black men, most of their conversations involved concerns about racism and racial identity. Notably, Black women were less likely to mention encountering resistance from their White male partners when it came to these conversations, in comparison to when they were relaying their personal experiences with racism or discussing current events. In other words, White men were more likely to agree or defer to their partners in these conversations. Black women found themselves carrying more authority in these conversations regarding their children, which can be explained by the authority that came with their experiential authority of being

Black and of the gendered authority that comes with childrearing as being women. In addition,

this cannot be mentioned without giving weight to the fact that these conversations involved the

welfare of their children, which could have resulted in White men being more empathetic and

understanding – or, at the very least, being cautious in their approach and, as a result, being less

resistant to the race-related concerns of their partner.

Carrie & Anthony

Carrie, a 36-year-old Black female medical professional, and Anthony, a 37-year-old White

businessman, reside in a northeastern city with their toddler daughter. According to Carrie, they

have had their share of conversations about race, at times agreeing with one another, other times

agreeing to disagree. However, when it comes to the raising of their daughter, they have so far

have yet to have a disagreement. This does not mean that it may not involve some explaining on

their parts of their perspectives. As Carrie explained,

> *We have been discussing, recently, where to enroll [their daughter] in school…since she's, um, getting to that age soon. Our neighborhood has good schools with good diversity---there are kids of all races, kids of immigrants, et cetera. And [Anthony] wanted her to go there. Those schools, though…I mean, diversity still means mostly White, and I felt like it was important to…give her more of a Black influence. Even though she's both Black and White, the world is going to view her as Black…and I felt it was important that she is well connected to Black people and her, her Blackness. I explained this to Anthony and, although I think he still preferred for her to go to the local school, he agreed to [us making arrangements to find a more predominantly Black school].*

According to Anthony, "it's important that [their daughter] is exposed to a wide range of people

from all over….that's what most parents look for." However, after considering Carrie's

argument, he agreed to sending their daughter to a predominantly Black school because he

thought "she made good points [I] hadn't thought of before." Discourse around racial diversity in

U.S. schools is a common theme on the national and local levels; however, many people fail to

see that this narrative is often implicitly centered around Whiteness – more specifically, middle

class Whiteness -- as it is always framed in what Whites view as "diversity" – being in the presence more people of color than is typical for the average White America (while often still being in the racial majority). For people of color, as racial minorities, being in the presence of other people of color and Whites is more of the "norm" for them. For Anthony, who grew up in predominantly White, middle class circles, this type of rhetoric and perspective seemed applicable to all children and had gone unchallenged until the conversation with Carrie, who has the perspective of a racial minority who has less concerns about diversity exposure and more about having connections to a minority community that may serve as a resource to their daughter. There is a possibility that Anthony would have given Carrie some resistance to her perspective, like with some other conversations Carrie and Anthony have had in past regarding race. However, the weight of a decision that could have long-term consequences for their daughter may have factored in his decision. This is not a hypothetical conversation about racial politics in America or about Carrie's perspective on a micro-level social interaction – it is about the welfare of their child, which may cause Anthony to be more cautious by relying on Carrie's embodied experience and perspective.

Samantha & Philip
Thirty-eight-year-old Samantha, a Black woman, and 49-year-old Philip, a White man, are non-profit entrepreneurs who work together and have been married for over 16 years. They live in a city in the Southeastern U.S. and have two school-aged children. Both of them describe themselves as having similar opinions and views on race and consider anti-racism very important. However, that does not mean that they have not found it necessary to have certain conversations about race regarding their children. Like a lot of parents of multiracial children, Samantha, who is a non-practicing Muslim, and Philip, who is Jewish, found themselves having

to decide how they were going to handle their children's racial identity. Below, Samantha recalls the conversation:

> It wasn't really an argument. It really was just a discussion about are our children White? You know, are they Jewish? Are they Black? Like, and so I said to him, 'Well, if you look at them, people are gonna look at them and say their African-American.' So, you know, before they started changing the boxes on the school registration form, which some of them still haven't--you had to choose whether you were Black [laughs] or White or Hispanic...and stuff. So, I, we identified them as Black, um, and, you know, and our rationale was because maybe they'll have more opportunities because they're a minority versus a majority, um, and they just look Black!

As can be seen by her frequent use of the pronoun "I", it was Samantha's idea to racially classify their children as Black, and they both came to an agreement to do so due to the physical appearance of their children and the belief that they would have more opportunities as a racial minority, such as when it came to scholarships. Samantha's "double consciousness" that often comes with the embodied experience of being a Black person in society highlighted the importance of how others would perceive their children phenotypically, resulting in her suggestion. Philip, in response, understood her reasoning and agreed with her suggestion. This is contrast to not only some of the resistance that Black women faced when discussing race in a way separate from their children in chapter 4 but also to how quite a few White women in my sample expressed frustration when others referred to their children as Black or when their children self-identified in such a way.

In comparison to chapter 4 when Black women were significantly more likely than any other group to voice complaints about their White male partners minimizing or dismissing their experience and feelings regarding racism or failing to comprehend certain racial concepts, Black women were more likely to discuss consensus with their partners when it came to racial issues regarding their children. Furthermore, it was not always necessary that Black women have to

convince or "spearhead" decisions regarding childrearing with their partners. For instance,

Samantha and Philip recalled how race factored into how they curated the social lives of their

children. As Samantha explained,

> *[Our children] go to a school that's about...75% Caucasian, and I'm a big*
> *[inaudible] believer of public school, and, unfortunately, [where we live] there*
> *are not a lot of public schools…that are good….[O]ur concern was would our*
> *kids automatically be identified as, um, not being academically sound based on*
> *appearance, and, so, um, that was a big conversation. And then the second part of*
> *that was because they're at that school, where, how do we give them the exposure*
> *that they should get, you know, from being Black children, and, so, the*
> *neighborhood we lived in for the first...eight years here was predominantly*
> *African-American, you know, upper middle class African-American*
> *neighborhood. We sent -- because [her husband] and I love diversity -- moved*
> *more in town, um, and our kids, all of their after school or extracurricular*
> *activities are with predominantly African-American groups.....to kind of*
> *compensate for the all-White, the predominantly White school. And it's not just*
> *that it's all-White. It's that it's White and affluent and, so, that is our biggest issue*
> *is that exposure because we want them to have a very diverse, you know,*
> *socioeconomic status in terms of their friends.*

Similar to Carrie, Samantha and Philip were concerned about others' perceptions of their

children based upon their race and that their kids had a connection with Black children their own

age. However, like Anthony, Samantha frames part of her concerns around diversity, primarily in

regards to their children's exposure to more Black children than were at their school and

socioeconomic diversity. (It was a rarity for anyone in my study to voice concerns about

socioeconomic diversity, so this was an exception for my sample.) In contrast, Samantha did not

have to negotiate with Philip about this aspect since they hold very similar views regarding race

and socioeconomic class. Philip, who also works as an educator, discussed some of the parenting

values that were important to him and Samantha:

> *It was important for our kids to go to public school. However, the good school*
> *district that it was convenient for them to move to was predominantly White, and*
> *we, as parents, struggled with that….It was also important for them to not go to a*
> *predominantly White school. It was important to us that they identified as*
> *African-American….Really, we're raising them to see themselves as Black and*

> *Jewish -- not really Black and White. Our Jewish heritage is important to me…and it is important, I believe, for them to be connected to it. [Talks briefly about the shared history of oppression for Jewish and Black peoples.] …So, um, to balance the predominantly White influence of their school now, we put them in extracurriculars where the kids are predominantly African-American.*

Like Samantha, Philip explains how they were both already thinking similarly about the racial identification of their children and the importance of curated racial exposure for their children. As he discusses the importance of raising their children within the Jewish faith, Philip makes it clear that they are Black and Jewish and *not* White, speaking to how he also views their children having a connection to Black people and culture as being important. (Samantha, who was raised in the Islamic faith, has been a non-practicing Muslim for a number of years, so it sounded like raising their children as Muslim was not a consideration.) In comparison to Anthony, Philip is not concerned with diversity and is only concerned that his children feel connected to being Black and Jewish.

Chantel & Jake

Chantel, a 32-year-old Black female entrepreneur, and Jake, a 31-year-old White male engineer, live in a northeastern city with their young daughter and have been together for 8 years. Jake admitted during our interview that he did not think much about race before entering into a relationship with Chantel, where he found himself confronted not only by the reactions of others but also by witnessing Chantel's lived experience. Over the years of being together, Jake's knowledge has grown enough to the degree where both he and Chantel have had individual conversations with their daughter about race. For instance, Jake shared with me a situation that occurred where their daughter, who was in the early years of elementary school, said "it would be nice if Mommy turned White." This hurt Chantel's feelings, possibly in part because, as she explained, she has struggled over the years with colorism as a woman with a deep skin tone. According to Jake, "we decided since I was the one who was White, I should have the

conversation with [their daughter]." Their reasoning was that they felt the conversation

explaining why her comment was problematic would mean more coming from someone who

was White.

> There are still some things…cultural differences, that I don't understand. For
> example, today…Chantel was talking to our daughter about [what it was like for
> Chantel] being the only minority in her advanced class in high school…in a
> school with a substantial African-American population. She was talking about,
> like, how those kids did not receive opportunities, you know? So…if this was a few
> years ago, I would have kept pressing her to explain what those inequalities are
> [sic], but, now…I just listen….I listen, process it, and, if I do have questions, I'll
> wait until later [to ask]….I have to take what she says and…make that a part of
> me.

While both Chantel and Jake assume the responsibility of having conversations with their

daughter about race, Chantel does seem to assume a certain level of authority on racial issues

since Jake views himself as still in a position where he is learning from Chantel.

While Jake has learned enough over the years to have conversations alone with their daughter

about race, he still has situations where he looks to Chantel for information and guidance on

what it is like to be Black in America. However, there are still some concepts that Chantel is

unable to communicate to Jake, which may result in her having to lead certain discussions with

their daughter as she continues to get older:

> I feel like there's just some things--and they're very intangible--there's some
> things that, just culturally, I'll never be able to articulate or never be able to
> explain [to Jake]. Um...I guess from my point of view just the sense that, like,
> African-Americans are always, like, working to do better or, at least, from my
> family experience and upbringing….if an opportunity is in front of you or there's
> an opportunity that you can create, like, work at it, go for it, that sort of thing,
> um...and I guess it's counterbalanced by the opportunities that...are being
> overlooked, or opportunities that aren't being given or haven't been given
> historically or things that have been, more or less, robbed or stolen. Kind of, like,
> historically always working to regain that ground, um...I just don't think my
> husband sees the world that way, and I don't think it's anything I'll ever talk him
> into, but, you know, a lot of my parenting preferences or choices are through that
> lens, and, um, you know, there might be some things that we see differently as
> parents but...um...but I think that we'll have to come to an agreement from a

> *different space, not from, like, a cultural experience because I just realized that*
> *we'll never be seeing with the same...*

There are certain aspects of the embodied experience of being African-American or Black that

Chantel either cannot fully explain or believes may be difficult for her husband to understand as

a White man. Regardless, they inform her parenting preferences, even if sometimes in the

background in a way that may be hidden to Jake. However, Chantel's main focus is not

necessarily that he understands her reasoning but that they can come to the same actionable

conclusion even if that has to be done coming from different experiential and conceptual paths.

Additionally, Chantel's last statement is profound because in that moment of sharing this with

me, she came to the conclusion for the first time that she and Jake will never be able to view the

world with the same lens due to their different cultural upbringing – something that is tied to

their race. At this point in their relationship, however, it has yet to be an issue due to Jake's

strategy of listening and deferring to Chantel on race-related childrearing issues, which is tied to

their embodied racial experiences.

Alisha & Sam
This contrast in managing race-related discussions for White men is at least tied in part to their

desire to want the best for their children, even if it at times may mean parenting based on certain

concepts that they may not entirely understand or endorse. Sam is a 26-year-old White tradesman

who grew up in the Midwest in an area that he describes as being predominantly White. He met

Alisha, a 27-year-old Black Midwestern woman who works in the beauty industry, about a year-

and-a-half ago in the east coast city they now reside in. Sam had no previous history of dating

outside of his race before and, considering his upbringing, did not know much about Black

culture or history, and found himself looking to Alisha for information. However, as he sees his

future involving Alisha and possibly biracial children, this has not prevented him from trying to

learn more about racism in the United States against Black people. As he explained,

> I think [the possibility of having biracial children] just made me more aware that,
> um, that the issues are very pressing, you know? Because before it was, like...it
> didn't, it didn't affect me personally, you know, but I'm dating a Black woman, you
> know, if we have kids, if we have, like, a child and he's a boy, like, this is an issue,
> like, he's gonna have to deal with. And, so, then, like, now I'm, like, 'Oh my
> gosh...This...this is crazy, like, I don't want my child to grow up in a world where
> he is, you know, automatically viewed a certain way or people see him a certain
> way. And, so, it makes it very personal, which is...which is unfortunate that it took
> that to make me wake up, but that's the reality, I think that's probably the reality
> of it. It's what made me more aware. [...] I mean, I cared about it before, but it
> wasn't, like, as pressing. Um...I think there's, like, I think there's a sense of
> urgency in it, and...I just no longer, like, an abstract, um, like, it's not just an
> opinion that I have. It's very, like...I get more passionate about it. I'm, like, this
> actually affects me and so I'm gonna be, I don't know...yeah, I take it personal
> when people make other comments that don't support that or go against what I,
> you know, what I think is happening. I take it a lot more personal, you know?

Sam has taken this personal interest in understanding and fighting racism deeper than most other

White participants I spoke with where he has extended it to looking within himself and reflecting

on his own thoughts and actions.

> I try to think before I speak, you know, because sometimes...I don't, yeah, I don't
> trust myself...that all my racial biases are--although, like, [inaudible] even though
> I'm not because I think, like, we all are, I think, like, everyone has, like, certain
> racial biases, like, you grow up--you grow up in that culture it's to to, like, purge
> yourself of...all those perceptions or stereotypes, and you know, so, I do try to be,
> like, I try to be conscious of that but I'm not as, I'm really not as afraid of [it].

This subtly reflects a change in how Sam previously approached his racial conversations with

Alisha earlier. Where he was more concerned about *saying* something racist or *being perceived*

as a racist, he has now become more focused on reflecting on his own views and perceptions that

may be racist and is looking to change those. Furthermore, he has come to the realization that

racism is inherent in American society, and, therefore, everyone has been socialized with a

certain level of racial bias. It is important to note that, for Sam, it is not necessarily being in a

serious relationship with a Black person that precipitated this change but the possibility of having

children. Sam's explanation points more directly to one of the reasons why White male partners

have a significantly different response to these conversations than they did about Black women's

own experiences or perspectives on racism.

Leslie & Joshua

I briefly wanted to bring attention to the fact that Black women and White men do not always

come to a consensus easily due to the fact that their children may be involved. Forty-one-year-

old Leslie, a Black woman who is currently unemployed, and Joshua, a 41-year-old White male

graduate student, live in a northeastern city and have been married for 14 years. While they have

yet to have children, like Alisha and Sam, they have had discussions about it and have already

found themselves disagreeing about racial identity. As Leslie explains,

> *I said, 'Well, it's pretty clear to me – they're Black.' And he said, like, you know,*
> *'Hold up. That's not true.' He said they're…biracial. I said I don't honestly feel*
> *there's no real designation for that. You know, from what I've always been*
> *told….You know, if one parent was Black and the other was White, the kid was*
> *considered Black. Don't try to fill their head [by] tell[ing] them that they're*
> *White because that's just a lie. […] I don't think it would be fair…for any kid that*
> *I had to say, 'Oh, I'm not really Black.' That's almost of an insult. You know,*
> *what's wrong with being Black?*

Leslie went on to compare this possible situation of her future children identifying with being

biracial with the movie *Imitation of Life*[6], based on the 1933 novel by Fannie Hurst that involves

Peola, a light-skinned African-American woman who attempts to pass as White to her darker-

skinned mother Delilah's dismay. She even went as far as discussing what she would feel like if

she found herself in a situation like Delilah's character. For Leslie, the racial identity of

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[6] The original movie was released in 1934, directed by John M. Stahl and starring Caludette Colbert and Warren
William. A 1959 remake was made, starring Lana Turner and Juanita Moore, and was directed by Douglas Sirk.
Leslie was not specific as to which version she was referring to, but according to the Turner Classic Movies Film
Archive, the former is considered more accurate to the book.

"biracial" is associated with disassociating from Blackness, desire to associate with Whiteness, and a shamefulness of being Black, including one's Black mother.

According to Joshua, he believes racial identity is under the purview of their children and is not their decision to make. However, the reality is that this is impractical for at least the first few years of their lives when they more than likely will not even understand what the concept of race or racial identity are. Leslie and Joshua both said that this is a discussion they have had several times, without coming to an agreement. From what I could ascertain from our interview, it does not appear that Leslie has explained her reservations to Joshua the way that she did with me. In chapter 4, Leslie expressed frustration with Joshua since she felt that he did not truly grasp how much racism and sexism were impacting her job search. It could be possible she has not explained her reasoning behind her view of their potential children's racial identity out of fear that he would not understand it or feeling like her feelings were being minimized again.

Another reason that White men in these couples may be more likely to be understanding during racial conversations about their real and hypothetical children's upbringing and future may be because Black women's reasonings may be viewed as more selfless and objective when pertaining to their children and not to themselves. When some Black women in chapter 4 were trying to point out their partner's White privilege or explain an encounter earlier in the day with a racist person, their partners may have viewed them as being biased or defensive, particularly when one considers the stereotype that Black women face as being hypersensitive due to their race and gender (Killian 2012, Evans and Moore 2015). However, at the same time, their gender may result in White men perceiving similar concerns their partners have regarding their children as being more selfless due to it being rooted in caring for their children. Not only is there a societal expectation of women to be selfless and self-sacrificing, particularly for their children,

but this model of femininity is more pronounced when one thinks of the expectation of the long-suffering Black mother who works tirelessly for the needs of others (Collins [2000]2009).

White Women & Black Men: Managing Different Viewpoints

All of the White women (11 in total) and Black men (8) in my study had children, but, as with Black women and White men, they were less likely to remember childrearing conversations or concerns if their children were grown adults. For the majority of these couples, while White women are the primary caregivers, there were times that Black men felt they needed to advise their partners on certain situations about race. In comparison to Black women, Black men were more likely to express concerns or reservations about their partners' comprehension regarding racism. As a result, they were more likely to talk about having to compromise with their partners, or they took it upon themselves to have certain conversations regarding race with their children without talking to their partners first – or at all. Additionally, Black men's role in racial socialization of their children meant that they were involved in parenting in an additional way to most White men in the study.

Lillian & Russell

Forty-seven-year-old Lillian, who identifies as half-White and half-Mexican, and 51-year-old Russell, a Black man, are both mid-level city government employees who have two children and have been together for about two decades. They were quite a notable couple due to how fondly they spoke of each other in their interviews; in many ways, they seemed like a newlywed couple in their honeymoon phase. This fondness and caring they have for each other also extended to situations here Russell felt like he needed to guide Lillian on some issues regarding Black culture that he felt like she may not be aware of. He used an example of when Lillian wanted to take their daughter to her hairstylist, who is Asian. As Lillian was mentioning this casually to Russell, he realized that she may not understand the realities that Black people have to manage when

looking for a hairstylist. As a result, he used that conversation as an opportunity to teach Lillian

the tools needed when looking for a hairstylist as a Black person in America. However, as he

explains, he was careful in how he framed it.

> *I kind of like to think of myself as being, um, polite. Ah, as I said, when I talked about, um, does [Lillian's hairstylist] know how to do Black hair. I said, this is no, this is exactly how I phrased it to you, I phrased it to her. Sorry to say this, I don't want to sound like, you know...'I'm not being prejudiced here, but does [the hairstylist] know how to do Black hair.'[...] And that is quote. So, if you can extrapolate from that statement, uh, the level of discomfort when we talk about Black or African-American [subjects], um, I think we tend to, between each other, use PC statements.*

While looking for a hairstylist may normally seem trivial, this discussion reflects how it can be a

difficult, time-consuming task for Black people living in a White-majority and White

supremacist society. Haircare, especially when it comes to daughters, often categorized under the

work of mothers or women. It not unusual to see other studies note how White women may

either find themselves being advised by Black female relatives or strangers how to manage their

children's hair or find themselves seeking this information out. (Lillian herself mentioned how a

Black female friend of hers had to teach her how to do her daughter's hair and how wonderful it

was for her to finally understand.) Therefore, it is notable that Russell is the one to step in and

guide Lillian on how she has to approach Black haircare differently – although it is still viewed

as primarily Lillian's responsibility to ensure it is taken care of. However, as Russell notes, the

tone is "PC" or "politically correct" when it comes to issues regarding Black people with Lillian,

which he later ties to being respectful of her. Russell may also be doing so as to not make Lillian

feel uncomfortable or insecure about not understanding some of the concerns required to care for

Black hair. According to Russell, Lillian appreciated him bringing this up since she had not

considered whether that would be an issue with her hairstylist.

During her interview, Lillian shared with a conversation she and Russell had about their

son where she was upset after finding out his teacher in second grade played an episode of the

1987 documentary series *Eyes on the Prize*, about the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to

1965, as an activity for Black History Month. Lillian felt the imagery was too violent for their

son to see at that age and was upset that the teacher played it without communicating with

parents first. For instance, she referenced "super disturbing" footage of police dogs in Alabama

attacking protesters, which she was most likely referring to the famous footage of Southern

Christian Leadership Coalition's (SCLC) members being attacked by Birmingham authorities

with high-pressure fire hoses and police dogs in 1963. However, according to Lillian, Russell

felt differently:

> *I remember being **so** [emphasis hers] upset that this brilliant teacher whom I*
> *respected and was so happy that, that [their son] got into her class, um...did not,*
> *like, say, 'Hey, parents! Head's up! I'm going to be showing this film clip in class*
> *that could bring up some scary issues for your children.' And I remember being so*
> *frustrated, and Russell and I having a really good conversation about the notion*
> *of, you know, [their son] being ready to see that and me feeling like, no, this is my*
> *-- God, second grade. You're like, what? Seven? Eight? And, you know, feeling*
> *like, no! The kid hasn't been exposed to any of this! I--I feel like it was wrong of*
> *the teacher to presume that it would be fine to show this, this news clip. Or, this,*
> *this portion of a documentary to second graders. And, so, I remember it being a*
> *really good opportunity for Russell and I to work through...you know, how do we*
> *approach that. [...] But what it really came down to was Russell feeling confident*
> *that he was old enough, and he needed to know the history.*

Russell also referenced this disagreement between him and Lillian about what is age appropriate

for their children to learn about the history of racism and the Civil Rights Movement in America.

As he explained,

> *I don't mind telling the kids about, you know, you know, the reality of African-*
> *American history and culture. You know the old story, if you forget about history,*
> *you're damned to relive it? I say, well, maybe they need to see that movie [The*
> *Autobiography of Jane Pittman]. Maybe [his kids] need to see "The Civil War"*
> *and…"Eye [sic] on the Prize." Definite….and "Roots." [...] It is a, uh,*
> *argument. Two different points of view. [Lillian's] a very positive person….She*

doesn't think terrible things belong in a children's [sic] mind or in their life. [...]
But...this is being Black, realize that [their son] has got to know about slavery on
a more visceral level. He has to know what a lynching is. He has to know how
unfair that is because if you're going to fight for something, you have to know
what you're fighting for and why. So, yeah, that's kind of thing where, uh...where
we differ, but, ultimately, I--I...I back down, I acquiesce. [...] If we have any
arguments about race, we kind of soft petal the more harsh aspects to the kids.

Russell mentioned at least one other example where he and Lillian disagreed about how honest

to be with their kids about this particularly fraught history and, in that case, it was in regards to

their daughter, who is their youngest. This topic is something that he felt passionate about during

our interview, which is partially shown by his categorization of this disagreement as an

"argument." Lillian finds herself coming up against some of the difficult realities and decisions

that must be made as the parent of a Black child in America. While it is understandable that she

wants to create a safe environment for her children where they view the world as a non-

threatening place, this is also clouded by a certain level of White privilege, where the seriousness

of preparation for racism is minimized. After Russell explained how he found it important as a

Black person to know and understand this history and its "power", Lillian viewed the result as

her agreeing with Russell by sitting down with their son to discuss what he watched in class that

day. Lillian added that they "made sure" to tell him that the world was no longer like that, and he

was safe from things like that happening to him. However, to Russell, it appears to have been

compromise: their children learn about these things but it is to a more limited extent than he

would like. As Lillian explained her interview, she does think it is important for her kids to

understand the history of racial politics in the US, but, according to her and Russell, she

struggles with deciding when is the correct age. This reason and the role that Lillian plays as

their mother may have resulted in Russell being willing to "acquiesce" in this case and

compromise, despite how strongly he feels about it. Comparing this to some of the Black

woman/White man couples, like Carrie and Anthony, this could possibly point to some

limitations that come for Black men during conversations of this nature. In many ways in

American society, mothers are given priority in childrearing decisions, so, while Black fathers in

these relationships may find themselves being involved in decision making in ways that White

fathers may not, it may be more limited than that of Black mothers.

Miriam & Richard

Miriam, a 44-year-old White woman who identifies as half-Middle Eastern, and Richard, a 48-

year-old Black man, live in West Coast suburbia with their young daughter from their

relationship of approximately 20 years. While Miriam works in the non-profit world, Richard

works in business. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Richard describes himself as often

avoiding talking about race in his self-described predominantly White world but expressed very

nuanced views about race during our interview. He also communicated some frustrations with

some of Miriam's parenting decisions. For instance, he shared how they disagree about the best

way to handle their daughter's racial identity:

> *I don't think Miriam is prepared to deal with [their daughter experiencing
> racism]. I had to deal with it as a kid, so I got [inaudible] so I was prepared to
> deal with it. But I don't think Miriam wants to deal with it face-on. For instance,
> two weeks ago, our daughter said, 'Boys are playing with my hair. They won't
> stop. I've asked them to stop, and they won't.' And Miriam was, like, 'Oh!' And,
> and, like, my immediate thought was, they're playing with your hair because
> you're the only Black kid on the playground. You have these crazy ass braids that
> everybody wants to touch. You see it all the time. And [his wife] is, like, 'Well, you
> can try this...' And, I was, like, 'We're going to speak to the person who runs your
> after-school program.' And, and, you know, that, that's what [their daughter]
> wanted. Like, she didn't want to hear this, right? It's, like, no, I don't care who
> these boys are, what age they are, this is what you're going to have to deal with.
> And this is trivial. And, I'll tell ya, the one thing I learned from growing up is you
> take no quarter from these fools. You stop it, and you nip it in the bud. You let
> them know...right away.*

During our interview, Richard explained that there were some aspects of parenting a Black child

that he felt Miriam was unable to handle in his opinion. In addition to the example above, he also

expressed frustration that she wanted to let their daughter decide her racial identity, with his argument being that they do not even let her decide something as benign "as how much cereal to pour herself," so how could they let her decide something as significant as her racial identity. In this example quoted above, he felt the need to interject himself into a conversation that Miriam and his daughter were having because he felt Miriam's solution was inadequate. Due to the racial undertones of the interactions that their daughter was complaining about, Richard felt the best way to address it was to bring the problem to the attention of the teacher in charge. Not only does this action increase the likelihood that the behavior will stop, under the assumption that the teacher observes and intervenes, but a parent coming into the classroom indicates the significance of the interactions to them – it is important enough for the parent to take time out of their work to come in to talk to the teacher about it, which is not something they are as likely to do with trivial issues.

Richard connects his understanding of how to handle this situation with his upbringing and his personal experience growing up. He was taught to not accept being treated poorly by racist people, and he also knew from experience what it was like to be at the receiving end of such treatment. Unlike Russell, Richard did not express to Miriam his reasoning as to why the situation involved directly parental intervention, which could be due to either his reticence to talk about race or a fear that she would not understand. However, it could preclude increasing the possibility that the next time a situation like this occurs, Miriam would know how to address it or the racist undertones involved.

Cathy & Cedric

Cathy and Cedric reside in the southeastern U.S. in the suburbs with their two children. Cathy, who is 41 years old and identifies as a White Hispanic, is a stay-at-home mom, and Cedric, a 40-year-old Black man, is a tech executive. Both them stated in their interviews that they do not talk

about race outside of current events. However, the one exception are their conversations with

their kids about race, which they both acknowledge Cedric tends to take the lead on.

> *The kids would tell you that he's racist. They like to tell him that all the time because he's more a comedian than anything else....We try to be open with the kids.... we both will, we still talk about social issues and things going on in the news. We do talk about it a lot. Um, so like I said, [her husband] makes jokes, so [laughs], they can find it so inappropriate, but he doesn't say it in front of people....while it's important for them to know the serious side of it, he also wants them to know that it's not serious, if that makes any sense....I think that we like to talk to them about it at home so that...they feel open enough to discuss [?] it to you, and, even like I said, living in this area we do, we live with a lot of, you know, Indian and Asian families, and so there are a lot of things that come up differently, and, we just, you know...this will be one of [her husband]'s bad jokes. If I would have said that, and he was here, he'd say, 'What's the problem? They all eat rice anyway.'...Yeah. And the kids would say, 'Dad, that's racist.'*

According to Cedric, the topics range from things that their children witness at school to things

that are being said in the media, like issues involving police violence. In the same vein to

Cathy's explanation, he "wants to expose them to as much as possible in a serious way and

through humor." From what I could ascertain from the interview, Cedric is a person who loves to

joke about things, in general, and race is no exception. Although neither of them gave an

explanation as to why Cedric seems to be the one to lead these conversations, one would deduce

that this is likely due to his embodied experience as a Black man, which he can derive

knowledge from to use to guide his children in conversations about race.

Mary & Larry
Mary, a 47-year-old White female office worker, and Larry, who is 57 years old Black man who

is currently unemployed, live in a city in the Northeast with their two sons. They have been

together for 25 years. During my interviews with them, I noticed a discrepancy in how they

racially categorize their children, which, as was revealed later, was because they never had a

discussion about it. Mary views their sons as biracial, whereas Larry confidently stated they were

Black. "I tell my kids that they're Black," he said, "I tell them that, even though they are light-skinned. And I ask them all the time, 'Who are you?'" When I inquired what the conversation that he and Mary had about their racial identities was like, he replied, "You presume that I'm asking her whether it's okay." He explained that he knows how Mary would feel about it, but implied that it was his decision as the man in the relationship.[7] He also has advised his eldest son to not date "White girls" due to the difficulties he has had in his relationship with Mary, which include poor treatment from her family and strangers and what he sees as a failure for them to have a common understanding of the world due to their race. While Larry's explicit exclamation of his traditional gender views is an exception in my sample, he still reflects some of the possibilities in these relationships – men with these types of gender views can be found in any type of relationship. Nonetheless, Larry views his gender in conjunction with his race as giving him priority in certain decisions regarding their sons – decisions that often Mary is not involved in.

In general, when it came to discussions about childrearing, Black men and White women had markedly different tones about what their conversations about race were like. Black men were more likely to mention points of disagreement or concerns they had about their partners understanding of what they viewed as being required to parent a child of color. By contrast, White women's interviews were largely absent of similar complaints or concerns about their partner or themselves. Their comments about childrearing were less about conversations they had with their partners and more about social interactions they had with others, as well, or some, their concerns about their children or others racial identifying their kids as "Black" and not "biracial." As mentioned earlier, this theme among Black men was in notable contrast to how

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[7] More specifically, he said that I asked that question because "Black women feel like they have a say", which he disagrees with based upon beliefs about gender and religion.

they felt about conversations they had with their partners about their own experiences with racism or about race within current events. They were less likely to mention any differing points of view or concerns, and White women rarely ever discussed having any disagreements or situations where they felt like they learned about race from their partners[8] -- in fact, White women were more likely to express a narrative of racial consensus when it came to those discussions more than any other group in the study. Pertaining to childrearing discussions, White women were still unlikely to mention any differing opinions or disagreements, despite Black men being more likely to do so, which could be indicative either of Black men being less likely to communicate these feelings with their partners or White women engaging in relationship impression management and presenting an image of their relationship where they are "in sync" with their partners; the latter of which would correlate with hegemonic femininity. With heterosexual women being tasked in society with the well-being and maintenance of their intimate relationships, they may view the outside perception of issues in the relationship as reflecting poorly on them. In regards to Black men, they may not worry about how their partner handles issues of race regarding them personally, but they may be more likely to do so when it comes to their children. They entered these relationships with a certain level of self-actualization and more than likely had experienced an upbringing that prepared them to deal with the realities of race and racism in the U.S. Since they and their partners are responsible for preparing their children for the realities, this sense of responsibility may make them more concerned about how their partner handles these issues as they pertain to their children.

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[8] Learning about race can occur in either direction – White partners can learn from Black partners and vice versa – however, I referenced specifically Whites learning from Blacks since that was significantly more likely to be the case in my study.

It was also interesting that Black men were more likely than any other group to talk about making decisions without consulting with their partners first, such as with Richard and Larry. For both, this spoke to them believing that their partners would not understand either how to best handle the situation or their beliefs about a certain issue, so they decided it was in the best interest of their child to proceed as they saw fit.

Conclusion

On the surface, it may appear that there would be little difference in how members of Black/White heterosexual couples approach conversations about raising biracial children. To many, the common denominator of having a biracial child means that managing childrearing would be fairly similar. However, as demonstrated in this chapter, the race and gender of the parents involved can have a bearing on how they view biracial childrearing, what types of discussions they choose to have and not have, and how they engage in these conversations. While in many ways Black motherhood is denigrated in American society, my study show how there are spaces outside of Black families where their motherhood is placed in a position of authority and respect. Of the research on biracial childrearing, the majority focuses on White women and, as a result, has neglected the labor and attempts that Black men make in this area. Furthermore, the ways in which the general responses of White partners in this chapter – in comparison to the chapter about racial education – also points to how empathy and understanding about racism in cross-racial conversations is situational as well. Lastly, not only does this research point to the importance of nuancing our understandings of privilege – primarily by noting situational privilege – but also demonstrates the importance of looking beyond predominantly White women's childrearing of biracial children to understand the variety of parental childrearing strategies and mindsets that are influencing this growing population of multiracial individuals.

From interviews from women and men in the study, racial issues in childrearing are considered more often by Black women in comparison to White women. Black women and White men were more likely to mention Black women initiating conversations about racial concerns, whether they were pertaining to hypothetical children or actual children. In particular, Black women who operated predominantly in White worlds – such as their neighborhoods, relatives that lived nearby, and schools – were more likely to express concerns about their children's connections to Black people. For them, it was about survival – they felt that in a racist society, developing a strong Black identity and social connections to Black people would be necessary to coping with discrimination and internalized racism.

White women rarely mentioned having childrearing discussions with their partners about race, but they did mention having some concerns about race albeit not to the same degree as Black women or their Black men. Furthermore, these were not framed as discussions they had with their partner but more so as their own internal concerns, therefore, not discussed in this chapter. However, when they did discuss this in their interviews, they expressed concerns about their children being viewed as Black and not biracial – a sentiment that has been documented often in literature on biracial childrearing. A few mentioned finding it "annoying" and often pointed to President Barack Obama's portrayal in the media as being identified racially as Black although his mother was White. Whereas Black women's concerns that were related to racial identity were often rooted in preparation for racism, White women's were more about of fear of being disassociated from their children by society or, possibly, by their children themselves.

For Black men, the racial aspect of biracial childrearing often resulted in the being involved in raising their children in an additional way than most White men in the study. They were more likely to speak of pointing out certain racial considerations to their partners that they

felt needed attention or taking it upon themselves to have certain discussions with their children that they felt their partner would not have. Furthermore, Black men were the most likely to group to express concerns or frustrations with some of the parenting decisions that their partners made when it came to race, which could be a result of their unique position in regards to race and gender. For instance, White men were unlikely to express concerns or disagreements – even in situations where they admitted they did not initially understand their partner's perspective, they were more likely to either try to understand it or decide to go with their partner's decision regardless. As the Black adult in the family, Black men likely feel a responsibility to ensure that their children's needs are met at people of color, and these needs may be ones that they are unsure their White partner is aware of due to their disparate embodied experiences. However, in most heterosexual families, mothers are the primary caregivers, which can result in Black men struggling with how to handle certain situations without making their partner feeling uncomfortable or threatened. In addition, Black men being less likely to communicate their concerns or reservations with their partners, with some just preferring to make decisions without consulting with their partner first, was an interesting contrast to how Black women handled racial conflicts. By comparison, most Black women in the chapter about racial education actively engaged in conversations with their partners about their views and feelings, as well as what they felt as problematic about their partner's perspective. The way that gender roles within childcare are constructed can also explain why Black women were less likely to express concerns or frustrations about their partners' understanding of racism in regards to raising children, which speaks to a certain type of situational privilege.

I also wanted to take a moment to address the occurrence of some Black women in my study discussing how having biracial children may or did bring up internal struggles they have

had with their Blackness. There is a stereotype of Black people who enter into intimate relationships with Whites as being ashamed of their Blackness and subconsciously (or consciously) yearning to be White (Steinbugler 2015) – since they cannot do so, the next best thing is to marry White and have children who are partially White. From what I ascertained from my interviews, however, none of the Black women I interviewed displayed these desires – many had significant knowledge of Black history, many had natural hairstyles, found anti-racism work important, and some had attended HBCUs. Furthermore, many spoke of the importance of their children having connections to their Blackness and to Black communities, and many went out of their way to do their best to ensure those things happened. Nonetheless, the possibility of having biracial children did cause some of them to have to wrestle with some internal issues they had about being a Black woman, whether that was because of their interactions with others or a certain level of internalized racism. Interestingly, Black women who already had biracial children did not express any of these concerns, which could indicate that these concerns are unfounded. However, the result is also depended on how the children phenotypically appear. Some Black women with deep skin who had yet to have children worried that having biracial children who looked lighter in skin tone than them would bring up issues they had tried to resolve regarding colorism. (While Leslie had concerns that identifying her potential children as "biracial" could result in them disavowing their Black side, this was an exception in my study.) Others also expressed concerns about if their daughters had straighter hair than them, it would cause internal struggles around "good hair/bad hair" ideology to surface. These concerns were not helped by the fact that quite a few Black women I interviewed mentioned having Black female friends or family members who made comments about "giving them 'good' hair babies" or being excited about seeing children that "looked biracial." It appeared that many of these

women had not expressed these concerns with their partners, possibly because of the complexity

of these concerns. However, these issues were obviously on their mind since the expressions of

these concerns were unprompted during my interviews and occurred organically. Based on this,

this is definitely a phenomenon that could use more research.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Introduction

I have demonstrated in this dissertation how race, gender and racialized gender ideologies shape how members of heterosexual Black/White intimate couples in perceive certain social situations and their options for negotiating social norms and issues. Not only has the intersection of race and gender been under-theorized in research on interracial couples, racialized gender ideologies have been virtually absent. My research also adds to the small body of literature around situational privilege in regards to race and gender – an area of research that I find particularly interesting and that nuancing our understanding of how racism and sexism operate.

It is important to note that although the majority of my dissertation focuses on issues of contention and conflict, it would be incorrect to draw the conclusion that these situations reflect the majority of these couples' lives. First, as a sociologist, I focus on social problems and, as a result, I have chosen to analyze problematic situations these couples have to deal with. Secondly, members of these couples were more likely to talk in detail or with more emotion about these particular problems, which is likely tied to the strength of their emotions at the time these situations occurred. I do not believe that they are more likely than same-race couples to focus on the difficulties; it is just that some of the difficulties they face involve managing the problems of racism and racial stratification in our society.

I begin the remainder of this chapter by summarizing my findings from each of my content chapter subjects – negative public interactions, racially educational conversations, and childrearing. These are followed by commentary on the importance of various social identities in my study, including class. The lives of these couples are so much more than just race and gender, and in the next section I explain the limitations of focusing only on race and gender in

understanding the lives of these couples. I conclude this chapter with an acknowledgement of the limitations of this research, potential future research directions, and some researcher reflections.

The Role of Racialized Heteronormativity in the Management of Negative Public Interactions

In chapter 3, I investigated the role heteronormative racialized notions of masculinity and femininity have on how members of these couples perceive negative public interactions (negative public interactions) and their chosen management methods. I demonstrated how the maintenance of masculinity factors into how men negotiate taboos around the interraciality of their relationships, while feminine norms resulted in women utilizing strategies that involved intra-relational work with their partners and individual, internal work. I found these racialized understandings of gender shaped their management strategy boundaries and how they verbally framed these interactions.

As can be expected with the intersection of race and gender, the ways in which this manifested varied when it came to race and gender. For White men, they managed negative reactions of others by re-asserting their autonomy and individuality – characteristics that are a part of hegemonic masculinity. The reclaiming of these characteristics – which were challenged by the judgement or harassment of others – was their method managing these reactions. However, some of the more assertive or aggressive means that some White men used to handle these situations tended to be less of an option for Black men, who had to manage racism and stereotypes of aggressiveness. Black men's experiences with negative reactions to their relationship were usually quite similar to their daily, individual experiences with racism. As a result, they tended to not express as much frustration or anger as White men did with these experiences. They were more focused on maintaining a masculine image within the relationship while maneuvering around racist obstacles, which manifested in the focusing on providing

protection and safety for their partner, and, at times, taking control of racially sensitive situations when they felt it was needed.

Women were more likely to engage in management of these situations after the incident, primarily by discussing the situation with their partner in hopes of obtaining validation – more likely for Black women – or clarification, which was more likely for White women. Nonetheless, both groups of women – regardless of race – still had to negotiate hegemonic femininity, which often meant choosing silence or the strategy of ignoring during the interaction and then turning to their partner later. However, Black women were more likely to actively resist negative comments and reactions, which I argue was due to Black femininity embodying more outspoken, assertive behavior than what is found in hegemonic (White) femininity.

Gender and Racial Socialization in Discussions Involving Racial Education

In chapter 4, I analyzed how racialized heteronormative gender ideologies influenced how individuals within these couples navigated conversations involving "racial education." I defined conversations that involved racial education as those that consisted the ongoing, discursive process of the transfer of knowledge about race, racism, or racial culture from one person to another in order to manage disparate racial orientations. With my data, I argue that understandings of racialized femininity and masculinity imposed limits on members of these couples during these types of conversations, including how they managed their partners' reaction, when necessary. The majority of the racial education examples that I heard from participants involved Black partners educating White partners. For Black partners, Black and hegemonic gender ideologies were resources that they could pull from when navigating their partners' resistance. For White partners, hegemonic gender ideologies were a guide to understanding how they were progressing in their understanding of racism. However, the

downside of using these as guides often resulted in them viewing their progress more positively than their partners did.

Black women's conversations with their partners often reflected a tension where they were trying to adhere to the tenets of hegemonic femininity by not saying anything that would threaten White men's sense of self and a sense of responsibility as Black women to educate their partners about the realities of racism. Black men were more likely than Black women to avoid or reduce these racial education conversations, often using hegemonic masculine language – such as explaining, as Bruce did, that one has to rely on themselves to manage the feelings of dealing with racism. Furthermore, it was also evident during some of these conversations that Black men were also navigating stereotypes of the "angry Black man", which at times resulted in avoidance or the utilization of "moderate Blackness." White women used language of racial consensus reflective of hegemonic femininity when reflecting on racial educational conversations by usually saying these conversations were not educational in nature because they already shared similar racial paradigm with their partner. In contrast to their partners, White men were more likely to talk about these discussions in terms of progress, with a focus on achievement that is reflective of hegemonic masculinity. However, this focus to progress and achievement seem to put the focus less on understanding their partners, which was counterproductive.

My findings nuance Steinbugler's concept of "racework" by adding to it an understanding of how gender dynamics influence the emotional labor involved in these conversations. The emotional labor that is involved in bridging their disparate racial habitus – as Steinbugler defines the concept – cannot be understood primarily through racial terms since gender can influence the racial dynamics within these relationships. Additionally, I also show that the common societal rhetoric about how racial differences can be erased with dialogue – an

"oldie but goodie" that resurrected after the 2016 Presidential election – is not always effective, even in situations where there are two people who love one another and want to share a common understanding of racial views.

Lastly, I wanted to make a quick point about the frequent frustration Black partners – particularly Black women – voiced about the resistance of some partners' to listening and understanding their concerns about racism. As bell hooks (1995) notes, "if White people remain unable to hear black rage, if it is the sound of that rage which must always remain repressed, contained, trapped in the realm of the unspeakable" then it is questionable if Whites and Blacks can create and maintain relationships recognize the full humanity of Black people (12). It is clear from my interviews that feeling "heard" is very important for these participants, especially when it comes to their own personal experiences of hurt, pain and humiliation in response to racism. These relationships can be functional and happy relationships, but there are limitations to this when Black partners feel there is a part of themselves that is connected to race that they have to hide away.

Childrearing & Situational Privilege/Disadvantage

In Chapter 4, I examined how the interaction of race and gender influenced how the type of interracial couple (Black women & White men vs. White women & Black men) negotiated conversations regarding childrearing of biracial children. I argued that race – specifically Blackness – interacts with gender in the management of race-related childrearing decisions in a way that creates a situational advantage for Black women and a disadvantage for Black men. Gendered parenting expectations gave Black women an advantage where White men were more receptive to their preferences for childrearing. However, for Black men, they found themselves facing resistance to some of their desired parenting choices from White women, which often resulted in them compromising or moving forward with their choices without their partner.

These findings were a bit of a surprise to me since, in Chapter 3, Black women faced

more resistance from White men when it came to accounts of their own experiences of racism or

during topical, racial conversations. Black men were less likely to speak of encountering

resistance from their partners, and White women often reported a consensus on racial issues. In

conversations about their own personal experiences with racism or their understanding/opinions

about topical issues, Black women's race and gender were more likely to make them appear less

credible to their White male partners who often questioned their perspective or experience. For

Black men and White women, there was less questioning of Black men's experiences or

understandings – in one case, the Black male partner's positionality made him an expert and a

reference. Within the context of childrearing – which often goes with a societal understanding of

"mother knows best," Black and White men were more likely to defer to their partners. However,

as mentioned earlier, Black men often navigated these issues by compromising with their

partners or directly/indirectly overriding them.

These findings point to the importance of research about biracial childrearing to

interrogate more the roles of men in childrearing, as well as Black mothers. Particularly for men,

it highlights the emotion work involved in father biracial children, how this emotion work

changes based upon race, and how these men navigate obstacles to their goals – if they navigate

them at all.

Importance of Gender

Gender is a concept that researchers of interracial intimacy often overlook, possibly due to a

subconscious belief that race would be more impactful on these couples than gender since it is

the interraciality that makes them different from the majority of couples in the U.S. However, as

demonstrated by my study, looking solely or primarily at race can result in researchers

overlooking some of the more nuanced dynamics that occur due to the intersectionality of race

and gender. The ways in which situations are perceived, the methods of management, and the

desired outcomes can vary based upon race *and* gender. A disapproving stare from a Black man

can "read" differently by a White man than by a Black woman – also differently by a Black man

and a White woman. The motivations of the stare and the socially acceptable and/or socialized

ways to respond can vary by race and gender. My study makes an argument for a more

intersectional approach to qualitatively analyzing these couples, not only to gain a better

understanding of how macro-level, structural forces impact micro-level dynamics of these

couples but also to further our understanding of the impacts of intersectionality.

Importance of Class

Like gender and race, class has an impact on virtually every aspect of interracial couples lives (or

any couple, regardless of race) albeit it is not determinative. It can impact the types of social

situations – positive or negative – that they find themselves negotiating, how they perceive the

reactions of others, the types of conversations they have with their partner, how they perceive

their partner's reactions, and the types of intra-relational dynamics within their relationship.

While there are a few couples' who would be classified as either low-income or upper-income,

the majority would be considered middle-income or middle class based upon their education and

occupation. It is important to note that the majority of my findings may be specific to middle

class heterosexual Black/White couples, and a study with a sample that is more class diversified

or that is concentrated, for instance, within low-income couples may find different scenarios,

perceptions, and management strategies.

Importance of Nationality of Origin

While there were a few participants of my study who were born and raised in other parts of the

world (primarily Black partners). They all came from different countries and had been the U.S.

for different amounts of time, and the numbers in my sample were too small to establish many

patterns. However, it would be interesting to see qualitative researchers put more focus on

understanding how nationality can impact how these relationships are managed. For instance,

three participants – 29-year-old Layla, 28-year-old Harold, and 67-year-old Bruce, who are all

from different Caribbean countries – expressed how surprised they were about the level of

racism and racial stratification in the U.S., compared to their home countries. Along with this

sentiment were discussions from Harold and Bruce about how they attempted to learn to adjust

to it and, in some cases, resist it. It is possible that this could affect how they perceive and

manage social dynamics within and without their relationship, especially when one considers

that gender roles may also differ from the U.S. While some researchers, like Hildebrandt (2002),

have looked specifically at the nationality dynamic – in her study, it was a comparison of

African-Americans to Caribbean Americans – most qualitative research has not made it a focus.

Hopefully, further research will consider this, especially as larger number of Black Latinos make

the U.S. their home.

How interraciality matters – and doesn't

As demonstrated in this dissertation, race does have an impact on these relationships in various

ways on the micro-level. Even for couples that do not report any reactions or issues at all, race

still as an impact on a macro-level as well, such as where they are able to live, the conditions

under which they met, and what jobs they have been able to obtain. Although this study is

focused on understanding the ways in which race – as well as gender – has an impact on the

social dynamics and lives of heterosexual Black/White couples, it is important that these

relationships are not viewed only through the lens of race. Society often characterizes these

relationships as if the most important aspect of it is race, which can be seen in common myths

that argue race is one of the primary reasons people in these relationships are attracted to each

other. For many of these couples, their lives appear very similar to same-race couples – date

nights, arguments over bills and chores, planning vacations, spending time with family, and just

generally supporting each other through the highs and lows of life. The ways in which race factor

into their daily lives can be measured on a spectrum from couple to couple and, even for a single

couple, can wax and wane throughout life. Some couples, like Russell and Lillian, report no

issues with others with their relationship, with their only issue being when to expose their

children to the history of racism in the U.S. – this would place them on the lower end of the

spectrum. However, for other couples, like Larry and Mary, they navigate racial issues quite

frequently, from Mary's unsupportive and, at times, hostile family, Mary feeling pressure to

conceal her relationship at work, and disagreements they have as a couple, such as about chores,

that can take on a racial tone. Furthermore, the importance of race may be an issue at the

beginning due to family opposition and then wanes as families get to know their children's

partners or as the couple themselves have children. These couples cannot and should not be

generalized as a "one-size-fits-all", and, as a result, that is not what I am attempting to do in this

study. My goals is to illuminate patterns that correlate with certain interactions of race and

gender, while also showcasing the diversity of experience among these couples.

Research Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study – the first of which involves the samples sizes. While the

goal of my study was to have equal numbers of my race and gender subsamples, that was

difficult to achieve primarily due to the reluctance of Black men to participate in my study. By

contrast, Black women were overly eager to join. Therefore, my sample is heavily weighted in

the latter and has relatively few from the former. For that reason, I would say that it would be

important for future studies that investigate the findings of Black men in my study to attempt to

obtain a larger sample in order to better diversify within that population.

A significant portion of my sample were Black women that were part of a community of Black women who blogged about their lives as being part of a multiracial relationship or family. As women who thought often about race and conversed with others over the internet about it, my sample may have an unusually high number of racially literate people. Furthermore, there could be other unknown characteristics about this particular group that could influence my findings.

As mentioned in the research methods chapter, my identity as a Black woman did have a bearing on how participants engaged with me. For example, I struggled to obtain Black men and White women who were interested in the study. In one case, I had a Black male participant express to me his problems with Black women, and many of the Black men and White women in my study expressed beliefs that Black women were more likely to be in opposition to their relationship. Conversely, Black women verbally expressed excitement to talk to me about their experiences, particularly when they discovered that I was in a relationship with a White man. However, all researchers come into these interviews with their own identities that can influence how participants react to them. For instance, a White man doing these interviews may elicit some different reactions in comparison to me that could result in some answers being more forthcoming, while others are more restrained. Therefore, I would argue that my positionality does not make my data less legitimate, but it does need to be evaluated with this reality in mind.

Future Research Directions

Interracial relationships between Black and Whites in the United States have been studied for decades with the St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's 1945 sociological study detailed in *Black Metropolis*, which included observation and analysis of these couples as they resided in the Black neighborhoods of 1930s South Side of Chicago. (These couples were usually unwelcomed in White communities.) While sociologists and psychologists have extensively built upon the foundational knowledge from Drake and Cayton, the more we know, the more we

realize what we do not know. There is still more research to be done on the internal racial

dynamics of these couples, and, in general, more focus needs to be put upon interracial couples

of various sexual orientations and gender identities. Additionally, while there has been an

increase in the number of studies that include Black women/White men couples – since,

historically, the focus has been primarily on White women/Black men couples – they should be

continued to be included in studies in an attempt to put together a more complete picture of these

lives of these couples and how they differ from others.

More specifically, in regards to my research, it points to two main areas where more

research is warranted. Firstly, understanding the role of racialized gender ideologies has not been

sufficiently investigated in past research. I have demonstrated how these ways of race and gender

socialization has a bearing at least three areas: managing public interactions, managing racially

educational discussions within the relationship, and in childrearing. For instance, it would be

revealing to understand how these ideologies have a bearing in the management of extended

families members' perceptions of the relationship or how they impact the initiation of

relationships. Additionally, if future research extends to broadening our analysis of interracially

couples to gay/lesbian couples or couples that include transgender individuals, then it could be

eye opening to see how race and gender interact to manage situations that may be unique to those

couples.

Secondly, situational privilege is a concept that has often been overlooked in literature on

racism. (Literature on gender has been better about this, thanks to women of color challenging

some of the middle class, White, heterosexual, cisgender rhetoric of the Second Wave Feminist

Movement.) My research adds to the small amount of literature – done primarily by Black

women scholars – that argues that, even in the same racist situation, Black women and Black

men may be affected differently and in ways that my results in benefits for one group. This is a fascinating area of research that can further develop and nuance our understanding of the peculiarities of racism in all of its complexity.

Researcher Reflections

Studying interracial relationships proved to be more controversial than I expected. In retrospect, I find myself wondering how that would have surprised me considering some of the notable hypocrisies Americans' have about interracial relations – Whites often report in studies that having Black friends and finding Black/White interracial relationships acceptable but, upon further probing, often reveal having primarily Black acquaintances and interracial relationships being more acceptable when it is not them or a family member involved in one. When I began this research project, I faced skepticism from some academics about the viability of it – primarily, those who were skeptical that interracial couples would want to talk to me about their intimate, private lives. I did not check on the welfare of most of the flyers that were posted in Boston and New York City, but one of them that I did walk past on my way home from school – that was on a neighborhood board for local activities, including research studies – was torn away within a day or two of me posting it. I put up a new one the following week, only to find it torn down the following day. When I posted study announcements on parenting and relationship forums online, I found myself on the other side of a variety of negative reactions – the most frequent one being that I was part of the "problem" for even recognizing race. Those postings proved entirely fruitless.

Even outside of the formal study itself, I found the reactions of strangers and acquaintances to be quite telling. Through my years in graduate school, I learned through experience how to explain what the focus of my studies were. For people of color, I found that I could be more honest about what I was studying. However, for Whites – even those who felt

they were quite "woke" – I had to temper my explanation if I wanted the conversation to be uneventful. In situations where they found I was studying "race and gender inequality" or, more specifically, "how members of heterosexual Black/White couples manage racial differences and how race and gender has a bearing on their management strategies", I often found them becoming visibility uncomfortable. Some chose to change the subject, some would ask me questions where they were trying to understand how race was still an issue for these couples "in the 21st century", and others – the most entertaining ones, at times – would make it their mission to make sure I understand that they "didn't see race." One of these scenarios involved a White person who stated this emphatically and repeatedly and then proceeded later in the evening to racist touch a Black person's hair with fascination and then, during a different part of the event, make a comment about Asian men. Albeit these conversations elicited a range of reactions from me, I came to appreciate these reactions for being a reflection of how far we have come as a country and how far we still have to go. Interracial marriage is legal and interracial relationships are continually on the rise, but America still continues to struggle with race – to understand its realities, its impact, its magnitude and its significance. As a country, we often espouse rhetoric to imply that racism is practiced only by a small percentage of individuals. However, how can such a persistent and highly prevalent problem only be practiced by a small few – especially when underlying this logic is the assumption that it is poor, uneducated Whites who are the only ones who remain racist? This reflects a certain level of denial and lack of self-reflection – as exemplified by my last example. To truly attempt to eradicate racism, these steps will be necessary to take, not just on an individual level but also as a country.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Demographic Information Tables

Table A.1.: Study Sample Demographic Data - by Race & Gender

Study Sample Demographic Information						
	Black Women	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Total Number	Total Percentage
Number of Participants	21	15	11	8	55	--
Percentage of Sample	38%	27%	20%	15%	--	--
Age						
25-34	9	6	3	9	20	36%
35-44	8	4	5	2	19	35%
45-54	1	2	2	2	7	13%
55-64	3	3	1	1	8	15%
65+	0	0	0	1	1	2%
Martial Status						
Married	13	9	9	6	37	67%
Cohabitating	1	1	1	1	4	7%
Dating (non-cohabitating)	2	2	0	0	4	7%
Engaged	5	3	1	1	10	18%
Relationship Duration						
1-5 years	7	5	1	1	14	25%
6-10 years	6	3	4	2	15	27%
11-20 years	5	4	4	3	16	29%
20+ years	3	3	2	2	10	18%
Number with Children	10	8	10	7	35	64%
Highest Educational Attainment						
Less than High School	0	1	0	0	1	2%
High School	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Some College	2	1	2	3	8	15%
College Degree	11	6	2	2	21	38%
Some Graduate School	0	0	1	1	2	4%
Graduate Degree (Master's/JD Level)	4	5	3	2	14	25%
Graduate Degree (PhD/PsyD Level)	2	1	3	0	6	11%
Region						
Northeast	11	7	6	4	28	51%
Southeast	4	2	1	1	8	15%
Midwest	1	1	1	0	3	5%
Southwest	2	2	0	0	4	7%
West Coast	3	3	3	3	12	22%
Number of Immigrants	2	0	1	2	5	9%
Also Identifies as Hispanic	0	0	3	1	4	7%

Table A.2.: Study Sample Demographic Data - by Only Race

Study Sample Demographic Information by Race				
	Black Participants	Percentage of Black Participants	White Participants	Percentage of White Participants
Number of Participants	29	--	26	--
Percentage of Sample	53%	--	47%	--
Age				
25-34	18	62%	9	35%
35-44	10	34%	9	35%
45-54	3	10%	4	15%
55-64	4	14%	4	15%
65+	1	3%	0	0%
Martial Status				
Married	19	66%	18	69%
Cohabitating	2	7%	2	8%
Dating (non-cohabitating)	2	7%	2	8%
Engaged	6	21%	4	15%
Relationship Duration				
1-5 years	8	28%	6	23%
6-10 years	8	28%	7	27%
11-20 years	8	28%	8	31%
20+ years	5	17%	5	19%
Number with Children	17	59%	18	69%
Highest Educational Attainment				
Less than High School	0	0%	1	4%
High School	0	0%	0	0%
Some College	5	17%	3	12%
College Degree	13	45%	8	31%
Some Graduate School	1	3%	1	4%
Graduate Degree (Master's/JD Level)	6	21%	8	31%
Graduate Degree (PhD/PsyD Level)	2	7%	4	15%
Region				
Northeast	15	52%	13	50%
Southeast	5	17%	3	12%
Midwest	1	3%	2	8%
Southwest	2	7%	2	8%
West Coast	6	21%	6	23%

Table A.3.: Study Sample Demographic Data - by Only Gender

Study Sample Demographic Information by Gender				
	Female Participants	Percentage of Female Participants	Male Participants	Percentage of Male Participants
Number of Participants	32	--	23	--
Percentage of Sample	58%	--	42%	--
Age				
25-34	12	38%	15	65%
35-44	13	41%	6	26%
45-54	3	9%	4	17%
55-64	4	13%	4	17%
65+	0	0%	1	4%
Martial Status				
Married	22	69%	15	65%
Cohabitating	2	6%	2	9%
Dating (non-cohabitating)	2	6%	2	9%
Engaged	6	19%	4	17%
Relationship Duration				
1-5 years	8	25%	6	26%
6-10 years	10	31%	5	22%
11-20 years	9	28%	7	30%
20+ years	5	16%	5	22%
Number with Children	20	63%	15	65%
Highest Educational Attainment				
Less than High School	0	0%	1	4%
High School	0	0%	0	0%
Some College	4	13%	4	17%
College Degree	13	41%	8	35%
Some Graduate School	1	3%	1	4%
Graduate Degree (Master's/JD Level)	7	22%	7	30%
Graduate Degree (PhD/PsyD Level)	5	16%	1	4%
Region				
Northeast	17	53%	11	48%
Southeast	5	16%	3	13%
Midwest	2	6%	1	4%
Southwest	2	6%	2	9%
West Coast	6	19%	6	26%

Appendices   Page | 171

Table A.4.: Recruitment Methods & Interview Medium Statistical Data

Recruitment Methods & Interview Medium Statistical Data

	Black Women		White Men		White Women		Black Men			
Recruitment Method	Number	Percentage *(of total Black Women)*	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Total Number	Total Percentage
Social Network	7	33%	5	33%	6	55%	4	50%	22	40%
Snowball	3	14%	3	20%	3	27%	2	25%	11	20%
Social Media	8	38%	4	27%	0	0%	0	0%	12	22%
Flyers	3	14%	3	20%	2	18%	2	25%	10	18%
Interview Medium										
In person	9	43%	6	40%	5	45%	4	50%	24	44%
Skype video	3	14%	1	7%	2	18%	0	0%	7	13%
Telephone	9	43%	7	47%	4	36%	4	50%	24	44%

<u>Interview Guide for Members of Black/White Heterosexual Couples</u>

Prior to the first interview (anywhere from a couple of days to several weeks), I have a 15 min. introductory conversation with the research participant where I explain the purpose of the interview in more detail, the format of the interview, my positionality to the research, and how I plan to handle confidentiality. I also reiterate to participants that they could decide to drop out of the research study at any time and that they can refuse any question. This introductory conversation also gives research participants the space in which to ask any questions and also gives us an opportunity become more familiar with one another prior to actually doing the interview. It's also important to note that at the beginning of each interview session I again explain to the participants that they can withdraw from the study and refuse questions. I also briefly go over the order of the interview sections.

    I.   <u>Demographics</u> *(These questions will be e-mailed in advance. If not answered by the time of the interview, I will ask them at the beginning of the interview.)*

    1. Age

    2. Race/Ethnicity

    3. Current city of residence

    4. Educational background (i.e. highest level of education achieved)

    5. Occupation

    6. Religious affiliation

    7. Relationship status (e.g. dating, living together, engaged, married)

        a. How long have you been together?

    8. If you have children, how many? What are their ages?

Transition: *[Go over flow/order of interview.] So, first, I want to know a little bit more about you.*

    II.   <u>Respondent's Introduction</u>

    9. Tell me a little bit about your life…

        a. Where did you grow up?
        b. What was your family life like?
        c. What was the racial makeup of the places where you lived?

Transition: Now I wanted to ask you about the beginning of your relationship, as well as your dating history.

III.   Initial Stages of the Relationship Questions

10. Had you dated outside of your race before?

  a. **YES:** If so, what other races? How conscious were you of the racial aspect of the relationship when entering the relationship? Did you have any particular feelings or thoughts about it?
  b. **NO:** If not, do you think there was a reason why you had not? How did you feel about entering an interracial relationship?
      i. If they intentionally had not dating interracially or had never thought about it before, ask what made them reconsider this stance.

11. What is the story of how you and your partner met?

  a. Who initiated interest first?

  b. How did you know you wanted to be in a committed relationship with him/her?

Transition: I wanted to ask you a few questions about your families and friends.

IV.   Friends & Family

Family
12. Could you tell me about when you told your family about your partner? How did your family react to you being in an interracial relationship?

13. How is your relationship with your partner's family? How have they received your relationship? Reactions include positive as well as negative responses.
  a. How did you feel about these reactions?
  b. Why do you think they reacted the way that they did?
  c. If some were notably positive/negative: Did these have any effect on how you viewed your relationship?
      i. Did you talk about these comments to your partner? Why or why not?

Friends

14. How did your friends react to learning you were dating a Black woman/a White man? Reactions include positive as well as negative responses.
  a. How did you feel about these reactions?
  b. Why do you think they reacted the way that they did?
  c. If some were notably positive/negative: Did these have any effect on how you viewed your relationship?
      i. Did you talk about these comments to your partner? Why or why not?

15. Do you know if your partner's friends had any particular reactions?
    a. How did they make you feel?
    b. Why do you think they reacted the way that they did?
    c. If some were notably positive/negative: Did these have any effect on how you viewed your relationship?
        i. Did you talk about these comments to your partner? Why or why not?

V.   Public Spaces

16. Do you feel that you are treated differently as a mixed race couple when you're out in public? If so, how?
    a. Why do you think people react this way?
    b. Do you and your partner ever talk about these situations?
        i. If **YES**, can you give me an example of a time that you talked about it? Who initiated the conversation? How did you feel when you were talking about it? How did you feel afterwards?
        ii. If **NO**, can you think of times where you or your partner have tried to talk about it? **need a why questions here that isn't leading**

VI.   Racial Discussions, Thoughts & Ideas
17. Do you and your partner talk about race?
        i. Can you give me an example of notable or recent conversation?
        ii. How did you feel during this conversation?

18. When you started talking about race in your relationship, how did you feel about it? Were you comfortable or uncomfortable? Do you think your partner was comfortable with it?

19. Do you feel like there are certain types of racial discussions or topics that you cannot discuss with your partner? Why?

20. Who initiates these conversations the most? How does that make you feel?

21. Do you or your partner ever experience individual instances of discrimination? Do you talk about it?
        i. Do you think you partner understands your feelings about this?
        ii. If you don't think they understand, why do you think that's the case?
        iii. How do you feel about their reaction?

22. Do you think your experience as a [insert race & gender here] is different than your partner's? If so, why?

23. Did you think that you think about certain racial groups differently since you started dating interracially?
    a. What about your partner?

VII.   Questions for those with children

24. How has having children introduced new racial issues in relationship to your interactions with people outside of your family and friends? This includes interactions as daycares, schools, and when you're simply out in public doing everyday activities.
                    i.   Did you and your partner discuss this? What did you decide to do?
                    ii. Have you talk to your child (or children) about these situations? If so, how do you approach it?
25. How has having children introduced new racial issues within your relationship with one another?
                    i.   How about with family members?

26. How does your child, or how do your children racially identify?

VIII.   General Questions about Interracial Relationships

27. Do you think the experiences of people in Black female-White male couples are different than other interracial couples, and, if so, how?
                    i.   Why do you think this is the case?

28. Do you believe you think differently about race after entering an interracial relationship? How, and why do you think it's changed?
                    i.   Do you think the way your partner thinks about race is different?

29. In general, what are your feelings or thoughts on interracial couples?

30. ***Newly Added Question:*** Do you think your child/children's gender will have a bearing on these issues? How would things different between boys and girls?

IV. Concluding Questions
        31. Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything in particular that you want to express about this subject, or are there any questions that you think I should be asking that I'm not?

Appendix C: Participation Solicitation

Looking for Members of Heterosexual Black-White Interracial Couples for Study

Are you in a Black female/White male or White female/Black male relationship? If so, you may be eligible for a study on the experiences of these couples. For this study, you need to be between the ages of 18 and 75 and have been in your relationship for at least 1 year. This could be a great way to contribute to the growing body of research on these couples and their experiences. For further information, please contact Boston College graduate student Marya Mtshali at 617-820-0069 or maryamtshali@gmail.com. For e-mail, please use the subject line "Interracial Couples Study".

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