

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL IDENTITY IN HETEROSEXUAL BLACK AND
WHITE INTERRACIAL COUPLES LIVING IN THE SOUTH

by

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B.S., The University of Southern Mississippi, 2001

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

There has been a rapid growth of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the United States in recent decades and numbers continue to increase. In addition, the concept of racial identity within Southern heterosexual Black and White interracial couples has not been explored. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how racial identity affects the dynamics of Black and White interracial relationships within the context of their extended family and community and the effect of interracial relationships on racial identity development. The focus of the study was to explore how partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples living in the South constructed and/or defined their individual racial identity, how the couple addressed cultural difference within the relationship, and how the couple handled opposition toward their relationship. Three theoretical/philosophical frameworks were used in this study. Phenomenology and social constructionism were utilized to provide a framework for the methodology of the study; Black racial identity theory (Cross, 1971, 1991) and White racial identity theory (Helms, 1990) were utilized to provide a framework for thinking about racial identity development.

The sample consisted of four couples, each with children. Each couple was interviewed conjointly in a neutral setting and then allowed the researcher to accompany them on an outing in a public setting. This experience allowed the researcher to observe how the couple was received in public and how the couple managed public response. Interviews provided rich descriptions of how the research participants experienced themselves as individuals and as a couple in their marriage with respect to racial identity.

Through case study analysis, six main themes and 22 sub-themes were identified. The main themes included: marital dynamics, racial identity, influences, reactions, advice, and counseling. Cross-case analysis revealed a small number of subthemes shared across cases. Differences between cases were considerable and were presented via the identification of new subthemes and unique cases. Three new subthemes were identified: normal couple, gaining acceptance, and religious affiliation. Recommendations are offered for future research and, tentatively, for marriage and family therapists who may work with couples similar to those in this study. Most notably, couples in this study saw themselves as “normal couples” brought together by love, and did not necessarily think of themselves as “interracial.” They did, however, talk as a couple about how to racially identify their children and how to help them respond to questions about their racial heritage.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: my husband, Christopher, Sr. and my son Christopher, Jr., who provide unconditional love, support, encouragement, and patience; my father, Reverend James Osby, for his spiritual support and love; my mother, Dr. Pearl Osby, for her love, guidance, and inspiration; my brother, Daryl, and his family, for their love, humor, and support of my endeavors.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Case Study

Eric and Cathy have been married three years and decided to move to a different part of the United States with the rationale that “things would be different.” As they drove home from what began as a romantic evening, but ended in a nightmare of humiliation, Cathy reflected upon the incident that occurred in the restaurant and how heartbroken she felt about being discriminated against because of her choice to be in an interracial marriage. Why couldn’t the rest of the world see her relationship with Eric as normal as any other relationship? Cathy was weary of the constant painful reminders from strangers that she was involved in a relationship with an individual whose skin color was different from hers. Her thoughts were broken by the unusual silence in the car. She could not help but wonder about Eric’s emotions and his experience. She began to wonder about having children, what types of challenges they will have to experience, and if it was worth seeing them experience the pain and humiliation that she and Eric have had to endure. Cathy began to drift in thought about the first time she met Eric and how much she loves him. A feeling of comfort came over her as she realized that, despite the challenges, isolation, and discrimination, they would persevere because of the strength that resulted from the unconditional love they shared.

The above paragraph introduces the emotionality experienced by many interracial couples in today’s society. Many heterosexual Black and White interracial couples view their relationship as “normal” and attempt exhaustively to prove this fact to outsiders who view their relationships as anything but normal. The following quotes from a study of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples illustrate how these couples strive towards normalcy: “*We’re no different than anybody else...everyone else is looking at it as a Black and White couple, which I*

think is really stupid because we are just a married couple.” (Houston); “We are people. I don’t think it’s a matter of color...or race or whatever, to decide if [two people] are going to be happy or not.” (Olivia); “We marry for the same reason as anybody else.... Basically, I don’t think there is any essential difference...race just really hasn’t made a lot of difference; it hasn’t intruded very much.” (William) (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995, pp. 24-27).

Interracial marriage is a phenomenon that has thrived for many years and can be traced back as far as the days of slavery. Mish (2000) defined interracial marriage as an institution in which individuals of different races are legally joined to establish a family. Before the 1960's, 16 states in the United States held laws that prohibited interracial marriages. The 1967 court case of *Loving vs. Virginia* abolished laws prohibiting interracial marriage. This was the result of a decision that these laws were a violation of the fourteenth amendment (Brown, 1995; Davidson, 1992). Since the 1960's, the occurrence of interracial marriages has increased tremendously, nearly quadrupling between the years of 1970 and 1993¹ (Hill & Thomas, 2000). Maria Root (2001) described several trends concerning interracial marriages since the 1970's: (1) Black and White interracial marriages represent the highest number among interracial couples in the United States, (2) White individuals marry interracially in the highest numbers, (3) with the exception of Black females, women marry interracially more than males, and (4) younger age is correlated with greater acceptance of interracial marriage. In the next sections, I will discuss certain aspects that pertain to Black and White interracial marriages including: basis for attraction, reactions from society, and a short history of Black and White distinctions and antimiscegenation laws in the United States. I will conclude with the questions that will guide this study.

¹ No numerical information was provided by authors concerning the increase in number of interracial marriages.

Basis for Attraction

Throughout United States history, Black and White marriages have been the most controversial of all interracial marriages among society (Porterfield, 1978; Porterfield, 1982 as cited in Davidson, 1992). The majority of Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages consist of Black male and White female dyads which continues to be the most frequent pairing among heterosexual Black and White interracial couples (Brown, 2001). The U.S. census in 2002 revealed that there were 116,000 marriages between Black women and White men and 279,000 marriages between Black men and White women (DePass, 2006). Despite limited research concerning Black and White interracial relationships, there are many theories of mate selection in general. Some of the theories are relevant to Black and White pairings. For example, there are four types of mate selection discussed in the literature pertaining to heterosexual Black and White interracial couples: (1) homogeneous, (2) heterogeneous, (3) endogamous, and (4) exogamous. Homogeneous and endogamous mate selection refer to the process of choosing a mate based on similarities of social characteristics such as race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, education, and personal interests. Conversely, heterogeneous and exogamous mate selection refer to the process of selecting a mate based on different social characteristics (Lewis, Yancey, & Bletzer, 1997; Porterfield, 1978).

According to Kouri & Lasswell (1993), only two theories are prominent in the literature concerning mate selection within interracial couples. The first theory, called *Structural Theory*, states that interracial couples marry for similar reasons as racially homogeneous couples do and that the couples' attraction is based on similarities rather than differences. *Structural Theory* also addresses how the overall change in the structure of society has contributed to the increase

of interracial marriages over the years. Such changes include desegregation and the civil rights movement, which afforded African Americans the ability to reach a higher education level and economic status than previously allowed. Furthermore, the increase of interracial couples will continue to change the structure of society to be more accepting of interracial couples. Another theory is *Racial Motivation Theory*. This theory states that many interracial marriages occur because of an attraction to racial difference both physically and mentally due to a desire not to conform to societal norms (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993).

In addition to theories, research on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples has focused on two areas: types of motives and other influential factors involved in mate selection. Motives, pertaining to the present study, refer to desires that an individual can control but of which a person may or may not be conscious. Influential factors refer to incidences that are socially influenced and beyond an individual's control. A qualitative study conducted by Porterfield (1978) yielded several motives involved in mate selection of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. These motives were divided into two categories: (1) non-race related motives and (2) race related motives. Non-race related motives included love, compatibility, and pregnancy. Race related motives included rebellion against society, curiosity and sexual desire of other races, social and/or economic mobility, White females' being less domineering, and Black females' being more independent.

Porterfield also identified two motives that were not part of the other categories developed: *marginality* and *ostracized from own racial group*. *Marginality* occurs when a person leaves one cultural group and fails to assimilate successfully to another cultural group. Thus, he or she finds him or herself "on the margin" of each cultural group, a member of neither. The second motive, being *ostracized from one's own racial group*, is also a reason for some

individuals to establish an interracial relationship. In this case, an individual is considered an outcast and is not accepted by members of his or her own racial group.

Influential factors are incidences that are socially influenced and beyond an individual's control that contribute to the prevalence of Black and White interracial marriages. Spickard (1989) identified three theoretical perspectives that describe influential factors in the prevalence of interracial marriages. The first theory states that interracial marriages occur due to an "unbalanced sex ratio", or a lack of potential mates in a minority group. Furthermore, this theory helps to clarify one of the reasons African American women feel offended and angry about interracial relationships in which the male is African American. The aforementioned phenomenon is because there is a small number of successful, established, and committed African American males that are potential mates for African American women. Most African American women hold the stereotype that many successful and established African American males choose or "turn to" White women as potential mates rather than African American females. The second theory states that the size of a minority group in a particular location determines the prevalence of interracial marriages. In other words, if the African American population in a specific area is small, then the rate of interracial marriage will increase, due to a scarcity of potential African American mates. The third theory states that interracial marriages will continue to increase, due to American society becoming more accepting of racial and cultural difference in recent decades.

Several studies concerning Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages have focused on mate selection among these couples. However, no studies were found to provide empirical support for the theories and/or motives and influential factors stated to be involved with mate selection among heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Furthermore, no

recent studies (e.g. since the late nineties) concerning mate selection have been conducted and there is a great need for current research to be conducted concerning mate selection among Black and White interracial relationships. For example, many studies concerning mate selection prior to the 1980's were aimed at proving biased notions and myths such as individuals involved in Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages are psychologically impaired and/or mentally unstable or these individuals are attempting to be rebellious against the norms of his or her family and society in general. In addition, current research concerning mate selection among Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages is needed to heighten the awareness of the racism and opposition experienced by these couples within society.

Societal Reaction to Black and White Pairings

There are many issues that heterosexual Black and White interracial couples face on a daily basis that are absent among same-race couples. These issues include but are not limited to, (1) cultural differences, (2) racism, and (3) family of origin issues. The first and most important issue is the cultural difference between the spouses. It often is the most obvious contribution to conflicts and challenges to the lives of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples.

Cultural difference, as utilized in this study, will be defined as “an acknowledgment that the two partners came from cultures that differ in many ways, such as language, religious practices, food, money management practices, etiquette, preferred musical forms, etc.” (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 232). Most of the literature (e.g. Brown, 2001; Killian, 2001a & b; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Werhly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999) yielded similar results, concerning how heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural differences within their relationship. In most cases, participants stated that cultural difference was not an immediate problem in the marital relationship and the couples addressed this concept in various ways. For

example, a qualitative study conducted by Kyle Killian (2001a), concerning heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, identified two methods that the participants in the study used to address cultural difference in their relationship. The first method consisted of the couples' combining each partner's family history and ethnicity to establish their "couple identity." The second method was each couple de-emphasizing the family histories and ethnic heritage of both partners to create a new "couple identity", based on common interests and other similarities of the partners. This method called for each partner to more or less "erase" his or her previous identity and "write" a new identity. Conversely, the participants described four circumstances that would cause cultural difference to become an immediate problem: (1) lack of addressing cultural difference early in the dating relationship and, particularly, how it will be addressed, (2) making the decision to have children, considering the opposition and identity issues the children will have to endure, (3) different beliefs about discipline and parenting roles, and (4) judgmental societal reactions toward the couple.

Racism, as applied to this study, refers to how interracial couples are perceived and treated by society, based on perceptions of race. According to Solsberry (1994), (as cited in Werhly et al., 1999), reactions towards interracial couples, positive, negative, or neutral, depend on geographical location or community where the couple resides; educational background; the couple's socioeconomic level. There are several negative reactions that heterosexual Black and White interracial couples face, including bodily gestures (such as spitting at or towards the couple); stares; inappropriate comments; exclusionary practices (couples are strongly discouraged from going to certain places/areas and not receiving services in particular places including church, hospitals, restaurants, and apartment buildings/housing complexes); harassment from police (particularly toward Black males); harassing phone calls; hate mail;

destruction of property such as graffiti on houses and automobile tires being slashed; experiencing discrimination from employers and co-workers (Datzman & Gardner, 2000; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt, et al., 1993). Gender of partners involved in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples determines how much racism the couple will encounter. To illustrate, Black males who have White spouses tend to experience racism more than Black females who have White spouses. Furthermore, White females who have Black partners tend to experience racism more than White males who have Black partners.

Heterosexual Black and White interracial couples also experience racism from both racial groups. Black partners of interracial marriage are often viewed by other Blacks as being disloyal to the African American race and are called such names as “*sellout*” (meaning that he or she does not appear to be loyal to the African American race), “*wanna-be*” (meaning that he or she desires to identify with the Caucasian race), and an “*oreo*” (meaning that he or she has “Black” physical characteristics but “White” ideals, perspectives, and personality characteristics) (Brown, 2001). Black males receive the most opposition from Black females. Many theories have been developed to explain this occurrence. For example, one theory states that this perspective is due to the disproportionate number of “good” Black males to “good” Black females, meaning that Black females view “good”² Black males as a “species that is rapidly becoming extinct” (Brown, 2001, p. 148) and White females are contributing to “extinction” by dating/marrying the Black males that have the potential to be desirable spouses for Black women. In other words, the perspective of Black females is that Black males who date/marry White females are being disloyal to the African American race and are not attempting to improve the Black male-female relationship. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) referred to the “extinction” of marriageable,

² The word “good” refers to an educated, financially and emotionally supportive Black male (Porterfield, 1978).

heterosexual Black men as “endangered Black man (EBM)” (p. 256). Porterfield (1978) reported that Black males who marry outside their race often avoid interactions with Black females. In addition, Black females may view Black males dating/marrying White females as a rejection or failure to recognize Black females’ beauty, pride, and support for Black males (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Spickard, 1989).

Black partners experience racism from White individuals. As one Black participant described his experience, “Wherever [I] go, [I] am the Black community” (Porterfield, 1978), meaning that, to White individuals in his community, he represents the African American race in an entirety and is characterized by the negative stereotypes that are associated with the Black race. White partners experience racism from both racial groups and are most opposed by Black females. However, many White partners experience racism in different ways than Black partners. For example, White partners, particularly White females, are often rejected by family members and may experience disinheritance. In many cases, parental pressures from the White partner’s family may contribute to termination of the relationship and/or family ties (Brown, 2001). Thus, emphasizing the third issue among heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, family of origin.

Family of origin, as applied to this study, refers to the immediate relatives who constitute the nuclear family (parent(s) and siblings) and may include members of the extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles) as well as non-relatives (close friends). Several authors (e.g. Brown, 2001; Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995) explored the views of the family of origin of partners involved in Black and White interracial marriages and identified a similar theme: the families of White partners appeared more opposed to interracial marriage than the families of Black partners. Rosenblatt et al. (1995)

identified several reasons White families tend to oppose interracial marriage: “(a) societal, community, neighborhood, or family disapproval; (b) issues of safety and well-being; (c) clannishness of African American families and communities; (d) problems the children would experience; (e) the likelihood of a poor economic future; (f) ‘problems³’” (p. 72). Moreover, more of the White participants stated that they felt comfortable and welcome with their African American in-laws than the Black partners reported with their Caucasian in-laws.

Individuals involved in Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages experience certain issues that are not present in the marriages of same-race couples such as racism and opposition from the public (e.g. businesses, restaurants, church, the overall community the couple resides in, and other racial groups) and within their places of employment; cultural differences within the marital relationship; difficulties within their families of origin. The issues that individuals involved in Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages endure are the result of embedded hatred and resentment that evolved from on-going conflicts between the races that began hundreds of years ago, here in the United States. In the next section, I will discuss the history and origin of the conflicts between the races that provide the foundation of the racism and opposition toward Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages today.

History of the Black and White Distinction in America and Development of Antimiscegenation Laws in the United States

Beginning in colonial times, stereotypes about heterosexual Black and White interracial couples began to emerge. A stereotype is defined as “a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment” (Mish, 2000, p. 1150). For clinicians and mental health

³ The term “problems” was not defined or named in the study (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

providers, recognizing and understanding stereotypes is crucial when working with heterosexual Black and White interracial couples because they are a key factor in the daily functioning of these couples.

Werhly et al. (1999) identified several stereotypes concerning heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. The stereotypes/myths are divided into two categories: psychological and sexual. The psychological stereotypes refer to the idea that there is an underlying “pathology” or “abnormality” of persons involved in interracial relationships. In addition, there is the assumption that Black and White interracial relationships are based on unhealthy motives⁴ such as: “self-hatred, desire for the “exotic”, rebellion against family, desire to exhibit liberal views of race relations”, and economic or social elevation (p. 28). Sexual stereotypes refer to the notion that White individuals and Black individuals exhibited different ideals concerning sexual behaviors. For example, White men and women viewed themselves as being “civilized” or “conservative” concerning sexual matters and viewed Black men and women as “animalistic, exploitable, promiscuous, and possessing exceptional sexual capabilities” (p. 29). Other stereotypes or myths concerning individuals involved in Black and White interracial relationships include: (a) pathological deviance; (b) race-mixing weakening the races, particularly, the Caucasian race; (c) the “forbidden-fruit syndrome” i.e. desiring the other race because it is taboo in society; (d) emotional maladjustments; (e) revenge towards another person or entire race (Brown, 2001; Davidson, 1992; Porterfield, 1978).

Conceptual Frame: Race as a Social Construction

From a historical perspective, race relations in America have endured many trials and transitions. Beginning as early as slavery in the 1600’s, the intermingling of races and the

⁴ Many of these motives were discussed previously under the other aspects section of “mate selection.”

concept of interracial relationships were present. For example, during the establishment of the colonies, European Americans would often run away to “join” nearby Native American tribes, due to the harsh living conditions present in the colonies. These runaways found the Native American culture intriguing and the sense of community and togetherness alluring; however, many of the elite colonists were opposed to intermingling of Native Americans and colonists. Circa 1617, when Black people first arrived in the colonies from the West Indies and some from England, European Americans and African Americans established a relationship that did not include racial tensions. Both groups were viewed as equals in that they lived and worked together, attended the same church services, and served on the same committees. It was not until the mid-1600’s, when planters in the colonies turned to racial slavery to fulfill the economic need for laborers, that the exclusive enslavement of Black people appeared. Poor White slaves were encouraged to turn against their Black counterparts through a bribe that they would no longer have to serve as slaves (Hitchcock, 2002).

After the establishment of slavery, several factors contributed to the presence of interracial relations that occurred during the 1600’s. First, slave owners, their sons, and overseers sexually abused slave women. Due to the unequal numbers of White men to White women in the colonial times, with White men outnumbering White women, White men initiated sexual relationships with Black slave women. Second, a genuine attraction and/or emotional bond between a White slave owner and a Black slave may have developed. Additionally, most White men were nursed and cared for by Black women who served as house servants during slavery. Therefore, White men had previous emotional bonds to Black women, which created circumstances that could nurture attraction. A third reason for interracial pairings in Colonial

America was the development of romantic relationships between African and European slaves who worked and lived together (Brown, 2001; Porterfield, 1978; Spickard, 1989).

The phenomenon of interracial pairings during colonial times caused those who opposed interracial relations to develop more rigid standards and consequences for those individuals who chose this lifestyle. As early as 1630, people in interracial relationships were enduring harsh punishments because of the opposition to interracial relationships. For example, a White male by the name of Hugh Davis was sentenced to be whipped in front of a group of Blacks and others as punishment for having a sexual relationship with a Black female (Brown, 2001; Porterfield, 1978; Spickard, 1989). Opposition to interracial relationships brought about laws that prohibited Black and White individuals from engaging in sexual intercourse or being legally married. These laws are referred to as miscegenation⁵ laws. Maryland and Virginia were first to establish such laws in 1661. Under Virginian law, any White woman who married a Black slave would be condemned to slavery until her husband died. Consequently, any children who were born to the couple also would be slaves. In 1681, an amendment was made to this law to state that any White woman who married a Black slave could retain her freedom as well as the children. However, the slave master or mistress and the officiate who performed the ceremony were to be penalized with a fine (Porterfield, 1978). Another law addressing White male and Black female unions was developed in 1662 and stated that any offspring of Black and White interracial unions, in which the mother was a Black slave, were to assume the status of their mother (i.e. the children were to become slaves). This law undermined the traditional English law that stated children were to assume the status of their father (Brown, 2001).

⁵ Miscegenation means “marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a White person and a member of another race” (Mish, 2000, pg. 741)

Besides the development of antimiscegenation laws, another standard, later referred to as the “one drop rule”, was introduced to deter interracial unions as well as to degrade interracial children. The rule established that only “White” blood was pure and that if a person had “one drop” of Black blood, he or she was to be considered Black and impure. Based upon the amount of “Black blood” an individual possessed, a “racial name” or classification was given to him or her. According to Williamson (1980), the classification went as follows: a person with zero “Black blood” was referred to as “White”, a person with one-eighth “Black blood” was referred to as “octoroon”, a person with one-fourth “Black blood” was referred to as “quadroon”, a person with one half “Black blood” i.e. a direct descendent of an interracial marriage was referred to as “mulatto”, a person with three-fourths “Black blood” was referred to as “griffe”, a person with seven-eighths “Black blood” was referred to as “sacatra”, and a person with all “Black blood” was referred to as a “negro” (as cited in Brown, 2001). These classifications and or “racial names” are no longer used; however, the “one drop rule” remains a standard in today’s society, especially among the African American population.

Of the racial classifications, individuals labeled as “mulattos” were a common focus of racism, due to the controversy of Black and White interracial unions. The original definition of mulatto is a sterile animal that is the offspring of a female horse and male donkey. In other words, the term “mulatto” literally means “mule” (Brown, 2001), which further demonstrates the negative treatment that these individuals experienced. Mulattos, who were usually lighter-skinned or brown-skinned, were the object of isolation in the eighteenth century. These individuals were believed to be in a higher position in society than “pure” Blacks because of the “White blood” inherited from their Caucasian parent. Mulattos were viewed as being more intelligent, more acceptable, and were frequently better treated than “pure” Black slaves.

Because of their acceptance on a high level, mulattos were often allowed to work in the slave master's house, also referred to as "the big house", as opposed to working in the harsh conditions of the cotton and vegetable fields. In addition, mulattos enjoyed privileges that other slaves did not; for example, mulattos were given opportunities to be educated and well-versed in business, trade, and farming (Frazier, 1957, as cited in Brown, 2001). On the other hand, mulattos were viewed as outcasts who would never attain the skills and intellect of Whites, due to their "Black blood." Although they were viewed as being better than Blacks, they would never fit in with Whites. Thus, mulattos were viewed as second class citizens.

Due to mulattos being held in high regard, conflict began between light-skinned and dark-skinned Blacks, a conflict that is still present among the African American population today (Brown, 2001). After the civil war, mulattos began overtly expressing their views of dark-skinned Blacks through the establishment of clubs, such as the Blue Vein Society of Nashville that allowed only lighter-skinned Blacks to become members. Requirements for membership into this elite club were based on skin complexion in which an aspiring member had to be "light enough" to see the blue veins in his or her forearm. Other attempts to segregate themselves came about through a trend known as "passing." Passing is defined as the "successful and permanent assumption of White status" by an interracial person who is aware that his or her genetic make-up is not solely Caucasian heritage (Porterfield, 1978, pp. 5-6). According to Porterfield (1978), individuals who chose to "pass" were not doing so to deny their identity, but for other reasons such as: (a) passing intentionally to obtain the privileges of White citizens, (b) passing for convenience, (c) passing for humor i.e. to enjoy deceiving others, and (d) passing for economic privileges or economic survival. Racism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries initiated conflicts with racial identity among individuals in American society in three areas: (1) among

Black and White individuals involved in interracial relationships, (2) among the Black population through the conflict between light and dark-skinned Blacks, and (3) among biracial individuals due to the struggle of not being accepted by either racial group. Racial identity among partners in an interracial relationship will be the focus of this study. The definition of racial identity that will be used in this study is as follows: “a continuous process of understanding one’s racial and ethnic heritage and/or identification with a racial reference group that becomes part of the individual’s self-concept” (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Smith, 1989).

The terms “Black” and “African-American” were utilized interchangeably in this study to reference racial identification. Although the term “Black” refers to race of the individual and “African-American” refers to ethnic background/heritage of the individual, both terms were utilized in the study to specify racial identification. Reasoning for using both terms is due to an issue of preference among the Black/African American population i.e. some individuals prefer to be called “Black” and others prefer to be called “African American.”

Research Problem

This study explored the concept of racial identity in the context of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. The purpose of the study was to understand how racial identity affects the dynamics of Black and White interracial relationships and the effect of interracial relationships on racial identity development. The focus of the study was to explore how partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples construct and/or define their individual racial identity, how the couple addresses cultural difference within the relationship, and how the couple handles opposition toward the relationship. The overarching research question for this study was: How do racial identity and the relational dynamics of Black and White interracial relationships effect each other?

Significance of the Study

There has been a rapid growth of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the United States in recent decades and numbers continue to increase. Hill and Thomas (2000) stated, “external opposition to interracial relationships in combination with the rapid growth of these relationships makes them an important and timely subject for family research” (p. 193). Killian (2001b) stated that limited research has been conducted to examine the “specific experiences and perceptions of interracial partners” (p. 2). In addition, exploration and increased awareness of this topic is of great importance because of limited research supporting interracial couples and an escalating demand for professionals in the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT) to be efficient in their knowledge and work with these couples.

Currently, the field of MFT lacks appropriate therapeutic techniques to utilize in therapy with interracial couples and families. Davidson (1992) stated that “clinical professionals such as counselors, psychotherapists, and social workers, have paid little attention to interracial marriage” (p. 151). Werhly et al. (1999) stated that, although the multicultural movement in the counseling professions has progressed in recent years, a lack of “addressing the unique needs and strengths of interracial couples, multiracial individuals, and multiracial families” remains in the helping professions (pp. 1-2). Implications from this study will contribute another voice to the call for cultural diversity in the work of family therapists. Moreover, an increase in literature addressing culture and diversity in the MFT field, which is also a scarce commodity, also will be a contribution of this study.

Werhly et al. (1999) suggested that research on interracial couples should include an exploration of where each partner is in terms of racial identity development. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) addressed racial identity in the context of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples; however, racial identity was not a major focus of the study. There have been no studies

conducted in the field of MFT that address the concept of racial identity with both partners and its relationship to other factors such as family of origin and the effects on the relationship of Black and White interracial marriages. Thus, there is a need to investigate the role of racial identity development in the relationships of interracial couples and to consider the implications of such research for the delivery of relational therapy to such couples.

The present study will potentially make a difference in the field of MFT through exploring two concepts, Black and White interracial relationships and racial identity, which have otherwise not been studied in the same context. These two concepts have been addressed in the literature independently such as in Cross's Black racial identity model (1971, 1991), Helms's White racial identity model (1990), and studies conducted on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples (Brown, 2001; Datzman & Gardner, 2000; Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Werhly et al., 1999). This study explored the inter-connection between these two domains.

Another important aspect of this study is that participants were included from the southern part of the United States. To date, most research on interracial couples has been conducted with participants from Midwestern and Western parts of the United States (Brown, 2001; Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Furthermore, the present study will develop implications for addressing these issues in therapy with all types of interracial couples, enhance literature concerning racial identity for both racial groups (Black and White), increase MFT literature on couple dynamics, and increase the prevalence of qualitative research in the field of MFT.

Definition of Terms

Couple identity – emphasizing one partner's race over the other or choosing to de-emphasize both partner's racial backgrounds and ethnic heritage to develop a

new identity (Killian, 2001a).

Cultural difference – an acknowledgment that the two partners came from cultures that differ in many ways such as language use, religious practices, food, money management, etc. (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, pg. 232).

Influential factors – incidences that are socially influenced and beyond an individual's control (Spickard, 1989).

Interracial marriage – an institution in which individuals of different races are legally joined to establish a family (Mish, 2000).

Miscegenation – marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a White person and a member of another race (Mish, 2000, pg. 741).

Motives – desires that an individual can control and may or may not be conscious of (Porterfield, 1978).

Passing – successful and permanent assumption of White status by an interracial person who is aware that his or her genetic make-up is not solely Caucasian heritage (Porterfield, 1970, pp. 5-6).

Race – a group of people unified by common interests, beliefs, and traditions and/or physical characteristics (Mish, 2000; Smith, 1989).

Racial identity – a continuous process of understanding one's racial and ethnic heritage and/or identification with a racial reference group that becomes part of the individual's self-concept (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Smith, 1989).

Racial reference group – the racial group with which an individual makes a psychological connection.

Stereotype – a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment (Mish, 2000, pg. 1150).

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite an increase in the prevalence of interracial couples in today's society, particularly Black and White dyads, research concerning these couples is scarce in the field of marriage and family therapy. Most studies conducted in this area involve the children of interracial relationships and the studies do not emphasize or focus on the interracial couple itself. This chapter focuses on studies that pertain to interracial couples and their significance to this study.

The “Lived Experience” of Heterosexual Black and White interracial couples

The research studies regarding heterosexual Black and White interracial couples utilize qualitative methodologies and address issues that are significant to interracial couples, such as management of cultural differences within the marital relationship, reactions to societal views concerning interracial couples, and family of origin issues. For example, Killian (2001a) explored how Black and White interracial spouses understand and cope with partner differences in the context of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Participants in Killian's study consisted of ten interracial couples (Black and White partners) recruited in the New York area. Requirements for participation included spouses having been married a minimum of one year and having at least one child. Age range for participants was 23 to 37 years. Killian utilized qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. An ecosystemic/narrative framework was utilized as a guide for the study. The ecosystems that Killian examined were the interaction of gender, race, and class and their effect on marital dynamics.

Couples were interviewed by Killian individually and conjointly. Individual interview questions focused on the beliefs and attitudes of each spouse's family of origin, couples' dating histories, and reactions from family, friends, and the public concerning their relationship. Couple interviews focused on milestones within the marital relationship, how the couple handled differences within their marital relationship, and reactions to the interview. Interviews were analyzed utilizing grounded-theory methodology and HyperRESEARCH software. The recognition of emergent themes and patterns from interviews with participants is most important in qualitative research. Themes and/or patterns identified after analysis related to "social support and resistance (intolerance and lack of support) to the relationship from family, friends, and the general public; negotiating differences to establish a couple identity; silenced histories and silent partners; and intersections of race and class" (Killian, 2001a, p. 29).

The first theme, "social support and resistance (intolerance and lack of support) to the relationship from family, friends, and the general public", refers to the couples' experience of support and opposition from individuals considered close acquaintances (family and friends) as well as strangers (general public). Killian discovered that many of the couples who experienced opposition from family and friends were willing to challenge the opposition in order to preserve the relationship. The couples' "challenge" included having civil wedding ceremonies without the attendance of opposing family members and friends and limiting and/or terminating contact with opposing family members and friends. Heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in this study also challenged opposing members of society in various ways such as appearing rebellious (e.g. staring back at rude on-lookers), avoiding particular places in which the couple felt uncomfortable, and attending places and appearing as if the spouses do not know each other.

Killian (2001a) further stated that “negative reaction from the public is a theme of personal pain and frustration reported by 16 of the 20 participants” (p. 36).

The second theme, “negotiating differences to establish a couple identity”, refers to the couples who conjointly chose to deemphasize certain aspects of ethnic and family history in order to establish a couple identity based on life experiences and milestones experienced within the relationship. Deemphasizing ethnic and family history refers to some couples choosing not to focus on the differences in race, class, sometimes gender within the relationship as well as traditions and rituals from each partner’s family of origin. Other couples stated that they decided to acknowledge and collaboratively combine differences within the relationship to form a “couple identity.”

“Silenced histories” refers to Black partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples remaining “silent” and not discussing topics of slavery and racism around their White spouses. This act of silence by Black partners is done out of loyalty to their families as well as to avoid making their White partners feel uncomfortable. The theme “silent partners” refers to both individuals in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples choosing not to discuss the concept of race within the relationship due to anticipated fear, pain, and intimidation of the subject. Killian (2001a) stated that many couples avoid discussing race due to the heaviness and discomfort associated with discussing race, ethnicity, and family history.

The fourth major theme identified by Killian is “intersections of race and class.” This theme describes how a difference in education level, gender, race, and class of spouses in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples further complicates relational dynamics through the inclusion of another underlying aspect, power. Power is also a prominent factor in

larger society further adding to the complications and daily struggles that heterosexual Black and White interracial couples have to endure.

Killian's study provided an in-depth understanding of the overt and covert dynamics and dilemmas endured by heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Throughout the study, Killian (2001a) stated that race is a factor that merits exploration in future research with heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, specifically in reference to addressing race in therapy with these couples. Killian's study was a cornerstone for the present study in that it was an excellent tool in comparing and contrasting results from the present study.

Killian (2001b) conducted another study similar to the above-mentioned study. Despite the fact that the second study used the same population (10 Black and White couples) and methodologies (inductive methodology) as the first study, there are several differences between the studies related to research questions and theoretical framework. The research questions raised in this study sought to answer the following: "(a) what struggles or challenges do interracial couples face, (b) do they see themselves as 'interracial', and (c) by what processes do they negotiate racial, gender, and class difference" (2001b, p. 2). The theoretical framework was different based on the use of both an ecosystemic theoretical framework as well as Black feminist theory. Ecosystemic framework "emphasizes the importance of recognizing the sociocultural contexts in which relationships and presenting problems are situated" (Killian, 2001, p. 2). In other words, individuals, couples, and families are influenced by the values and beliefs of larger social structures, which contain different types of isms such as sexism, racism, ageism, etc. Black feminist theory was included to demonstrate that an interconnection of race, gender, and class can effect the marital dyad by contributing to the oppression that is experienced by Black partners of interracial marriages and the distribution of power within these

relationships. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Black feminist theory, also referred to as Black feminist thought, views “these distinctive systems of oppression [race, class, and gender] as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (p. 222). In addition, Collins stated that by viewing the concept of domination as a structured system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression, the focus expands from merely describing similarities and differences to how race, class, and gender interconnect within relationships and/or systems.

Themes that were identified after analysis included: “falling in love interracially; interracial couples and social networks; partner sensitivity to racism; silenced histories/silent partners; the ecosystem of gender; intersections of gender and race” (pp. 15-25).

The first theme, “falling in love interracially” refers to the ideal that “love is the primary and essential motivation for marriage” (Lee, 1982; Udry, 1974 as cited in Killian, 2001b, p. 15). According to Killian (2001b), the results found in reference to this theme extensively support the ideal of love and marriage within Black and White interracial relationships as it pertains to homogamous or same-race relationships. In other words, the foundation for Black and White interracial relationships is the same as with same-race relationships i.e. attraction, dating, and marriage. Killian (2001b) stated that most of the couples interviewed reported a “gradual process of falling in love” that led to marriage (p. 16). In addition, “partners made reference to common themes of love, companionship, and compatibility, [which are] positive aspects of many relationships” (Killian, 2001b, p. 16). Killian (2001b) also described that this theme does not lend support to theories or stereotypes stating that Black and White interracial relationships involve pathological or deviant motives such as rebellion against family of origin and/or economic or social elevation.

The second theme, “interracial couples and social networks”, is similar to the first theme in the Killian study previously mentioned in this chapter. This theme describes how heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the study coped with opposition from within their social networks (family and friends). According to Killian (2001b), many couples married in spite of opposition from their social networks and the resistance to opposition was stronger in individuals who: (1) were reared in an environment that encouraged interracial marriage and/or had family members who married interracially, and (2) received support from family and friends who do not view interracial marriage as problematic. Coping methods found in this study are similar to the methods under the first theme mentioned in Killian’s previous study (refer to Killian, 2001a).

“Partner sensitivity to racism” refers to the theme that nine out of ten Black partners described in the study, which is that their White partners failed to recognize racism in the workplace and in public. In addition, the Black partners in the study felt that their White partners were not empathetic or supportive of the Black partners’ feelings of pain and anger toward racism. Killian (2001b) attributed this phenomenon within heterosexual Black and White interracial couples to the underlying aspects of invisible power and privilege as related to White partners present in dynamics of the relationship as well as society in general. These aspects create a “blind spot” for White partners in reference to recognizing and/or acknowledging the power of hidden racism in society. Killian (2001b) further commented that with regards to White partners’ lack of empathy for Black partners’ anger and pain associated with hidden racism, Black partners have two choices: (1) “remain silent about daily experiences” or (2) identify and discuss circumstances with White partners in which hidden racism occurs (p. 18).

“Silenced histories/silent partners” is the same theme found in Killian’s first study mentioned at the beginning of this section. “Silenced histories/silent partners” refers to Black partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples remaining “silent” and not discussing topics of slavery and racism around their White spouses and both individuals in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples choosing not to discuss the concept of race within the relationship due to anticipated fear, pain, and intimidation of the subject.

The fifth theme found in Killian’s study is “the ecosystem of gender.” This theme describes the context of gender and gender roles within the interracial couples who participated in Killian’s study. Male participants were more likely to describe their relationship with reference to physical attraction to their partners (e.g. “She was gorgeous” or “She had great legs”) whereas female partners described their relationship in reference to the personality traits of their partners. For example, one female participant stated that her husband was so attentive to her (Killian, 2001b).

The last theme found in Killian’s (2001b) study is discussing the intersection of race and gender within heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Killian’s study found several examples of the intersections of race and gender. First, White male participants viewed their Black female partners as exotic. Killian (2001b) explained that American standards of beauty cause Eurocentric individuals to feel that individuals of the Black race are exotic and different from the norm and causes “color-cast hierarchies” (p. 20) within the Black race meaning that light-skin and straight hair are more accepted and desirable than dark-skin and coarse hair. Second, White male and female partners tend to overlook racism because “Whiteness is not a self-conscious racial identity or social signifier in most White people's minds” (p. 20). Killian further explained this concept in the following quote, White individuals “can choose not to read

the situation as their partners do because their race, gender, and class positions permitting them from experiencing the racism that their Black partners have had to continually face” (2001b, p. 21). White partners continually struggle with discussing the subject of race due to the pain and frustration associated with recognizing the racial judgment and prejudice experienced by their Black partners as well as their biracial children (Killian, 2001b).

Killian’s (2001b) study provided an in-depth understanding of the intersections of race, gender, and class difference within Black and White interracial relationships and discussed the aspect of power and invisible privilege that White partners tend to not recognize and how this contributes to the underlying racial dynamics within Black and White interracial relationships.

Datzman and Gardner (2000) conducted a study exploring the types of public harassment that heterosexual Black and White interracial couples experience and the types of management strategies employed by interracial couples. The authors defined public harassment as “evaluative, hostile, and discriminatory actions and reactions that couples receive from strangers in public places” (p. 5). The theoretical framework for this study was based on the work of Goffman, who emphasized public order and representation of self in a social setting, and social interaction theory.

Participants consisted of nine heterosexual, Black and White couples and one individual, all recruited in the Midwest. Racial profiles of the participants included seven White females, three Black females, six Black males, and three White males. Age ranges for participants were 21-30 (twelve of the 19 participants were in this category) and 31-40 (seven of the 19 participants were in this category). Three of the couples were engaged. Data collection techniques included in-depth qualitative interviews. Participants were interviewed individually (a total of 19 interviews). There were three categories of information found after analysis of

data: public harassment experiences, types of reactions to public harassment, and types of management strategies.

Various public harassment experiences included: (1) staring, bodily movement/gestures (strangers obviously staring or staring a minute too long at the couple while walking by), (2) evaluative practices (strangers verbally expressing their opinions about interracial couples), and (3) exclusionary practices (couples strongly discouraged or legally forbidden from going to certain places/areas and not receiving services in particular places) these practices occurred at a variety of public places, including restaurants and other public service areas.

Types of reactions to public harassment identified included: shock, surprise, a blank “numbness” or “dead feeling”, sadness, shame, resentment, and anger. According to Datzman and Gardner (2000), many of the participants in their study associated feelings of anger toward public harassment with the beginning stages of their interracial relationships. In other words, early in their relationships participants were angered by the harassment they experienced. The participants further explained that as they matured, the feelings of anger turned into feelings of pity for opposing individuals and their ignorance about racism. In addition, participants also stated that the most opposing group of individuals included Black females and their opposition to the White female/Black male dyads. This phenomenon confirms a similar pattern described by several authors (Brown, 2001; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Spickard, 1989).

Management strategies for public harassment that emerged from the data included: (a) ignoring/repressing – purposefully ignoring and being non-reactive to public harassment, (b) avoiding – choosing to avoid places where they are subject to public harassment, (c) presence alignment – one partner aligning with the actions of the other partner in reference to public harassment (i.e. both partners have discussed certain actions that may be taken against public

harassment and both partners are in agreement with said strategies), (d) segregating/changing domains – couples choosing to go to places that include only other interracial couples, (e) accompaniment – couples’ choosing to go to places accompanied by other interracial couples in a group, and (f) answering back – couples choosing to verbally respond to public harassment. Some participants stated that the first strategy was the safest in that this strategy avoided confrontation and/or the potential for an escalated encounter.

Daztman and Gardner (2000) provided an excellent tool for understanding how heterosexual Black and White interracial couples are accepted by society and also provides specific examples and in-depth detail of the harassment heterosexual Black and White interracial couples experience from the public. This study will be used as a reference for the present study in relation to how the Black and White couples in my study experience harassment and the strategies that they utilize to handle public harassment.

Paul Rosenblatt, Terri Karis, and Richard Powell (1995) conducted a qualitative study with 21 heterosexual, Black and White interracial couples from the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan area. The purpose of the study was to present heterosexual Black and White interracial couples with the opportunity to share their experiences without interpretations from other sources such as the researchers’ opinions and theoretical assumptions. The researchers explained that another purpose of their study was to provide the “untainted” words of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples with the objective of helping to debunk myths and stereotypes concerning interracial couples and bi-racial children.

Participants were recruited through several means: workshops for interracial families; advertisements in newsletters for multiracial families, the YMCA, and African Americans; and announcements posted throughout the community. Snowball sampling techniques also were

utilized. The major criterion participants had to meet to be included in the study was having been a couple for at least a year⁶. Nineteen of the participants were married and the age range of participants was 23 to 51, with five being in their 20's and one being over age 50. In addition, the authors noted that efforts were made to recruit same-sex couples for the study; however, no same-sex couples participated. The study consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews that included questions addressing certain issues faced by heterosexual Black and White interracial couples; for example, "What kinds of concerns, if any, have been raised by your family (parents, siblings, etc.) or friends about your interracial relationship?" and "Has race ever been an issue as a part of your conflicts with each other?" (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 13).

The analysis of themes and patterns in qualitative research requires a systematic process that includes certain methodologies and/or frameworks and may include the use of software created for qualitative research (e.g. Hyper RESEARCH). The researchers of this study, however, did not specify the method of analysis used in the study. Several themes were discussed in spite of researchers not specifying a method of analysis.

The first theme related to many participants describing their consistent efforts toward presenting themselves as having "ordinary" relationships and/or being as "normal" as same-race couples. According to Rosenblatt et al. (1995), many of the participants in the study stated that they viewed their interracial relationships as ordinary, meaning that they did not focus on the difference in race or racial issues within the relationship; however, experiencing racism from society would "remind" the participants of the difference in race as well as racial issues that are present within their relationships. This suggests that the heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the Rosenblatt et al. (1995) study avoided and/or repressed issues of race at

⁶ Authors did not specify what "being a couple" represented other than "being together" (p. 16).

the cost of attempting to appear “normal” to others as well as themselves. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) stated that this theme is consistent with similar themes found in several other studies that are cited in chapter one (e.g. Kouri & Laswell, 1993; Porterfield, 1978).

Second, participants explained how their families of origin and community values have effected their interracial relationship. The participants mentioned several factors from families of origin and community that influenced the likelihood of becoming involved in an interracial relationship: (1) learned tolerance of racism and racial differences from within the nuclear family or other community organizations such as church, (2) being reared in a multicultural community, and (3) living in a community with interracial relationships and/or having family members that are involved in interracial relationships or marriages. Furthermore, some participants considered themselves to be “pioneers” i.e. some participants were the first in their family to be involved in an interracial relationship.

Third, couples’ described their experience of racism toward interracial relationships. Many of the participants experienced racism via several methods including: racial slurs, staring, police harassment, and discrimination in public places such as restaurants, hotels/motels, real estate (e.g. buying a house), church, and place of employment. Most of the couples described their experiences of racism as “difficulties” that the couples had “put behind them” and moved beyond to focus on the positive aspects of their relationships (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 157).

A fourth theme related to racial identity issues of both partners and how each couple addressed racial issues within the relationship. Patterns pertaining to racial identity identified by the authors are as follows: first, all of the Black partners in the study stated that they possessed a strong Black identity and identified with the Black race. Second, most of the Black partners stated that due to their involvement in an interracial relationship, they have experienced a loss of

credibility among individuals from the Black race concerning African American issues, and White individuals felt as if they (the Black partner) possessed hatred towards the Black race. Third, White partners did not discuss identity in the same manner as the Black partners and felt that being part of an interracial relationship “forced” them to have an identity that was not previously acknowledged. Fourth, White partners described their experiences as being the “spokesperson” concerning the African American race because of their involvement in an interracial relationship. Moreover, Rosenblatt et al. (1995) suggested that White partners’ silence and/or lack of awareness about racial identity may be the result of White partners not having to deal with or better understand their “Whiteness” due to invisible privilege and power.

The last theme related to how the couples in the study developed a support system (i.e. persons, groups, or activities). The participants described a “sorting out process” which consisted of making decisions regarding with whom to remain in contact and who to include in the couple’s supportive circle. Friends, family members, and associates who were accepting and supportive of the couples’ interracial relationship remained in contact with the couples; however, those family members, friends, and associates who were oppositional and/or negative toward the couples’ relationships were distanced via no contact with the couples.

Many of the themes found by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) study were consistent with themes found in the previous studies cited in chapter two (e.g. Datzman & Gardner, 2000, Killian, 2001a & b). The Rosenblatt et al. study also provided an in-depth perspective into the lives of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples using qualitative methodology. This study will also be beneficial to the present study of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples and racial identity, specifically to compare and contrast the results pertaining to racial identity.

In summary, the aforementioned studies focused on concepts that are pertinent to heterosexual Black and White interracial couples and yielded similar themes and patterns. These studies are significant to the present study in that they provide foundational concepts and perspectives about heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Although a majority of these studies focused on racial issues within the marital dyad, only one study included the concept of racial identity within the marital dyad; however, racial identity was not a major focus of the study (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In connection to race and racial matters, one of the most important factors for interracial couples is the racial identity of each partner as well as how racial identity affects the marital relationship. Brown's (2001) study concerning heterosexual Black and White interracial couples validates the previous statement. Brown reported that over half, approximately 56.3%, of the participants in the study stated that their racial identities were affected by being in an interracial relationship. Many of the participants stated that dating interracially allowed them to strengthen what they felt to be their "true" identity. To illustrate, by dating Black individuals, White participants felt as if they were provided the opportunity to express their "Black" identities; therefore, suggesting that the White participants had a prior sense of "Blackness" and dating interracially helped them to establish a more defined sense-of-self and racial identity. In the next section, I will discuss the definition and fundamentals of race and racial identity as they apply to the present study.

Racial Identity

Race and racial identity are concepts that remain controversial due to a lack of agreement concerning the meaning and understanding of these concepts. Both concepts have neither one specific definition nor explanation. There are numerous ways to define both, and some definitions depend on the context. For example, one definition states that race is "a class or kind

of people unified by community of interests, habits, or characteristics" (Mish, 2000, p. 959). Smith (1989) stated that race consists of "the differential concentrations of gene frequencies responsible for traits that are usually confined to physical manifestations such as skin color or hair type" (p. 277), meaning that race often is associated with physical characteristics and appearance rather than biological characteristics. According to Rosenblatt et al. (1995), race is one of many socioculturally constructed categories that are applied to individuals and groups based upon geographic location of ancestry and physical attributes. In addition, Hartigan (1997) stated that the term "race" is used to "characterize difference and deviance from social norms" established by majority group members (p. 496-7). The definition of race used in this study was the following: a group of people unified by common interests, beliefs, traditions, and/or physical characteristics (Mish, 2000; Smith, 1989). I chose to combine certain components of each of the definitions concerning race that were previously mentioned. I feel that the components used to create the definition are essential to the meaning of race as it pertains to my study in that race encompasses different aspects and characteristics (i.e. race is not limited to physiological appearance but may include a psychological component).

The concept of racial identity also has numerous definitions. To illustrate, Hill and Thomas (2000) define racial identity as the value an individual places on his or her identification with a particular racial group. Racial identity, as defined by Janet Helms (1990), refers to "an individual identifying or not identifying with the racial group with which he or she is assumed to share racial heritage" or the "quality or manner of one's identification with respective racial groups" (p. 5). One can conclude from Helms's definition that racial identity does not necessarily assume that an individual identifies with his or her "own" racial group. Helms described the process of an individual using a particular racial group, which may not be his or

her own racial group, to guide his or her feelings, thoughts, and actions as “reference-group orientation”(p. 5). Thus, the term racial reference group becomes an important aspect of racial identity and racial identity development.

Smith (1989) stated that a racial reference group is considered the group that an individual makes a psychological connection with; consequently, this group becomes part of his or her definition of self and identity. Individuals differ in their identification or orientation with a certain racial reference group, and this applies to individuals within the same race. For example, one Black male may view his racial reference group as being the African American/Black race and another Black male may view his racial reference group as being the Caucasian race. Helms (1990) refers to this process as “ascribed identity”, which is an “individual’s deliberate affiliation or commitment to a particular racial group” (p. 5). Thus, the definition of racial identity used in this study includes a combination of several definitions and was defined as follows: a continuous process of understanding one’s racial and ethnic heritage and/or identification with a racial reference group that becomes part of the individual’s self-concept (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Smith, 1989).

Racial identity, as mentioned previously, includes how an individual’s racial reference group accepts and/or reacts to certain thoughts, behaviors, and actions, for instance, marrying interracially. According to Rosenblatt et al. (1995), identity is broader than self-concept and includes how others perceive his or her actions, suggesting that racial reference group identification is a major part of racial identity development. Therefore, recognition and understanding of racial identity in the context of Black and White interracial relationships is important because of the unique circumstances that each partner encounters. For example, African American partners in interracial relationships experience several challenges that are

different from other African Americans: (a) credibility of their racial identity is questioned, (b) stances on racism are questioned, (c) certain jobs and organizational membership opportunities as well as leadership roles in organizations are not accessible, (d) resentment from Black females towards Black males who marry interracially, and (e) being viewed as an “outcast” from the Black race. African American partners also experience challenges from majority group members such as the assumption that Black partners are “anti-Black” because they are interracially married. The challenges faced by African American partners causes them to question their concept of racial identity as well as their loyalty to the African American race, assuming that these partners view this group as their racial reference group. White partners also have their share of unique experiences such as (a) learning to include race as part of their self-identity, which was not a concern prior to marrying interracially, (b) understanding and accepting the concept of White privilege, and (c) being viewed by the majority group as an expert on African American issues and experiences (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

One can assume that individuals involved in interracial relationships must possess a well-defined racial identity in order to maintain successful marital relationships and endure the challenges that confront many interracial couples. According to Rosenblatt et al. (1995), “interracial partnership can lead to questions about one’s [racial] identity” (p. 191); therefore, understanding how racial identity is conceptualized becomes important when studying the dynamics of interracial couples. The next sections will focus on theories concerning racial identity development for both Black and White individuals.

Racial Identity Development: Black Racial Identity

Research on Black racial identity development began in the late 1940’s. By the early 1970’s, researchers began to focus on developing theories that explained the developmental

process of Black racial identity (e.g. Asante, 1980; Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Sanders-Thompson, 1991). The pioneer of such theories, William Cross, created a model depicting how African Americans develop their sense of “Blackness” or how they experience “nigrescence”, which means “becoming Black.” According to Cross (1971, 1991), African American individuals who experience “nigrescence” are re-socialized from having a Eurocentric-influenced identity to having an Afrocentric identity. Cross’s model depicts five developmental stages that an individual experiences to develop his or her Black identity: *Pre-encounter*, *Encounter*, *Immersion-Emersion*, *Internalization*, and *Internalization-Commitment*.

Stage one - *Pre-encounter*: This stage of Cross’s model depicts the “old” identity to be changed. Individuals in this stage are unaware of their “Afrocentricity” or Black heritage because of an overexposure to Eurocentric ideals and culture. Furthermore, the perspective of African Americans in this stage is difficult to change concerning race and “being Black” due to a lack of awareness. According to Cross, this lack of awareness contributes to the development of several attitudes and characteristics associated with this stage of Black identity development.

The first attitude is the *low-salience attitude*, which describes individuals who identify as being Black, but emphasize other values such as religion, social status, and professional development as being significant aspects of their identity. Individuals with the *low-salience* attitude hold the beliefs that they are “human beings who happen to be Black” (p. 191) and their physical attributes and/or racial identification play an insignificant role in daily interactions. The second attitude, *social-stigma attitude*, describes individuals who view their race as a problem or an annoyance due to stigma and discrimination associated with being Black. These individuals define their “Blackness” through statements of oppression and exhibit a lack of knowledge concerning Black culture. Third, individuals who exhibit an *anti-Black attitude*, view being

Black as a negative experience and hold a racist perspective of African Americans. The perspectives of *anti-Black* individuals in the *pre-encounter* stage resemble those of White racists (i.e., *anti-Black* individuals hold positive stereotypes of White individuals and White culture and negative stereotypes of Blacks).

Cross (1991) identified several characteristics associated with stage one that contribute to the aforementioned attitudes as well as the general perspective of individuals in the *pre-encounter* stage. The following are characteristics that Cross identified: *miseducation*; *Eurocentricity*; “*spotlight*” or *race-image anxiety*; *assimilation-integration*; and *value-structure* and *orientation*.

Miseducation refers to how the education system in America educates students about White, American history and culture, but scarcely informs students about African American roles in U.S. history and/or Black culture. Thus, African Americans are “ill-informed” about their Black heritage and may adopt a Eurocentric identity and racially define themselves using a Eurocentric perspective. Moreover, Cross stated that miseducation may cause *anti-Blacks* to develop hatred towards themselves and the Black race. *Eurocentricity* further reiterates the concept of African Americans being socialized to accept and favor a Eurocentric perspective. Cross also mentioned that most individuals in the *pre-encounter* stage are socialized to be “bi-cultural”, meaning that African American individuals learn about both White and Black cultures; however, they tend to value White cultural perspectives with high regard. A third characteristic, “*spotlight*” or *race-image anxiety*, refers to the hypersensitivity of some African Americans to acting “too Black.” The concern of persons exhibiting this characteristic is that they will be perpetuating negative stereotypes about Black people. When in a group of White people, *spotlight* individuals feel they are in the “spotlight” and are continuously mindful of portraying

the “best image” for persons of the Black race as much as possible. For *anti-Blacks*, this phenomenon is viewed as a “mark of oppression” (p. 196). *Assimilation-integration* refers to the belief that it is the responsibility of African Americans to become part of the mainstream society and overcome certain obstacles to be accepted by “White America.” The responsibility is solely on African Americans to assimilate to the beliefs of White culture. Conversely, White individuals are not expected to become accustomed to Black culture. Moreover, the only challenge to the White community from African Americans who exhibit the *assimilation-integration* characteristic is to cease acts of discrimination. The last characteristic, *value structure and orientation*, refers to values that are deemed important and how these values are prioritized. According to Cross (1991), *pre-encounter* individuals and those in the higher stages of the model may view the same values as being important, but may not prioritize them in the same manner. For example, *pre-encounter* individuals, as mentioned earlier, consider religion, career goals, etc. as being most important while persons at a higher stage (e.g. *internalization*) deem race relations as highly significant.

Stage two – *Encounter*: During this stage, the individual encounters an event such as an act of discrimination in college or place of employment, the death of a major figure such as Martin Luther King, or several small events that induce change within the individual’s perspective of race and/or his sense of identity. The encounter(s) must be “traumatic” enough to evoke a sense of confusion and/or questioning of the individual’s current frame of reference concerning race and his or her “Blackness.” Cross further divided this stage into two steps: “(1) experiencing an encounter and (2) personalizing it” (p. 200). Cross stated that the encounter is most effective when the person internalizes the event. In addition, the encounter does not have to be negative. A person who previously was not well-versed on Black history and culture, who

encounters an event in which a curiosity for knowledge in this area is heightened, has experienced a positive encounter that will evoke change in his or her perspective of race. Cross described emotions individuals in stage two might experience: “initial reactions include confusion, alarm, anomie, or depression, and feeling as if they are ‘not Black or Afrocentric enough’” (p. 201). In addition, individuals may also experience “guilt, anger, and anxiety” (p. 201).

Stage three – *Immersion-Emersion*: This stage depicts the internal conflict that African Americans experience while developing a more “Afrocentric” identity. At this stage, individuals experience being “between” the old identity and the new identity to be achieved. Stage three is divided into two phases: the *immersion* phase and the *emersion* phase. During the *immersion* phase, individuals immerse themselves in “everything Black”, including Black history; Black literature, music, and art; African dance and other forms of African art; African dress, hairstyles, flags, and the national colors of Africa. *Immersion* individuals also join groups or organizations that help immerse themselves in the Black world. *Immersion* individuals also develop an attitude that anything White is “evil, oppressive, inferior, and inhuman”, while anything Black is “superior” (Cross, 1991, p. 202). Cross stated that individuals in the *immersion* phase may appear to have a sense of arrogance about their new-found “Blackness” and has labeled this phenomenon the “Blacker-than-thou syndrome” (p. 202). The “Blacker-than-thou” syndrome is accompanied by a confrontational and forthright persona that may appear to be hostile and is displayed toward anyone, both White and Black. Additionally, *immersion* individuals may change their names to reflect a more Afrocentric identity or drop their “American” names such as Malcolm X. Other emotions associated with the *immersion* phase of stage three include: anger towards Eurocentric culture, guilt concerning a lack of awareness about Black culture and

ideals, pride towards Black culture and developing sense of Afrocentricity, and a fervent attachment to “everything Black.” Furthermore, African Americans experience a sense of anxiety resulting from a fear of not being “Black” enough (i.e., not being as knowledgeable about Black culture as they desire).

During the *emersion* phase of stage three, African Americans emerge from the previous phase with a greater sense of how to balance their emotions and knowledge they have attained. They appear to have a more mature and focused understanding of their newly developed Black identity than when they began the emersion/immersion stage.

Cross (1991) mentioned three negative consequences involved with stage three: (1) *regression* - refers to an individual who may reject “Blackness” and regress back to his or her identity present in the *Pre-encounter* stage due to a negative experience during the *immersion-emersion* phase, (2) *continuation/fixation* – refers to an individual who becomes overwhelmed with hatred for White individuals and White culture, and (3) *dropping out* – refers to an individual who does not regress to another stage, but ceases all efforts in striving for a more mature sense of “Blackness.” *Dropping out* may occur for two reasons: (1) the individual experiences exhaustion due to viewing problems associated with race as undefeatable and/or unsolvable and (2) the individual has achieved a sense of completion in his or her attempt to have a profound understanding of Black culture.

Stage four – *Internalization*: Individuals in this stage have internalized their new identity and have incorporated this new identity in their daily interactions and cognitions. *Internalization* individuals exhibit a mature sense of “Blackness” that is less defensive, more serious, and more complex as compared to the individual’s state of mind in stage three. That is to say that the concept of “being Black” means more than reading Malcolm X, quoting African slogans, or

despising White individuals and White culture. Additionally, the individual exhibits a sense of peace with who he or she is as an African American person. Individuals in this stage also may develop a sense of biculturalism and multiculturalism. Cross defines biculturalism as the process of combining aspects of Black identity with American identity; multiculturalism is defined as the process of combining aspects of Black identity with multiple cultural interests. Stage five – *Internalization-Commitment*: This stage describes individuals who not only have internalized their sense of “Blackness”, but also devote a long-term, and in some cases a lifelong, commitment to understanding and expressing what it means to “be Black.”

Cross’s theory has endured several changes since the completion of the first version in 1971. After research studies were conducted on the model (e.g. Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985; Parham, 1989), three flaws were found with the concepts introduced in the first model completed in 1971. For example, in the first model, Cross described self-hatred dynamics associated with individuals in the *pre-encounter* stage that were not consistent with findings from research studies concerning Black identity. Some individuals exhibited a priority of other values over race such as religion and/or social status; therefore, the preference for values other than race should not be considered an indication of self-hatred or hatred towards the Black race. Another aspect of Black racial identity development introduced in the 1971 model was that African Americans who develop an Afrocentric identity experience changes to innate personality characteristics; however, empirical evidence revealed that little or no changes occurred in personality characteristics. Third, in the first model Cross assumed that progression through the stages was achieved once in an individual’s lifetime. In other words, once an individual reached stage five of the model, he or she did not re-experience to any of the previous stages. In an attempt to address this concept, Parham (1989) included the concept of “recycling” in Cross’s

model. “Recycling” occurs when individuals who have reached stage five experience an event and/or new challenges that generate a repetition or “re-cycling” of lower stages (as cited in Cross, 1995). Therefore, in 1991 and 1995, Cross revised the model to include the aforementioned concepts. The model discussed in this section described the revised version of Cross’s model.

Racial Identity Development: White Racial Identity

Research pertaining to theories of racial identity development among White individuals began as early as the 1970’s. By the late 1980’s, Janet Helms emerged as the predominant contributor to theory addressing White racial identity development. According to Helms (1990), White individuals live in a society in which they fail to recognize several factors: (a) racial and/or diversity issues and concerns, (b) privilege associated with members of the majority group, and (c) how being part of the majority group impacts their interactions with others and their societal views. The author conveyed that White individuals could exist in society without ever having to acknowledge that their “White skin entitles them to feel superior to Blacks” (Dennis, 1980 as cited in Helms, 1990, p. 54). Furthermore, Helms stated that it is only when White individuals encounter individuals from other races, and this encounter is intrusive, that “Whiteness” and racial identity become an issue. Helms’s theory is comprised of six stages that are conceptualized into two phases: the *abandonment of racism* (phase one) and *defining a positive White identity* (phase two). Phase one includes stages one through three and phase two includes stages four through six.

Phase one – *The Abandonment of Racism*: Stage one – *Contact*: individuals in this stage become apprehensive around African American people and uphold a false sense of White awareness by failing to recognize the importance of race in daily interactions. For example,

White individuals in this stage are likely to make such statements as “I don’t notice what race a person is” (Helms, 1990, p. 57). Moreover, *contact* individuals rely on stereotypes as a means of understanding African American experiences and apply these stereotypes to all African American individuals. *Contact* individuals avoid interactions with African Americans unless the encounter is initiated by an African American(s) who appears “to act White.” Furthermore, these interactions are used by *contact* individuals to educate themselves about the experiences of African American people, causing the Black individual to be a “spokesperson” for the entire race.

Stage two – *Disintegration*: during this stage, White individuals begin to recognize societal inequalities between Whites and African Americans, the discrimination African Americans experience, and that previously held stereotypes about African Americans are inaccurate. Furthermore, White individuals realize that there are negative consequences associated with not upholding societal standards of inequality. As a result, White individuals in this stage experience cognitive dissonance and a sense of being “between the two races.” Other reactions include feelings of “guilt, depression, helplessness, and anxiety” (Helms, 1990, p. 59). In response to the cognitive dissonance and emotions experienced in this stage, a White individual will attempt to reduce discomfort through several means: (1) avoid interactions with Black people, (2) challenge the belief that African Americans are inferior to Whites, and (3) attempt to prove that racism is not his or her fault and/or deny the existence of racism. In general, the individual in this stage is in denial about racism, his or her White identity, and the social benefits associated with being White.

Stage three – *Reintegration*: individuals in this stage begin to accept the ideal of White superiority and demonstrate this acceptance covertly by avoiding any social interactions with

African Americans and overtly through treating African Americans as inferior in efforts to defend White privilege. Differences rather than similarities between Whites and Blacks are emphasized and feelings of guilt and helplessness are replaced with fear and anger towards Blacks persons.

Phase two - *Defining a Positive White Identity*: Stage four – *Pseudo-Independent*: White individuals in this stage begin to acquire more of an intellectual perspective towards the concept of White privilege and gain control of the chaotic emotions experienced in the previous stages. *Pseudo-independent* individuals assume responsibility for the existence of racism and acknowledge individual actions that promote racist ideologies. Individuals in this stage actively interact with African Americans in attempts to help them become successful according to White standards and search for solutions to racism in Black communities rather than White communities. Moreover, *pseudo-independent* individuals find themselves experiencing “in-between” emotions similar to emotions experienced in the *disintegration* stage (stage two) due to being treated suspiciously by African Americans, being treated as outcasts by Whites, and having neither a positive nor negative White identity.

Stage five – *Immersion/Emersion*: during this stage, White individuals immerse themselves in literature pertaining to other White individuals who have embraced similar racial identity experiences and join groups addressing interests of abandoning and challenging racism. The focus at this stage is to challenge White individuals, not Black individuals, about racist ideologies to induce change and debunk stereotypes and myths about Blacks and Whites. *Immersion/emersion* individuals begin to question what it means to be White and to explore and find answers concerning what it means to have a White identity.

Stage six – *Autonomy*: this stage depicts White individuals who have internalized their reestablished White identity. *Autonomy* individuals demonstrate a genuine interest in learning about other cultures and recognize how other “isms” such as sexism and ageism contribute to racism and actively work to eradicate these detrimental belief systems in society. Individuals in this stage no longer have a need to oppress or discriminate against people of other racial backgrounds because race is no longer a threat. In general, individuals in this stage have developed a non-racist, White identity and have learned to accept their “Whiteness” and the implications that are associated with being White individuals.

Helms has revised her theory since the first version completed in 1984. The revised model no longer uses the term “stage” to describe each category of the model, but rather the term “status” is used. Helms discussed that this change was implemented to depict a more dynamic developmental process associated with her model (Helms, 1995). Based on research conducted utilizing Helms’s model, the following are criticisms of the model. First, the White racial identity model is based on Cross’s model, which represents an oppression-adaptive model of racial identity development. Racial identity development will not be the same for a White individual because he or she is not oppressed and therefore lacks the need of adaptation to another racial group’s norms and belief systems. Second, Helms’s model has been criticized due to its lack of focus on White racial identity development from the White individual’s perspective, but from the perspective of gradually progressing from unawareness to awareness of African American culture. Third, the model has been criticized due to its focus primarily on White individuals’ awareness of the African American culture rather than all cultural groups (i.e. Hispanic, Asian, Native American, etc.) (Leach, Behrens, & LaFleur, 2002; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

After reviewing the criticisms to Helms's model, there is a perspective that I agree with and one that I do not. First, I agree that there is a difference in how White and Black individuals experience racial identity development. Helms's model expresses a *surface-level* view of White racial identity. To illustrate, Helms's model indicates that a White individual merely becomes aware of the African American culture, racism, and oppression. Rather, the individual should recognize how he or she contributes to racism and/or oppression and actively attempt to change his or her thought processes and behaviors. If the indication mentioned above was not Helms's intent, I feel that Helms should re-evaluate the context of her model to express a *process-level* view of how White individuals experience racial identity development. Second, I feel the argument concerning Helms's use of Cross's model to develop a model for White racial identity development is not legitimate and is taken out of context. Helms aspired to develop assessments that would quantify and measure Black and White racial identity development as well as compliment her Black and White interaction model (Helms, 1990); therefore, developing a model similar to Cross's model was essential. Third, I feel that Helms's model is applicable to any ethnic group in that her model addresses the experiences of White individuals and racial identity, which is not dependent on the ethnic group involved.

William Cross's model for Black racial identity development and Janet Helms's model for White Racial Identity development are utilized in this study for several reasons. First, Cross and Helms are the innovators of racial identity development models for African Americans and White Americans. Second, both models have been referenced throughout the literature concerning Black racial identity, racial identity in general, and White racial identity (e.g. Abrams & Trusty, 2004; Block; Roberson, & Neuger, 1995; Carter, 1991; Gandy, 2001; Sanders-Thompson, 1991; Tokar & Swanson, 1991; Wilson & Constantine, 1999). Third, Cross's model

has led researchers in all fields to develop racial identity models for other racial groups (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1990; Ruiz, 1990), sexual orientation identity, chemically-dependent groups (Finnegan & McNally, 1987; Troiden, 1989), adolescent identity (Phinney, 1989, 1993), and racial/ethnic groups in general (Sue & Sue, 1990). Fourth, Helms utilized Cross's model as a basis for developing a model for both Black and White racial identity development; in addition, Helms developed assessments to measure Black and White racial identity development based on the models. Fifth, according to Rowe et al. (1994), racial identity conceptualization provides a framework to enhance the understanding of within-group variability and cross-cultural interactions, and the models by Cross (1991; 1995) and Helms (1990) provide this.

My view on the process of racial identity includes two factors. First, I feel that the process of racial identity is more than understanding how one relates to other races. Racial identity is the process of understanding oneself, which includes one's race, one's heritage, one's place in society, challenges (e.g. racism), strategies concerning coping with challenges, and how other aspects of one's overall identity interconnect with racial identity.

Second, I feel that the process of racial identity includes how one interacts with and views individuals from the same race. For example, the foundation of the Black race and Black heritage includes having a collective sense of self in which members of the Black culture feel a sense of loyalty to one another and that "you are your brother's keeper" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p. 71); therefore, it is imperative and an underlying understanding that Blacks show each other that sense of oneness and acceptance i.e. as a "brother" and "sister." When that sense of oneness is not shown, relationships within the Black community begin to deteriorate and lead to an individualistic sense of communion and/or cliques within the Black race. Healthy relationships within the Black race are a direct reflection on Black racial identity and how the

person views him or herself. If a person feels unaccepted by his or her own race or has negative experiences, then he or she may find solace with other races or cultures.

During this research process, I experienced the process of racial identity and at the time of my research, categorized myself in the third stage of Cross's model. Most of my life, I have been exposed to White culture and long to immerse myself in "all things Black." The life-changing event that happened in my life was moving from my Southern home in Mississippi to the Midwestern state of Kansas. Kansas was a state that I had never visited prior to my move to attend graduate school. The racial experiences that I had were not negative, however, I learned a lot about my racial identity and how I define myself racially. This experience has enhanced my understanding of who I am as a Black female and further how these social contexts, race and gender interconnect to form part of my identity. I also understand what it means to be a Black individual in a White society.

Racial Identity and Interracial Marriage

From the review of the literature, it is apparent that few studies have focused on racial identity in the context of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Of the studies concerning heterosexual Black and White interracial couples mentioned in the beginning of this literature review, only one was found that purposefully addressed how racial identity development affects partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples (Rosenblatt et al., 1995); this therefore, emphasizes a major gap in research concerning interracial couples.

Most research concerning Black racial identity development focused on how Black racial identity correlated with other variables such as social desirability among African Americans (Abrams & Trusty, 2004), self-concept and family cohesion among African Americans (Wilson & Constantine, 1999), stressors and coping styles in African American college students (Neville,

Heppner, & Wang, 1997), and cultural mistrust and self-esteem among African American college students (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). Most research conducted on White racial identity utilized a contextual perspective, i.e. the research mostly critiqued or attempted to expand Helms's model. However, two studies focused on White racial identity development in an interracial context such as African Americans and Whites in a place of employment (Block et al., 1995) and White mothers of children of color (Stoddart, 1999 as cited in Stoddart, 2002), but not heterosexual Black and White interracial couples.

Another gap in the research is a lack of studies concerning racial identity and interracial couples in the field of MFT. Most studies concerning racial identity were found in Psychology and Sociology journals. Furthermore, only two articles concerning interracial couples related findings to MFT. This study will be significant to the field of MFT and sought to: (1) increase the focus on interracial couples and develop implications for family therapists and/or other mental health professionals who work with interracial couples, (2) increase research on racial identity, (3) enhance the understanding of within-group variability of racial identification, (4) increase studies concerning couple dynamics in Black and White pairings, and (5) enhance research concerning issues of diversity in MFT.

Research Questions

Four research questions were addressed in the study:

- 1) How does each partner involved in a heterosexual Black and White interracial relationship experience him or herself as a racially defined person?
- 2) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial relationships effect the experience of racial identity of each partner?
- 3) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural difference within the relationship?
- 4) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address opposition toward their marriage?

Continuation of Case Study

Weeks after the encounter Eric and Cathy experienced at the restaurant, Eric continued to be silent. Cathy could sense that Eric was trying to cope with the pain and humiliation that he felt through avoiding the discussion of the incident at the restaurant. Although Cathy could not relate to the pain and humiliation Eric experienced as a Black man, she did recognize that the silence had taken a toll on their marriage. At that moment, Cathy realized that unconditional love was not the only resource that she and Eric needed to remain happy and content with their marriage. Being that neither she nor Eric had any close friends to talk to about their emotions or who could even begin to understand what was going on in their relationship, Cathy thought about marital therapy. Before mentioning the idea to Eric, Cathy decided to search for quality marital therapy resources and realized that most of the advertisements for marital therapy did not specify any specialties concerning interracial couples.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used qualitative methodologies. Qualitative methods are utilized in studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret their lives and/or experiences and how they structure the world in which they live, a process often referred to as meaning-making. Qualitative researchers are most interested in the mechanisms that become part of the meaning-making process, including themes and patterns. Qualitative data is collected via three fieldwork methods: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, (2) direct observation, and (3) written document analysis (Patton, 2002). When utilizing qualitative data collection methods, a qualitative researcher becomes an active part of the research process; therefore, maintaining a subjective view of research. Qualitative research yields results that are descriptive, that is, they give insight to an otherwise unknown subject. Qualitative results provide *depth*, which is a detailed, in-depth description of participant experiences and their construction of reality. In contrast, *breadth* (most often found in quantitative studies), provides a broad view of a larger number of subjects allowing for statistical aggregation and comparisons. Furthermore, qualitative results cannot establish cause-and-effect relationships, predictive outcomes, or provide statistical information (Patton, 2002). In this study, open-ended interviews depict the in-depth experience of racial differences and racial identity within Black and White interracial relationships. This study did not include all interracial couples nor attempted to represent the entire range of experience among interracial couples. Rather, this was an in-depth study of the patterns and themes experienced by a sample of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples.

Providing my rationale for utilizing qualitative methodology for my dissertation can be accomplished through the following explanations. First, qualitative research is congruent with my beliefs as a therapist and as a person. I believe that every individual's experience of a similar situation is different; therefore, a "right or wrong" perspective of reality does not exist. Each individual has a personal perspective of reality constructed from life experiences, which makes each individual perspective unique. Second, it is my belief that there is more to research than quantitative data. I desire to discover and understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants in a manner that can be accomplished only with qualitative methodologies. Third, I believe in giving a voice to those who are otherwise unheard and this can be accomplished through qualitative research in that the "voices", words, and actual experiences of participants are revealed through interview transcripts and the inclusion of quotes in reporting findings and results. Fourth, I believe that qualitative research can provide "stepping stones" for future research through theory development and exploring concepts and topics that have not previously been explored. Qualitative methods are appropriate for my dissertation topic in that I am examining the lived experience of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. The concepts involved in the present study (e.g. racial identity and the relational dynamics of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples) are difficult to quantify and measure; therefore, qualitative methods are efficient and applicable to my research endeavors.

Theoretical and Philosophical Frameworks

Qualitative research incorporates a variety of inquiry methodologies that have specific theoretical and/or philosophical foundations. These theoretical perspectives were developed from numerous disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics. Having a variety of inquiry methodologies is beneficial to qualitative research in that researchers are

provided with several options to utilize when conducting qualitative studies. The theoretical/philosophical frameworks that corresponded with the present study are phenomenology and social constructionism.

Phenomenology is a school of thought that underlies all of qualitative research and is defined as a qualitative method of inquiry that focuses on the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon for an individual or group of people; therefore, the task of a phenomenologist is to “depict the essence or basic structure of experience” without the interference of prior beliefs concerning the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998, p. 16; Patton, 2002). There are a variety of theoretical traditions and orientations associated with qualitative research including ethnography, heuristic inquiry, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism to name a few. The present study utilized the theoretical foundation of social constructionism. Social constructionism is defined as “the way knowledge is constructed by, for, and between members of a discursively mediated community; constructing knowledge about reality” (Hruby, 2001, p. 51; Patton, 2002, p. 96). Qualitative methods of inquiry informed by social constructionism focus on patterns, themes, and meanings shared among a group of individuals (Patton, 2002). The focus of the present study was to explore how partners in heterosexual Black and White interracial couples construct and/or define their individual racial identities, how couples address cultural difference within the relationship, and how the relationship has affected each partner’s stage/status of racial identity development. Other theories utilized in this study include: Black racial identity theory (Cross, 1971, 1991) and White racial identity theory (Helms, 1990) to provide a framework for racial identity development.

Research Questions

Qualitative research may address four groups of research questions: (1) basic, (2) applied, (3) action, and (4) evaluation (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this study was basic, which is research that is conducted with the purpose of gaining insight, understanding, and explanation. The overarching research question for this study is: How do racial identity and the relational dynamics of Black and White interracial relationships effect each other? Four specific research questions were addressed in the study:

- 1) How does each partner involved in a heterosexual Black and White interracial relationship experience him or herself as a racially defined person?
- 2) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial relationships effect the experience of racial identity of each partner?
- 3) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural difference within the relationship?
- 4) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address opposition toward their marriage?

Sampling Strategy

A combination of snowball/chain and homogenous sampling were utilized in this study. Snowball/chain sampling is described as “locating information-rich cases” through referrals from agencies, participants, and other resources (Patton, 2002, p. 237). Homogenous sampling is described as “the strategy of picking a small, homogenous sample, the purpose of which is to describe some particular subgroup in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Unit of analysis was couples, who will be recruited through community agencies, such as churches, public/county school systems, participants, and other individuals. Couples were recruited from the state of Mississippi. Participation criteria included the following: (1) participants must be married for at least two years and no more than 10 to 15 years and (2) participants should have at least one child. Four couples were recruited for the present study. The rationale for the chosen sample size was based on a rationale provided by Creswell (1998). According to Creswell (1998), when

researchers employ a multiple case perspective with case study research, typically the number of cases is limited to four due to a small number providing a greater depth of analysis and the lack of attempting generalizability with qualitative studies which would require a large sample size.

The rationale for choosing participants from Southern states was due to the small amount of southern Black and White interracial couple participation in previous studies on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Most studies have used Black and White couples residing in Northern, Eastern, and Western states (Brown, 2001; Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Another reason why southern couples were chosen is to provide a different perspective of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples and their experiences. For example, based on my experiences, racism in the South tends to be more overt than in other areas of the United States in that racist individuals are more open to expressing their views and opinions concerning race. Thus, the experience of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the South will be entirely different from heterosexual Black and White interracial couples not from the South. The phenomenon of overt racism also applies to families of origin; thus, experiences and acceptance from the families of origin of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in the South also will differ from such couples in other parts of the U.S. Length of marriage and inclusion of at least one child were chosen as participation requirements to replicate participation criteria utilized by Killian (2001a). Killian (2001a) explained the rationale for using the aforementioned requirements was to “include couples that demonstrated an exclusive commitment to one another and who were forging a new family system together” (p. 28). Killian also utilized snowball/chain sampling to recruit participants. Furthermore, using participation requirements similar to Killian’s allowed the results of this study to be compared with Killian’s results. Thus, participation criteria that emphasized commitment to a long-term

relationship became "sensitizing concepts" in my study. Patton (2002) defines sensitizing concepts as "a starting point in thinking about the class of data of which the social researcher has no definite idea and provides a guide to her research" (p. 278).

Data Collection

In-Depth Interviews and Observations

Before data collection began, consent and approval from the Internal Review Board of Kansas State University was obtained and a copy of the approval was maintained for personal records. Demographic variables such as education, age, occupation, years of marriage, racial classification, and number of children were collected via a form compiled by the researcher and completed by both individuals prior to the interview. Each couple was given a consent form to sign prior to the interview process explaining the purpose and focus of study, who I am as a researcher, that there is no "right or wrong" answer to questions, and giving permission to be audiotaped.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and observations. The interview design was a combination of an interview guide and a structured/open-ended interview. An interview guide consists of a semi-structured interview in which a list of topics or questions is specified and is presented in a similar manner to all participants. A standardized/open-ended or structured interview consists of formal questions that are presented to all participants in the same manner. This interview structure provides full wording of each question and is designed with detail, which ensures that each question will be presented in the same manner (Patton, 2002). During data collection, the researcher shifted from an interview guide to a more structured interview due to participants requiring more prompts with questions.

Interview questions focused on racial identity (definition, racial reference group, etc.), relational background and dynamics of the couple (e.g. how they met, who attended wedding ceremony [if applicable], what obstacles the couple has to endured), values/beliefs concerning interracial marriage and racial identity received from family of origin, how racial issues are addressed within the marriage, how opposition towards the marriage is handled, and what strategies the couple will utilize to address racial identity with their child or children. Each couple was interviewed jointly. The researcher accompanied each couple on an outing of the couple's choice to conduct an observation. According to Patton (2002), observation is defined as "the circumstance of being in or around an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis of that setting" (p. 262). The outing included accompanying the couple to the following: a buffet-style restaurant, a fast food restaurant, a popular supercenter, and a local mall. The purpose of observations in the present study was to provide the researcher with an opportunity to observe couple interactions in a community setting, interactions outside the relationship, and involve the participants as "co-creators" of the research process.

Patton provides several strengths of observations: (1) the researcher is better able to understand the context in which the participants interact; (2) the researcher is able to remain as inductive and as open to discovery as possible due to the absence of prior conceptualizations; (3) the researcher is able to observe phenomena that the participants may not be aware of; (4) participants are afforded the opportunity to express thoughts that they would otherwise be unwilling to discuss during an interview; (5) the researcher is provided with the opportunity to "move beyond the selective perspective of others"; (6) during the interpretation stage of analysis, the researcher will be able to "draw upon personal knowledge" (Patton, 2002, pp. 262-64). The researcher took field notes and developed a summary of each couple outing. The summaries

were included as part of data collection and were analyzed for themes and patterns that support, challenge, or expand upon those described from interviews. After couple interview and outing, the researcher reconvened with the couple for a de-briefing session. During couple debriefing, the researcher provided a list of locations for mental health services/marital therapy resources in case the interview process exacerbated any underlying or unresolved issues that the couple desired to further explore via therapeutic services. All interviews, with the exception of couple de-briefing and observation, were audiotaped. Confidentiality was maintained via names or places in interviews being assigned codes rather than utilizing any identifying information. All interviews (audiotapes, transcripts, consent forms, and computer disks) remained locked in a file cabinet located in the researcher's home. The researcher kept a master list linking names to codes which will be kept in a separate location from other data and locked.

Interview Guide

As previously mentioned, the interview design was a combination of an interview guide and a structured/open-ended interview. The interview consisted of questions compiled by the researcher based on interviews from research studies pertaining to Black and White couples included in literature review (Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Questions were divided into sections that pertain to family of origin, how each individual defines racial identity, how the couple as a unit defines racial identity concerning a "couple identity", opposition the couple has faced due to racial difference within the marriage, therapeutic services the couple has experienced, and questions or comments from the couple. Examples of the questions are as follows: How do you racially identify yourself? What values/beliefs from your family of origin have contributed to your racial identity? How has your racial identity affected your marriage and vice versa? Tell me about a time when you argued about race or got angry about a racial

“word”? How would the relationship be different if you switched races? How do you deal with the outside world’s issues with race now compared to before you were a couple? What was the most significant event that shaped the way race is dealt with in the marriage? How has your Family of origin(s) been most helpful and least helpful?

Instruments that measure racial identity such as Helms’s Black Racial Identity Development scale [BRID] and White Racial Identity Development [WRID] scale were not utilized in this study. After discussing the idea of using these instruments with Dr. Mark Leach, a professor at the University of Southern Mississippi who has conducted and published research on racial identity, I chose not to use them for the following reasons: (1) the small number of participants in this study would not be enough to obtain a true and accurate indication of racial identity using the instruments as the instruments are designed for larger populations and not individual respondents, and (2) increasing the number of participants would change the intent of this study.

Researcher as Measurement Tool

The credibility of the researcher affects the credibility of qualitative research through the experiences, training, and presentation of self of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Credibility of the researcher is important to qualitative research because the researcher is the measurement tool. My role as researcher will not only be to analyze data, but I also conducted all interviews and personally experience the lives of the participants via the interview process as well as the observation. Due to my crucial involvement in the research process, a brief description of me as a researcher will be provided. I am a Black female in my thirties and was reared in southern United States, specifically the state of Mississippi. I come from an upper-middle class family and was raised in an area where heterosexual Black and White interracial couples were not

encouraged and were rarely accepted. However, interracial couples are part of my ancestry/family roots that include Black and White, Native American/White, and Native American/Black dyads.

I am a novice researcher, but I have training in the area of qualitative research via a qualitative methodology class and have participated in the collection, analysis, and publishing of qualitative research. I have an Associates of Arts degree from Meridian Community College, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and a Masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from the University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently working on a doctoral degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Kansas State University and have been a therapist for seven years, which includes internships and graduate requirements. I have been married to a Black man for four years and have one son below the age of one, who was born during the analysis phase of this study. Having my son introduced another aspect of racial identity via the questions I received based on my son's skin complexion. I have had several encounters in which my son has been mistaken for being a bi-racial child when he and are out without my husband. My son is very light-skinned, like my husband, and both have a lighter complexion than me. When my husband and I are out with my son or if he and my son are out alone, no one questions my son's racial identity. However, when I am out alone with my son, I receive numerous questions about his racial identity, particularly from other Black people. This is surprising to me because I assume that most Black people are aware of the variety in skin complexions among the African American race which is a major part of African American heritage and culture.

Because I am the measurement tool in the present study, there are several strengths and weaknesses that I bring to this study. I am a Black female and therefore understand racial identity development from the African American perspective. I prefer to use the term "Black" in

reference to my racial identification rather than the term “African American” based on the fact that the term “Black” has more meaning than “African American” in that my heritage includes many cultural entities. I was raised in the South in an area that was not as accepting of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples as some areas in the U.S. As a result, I possess a limited understanding of the experience of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Although I am not in an interracial marriage and possess limited knowledge of the relational dynamics involved with interracial marriages, I possess the strength of being in a neutral stance about heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. My neutrality will provide more of an unbiased stance in my research in that I am not for or against heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Furthermore, my aim in the proposed study is not to prove or disprove any notions concerning heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. However, I have had personal biases toward heterosexual Black and White interracial couples (specifically, Black male/White female dyads). The proposed study as well as my experience as a therapist has allowed me to recognize my biases and work towards broadening my perspective. I feel that thus far in this study, my perspectives have changed for the better. I feel that while working on this research project, I have evolved as a more compassionate and empathetic individual toward heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in that I recognize the obstacles and hardships these couples endure on a daily basis. In many ways, the hardships that individuals involved in Black and White interracial relationships endure are similar to the struggles I have had to and continue to face being a Black female. For example, individuals involved in Black and White interracial relationships are effortlessly attempting to prove to the world that their relationship is normal and ordinary (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). I feel that I can relate to that struggle because I

feel at times that I consistently have to prove that even though I am a Black female, I am “good enough” or “just as good” as any White individual.

Another factor that has helped my growth towards changing my biases is working with a White female who is currently in a relationship with a Black male. I have gotten to know my co-worker on a level other than as an individual who is involved in an interracial relationship. I have gotten to know her as a person who understands certain aspects of having to endure hardships based on the color of one’s skin or because of the individual one chooses to date or marry. My co-worker and I have had numerous conversations about my study, race, and how frustrated she becomes when others assume that she is racist or biased because she is White. Listening to my co-worker’s perspective on her relationship has provided me with a different perspective on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. In addition, my journey concerning my racial identity (discussed in chapter two) has also challenged my views on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples to be more compassionate and understanding. In addition, while working on my dissertation, I have had several opportunities to work with interracial couples via providing counseling services at my church as well as working with parents of bi-racial children through my current position as an Elementary mental health counselor.

The impact I had on the participants in this study came from my being a Black female. I hypothesized that Black male and White female participants might feel judged and/or that I was angry/resentful towards their relationship due to the stereotype that most Black women resent Black men who date and marry White women. This perspective could have hinder couples from being open during the interview process and disclosing certain feelings or perspectives.

However, sharing my commitment not to judge any participant but rather to learn from the couple facilitated the research/interview process.

Analysis

The analysis for this study included the following aspects: (a) organization of the data, (b) protecting the data, (c) plan for coding and finding patterns, themes, and categories, (d) examining convergence/divergence, and (e) determining substantive significance. Organization of the data was accomplished through using a “case study” method i.e. I organized my data by viewing each interview as a case study.

According to Sharan Merriam (1998), a case study design is “employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.” Furthermore, the focus of case studies is in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19). In addition, Merriam (1998) stated that “information gathered from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (p. 19). Qualitative case studies exhibit three characteristics: *particularistic*, which means focus is placed on a specific situation, event, or phenomenon; *descriptive*, which means the finished product is a “rich, thick, description of the phenomenon under study”; and *heuristic*, which means the case study provides the reader with a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-30).

In addition, Merriam (1998) described the use of multiple case studies in qualitative research. Multiple case studies, also referred to as *collective case studies*, *cross-case studies*, and *comparative case studies*, will be utilized in the present study. The term *cross-case studies* will be used when referencing multiple case studies. *Cross-case studies* involves “collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may

have subunits or subcases embedded within that single study” (pg. 40). Merriam (1998) also stated that employing a cross-case design will enhance the precision, validity, and stability of the study, particularly, external validity.

During and after transcription, data was protected by means of making multiple copies on computer disks, saving data to the computer’s hard drive, e-mailing data with identifying information carefully removed to myself, major professor, peer coder, and external auditor and making multiple hard copies that were kept in a locked file cabinet for confidentiality purposes as well as for back-up purposes.

My plan for coding followed the strategy presented by Merriam (1998). According to Merriam (1998), coding is defined as “assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of data to easily retrieve specific pieces of the data and the designations can be letters, numbers, phrases, or a combination of these” (p. 164). Coding occurs in two levels: (1) “identifying information about the data” and (2) “interpretive constructs related to analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Regarding the first level, each interview and set of field notes was coded for easy retrieval during analysis and reporting. The second level of coding is essential when interpreting interviews and data and includes the researcher’s “thoughts, musings, and speculations during analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 165). Finding patterns, themes, and/or categories was to first analyze each individual interview searching for re-occurring themes and patterns. Second, I cross-case analyzed interviews in an effort to develop general themes and/or categories.

Convergence is defined as the process of determining how things fit together and/or similarities among patterns and categories and divergence is defined as “fleshing out” patterns and categories focusing on differences among these patterns and categories through expounding

on information in the data, making connections between patterns and themes, and revealing new information (Patton, 2002). The aforementioned concepts were examined through ensuring that items in the categories “fit together” using the following criteria specified by Patton (2002): internal homogeneity (items in a category correspond to each other), external heterogeneity (categories are clearly and distinctively different from each other), and making certain that categories were saturated and exhaustive through overlap and redundancy. Substantive significance was determined through resources discussed by Patton (2002), which include my experiences and judgment of patterns/themes/categories from the data, responses from participants, and responses/ reactions from reviewers of the data. I also employed inductive analysis techniques in this study in that categories will be developed from themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Achieving Credibility

Rigorous methods in qualitative research refer to techniques that are utilized to yield quality data that enhance credibility. There are several rigorous methods utilized to establish credibility including “match with purpose”, data collection and analysis, triangulation, and evaluating unique cases and alternative explanations (Patton, 2002). “Match with purpose” is important in that defining the purpose of a study is the first step in research design and serves as a guideline for the decision-making process. The purpose of this study was basic research, which is to seek knowledge in an effort to understand phenomena; therefore, this study will be an addition to current literature on heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, will provide insight into the reality and experiences of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, and provide implications for therapy and future research.

Another method of establishing credibility through rigorous methods is data collection and analysis. This study utilized a pure qualitative strategy that includes naturalistic inquiry, qualitative data, and content analysis. Credibility was established during data collection and analysis via finding similar themes and patterns across cases. Furthermore, patterns and themes found during data collection was compared and contrasted to patterns and themes found in Killian's two articles referenced in chapter two (Killian, 2001a; Killian, 2001b).

A third example of rigorous methods in qualitative research is triangulation. Patton (2002) identified four types of triangulation: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. Credibility was established with this method via the use of multiple perspectives. For example, I used analyst triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation. Analyst triangulation occurs when more than one person analyzes qualitative data. I had one person assisting with data analysis (peer coder) and one person who served as an external auditor. According to Creswell (1998), an external auditor is a person who does not have a direct connection to the study like that of a peer coder, but assesses the product "to examine whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data." In addition, the position of the external auditor can assist with reliability among the researcher and peer coder (p. 203). I included persons familiar with qualitative analysis and the research process in general (colleague from the KSU graduate program). Theory/perspective triangulation involves using different theories to analyze data. I utilized phenomenology, social constructionism, and theories on Black and White racial identity development. Racial identity theories were utilized as a philosophy to provide guidance and structure for the study concerning Black and White racial identity. Furthermore, I focused on the

process of racial identity development for the participants rather than attempt to categorize participants in a static fashion concerning racial identity.

Evaluating unique cases and alternative explanations is a fourth type of rigorous methods. Unique cases refer to themes and patterns that stand out and do not “fit” with other themes and patterns. Alternative explanations were found using both inductive and deductive analysis techniques and are similar to evaluating unique cases. Alternative explanations consisted of supportive and non-supportive themes and patterns found within the data.

The rigorous methods mentioned above that I incorporated in my dissertation exhibit several strengths and limitations. First, match with purpose served as a guideline for data analysis and interpreting/reporting findings. My purpose served as a “buffer” preventing data analysis from venturing into areas that do not pertain to the focus of the research. In contrast, my purpose may have limited my perspective of the research by hindering the exploration of certain themes or patterns.

Second, the data collection and analysis techniques that I chose allowed me to capture the experiences of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples as well as discover patterns and themes. Learning about heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in this manner allowed me to provide implications for professionals in the mental health field. A limitation of my data collection methods was the possible influence or change in the normal interactions of the couples’ during observations due to the presence of an observer.

Third, the methods of triangulation I employed allowed multiple perspectives to be included in the analysis of data (e.g. multiple analysts and theories), which yielded a thorough analysis of the data. Therefore, to prevent the use of multiple perspectives becoming overwhelming, I collaborated with a peer coder and an external auditor throughout the data

analysis phase of the study to develop codes, categories, discuss any consistencies or inconsistencies among patterns and themes, emphasize any unseen biases of researcher and coder, and enhance clarity. The peer coder was my major professor. The external auditor was a White female who is married to a Black male and has one child, a Masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, and was working on a doctoral degree in MFT.

Fourth, searching for unique cases and alternative explanations helped me to focus on themes and patterns that are supportive and unsupportive of emerging hypotheses concerning the experiences of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. Thus, I sought themes that were meaningfully supported by “thick, rich descriptions.”

Reflections of the Interview Process

Recruiting

After receiving approval from the IRB to proceed with conducting interviews, I began recruiting Black /White interracial couples in the community where I reside. My plan was to place flyers in common places such as the windows of grocery stores, apartment complexes, bus stops, the church my husband and I attend, and local libraries. I quickly realized that using this method was not going to be beneficial. The managers of these places were reluctant to allow me to place my flyers on their property. I specifically recall the manager of a local grocery store asking to see the flyer. After looking at the flyer, which described what the study would include, he immediately stated, “I’m sorry we cannot display this in our store.” Prior to seeing the flyer, he was willing to allow me to place it in the window. The manager was an older White male. Luckily, the pastor of my church allowed me to place the flyers in the vestibule of the church on a table by the front door. After a few weeks, I went back to see if any of the flyers had been taken and noticed that the entire pile I placed on the table was gone. After this idea failed, I

decided to take my chances and approach heterosexual Black and White interracial couples that I saw when I was out shopping or eating. After building my nerve, I decided to approach a couple that attended my church. They looked as if they were in their late 20's to early 30's and had three small children. The wife appeared interested in participating, but the husband's body language stated otherwise. He looked at me with a suspicious glare and had little to say. I explained who I was and the details of the study and gave them a flyer, which included my contact information. I never heard from the couple nor saw them at church again.

By this time, I was really discouraged and frustrated. While talking about my study and frustration with my mother, she remembered an interracial couple who had children that attended the school where she worked prior to retiring the year before. She also remembered a substitute teacher who was a regular at the school being interracially married. In addition, another school in the district had a parent liaison whose son was in an interracial marriage. The last couple was referred by an associate whose nephew was interracially married. After making contact with the couples to invite them to participate in the study, I began conducting interviews. A total of four interviews and Observations were completed.

Conducting Interviews: Context

The interviews were conducted in the community where three of the four couples reside. One couple resides in another Southern state. Most of the participants were local to the community or the state where interviews were conducted with the exception of one Black female who was born in a Midwestern state. The community includes residents of all economic statuses from the poor to the lower upper class and includes a mixture of mainly Black and White residents in which some parts of town are predominantly Black and other parts are predominantly White. There have been no natural disasters in this community for a number of

years. During Hurricane Katrina, some parts of the community were without power for a week or two at the most. At the time of the interviews, the economy was falling into great turmoil in which businesses were either bankrupt or closing, and a Black Democratic presidential candidate was well on his way to becoming the first African American president in history.

Conducting Interviews: The Interview Process

I was ecstatic to begin the interview process and definitely surprised when I realized that three of the couples were located in the community in which I was raised. Living in this community as a child and young adult, I failed to realize that interracial couples “existed” because I was not exposed or introduced to individuals married interracially. In addition, as a child and teenager, I don’t recall any children in my schools who were bi-racial. The interviews took place in a neutral setting; three were conducted in an office, and one was conducted in a restaurant/café where not a lot of people congregated. These places were chosen to allow the couples to meet without their children to provide them a chance to focus on the interview without interruption and because the areas were relatively quiet.

The interview process became easier and more familiar as I completed them. Throughout each interview, I did a fair amount of disclosure about my experiences and concepts that I found in the research literature concerning interracial couples. I feel that my disclosure helped the participants feel more comfortable with me and provided an introduction to the topics that were to be the focus of the interview. For example, describing my experiences with being asked about my hair and the way that I speak as well as being told that I talk “like a White person.”

For the purposes of this report, I assigned pseudonyms to each couple: Orlando and Chelsea, Troy and Celean, Harper and Danielle, and Forrest and Alicia. Orlando and Chelsea were the first couple I interviewed. After speaking to Chelsea on the phone prior to the

interview, I realized how important all of the couples' participation in the study would be because of something that Chelsea stated during the conversation. She stated that she was happy that the study focused on married couples as opposed to couples who were dating. Chelsea felt that this was important because marriage exhibits more of commitment than dating, which was a major part of Chelsea's perspective of her marriage. I was elated to meet the couple and conduct the interview. Orlando appeared to be soft spoken at times and Chelsea appeared to be very cautious about her responses as if not to offend anyone with her statements. Throughout the interview, the couple would begin discussing other ideas and concepts when answering questions. Many of the side conversations were insightful and enlightening. Chelsea became agitated with Orlando, in particular, when discussing their different points of view concerning the race of their children.

Troy and Celean, the second couple interviewed, appeared to use humor throughout the interview as a way to feel comfortable during the interview. When Troy and Celean entered the office agreed upon as the meeting place for the interview, I was ecstatic to finally meet the couple in person. The phone conversation with Celean prior to the interview was inspiring and intriguing as she explained her excitement about participating in the study as well as providing a brief description of her and Troy's background and experiences as an interracial couple.

The third couple interviewed, Harper and Danielle, appeared to have a lot of respect for the support they receive from family and friends. They also used some humor during their interview. I was excited about meeting this couple, especially after talking with Harper on the phone prior to the interview. The tone and sound of his voice reminded me of a particular stereotype that I am all too familiar with. He sounded and spoke with the articulation of a "White person." Most of my life, I've heard that infamous phrase "you talk like a White girl."

The fourth couple that I interviewed was insightful and inspirational in their perspective on interracial marriage and racial identity. Forrest and Alicia appeared to have a lot of insight regarding their racial identity and the role of race in their marriage. The couple appeared to be excited to participate in the study and both individuals were forthcoming throughout the interview. The couple was also very concerned with how their children will eventually identify themselves racially and what influences will contribute to that process.

Conducting Interviews: Observations

Observations occurred in various places of the participants' choice. The places included: a buffet style restaurant, a fast food restaurant, a popular supercenter, and the local mall. Each observation was completed after the interview and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. I met with each couple a third time to debrief about the observations. All interviews, Observations, and debriefing interviews were completed the same day. Debriefing meetings consisted of each couple and myself comparing notes on what was or was not witnessed during the observation. All of the couples, with the exception of Orlando and Chelsea, appeared to be unaware and unaffected by any opposition such as stares, comments, or verbal/nonverbal signs of curiosity or disapproval.

Overview of Demographics

An overview of demographics is included in order to provide background information concerning the participants. Below are two tables that display the demographic information for each couple. Table 4.1 includes information about cases one and two and Table 4.2 includes information about cases three and four. The tables include the following information: gender, pseudonyms, how each participant racially identified him or herself, age, area of the United States in which each participant was born and currently reside, number of years married and if

first marriage, number and ages of children, stage in family life cycle, education, occupation, and number of years in occupation. Of the couples that participated, three were Black male/White female dyads and one was a White male/Black female dyad. For all the couples, their current marriage is their first marriage. The highest education level among the couples was a Masters degree and the longest marriage in terms of years was 14. All information was participant reported via a demographic questionnaire completed during the interview with the exception of area of the United States in which each participant was born and currently reside, which was obtained through interviews; stage of family life cycle, which was based on categories developed by Carter and McGoldrick (1999); socioeconomic status (SES) of each couple, which was obtained via information provided by the United States Department of Labor and Gilbert (2008). The information from the Department of Labor consisted of a chart that provided the national yearly mean income by occupation. Gilbert (2008) provided a chart that specified (SES) according to total income.

Table 3.1

Participants	Case 1 (C1)		Case 2 (C2)	
	M	F	M	F
Gender				
Alias	Orlando	Chelsea	Troy	Celean
Racial Identity	African American/Black	Caucasian/White	Caucasian/White	“Woman of Color”
Age	26	32	34	37
Birth Place (Area of US)	South	South	South	Midwest
Residence (Area of US)	South	South	South	South
# of Years Married	3		14	
First Marriage	Yes		Yes	
# and Ages of Children	1 (boy) (6 total); 18 months		2 (boys); 13 and 10	
Stage in Family Life Cycle	families with young children		families with adolescents	
Education	some graduate school	some college	high school diploma	some college
Occupation and Estimated Income	Dental Assistant-\$33,170	Homemaker	Auto Painter-\$39,950	Substitute teacher-\$23,560
# of Years in Occupation	7	1	16	1

Table 3.2

Participants	Case 3 (C3)		Case 4 (C4)	
	M	F	M	F
Gender	Harper	Danielle	Forrest	Alicia
Alias	Harper	Danielle	Forrest	Alicia
Racial Identity	African American/Black	Caucasian/White	African American/Black	Caucasian/White
Age	38	36	35	35
Birth Place (Area of US)	South	South	South	South
Residence (Area of US)	South	South	South	South
# of Years Married	11		10	
First Marriage	Yes		Yes	
# and Ages of Children	2 (boy and girl); 8 and 14		3 (1 boy and 2 girls); 6,3, and 2	
Stage in Family Life Cycle	families with adolescents		families with young children	
Education	high school diploma	high school diploma	Bachelors degree	Masters degree
Occupation and Estimated Income	Construction worker-\$32,250	Nail technician-\$22,040	Self employed; manager for a real estate company-\$56,250	Speech pathologist-\$66,130
# of Years in Occupation	12	6	1	11

Background of Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

Of all the couples interviewed, Orlando and Chelsea have been married the fewest number of years and had the most children, a total of six. Five are bi-racial children from prior relationships. Their son was 18 months at the time of interview. The couple has been married three years and resides in the Southern state in which they were both born and raised. Orlando's occupation of seven years had been a dental assistant and Chelsea had been a homemaker for a year at the time of the interview. Based on occupation and income (refer Table 4.1), the couple is considered working class. The couple is in the "families with young children" stage of the family life cycle and appears to have adjusted well to raising a large family.

Background of Case Two: Troy and Celean

Troy and Celean reside in the southern state in which Troy was born while Celean was born in the Midwest. Celean and Troy met after Celean moved to the South. Troy and Celean have been married 14 years and have two sons. Troy had been an auto painter for 16 years and

Celean had worked as a substitute teacher for one year at the time of the interview. Based on occupation and income (refer to Table 4.1), the couple is considered middle class. Troy and Celean would be considered in the “families with adolescents” stage of the family life cycle due to their oldest child being 13. The couple appeared to have learned to function on their own, depending upon one another for survival due to the lack of support from each family of origin. They describe their marriage as “one without color” in that they look beyond their race to view each other for who they are as individuals.

Background of Case Three: Harper and Danielle

Harper and Danielle reside in the southern state and community in which they both were born and raised. They have been married for 11 years and have two children, a daughter, and a son. Harper had been a construction worker for 12 years and Danielle had been a salon nail technician for six years at the time of the interview. Based on occupation and income (refer to Table 4.2), the couple is considered working class. The couple is considered in the “families with adolescents” stage of the family life cycle due to their oldest child being 14. During the interview, the couple appeared to have a great appreciation for the support they receive from both families and their friends. The couple described their marriage in terms of not being an interracial marriage, but one in which each spouse is viewed as an individual.

Background of Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

Forrest and Alicia have been married 10 years and have three children, two daughters, and one son. Forrest and Alicia reside in the Southern state that Alicia was born and raised. Both spouses are from Southern states and met while attending college in the South. Forrest has been self-employed and a real estate office manager for one year and Alicia has been a speech pathologist for 11 years. Based on occupation and income (refer to Table 4.2), the couple is

considered upper middle class. The couple is considered to be in the “families with young children” stage of the family life cycle. The couple described their marriage as one that serves as an example for family, friends, and associates of how relationships and people can be viewed based on individual characteristics and not race or skin color. The recurrent theme during the interview was that everyone should learn about and be knowledgeable of other races and cultures.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

The results of this study reflect the lived experience of four heterosexual Black and White interracial couples and depict the themes involved with the process of reflecting upon their lives as interracial couples in a Southern state of the United States. In this chapter, within case and cross-case analyses are presented. A review of the research questions is followed by results of case study analysis by research question, and results of cross-case analysis.

Review of the Research Questions

The research questions for this study were designed to reveal the “lived experience” of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples and how they address issues such as race, racial identity, and opposition in their marital relationships. The research questions will serve as a guide to understanding the case study analysis that will follow. The research questions for the study are as follows:

- 1) How does each partner involved in a heterosexual Black and White interracial relationship experience him or herself as a racially defined person?
- 2) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial relationships effect the experience of racial identity of each partner?
- 3) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural difference within the relationship?
- 4) How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address opposition toward their marriage?

Case Study Analysis

A case study analysis was conducted on all four interviews. The plan for case study analysis was completed as outlined in chapter three. Results are described in terms of themes identified in each case by research question. As described in chapter three, interview questions were compiled by the researcher based on interviews from research studies pertaining to Black

and White couples included in chapter two (Killian, 2001a, 2001b; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Questions were divided into sections that pertain to family of origin, how each individual defines racial identity, how the couple as a unit defines racial identity, opposition the couple has faced due to racial difference within the marriage, therapeutic services the couple has experienced, and questions or comments from the couple.

After analysis of the data, my major professor, who served as a peer coder, and I discussed the application of the stage theories (Black and White Racial Identity Development theories) to the data. After attempting to apply these theories by couple, we had a thorough discussion about the descriptions of each partner's progression of racial identity. We both felt "troubled" and quickly realized how judgmental the descriptions appeared due to the progressive nature of the theories i.e. one stage is progressively "better" than another. We felt that the couples may be offended and feel judged on a sensitive and intimate topic...their marital relationship. We felt that this could possibly be harmful to the participants and decided not to apply these theories to the data. Moreover, we both agreed that evidence of racial identity according to the stage theories was lacking in the data. It was not possible to assign participants to a stage given the interview responses I had. However, the interviews did allow for a description of how each partner related to the concept of race and its meaning within their couple and family relationships. Furthermore, as stated in chapter three, I wanted to maintain the focus of the study on the process of each partner "making meaning" of his or her racial identity and how that was experienced in his or her marital relationship.

Six overall themes were identified during case study analysis: marital dynamics, racial identity, influences, reactions, advice, and counseling. "Marital dynamics" pertains to specifics of the marital relationship such as how the couple met, positives and stressors of marriage,

conflicts about race in marriage, intersections of race and class, and strengths of being married interracially. "Racial identity" refers to how each partner defines racial identity, how each partner racially identifies him or herself, effect of racial identity on marriage, changes in racial identity since being interracially married, and changes in ideals or views about race since being interracially married. "Influences" pertain to the social background of each partner as well as environment of each partner's family of origin including values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that may or may not have contributed to the couple marrying interracially. "Reactions" refers to couple identity and child rearing practices, reaction of each partner's family to marriage, support of both partner's families of origin, opposition experienced from family members and society, and how each couple handles opposition. "Advice" refers to any advice the couple would give other interracially married couples and/or those seeking to be involved in interracial relationships or marriages. "Counseling" pertains to any counseling or therapy each couple has experienced and their thoughts and suggestions concerning their counseling/therapy experience.

Prior to describing results of each case study by research question, a brief description of which themes correspond to each research question will be provided. Research question one, how does each partner involved in a Black and White interracial relationship experience him or herself as a racially defined person, corresponds with the following themes: racial identity and influences. Research question two, how do Black and White interracial relationships effect the experience of racial identity of each partner, corresponds with the theme of racial identity. Research question three, how do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural difference within the relationship, corresponds with the themes of marital dynamics and couple identity and child-rearing. Research question four, how do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address opposition toward their marriage, corresponds with the theme of

reactions. The themes advice and counseling will be described as separate themes and not correlated with a research question.

Results of Case Study Analysis by Research Question

Research Question One: How does each partner involved in a heterosexual Black and White interracial relationship experience him or herself as a racially defined person?

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

Racial Identity

In terms of racial identity, Orlando, a Black male, and Chelsea, a White female, viewed this concept differently. This is evident in their responses to the question asking what the term racial identity means to them:

C: "When I think of racial identity, I'm thinking the history of the person...um...identifies them from one person to another...." O: "Oh, it don't mean nothing to me because I don't see, I mean, I don't see any race. I see different race, but it don't mean anything to me, you know what I'm sayin'? I mean, it don't matter to me if you purple, red, blue or...I know it means something. I can tell you what it means, but, personally it don't mean anything to me." C: "Right. I think what he is sayin' is that he doesn't want to be labeled."

Based on Orlando's response, he views racial identity as an irrelevant label and/or the categorizing of a person based on skin color; although the term has a technical definition, it has no value to him. Chelsea views the term as a concept that incorporates a person's history and/or how people are distinguished from one another.

Another concept concerning racial identity was how each partner racially identified him or herself. Chelsea stated that she identifies herself as White/Caucasian and stated that she is proud of her racial identity. Because Orlando explained racial identity in terms of being an irrelevant label, he did not racially identify himself during the interview. However, he considers

himself Black/African American as evidenced by the demographic questionnaire completed during the interview process.

Influences

Socially, Orlando and Chelsea dated interracially prior to marriage, which is evident in the following quote from Orlando: *“I mean, she’s not the first White girl I ever dated.”* The five children she brought to her marriage to Orlando from other relationships are bi-racial.

Chelsea also had previous experiences with interracial partnerships. Another social factor that may have influenced Orlando’s decision to marry interracially is that the men in his family, particularly brothers, cousins, uncles, and friends have dated and/or married interracially:

“...Brothers, cousins, friends. I know a lot of people who have dated out of their race. I have a lot of people in my family that is married to someone that’s another race.” C: *“Not his immediate family...talking about distant family....”* O: *“Not immediate family but like second, third, cousins, mainly. On my side of my family, no body as far as just men....”*

A second aspect of influences includes values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals each partner brings to the marriage from their families of origin. In the following quote, Orlando and Chelsea are describing the differences between certain practices and beliefs from their families of origin such as cooking:

C: “...I mean there is a lot of differences, but I don’t know if it’s um...for instance...cooking...the way that he does it and the way that I do it, it’s just very different. Because, for instance, rice...he cooks rice open. Me, I measure, 2 parts water, one part rice. It’s just different. ...Or peas. He put some kind of fatback in it. (laughs) O: “Peas. Greens. Us Black people, you have to have corn bread. You can’t cook that and not have cornbread....and that’s like the real big pet peeve of mine, is she cooks like some vegetables and no cornbread.” C: “But my parents never, they did, I don’t want to say never, ‘cause my dad loves corn bread, but I mean, it wasn’t like every time he cooks he made corn bread. Well, his mother, Orlando’s mother, every time she cooks, she cooks a bread....”

discipline:

O: "Discipline, could play another role. Like, sometimes where I probably feel that the child might need a spanking, she might feel that he need time out or something." C: "...or a vice versa 'cause he received a lot of spankings growing up and...he's often said that if his parents had talked to him instead of just spanking him that he would have done a lot better. Have you not said that?" O: "Yeah, like, I probably would have done a lot better with them just talking to me...it would just make me angry that I got a spanking."

wardrobe for church and attending each other's church:

O: "Well, her people, like, you know, we have to uh...like when we go to church, you know, most of us...dress up to go to church. Where, my church...the church I grew up in was a Baptist Church, so most everybody that went to church, they come...all dressed up or whatever...." C: "He liked his church. I like my church.... He just doesn't feel like he gets fed at my church and I certainly don't feel like I get fed at his. ...Even in just going out, like today, he would press his clothes and I may not...." O: "I mean, I might just throw on some...throw on clothes, but they're gonna look decent...." C: "My parents just didn't iron. If you go to my momma's right now, you see the iron used, but..." O: "That's just the difference in the environment that we grew up...."

and greeting Orlando's family members:

C: "If you walk in a room, you are supposed to speak. That's a big thing. If you go to his family's and you come through that door, you are supposed to speak to everybody in the house. The culture that I grew up in, you don't speak until spoken to."

Case Two: Troy and Celean

Racial Identity

Troy and Celean had similar responses regarding the definition of racial identity. Celean answered the question by explaining with whom she racially identifies. She stated that she does not identify with a particular race, but identifies with the beliefs and experiences of others. Troy agreed with his wife: C: "It don't really mean anything. I mean, I don't really identify with any

particular race. I try to take some from everybody that I'm around, pick up a little...if they have something that I admire, I try to incorporate that into my personal beliefs.” T: “Yep.”

In response to how each partner racially identifies him or herself, Celean feels that she can identify with any race and still be herself. Troy agrees with Celean: *C: “I really don't say I identify more with Black, or I identify with Whites or more with any other race. I feel that I'm simply Celean.” T: “Yep.”* Although, Troy and Celean did not racially identify themselves during the interview, on the demographic questionnaire, Troy checked White/Caucasian and Celean wrote “Woman of Color.”

Influences

Troy and Celean's social backgrounds and environments are different in that Troy came from a majority White community and Celean associated and grew up in an African American home within a majority White community. Celean describes how being from an all White community, she has always related to White individuals:

“...growing up it was never a problem with my parents because we had been around people where, um, Black and White wasn't really an issue. I mean, we lived all in a White neighborhood, so that's basically all I knew. I mean, cause, growing up, I thought Q101 was the only radio station there was to listen to. I didn't realize there was ones for Black...that WQIC was for Black.”

Troy's perspective was limited to the prejudice he was taught to portray towards Black individuals: *“When I first....as a kid I was taught that Black people were evil, pretty much, you know”?* Both partners were the first in their families to date and marry interracially:

T: “No. Um, I broke the mold on my family. [referencing other family members marrying interracially]” C: “I mean, my sisters are all married...I have two sisters who are married to White guys and I have a brother that's with a White woman.” T: “She was the first one to do it in her family....” C: “I have two other sisters [but] I led the way. That's how you do it.” (laughs)

The couple also described the differences between the beliefs and traditions from their families of origin such as certain foods being cooked or not cooked as well as other traditions:

T: "Anyway, so we didn't eat pork in my house because my dad didn't eat it and growing up I never ate it. Never ate bacon, never ate pork so whenever she cooks it, I'm like, 'I don't really like it.' Because I don't like it as much as beef because I always ate beef. But, she is having to change her way of cooking because of that and growing up, also another thing, my parents never spiced up a lot of food. They just cooked it and threw it in a pot, it's done, and you eat it. You know? She spices everything and I'll be, 'It's too much salt!'...."

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

Racial Identity

Harper and Danielle also had different responses to how they viewed the term racial identity. Harper views his racial identity as being Black American and Danielle views the concept of racial identity as being an irrelevant label and that people should be seen for who they are and not by race or color. Harper also stated that he is proud to be Black:

H: "It means that I'm a Black American and that's what I'm gonna always be and I'm proud of it." D: "I honestly don't like the term because I don't think it's your race. I think it's your person. 'Cause I don't see color...I mean, I just don't see people as 'That's what color you are.' You know, I see the person that they are, you know, I don't really...it's just being divided into groups, you know and I just don't, you know I don't care for being divided into groups (laughs). You know, and I just really think it's the person. It's not what color you are or what your race is."

Based on his statements, Harper racially identifies himself as Black. Danielle did not identify herself in the interview, but she identifies with White/Caucasian via the demographic questionnaire. The couple goes on to explain their experience of being labeled by others and that they identify with other cultures: *D: "You're considered White. Black or White." H: "...you're considered White, so, I mean, you identify with something else but your birth certificate it labels you as a White." D: "Um hm. It's a label. H: Yeah, it's a label. Right. (laughs) and, you know, it's like me, accept me, so...but we can identify with many of cultures, though."*

Influences

As Harper and Danielle describe their social backgrounds and family environments, there are many similarities. A major similarity is that they came from environments in which all races were accepted. Harper specifically discusses how he enjoyed mixed crowds, but related more to White individuals than Black when growing up:

H: "In the neighborhood that I grew up in, it was basically Black. Then right at the end, there was some Whites moving in, but it was basically Black. But, you know, hanging out with different friends, I would end up in a bunch of different neighborhoods and, you know, and like I said, I had mostly White friends. It was about half and half, but I hung with more of the White side and uh, and in their neighborhoods a lot, you know...." D: "I mean and it [neighborhood] was basically White and the kids, I mean, you might have had a few different races, you know.... So I don't guess...basically we were raised...growing up you're having friends and your hanging out with friends and I'm like him, about half and half, you know, mix of friends and...and then I guess with us being raised in public schools, you know, we had a mix of friends. It's just what we're used to. ...my parents always welcomed anybody in. You know, our family always had friends of every race. It was never...we were never, you can't do this because of that or can't do this because they are this color, because my best friend through elementary school was a Black girl. I mean, you know and she was welcome in my house just as well as any White friends that I had."

Furthermore, Harper and Danielle both dated interracially prior to marriage: *H: ...I've always dated White women; I dated White and she dated Black...."*

When the couple described the values and beliefs from their families of origin, it was evident that they were both raised in homes that accepted persons of any race and had similar belief systems. The couple also described differences in their practices such as cooking and discipline of their children:

H: "Yeah, but you never had ate greens before." D: "I had tried 'em, but I didn't care for 'em I guess but I just hadn't had them cooked right." (laughs) D: "I love 'em and I can cook 'em." (laughs) H: "Now she can cook 'em. I wouldn't say...we had, we used to have a lot of cookouts on each side of the family. We would have Barbeques on my side and they would have...." D: "We had gatherings. We didn't actually cook out, we just cooked and brought everything together. Anything else? I mean as far as, I think we were raised like

the same, you know, as far as, you know, Christmas and just holidays...Never been a conflict or anything because we were pretty much raised with same beliefs and the same....” H: “Except spanking kids.”

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

Racial Identity

Forrest and Alicia stated that racial identity means to identify with either the Black or White race. Forrest discussed another way of defining racial identity, which is to interact and connect with others based on similarities and moral characteristics. Alicia agrees with her husband’s explanation:

F: “I think racial identity in a broad sense would probably mean to me which side do you choose: Black or White. That’s the short version of it. And you know another way to think of identity would maybe be who are you most comfortable around and to be honest, it’s the person, it’s not necessarily skin color, because there are some African-Americans that I am not comfortable being around because of their morals. There are some Caucasians that I am not comfortable around because of their morals and character, so it goes back to the person and that’s who I would identify with whoever I’m comfortable being around.” A: “I agree.”

As far as racially identifying themselves, Forrest and Alicia stated which racial group they identified with during the interview as well as discussed other aspects of their racial identity including how they were raised and the environments in which they were raised. Forrest identifies himself as Black/African American and Alicia identified herself as White/Caucasian:

F: “However, me personally, I grew up obviously African-American family, extended family, but school, grammar school, neighbors, were predominantly Caucasian. So, if I had to identify, obviously African-American, however, it’s really not that easy for me because my influences, my environments were so diverse and it was really more of the person inside, the character, the morals versus skin color.” A: “And I think for myself, I was raised in an all White community so I never did really think about racial identity because I never had to. Then when I went to college and met Forrest, I still know that I’m White or Caucasian, but I do identify with not just African-American race, but Japanese and other races in general because I feel like I’m more multi-cultural and I’ve had pen pals who are different races and friends who are different, from different backgrounds.”

Influences

In reference to social influences, Forrest grew up in a diverse atmosphere in which people of all races were accepted and had a role in his perspective of the world and racial identity. In contrast, Alicia grew up in an all White community and explains that it was not until she attended college that she realized her perspective of other races had been limited. Forrest dated interracially prior to marriage and Alicia did not: *A: "I did date White people mainly before I met Forrest, but there was something about them, their morals, their beliefs, that I just didn't click with." F: "Yeah, I just...I dated, we say dated but when you're in high school you really don't know, but I... But I've dated White and Black, if you want to call it dating."*

The values and beliefs, and traditions and rituals from each partner's family of origin was different for Forrest and Alicia. Not only was Alicia from an all-White community, but her family was prejudiced against Black individuals as evident in the following quote:

A: "Well, I think for me growing up in an all White county, it was probably more dominant and it wasn't directly fed, but it was alluded to. You don't mix, you know, that they're not as good as us, that they're dirty or things of that nature and just other people in general, but mainly African-Americans, and you just don't mix and I think that I probably knew that that was wrong but I never was involved with anyone or never was around anyone so I didn't...I just knew that that's what I was told. I think White people think it's okay if it's a lesser skin color, meaning Asian, you know it was okay for me to have a pen pal in the 10th grade from Japan and she came over to visit and that's okay... F: There are certain boundaries that you don't cross. A: Yeah, you just don't marry somebody of a different race. But I think that White people in general can probably accept more lighter skin than African-American and it's okay for you to adopt a child that's Asian because you are helping them, but yeah, don't adopt anybody else, that type of thing."

Forrest goes on to describe how prejudiced beliefs are a cycle within a family:

F: And just with any most other influences, particularly when you talk about family environment, it's a cycle. I would think it's a cycle of you know, this is how my parents were raised and taught, and this is how they are gonna teach their kids and the kids hold onto those same morals and values, good or bad, chances are they're gonna teach their kids, but I think it's....I was fortunate to,

you know, early on have Caucasian people spend the night at our house, you know, we would go and spend the night at their house, you through grammar school and of course, we had our family reunions, which was all Black, so um, but I think other people that that's all they know doesn't make it a bad thing, it's just that that cycle of traditions and teachings which that's what people value because that's all they have."

The couple also describe traditions and practices from their families of origin and how similar they are: *A: "Well, we're both from the South so I think a lot of times people are surprised that I was raised very similar to how you were raised as far as the cooking and we were both raised in church and we both have the Christian foundation." F: "It's interesting that we are very similar in the fact of you know, we like fresh garden vegetables and chicken and the Southern-type things." A: I didn't know what chicken wings were until I met you...."*

Research Question Two: How do heterosexual Black and White interracial relationships effect the experience of racial identity of each partner?

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

Effect of Racial Identity/Change in Racial Identity

Orlando and Chelsea described the effect of racial identity on the marriage and/or change in racial identity in terms of relationship rules using racial slurs:

O: "She probably could say the 'N' word and get away with it." C: "But I don't. I choose not...I have family members that do and he'll even say...I have this one particular cousin who is um, White and she uses it like...She would identify more with Black people than she would with White people. I don't use it period because I don't like it either way. I just feel like it's just a way that people have been able to label Black people and they not even know it. Just in my relationship, in life in general...just, I just choose not to go there...it was just a rule before my husband with my children or with my friends that I don't appreciate it and...cause I just feel like that's a, um, way of enslaving people too...you know what I mean?...A way that they can still be enslaved, not just by the White man, I don't meant that, I just mean in periodically. So, we're just people." O: "I don't see any race. I mean, she's not the first White girl I ever dated. I mean, I wouldn't treat a White girl any different than I would a Black girl when I was coming up. We've experienced a lot."

Chelsea notes cultural changes she has made and continues to make:

C: "I've made changes like I cook cornbread, before as I didn't want to...and I speak when I go...it's out of my comfort zone, it's very hard for me to do that 'cause I feel vulnerable to go into this room of people I don't know and just be like 'Hi, I'm the White girl (laughs)...the snow bunny!' (jokingly).... But I do it because I know that it makes him feel...he wants a bubbly wife and a wife that's very outgoing and, you know...."

Chelsea also commented on how she continues to experience racism, especially when out with her bi-racial children. She is thought to be someone other than the mother of her children. Chelsea stated that she feels "relieved" when she is out alone without the children or Orlando because she has to deal with the "baggage" of racism: *"...I am a White woman and you may think that I don't face racism because I am a White woman. I kinda catch myself when I go out sometimes alone...I almost want to say that it's like a relief that I don't have that baggage. Because when we go out, [referring to outings with husband] there's stares or whatever but when I go out with my children, it's even worse...like, 'cause they're wondering, 'Are those her children'?"*

Changes in Views and Ideals about Race

In reference to changes in views and ideals about race, Orlando and Chelsea continue to view race and racism the same as they did prior to marriage: *O: "I pretty much do [referring to seeing racism the same before and after marriage]. I disagree with prejudice, racism...I disagree with all of it because I think we all pretty equal. I still have the same beliefs I had when I was younger."* In the following quote, Chelsea describes her perspective of racism from a White individual's perspective and how her perspectives of racism are the same as they were prior to her marriage. Chelsea feels that White individuals are sometimes "picked on" by other

racism and this contributes to her perspective of racism being different from Orlando's perspective:

"I love Orlando and I love Black people, but there's (pause) a very...I love my race and sometimes I feel like we get picked on so to speak. So, I don't necessarily relate a lot of times with things that he may would call racist that I may not would. For example, once upon a time there were these people who were trying to get checks for their families, from their ancestors being slaves. We were going to have to pay for 'em...me as a White citizen. And I felt like...that's me paying for something that somebody else did that just happened to be White. You know what I'm saying? I don't get that... 'cause that was something that...and it didn't even happen to him, I mean, he would be getting a check and it wasn't even something that happened to him...it was something that happened 200 years ago.... And as far as how it's has changed me, I don't feel like that has changed (pause) I don't think it's really changed me...who I am. A lot of people, a lot of women that I know really down their race when the date Black men...they like, forget about their White race and I have not...." O: "That's because most of them aren't accepted...they family disowns them." C: "Maybe so, maybe the culture difference because I'm accepted within my own environment...." O: "Both of families accept each other, but most of the people that you're talking about that don't want to have any thing else to do with...." C: "Like [names persons]? Their families really kinda turned their backs on them... O: Yeah, their racist, their family's racist and they don't agree with the bi-racial...." C: "I guess so...So, I will have to say that mine has stayed the same within my marriage. I've been accepted, though, outside my marriage...."

Case Two: Troy and Celean

Effect of Racial Identity/Change in Racial Identity

Troy and Celean have different positions on the effect of racial identity on their marriage and their marriage being a contributing factor to a change in their racial identity. Troy expressed a change in racial identity in terms of having a less prejudiced perspective towards Black individuals due to being married interracially, which he explains in this quote:

T: "Okay, my dad was like I said extremely prejudiced and whenever he would see anybody Black or anybody, they are Blackbirds. That was a way of not saying nigger, but it was saying 'A Blackbird's over there' or whatever. It was kind of strong, but that's the way I grew up and ever since I was a little kid, I heard that and whenever I was growing up and all that in a household that you hear it all the time, anything racist, Black people are bad and all that, then whenever I got with her, I still have some of them thoughts of, like that, but over time, it took a while, you know, what you were saying earlier, when I first got together, it's not that I

did hate people that were Black...I just had the idea that it was wrong to be together, but over time, I don't care and so in a way, my thoughts have changed."

Celean states the difference in her and Troy's perspective in a humorous manner: *"I never grew up like Troy, to hate honkies."* (laughs)

Changes in Views and Ideals about Race

Both partners describe a change in their views prior to marrying interracially such as Celean, a Black woman, being more comfortable in a "mix of people" rather than one race or another:

"I have a different perspective because sometimes I'll be in a Black part of town and I'll feel uncomfortable. Like, I need to hold my purse a little bit tighter or if I'm surrounded by a group of Black people or even if it's a group of White people, I'm still, 'Okay?' I'm more comfortable in a mix of people than I am if it's all totally one and I don't know if that has anything to do with race or about personal protection.... But, um, most of the people that I know that I would consider as acquaintances are all White. I have very few Black friends.... so I'm more comfortable with older, people that are older than me, than I am people my age or younger... I don't feel like I have to put on a show when I'm with the older ones versus somebody my age because when you are with someone your own age...."

Troy's perspective has changed in that he views people as experiencing similar problems, which unifies everyone: *"When I first....as a kid I was taught that Black people were evil, pretty much, you know? And now, the way I look at it now, everybody, everybody in the world from one end of the world to the other end of the world as the same problems... just having the same problems unifies everybody in a way. That's why I don't see that being together is a big race issue, you know"?*

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

Effect of Racial Identity/Change in Racial Identity

In terms of effect of racial identity on their marital relationship and change in racial identity since marriage, Harper, a Black male, and Danielle, a White female, feel that because they were raised with similar backgrounds and are accepted by each other's families, there has been no change in their racial identity and racial identity has not affected the marital relationship:

H: "Well, I think it's, uh, it's really came out...it really helped...it helped a lot, because the way we was raised where a certain race wasn't allowed in your house, it was always open, and you know that helps a lot because, you know you don't look at a person as White or Black or Mexican, you just look at the person and if it's a good person, you know, you know, it will work. If the chemistry is there, it will work." D: "I think it's been a positive, you know, thing on as far as our marriage because like he said, we weren't racist or prejudice. We didn't have those issues in our home and those, you know.... You know, it just wasn't a problem, I mean in where I had thought and I have made the comment that numerous times to numerous people that I just feel blessed that you know, I was so welcomed by his family, you know I just feel blessed that I've got good in-laws, you know great in-laws that have always accepted me."

Changes in Views and Ideals about Race

As with the previous theme, Harper and Danielle state that their views about race have not changed, mainly due to having similar backgrounds and not having the pressures of racial difference from either family: *D: "...I think that's why the marriage has worked so well because we haven't had the pressure of racial issues on either side of the family."*

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

Effect of Racial Identity/Change in Racial Identity and Changes in Views and Ideals about Race

Forrest, a Black male, and Alicia, a White female, stated that their interracial marriage has increased their awareness of each other and their marital relationship: *F: "I think it's helped broaden our, Alicia and myself, awareness. I think it has taught each of us a lot more about the*

other as not only as the person but as a Black man and a White lady.” Forrest and Alicia have decided to utilize this awareness and their marriage to educate others about prejudices and racism:

A: But I think it's also helped other people with their views on race. F: Friends and associates. A: And I think for myself, I was raised in an all White community so I never did really think about racial identity because I never had to. F: ...since we've been married...we've taken and matured to be able to recognize opportunities to educate people and I think...obviously more so since we've been married versus in college, because it was still exciting and new, you know, but now it's kind of like, hey, if we get an opportunity, we can help somebody. Talk to them, answer questions and be an example....”

Alicia also stated that she recognizes that she is given privilege because of her skin color and describes how she knew that she was “different” in her thinking about race:

“Well, I was just going to say I know that because of my skin color I know I'm more privileged than Fred and I think that because he's African American and a male, I understand more now as to why because he's not a White male why he my not get further or people see him in a different light, um I think that people still have those views that Black men or Black women may not be as articulate or they may not speak correct English or they're surprised when you do.”

Alicia stated that she feels she has changed more so than her identity:

“Well, and I don't know that my racial identity has changed as much as (laughs) much as me as a person has changed. My thought process and just living different places and being exposed to different people and being asked that...and my own person growing individually.... I knew I didn't fit in with these people fully in a White world, because I don't think in a White way.”

Research Question Three: How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address cultural difference within the relationship?

The following subthemes relate to cultural differences within the couple' relationships: how the couple met, positives and stressors of marriage, conflicts about race in marriage,

intersections of race and class, strengths of being married interracially, and couple identity and child-rearing. Each partner brought a unique world view to the marriage.

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

How Couple Met

Orlando, a Black man, and Chelsea, a White woman, met through mutual friends. Both partners were exiting past relationships:

O: "We was, uh, how...I was actually in a relationship and she was in a relationship and um, she was at; I knew one of her friends, but I didn't know her, so I went to a friend's house one day and the relationship she was like in an abusive relationship and the relationship I was in wasn't going so well, either.... We had our problems, but, anyways, her spouse or boyfriend or whatever had jumped on her the day I had went over to her friend's house and I was over at her friend's house and she come in all crying and had bit her hand or something and that's how we met.... I guess I comforted her from the situation that she had been in and I think the next day I was over there and I got her number." C: "We just became friends." O: "...and we became friends and then friends led to boyfriend and girlfriend and boyfriend and girlfriend led to this."

Positives in Marriage

Orlando and Chelsea described the following as the positives in their marriage: their children having a mother and father, children having a father figure, Chelsea having support from spouse, Orlando's acceptance of Chelsea other children, having children, and being in love:

O: "We both...we require our kids to have uh...a father and a mother figure in the home...." C: "That he's my half and he can do what I can't, you know what I'm sayin'?" O: "If she, for some reason, can't carry the load, she knows that I will...that I'm her backbone and I'll do it." C: "He's my best friend. I can call him with anything and just to know that he's thought enough of me for marrying me and be there for me, you know what I'm sayin'?" O: "...I didn't marry you to be there for you, just you. Our marriage deal is a package deal. I married you to be there for you all" (referring to their children). O: "Besides that, we was in love, you know"?"

Stressors in Marriage

The couple described the following as stressors in their marriage: finances, not spending enough time together, and their differences in interests: C: *“Well, I’ll tell you what I stress out about. It’s money and time that we don’t have for each other ‘cause I like some time together. He’s outdoorsy and I’m homebound most of the time.”* O: *“I can’t just sit in the house and....”*

Conflicts about Race in Marriage

Orlando and Chelsea describe the conflicts about race in the marriage via a question that was asked pertaining to how their relationship would be different if the couple switched races. Both spouses stated that they could not relate to being the other race, but attempted to provide a description of how the relationship would be different. Chelsea stated that she felt that her views would change more so than the relationship:

O: “I really can’t answer that question ‘cause I don’t know...I mean, I’m not White and I haven’t been around too many couples that...where the guy was White and female was Black so....I really can’t say....” C: *“I think it would be a lot different...Um, that’s taking to a different train of thought because I wouldn’t be actually be changing our relationship, it would be changing my views and...’cause then I would be the Black woman...and I can’t relate to them. I don’t relate them on that... I’m not very...I have Black girlfriends that are women but my views and their views are completely different...I butt heads with them...like on issues with child rearing and, um, dating.... I just really...I don’t know that I could relate at this point in my life...to being a Black woman.”*

Chelsea also stated that she would experience more racism than a White woman with a Black man:

O: “I think if I were a White guy, that, I probably would get more stares from male White guys, more White males, and more White females. That’s just my opinion....” C: *“And, you know, I think it’s a lot different when I see a Black female with White husband or couple or whatever. I kinda view it different than when I see White women with Black men. I think it’s almost kinda...awesome, just because, I kinda think it would be harder for a White man to...I think they may would face more racism than a White woman with a Black man.”*

Intersections of Race and Class

Orlando and Chelsea did not feel that there was an intersection of these concepts in their marriage due to their families of origin having similar class dynamics as demonstrated in this quote:

O: "We pretty much came from similar, um, similar families...classes 'cause neither one of us is rich!" (laughs) C: "I don't think we are poor, we're just...we're not rich and we're not poor." O: "Both sides are hardworking families, I mean, they all about having something, so...I mean, I guess that influence us to want to have...or motivate us to want to have stuff in our life." C: "To realize the value of a dollar."

Strengths Due to Interracial Marriage

The couple felt that their marriage has been strengthened, but due to Chelsea's patience rather than racial difference. Orlando stated that Chelsea puts up with more than a Black woman would: *O: "I don't think it really...strengthened us racially or made us weaker...I would still be the same person if I was with a Black woman or married to a Black woman. I don't think a Black woman would put up with some of the stuff that you put up with...."* However, Chelsea feels that her patience is due to the way she was raised more so than because she is White as Orlando has stated:

"That's a good answer...but I don't necessarily know that I believe that that's a race thing and not just...I think it's a culture thing. The way that they...and the difference in me. I put up with a lot, like, well I think he does as well, but I think it's strengthened us because we know each other's weakness...we know what we can get away with. You teach people how to treat you, and, whether White, Black, whatever...."

Couple Identity and Child-rearing

Orlando and Chelsea stated that they choose not to emphasize one race over another with their children; however, the couple disagree on the children's racial identities. Orlando refers to the "one drop" rule discussed in chapter one stating that because their children have Black blood,

they are considered Black. Chelsea argues her point that they are bi-racial and should be taught to recognize both racial backgrounds. Orlando feels that “bi-racial” is not a race:

C: “I think that our kids are pretty well-rounded because they have had a good dose of both sides and they will tell you ‘I’m White and Black’...and that probably has a lot to do with me because I never fill-out a form, ever in any of my children’s’ life where I put White or Black alone. I either mark ‘em both or I’ll put bi-racial. Because I feel like I’m betraying someone by doing that....” O: “Biracial is not a race. He’s Black. Like I said a while ago, I think my opinion which I have been taught in school that Black race has the most dominant traits. Genes or traits or whatever. It don’t bother you that your kids have White on their birth certificate, then.” C: “No, it doesn’t. I mean....” O: “It bothers...me because I think it should be Black.” C: “I think it should be a race of their own. They’re neither Black nor White.” O: “They Black. They’re Negroes.” C: “That’s what we disagree on.”

Chelsea describes how she feels about her children understanding both racial backgrounds and that she is “proud of being White” just as her husband is “proud of being Black.” She feels that all of her characteristics should be accepted including her race and she expresses the same desire for her children:

“Ya’ll are within the Black race and I can admire you for wanting to uphold your race, but I feel just as strongly about mine. I...you hear about White girls or I’ve heard the saying that ‘they’re trying to be Black’ or...and I’ve seen girls that I feel that way about, but I don’t...I’m proud of my White race...I don’t deny that. I would not want to be Black or Indian or any other race. It’s not...I’m just proud of who I am and I want my children to be proud of who they are...it’s not be proud of one race over another. I wouldn’t want my child to say ‘Oh, I’m White’ and not count...(pause) I don’t want that label, you know, I don’t want to discredit one race or the other because I love mine and of course he loves his, so why can’t there be a compromise of both where our child can be a little bit of both? ...for him to love me, he has to love the White.”

Case Two: Troy and Celean

How Couple Met

Troy, a White man, and Celean, a Black woman, met working together at a grocery store:

T: “I, uh. The first time I met her I worked for [name of grocery store] and it was on a Sunday,

wasn't it? And I was bagging groceries and she was the lady in front of me that was checking them out. That's the first time we met."

Positives in Marriage

The couple stated the following as the positives in their marriage: opportunity to be in an interracial relationship, changes in perspective to look beyond skin color or race, marriage, and children:

"Well, um...I think uh, being with Troy has given me an opportunity, a window, a first-hand look into what it is to be with someone of...outside your race. And, so, you go beyond thinking this is a person and their skin color is different from mine to what that person is...you see the person of their heart so you no longer see them for the skin color. And the fact that we have two beautiful boys that are um, I mean I really cannot ask for better kids."

Celean explained that her father had been in the military and he suffered from PTSD symptoms, which hindered her from being able to express her thoughts and opinions. In the following quote, Celean discussed how being married to Troy allows her to have a "voice":

"...growing up, you know, my Dad was in the military. He was in the Vietnam war and so he had a lot of visions coming back and uh, it was his way or no way. So, um, there wasn't a lot of chances of you expressing how you really felt. So, when I got with Troy and he actually let me say it without any fear of him getting upset and getting angry and screaming his head off. Troy just let me be, let me talk and I haven't shut up since...."

Troy also stated that they do not see color in their marriage but they see each other for who he or she is as a person: *"As far as the positives on my end, uh, as far as race, I don't really see an issue with that. Well, let me rephrase that. Um, positive doesn't really include race. I just, I'm with a woman and she's my wife and because of that, you know, there's positive stuff being married because, you know, we have a relationship together....race is not an issue."*

Stressors in Marriage

The couple stated the following as the major stressors of their marriage: Troy being on the computer a lot interferes with family time. Celean stated that this interferes with the oldest son being a “well-rounded” individual:

“...I feel that [Troy being on the computer a lot] cuts a little bit in family time and the boys are getting older and um, you know, they’re activities, interests are changing.... You know, I just want him to have a little bit more of a well-roundedness in his, his...I guess his social outlook. I don’t want him to just stay all about technical stuff. I want him to be able to have a little bit about the arts, a little bit about entertainment, a little bit about what makes women the way they are....”

Conflicts about Race in Marriage

Troy and Celean stated that they have never had a conflict about race in their marital relationship:

T: “Never have. Never have [had a conflict about race]. Usually we just laugh about it.” C: “I don’t feel we’ve ever had any problems where we ...it was a conflict because of race.” The couple felt that they had a lot of respect for each other, which prevented conflicts about race: C: “We’ve never had that...we’ve never even crossed the line because I guess we respect each other enough to know that that’s just not something we need to do to...you don’t need to go to that level in order to make someone feel bad.” They also described that they do not see the race of the person, just the person: C: “...we respect each other enough to where you know you don’t even...actually you stop seeing a White person. ...It’s not Troy the White person that did this or this White man that did this.... It’s like uh, when I was having [our son] it was, ‘Troy, YOU did this to me!’”

Intersection of Race and Class

Troy and Celean feel that there has been no influence of race and class on their marriage because they started out together financially equal and did not have much when they were first married:

T: “On our end, we are both pretty much dirt poor (laughs) so...It wasn’t like I was rich and she wasn’t or she was and I wasn’t.” C: “His family had more than my family had.” T: “Not much more.” C: “No, not much more.... That’s what it was for me. It wasn’t how much he had because like I said, when we first got together, we didn’t have anything. We were sleeping on the floor on an air mattress.” T: “Yeah. She had a living room suite and we would take it...take the

cushions off of that and put a sheet on it and sleep in the bedroom in the apartment.... We didn't have no furniture."

Strengths Due to Interracial Marriage

Celean stated that being married interracially has helped her and Troy to be stronger and look beyond the surface of people and relationships, and for them the process has been more about developing a relationship:

C: "Well, it makes you stronger...a lot stronger...you don't take everything at face value anymore. You look beyond the surface." T: "I wouldn't know the other side of that because I've never been married to anybody else or been with anybody else other than her, you know. I wouldn't know the other side. I wouldn't know the difference between this or that, you know?" C: "It was more about developing a relationship...."

Couple Identity and Child-rearing

Troy and Celean choose not to emphasize one race over another with their children. They instead try to expose their children to both races: *T: "Oh yeah. We don't try to push one [race] over the other." C: "I want my kids to understand both their heritage but I'm not going to say, 'I think you need to identify more with this one or with that one. You need to take some of [the] qualities from them versus this one right here'."*

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

How Couple Met

Harper, a Black man, and Danielle, a White woman, met while working together at a local restaurant: *D: "We met at a restaurant that we were both working at...." H: "Yeah, I was uh, the kitchen manager and she was the hostess."*

Positives in Marriage

Harper and Danielle described several positives about their marriage including: love, children, having good communication and a positive relationship, both spouses being family-oriented, and having a lot in common such as similar interests:

D: "Love, first of all." H: "Yeah, relationship and our kids." D: "Good communications and we're both real family oriented." H: "We've got a lot in common. Like, she likes to fish and I like to fish. We ride four-wheelers and you, know, we just do a lot of stuff together." D: "We do it all as a family. You know, we're really. We spend a lot of time together other than work and we worked together for a long time."

Stressors in Marriage

The couple stated the following as the stressors of their marriage: raising children due to a difference in views concerning discipline, understanding how to handle opposition regarding interracial relationships, and the difficulties associated with being married at a young age. The following quote demonstrates their responses:

D: "Raising children. (laughs) Raising children is hard because I mean, we never disagree in front of the children, but we, you know, talk about things and we don't usually ever without the other one's opinion, we don't agree to let one of the children do anything without talking with one another and I think it's kind of stressful sometimes because we see differently, you know, sometimes and I think that's where sometimes some of the stress comes in at. H: "Well, early on in our relationship there was, you know, how the public was, you know, because a lot of times you're like, 'Man, what is he looking at?' or 'What is she looking at?' or, you know, it got frustrating then." D: "That's been 16, 17 years ago and it was stressful to go out in public, you know, because sometimes we would get a lot of stares."

Harper and Danielle attribute incorporating church in their life as the major factor that has helped them mature as a married couple: *D: "I have to say the first three to five years, is really a hard time, but once we really got involved in church and we both grew up...I consider, that we were both still kids at the time.... Because, I mean we were young, 18, 19, 20 years old."*

Conflicts about Race in Marriage

Harper and Danielle describe conflicts about race in their marriage in terms of racial tension with family members and using racial slurs. Both partners stated that they do not have issues of race in their marital relationship due to the acceptance and support received from each spouses' family and that focusing on race is considered irrelevant labeling:

D: "I don't think race has not been an issue in our home. As far as in our house its not...in our whole family, we don't say you're White, your Black or this is this and this is that. We don't label and just do like that. You know, like I said, with any marriage, our marriage hasn't been a bed of roses the whole entire time, but you know as far as a race issue, we have not really had with either family, either side of the family, or friends even, you know."

The couple was also questioned about what would be different about their relationship if they switched races. The couple stated that there would be no difference and attributed this to having similar family backgrounds: *H: "Well, like I say, it'd probably be the same...it'll be the same." D: "It's the same." H: "Because of the way we was raised."*

Intersection of Race and Class

Harper and Danielle stated that there is no influence of race and class due to being raised similarly as pointed out in this interaction between couple and researcher: *I: "And that was my next question, was just how has the intersection of race and class influenced your relationship? But it really hasn't it sounds like, because you were the same." D: "uh ummm." H: "Right."*

Strengths Due to Interracial Marriage

The strengths that Harper and Danielle discussed include having open communication so that if an issue were to arise in their relationship, they would communicate about it rather than "walk away", and being able to make light of the opposition they receive from others:

D: "I think with us it's we have such a communication and we're so close that you know, if an issue arises, I would come to him and we would talk about it and I think it's just opened more doors to be able to communicate... he's there for me"

and I'm there for him." H: "But we never did leave or like one, 'I'm leaving. I'm going here or I'm going there.' No, we just stay there and just work it out." D: "I think...it's because we're able to talk to each other about it. Of course, we do get glares and stares and looks and we can look at each other and laugh about it, you know and look at each other and go, 'Well, they just don't know what we know.' You know, the thing is not how we look on the outside, it's what we know we are and how we feel about each other on the inside."

Couple Identity and Child-rearing

In reference to child-rearing and creating a couple identity, Harper and Danielle emphasize focusing on the characteristics of others such as morals, belief systems, etc. rather than race. Danielle stated that the couple's children are exposed to more White on a daily basis, and she and Harper want to emphasize qualities other than race. Danielle also stated that they do not place an emphasis on one race or another with their children:

"Well, the thing is, like with us, we do live near my family, so [our children] are probably on a day-to-day basis as far as at home, more exposed to, you know, to White. You know and that's our whole point and I think that's what we've tried to teach our kids, is it's not the color it's the person, you know, you just have to see the person for who they are, but um. And we go to his parents' house and you know, it's not like we try to go push this race over 'You've gotta be with the White race.' I want 'em to know both sides. What I always...we always try to tell 'em, 'You've got the best of both worlds.' You know, you've got both, so, I mean...we don't ever try to push one [race] over on the other."

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

How Couple Met

Forrest and Alicia met in college: F: "We met at a junior college...I was a basketball player and she was a sweet, little innocent lady in the library."

Positives in Marriage

When asked about positives in marriage, researcher and couple discussed their responses off tape prior to starting the interview while the couple and researcher were getting settled to begin. Therefore, there are no quotes to support their statements. However, they stated that children and their marital relationship were the positives.

Stressors in Marriage

When asked about the stressors of their marriage, the couple's response included role changes, meaning becoming parents in addition to being a married couple, and finances in reference to wanting to provide the best for their children: *A: "Role changes." F: "Financial in the sense of trying to provide the best living conditions, school conditions for our kids. I would just say the normal stresses of any relationship."*

Conflicts about Race in Marriage

With reference to conflict about race in the marriage, the couple stated that they do not have conflicts about race: *A: "No, have we? No?" F: "Not about race, no. We haven't."*

When asked how their relationship would be different if they switched races, Alicia stated that as a Black woman she would probably be more aggressive and hypersensitive to racism: *"Knowing my personality, I'm vocal now, but I'd probably be much more vocal and angry as a Black woman, I'd be like, 'Who do they think they are...' duh, duh, duh, duh. I'd be a lot more aggressive. I'd be a lot more...I'd take things more sensitive. I would...not more sensitive, but I would probably read into things a lot more.... I'd just be more vocal. I'd be much more in your face probably."* In addition, Alicia stated she probably would not receive the inappropriate questions about her partner as she currently does: *"I don't think as many people would come up to me and say things to me or say inappropriate things to me because of my skin color if I was Black."* She also stated that her husband would be provided more opportunities because he would be a White male. Husband stated that he feels that he has received many opportunities being Black:

"I don't know that I'd be much different." A: "Yes, you would, too. I think you would because I think you would see the privilege that White people have and you don't see that now because of your skin color." F: "Yeah, but I don't think I'm dis-privileged. I think I've had a lot of opportunities to do a lot of different

things....” A: “But I think you would see that you would have more opportunities. More opportunities, I think, would be presented to you.”

In addition, Alicia felt that she would be perceived more as her children’s mother when out with them rather than their babysitter: *“I probably would be viewed as my children’s mother as opposed to a baby-sitter or nanny sometimes (laughs), but that hasn’t happened that much.”* She goes on to say that she and Forrest have not had many instances in which race was an issue: *“I don’t think Forrest and I have ever had too many instances to where race has been an issue.”*

Intersection of Race and Class

In reference to the intersection of race and class, Forrest and Alicia feel that this has not been an issue in their marriage in that they have similar family backgrounds regarding class. He goes on to state that this may have been somewhat of a disadvantage because it has allowed he and Alicia to “live in a bubble” and not relate to others who have experienced poverty: *“Class, yeah. We’re kind of at a, I guess, disadvantage in the fact of we both grew up middle class and we’ve maintained middle class status, so friends and associates were always middle class for the most part, more than middle class, very seldom less than middle class, so I think it’s still somewhat of a bubble, because we never knew and our kids never knew poverty.”*

Strengths Due to Interracial Marriage

Forrest and Alicia feel that race has not been a major factor as far as strengths in their marriage but more so how they were raised to cope with adversity and having a foundation in a religion:

A: *“I don’t know that race has really played a big part. I think it’s more of how we were raised and issues that we’ve had in our marriage haven’t been racially driven. They’ve been financially, role changes, things of that nature and I think because of the way we were raised in a Christian foundation and the commitment that we made on our wedding day that divorce is not an option, that we are going to work through those and communicate with each other on a daily basis and we*

have three children, so there is no way that we're gonna separate or let the devil get...it's not racially.... It's more religious. You know, God has blessed this union... (crying)...sorry. So, its...Satan is not going to drive it apart no matter....”

Couple Identity and Child-rearing

Forrest and Alicia describe their child-rearing practices as emphasizing both races by using the term “bi-racial” with their children:

F: “Our oldest is six and she is already starting to develop and what’s her outlook on life and people are gonna be...she’s biracial. We’ll never know what being biracial means...you know you talk about racial identity, you know, who is she gonna identify with? Is that gonna be a struggle? Maybe not, but we try to make sure we give her all the tools that we have acquired over the last 16 plus years as an interracial couple to help her in her development. You know, we can’t tell her or make her...’Hey, you’re Black’ or ‘You’re White’ or ‘You’re biracial.’ Okay, what does that mean? More of the importance of, you know, go back to people and morale, not morale, but morals and character. So, that is a struggle and it’s probably sometimes easier to say, ‘Hey, you’re Caucasian. This is what Caucasian people do.’ Or ‘You’re Black. This is how we do it.’ But when you say, ‘You’re biracial.’ You know, you’ve got a lot of balls to juggle and we’ve gotta kind of figure out where do I fit in and what am I comfortable with and we try to help them with that.” A: “Well, I think we try to influence that they are both races. They are a little bit of mommy and a little of daddy and that they need to know that because they are going to be in probably situations to where, especially at a young age, that they’re going to have to identify one way or another on a piece of paper or a form and I don’t think that they should have to do that. I’m very adamant about that.”

Alicia stated that she condones more influence with the African American race because there is “less drama” with Forrest’s family; however, she and Forrest try to expose their children to multi-cultural settings because the children feel more comfortable in this type of setting:

“I think I probably try to influence the more African American side because I know it’s a White world and we try to go to a multi-cultural church, but it’s mainly White people and I think that our children have felt more comfortable around a multi-cultural church than an African American church. Um, but they feel comfortable around my husband’s family and my family and we try to include both families together so that they can see that interaction, that the African American side and the Caucasian side do things together and we mix together. I feel much more comfortable on his side with his family because there is less drama and not racial drama.”

Research Question Four: How do heterosexual Black and White interracial couples address opposition toward their marriage?

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

Acceptance: Family Reaction to and Support of Marriage

Orlando and Chelsea stated that both families were accepting of each spouse and supportive of their marriage. The couple had a traditional church wedding and all family members from both families were present: O: “*Yeah, we did it in a church. Yes, [referring to all family members being present at the wedding] it was like...*” (laughs) C: “*White folks on one side....*” O: “*And Black folks on the other side....*” C: “*It was so funny!*”

Orlando’s family members were somewhat concerned about marriage at first due to Chelsea having children prior to marrying Orlando; however, Chelsea’s family was accepting of Orlando: “*Mine was [referring to her family accepting husband]. I don’t really how his reacted since I had children. It may not have been a race thing as much as a...*” O: “*They accepted her. They wanted to make sure that I was making the right decision.*” C: “*I don’t think it was so much my color as it was my baggage...so to speak.*”

Chelsea also explains how the history of other marriages in Orlando’s family including his parents was reassuring for her in that their marriage would last:

“And another plus for him is, most of the men in his family that are married, are still married...that was a big thing with me. I would have married him anyway, but I’m just saying, his mother and father have been married for thirty something years...Uncles have all been married for (pause) one time, to the same woman for long periods of time and that just showed me that he knew...you know, to stick it through....”

Chelsea provides a history of how her and Orlando’s relationship began as an example of the acceptance his family displayed towards her:

“In his family, I don’t really...they’ve all accepted me and they love me and I know that the situation...our relationship began very complicated. We started dating and we decided to go our separate ways. He had a relationship with someone else and anyways, I found out I was pregnant and we were not together the whole pregnancy and she was born and it was like it just clicked all of a sudden that we became closer. Anyway, three weeks later she passed away from SIDS and his family just...I had never even met ‘em and they just loved on me and just accepted me and just, I guess because of my pain, you know. I don’t know how else to put it. ...from that day, there was no more, ‘She’s the White girl or the snow bunny or’ But I mean they look at me as a person, I guess maybe we connected...I guess that’s just how God worked it out ‘cause I believe in our Lord Jesus and I feel like He just worked it out for me and Orlando “cause they may not have accepted me as they do now...if everything had fell into place the way it did. So, I think that they see me as a person and not as a color or a race and that’s why they’ve been so accepting of me.”

The couple explain how supportive the faculty and staff of their children’s school has been. The support was surprising to the couple because the school is a predominately White school in a rural area of their community: C: *“Our children’s school is very...and you wouldn’t think...they go to [name of school] and it’s, like, ninety (pause) I think it is, ninety percent White....”* O: *“We don’t get that ‘look’, like, at [name of school], like at the ball games....”* C: *Very accepting people out there and....”* O: *“They’re really good....”*

Opposition and how Handled in Marriage

Orlando and Chelsea mainly receive opposition from Black women:

C: *“The women [in husband’s family], which is probably like most Black women, have a problem with a White guy, or a Black guy dating somebody who is not their race, especially a White girl.”* O: *“They play a big part like when you are in public as far as, I mean, you will find more Black females giving you that look than White people giving you that look.”* C: *“...my husband’s young and he does go out occasionally and I don’t feel comfortable going to the type of environment that he goes in because there is so much...you can feel the tension in the room when we walk through the door.”* O: *“Say for instance we went to a club out of town...I mean the tension won’t be as bad. But, around here, most of your clubs are like mostly Black, the clubs that I attend or go to, most of it is Black people, so we got all these Black women up in there.... She gets most of the tension from the Black women....”*

When asked if the opposition was surprising, both spouses stated that it was expected; however, Chelsea is more sensitive to the opposition than Orlando: *O: "I had already been down that road, so it really didn't even bother me. I was prepared for it, basically...so to speak."* [referring to opposition being a surprise to the couple] *C: "Yeah.... It doesn't bother him as much as it bothers me."* *O: "It depends ...I'm not just gonna let 'em (pause) say what they want to say and front off on me in a disrespectful way."*

Orlando mostly ignores the opposition, but the couple will address the opposition in situations where the person(s) are becoming disrespectful. The couple stated that Chelsea addresses the females and Orlando addresses the males: *O: "Now, if they...if they, so to speak, if they walking passed us, they looking at us weird and whispering to each other, you know, then I might stop, and be like...."* *C: "It depends...if it's a man doing that, he'd probably act that way, but if it's a female, he leaves it to me."*

Case Two: Troy and Celean

Acceptance: Family Reaction to and Support of Marriage

Troy and Celean went to the courthouse to get married and no family members attended: *T: "Yeah."* [referencing couple getting married at courthouse] *C: Just me, Troy, and [first son].* [referencing who attended marriage ceremony]. The couple's families were not supportive of their marriage, but for different reasons. Troy's family, particularly his mother, did not approve of the couple dating or of the marriage:

C: "Troy's parents had some problems with it...." *T: "Oh yeah. Yeah, they did."* *C: "But his brother first realized that I was Black, he came to the store with Troy...Troy and his dad, they came and [his brother] was so disgusted...that he turned around and walked out the store.... His sister that was in the military. She didn't mind [but] his mom, oh my God. His mom.... His mom called me everyday, especially when I found out I was pregnant, she called everyday and literally did everything short of cussing me out...She was gonna give me \$10,000 to abort my baby and give him \$10,000.... She didn't have any problem with us*

being together. Her problem was that she didn't want us to have any kids." T: "Or to lock in that relationship."

Celean's family was somewhat opposed to the relationship but this was not based on Troy being of a different race than Celean. It was because Celean had a child before marriage:

T: [referencing wife's family] "They didn't have any issue with the fact that she got with a White guy. No issue on that. Only issue that they had was we was together, that she had a child without marrying the person first." C: "...and so they withdrew...."

Troy and Celean discuss the hardship of not having support from either partner's family and that eventually some family members became more accepting:

C: (laughs) "I mean, because, it was extremely hard. I mean we were totally on our own. No help from anybody." T: "...we had no support from our families at all until...." C: "...after [first son] came. My parents, they really didn't help. I mean they didn't support me...I mean they didn't really say they [have] anything against me, but they didn't support it either. I think that after a while before his mom died, she did tell me that she thought I was the best thing that happened to her son...and his brother, before he died, told me that would do anything for me if I broke down somewhere or needed anything, just call him and he would come and do it...."

Opposition and how Handled in Marriage

Troy and Celean have received opposition toward their marriage from family members, friends, as well as from society in general, specifically older White women as evident in the following quote:

C: "...[Husband's best friend] told me that he felt that if Troy and I did get together that it would be better for me because as a Black woman I would be lifting myself up out of a negative situation...where if it had of been a White woman getting with a Black guy, she would have been bringing herself down and in his heart of hearts, I truly believe that he thought he was giving me a compliment and saying...and saying...giving me his...that it was okay for Troy and I to get together. He actually said that if a Black guy, if she, uh, if a Black guy married a White woman, that the White woman would be bringing herself down.... Before we came in together and she [referring to an elderly woman] saw that we were together and I said since that time she let it be known that I was uh, betraying my race by being with Troy. I get that one or uh, I get a lot of old people...I've had some White women and Black women that have flirted with my

husband in front of me. You know, and I've had some White women say, 'Well, I don't believe...I think you're taking a good White man away from us'."

The couple could not find a judge to marry them in the area they lived and had to go to a courthouse in a neighboring state: C: *"Yeah, yeah, because when we first got together there was hardly any interracial couples in '94. I mean we couldn't even get married here. The judge would not marry us here. We had to go to [a neighboring state] to get married."*

Troy and Celean handle the opposition they have received by using humor and appreciating the fact that the opposition is forthcoming rather than hidden. For Celean, the opposition being forthcoming is a comfort because it provides awareness of people's true feelings:

C: I think, to me, it's....I'd rather know who hates me than be in someone's face and think that they like me they're all behind my back going, 'That nigger with that White person right there. I gotta cross that's gonna be in their yard.' Sometimes Troy and I will see a couple that is the same color, like two White people and they're looking at us I'll go, (whispering), 'Look! There's a White couple! Oh! They're together!'"

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

Acceptance: Family Reaction to and Support of Marriage

Harper and Danielle traveled to another state to get married because they lived together prior to marriage and felt that a traditional wedding would not be appropriate. The couple had a reception after their return and all family members were present:

D: "We went up to the mountains because our thing was that we already lived together, we already had a child together, you know. I didn't want to have this big blowout, you know, wedding when we did do things, you know, slightly backwards.... We had a short and sweet wedding. We had a beautiful ceremony. We went to the mountains and got married in a small chapel, you know, on the side of a mountain and it was gorgeous in October, you know, in the fall when the leaves were pretty and so and we stayed there for a week." H: "Well, when we got back, we had the reception at our house, so everybody that wanted to that didn't make it to the mountains, they was all there then."

Harper and Danielle describe how members of both families interact with each other:

D: "Um hmm. I mean, we did...and it's not like the Whites were on this side of the room and the Blacks were on this side.... I mean, when we have anything out at our house, you know I say at our house, because that's on my side of the family usually because like I said we live near them, you know, his family is always invited and welcome and anytime they come they are welcome."

Both families are supportive of the couple and their marriage. In the following quote, Danielle describes how apprehensive her father was at first when she mentioned marrying

Harper:

"It's the fact that we were still young. I was what? 19, 20 years old and so he had this thought, he had never met him, you know and I tell him this and of course, he's like, probably thinking, thug (laughs) or you know, it's not that he was really thinking that.... I guess you could say it was a race issue, I don't know, I mean...he's never been prejudiced, you know, before that, so I hate to say that he was prejudiced at that point."

In the next quote, Harper and Danielle are describing how each of their families accepted their spouse:

D: "...and I have made the comment numerous times to numerous people that I just feel blessed that you know, I was so welcomed by his family, I just feel blessed that I've got good in-laws, you know great in-laws that have always accepted me." H: "We identify with both sides, you know. It's not just like, you know when I go with her family, I just stick out, you know. It's not like that because uh, one of her aunts made the comment before like, 'We don't say Harper is Black. We just say 'It's Harper.''" D: "I mean, when we have anything out at our house...on my side of the family, his family is always invited and welcome and anytime they come they are welcome."

In addition, the support from their families was not surprising to the couple: *H: "The family members? Nah, because the way we was raised. It would be different if we was raised in a different belief and then, just happened and then be like, 'I can't believe they're supporting us!'" [Referring to the question: was the support surprising?]*

Opposition and how Handled in Marriage

Harper and Danielle stated that the opposition they have received is not surprising and they felt prepared for what to expect due to dating interracially prior to marriage and living in the same community in which they were raised:

H: "We both knew that [expected opposition from others]. I dated White and she dated Black, so this wasn't our first experience...we already knew what we was in for." D: "...I don't know if this is because almost everybody in [city couple resides] probably knows us, (laughs) but we're out a lot and we're out in the public a lot, both he and....I don't know if they're just used to seeing us or what but...." H: "Well, and then they're used to seeing us and we both, like she got her nail business and I've got a construction business and so we deal with a lot of different people and uh, then, some of our clients, and we might see them and we might be in [different places] or any of these restaurants, and they'll put us two together then, they realize and then they, you know, they don't have a problem with it."

The couple has received opposition from older individuals and Black females:

D: "...there's times you still go out and you still will be in public and you see older couples, you know that may look or something, but like I say, it goes back to a lot of people know us and um, so I guess it's not as much anymore even with the older. Like I said, I've had stares, like we'll go out, like let's just say, for instance, we may go to a club and we just say it's a Black club, you know I'm going to get a lot of stares from Black ladies. And...I mean they're probably thinking, 'Well, he's a nice looking man, but he's with a White lady. Why does he have to be [with her]?' " H: "Yeah, or 'they're taking our men from us.'" D: "I mean, that's the comment that you do hear on a regular basis. And...it's more a jealousy issue." H: "Jealous, yeah. Right. It's more on her end with Black women, because I never do...have that feeling, you know, anything, unless we go [to] a town where it's predominantly White, you know I might have that, but basically...we get more from Black women. If we're walking down the mall or anywhere like that and they'll look, and they'll be like, 'What's the deal?'"

Harper discussed that earlier in the relationship, he would be frustrated; however, the opposition did not bother Danielle:

"Well, early on in our relationship there was, you know, how the public was...because a lot of times you're like, 'Man, what is he looking at?' or 'What is she looking at?' or, you know, it got frustrating then." D: "But really, [the opposition] never bothered me. You know, really to say that it bothered me, it

didn't. Because I wasn't one that was real worried about what people thought. I knew who I was, you know, and that's what mattered and I knew who I loved and that's what mattered. So, I really didn't care a whole lot about what everybody else thought." H: "I really didn't worry about what the public thought, because, I knew how it was and it's back, you know, 15, 16 years ago. See back then, if you're with a White girl, they'd be like, 'What is he doing? Is he crazy?' you know...."

Most of the opposition is expressed after the couple has left a particular place/outing as described in the following quote: *H: "So a lot of times, it's stuff said when after we leave. For instance, if I was in a store by myself and a mixed couple come in and they don't know that I'm married to a White lady, they, you know, they might say, after they leave out, 'What's that Black guy doing with that White girl.' And they may be saying it out loud, you know."*

The couple handled opposition in various ways including: going out of town for a date (earlier in the relationship), using humor, associating with other interracial couples, and depending on church family for support:

D: "We would tend to go out of town when we were first really dating, we would tend to go out of town. We do get glares and stares and looks and we can look at each other and laugh about it, you know and look at each other and go, 'Well, they just don't know what we know.'" H: "...we gotta, you know, a couple of mixed couples that, you know, that we do hang out with. So, then again, you know, if we got a couple of friends that are just Black and Black and some that's White and White, you know, it just goes together." D: "You probably wouldn't be accepted, but our church has been. They've been wonderful. We have a lot of um, mixed couples and"

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

Acceptance: Family Reaction to and Support of Marriage

Forrest and Alicia describe their families' reaction to their marriage. It appears that Forrest's family was more accepting than Alicia's as evident by the following quote:

F: "Well, as far as the family reaction. It was different on both sides. My family's reaction was a little bit, a lot different than hers. Uh, my wife's. Most, 99 or 95% of my family were supportive because of our beliefs and morals growing up, you know, multi-cultural, so it wasn't anything new. The biggest

concern was making sure that this person I'm about to marry is a good person. You know, it's interesting because the males on my side, no body had an issue, they could care less. It was primarily the females. Um, which I thought was somewhat interesting, but probably not, but the males...uncles and Dad and they could care less. A: "Oh Lord! (laughs) My family? Nope, you don't mix. You now, I mean....but I think, at first, my parents did not accept it, you know, you don't mix. But they even tried to use like religion, you know, it's against the Bible, you're gonna go to Hell, um." F: "Yeah and for the most part, best we know, that's all changed. Their outlook, they love the grandkids, they know no reservations."

The couple had a small wedding in another state and family members attended from both families. A: "...we were living in [another state] at the time and had a small wedding. My brother came and my mother and father came and.... My uncle actually married us...and his uncle actually said a prayer and my dad walked me down the aisle...."

Opposition and how Handled in Marriage

In reference to opposition, the couple stated that they are unaware of a lot of opposition they may receive, but have had blatant statements or questions asked, mostly from White men or older individuals:

F: "We haven't noticed any. Maybe we have, (laughs) but maybe...." A: We've noticed some things. I think...we've experienced some, but not enough to hinder or hurt us in a negative way. We were out at a club, you know, I've had a White guy say, 'Why are you with him?' and then when we were shopping...we had this older man looking at us and I looked at Forrest and I honestly said, 'Why is he looking at us? Why is he staring at us?' and Forrest looked at me with a puzzled look and he said, 'Are you serious? You don't know why he's looking at us?' and I said, 'Oh, you're Black and I'm White. That's why he's looking at us?'"

The couple handle opposition by reframing other people's perspective, humor, and being aware of their surroundings as to avoid unnecessary opposition:

F: "...that's why it doesn't bother me because I understand, you know what, they're narrow-minded, they've got a wall built up, you know, hey, sorry. (laughs) ...because if they really didn't care, they wouldn't look, so that's why it's never really bothered me, you know, because I know that they're just curious and they are afraid to get outside of the box and learn about people. That's my

thought.” A: “...you have to be aware of where you are where you’re going and it’s not that we really care, but it’s just that why would you put yourself in a circumstance to where you know, you’re going to get hated everyday or looked upon ugly or you know, you don’t want that, so you’re gonna make a better life for yourself somewhere else.”

Advice and Counseling/Therapy Experience

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

Advice and Counseling/Therapy

Orlando and Chelsea offered the following advice regarding interracial relationships:

O: “Hold your head high and be prepared for whatever comes your way and....”
C: “I think people who are interracially married have to be very diverse ‘cause you got so much differences, just in the culture....” O: “Don’t bow down to nobody, so to speak, like if somebody....” C: “Be proud of who you are....” O: “If somebody down you, saying that you’re wrong for marrying a White guy or whatever, I mean, you hold your head high and tell them something that might help them (pause) realize that, ‘Oh, I never thought of it that way’, you know....”
C: “Like, I’ve been asked why (pause) why did I...and it’s just, the person, I just tell ‘em I’m in love with the person not necessarily the color.”

The couple had two pre-marital counseling sessions with the priest of their church, but did not feel that it was enough to evaluate it as a positive or negative experience: C: “We had pre-marital (pause) from my priest. We only went like, twice.”

Case Two: Troy and Celean

Advice and Counseling/Therapy

Troy and Celean offered the following advice regarding interracial relationships: C: “You really have to be a strong person to be able to withstand the hate and the attention that you get everywhere you go. Make sure you’re strong and you can deal with it.” T: “Oh, yeah. It would be easier if you moved to a [place] more [accepting of interracial couples].” C: “Yeah, it would be easier, true but then you wouldn’t know exactly how people felt about you.” The couple had has no counseling/therapy experience.

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

Advice and Counseling/Therapy

Harper and Danielle offered the following advice regarding relationships in general and not based on racial difference. Danielle stated that due to she and Harper viewing their marriage as a marriage and not an interracial marriage, it was difficult for her to offer advice based on being in an interracial relationship:

H: "Just make sure that that's what you want and make sure that y'all will be able to live together, you know, because it's a lot of people will run and go get married and don't even know her bad habits or good habits. Don't even know the person and they want to jump up just because they are infatuated right now, and when that wears off, you're stuck with a spouse. (laughs) So, but just being able, to you know, if you love each other and you can live together and can make it work, you know...." D: "...if you really love a person then you can really work, you know, you can work through the little things...like with other couples, interracial couples, or any couples period that don't have the support from the in-laws or whatever, I hate it, because it is that stress on the marriage.... So, I know that's stressful, but I think it's love and the communication and the understanding and like I say...I guess because race has never been an issue to me, it's hard for me to give advice I mean, this is both of our first marriages. Neither one of us has been married before, you know, so it's hard to say, just because it's an interracial marriage. I don't even look at our marriage as an interracial marriage....because we've been together so long and it's nothing.... I guess, just race to me isn't an issue...."

The couple has not had counseling or therapy.

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

Advice and Counseling/Therapy

Forrest and Alicia offered the following advice regarding relationships in general and not based on racial difference. Alicia stated that due to she and Forrest viewing their marriage as a marriage and not an interracial marriage, it was difficult for to offer advice based on being in an interracial relationship:

A: "...make sure you have the same beliefs, values, you know, because you can't change that. Make sure you're gonna be committed and communicate honestly, and more values, I think." F: "...just make sure...two things: make sure you take the opportunity and nurture the values in other races, because not all White, middle aged older men are prejudiced and not all young African American young women hate White girls because they take all the good men. (laughing) The other thing is the outside influences...the looks, the stares, the comments, expect those and have a mental and a physical, if you have to, for how you are going to consistently deal with them." A: "And don't have hatred because you don't know where they are coming from and if you go at them harsh or in a negative way, that it's just confirming maybe some of their belief." F: "Yep. That's why having a planned way to deal with them. And dealing with them basically means within yourself that you know, that's what that means. Probably more so than dealing with them is to expect them because when you expect something you kind of habitually learn how to deal with it because you expect it." A: "And even make it a teachable moment for your children." F: "Yeah, because they'll see the example...." A: "And the way you react is gonna be an example as to how they handle situations because if you confront somebody or you go at them, then your children are gonna see that characteristic in you as maybe hatred, or whatever, so you don't want to portray that."

The couple had has no counseling/therapy experience.

Cross Case Analysis

After a case study analysis was conducted on all four interviews, cross-case analysis was conducted to determine the similarities and differences between cases. Similarities are discussed via the identification of cases that shared similar themes. Differences between cases are discussed via the identification of new themes and unique cases. Unique cases refer to those cases in which certain subthemes were identified that did not "fit" with other themes and/or were experienced by only one of the couples. When referring to cases in cross-case analysis, each case will be represented as follows: Case one = C1, Case two = C2, Case three = C3, and Case four = C4.

Similarities

After completing cross-case analysis, I and peer coder identified few similarities between cases. There were six general themes and 22 subthemes identified; however, the process of how each couple experienced each theme was different. A description of subthemes shared by all cases will be followed by a description of subthemes shared by at least three cases and an overview of themes shared by two cases.

Similarities among All Cases

Cross-case analysis of all four interviews revealed that of the 22 subthemes, three were shared by all cases, and include: positives in the marriage, intersection of race and class, and how each partner racially identified him or herself. All the couples expressed love/being married and having children as the positives of their marriages. Within the context of my interviews, these concepts are perceived as important because being married and having children helped the couples develop a new awareness and/or perspective on topics such as racism, embracing other cultures, understanding concepts from another person's point of view, having a different outlook on the future, and a new meaning of the term racial identity. In reference to racially identifying him or herself, six of the eight partners said they did not identify with a particular racial group and/or considered racial identification to be a label, a method of categorizing people to create commonality in an area where there is none. All partners stated that they look beyond race or skin color to view people, including their spouses for who they are via morals, values, beliefs, and overall character. All four couples described the subtheme of intersection of race and class as not being influential in their marriages due to each couple having similar backgrounds in regards to class and their upbringing.

Similarities among Three Cases

Cross-case analysis of interviews revealed that of the 22 subthemes, three were shared by at least three cases, which include: conflicts about race in marriage, opposition from society, and handling opposition from others.

The subtheme, conflicts about race in marriage, was common for C2, C3, and C4 in that the couples stated they did not experience conflicts about race in their marriage for several reasons including: not viewing their partners based on race, having mutual respect for each other, and having open communication within their marriages.

The females of C1, C3, and C4 describe receiving the most opposition from Black females. For the female in C1, the opposing Black females include females within the husband's family of origin. The types of opposition received consist of stares and some comments. The females in C1, C3, and C4 stated that the opposition received from Black females occurs mostly in settings in which the couples are in a predominately Black or all-Black environments.

Three of the cases (C2, C3, and C4) described using humor between spouses as a means of addressing opposition toward their marriages. Rather than directly addressing individuals and/or experiencing negative emotions concerning the opposition, these couples choose to address the issue of opposition by sharing an intimate moment that draws the partners closer to each other and to family and friends that are accepting and supportive of their marriages. Some of the partners describe how they have matured from the early stages of their marriages in which the opposition was emotionally disturbing to a state of mind where ignoring the stares and/or rude comments is easier.

Similarities among Two Cases

Cross-case analysis of interviews revealed that of the 22 subthemes, eight were shared by at least two cases. An overview of these subthemes will be described. The first subtheme shared by two cases is how the couples met. Case two and case three describe meeting while working together at a grocery store (C2) and restaurant (C3). Second, raising children as a major stressor in the marriage was expressed by C3 and C4 and lack of family time as a major stressor was expressed by C1 and C2.

The third subtheme includes change in identity, which was shared by C2 and C4. Although this subtheme is shared by two cases, the experience and meaning of a change in identity is different. For example, change in identity for the female in C2 means that she is more comfortable in a “mix of people” regarding racial groups rather than being among a crowd of all-Black or all-White people. For the female in C4, change in identity means that she realized she had an “identity” for the first time after marrying interracially.

Fourth, the male in C2 and the female in C4 describe becoming the “expert” on individuals in the Black race due to marrying interracially. These individuals discuss how when people from the White race discover that they are married to Black individuals, they are questioned about stereotypical concepts concerning the Black race. For example, the female in C4 discusses how she has been asked about her husband’s sexual performance and/or why Black people name their children certain names.

The fifth subtheme, prejudiced families, is shared by the male in C2 and the female in C4. They were taught that persons of the Black race were inferior to persons of the White race in all areas including: hygiene, intelligence, articulation, education, and being professional. Religious connotations were included with these values in that the male in C2 was taught that Black people were “evil” and the female in C4 was told that she was “going to hell” by marrying

outside her race. Thus, both individuals have decided to differentiate from the beliefs of their families of origin.

Sixth, the females of C1 and C4 describe how they are viewed as “babysitters” and not the mother of their biracial children when out alone with their children. Although the females share this theme, they describe this incidence in different contexts. For example, the female in C1 discussed this occurrence in reference to how she experiences racism as a White woman and the female in C4 describes this incidence as an example of how she is viewed as a White woman when asked how her marriage would be different if she and her husband switched races. However, both women are describing the experience of racism as White individuals who are interracially married.

The seventh subtheme, differences between spouses in reference to discipline with children, was shared by C1 and C3. The females in these couples state that they and their husbands have differing views about the type of discipline their children should receive and which spouse should be the disciplinarian.

The eighth subtheme shared by two cases is the family of origin of both spouses are accepting and supportive of interracial marriage. This theme is shared by C1 and C3. These couples explain how their families were accepting of their spouse and have always been supportive of their marriages.

Differences

After completing cross-case analysis, researcher and peer coder identified many differences between cases. As with similarities, there were six general themes and 22 subthemes identified within each case. Due to a large number of differences across cases, differences will be presented via a description of new subthemes that emerged from the data and unique cases.

New Subthemes

Cross-case analysis revealed three new subthemes: normal couple, gaining acceptance, and religious affiliation. The subtheme normal couple refers to couples viewing their marriages as normal, meaning they do not see race as being a major part of their marital relationship or view their marriages as interracial. In addition, they feel that their marriages have the same positive and negative aspects as those of same race marriages. This subtheme was shared by C1, C3, and C4 and became evident in diverse ways during the interviews. The female in C1 stated that prior to the interview, she did not feel that she and her husband had anything to offer in their participation in the study due to her view of their being a normal couple. The females in C3 and C4 expressed their views of their marriages as being normal when asked to give advice based on being an interracial couple. Both individuals stated that this was difficult for them due to not viewing their marriage as interracial.

The subtheme, gaining acceptance, describes the process of how couples gained acceptance from family members that were not accepting of their marriage but who eventually became accepting of the marriages. Processes of gaining acceptance include: birth of children (C2 and C4), being the first to marry interracially (C2 and C4), death of a child prior to marriage (C1), choosing to allow their actions to demonstrate character (C2 and C3), and using the marriage as a tool to educate and bring awareness to others about interracial relationships (C4). The processes in which acceptance was obtained was demonstrated through what can be considered "turning points" in each couple's marriage. In addition, these processes illustrate how acceptance is embedded in a connection to extended family members.

The third subtheme, religious affiliation, indicates how couples incorporate religious beliefs into the meaning making of their interracial marriages. For example, C1, C3, and C4 discuss how their religious beliefs have contributed to the endurance of obstacles within their

marriage including opposition from family members and society, being immature due to young age when married, and making the decision to get married.

Unique Cases

As described previously, unique cases refers to those cases in which certain themes were identified that did not “fit” with other themes and/or were not experienced by a given couple. All cases were found to have different factors to indicate them as unique cases. Case one is considered a unique case due to the conflict between spouses about the racial identity of their children. This couple was the only couple to experience this conflict. The husband refers to the “one drop” rule and believes that anyone with Black heritage should be considered Black while the wife believes that anyone who is biracial should be allowed to connect with and experience both heritages and not be made to choose one or the other.

Case two is considered a unique case due to this couple being the only White male and Black female dyad to participate in the study. Thus, Troy and Celean have had experiences unique to their case such as: (1) being the only couple in which no support was received from either family of origin, and (2) being the only couple that had to leave the state in which they reside to get married. They have learned to depend on each other and create their own family dynamics, traditions, and beliefs.

Furthermore, Celean was the only Black female to participate in the study and explained experiences that were unique to her case. Celean’s experiences were as follows: receiving opposition more from White women who felt that she was “taking a good White man away” from the White race; receiving criticism from other Black women about her dress and hair, stating that she is trying to look White; being told that she is betraying her race by marrying interracially; has been told that she is marrying “up” by marrying a White male; being told that

she talks like she is White; and the assumption that she is in the military because she is married interracially.

Case three is considered a unique case in that the couple perceived that many of the issues and/or factors discussed during the interview such as the intersection of race and class, opposition received, and the acceptance of their marriage were not issues that affected their relationship. The couple related their perception to the result of living in the same community in which they were born and raised.

Case four is considered a unique case due to the discussion of the process of growing as a person by the wife, Alicia. Alicia stated during her interview that she has come to the realization that she had “privilege” because she is of the White race. She also explained the ability to view racism from her husband’s point of view and recognizing that she has a racial “identity” via interracial marriage. Prior to marriage, she did not have this awareness. In addition, Forrest and Alicia were the only couple who stated how they use their marriage as a means to educate others about interracial marriage, racism, and race relations.

Results from Observations

The following section will provide a description of each observation that I conducted on each couple. Each description was recorded immediately following the observation and debriefing session. Also, during debriefing, each couple described what they were or were not aware of concerning responses from others.

Case One: Orlando and Chelsea

I accompanied Orlando and Chelsea to a local restaurant to eat. I arrived prior to the couple and the restaurant was somewhat busy. When the couple arrived and walked into the restaurant, I observed that other individuals began to stare and make faces such as frowning or

looking perplexed. Some individuals followed the couple with their eyes until they got in line. After getting trays and preparing to go to the buffet tables, the couple and I chose a table and sat down. I sat at the same table as the couple with the couple sitting together on one side and I sat across from them.

As I observed, individuals sitting at the tables near us would look at the couple, but did not make any facial cues. While eating, two of Orlando's relatives (an aunt and a cousin) were in the restaurant and came over to visit briefly with the couple. The relatives appeared to be accepting of the wife as evidenced by acknowledging her, talking with her, and portraying positive non-verbal and verbal cues (e.g. smiling, and making direct eye contact with the couple). I was introduced as a friend of the family. Afterwards, one of Chelsea's friends came over to speak to her and she introduced her friend to Orlando and the friend hardly acknowledged him as evidenced by making little direct eye contact and not engaging Orlando in conversation. As we continued to eat, the crowd appeared to be more accepting and more comfortable with the couple's presence as evidenced by a decrease in stares. Orlando and Chelsea appeared to be very attentive to the reactions from others and even commented to me about the reaction of others as they first entered the restaurant.

Case Two: Troy and Celean

I accompanied Troy and Celean to a local supercenter. I followed behind the couple through the store to observe the couple and the environment. During the observation, I noticed different individuals throughout the store who would stare excessively (too long), make facial expressions, and/or follow the couple with their eyes. Mostly women tended to exhibit the above interactions. I observed that when Troy and Celean separated and went on different isles of the store or went to different counters, individuals tended to respond in a friendlier manner. In

general, the couple appeared to be unaware of the reactions from others as evidenced by our conversation during the debriefing session. Troy and Celean stated that they did not notice any opposition during the observation.

Case Three: Harper and Danielle

I accompanied Harper and Danielle to a local fast food restaurant. I observed the couple from afar while the couple sat and ate at another table. The atmosphere of the restaurant was quiet and not a lot of people were present at the time of observation. The couple received some stares from some individuals as they entered the restaurant, but the stares decreased after they initially entered the restaurant. The couple appeared to be unaffected by their surroundings while eating and conversing with each other which I observed. During the debriefing session, Harper and Danielle stated that they did not notice any opposition.

Case Four: Forrest and Alicia

I accompanied Forrest, Danielle, and their three children to the local mall. During the first part of the observation, the couple separated to enter different stores. I decided to walk beside Alicia and the children. I noticed people looking at the children and engaging me with their eyes in an approving way. This made me wonder if they thought I was the mother of the children. Once I realized this, I decided to walk behind Alicia and the children. I then noticed what appeared to be disapproving stares. Once Forrest and Alicia reunited, I followed behind the couple to another store and the food court. I observed that the couple received stares from mostly older individuals.

In the food court, I sat at a different table from Forrest and Alicia and the children and observed the couple, children, and the environment. While eating in the food court, the couple did not appear to receive any stares. The couple appeared to be unaffected by their surroundings

while eating and conversing with each other and the children. During the debriefing session, the couple stated that they did not recognize any stares or opposition at any point during the observation.

Summary

The results of this study provided details of the lived experience of four heterosexual Black and White interracial couples with rich, thick description. Results were presented through an overview of the interview process and demographic information, a review of the research questions, results of case study analysis and cross-case analysis. Each couple's experiences and process of meaning-making was presented using the four research questions as a guide.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

Summary and Significance of the Study

As recently as October, 2009 in the Southern state of Louisiana, a judge refused to perform the marriage of a Black/White interracial couple. He justified his actions by a belief that bi-racial children will never be fully accepted by society. Clearly living as an interracial couple in the South brings with it special challenges.

The heterosexual Black and White couples in my research, all of whom lived in the Southern region of the United States, described how they experience themselves and their relationships with respect to race. They described both rejecting and accepting attitudes from family and friends about their courtship and eventual marriage. They described how attitudes within extended kinship networks softened over time. Often it was the introduction of children into the marriage, the birth of grandchildren, that moved previously rejecting kin towards acceptance of the interracially married couple.

Two of the White participants spoke of the vicarious racism they experienced through being interracially married. The White females in the study experienced the most opposition from Black females. All couples in the study experienced opposition to their marriages at some point from family members, friends, the community, or all of the above. All expressed concern about opposition their bi-racial children may encounter and were preparing them for the negative experiences they may have.

At least one White research participant described in depth, and with great feeling, how she has grown in her own awareness of what it means to be a White woman. She described her identification with Black people, her comfort with the Black community, and her appreciation for the greater power and privilege accorded her because of her White skin. Though the data

from this study did not allow me to place participants in a particular “stage” of racial identity development, this participant appeared to be quite advanced in her racial identity development, and she and her Black husband saw themselves as having a special opportunity to educate others about race and what it means to be Black, White, or bi-racial. Their understanding of race was complex.

Other participants understood race as more tied to the color of one’s skin. One couple experienced strong disagreement over how to describe their children racially. The White spouse considered their children to be bi-racial while the Black spouse considered their children to be Black. The Black spouse made reference to the “one drop” rule: if an individual has "one drop" of Black blood, he or she is considered Black.

It seems that the couples in this research found ways to increase their own solidarity in the face of critical community response to their Black and White union. Some used humor, mocking on-lookers or challenging them with such comments such as “Oh look, there’s a white person married to a white person over there.” Others described seeking out settings where they would be less likely to experience uncomfortable looks or comments. One participant, who was Black, shared how she feels more comfortable in a mixed setting of White and Black individuals. This is another example of how participants’ racial identities were complex. The color of her skin, her preferred socializing patterns and the way she thinks of herself and her marriage could not be assumed merely by looking at her or a photograph of she and her husband.

One of the clearest findings of my study was that my couples did not think of themselves as “interracially married”. They simply thought of themselves as “Harper and Danielle” or “Orlando and Chelsea”, a man and a woman who happened to fall in love. Repeatedly, the participants told me they do not “see color” when they look at their partners.

The observations allowed me to observe the couples in a public setting that was typical in their daily lives. My intent was to be able to observe public reaction to their Black and White pairing and then talk with the couple about their response. Despite the recent news story about the judge in Louisiana referenced above, I saw no extreme responses to my interracial married couples in our outings...stares and looks, but no rude comments or refusals to offer service, for instance. Three of the four couples reported during our de-briefing session that they were not aware of stares or looks. Interestingly, the couple that was aware of stares/looks was married the shortest length of time. This led me to wonder if “not noticing” had become a coping strategy developed by the couples married longer.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will compare the results of my study with the research of Killian (2001a & b), whose work provided sensitizing concepts for my own. This will be followed by a review of the strengths and limitations of my study and recommendations for future research and implications for clinicians who may see interracial couples for therapy.

Results in Comparison to Killian’s Studies

In this section I will compare results from my study with those from Killian (2001a & b), whose work provided sensitizing concepts for my own. I will also comment on ways in which my study expands on Killian’s research.

Similarities

Similarities between the themes found in Killian’s studies and this study include the following: (1) couple identity (C2 and C4), (2) supportive families (C1 and C3), (3) how opposition was addressed (all cases), and (4) “falling in love” (all cases). Couple identity in reference to Cases two and four is similar to Killian’s findings in that the White spouses in both cases were raised by families with prejudiced about people of the Black race in their families of

origin and chose not to emphasize this aspect of their family histories. The theme of supportive families was similar to Killian's results for Cases one and three in that members of their families were supportive of their marriages. Opposition was addressed in ways similar to Killian's findings for all cases in that Case one directly addresses people that make rude comments, Case two and the White spouse of Case four have chosen to limit and/or cease contact with opposing family members and friends, and Cases three and four avoid places in which they feel uncomfortable. The theme of "falling in love" was similar to Killian's findings across all cases in that the race of the person played no part in the process of dating and/ or the decision to marry. Furthermore, the process and context of love was the same as with same-race couples. As with Killian's findings, no evidence supported the myths or stereotypes pertaining to pathological or deviant motives such as rebellion against family of origin and/or economic or social elevation as the motivation for the establishment of Black and White interracial relationships.

Differences

The differences between the themes found in Killian's studies and this study are as follows: (1) "silenced histories/silent partners", (2) intersection between race and class, and (3) "partner sensitivity to racism."

In reference to the "silenced histories/silent partner" and "partner sensitivity to racism" themes, the White participants in this study were open to and vocal about discussing racial issues with their partners as they impacted their marriages and/or partners. The Black participants did not express the need to refrain from discussing these issues with their partners. Therefore, no evidence was found to support these themes. In addition, two of the White partners (C1 and C4) expressed being able to relate to their Black partners' experiences with racism in that they have experienced racism as well.

No evidence was found in the results to support the theme of intersection of race and class in this study. All evidence supported that across cases, participants did not experience this theme in their marriages, mostly due to the fact that both partners in this study have similar backgrounds and were close in level of education. The underlying concept of power was not found due to the White partners recognizing the differences between their experiences and the experiences of their Black spouses in reference to racism.

Expansion

The work of Killian was extended in my study through a focus on the concept of racial identity within the context of heterosexual Black and White interracial marriage. The focus in my work is relational. I explored how couples view their personal racial identity as well as the impact of that identity on the marital relationship, child rearing practices, and the development of appreciation of the racism experienced by the Black partner. My study suggests that it may be appropriate to develop a model of couple racial identity which focuses on meaning making within the marital dyad. This could, in turn, inform both further research on racial identity and clinical practice with heterosexual couples in Black and White dyads.

My experience with the analysis of the interviews presented in this study is that a focus on meaning making and marital process in the development of models is more appropriate than a focus on racial identity development when working with heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. This would be true of two reasons. First, using my interview data, I was not able to categorize research participants into “stages” of racial identity development. Either the research participants did not experience their reality in terms congruent with existing racial identity theories, or my questioning was not refined enough to draw those distinctions out. Secondly, my couples had many stories to tell about how race impacted their interaction with

kinship and friendship networks and engaged in lively discussion around the meaning of race in their parenting practices.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of the Study

The strengths of the study evolve from the concepts explored in the study, the unit of analysis (sample), and methodology. Racial identity explored in the context of Black and White interracial relationships provided the opportunity to examine how partners within Black and White heterosexual interracial marriages experience their relationships with respect to race, the overall marital dynamics of these couples, changes in their view of themselves and racism, changes in the ideals about racism they received from their families of origin, how they cope with opposition and lack of support from others, and how the effects of their experiences impact how they raise their bi-racial children.

Another strength of the study is based on the research sample. Studies utilizing heterosexual Black and White interracial couples who reside in the Southern part of the United States are very few, especially in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. Most studies regarding interracial couples have utilized couples from the MidWest and Western parts of the United States. Exploring the experiences of Southern heterosexual Black and White interracial couples provided the opportunity to understand the impact of living as an interracial couple in an area of the country where racism tends to be more overt and where the couple grew up seeing overt racism. Growing up in and within small, "close-knit" communities and cities in the South may make racism and opposition more pronounced than in urban areas of the United States.

A third strength of the study is the methodology. Due to the descriptive nature of qualitative research, the opportunity was provided to explore the "lived experiences" and

“meaning-making” in Black and White interracial relationships. Qualitative methodology provided a rich, thick description of these couples’ experiences to further the knowledge of the dynamics in Black and White interracial relationships. Because this study is one of the few exploring racial identity and heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, quantitative or mixed methods could not be utilized. Moreover, the use of quantitative methods would not have allowed the opportunity to understand the experiences of these couple in a descriptive manner or allow the participants to have a voice.

Limitations

The limitations of the study include the following: (1) generalization of results based on sample size, type of participants (Southern heterosexual Black and White interracial couples), and participation criteria, (2) possibility of self-selection, (3) social desirability, (4) interview data limitations, and (5) Observation limitations.

Generalization of results is limited due to the sample size in that only four couples were interviewed. The results are based on the "lived experiences" of the four couples who participated in this study and cannot be generalized to all heterosexual Black and White interracial couples nor interracial couples in general. In addition to the small sample size, the study was limited to Southern heterosexual Black and White interracial couples, which further decreases the possibility to generalize the results. Furthermore, due to the limits of participation criteria, the results of this study cannot be generalized based on the following: interracial couples married longer than 14 years, interracial couples who have children older than age 14, interracial couples who are interracially married more than once, interracial couples who have no children, and interracial couples living in other areas of the United States.

Another limitation includes interview data distortion due to characteristics of the interviewer and potentially distorted responses. Data distortion based on the interviewer may have occurred due to unknown effects of the interviewer such as personality and/or race of the interviewer on the couples' during the interviews and Observations. Data distortion based on distorted responses may have occurred due to participants' personal biases and/or anxiety.

A third limitation comes from the "self-selection" of couples in my study. The couples who willingly participated in my study may have been more comfortable discussing race than those couples who declined participation, or those couples where one partner wanted to participate but the other partner did not.

Other limitations are based on the effects of social desirability and interviewing the couple one time. Social desirability refers to the couples unknowingly altering their behavior during the interviews and Observations due to being observed and/or interviewed (Patton, 2002). Interviews and Observations were a "small glimpse" into the lives of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples which is a limitation due to many aspects affecting the interview process such as personal or intimate experiences occurring between the spouses and/or individuals such as an argument prior to interview; time of year, month, or day.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative study was basic research, which is to seek knowledge in an effort to understand phenomena. The results of this study have several implications for Marriage and Family Therapists working with heterosexual Black and White interracial couples. The following implications are provided with respect to the four couples that participated in the study. First, it should not be assumed that these couples' have difficulties in their relationships

due to racial difference. A major theme, both spoken and implied, by the couples in the study is that “race is not a factor in their marriages.” Unless, the context of race is identified as a problematic area for the couple, the focus of therapy should be problematic areas identified by the couple (e.g. communication difficulties, issues with trust, or lack of intimacy). Therapists may explore how the context of race impacts marital or relational dynamics if necessary. If after assessment racial differences appear to be contributing to the presenting problem, therapists should help couples explore how beliefs about race may be placing constraints on their relationship. Making racial oppression visible to the couple may help them unite against an outside force. Furthermore, therapists should refrain from using the term “interracial marriage or couple” as the majority of the couples in this study described themselves as a “normal couple” and distanced themselves from the “interracial” descriptor.

Second, racial identity within heterosexual Black and White interracial couples should be viewed in terms of how the spouses define and socially construct their racial identity. Each participant in this study defined their racial identity in different ways. However, it is not recommended to assume the White spouses of heterosexual Black and White interracial couples have not experienced a change in how they see themselves in the context of race. In addition, therapists should keep in mind that the racial development theories used in this study were merely used to provide a context for racial identity development. Therefore, it may serve no benefit to heterosexual Black and White interracial couples to be “placed” in a stage or have their racial identity development evaluated according to these theories.

Third, based on the results, it is evident that all heterosexual Black and White interracial couples in this study experienced opposition towards their marriage in various ways; however, methods of coping and/or how the couples addressed the opposition will differ from one couple

to another. Additionally, the length of marriage of the couple may be a contributing factor in how the couples react to opposition received and/or if the opposition is a major stressor for the couple. These areas may be explored in therapy with heterosexual Black and White interracial couples that have been married for a shorter length of time.

Recommendations for Future Research

An exploratory study such as mine raises many more questions than it answers. I would recommend additional qualitative investigations of racial identity among interracial marriages other than Black and White, such as those involving various combinations of Hispanic, Asian and Native American couples. The unique cultural history of each of these groups may inform how cultural history as well as family history inform couple racial identity, as would studies of interracial marriages outside of the United States.

Because I found parenting to be a revealing part of my interviews, I would suggest that future investigations include couples who have children of dating age, where children are beginning to pair off in ways that may eventually lead to sexual intimacy and marriage or marriage-type relationships. Couples who appear to be relaxed about issues of race in early stages of the family life cycle may find themselves more anxious about the issue as their children begin to pair off. A study that compares couples with late teen-agers with couples who have no children would be especially enlightening.

Using myself as the only observation tool in the observation part of my study was a limitation in that there was no additional observer (other than the couples themselves) against which to reference my observations. Therefore, it would be excellent to include videotaping of observations in the future. Blind observers could code interactions and couples could provide their reflections on videotapes played back for them.

Future studies also might further investigate the role of geography on couple process around race. Researchers might study couples where partners grew up in different as well as similar geographical areas.

While I did not believe it was appropriate to assign my research participants to a racial identity category based on data available from my interviews, future researchers might show couples racial identity descriptions from the Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) models and ask them to select a category that is most like them. Those self-assigned categories could then be compared with interview data similar to that presented in my study.

Finally, I would like to see studies of how therapists can helpfully adapt therapy services for couples in interracial marriages. What therapist characteristics and behaviors facilitate therapist-client alliance? How do therapists determine “when race matters” (Killian, 2001) in therapy and when to bring it up.

Continuation of Case Study

Cathy continued to research the yellow pages and the internet for therapists that specialized in or worked with interracial couples. Although, she did not find any resources that specifically recognized interracial couples, she decided to try a local Marriage and Family Therapist and talked with Eric about attending marital therapy. Eric agreed under one condition, if he or Cathy did not feel that the therapist could assist them with their marital issues, they would discontinue therapy. After a few sessions, Eric and Cathy appeared to enjoy their therapy sessions and agreed that although, the Marriage and Family therapist did not specialize in working with interracial couples, she was very knowledgeable about certain dynamics and was able to assist Eric and Cathy with underlying issues in their marital relationship that caused the lack of communication between them. The most notable reasons Eric and Cathy viewed

attending therapy as a benefit are the fact that the therapist understood that racial difference *was not* a factor in their marriage and they were treated as a "normal couple."

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Appendix A - Recruitment Flyer

Attention Interracial Couples!!!




Would you like the opportunity to participate in a research study concerning interracial relationships?

Please Read Further!!

Objective:

-  To understand the experience of being a Black and White couple and how cultural differences are negotiated within the relationship

Participation criteria:

-  Black and White interracial couples who have been married between 2 and 10 years
-  Must have at least one child
-  Willingness to be interviewed for 1 to 1.5 hours, allow researcher to accompany couple on an outing of the couple's choice (e.g. grocery store, shopping mall, etc.) for 30 minutes to 1 hour, and participate in a debriefing session for 30 minutes

For more information or to set-up an interview, please contact:

Jamie Williams, Doctoral Candidate @ (228) 594-3366

Email: LadyJ824@yahoo.com

-  This study will be conducted through Kansas State University and has been approved by the KSU Internal Review Board for Human Subjects 

Appendix B - Informed Consent

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Racial Identity and Black and White interracial couples: A Qualitative Study

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: July 17, 2007 **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:**
July 17, 2009

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Candyce Russell

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Jamie Osby Williams

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Candyce Russell -
phone: (785) 532-1489; Email: crussell@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: *(This information is for the subject in case he/she has questions, or needs or wants to discuss any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB)*

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 1 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 1 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: Kansas State University

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The overall purpose of this dissertation research project is to understand how racial identity effects the relationships of Black and White interracial couples and the effect of these relationships on racial identity development.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Participants will complete an audio-taped interview lasting 1 hr to 1.5 hrs and a participant observation of an outing of the couples' choice for 1 hr to 1.5 hrs. Childcare fees and/or any other fees accrued during participant observation will be provided for participants. The interviews will address questions concerning racial identity, any racial issues within the marriage, family and societal influences and/or reactions to interracial marriage, and any experiences with therapy the couple may have had. The participant observation will allow researcher to observe participants in order to view and understand experiences of Black and White interracial couples outside their relationship. A debriefing interview will follow participant observations. In addition, participants will be re-contacted throughout project and after completion to discuss results and conclusions.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: Those that are uncomfortable discussing their perceptions and experiences may choose not to answer one or more questions or to withdraw participation at any time.

LENGTH OF STUDY: Participants are expected to participate in the project a maximum of 4 hours.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Perceived discomfort of participants may come from the sensitivity of topics discussed during the interview process.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: By completing this project, participants have the opportunity to discuss their unique experiences and views about interracial marriage. Participants will assist society as a whole in understanding the strengths and difficulties involved with interracial relationships and families. Participants will also give a “voice” to Black and White interracial couples with hopes of decreasing racism and discrimination against these couples. Furthermore, the results of this project will help to increase the understanding of how marriage and family therapists can better help and work with interracial couples and families.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality will be maintained by all identifying information will be removed from transcripts of interviews. The write-up of results from study may use individual quotes, but quotes will not include any identifying information. All interviews (audiotapes, transcripts, consent forms, and computer disks) will remain locked in a file cabinet located in the researcher’s home. All researchers involved in this dissertation research project are mandated reporters of child or elder abuse.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: Not applicable to this research project.

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: Not applicable to this research project.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness to Signature (project staff): _____ Date: _____

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Appendix C - Demographic Questionnaire

Dissertation Research: Racial Identity and Interracial Couples Jamie Osby Williams, Doctoral Candidate Kansas State University

Demographic Questionnaire

Participant # _____

Gender: M or F (circle one)

Education:

- SOME HIGH SCHOOL
 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE/GED
 SOME COLLEGE
 2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
 SOME GRADUATE SCHOOL
 GRADUATE DEGREE (MS, PHD, MED, EDD)

Age: _____ Marriage Date: _____ # of children: _____

Ages of children: _____

Occupation: _____ # of years in occupation: _____

How do you identify yourself racially? (Please check one)

- AFRICAN AMERICAN/ BLACK
 CAUCASIAN/WHITE
 MULTIRACIAL - please list: _____

Appendix D - Interview Guide

1. How did you meet?
2. How long have you known each other? Before married?
3. What do you consider the major stressors of your married life thus far?
4. What do you consider the major positives of your married life thus far?
5. What does the term “racial identity” mean to you?
 - understanding one’s racial and ethnic heritage and/or identification with a racial reference group (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Smith, 1989)
 - racial reference group – the racial group that an individual makes a psychological connection with
 - part of self-concept
6. How do you identify yourself racially?
 - racial group – a group of people unified by common interests, beliefs, and traditions and/or physical characteristics (Mish, 2000; Smith, 1989)
 - racial reference group – the racial group that an individual makes a psychological connection with
 - How has the meaning of racial identity changed over time?
7. What values/beliefs from your family of origin have contributed to your racial identity?
8. What traditions/rituals from your family of origin have contributed to your racial identity?
9. What social influences have affected your racial identity?
 - school environment
 - neighborhood environment
 - religious/spiritual environment
 - early peer group (school-aged friends)
 - current peer group (friends including other interracial couples)
 - exposure to other cultures: dating
 - society
 - historical influences and references
10. How has your racial identity affected your marriage? How has your spouse’s racial identity affected your marriage?

- racial boundaries within the marriage
- rules within the marriage

11. How has your racial identity changed since you have been married?
12. What conflicts about race have you experienced within your marriage?
 - Tell me about a time when argued about race or got angry about a racial “word.”
 - How would the relationship be different if you switched races?
 - What was the most significant event that shaped the way race is dealt with in your marriage?
13. How has the intersection of race and class influenced your relationship?
14. How are these conflicts about race handled within your marriage?
15. How has your marriage strengthened due to racial difference?

Some interracial couples create a “couple identity”, which means both partners decide to emphasize one partner’s race over the other or the partners decide to de-emphasize both partner’s racial backgrounds and ethnic heritage to create a “new” identity (Killian, 2001a).

16. How have you chosen to create a couple identity?
 - describe an incident that illustrates how your couple identity was created
17. What factors contributed to the establishment of your couple identity?
18. How does your couple identity influence child-rearing decisions?
19. What was each of your families’ reaction to your marriage?
 - type of wedding ceremony
 - who was present at ceremony
 - How has each family of origin been most helpful and least helpful?
20. In what ways have you as a couple experienced opposition towards your marriage?
21. Was the opposition “surprising”? Support? Was the support “surprising”?
 - from society
 - isolation from your racial group
 - isolation from your racial reference group
 - isolation from other races
 - receiving negative or derogatory statements/remarks
 - receiving stares/awkward facial expressions

22. What are ways that you as a couple handle opposition towards your marriage?
 - experience as an interracial couple in the South
 - experience in other areas of the U.S.
23. How do you deal with the outside world's issues with race now compared to before you were a couple?
24. If I was involved in an interracial relationship and considering marriage, what advice would you offer me about interracial marriage?
25. Have you ever had counseling or therapy as a couple?
 - pre-marital counseling
 - therapy for racial issues within marital relationship
 - therapy for general marital issues: parenting, communication
26. How satisfied were you with that experience?
27. What suggestions do you have that could have improved your experience with therapy?

***Any other questions or comments that you would like to add?**

Appendix E - Case One – Complete Themes and Examples

Couple 1: Husband is Black and Wife is White	
Marital Dynamics	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
How couple Met: met through friends; wife in an abusive relationship prior to meeting husband	<p>H: We was, uh, how...I was actually in a relationship and she was in a relationship and um, she was at; I knew one of her friends, but I didn't know her, so I went to a friend's house one day and the relationship she was like in an abusive relationship and the relationship I was in wasn't going so well, either.... We had our problems, but, anyways, her spouse or boyfriend or whatever had jumped on her the day I had went over to her friend's house and I was over at her friend's house and she come in all crying and had bit her hand or something and that's how we met....</p> <p>H: I guess I comforted her from the situation that she had been in and I think the next day I was over there and I got her number.</p> <p>W: We just became friends.</p> <p>H: ...and we became friends and then friends led to boyfriend and girlfriend and boyfriend and girlfriend led to this. (laughs)</p>
Positives in Marriage	<p>W: The major positive...that would be...</p> <p>H: We both...we require our kids to have uh...a father and a mother figure in the home and</p> <p>W: ...in the marriage</p> <p>W: That he's my half and he can do what I can't, you know what I'm sayin'?</p> <p>H: If she, for some reason, can't carry the load, she knows that I will...that I'm her backbone and I'll do it.</p> <p>W: He's my best friend. I can call him with anything and just to know that he's thought enough of me for marrying me and be there for me, you know what I'm sayin'?</p> <p>H: I wasn't...I didn't marry you to be there for you, just you. Our marriage deal is a package deal. I married you to be there for you all...</p> <p>I: Meaning the children...her children.</p> <p>W: Right.</p> <p>H: Right. Knowing that they didn't have a father figure and, you know, and they father didn't really do much for them and that played a big role in it also.</p> <p>W: And also, our kids.</p> <p>H: Besides that, we was in love, you know.</p>
Stressors in Marriage	<p>W: Well, I'll tell you what I stress out about. It's money and time that we don't have for each other "cause I like some time together.</p> <p>H: Right and I'm the type...</p> <p>W: He's outdoorsy.</p> <p>H: I can't just sit in the house and...</p> <p>W: I'm homebound most of the time.</p>
Switched Races	<p>H: I have a lot of people in my family that is married to someone that's another race.</p> <p>W: Not his immediate family...talking about distant family....</p>

	<p>H: Not immediate family but like second, third, cousins, mainly.</p> <p>H: I really can't answer that question "cause I don't know...I mean, I'm not White and I haven't been around too many couples that...where the guy was White and female was Black so....I really can't say....</p> <p>W: I think it would be a lot different...</p> <p>H: I didn't say it wouldn't be different, but I can't tell you how it would be different.</p> <p>W: Um, that's taking to a different train of thought because I wouldn't be actually be changing our relationship, it would be changing my views and..."cause then I would be the Black woman...and I can't relate to them. I don't relate them on that... I'm not very...I have Black girlfriends that are women but my views and their views are completely different...I butt heads with them...like on issues with child rearing and, um, dating, and....</p> <p>I know the differences in racism...</p> <p>...I am a White woman and you may think that I don't face racism because I am a White woman. I kinda catch myself when I go out sometimes alone...I almost want to say that it's like a relief that I don't have that baggage. Because when we go out, [referring to outings with husband] there's stares or whatever but when I go out with my children, it's even worse...like, "cause they're wondering, 'Are those her children?'... [referring to the opposition from the public].</p> <p>W: I just really...I don't know that I could relate at this point in my life...to being a Black woman.</p> <p>H: I think if I were a White guy, that, I probably would get more stares from male White guys, more White males, and more White females. That's just my opinion, now, I don't that that really would happen, but it just seems like it.</p> <p>W: And, you know, I think it's a lot different when I see a Black female with White husband or couple or whatever. I kinda view it different than when I see White women with Black men. I think it's almost kinda...awesome, just because, I kinda think it would be harder for a White man to...I think they may would face more racism than a White woman with a Black man. I mean, as far as the difficulties because...I don't know.... That's a deep question though...I really like that question "cause it's gonna make me think about it....</p>
<p>Intersection of Race and Class – has not influenced marriage due to similar family backgrounds</p>	<p>H: We pretty much came from similar, um, similar families...classes "cause neither one of us is rich! (laughs)</p> <p>W: I don't think we are poor, we're just...we're not rich and we're not poor.</p> <p>H: Both sides are hardworking families, I mean, they all about having something, so...I mean, I guess that influence us to want to have...or motivate us to want to have stuff in our life.</p> <p>W: To realize the value of a dollar.</p>
<p>Strengths due to Interracial Marriage – has not strengthened</p>	<p>H: I don't think it really...strengthened us racially or made us weaker...I would still be the same person if I was with a Black woman or married to a Black woman.</p> <p>W: The way that it's made it stronger is because....</p>

	<p>H: I don't think a Black woman would put up with some of the stuff that you put up with...as far as...</p> <p>W: That's a good answer...but I don't necessarily know that I believe that that's a race thing and not just...I think it's a culture thing. The way that they...and the difference in me. I put up with a lot, like, well I think he does as well, but I think it's strengthened us because we know each other's weakness...we know what we can get away with. You teach people how to treat you, and, whether White, Black, whatever....</p>
Racial Identity	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Definition – What does racial identity mean to you?	<p>W: When I think of racial identity, I'm thinking the history of the person...um...identifies them from one person to another. I don't know if that's what you're looking for.</p> <p>H: Oh, it don't mean nothing to me because I don't see, I mean, I don't see any race. I see different race, but it don't mean anything to me, you know what I'm sayin'?</p> <p>H: I mean, it don't matter to me if you purple, red, blue or ...I know it means something. I can tell you what it means, but, personally it don't mean anything to me.</p> <p>W: Right. I think what he is sayin' is that he doesn't want to be labeled.</p>
How do you Racially Identify?	<p>H: I mean, it don't matter to me if you purple, red, blue or ...I know it means something. I can tell you what it means, but, personally, it don't mean anything to me.</p> <p>W: Right. I think what he is sayin' is that he doesn't want to be labeled.</p> <p>W: I'm proud of my White race.</p>
Effect of Racial Identity on Marriage/change in Racial Identity since Marriage; racial slurs	<p>H: She probably could say the 'N' word and get away with it.</p> <p>W: But I don't. I choose not...I have family members that do and he'll even say...I have this one particular cousin who is um, White and she uses it like...She would identify more with Black people than she would with White people.</p> <p>W: I don't use it period because I don't like it either way. I just feel like it's just a way that people have been able to label Black people and they not even know it. Just in my relationship, in life in general...just, I just choose not to go there...it was just a rule before my husband with my children or with my friends that I don't appreciate it and...''cause I just feel like that's a, um, way of enslaving people too...you know what I mean?...a way that they can still be enslaved, not just by the White man, I don't meant that, I just mean in periodically. So, I choose not to...but I really don't think there's anything that we've...do you...my love? (talking to husband) We're just people.</p> <p>H: I don't see any race.</p> <p>H: I mean, she's not the first White girl I ever dated. I mean, I wouldn't treat a White girl any different than I would a Black girl when I was coming up.</p> <p>H: We've experienced a lot.</p> <p>W: I've made changes like I cook cornbread, before as I didn't want to...and I speak when I go...it's out of my comfort zone, it's very hard for me to do that ''cause I feel vulnerable to go into this room of people I</p>

	<p>don't know and just be like 'HI, I'm the White girl (laughs)...the snowbunny!' (jokingly)... But I do it because I know that it makes him feel...he wants a bubbly wife and a wife that's very outgoing and, you know...</p> <p>H: I need someone like me.</p> <p>W: A people person...right. And I would rather stay in my house watching Lifetime to be honest. I mean, I'm just very...</p> <p>H: (interrupts) Baby, why don't we go to the country and ride four-wheelers or, or something, go fishing or something...</p> <p>W: He's pretending like he's me...</p> <p>H: Uh, she always come up with an excuse... 'I really don't feel good' or 'We got to get all the kids dressed...' or something...it's always something...</p>
<p>Change in Views and Ideals about Race</p>	<p>H: I pretty much do [referring to seeing racism the same before and after marriage]. I disagree with prejudice, racism...I disagree with all of it because I think we all pretty equal. I still have the same beliefs I had when I was younger.</p> <p>W: I love Orlando and I love Black people, but there's (pause) a very...I love my race and sometimes I feel like we get picked on so to speak. So, I don't necessarily relate a lot of times with things that he may would call racist that I may not would. For example, once upon a time there were these people who were trying to get checks for their families, from their ancestors being slaves. We were going to have to pay for 'em...my as a White citizen. And I felt like...that's me paying for something that somebody else did that just happened to be White. You know what I'm saying? I don't get that... 'cause that was something that...and it didn't even happen to him, I mean, he would be getting a check and it wasn't even something that happened to him...it was something that happened 200 years ago.... And as far as how it's has changed me, I don't feel like that has changed (pause) I don't think it's really changed me...who I am.</p> <p>W: A lot of people, a lot of women that I know really down their race when the date Black men...they like, forget about their White race and I have not...</p> <p>H: That's because most of them aren't accepted...they family disowns them.</p> <p>W: Maybe so, maybe the culture difference because I'm accepted within my own environment...</p> <p>H: Both of families accept each other, but most of the people that you're talking about that don't want to have anything else to do with...</p> <p>W: Like [names persons]? Their families really kinda turned their backs on them...</p> <p>H: Yeah, their racist, their family's racist and they don't agree with the bi-racial...</p> <p>W: I guess so...So, I will have to say that mine has stayed the same within my marriage. I've been accepted, though, outside my marriage....</p>
<p>Influences</p>	
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Descriptive Examples</p>
<p>Social</p>	<p>H: Yes. I have a couple of brothers...umm...</p>

	<p>W: Date them or just ...what I mean is (laughing) there's a stigma behind a Black man dating a White women. There is always...</p> <p>H: You still want me...Brothers, cousins, friends. I know a lot of people who have dated out of their race.</p> <p>I: Yeah, that's the question.</p> <p>H: On my side of my family, no body as far as just men. I'll put it like that.</p> <p>H: The women, which is probably like most Black women, have a problem with a White guy, or a Black guy dating somebody who is not their race, especially a White girl.</p> <p>H: I have a lot of people in my family that is married to someone that's another race.</p> <p>W: Not his immediate family...talking about distant family....</p> <p>H: Not immediate family but like second, third, cousins, mainly.</p> <p>H: I mean, she's not the first White girl I ever dated.</p>
<p>Values and Beliefs; traditions/rituals from Family of Origin</p>	<p>W: What she wants to know is what beliefs did we bring to the table for our, like, the differences. I mean there is a lot of differences, but I don't know if it's um...for instance, I don't know if this will even be...cooking...the way that he does it and the way that I do it, it's just very different. Because, a for instance, rice...he cooks rice open. You just pour water in there and pour the rice in there and boil it till it's done. Me, I measure, 2 parts water, one part rice. It's just different.</p> <p>H: And another thing...</p> <p>W: Or peas. He put some kind of fatback in it. (laughs)</p> <p>H: Peas. Greens. Us Black people, you have to have corn bread. You can't cook that and not have cornbread.</p> <p>H: ...and that's like the real big pet peeve of mine is she cooks like some vegetables and no cornbread. Then, I'm like...</p> <p>W: But my parents never, they did, I don't want to say never, "cause my dad loves corn bread, but I mean, it wasn't like every time he cooks he made corn bread. Well, his mother, Orlando's mother, every time she cooks, she cooks a bread and so when I cook and I'm not a corn bread person. I like White bread, but I don't like...I just don't. I'm not a bread person, but he is so.... When I cook, it just seems like a chore to me to have to go to the other step to make something else</p> <p>H: Discipline, could play another role. Like sometimes where I probably feel that the child might need a spanking. She might feel that he need time out or something.</p> <p>W: ...or a vice versa 'cause he received a lot of spankings growing up and...he's often said that if his parents had talked to him instead of just spanking him that he would have done a lot better. Have you not said that?</p> <p>H: Yeah, like, I probably would have done a lot better with them just talking to me...it would just make me angry that I got a spanking. Well, let me call...it was called whooping as well. (laughs) But, uh, sometimes I feel like it is something is that bad where I needed to a whooping like if I forget to do a chore or something, then they could of just came and talked to me. They could have just talked to me, but my parents, well, my father basically was the type where he believed in a good whooping....</p>

H: Well, her people, like, you know, we have to uh...like when we go to church, you know, most of us dress like...dress up to go to church. Where, my church...the church I grew up in was a Baptist Church, so most everybody that went to church, they come...all dressed up or whatever...
W: He liked his church. I like my church.... He just doesn't feel like he gets fed at my church and I certainly don't feel like I get fed at his. Something else, too...what else do we do?...um...Even in just going out, like today, he would press his clothes and I may not...I did today, but I mean, I may not...that's just...everything's gotta be matching or
H: I mean, I might just throw on some...throw on clothes, but they're gonna look decent...
W: (talking over M)...his 'throw on clothes' and my 'throw on clothes' are a lot different, you know what I'm sayin'?
W: My parents just didn't iron. They just didn't. If you go to my momma's right now, you see the iron used, but...
H: That's just the difference in the environment that we grew up in....
W: If you walk in a room, you are supposed to speak. That's a big thing. If you go to his family's and you come through that door, you are supposed to speak to everybody in the house.
W: The culture that I grew up in, you don't speak until spoken to.
W: I've made changes like...I speak when I go...it's out of my comfort zone, it's very hard for me to do that 'cause I feel vulnerable to go into this room of people I don't know and just be like 'HI, I'm the White girl (laughs)...the snowbunny!' (jokingly).... But I do it because I know that it makes him feel...he wants a bubbly wife and a wife that's very outgoing and, you know...

Reactions: Acceptance and Opposition

Themes	Descriptive Examples
Acceptance: Couple Identity and Child-rearing	<p>W: Ya'll are within the Black race and I can admire you for wanting to uphold your race, but I feel just as strongly about mine. I...you hear about White girls or I've heard the saying that 'they're trying to be Black' or...and I've seen girls that I feel that way about, but I don't...I'm proud of my White race...I don't deny that. I would not want to be Black or Indian or any other race. It's not...I'm just proud of who I am and I want my children to be proud of who they are...it's not be proud of one race over another. I wouldn't want my child to say 'Oh, I'm White' and not count...(pause) I don't want that label, you know, I don't want to discredit one race or the other because I love mine and of course he loves his, so why can't there be a compromise of both where our child can be a little bit of both? ...for him to love me, he has to love the White.</p> <p>W: I think that our kids are pretty well-rounded because they have had a good dose of both sides and they will tell you 'I'm White and Black'...and that probably has a lot to do with me because I never fill-out a form, ever in any of my childrens' life where I put White or Black alone. I either mark 'em both or I'll put bi-racial. Because I feel like I'm betraying someone by doing that....</p> <p>H: Biracial is not a race. He's Black. Like I said a while ago, I think my opinion which I have been taught in school that Black race has the most</p>

	<p>dominant traits. Genes or traits or whatever.</p> <p>H: It don't bother you that your kids have White on their birth certificate, then.</p> <p>W: No, it doesn't. I mean...</p> <p>H: It bothers me because I think it should be Black.</p> <p>W: I think it should be a race of their own. They're neither Black nor White.</p> <p>H: They Black. They're Negroes.</p> <p>W: That's what we disagree on.</p>
<p>Families' Reaction to Marriage</p>	<p>H: Yeah, we did it in a church.</p> <p>H: Yes, [referring to all family members being present at the wedding] it was like...(laughs)</p> <p>W: White folks on one side...</p> <p>H: And Black folks on the other side...</p> <p>W: It was so funny!</p> <p>W: Mine was [referring to her family accepting husband]. I don't really how his reacted since I had children. It may not have been a race thing as much as a...</p> <p>H: They accepted her. They wanted to make sure that I was making the right decision.</p> <p>W: I don't think it was so much as my color as it was my baggage...so to speak (laughs).</p> <p>W: And another plus for him is, most of the men in his family that are married, are still married...that was a big thing with me. I would have married him anyway, but I'm just saying, his mother and father have been married for thirty something years...Uncles have all been married for (pause) one time, to the same woman for long periods of time and that just showed me that he knew...you know, to stick it threw....</p> <p>W: In his family, I don't really...they've all accepted me and they love me and I know that the situation...our relationship began very complicated. I mean it wasn't complicated...I'll just share a little.... We started dating and we decided to go our separate ways. He had a relationship with someone else and anyways, I found out I was pregnant and we were not together the whole pregnancy and she was born and it was like it just clicked all of a sudden that we became closer. Anyway, three weeks later she passed away from SIDS and his family just...I had never even met 'em and they just loved on me and just accepted me and just, I guess because of my pain, because of, you know. I don't know how else to put it. They accepted...from that day, there was no more, 'She's the White girl or the snowbunny or' I'm their snowbunny. But I mean they look at me as a person, I guess maybe we connected...I guess that's just how God worked it out 'cause I believe in our Lord Jesus and I feel like He just worked it out for me and Orlando 'cause they may not have accepted me as they do now if it hadn't of...if everything had fell into place the way it did. So, I think that they see me as a person and not as a color or a race and that's why they've been so accepting of me, so to speak.</p>
<p>Support from Families of Origin</p>	<p>W: In his family, I don't really...they've all accepted me and they love me...</p>

and Others	<p>W: Mine was [referring to her family accepting husband].</p> <p>W: Our childrens' school is very...and you wouldn't think...they go to [name of school] and it's, like, ninety (pause) I think it is, ninety percent White...</p> <p>H: We don't get that 'look', like, at [name of school], like at the ball games...</p> <p>W: Very accepting people out there and...</p> <p>H: They're really good...</p>
Opposition: from Society	<p>H: I had already been down that road, so it really didn't even bother me. I was prepared for it, basically...so to speak. [referring to opposition being a surprise to the couple]</p> <p>W: Yeah...</p> <p>H: The women [in husband's family], which is probably like most Black women, have a problem with a White guy, or a Black guy dating somebody who is not their race, especially a White girl.</p> <p>H: They play a big part like when you are in public as far as, I mean, you will find more Black females giving you that look than White people giving you that look.</p> <p>W: Because with a White thing.... Because I...I don't...I've told him many, many times. I don't feel comfortable going to...my husband's young and he does go out occasionally and I don't feel comfortable going to the type of environment that he goes in because there is so much...you can feel the tension in the room when we walk through the door. Just like...</p> <p>H: I might notice it but she might not. You know.</p> <p>H: Say for instance we went to a club out of town...I mean the tension won't be as bad. But, around here, most of your clubs are like mostly Black, the clubs that I attend or go to, most of it is Black people, so we got all these Black women up in there that are.... She gets most of the tension from the Black women....</p> <p>W: For one, I don't think, I don't know statistically saying, but just from the people that I know, Black men don't marry, to me, my personal opinion, do not marry as quickly or as rapidly in relationships as White men. This is my own observations. The White men that I know pretty much are all married. The Black men don't want that commitment and when you see a Black man married outside of his race, I can see where it would 'cause some [tension].</p>
Handling Opposition/Coping	<p>W: It doesn't bother him as much as it bothers me.</p> <p>H: It depends on tha...I'm not just gonna let 'em (pause) say what they want to say and front off on me in a disrespectful way. Now, if they...if they, so to speak, if they walking passed us, they looking at us weird and whispering to each other, you know, then I might stop, and be like...</p> <p>W: It depends...if it's a man doing that, he'd probably act that way, but if it's a female, he leaves it to me.</p>
Advice	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Advice about Being Involved in an	H: Hold your head high and be prepared for whatever comes your way and...

<p>Interracial Relationship</p>	<p>W: I think people who are interracially married have to be very diverse “cause you got so much differences, just in the culture, “cause we were raised, just a lot alike, just in a lot of different...</p> <p>H: Don’t bow down to nobody, so to speak, like if somebody...</p> <p>W: Be proud of who you are...</p> <p>H: If somebody down you, saying that you’re wrong for marrying a White guy or whatever, I mean, you hold your head high and tell them something that might help them (pause) realize that, ‘Oh, I never thought of it that way’, you know....</p> <p>W: Like, I’ve been asked why (pause) why did I...and it’s just, the person, I just tell ‘em I’m in love with the person not necessarily the color.</p> <p>H: It was a challenge for me...I don’t know how to explain it, but...</p> <p>W: But you were attracted to White women too...</p> <p>H: I was attracted to White women, but at the same time it was a challenge too, because I kinda got a kick out of...when I was coming up, I would have to lean down so their parents wouldn’t ride by and...you know...because every White person I’ve dated parents’ didn’t accept the fact that they were dating a Black boy....</p>
<p>Counseling Experience</p>	
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Descriptive Examples</p>
<p>Counseling</p>	<p>W: We had pre-marital (pause) from my priest. We only went like, twice.</p>

Appendix F - Case Two – Complete Themes and Examples

Couple 2: Husband is White and Wife is Black	
Marital Dynamics	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
How couple Met: met working together	<p>H: I, uh. The first time I met her I worked for [name of grocery store] and it was on a Sunday, wasn't it? And I was bagging groceries and she was the lady in front of me that was checking them out. That's the first time we met.</p> <p>W: I remember it a little bit more than that. [Name of co-worker] and I...I was getting ready to go on vacation and um...he started that week and I kind of looked back and, 'Oh, we got a different guy back there.' I said to myself, you know. You kinda, 'He's kinda cute.' 'He's kinda cute, though. He's kinda cute.' But, you know, you didn't really think too much about it because you know, this is still the South and there is probably not a chance that that's gonna go anywhere, so I went on vacation and came back and lo and behold, he was still there! (laughs)</p>
Positives in Marriage	<p>W: Well, um...I think uh, being with Troy has given me an opportunity, a window, a first-hand look into what it is to be with someone of...outside your race. And so you go beyond thinking this is a person and their skin color is different from mine to what that person is...you see the person of their heart so you no longer see them for the skin color.</p> <p>W: And the fact that we have two beautiful boys that are um, I mean I really cannot ask for better kids.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">H: Oh yeah. She can talk, now.</p> <p>W: ...growing up, you know, my Dad was in the military. He was in the Vietnam war and so he had a lot of visions coming back and uh, it was his way or no way. So, um, there wasn't a lot of chances of you expressing how you really felt. So when I got with Troy and he actually let me say it without any fear of him getting upset and getting angry and screaming his head off. Troy just let me be, let me talk and I haven't shut up since...(laughs).</p> <p>H: As far as the positives on my end, uh, as far as race, I don't really see an issue with that. Well, let me rephrase that. Um, positive doesn't really include race. I just, I'm with a woman and she's my wife and because of that, you know, there's positive stuff being married because, you know, we have a relationship together...race is not an issue.</p>
Stressors in Marriage	<p>W: (laughs) But that, um, that's basically the only thing that I can call...I feel that [Troy being on the computer a lot] cuts a little bit in family time and the boys are getting older and um, you know, they're activities, interests are changing.... You know, I just want him to have a little bit more of a well-roundedness in his, his...I guess his social outlook. I don't want him to just stay all about technical stuff. I want him to be able to have a little bit about the arts, a little bit about entertainment, a little bit about what makes women the way they are....</p>
Conflicts about Race in Marriage-No	<p>H: Never have. Never have [had a conflict about race]. Usually we just laugh about it.</p>

conflicts	<p>W: I don't think we would...we respect each other enough to where you know you don't even...actually you stop seeing a White person. You stop seeing me as a...yeah, you just see Troy. ...It's not Troy the White person that did this or this White man that did this.... It's like uh, when I was having [our son] it was, 'Troy, YOU did this to me! You gave me all this pain.' So we never really had any conflict where we had say, well where Troy would look and say, 'Well, you know, you nigger,' or anything like that. We've never had that...we've never even crossed the line because I guess we respect each other enough to know that that's just not something we need to do to...you don't need to go to that level in order to make someone feel bad. We do that enough on our own...(laughs), you know...I don't feel we've ever had any problems where we ...it was a conflict because of race.</p>
Intersection of Race and Class – has not influence marriage due to starting out together and equal financially	<p>H: On our end, we are both pretty much dirt poor (laughs) so...It wasn't like I was rich and she wasn't or she was and I wasn't. W: His family had more than my family had. H: Not much more. W: No, not much more.... That's what it was for me. It wasn't how much he had because like I said, when we first got together, we didn't have anything. We were sleeping on the floor on an air mattress. H: Yeah. She had a living room suite and we would take it...take the cushions off of that and put a sheet on it and sleep in the bedroom in the apartment.... We didn't have no furniture. W: We didn't get a television set until after we had been together, his mom bought it, and then the power went out, so we couldn't even watch it. We even used to...to entertain ourselves....</p>
Strengths due to Interracial Marriage	<p>W: Well, it makes you stronger...a lot stronger...you don't take everything at face value anymore. You look beyond the surface. H: I wouldn't know the other side of that because I've never been married to anybody else or been with anybody else other than her, you know. I wouldn't know the other side. I wouldn't know the difference between this or that, you know? W: It was more about developing a relationship....</p>
Racial Identity	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Definition – What does racial identity mean to you?	<p>W: It don't really mean anything. I mean, I don't really identify with any particular race. I try to take some from everybody that I'm around, pick up a little...if they have something that I admire, I try to incorporate that into my personal beliefs. H: Yep.</p>
How do you Racially Identify?	<p>W: I really don't say I identify more with Black, or I identify with Whites or more with any other race. I feel that I'm simply Clean. H: Yep.</p>
Effect of Racial Identity on Marriage/change in Racial Identity since Marriage	<p>W: I never grew up like Troy, to hate honkies. (laughs) H: Okay, my dad was like I said extremely prejudiced and whenever he would see anybody Black or anybody, they are Blackbirds. That was a way of not saying nigger, but it was saying 'A Blackbird's over there' or whatever. It was kind of strong, but that's the way I grew up and ever since</p>

	<p>I was a little kid, I heard that and whenever I was growing up and all that in a household that you hear it all the time, anything racist, Black people are bad and all that, then whenever I got with her, I still have some of them thoughts of, like that, but over time, it took a while, you know, what you were saying earlier, when I first got together, it's not that I did hate people that were Black...I just had the idea that it was wrong to be together, but over time, I don't care and so in a way, my thoughts have changed.</p>
Change in Views and Ideals about Race	<p>W: I have a different perspective because sometimes I'll be in a Black part of town and I'll feel uncomfortable. Like, I need to hold my purse a little bit tighter or if I'm surrounded by a group of Black people or even if it's a group of White people, I'm still, 'Okay?' I'm more comfortable in a mix of people than I am if it's all totally one and I don't know if that has anything to do with race or about personal protection.... But, um, most of the people that I know that I would consider as acquaintances are all White. I have very few Black friends.... so I'm more comfortable with older, people that are older than me, than I am people my age or younger... I don't feel like I have to put on a show when I'm with the older ones versus somebody my age because when you are with someone your own age....</p> <p>H: When I first....as a kid I was taught that Black people were evil, pretty much, you know? And now, the way I look at it now, everybody, everybody in the world from one end of the world to the other end of the world as the same problems... just having the same problems unifies everybody in a way. That's why I don't see that being together is a big race issue, you know?</p>
Influences	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Social	<p>W: ...growing up it was never a problem with my parents because we had been around people where, um, Black and White wasn't really an issue. I mean, we lived all in a White neighborhood, so that's basically all I knew. I mean, cause, growing up, I thought Q101 was the only radio station there was to listen to. I didn't realize there was ones for Black...that WQIC was for Black.</p> <p>H: No. Um, I broke the mold on my family. [referencing other family members marrying interracially]</p> <p>W: I mean, my sisters are all married...I have two sisters who are married to White guys and I have a brother that's with a White woman.</p> <p>H: She was the first one to do it in her family...(inaudible)</p> <p>W: I have two other sisters [but] I led the way. That's how you do it. (laughs)</p>
Values and Beliefs; traditions/rituals from Family of Origin	<p>H: When I first....as a kid I was taught that Black people were evil, pretty much, you know?</p> <p>H: Anyway, so we didn't eat pork in my house because my dad didn't eat it and growing up I never ate it. Never ate bacon, never ate pork so whenever she cooks it, I'm like, 'I don't really like it.' Because I don't like it as much as beef because I always ate beef. But, she is having to change her way of cooking because of that and growing up, also another thing, my parents never spiced up a lot of food. They just cooked it and threw it in a pot, it's done and you eat it. You know? She spices everything and I'll be, 'It's too</p>

	<p>much salt!’ and I have to tell her.</p> <p>W: I mean, we would do an anniversary party for my parents and I tried to give one for Troy and myself so kids eventually will take it over so I don’t have to do it all. I do ‘just because’ parties for my boys, you know, right after school is getting out and I’ll do ‘em a party and I’ll do the cake and I’ll make up the icing myself and decorate the whole thing but as far as any traditions of...</p>
Reactions: Acceptance and Opposition	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Acceptance: Couple Identity and Child-rearing	<p>H: Oh yeah. We don’t try to push one [race] over the other.</p> <p>W: I want my kids to understand both their heritage but I’m not going to say, ‘I think you need to identify more with this one or with that one. You need to take some of [the] qualities from them versus this one right here.’</p> <p>H: She does do this, now, which kind of really makes me upset sometimes, is that she, in the car, will play whatever music she wants to play. She won’t play my music...like...see, mine is like old rock and roll.</p>
Families’ Reaction to Marriage	<p>W: Oh wow, this is gonna be the one and um, so, my parents never had any big problems. Troy’s parents had some problems with it...</p> <p>H: Oh yeah. Yeah, they did.</p> <p>W: But his brother first realized that I was Black, he came to the store with Troy...Troy and his dad, they came and [his brother] was so disgusted...that he turned around and walked out the store.... His sister that was in the military. She didn’t mind [but] his mom, oh my God. His mom.... His mom called me everyday, especially when I found out I was pregnant, she called everyday and literally did everything short of cussing me out...She was gonna give me \$10,000 to abort my baby and give him \$10,000.... She didn’t have any problem with us being together. Her problem was that she didn’t want us to have any kids.</p> <p>H: Or to lock in that relationship.</p> <p>W: I think that after a while before his mom died, she did tell me that she thought I was the best thing that happened to her son...and his brother, before he died, told me that would do anything for me if I broke down somewhere or needed anything, just call him and he would come and do it....</p> <p>H: [referencing wife’s family] They didn’t have any issue with the fact that she got with a White guy. No issue on that. Only issue that they had was we was together, that she had a child without marrying the person first.</p> <p>W: ...and so they withdrew...</p> <p>H: Yeah. [referencing couple getting married at courthouse]</p> <p>W: Just me, Troy, and [first son]. [referencing who attended marriage ceremony]</p>
No Support from Families of Origin	<p>W: (laughs) I mean, because, it was extremely hard. I mean we were totally on our own. No help from anybody.</p> <p>H: ...we had no support from our families at all until...</p> <p>W: ...after [first son] came. My parents, they really didn’t help. I mean they didn’t support me...I mean they didn’t really say they [have] anything against me, but they didn’t support it either.</p>
Opposition: from	<p>W: ...[Husband’s best friend] told me that he felt that if Troy and I did get</p>

Society and Family	<p>together that it would be better for me because as a Black woman I would be lifting myself up out of a negative situation...where if it had of been a White woman getting with a Black guy, she would have been bringing herself down and in his heart of hearts, I truly believe that he thought he was giving me a compliment and saying...and saying...giving me his...that it was okay for Troy and I to get together. He actually said that if a Black guy, if she, uh, if a Black guy married a White woman, that the White woman would be bringing herself down....</p> <p>W: Before we came in together and she [referring to an elderly woman] saw that we were together and I said since that time she let it be known that I was uh, betraying my race by being with Troy. I get that one or uh, I get a lot of old people...I've had some White women and Black women that have flirted with my husband in front of me,</p> <p>W: You know, and I've had some White women say, 'Well, I don't believe...I think you're taking a good White man away from us.'</p> <p>W: Yeah, yeah, because when we first got together there was hardly any interracial couples in '94. I mean we couldn't even get married here. The judge would not marry us here. We had to go to [a neighboring state] to get married.</p>
Handling Opposition/Coping	<p>W: I think, to me, it's...I'd rather know who hates me than be in someone's face and think that they like me they're all behind my back going, 'That nigger with that White person right there. I gotta cross that's gonna be in their yard.'</p> <p>W: Sometimes Troy and I will see a couple that is the same color, like two White people and they're looking at us I'll go, (whispering), 'Look! There's a White couple! Oh! They're together!'</p>
Advice	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Advice about Being Involved in an Interracial Relationship	<p>W: You really have to be a strong person to be able to withstand the hate and the attention that you get everywhere you go.</p> <p>W: Make sure you're strong and you can deal with it.</p> <p>H: Oh, yeah. It would be easier if you moved to a [place] more [accepting of interracial couples].</p> <p>W: Yeah, it would be easier, true but then you wouldn't know exactly how people felt about you.</p>
Counseling Experience	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
No Counseling	<p>I: have you all ever had any therapy, counseling or therapy as a couple?</p> <p>H: Nope. Never.</p>

Appendix G - Case Three – Complete Themes and Examples

Couple 3: Husband is Black and Wife is White	
Marital Dynamics	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
How couple Met: met working together	<p>W: We met at a restaurant that we were both working at...</p> <p>H: Yeah, I was uh, the kitchen manager and she was the hostess.</p>
Positives in Marriage	<p>W: Love, first of all.</p> <p>H: Yeah, relationship and our kids.</p> <p>W: Good communications and we're both real family oriented.</p> <p>H: We've got a lot in common. Like, she likes to fish and I like to fish. We ride four-wheelers and you, know, we just do a lot of stuff together.</p> <p>W: We do it all as a family. You know, we're really. We spend a lot of time together other than work and we worked together for a long time.</p> <p>H: Yeah, we worked together for a long time. (laughs)</p>
Stressors in Marriage	<p>W: Raising children. (laughs) Raising children is hard because I mean, we never disagree in front of the children, but we, you know, talk about things and we don't usually ever without the other one's opinion, we don't agree to let one of the children do anything without talking with one another and I think it's kind of stressful sometimes because we see differently, you know, sometimes and I think that's where sometimes some of the stress comes in at.</p> <p>H: Well, early on in our relationship there was, you know, how the public was, you know, because a lot of times you're like, 'Man, what is he looking at?' or 'What is she looking at?' or, you know, it got frustrating then.</p> <p>W: That's been 16, 17 years ago and it was stressful to go out in public, you know, because sometimes we would get a lot of stares. Never really were we approached or had anything directly said to us, but we, you know, kind of felt uncomfortable sometimes. We would tend to go out of town when we were first really dating, we would tend to go out of town.</p> <p>W: We weren't, you know, and it was a struggle and it's hard and any marriage is like that. I have to say the first three to five years, is really a hard time, but once we really got involved in church and we both grew up...I consider, that we were both still kids at the time.... Because, I mean we were young, 18 19, 20 years old.</p>
Conflicts about Race in Marriage-Race not an issue; use of racial slurs	<p>W: I don't think race has not been an issue in our home. as far as in our house its not...in our whole family, we don't say you're White, your Black or this is this and this is that. We don't label and just do like that.</p> <p>W: You know, like I said, with any marriage, our marriage hasn't been a bed of roses the whole entire time, but you know as far as a race issue, we have not really had with either family, either side of the family, or friends even, you know.</p> <p>H: Yeah, it's definitely a no-no...[referring to using the 'N' word]</p> <p>W: ...we've never used it in my family, you know, never, ever, ever, ever a word that was frequently used in my house at all ever.</p> <p>H: (laughing) It was used in our house. It was a second language!</p> <p>W: I know. They use it as if it's a slang word, you know?</p> <p>H: Yeah. We put a sentence together with it. (laughs)</p> <p>W: But, I'm saying, I'd feel...and now it's gotten a little bit better with me, but before I couldn't stand it, you know, it was like ugly, it was just awful, but now</p>

	<p>it is nothing for, like our 14 year old, you know? I mean, it's just like calling somebody 'dude' or, I mean, it's nothing.</p> <p>H: Yeah, yeah.</p>
Switched Races	<p>H: Well, like I say, it'd probably be the same...it'll be the same.</p> <p>W: It's the same.</p> <p>H: Because of the way we was raised.</p>
Intersection of Race and Class- has not influenced marriage due to similarities	<p>I: And that was my next question, was just how has the intersection of race and class influenced your relationship? But it really hasn't it sounds like, because you were the same.</p> <p>W: uh ummm.</p> <p>H: Right.</p> <p>I: You came from the same, so....</p>
Strengths due to Interracial Marriage	<p>W: I think with us it's we have such a communication and we're so close that you know, if an issue arises, if it was, or if it did, I would come to him and we would talk about, you know, we would talk about it and I think it's just opened more doors to be able to communicate and to be able to, you know, it just strengthens because of course, that opens lines of communication and just strengthens it all and the thing is I mean, he is, just like with any marriage, though, but he's there for me and I'm there for him.</p> <p>H: But we never did leave or like one, 'I'm leaving. I'm going here or I'm going there.' No, we just stay there and just work it out.</p> <p>W: I think, I think it's our strengthening the marriage, you know I think it's because we're able to talk to each other about it. It would be hard if I came to him and said, you know, I mean, because, of course, we do get glares and stares and looks and we can look at each other and laugh about it, you know and look at each other and go, 'Well, they just don't know what we know.'</p> <p>W: You know, the thing is not how we look on the outside, it's what we know we are and how we feel about each other on the inside.</p>
Racial Identity	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Definition – What does racial identity mean to you?	<p>H: It means that I'm a Black American and that's what I'm gonna always be and I'm proud of it.</p> <p>W: I honestly don't like the term because I don't think it's your race. I think it's your person. 'Cause I don't see color...I mean, I just don't see people as 'That's what color you are.' You know, I see the person that they are, you know, I don't really...it's just being divided into groups, you know and I just don't, you know I don't care for being divided into groups. (laughs) You know, and I just really think it's the person. It's not what color you are or what your race is.</p>
How do you Racially Identify?	<p>W: You're considered White. Black or White.</p> <p>H: ...you're considered White, so, I mean, you identify with something else but your birth certificate it labels you as a White.</p> <p>W: Um hm. It's a label.</p> <p>H: Yeah, it's a label. Right. (laughs) and, you know, it's like me, accept me, so...but we can identify with many of cultures, though.</p>
Effect of Racial Identity on Marriage/change in Racial Identity since Marriage	<p>H: Well, I think it's, uh, it's really came out...it really helped...it helped a lot, because the way we was raised where a certain race wasn't allowed in your house, it was always open, and you know that helps a lot because, you know you don't look at a person as White or Black or Mexican, you just look at the person and if it's a good person, you know, you know, it will work. If the</p>

	<p>chemistry is there, it will work.</p> <p>W: I think it's been a positive, you know, thing on as far as our marriage because like he said, we weren't racist or prejudice. We didn't have those issues in our home and those, you know.... You know, it just wasn't a problem, I mean in where I had thought and I have made the comment that numerous times to numerous people that I just feel blessed that you know, I was so welcomed by his family, you know I just feel blessed that I've got good in-laws, you know great in-laws that have always accepted me.</p>
No Change in Views and Ideals about race due to supportive family	<p>W: You know and I think that's why the marriage has worked so well because we haven't had the pressure of racial issues on either side of the family. You know and I imagine, cause I've talked to other couples and you know, it's bound...</p>
Influences	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Social	<p>H: In the neighborhood that I grew up in, it was basically Black. Then right at the end, there was some Whites moving in, but it was basically Black. But, you know, hanging out with different friends, I would end up in a bunch of different neighborhoods and, you know, and like I said, I had mostly White friends. It was about half and half, but I hung with more of the White side and uh, and in their neighborhoods a lot, you know....</p> <p>W: I mean and it [neighborhood] was basically White and the kids, I mean, you might have had a few different races, you know, couples that normally that there wasn't any children, you know, from them, so I think it was just basically White and then when we moved from there.... So I don't guess...basically we were raised...growing up you're having friends and your hanging out with friends and I'm like him, about half and half, you know, mix of friends and ...</p> <p>W:...and then I guess with us being raised in public schools, you know, we had a mix of friends. It's just what we're used to.</p> <p>H:...I've always dated White women; I dated White and she dated Black....</p>
Values and Beliefs; traditions/rituals from Family of Origin	<p>W: ...my parents always welcomed anybody in. You know, our family always had friends of every race. It was never...we were never, you can't do this because of that or can't do this because they are this color, because my best friend through elementary school was a Black girl. I mean, you know and she was welcome in my house just as well as any White friends that I had</p> <p>H: Yeah, but you never had ate greens before.</p> <p>W: I had tried 'em, but I didn't care for 'em I guess but I just hadn't had them cooked right. (laughs)</p> <p>W: I love 'em and I can cook 'em. (laughs)</p> <p>H: Now she can cook 'em.</p> <p>H: I wouldn't say...we had, we used to have a lot of cookouts on each side of the family. We would have Barbeques on my side and they would have...</p> <p>W: We had gatherings. We didn't actually cook out, we just cooked and brought everything together. Anything else? I mean as far as, I think we were raised like the same, you know, as far as, you know, Christmas and just holidays...Never been a conflict or anything because we were pretty much raised with same beliefs and the same...</p> <p>H: Except spanking kids.</p>
Reactions: Acceptance and Opposition	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Acceptance: Couple	<p>W: Well, the thing is, like with us, we do live near my family, so ours</p>

<p>Identity and Child-rearing</p>	<p>[children] are probably on a day-to-day basis as far as at home, more exposed to, you know, to White.</p> <p>W: You know and that's our whole point and I think that's what we've tried to teach our kids, is it's not the color it's the person, you know, you just have to see the person for who they are, but um. They are exposed more as far let's say on a day-to-day home life basis, they probably more exposed to White.</p> <p>W: And we go to his parents' house and you know, it's not like we try to go push this race over 'You've gotta be with the White race.' I want 'em to know both sides. What I always...we always try to tell 'em, 'You've got the best of both worlds.' You know, you've got both, so, I mean that as far as that, like I say, we don't ever try to push one [race] over on the other.</p>
<p>Families' Reaction to Marriage</p>	<p>W: We went up to the mountains because our thing was that we already lived together, we already had a child together, you know. I didn't want to have this big blowout, you know, wedding when we did do things, you know, slightly backwards....</p> <p>W: We had a short and sweet wedding. We had a beautiful ceremony. We went to the mountains and got married in a small chapel, you know, on the side of a mountain and it was gorgeous in October, you know, in the fall when the leaves were pretty and so and we stayed there for a week.</p> <p>M: Well, when we got back, we had the reception at our house, so everybody that wanted to that didn't make it to the mountains, they was all there then.</p> <p>F: Um hmm. I mean, we did...and it's not like the Whites were on this side of the room and the Blacks were on this side....</p> <p>W: I mean, when we have anything out at our house, you know I say at our house, because that's on my side of the family usually because like I said we live near them, you know, his family is always invited and welcome and anytime they come they are welcome.</p>
<p>Support from Families of Origin</p>	<p>W: It's the fact that we were still young. I was what? 19, 20 years old and so he had this thought, he had never met him, you know and I tell him this and of course, he's like, probably thinking, thug (laughs) or you know, it's not that he was really thinking that.... I guess you could say it was a race issue, I don't know, I mean, but he's never been prejudiced, you know, before that, so I hate to say that he was prejudiced at that point. [Wife discussing father's first reaction to her marrying husband]</p> <p>W: ...and I have made the comment that numerous times to numerous people that I just feel blessed that you know, I was so welcomed by his family, you know I just feel blessed that I've got good in-laws, you know great in-laws that have always accepted me.</p> <p>H: We identify with both sides, you know. It's not just like, you know when I go with her family, I just stick out, you know. It's not like that because uh, one of her aunts made the comment before like, 'We don't say Harper is Black. We just say 'It's Harper.'</p> <p>W: I mean, when we have anything out at our house, you know I say at our house, because that's on my side of the family usually because like I said we live near them, you know, his family is always invited and welcome and anytime they come they are welcome.</p> <p>H: The family members? Nah. Not because the way we was raised. It would be different if we was raised in a different belief and then, just happened and then be like, 'I can't believe they're supporting us!' [Referring to the question was the support surprising]</p>
<p>Opposition: from</p>	<p>H: We both knew that [expected opposition from others]. I dated White and</p>

<p>Society and Family</p>	<p>she dated Black, so this wasn't our first experience, so we already knew what we was in for.</p> <p>W: ...it wasn't surprising at all and like you say, now, yeah, that long ago we knew what we were in for. It wasn't surprising, but now, you rarely have that. You know, really to say, and I don't know if this is because almost everybody in [city couple resides] probably knows us (laughs) but we're out a lot and we're out in the public a lot both he and I, so I guess that's... I don't know if they're just used to seeing us or what but....</p> <p>H: Well, and then they're used to seeing us and we both, like she got her nail business and I've got a construction business and so we deal with a lot of different people and uh, then, some of our clients, and we might see them and we might be in [different places] or any of these restaurants, and they'll put us two together then, they realize and then they, you know, they don't have a problem with it.</p> <p>W: ...there's times you still go out and you still will be in public and you see older couples, you know that may look or something, but like I say, it goes back to a lot of people know, you know, know us and um, so I guess it's not as much anymore even with the older.</p> <p>H: So a lot of times, it's stuff said when after we leave. For instance, if I was in a store by myself and a mixed couple come in and they don't know that I'm married to a White lady, they, you know, they might say, after they leave out, 'What's that Black guy doing with that White girl.' And they may be saying it out loud, you know,</p> <p>W: Like I said, I've had stares, like we'll go out, like let's just say, for instance, we may go to a club and we just say it's a Black club, you know I'm going to get a lot of stares from Black ladies. And... I mean they're probably thinking, 'Well, he's a nice looking man, but he's with a White lady. Why does he have to be [with her]'</p> <p>H: Yeah, or 'they're taking our men from us.'</p> <p>W: I mean, that's the comment that you do hear on a regular basis. And...it's more a jealousy issue.</p> <p>H: Jealous, yeah. Right. It's more on her end with Black women, because I never do...have that feeling, you know, anything, unless we go [to] a town where it's predominantly White, you know I might have that, but basically...we get more from Black women. If we're walking down the mall or anywhere like that and they'll look, and they'll be like, 'What's the deal?' and you know.</p>
<p>Handling Opposition/Coping</p>	<p>H: Well, early on in our relationship there was, you know, how the public was...because a lot of times you're like, 'Man, what is he looking at?' or 'What is she looking at?' or, you know, it got frustrating then.</p> <p>W: But really, [the opposition] never bothered me. You know, really to say that it bothered me, it didn't. Because I wasn't one that was real worried about what people thought. I knew who I was, you know, and that's what mattered and I knew who I loved and that's what mattered. So, I really didn't care a whole lot about what everybody else thought.</p> <p>H: I really didn't worry about what the public thought, because, I knew how it was and it's back, you know, 15, 16 years ago. See back then, if you're with a White girl, they'd be like, 'What is he doing? Is he crazy?' you know....</p> <p>W: We would tend to go out of town when we were first really dating, we would tend to go out of town.</p> <p>W: We do get glares and stares and looks and we can look at each other and laugh about it, you know and look at each other and go, 'Well, they just don't</p>

	<p>know what we know.’</p> <p>H: ...we gotta, you know, a couple of mixed couples that, you know, that we do hang out with. So, then again, you know, if we got a couple of friends that are just Black and Black and some that’s White and White, you know, it just goes together.</p> <p>W: You probably wouldn’t be accepted, but our church has been. They’ve been wonderful. We have a lot of um, mixed couples and</p>
Advice	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Advice about Being Involved in an Interracial Relationship	<p>H: Just make sure that that’s what you want and make sure that y’all will be able to live together, you know, because it’s a lot of people will run and go get married and don’t even know her bad habits or good habits. Don’t even know the person and they want to jump up just because they are infatuated right now, and when that wears off, you’re stuck with a spouse. (laughs) So, but just being able, to you know, if you love each other and you can live together and can make it work, you know...</p> <p>W: ...if you really love a person then you can really work, you know, you can work through the little things...like with other couples, interracial couples, or any couples period that doesn’t have the support from the in-laws or whatever, I hate it, because it is that stress on the marriage.... So, I know that’s stressful, but I think it’s love and the communication and the understanding and like I say...I guess because race has never been an issue to me, it’s hard for me to give advice I mean, this is both of our first marriages. Neither one of us has been married before, you know, so it’s hard to say, just because it’s an interracial marriage....because we’ve been together so long and it’s nothing.... I guess, just race to me isn’t an issue....</p>
Counseling Experience	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
No Counseling	<p>I: Have you all ever had counseling or therapy as a couple?</p> <p>W: Uh uh. [Indicating negative]</p>

Appendix H - Case Four – Complete Themes and Examples

Couple 4: Husband is Black and Wife is White	
Marital Dynamics	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
How couple Met: met at college	H: We met at a junior college...I was a basketball player and she was a sweet little innocent lady in the library.
Positives in Marriage	Answers given prior to interview; children and marriage
Stressors in Marriage	W: Role changes. H: Financial in the sense of trying to provide the best living conditions, school conditions for our kids. I would just say the normal stresses of any relationship.
Conflicts about Race in Marriage	W: No, have we? No? H: Not about race, no. We haven't.
Switched Races	W: Knowing my personality, I'm vocal now, but I'd probably be much more vocal and angry as a Black woman, I'd be like, 'Who do they think they are...' duh, duh, duh, duh. I'd be a lot more aggressive. I'd be a lot more...I'd take things more sensitive. I would...not more sensitive, but I would probably read into things a lot more.... I'd just be more vocal. I'd be much more in your face probably. H: I don't know that I'd be much different. W: Yes, you would, too. I think you would because I think you would see the privilege that White people have and you don't see that now because of your skin color. H: Yeah, but I don't think I'm dis-privileged. I think I've had a lot of opportunities to do a lot of different things... W: But I think you would see that you would have more opportunities. More opportunities, I think, would be presented to you. W: I don't think as many people would come up to me and say things to me or say inappropriate things to me because of my skin color if I was Black. I probably would be viewed as my children's mother as opposed to a baby-sitter or nanny sometimes (laughs), but that hasn't happened that much. I don't think Forrest and I have ever had too many instances to where race has been an issue.
Intersection of Race and Class	H: Class, yeah. We're kind of at a, I guess, disadvantage in the fact of we both grew up middle class and we've maintained middle class status, so friends and associates were always middle class for the most part, more than middle class, very seldom less than middle class, so I think it's still somewhat of a bubble, because we never knew and our kids never knew poverty.
Strengths due to Interracial Marriage	W: I don't know that race has really played a big part. I think it's more of how we were raised and issues that we've had in our marriage haven't been racially driven. They've been financially, role changes, things of that nature and I think because of the way we were raised in a Christian foundation and the commitment that we made on our wedding day that divorce is not an option, that we are going to work through those and communicate with each other on a daily basis and we have three children, so there is no way that we're gonna separate or let the devil get...it's not racially... H: It's almost more ... W: It's more religious. You know, God has blessed this union...

	(crying)...sorry. So it's Satan is not going to drive it apart no matter what and that is not...and this crying is not coming from racially, it's just coming from other areas.
Racial Identity	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Definition – What does racial identity mean to you?	H: Very interesting question. I think racial identity in a broad sense would probably mean to me which side do you choose: Black or White. That's the short version of it. And you know another way to think of identity would maybe be who are you most comfortable around and to be honest, it's the person, it's not necessarily skin color, because there are some African-Americans that I am not comfortable being around because of their morals. There are some Caucasians that I am not comfortable around because of their morals and character, so it goes back to the person and that's who I would identify with whoever I'm comfortable being around. W: I agree.
How do you Racially Identify?	H: However, me personally, I grew up obviously African-American family, extended family, but school, grammar school, neighbors, were predominantly Caucasian. So, if I had to identify, obviously African-American, however, it's really not that easy for me because my influences, my environments were so diverse and it was really more of the person inside, the character, the morals versus skin color. W: And I think for myself, I was raised in an all White community so I never did really think about racial identity because I never had to. Then went I went to college and met Forrest, I still know that I'm White or Caucasian, but I do identify with not just African-American race, but Japanese and other races in general because I feel like I'm more multi-cultural and I've had pen pals who are different races and friends who are different, from different backgrounds.
Effect of Racial Identity on Marriage/change in Racial Identity since Marriage	W: Well, I was just going to say I know that because of my skin color I know I'm more privileged than Fred and I think that because he's African American and a male, I understand more now as to why because he's not a White male why he my not get further or people see him in a different light, um I think that people still have those views that Black men or Black women may not be as articulate or they may not speak correct English or they're surprised when you do. H: I think, back to the original question, it's racial identity, I think it's helped broaden our, Alicia and myself, awareness. I think it has taught each of us a lot more about the other as not only as the person but as a Black man and a White lady. W: But I think it's also helped other people with their views on race. H: Friends and associates. W: And I think for myself, I was raised in an all White community so I never did really think about racial identity because I never had to. I: Alicia, you said something interesting when Forrest left to get something to drink about how White people...how you have come into your own as a White individual realizing that privilege that White people don't see that they have...that invisible privilege and I think that's just...for me to hear that, is a great growth for you.... H: ...since we've been married...we've taken and matured to be able to recognize opportunities to educate people and I think...obviously more so since we've been married versus in college, because it was still exciting and

	<p>new, you know, but now it's kind of like, hey, if we get an opportunity, we can help somebody. Talk to them, answer questions and be an example, be a physical example of hey, those are good people, not that's an interracial couple.</p> <p>W: Well, and I don't know that my racial identity has changed as much as (laughs) much as me as a person has changed. My thought process and just living different places and being exposed to different people and being asked that...and my own person growing individually. Not as a White woman, because I actually wouldn't consider myself as a full-blown White woman because I have bi-racial children, so I think that when I go into the situation I think of myself as different.... but not in a negative way as far as...I knew I didn't fit in with these people fully in a White world, because I don't think in a White way.</p>
<p>Change in Views and Ideals about race – marriage as an example for others; wife able to view racism from a minority's perspective</p>	<p>H: I think, back to the original question, it's racial identity, I think it's helped broaden our, Alicia and myself, awareness. I think it has taught each of us a lot more about the other as not only as the person but as a Black man and a White lady.</p> <p>W: But I think it's also helped other people with their views on race.</p> <p>H: Friends and associates.</p> <p>W: I understand more now as to why because he's not a White male why he my not get further or people see him in a different light, um I think that people still have those views that Black men or Black women may not be as articulate or they may not speak correct English or they're surprised when you do.</p>
<p>Influences</p>	
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Descriptive Examples</p>
<p>Social</p>	<p>H: I grew up obviously African-American family, extended family, but school, grammar school, neighbors, were predominantly Caucasian. So, if I had to identify, obviously African-American, however, it's really not that easy for me because my influences, my environments were so diverse.</p> <p>W: I was raised in an all White community so I never did really think about racial identity because I never had to. Then went I went to college and met Forrest, I still know that I'm White or Caucasian, but I do identify with not just African-American race, but Japanese and other races in general because I feel like I'm more multi-cultural and I've had pen pals who are different races and friends who are different, from different backgrounds.</p> <p>W: I did date White people mainly before I met Forrest, but there was something about them, their morals, their beliefs, that I just didn't click with.</p> <p>H: Yeah, I just...I dated, we say dated but when you're in elementary and junior high and high school you really don't know, but I.... But I've dated White and Black, if you want to call it dating.</p>
<p>Values and Beliefs; traditions/rituals from Family of Origin</p>	<p>W: Well, I think for me growing up in an all White county, it was probably more dominant and it wasn't directly fed, but it was alluded to. You don't mix, you know, that they're not as good as us, that they're dirty or things of that nature and just other people in general, but mainly African-Americans, and you just don't mix and I think that I probably knew that that was wrong but I never was involved with anyone or never was around anyone so I didn't...I just knew that that's what I was told.</p> <p>H: And just with any most other influences, particularly when you talk about family environment, it's a cycle. I would think it's a cycle of you know, this is how my parents were raised and taught, and this is how they are gonna</p>

teach their kids and the kids hold onto those same morals and values, good or bad, chances are they're gonna teach their kids, but I think it's...I was fortunate to, you know, early on have Caucasian people spend the night at our house, you know, we would go and spend the night at their house, you through grammar school and of course, we had our family reunions, which was all Black, so um, but I think other people that that's all they know doesn't make it a bad thing, it's just that that cycle of traditions and teachings which that's what people value because that's all they have.

W: Well, I think White people think it's okay if it's a lesser skin color, meaning Asian, you know it was okay for me to have a pen pal in the 10th grade from Japan and she came over to visit and that's okay...

H: There are certain boundaries that you don't cross.

W: Yeah, you just don't marry somebody of a different race. But I think that White people in general can probably accept more lighter skin than African-American and it's okay for you to adopt a child that's Asian because you are helping them, but yeah, don't adopt anybody else. That type of thing.

W: Well, we're both from the South so I think a lot of times people are surprised that I was raised very similar to how you were raised as far as the cooking and we were both raised in church and we were both have the Christian foundation.

H: It's interesting that we are very similar in the fact of you know, we like fresh garden vegetables and chicken and the Southern-type things.

W: I didn't know what chicken wings were until I met you...

Reactions: Acceptance and Opposition

Themes	Descriptive Examples
<p>Acceptance: Couple Identity and Child-rearing</p>	<p>H: Our oldest is six and she is already starting to develop and what's her outlook on life and people are gonna be...she's biracial. We'll never know what being biracial means...you know you talk about racial identity, you know, who is she gonna identify with? Is that gonna be a struggle? Maybe not, but we try to make sure we give her all the tools that we have acquired over the last 16 plus years as an interracial couple to help her in her development. You know, we can't tell her or make her...'Hey, you're Black' or 'You're White' or 'You're biracial.' Okay, what does that mean? More of the importance of, you know, go back to people and morale, not morale, but morals and character. So that is a struggle and it's probably sometimes easier to say, 'Hey, you're Caucasian. This is what Caucasian people do.' Or 'You're Black. This is how we do it.' But when you say, 'You're biracial.' You know, you've got a lot of balls to juggle and we've gotta kind of figure out where do I fit in and what am I comfortable with and we try to help them with that.</p> <p>W: Well, I think we try to influence that they are both races. They are a little bit of mommy and a little of daddy and that they need to know that because they are going to be in probably situations to where, especially at a young age, that they're going to have to identify one way or another on a piece of paper or a form and I don't think that they should have to do that. I'm very adamant about that. I think I probably try to influence the more African American side because I know it's a White world and we try to go to a multi-cultural church, but it's mainly White people and I think that our children have felt more comfortable around a multi-cultural church than an African American church. Um, but they feel comfortable around my husband's family and my family and we try to include both families together so that they can see that</p>

	<p>interaction, that the African American side and the Caucasian side do things together and we mix together. I feel much more comfortable on his side with his family because there is less drama and not racial drama.</p>
Families' Reaction to Marriage	<p>H: Well, as far as the family reaction. It was different on both sides. My family's reaction was a little bit, a lot different than hers. Uh, my wife's. Most, 99 or 95% of my family were supportive because of our beliefs and morals growing up, you know, multi-cultural, so it wasn't anything new. The biggest concern was making sure that this person I'm about to marry is a good person. You know, it's interesting because the males on my side, no body had an issue, they could care less. It was primarily the females. Um, which I thought was somewhat interesting, but probably not, but the males...uncles and Dad and they could care less.</p> <p>W: Oh Lord. (laughs) My family? Nope, you don't mix. You now, I mean...but I think, at first my parents did not accept it, you know, you don't mix. But they even tried to use like religion, you know, it's against the Bible, you're gonna go to Hell, um.</p> <p>H: Yeah and for the most part, best we know, that's all changed. Their outlook, they love the grandkids, they know no reservations.</p> <p>W: ...we were living in [another state] at the time and had a small wedding.</p> <p>W: My brother came and my mother and father came and.... My uncle actually married us...and his uncle actually said a prayer and my dad walked me down the aisle....</p>
Support from Families of Origin	<p>H: Most, 99 or 95% of my family were supportive because of our beliefs and morals growing up, you know, multi-cultural, so it wasn't anything new.</p> <p>W: ...at first my parents did not accept it, you know, you don't mix.</p> <p>H: Yeah, and for the most part, best we know, that's all changed. Their outlook, they love the grandkids, they know no reservations.</p>
Opposition: from Society	<p>I probably would be viewed as my children's mother as opposed to a baby-sitter or nanny sometimes (laughs) but that hasn't happened that much. I don't think Forrest and I have ever had too many instances to where race has been an issue.</p> <p>H: We haven't noticed any. Maybe we have, (laughs) but maybe...</p> <p>W: We've noticed some things.</p> <p>W: I think...we've experienced some, but not enough to hinder or hurt us in a negative way. We were out a club, you know, I've had a White guy say, 'Why are you with him?' and then when we were shopping...we had this older man looking at us and I looked at Forrest and I honestly said, 'Why is he looking at us? Why is he staring at us?' and Forrest looked at me with a puzzled look and he said, 'Are you serious? You don't know why he's looking at us?' and I said, 'Oh, you're Black and I'm White. That's why he's looking at us?'</p>
Handling Opposition/Coping	<p>H: ...that's why it doesn't bother me because I understand, you know what, they're narrow-minded, they've got a wall built up, you know, hey, sorry. (laughs) ...because if they really didn't care, they wouldn't look, so that's why it's never really bothered me, you know, because I know that they're just curious and they are afraid to get outside of the box and learn about people. That's my thought.</p> <p>W: ...you have to be aware of where you are where you're going and it's not that we really care, but it's just that why would you put yourself in a</p>

	circumstance to where you know, you're going to get hated everyday or looked upon ugly or you know, you don't want that, so you're gonna make a better life for yourself somewhere else.
Advice	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
Advice about Being Involved in an Interracial Relationship	<p>W: ...make sure you have the same beliefs, values, you know, because you can't change that. Make sure you're gonna be committed and communication and honestly, and more values, I think.</p> <p>H: ...just make sure...two things: make sure you take the opportunity and nurture the values in other races, because not all White, middle aged older men are prejudiced and not all young African American young women hate White girls because they take all the good men. (laughing) The other thing is the outside influences...the looks, the stares, the comments, expect those and have a mental and a physical, if you have to, for how you are going to consistently deal with them.</p> <p>W: And don't have hatred because you don't know where they are coming from and if you go at them harsh or in a negative way, that it's just confirming maybe some of their belief.</p> <p>H: Yep. That's why having a planned way to deal with them. And dealing with them basically means within yourself that you know, that's what that means. Probably more so than dealing with them is to expect them because when you expect something you kind of habitually learn how to deal with it because you expect it.</p> <p>W: And even make it a teachable moment for your children.</p> <p>H: Yeah, because they'll see the example...</p> <p>W: And they way you react is gonna be an example as to how they handle situations because if you confront somebody or you go at them, then your children are gonna see that characteristic in you as maybe hatred, or whatever, so you don't want to portray that.</p>
Counseling Experience	
Themes	Descriptive Examples
No Counseling	W: No. We do our own counseling!