UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

EXPERIENCES OF INTERRACIAL COUPLES IN A "POST-RACIAL" SOCIETY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

MEREDITH PAIGE MOUSER
Norman, Oklahoma
2016

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/47068

EXPERIENCES OF INTERRACIAL COUPLES IN A "POST-RACIAL" SOCIETY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

_____
Dr. Ann M. Beutel, Chair

_____
Dr. Stephanie W. Burge

_____
Dr. Meta G. Carstarphen

_____
Dr. Craig St. John

_____
Dr. B. Mitchell Peck

© Copyright by MEREDITH PAIGE MOUSER 2016
All Rights Reserved.

Acknowledgements

Many people have been incredibly helpful and supportive of me, not only during the process of my dissertation, but through my entire graduate experience. First, I would like to thank my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Ann Beutel. Dr. Beutel also advised by master's thesis, so it only seemed appropriate that she should see me through my dissertation, too. I do not believe this research, or the maturation I experienced as a graduate student would have been possible without her guidance and support. I am forever indebted to Dr. Beutel and I truly appreciate her serving as my committee chair. Next, I would like to thank my dissertation committee members: Dr. Meta G. Carstarphen, Dr. Stephanie Burge, Dr. Craig St. John, and Dr. B. Mitchell Peck. Also, I wish to thank Dr. Maria-Elena Diaz, who served as a past member of my dissertation committee. I am grateful for the time they spent reading my dissertation and providing valuable feedback; I am also thankful for their support over the last several years. Third, I would also like to thank Dr. Trina Hope. I truly appreciate Dr. Hope's support over the years, and especially her support as I finished and prepared to defend my dissertation. Fourth, I would be remiss to not thank the couples who participated in this research. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, James, and our fur kid, Rafi. I am incredibly fortunate to have a husband who did not mind taking on extra domestic responsibilities as I worked to finish my dissertation. I am also thankful for his unwavering support, as well as his attempts to use reverse psychology when I did not think I would finish. Additionally, I could not have completed this dissertation without Rafi's steadfast loyalty.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: A Brief History of Interracial Relationships in the United States and the Current State of Racial Attitudes	7
Chapter Three: Explanations for Increases in Interracial Marriage and Ongoing Reluctance Toward Them	14
Chapter Four: Past Research on the Experiences of Interracial Couples	20
Chapter Five: The Research Problem	25
Chapter Six: Data and Methods	31
Chapter Seven: Findings for Racial/Ethnic Identity	42
Chapter Eight: Findings for Early Life Experiences	49
Chapter Nine: Findings for Experiences of Getting Together and Getting Married	93
Chapter Ten: Findings for Experiences as Married Couples	124
Chapter Eleven: Findings for Planning for Children and the Race-Related Experiences of Children of Interracial Couples	177
Chapter Twelve: Findings for Research Participants' Interpretations of Interracial Couples in the Media	209
Chapter Thirteen: Discussion and Conclusion	220
References	231
Appendix: Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Schedule	241

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics 38

Table 2: Age and Gender of Children 41

Table 3. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of Strangers Who Reacted to Interracial Marriages 152

Abstract

In spite of the perception held by some Americans that race/ethnicity no longer matters much (i.e., the United States is a "post-racial" society), racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination continue to shape the lives of many people living in the United States. This research considers the role of race/ethnicity in contemporary U.S. society by examining the experiences of couples in interracial (and/or interethnic) marriages. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 interracial (and/or interethnic) couples to investigate their experiences in a so-called "post-racial" society. The analysis was conducted in a manner that allowed for themes to emerge from the data. Six major themes related to the experiences of interracial couples emerged from the analysis: experiences of diversity, public/private dynamics, children's experiences with race/ethnicity, white privilege, subtleties in responses from family members, and the continuing salience of race and ethnicity. The findings from this study provide further evidence that race/ethnicity still matters in contemporary U.S. society.

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2015, African Americans/blacks made up 13 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2015), but were 26 percent of the victims of all deadly police shootings. What is more, in nearly 15 percent of these shootings, the victim was not armed (*Washington Post* 2016). Additionally, of the 5,818 single-bias hate crimes reported in the United States in 2015, 56.9 percent were motivated by a race/ethnicity/ancestry bias (U.S. Department of Justice 2016). Despite these incidents, many whites argue that the color of a person's skin is not related to their position in the social and economic hierarchies of the United States (Gallagher 2003). Furthermore, scholars such as Wilson (1978) have argued that race is not as salient as other factors, such as social class, for lived experiences in the United States. Though, a large body of research suggests racial/ethnic minorities continue to face disadvantages in many facets of life, including education, employment, and housing (Kozol 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; Feagin 1994; Charles 2003; Deitch et al. 2003; Kao and Thompson 2003; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Lewis and Diamond 2015). Thus, scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2003, 2015) argue that race/ethnicity still matters for life experiences in the United States.

Further, despite the "color-blind" ideology now dominating American culture, it has been well documented that a significant gap in physical and social distance continues to exist between whites and racial/ethnic minority groups. Physical distance refers to the physical space between groups, while social distance, according to Bogardus (1925), refers to, "the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterized pre-social and social relations generally" (216). Research has found

physical distance occurs in educational and religious settings and in suburban neighborhoods; it is important to note that physical distance is mostly manifested in segregation (Robinson 1980; Massey and Denton 1993; Tatum 1997; Lewis 2003; Emerson 2006; Pager and Shepherd 2008).

One particular issue related to race/ethnicity that many individuals claim to no longer have problems with is interracial/interethnic marriage.[1] Interracial marriage is often a measure of social distance (Muhsam 1990; Moran 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007).[2] In the past, attitudes regarding interracial marriage were usually not positive, and interracial relationships in the United States could be characterized as very difficult (McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton 1999). However, recent research has indicated that attitudes are becoming more positive regarding interracial marriage (Passel et al. 2010) relative to the resistance and negative attitudes about it that were commonly held in the past (McClain 2011). Nevertheless, although 61 percent of whites and 72 percent of blacks report being "fine" with a family member marrying someone of another race in one study (Passel et al. 2010), individuals tend to be reluctant to engage in interracial marriage themselves ("It is fine for them, but it is not for me") (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This suggests that there still might be some lingering social taboo around interracial marriage. Therefore, it is important and necessary to understand the experiences of couples who have experienced interracial marriage in contemporary "post-racial" America.

[1] For the sake of brevity, I often use "interracial" to refer to interracial and/or interethnic marriages.
[2] It should be noted, that a tautological relationship may exist between interracial marriage and social distance. That is, interracial marriage is a measure of social distance, but the lack of interracial marriage might increase social distance (which leads to even less interracial marriage).

The goal of my research was to interview interracial (interethnic) couples in order to answer the following questions: what are the experiences of interracial couples in a so-called "post-racial" society and how much does race/ethnicity matter in interracial marriages in the contemporary United States? While much of the existing literature has explored the growth of interracial marriage and attitudes toward interracial marriage, research has neglected to explore fully the experiences of couples in interracial marriages in a comprehensive manner, especially using a variety of couple combination (e.g., black/white, Hispanic/white, black/biracial). I seek to help fill this gap in the literature.

The following serves as an outline of the chapters in this dissertation. In Chapter Two, I briefly review the history of interracial relationships in the United States. In doing so, I discuss interracial relationships in the pre-Emancipation era and the post Emancipation era, including the historic *Loving v. Virginia* decision in 1967, which declared miscegenation laws unconstitutional in the United States. Additionally, I describe trends in interracial marriage toward the end of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st century.

Increases in, as well as continuing reluctance toward, interracial marriage is discussed in Chapter Three. Here, I describe the impact of social forces, such as social distance/physical proximity between certain racial/ethnic groups (e.g., whites and blacks), sub-population growth, changes in racial attitudes (i.e., increases in progressive racial attitudes), and educational attainment on interracial marriage.

Previous research regarding the experiences of interracial married couples is reviewed in Chapter Four. I mainly focus on the literature describing the adverse

reactions interracial married couples have experienced from strangers and from their family members, the increased likelihood of marital disruption for interracial couples compared to racially/ethnically homogenous marriages, and difficulties experienced in raising children within an interracial marriage.

The research questions are reviewed and the "driving forces" behind each line of inquiry in this investigation are discussed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I describe the design of my study of the experiences of interracial married couples in a "post-racial" society. I discuss the recruitment techniques I used to gather a sample of interracial couples, the interview protocol and other aspects of the qualitative interviews I conducted, the demographics of my sample, and the analytical procedure.

The research findings are presented in the following chapters. Chapter Seven presents the findings for the strength of the participants' racial/ethnic identification. The early life experiences of the respondents are presented in Chapter Eight. This includes the exposure respondents had to other racial/ethnic groups while growing up, especially in the schools they attended and the neighborhoods in which they lived. Next, I focus on the interracial friendships of those who participated in this study. I then explore the messages the respondents received about whom they should marry, if they knew any interracial couples while growing up, and the respondents' own experiences with interracial dating prior to marrying their current spouse.

In Chapter Nine, I describe the experiences the couples had getting together and getting married. Specifically, I highlight when, where and how these couples met, how long they dated before they married, and their experiences with cohabitation (if any) prior to marriage. I also discuss the responses those who participated in their research

received from family and friends when they found out they were dating someone of a different race/ethnicity, as well as when their family and friends found out they were getting married. Next, I describe the thoughts some respondents had about being in an interracial marriage when they decided to get married. I also briefly review how long these couples were engaged, and finally, I describe the weddings of those who participated in the research.

The focus of Chapter Ten is on the experiences of these couples after they were married. Here, I focus on whether the interracial couples place much emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, whether they notice reactions from strangers in public settings (including what they have noticed about these reactions and if these reactions have created issues in their marriages), whether family and friends' attitudes toward their marriage have changed over time, and finally, the specific successes of their marriages. At the end of this chapter, I discuss how being in an interracial marriage has changed over time for couples married 10 or more years, and (for all the couples) the dynamics of their marriages with respect to the division of domestic labor and household decision-making.

Chapter Eleven focuses on the children or future children of the couples who participated in the research and is divided into two sections. The first half of the chapter discusses how the childless couples expect the arrival of children, if they intend to have any, will change their marriage. The second half of the chapter focuses on the couples with children. I first present findings regarding whether the respondents believe their children will ultimately identify with one race/ethnicity over the other(s) and whether respondents prefer their children to identify with one race/ethnicity over another.

Second, I discuss whether these couples talk to their children about racial/ethnic identity and racial/ethnic discrimination (including how to deal with racial/ethnic discrimination). Next, I describe the experiences, both positive and negative, of the respondents' children as biracial/multiracial children. I also discuss the preferences some respondents had for whom their children date and marry in the future. Lastly, I describe childrearing techniques of the interracial couples.

The final question asked in the interviews focused on how the interracial couples believed the media, specifically television and movies, portrayed interracial couples, and the participants' answers are discussed in Chapter Twelve.

Finally, in Chapter Thirteen, I discuss the major themes that emerged from the data collected through the qualitative interviews, I identify weaknesses and strengths of the research, and I provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: A Brief History of Interracial Relationships in the United States and the Current State of Racial Attitudes

Pre-Emancipation Era

In the pre-Emancipation era, those who engaged in interracial relationships were often charged with a felony and ostracized (Fryer 2007). The dark past associated with interracial relationships can largely be attributed to white colonists establishing a racial hierarchy during the eras of indentured servitude and slavery (Smedley 1999). The taboo placed on interracial intimate personal relationships at that time had a profound impact on creating and maintaining a racial order (Romano 2003).

In spite of the taboo, interracial intimate relationships were not completely absent from the social order during Colonial times, however. Interracial sexual relationships often occurred among black male slaves and white female indentured servants (Hodes 1997). During a transitional period when the indentured servant system was being phased out and African slavery became increasingly popular, these two groups often shared quarters and so they were in close proximity to each other.

In order to limit the sexual contact between white indentured servants and black slaves, anti-miscegenation laws were created by white elites.[3] Anti-miscegenation laws made it virtually impossible for an interracial couple to legally marry (Gullickson 2006). Many of these laws had harsh punishments for whites who did engage in racial mixing (Fryer 2007). In addition to anti-miscegenation laws, the reduced use of white indentured servants also assisted in preventing sexual contact between whites and blacks (Smedley 1999). Yet, even though elite whites attempted to eliminate interracial sexual contact, they did not completely eradicate such practices. It was during this time

[3] Anti-miscegenation laws deemed interracial marriage to be illegal.

period that a particularly high level of interracial sexual contact occurred in the United States, which was largely due to the power relationships between white male slave owners and black female slaves (Spickard 1989; Moran 2001; Gullickson 2006). Sexual contact between black slaves and whites continued as slavery persisted in the United States; as white male slave owners often forced themselves sexually on black female slaves on plantations. Thus, interracial sexual contact was a likely occurrence for women in slavery, but interracial marriage was out of the question.[4] Less is known about interracial relationships off plantations, but past research does indicate that interracial relationships between whites and free blacks were taking place in the South (specifically, Alabama) during the Antebellum period, even though these relationships were prohibited (Mills 1981; Hodes 1997). Therefore, many interracial couples who wanted to marry did so in name only. That is, they viewed each other as husband and wife, but did so without going through the appropriate legal channels (Gullickson 2006). According to Davis et al. (1941), arrangements such as this did occur quite frequently (even in the deep South), but it should be noted that it was found to be a somewhat more common arrangement for white males/black females, than for black males/white females.[5] In sum, while interracial sexual contact occurred during and after slavery, interracial marriage was rare during both time periods.[6]

[4] According to Gullickson (2006), interracial marriage was prohibited among slaves, though, free blacks could engage in interracial marriage if they did not reside in areas subject to anti-miscegenation laws.
[5] Black males in the South were often criminalized, tried, and even put to death for their romantic involvement with white females (Davis et al. 1941).
[6] It should also be noted that anti-miscegenation law applied to whites marrying blacks and Asians, but not to whites marrying Native Americans and Hispanics.

Post-Emancipation Era

Emancipation had a large role in reducing interracial relationships and sexual contact. After Emancipation in 1863, whites were forced to find a way to maintain racial dominance, especially in the southern United States. This was often accomplished by the use of segregation, extreme violence, and Jim Crow laws (Gullickson 2006). Jim Crow laws were designed to separate people by skin color; for example, blacks were required to drink from separate water fountains and be separate from whites while in a variety of establishments (Tischauser 2012). The mechanisms used to maintain the racial order lead to extreme physical and social distance between blacks and whites, which resulted in declines in interracial sexual contact following Emancipation (Kennedy 2003). The effects of physical and social distance lasted well into the early twentieth century, when interracial intimacies between blacks and whites were at an all-time low (Gullickson 2006).

One example of the widening social and physical chasm between the racial groups during the twentieth century was residential segregation. Following World War II, many veterans were given government benefits through the GI Bill. These benefits included home loans; however, white veterans were able to find seclusion in the suburbs away from their minority counterparts, who were mostly restricted to the inner-city. The popular term used to describe the fleeing of middle class whites to newly constructed suburban housing was "white flight." The practices used by the federal government that allowed for residential segregation (e.g., low interest home loans disproportionately awarded to white GIs) were only exacerbated by the private sector, as real estate agents and banks made attempts to keep minorities from living in "white neighborhoods"

(Massey and Denton 1993). Moreover, the continued practice of "de facto" housing segregation only furthered the idea that most whites did not want to be in close proximity to minorities specifically, blacks.

Housing segregation was not the only area in which minorities were intentionally distanced from whites. Another area in which legal segregation occurred was in the education system. Adopted in 1868, The Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution declares that all United States citizens have "equal protection under the law." However, in 1896 it was decided that this clause did not necessarily pertain to several public facilities, including education. While *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) did not directly deal with education, it certainly made the message of "separate but equal" quite clear.[7] It was not until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision that segregation in schools was declared unconstitutional.[8] Neither the desegregation of schools as a result of the Brown decision nor the Civil Rights Act (to be discussed later) eliminated the sanctions against and criminalization of interracial marriage, however.

Some interracial couples who wanted to marry in the post-Emancipation era could do so, but only in a limited number of states prior to the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967).[9] Twelve states never had anti-miscegenation laws

[7] The United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* declared Louisiana law constitutional regarding separate but equal accommodations in all public facilities, including schools. (*Plessy v. Ferguson 1896*).

[8] In the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas,* lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that separate but equal schooling was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the U.S. Supreme Court Justices agreed (Martin 1998).

[9] The Loving v. Virginia case involved the marriage of a black woman, Mildred Loving, to a white man, Richard Loving. While the couple did not marry in Virginia (where miscegenation laws existed) the state's Racial Integrity Act prohibited interracial couples from living together as husband and wife. After they were arrested and asked to leave the state, the couple appealed their conviction all the way up to the United States Supreme Court (Newbeck 2008).

and twenty-two states that had anti-miscegenation laws either repealed such laws prior to 1900 or after 1900 but before the Loving decision.[10] Sixteen states had anti-miscegenation laws until they were forced to repeal them by the Supreme Court's decision (Fryer 2007).[11] Yet, even as many states repealed anti-miscegenation laws prior to the Loving decision or were forced to revoke such laws because of the decision, the divide between racial minorities and whites widened in the early to mid- twentieth century (Gullickson 2006)

Interracial Relationships and Marriages Since the 1960s

1960s-1980s

While it may have seemed as if changes to laws in the mid-twentieth century would have contributed to an increase in black/white interracial marriages, the actual numbers tell a different story. During the Civil Rights Movement, attitudes toward equality for racial minorities slowly changed for some whites. However, the Civil Rights Movement did little in the way of changing attitudes and behaviors specifically regarding black/white interracial marriage in the 1960s and 1970s.[12] According to the United States Bureau of the Census (1998), there were only 51,000 black/white married couples in 1960, and only 65,000 by 1970 (around 0.1 percent of all married couples in 1970). However, the number of black/white married couples increased to 167,000

[10] States never having anti-miscegenation laws include: Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. States repealing anti-miscegenation laws prior to 1900 include: Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. States that repealed anti-miscegenation laws after 1900, but before the Loving decisions include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

[11] Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia were forced to repeal miscegenation laws following the Loving decision.

[12] Blacks were the minority group that fought most visibly for equality during the Civil Rights Movement, which lasted from 1954-1968 and involved the fight of racial minorities for the same basic human rights afforded to non-minorities (Eagles 1986).

(about 0.3 percent of all married couples) in 1980, representing more than a doubling. (It is not known whether these numbers represent new marriages or existing marriages, but only the number of married couples.) The overall slow growth in the occurrence of black/white interracial marriage over this 20-year span suggests there was not much lessening in social distance among blacks and whites.

1990s-2000s

However, intermarriage rates for the 1990s and beyond suggest some narrowing of social distance and improved race relations between blacks and whites during the 1990s and beyond. Data from the Census Bureau (2012) show the number of black/white married couples increased to 211,000 by 1990 (almost 0.4 percent of all married couples), to 363,000 in 2000 (0.6 percent of all married couples), and to 558,000 in 2010 (0.9 percent of all married couples).

Despite the apparent evidence of decreased social distance and improved race relations between blacks and whites, the number of black/white married couples remains low relative to other interracial combinations. By 1970, the number of married couples for American Indian/white (85,000) and Asian and Pacific Islander/White (96,000) easily exceeded that of black/white married couples (65,000) (U.S. Census Bureau 1998). In 1980, the number of Hispanic/white married couples was 891,000 (versus 167,000 for black/white couples). The number of Hispanic/white married couples continued to climb during the 1990s (to 1,193,000 in 1990) and reached 1,743,000 in 2000. By 2010, the number of Hispanic/white married couples was 2,289,000 – far more than the 558,000 black/white married couples for that year (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

Current Racial Attitudes

Racial attitudes have changed over time, usually becoming more progressive than they were in the past (e.g., Krysan and Moberg 2016). Regarding whites and blacks attending the same school, 96 percent of whites and nearly 100 percent of blacks support racially integrated schools. However, while 97 percent of blacks support interracial marriage, a smaller percentage of whites (86 percent) supported such unions (Krysan and Moberg 2016). Furthermore, findings from a survey conducted in 2016 by the Pew Research Center suggest that fewer whites believe blacks are treated less fairly than whites in the United States. For instance, 25 percent of whites compared to 66 percent of blacks thought blacks were treated less fairly than white when applying for a loan or mortgage. Additionally, 22 percent of whites compared to 64 percent of blacks thought blacks were treated less fairly than whites in the workplace. What is more, 38 percent of whites believe the United States has made all necessary changes to give blacks equal rights as whites, but only eight percent of blacks felt the U.S. had made these changes (Pew Research Center 2016). These results suggest that many whites in the U.S. believe race does not matter for lived experiences. However, despite this belief, blacks continue to have lower rates of homeownership, household wealth and median income than whites. Additionally, these gaps persist even when educational level is controlled (Pew Research Center 2016). This indicates, as scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2006, and 2015) contend, that race still matters in the United States. In the next chapter, I explore increases in interracial marriage but also how there is continued reluctance toward such marriages.

Chapter Three: Explanations for Increases in Interracial Marriage and Ongoing Reluctance Toward Them

Racial and Ethnic Divisions

One explanation for these differences in rates of interracial marriage is that the social taboo placed on interracial marriage between whites and non-black racial minorities is not as pronounced as it is for interracial marriage between whites and blacks. Though, it may also be that there is less social distance between whites and non-black minorities (Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans) than between blacks and whites. Yancey and Lewis (2008) point out that interracial marriage is impacted by the emphasis on racial divisions in the United States. When examining the color line, it becomes clear that whites and blacks are at opposite ends of the racial/ethnic spectrum with all other racial and ethnic minority groups falling in between. Therefore, it seems plausible that whites may feel interracial marriage with groups other than blacks is more socially acceptable, or that whites might already feel more comfortable being in close proximity to non-black minorities, which could increase their opportunities for interracial marriage (Muhsam 1990; Moran 2001).

Sub-population Growth

Another explanation for group differences in rates of intermarriage is patterns of immigration and the resulting differences in sub-group population growth (Yancey and Lewis 2008). While Hispanics only comprised 7 percent of the United States population in 1980, by 2000 they comprised 11 percent of the population. Furthermore, demographers predict the percentage of Hispanics will continue to grow to about 25 percent of the total United States population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Asians have also experienced population growth in the United States but not as much as

Hispanics have. In 1980, the Asian population made up only 2-3 percent of the total United States population. There was not any substantial increase in the number of Asians during the 1990s (by 2000 they only made up 4 percent of the United States population), but it is projected that Asians will comprise 8 percent of the population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Hispanics and Asians are the only groups whose numbers are expected to grow in the coming decades; other groups (i.e., blacks, whites, and Native Americans) are expected to decline or remain steady proportions of the population in the coming years (Yancey and Lewis 2008). The population increases among Asians and Hispanics may be one explanation for why interracial marriage with whites has continued to grow for these groups (i.e., the greater availably of Asians and Hispanics for interracial marriage). Therefore, relative group size can explain some of the propensity toward interracial marriage. Considering that Hispanics made up nearly 18 percent of the United States population in 2015 compared to the 13 percent of the population that was African American, Hispanics and whites may have more opportunities for intermarriage than blacks and whites do (U.S. Census Bureau 2015).

Changing Attitudes

There is other evidence that indicates lessening social distance between whites and all racial and ethnicity minorities. Such evidence can be found in studies of racial attitudes in the United States. Research has shown whites' attitudes regarding racial inequality and integration have improved over time. In the 1940s, over 50 percent of Americans felt schools should be segregated and blacks should not (have) receive the same job prospects available to whites. In 1972, only three percent of Americans felt

blacks should not be afforded the same job opportunities as whites. By 1985, only seven percent of Americans felt schools should be segregated (Bobo and Smith 1998).

Of course, progressive racial attitudes in general may be related to increased contact between whites and non-whites over time (Johnson and Jacobson 2005). Research has indicated that attitudes regarding interracial relationships and marriage have become more progressive during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Most Americans no longer believe laws should exist that confine marriage to two people of the same race; about 38 percent of respondents favored such laws in 1975, compared to about 10 percent in 2002 (Yancey and Lewis 2008). Moreover, there has been growth in approval of interracial marriage. According to a 2001 *New York Times* study, 29 percent of Americans approved of interracial marriage in 1972. Those who approved of interracial marriage grew to 65 percent by 2001. Yet, while more Americans currently approve of interracial marriage now than in the past, there still seems to be some reservations among whites regarding interracial marriage. While most whites tend to support interracial marriage, some feel it is okay for others but not for themselves. For instance, respondents to a study by Bonilla-Silva (2003) indicated they did not have a problem with others engaging in interracial relationships and marriage; however, they could not or did not see themselves in such a relationship. Similarly, Herman and Campbell (2011) found many whites hold progressive attitudes toward interracial relationships and marriage with African Americans and Asian Americans, but their attitudes do not translate into behaviors. That is, while they may report holding favorable attitudes toward interracial marriage, they may be hesitant or resistant to actually engaging in interracial marriage themselves.

Research has shown a link between education and racial attitudes. For instance, Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo (1985) note that individuals who have a college education and who live outside the South historically possessed more progressive racial attitudes. However, in the past their rates of interracial marriage were not higher.

Research has also found gender disparities in racial attitudes. Johnson and Marini (1998) examined a variety of racial attitudes about interracial friendships, school segregation, and job prospects and hierarchies held by high school seniors. Their findings indicate that females hold more racially progressive attitudes than males; and what is more, these findings apply to both black and white females. For instance, the authors found females were more likely to build friendships with individuals of differing races and were less likely to express resistance to living and working in close proximity to members of a different race. McClelland and Linnander (2006) also found gender to be significant in their study on the racial attitudes of college students. Consistent with the findings of Johnson and Marini, their findings suggest white females are more racially progressive than white males. However, it should be noted that McClelland and Linnander only examined whites' racial attitudes toward African Americans. Factors besides the racially progressive attitudes white females are more likely to possess may contribute to their greater likelihood of interracial marriage (relative to white males). That is not to say, however, that gender is the only factor that impacts racial attitudes; other research (e.g., Hughes and Tuch 2003), suggests that one's group position in the racial hierarchy has more influence on one's racial attitudes than one's gender.

Research regarding racial attitudes should be interpreted with caution. As pointed out by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Schuman and Johnson (1976), attitudes do not always translate into actual behaviors. Therefore, while whites' attitudes appear to have become more progressive over time, their behaviors do not necessarily match their attitudes. For instance, when measuring interracial friendships through wedding photographs, Berry (2006) found that whites are less likely to have friends who are black than friends who are white (that is, most friendships tend to be racially concordant). Additionally, research has shown that in order for America's neighborhoods to become desegregated, large numbers of whites and non-whites would have to move (Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004). As whites are less likely to have black friends and live in the same residential areas as blacks, this means they are less likely to socialize and have meaningful relationships with blacks, and therefore, are more likely to participate in homogenous marriage markets.

Education

Qian (1997) examined the role education plays in the likelihood of one experiencing interracial marriage. The author not only found educational homogamy to increase interracial marriage, but he also found basic gender differences in interracial marriage. For instance, when compared to their male counterparts, white females have low rates of endogamy. However, he does not indicate specific racial groups in which white women are more likely to marry. Research by Kalmijn (1993), though, has found that white females are more likely to marry black males. Kalmijn suggests that white females are likely to marry black males when they have the opportunity to increase their socioeconomic status. That is not to say that obtaining higher levels of education will

automatically increase the prevalence of interracial marriage among blacks and whites, however. Fryer (2007) notes that, between 1940 and 1960, whites with less than a high school education were more likely to intermarry that any other group of whites. The same pattern is evident for other racial and ethnic groups as well. For instance, Asian men with higher levels of education were much less likely to intermarry than Asian men with less than a high school education. While the pattern is similar for Asian women with the same levels of education, the timing slightly differs (Asian women with less than a high school education were more likely to intermarry between 1950 and 1980). Additionally, African Americans with less than a high school education were more likely to intermarry during the 1960s and 1970s, after which those with some college education became the most likely group of African Americans to intermarry. A possible explanation for this shift is that more educated African Americans are more likely to live in racially mixed areas, which can decrease social distance and increase odds of interracial marriage (Qian 1997). As Qian (1997, 2005) points out, physical distance and other elements of the social structure (e.g., racial identity, residential and school segregation, and economic inequality) might keep rates of black/white intermarriage low. However, current statistics indicate that regardless of race or ethnicity, those with higher levels of education are more likely to experience interracial marriage (Kreider 2000; Qian 2005).

Chapter Four: Past Research on the Experiences of Interracial Couples

Even though resistance to and openly expressed negative attitudes toward interracial marriage have declined, unspoken prohibitive norms might impact the marriage experience for some couples in more recent times. Because there still seems to be a subtle social taboo placed on interracial marriage in the United States, interracial couples might face some adverse reactions. When interracial couples married in the past (e.g., the 1960s), it seems as though they could expect an adverse reaction from family. In her 2011 article, McClain highlights some of the experiences of those who married interracially prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Some of the participants tell stories of their family's distaste for their decisions, including statements such as, "…very, very upset and wouldn't attend the wedding," and "His father was a bitter racist who threatened to have Tom hospitalized in a mental hospital. He had the family minister come and try to dissuade him from marrying me…" (16). Although acceptance and support from family and friends seemed to be lacking in the past, it appears that younger generations are more supportive of family and friends in interracial relationships. Lewis and Yancey (1995) report that about half of their respondents' parents were very supportive of their decision to marry someone of a different race. Therefore, research suggests that the familial barrier to interracial marriage has not been as prominent in recent years as it has been in the past (Yancey and Lewis 2008). However, research has shown these barriers do persist to some degree; Qian (2005) notes that many interracial couples experience anxiety from the anticipated reaction of their family members when they learn of the interracial relationship.

Even though family and friends might be more supportive of interracial marriage nowadays than in the past, interracial couples continue to be on the receiving end of adverse reactions from the larger society. Research has suggested that reactions may differ based on the type of intermarriage (Yancey 2007; Yancey and Lewis 2008). In the past, couples in interracial marriages, especially black male/white female marriages, were subject to prosecution (Romano 2003) or even acts of violence and death (Davis et al. 1941). Scholars have found that those in black/white contemporary interracial marriages also face higher social sanctions (e.g., discrimination and rejection) than other interracial married couples (Lewis and Yancey 1995; Herring and Amissah 1997; Yancey 2003). Yancey (2007) examines the ways in which black/white couples have experienced racism. One individual in a black male/white female interracial marriage described an event in which a law enforcement officer assumed the female was in danger because she was seen leaving a bar with a black man:

> [H]e asked me to get out of the car. I came to the front of the vehicle and he said he pulled me over to find out if I was okay. I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Well, we don't usually see white women in a vehicle with black men. You don't look like a prostitute.'…I said, 'That is my husband. We are fine' (Yancey, 2007:206).

Given the stressors they experience, it may not be surprising that research has found higher rates of marital conflict and dissolution for racially discordant couples compared to racially homogenous couples (Kreider 2000; Bratter and King 2008; Zhang and Van Hook 2009). However, there are certain types of interracial marriages that have higher odds of marital conflict and dissolution than others. Bratter and King (2008) found that interracial marriages involving white females and non-white males to be the most

vulnerable for all types of interracial marriage when compared to white/white marriages. Particularly high rates of divorce were found for black males/white females when compared to the divorce rate for white/white couples. Bratter and King, however, did not find a difference in the divorce rate for white men/non-white women when compared to white/white couples. What is more, the authors found white men/black women to have even lower divorce rates than those of white/white couples.

Other research has also noted the greater likelihood of marital disruption for interracial marriages. Using Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data, Zhang and Van Hook (2009) found about 14 percent of interracial marriages ended during their participation in the SIPP study. Conversely, the authors found only 10 percent of same-race marriages ended. Consistent with the findings of Bratter and King, the authors also found black/white marriages to have the highest divorce rate, relative to other white/non-white groups. Zhang and Van Hook found 20 percent of black/white marriages in the sample experienced a divorce. Hispanic/white and Asian/white couples in the sample experienced lower divorce rates (14 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

Bratter and King (2008) suggest that social distance plays a role in the duration and strength of interracial relationships. The authors indicate that marriages that take place between groups who experience the most social distance (i.e., blacks and whites), can often experience social stigmas, which can negatively impact relationship quality. Furthermore, the authors point to gender differences in rates of black/white interracial marriages as a factor that further complicates marriage quality. Bratter and King note that white women have married black men at a higher rate than black women have married white men since the 1960s. They suggest that black women have more

obstacles to interracial marriage than black men (although they do not indicate the specific obstacles). However, Bratter and King suggest that there may be a certain level of selectivity and commitment present in white male/black female marriages that might be lacking in black male/white female marriages, which might protect white male/black female marriages from the possibility of divorce.

Other scholars suggest that black females often hold negative attitudes toward black male/white female intermarriage, as they may perceive white females to be a threat to their marriage market candidates (Dalmage 2000; Childs 2005). The number of marriageable black males can be limited due to black men's disproportionate rates of incarceration (Pettit and Western 2004) higher rates of mortality (Staples 1985), and inadequate job prospects (Wilson 1996). White women are also viewed by black women as incapable of adequately mothering a potential non-white offspring, as white mothers do not have the experience of being a racial minority in America (Twine 1999).

Aside from marital conflict and dissolution, raising children in an interracial union can be difficult at times. For instance, many parents want their bicultural or multiracial children to embrace their entire heritage, but at the same time, they worry about how their children will be treated in social interactions (Norment 1985; Root 2001; Childs 2005). Additionally, mixed race adult children often feel that their parents were not prepared to raise biracial children (Root 2001).

Besides societal perceptions and lack of family/friend support, other factors can also have an impact on the dissolution of an interracial marriage. Zhang and Van Hook (2009) found those in interracial marriages have larger age and education gaps between spouses, which could partly explain some of the high risk of divorce for interracial

couples. Though, the authors found income and age at marriage did not explain the high divorce rate for interracial couples (as interracial couples usually are older at first marriage and also have higher incomes). It should be noted that the couples in the sample were married at any point before 1970 until 1995.

The majority of the research on interracial marriage has focused on trends and rates of interracial unions over time, with less research examining the experiences of interracial couples in a comprehensive manner (that is, looking at their early life experiences with race/ethnicity, experiences forming interracial marriage, experiences within interracial marriages, and experience as interracial parents). As racial attitudes in general, and interracial marriage attitudes in particular, have become more positive and progressive since the 1960s, it is important to understand whether society has become more receptive to interracial couples and understand they array of experiences of interracial married couples.

Chapter Five: The Research Problem

In this chapter, I discuss the broad research questions that were addressed in the study and the "driving forces" behind the six specific lines of inquiry that were investigated.

Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, the goal of my research was to examine the experiences (e.g., discrimination experienced, familial reactions, parenting) of interracial couples in a so-called "post-racial" society. That said, the first broad research question addressed in this study is: "What are the experiences of interracial (interethnic) married couples in a so-called 'post-racial' society?" If we do in fact live in a society in which race/ethnic relations have been improved to the extent that race/ethnicity no longer shape life experiences—a belief that some Americans seem to hold (e.g., Pew Research Center 2016) —then race/ethnicity should not matter much in interracial marriages. Therefore, I formed a second broad research question: "How much does race/ethnicity matter in interracial (interethnic) marriages in the contemporary United States?"

Lines of Inquiry

In addition to addressing the broad research questions discussed above, my research also investigated six specific lines of inquiry: participants' racial/ethnic identity, their early life experiences, their experiences of getting together and getting married, their experiences as a married couple, their plans for future children and the race/ethnic-related experiences of their children, and their perceptions of interracial couples in the media.

Racial/Ethnic Identity

As I will discuss in Chapters Six and Seven, participants were asked on a questionnaire completed prior to the interview (see the Appendix) to describe their racial/ethnic groups (background). Participants then were asked at the beginning of the interview how strongly they identified with the racial/ethnic group(s) they chose. Since the individuals who participated in this research were in interracial (interethnic) marriages, it seems possible that they may not strongly identify with the racial/ethnic group(s) they selected on the questionnaire. As pointed out by Hill and Thomas (2000), whites may change their behaviors toward other whites in an interracial marriage (i.e., treat them worse), because they are viewed as a "White person who is in an interracial relationship," and not as a "white" person (without any qualifiers). Also, blacks in interracial marriages may be viewed as "not black enough" by other blacks, or in the case of blacks' marriages to whites, as more assimilated to white culture by whites (Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell 1995). Because the racial/ethnic identity of those in an interracial marriage can be constantly constructed and reconstructed by others, that might mean that the racial/ethnic identity of those in an interracial marriage is influenced by their social settings and those in their social settings (Afful, Wohlford, and Stoelting 2015). Therefore, this line of inquiry sought to determine not only the strength of the participants' racial/ethnic identity, but also if they felt any less attached to the racial/ethnic group they selected as a result of being in an interracial marriage. Additionally, I wanted to determine the factors (internal and/or external) on which participants based the strength of their racial/ethnic identity.

Early Life Experiences

The rationale behind assessing the early life experiences of the research participants was to determine whether and how these experiences may have influenced the participants ending up in an interracial marriage. Examining the influence of earlier life events on later ones draws upon the life history/life course perspective (e.g., Giele 2009). Several interview questions were used to assess whether and how the early life experiences of the research participants may have influenced their interracial marriages later. More specifically, the interview questions asked about the exposure participants had to other racial/ethnic minority groups in their neighborhoods and schools while growing up, and if the participants had friends outside of their racial/ethnic group while growing up (see Chapter Seven and the Appendix for more detail). As found by Emerson, Kimbro, and Yancey (2002), those who have exposure to other racial/groups in their schools and neighborhoods have higher likelihoods of diverse social networks in later life and are more likely to be in interracial marriages. In addition, I investigated whether and how messages participants received about potential or appropriate marriage partners were a part of their early life experiences, as such messages were likely communicated (if they were communicated at all) when the participants became interested in dating or earlier. Messages from parents about interracial relationships during adolescence can impact the formation of interracial romantic relationships (Petroni 1971; Edmonds and Killen 2009). The exposure the participants had to interracial married couples and their own experiences of interracial dating while growing up (if any) were also investigated. If the participants had exposure to interracial married couples while growing up, it seems possible that they may have viewed these

relationships as more normative, and therefore, they were more open to engaging in interracial relationships themselves. Furthermore, interracial dating behaviors can be a predictor of selecting mates across the race line in the future (King and Bratter 2007).

Experiences of Getting Together and Getting Married

This line of inquiry was used to investigate how interracial relationships were formed among the participants in this study (e.g., when, where, and how couples met) and how being in an interracial relationship may have influenced the length of courtship, experiences of cohabitation, and the engagement period. Additionally, the reactions research participants received from family and friends as a result of their interracial relationship and marriage also was investigated; this allowed for the exploration of the impact of marriage markets and the mate selection process on forming interracial relationships. In particular, black women may experience a squeezed marriage market because of limited numbers of "marriageable" black men (e.g., Crowder and Tolnay 2000). Given that black females have higher rates of obtaining college degrees than black males (U.S. Department of Education 2016), highly-educated black females may have an especially difficult time finding black men with levels of education similar to theirs to marry; therefore, they may be more likely to cross the race line in order to find a spouse with a similar level of education (Choi and Tienda 2016). (Education is an important factor in assortative mating, see, for example, Schwartz and Mare 2005.) Finally, reactions from family and friends, especially negative reactions, may be due to the perceived exchange or social status. That is, the parents of whites (considered a higher status group in the United States) may react negatively toward interracial relationships, especially when the racial/ethnic minority in

the relationship is black (considered a lower status group in the United States). Because of the different statuses of whites and blacks in the United States, whites might be perceived by parents (as others) as losing status and/or white privilege when they marry blacks. In sum, there were multiple driving forces behind this specific line of inquiry.

Experiences as Married Couples

Clearly, it was necessary to examine marital experiences in order to understand the complexities associated with being in an interracial marriage (e.g., emphasis spouses placed on being in an interracial marriage, reactions from strangers in public settings) and to determine whether aspects of married life (e.g., the successes within their marriage and the dynamics of their marriage) differ between interracial couples and same-race couples. As mentioned in the prior chapter, interracial married couples in the past have often had negative experiences. Therefore, the experiences of interracial couples as described in the literature was a driving force behind this specific line of inquiry.

Anticipating Children and Experiences of Children

As mentioned in the previous chapter, planning to raise and actually raising biracial/multiracial (multiethnic) children can be challenging because interracial couples know their children are likely to have or have had negative experiences due to their racial-ethnic background. Negotiating the racial identity of biracial/multiracial children also can be a challenge (Norment 1985; Root 2001; Childs 2005). The literature reviewed earlier (e.g., the disproportionate shooting of black men by law enforcement) was the major driving force behind this line of inquiry.

Perceptions of Interracial Couples in the Media

The driving force behind investigating participants' perceptions of interracial couples in the media was an interest in what parallels, if any, research participants drew between their own lived experiences with interracial marriage and portrayals of interracial marriages on television and in movies. Given their own experiences, I wanted to know whether the couples considered what is shown on television and in movies to be an accurate portrayal of what it means, and what it is like, to be in an interracial marriage.

Chapter Six: Data and Methods

The data for this research were primarily collected using qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews. Using qualitative methods allowed for the gathering of detailed information that would not have been obtained otherwise. Semi-structured interviews were used to learn about the experiences of interracial couples. A short questionnaire was also utilized to gather demographic and other information from each respondent.

Recruitment

The couples who participated in this research were recruited using a variety of methods. Snowball sampling and web-based announcements were the primary methods used to identify couples who wished to participate in this research. I placed an initial announcement seeking participants for this study on my personal Facebook page on January 28, 2014. An additional recruitment announcement was placed on my Facebook page on July 6, 2015. In a few cases, interracial couples contacted me directly to express interest in the study. In other cases, someone who knew interracial couples provided me with the couple's contact information (with the couple's permission and expectation that I would be contacting them). In addition to relying on web-based announcements, I also relied on snowball sampling to identify potential participants. In these instances, individuals who knew interracial couples who might be interested in participating provided me with the couples contact information. I would then contact the couple to gauge their interest and arrange an interview if the couple decided to participate.

Interviews were conducted between January 2014 and July 2015. Couples were eligible to participate in this research if they were in a heterosexual interracial or interethnic marriage and between the ages of 18 and 64. Initially, no incentives were used to encourage participation. However, in order to encourage interest and participation in the study, the decision was made to offer an incentive. Three couples participated in this research prior to the IRB approval of an incentive; therefore, these three couples were not offered, nor did they receive any incentives for their participation. Couples who agreed to participate in the research after April 2, 2014 were provided with one $45 gift card to either Target or Walmart. A total of 15 couples (30 individuals) participated in this research.

Since my web-based announcement was viewed by interracial couples outside of the Oklahoma, I did not place any restrictions on where participants lived, as long as they met the basic requirements for participation. However, in the event a couple lived out of state or not within reasonable driving distance, the informed consent form, the study questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope were mailed to the participants via the United States Postal Service. The interviews with these couples were scheduled only after I received the signed informed consent.

Seven couples who participated in this research were from the Oklahoma City metropolitan area and one couple lived in the Tulsa metropolitan area. Seven couples lived outside of the state of Oklahoma. All interviews of couples living in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area were conducted in person. The couple living in the Tulsa metropolitan area and six of the seven interviews with couples who did not live in Oklahoma were conducted using FaceTime or Skype. One interview with a couple who

did not live in Oklahoma was conducted over the telephone. Four of the seven in-person interviews were conducted at the couples' homes. One was conducted in an office in the Department of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma, another was conducted at my office at the University of Central Oklahoma at the time, and one interview was conducted in a participant's office. Couples were interviewed together and each couple was interviewed once. Interviews lasted from just over 30 minutes to just under two hours. All interviews were audio-recorded, if both respondents in a couple consented.

Interviews

All interview questions included on the schedule were open-ended. The interview schedule included 37 questions (not including prompts) designed to gain information about respondents' experiences while growing up (e.g., exposure to different racial/ethnic groups, interracial dating, etc.), the couple's experiences getting together and getting married, their experiences as a married couple, the dynamics of their marriage (e.g., household chores and decision making), how children will impact their marriage (only asked for those without children), the experiences of their children interacting and dealing with race and ethnicity (for those with children), and a question about how the participants felt interracial couples were portrayed in the media. Prompts were also included on the interview schedule and were sometimes used to gain more detailed information from respondents (see Appendix). It should be noted that, prior to each interview, the brief questionnaire was completed by each respondent. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items that included such items as the age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and occupation of each respondent; income (individual and household); domestic responsibilities; and, if they couple had any children, the age and

gender of each; and plans to have any children (if they were not already parents) (see Appendix). Also, I spent a few minutes at the beginning of each interview verifying some of the information provided by the respondents on their questionnaires (e.g., how strongly the respondents identified with the racial/ethnic group(s) they selected on the questionnaire, if either respondent in a couple had children from a previous marriage, if any of the children a couple had together were adopted).

The interview questions (i.e., how the interview schedule moves from early life experiences to later life experiences) were guided by the life course/life history perspective principle that earlier life experiences shape later life experiences (e.g., Giele 2009), as well as the "driving forces" discussed in the previous chapter. Some of the specific questions on the interview schedule were adapted from Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell (1995); however, other question development was guided by my goals for the project. The original research (without incentives) and the modification with incentives were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus.

As previously mentioned, all interviews were audio recorded. I did occasionally make notes during the interviews, especially to highlight body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice used by respondents during the interviews. A note regarding the skin tone of each participant was also made immediately following each interview. Using Microsoft Word, I transcribed all interviews. This insured that any information that could be considered identifying (e.g., the names of the couples' children) were redacted from the interview transcripts.

Participants

The demographic characteristics of the 30 individuals (15 couples) who participated in this research are presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms were created to protect the identity of the research participants. The occupations were also "masked" as the respondents' real occupations could potentially allow for their identification. Other potentially identifying information (e.g., names of children, states/towns respondents lived, etc.) were changed or redacted to maintain anonymity. Interview participants ranged in age from 28-years-old to 43-years-old. The age distribution of those who participated in this research is as follows: five (16.7 percent) were in their late 20s (28 and 29 years old); 10 (33.3 percent) were between 30 and 34 years old; seven (23.3 percent) were between 35 and 39 years old; and eight (26.7 percent) were in their early 40s (40-43 years old). The mean age for the sample was 35.4 years.

The highest level of education attained by research participants ranged from less than a high school diploma to having completed a graduate or professional degree. One respondent reported having not completed high school; one respondent reported having a high school diploma; one respondent reported having skilled/vocational training; four reported having some college, but no degree; two reported completing an associate's degree; four had completed a four-year college degree; two had completed some graduate school, but had not attained a graduate degree; and 15 participants had completed a graduate or professional degree. Even though there was some diversity in the educational attainment of those who participated in this research, overall the sample skews to being highly educated.

In terms of race-ethnicity the couple combinations in this research are as follows: five couples (33.3 percent) consisted of a Hispanic male and a white female; four (26.7 percent) were a black male and a white female; three (20 percent) were a black female and a white male; two (13.3 percent) were a Hispanic female and a white male; and one (6.7 percent) was a black male and a Hispanic/Asian female.

The religious affiliation of respondents while growing up is as follows: four (13.3 percent) were raised as Evangelical Protestants; nine (30 percent) were raised in mainline Protestant churches; eight (26.7 percent) were raised as Catholics; five (16.7 percent) were raised as non-denominational Christians; and four (13.3 percent) were raised in other religions (e.g., Anglican/Church of England, Jehovah's Witness, and Bahá'í). When asked to report their current religious affiliation, ten participants, or 33.3 percent of the sample reported having no religious affiliation; three (10 percent) reported affiliating with Evangelical Protestant; one (3.3 percent) identified as mainline Protestant; six (20 percent) identified as Catholic; two (6.7 percent) reported identifying as Muslim; six (20 percent) were affiliated with non-denominational Christian; and two (6.7 percent) identified as Bahá'í.

Nine couples reported they had children, while six couple reported not having children. The demographic information for the children of the couples who participated in this research are presented in Table 2. The children of the couples who participated in this research ranged in age from one-year-old to 23-years-old. One couple (11.1 percent) had three children; four (44.4 percent) had two children, and four (44.4 percent) had one child (one couple who already had one child was expecting another child at the time of their interview). While six couples reported not having children

when they were interviewed, five couples reported they planned on having children in the future.

Analysis

I analyzed the data by reviewing the transcripts several times to identify coding categories and to allow themes to emerge from the data so the data "could speak for themselves." The following themes emerged from the data collected in this research: experiences of diversity, public/private dynamics, children's experiences with race/ethnicity, white privilege, subtleties about responses from family members, and finally, the continuing salience of race and ethnicity. These themes are illustrated in the following presentation of results.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education	Religion	Occupation	Years Married	Number of Children
David	Black/African American	43	Some college	Islam	Student	Seven years	1
Amanda	White/Caucasian	28	Associate's degree	Islam	Teacher's assistant		
Jeremy	White/Caucasian	43	Graduate/professional degree	None	Professor - Economist	Fifteen years	3
Sophia	Black/African American Hispanic/Latina	42	Graduate/professional degree	Catholic	Professor – Historian		
Jacques	Black/African American	33	College degree	None	Industrial Engineer	Six years	0
Michelle	White/Caucasian	29	Graduate/professional degree	None	Teacher		
Brandon	Black/African American	41	Some graduate school	Evangelical Protestant	Military	Eight years	2
Rachel	White/Caucasian	42	Skilled trade, vocational program	Agnostic	Real Estate Agent		
Kevin	White/Caucasian	36	Graduate/professional degree	None	Mathematician	Eight years	2
Laura	Native American Black/African American White/Caucasian	36	Graduate/professional degree	Non-denominational Christian	Biochemist		

Table 1. Participant Demographics, cont.

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education	Religion	Occupation	Years Married	Number of Children
Steven	White/Caucasian	38	Graduate/professional degree	Non-denominational Christian	Adjunct instructor	Nine years	0
Maria	Hispanic/Latina	34	Graduate/professional degree	Non-denominational Christian	Librarian		
Ryan	White/Caucasian	30	High school/GED	Non-denominational Christian	Line installer	Nine years	1
Anna	Hispanic/Latina	30	College degree	Non-denominational Christian	Art director		
Desmond	Black/African American	41	Graduate/professional degree	None	Professor/ Administrator	Twenty-three years	2
Christina	Asian/Asian American Hispanic/Latina	40	College degree	None	Unemployed		
Daniel	Black/African American	34	Associate's degree	None	Electrician	Fourteen years	2
Sarah	White/Caucasian	34	Some college	Non-denominational Christian	Financial Clerk		
Eric	Native American White/Caucasian	38	Graduate/professional degree	Bahá'í	Professor	Three year	0
Portia	Black/African American	35	Graduate/professional degree	Bahá'í	Epidemiologist		

Table 1. Participant Demographics, cont.

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education	Religion	Occupation	Years Married	Number of Children
Gabriel	Hispanic/Latino	35	College degree	None	Student	Seven years	1
Jennifer	White/Caucasian	28	Some college	None	Cashier		
Jorge	Hispanic/Latino	41	Less than high school	Evangelical Protestant	Painter	One year	0
Heather	White/Caucasian	28	Graduate/professional degree	Evangelical Protestant	Human resources manager		
Simon	Hispanic/Latino	39	Some college	Catholic	Military	Five years	0
Jessica	White/Caucasian	34	Graduate/professional degree	Catholic	Financial Manager		
Andrew	Hispanic/Latino	33	Graduate/professional degree	Catholic	Architect	Six years	1
Emily	White/Caucasian	29	Graduate/professional degree	Catholic	Arbitrator		
Aaron	Hispanic/Latino	34	Graduate/professional degree	Catholic	Audiologist	Two years	0
Hannah	White/Caucasian	33	Some graduate school	Mainline Protestant	Fundraising manager		

Table 2. Age and Gender of Children

Couple	Age & Gender of Child 1	Age & Gender of Child 2	Age & Gender of Child 3
David Amanda	5-years-old Male		
Jeremey Sophia	13-years-old Male	11-years-old Male	9-years-old Female
Brandon Rachel	6-years-old Male	4-years-old Male	
Kevin Laura	6-years-old Female	3-years-old Male	
Ryan Anna	1-year-old Female		
Desmond Christina	23-years-old Female	16-years-old Male	
Daniel Sarah	9-years-old Female	6-years-old Female	
Gabriel Jennifer	6-years-old Male		
Andrew Emily	1-year-old Male		

Chapter Seven: Findings for Racial/Ethnic Identity

As mentioned in Chapter Six, I started each interview by briefly reviewing some of the items respondents answered on the demographic questionnaire. One of the socio-demographic questions asked respondents, "Which of the following races and ethnicities describe you? Choose all that apply." Six response categories were provided, as well as a space for study participants to write in a response. In order to gain more insight into participants' racial/ethnic identity, I asked them during the interview to describe how strongly they identified with the race/ethnicity group(s) they selected on the questionnaire. Some participants were uncertain about how to describe the strength of their racial/ethnic identity. For instance, some individuals asked if they were supposed to answer my interview question using a numerical scale (the question as worded on the interview schedule did not include a scale – see Appendix), while others seemed to struggle with what was meant by the word "identify." Brandon, a black male, even asked, "What do you mean by *identify*?" Brandon was able to answer the question once I provided an interpretation of "identify" (I simply told him, "How do you see yourself?"). Other respondents seemed to understand what the question about identity was asking but were unsure about *how* to answer it. For instance, Desmond, a black male, was one respondent who asked if he should use a numerical scale. Desmond said, "What is the strength based upon? The scale would involve one to what?" Once I told Desmond it was fine if he used a numerical scale from one to ten, he was able to provide a numerical response to describe how strongly he identified with the race he selected on the demographic questionnaire. In total, four respondents asked if they were supposed to use a numerical scale to answer the question. I instructed all of the

respondents who asked if they were to use a numerical scale to do so if that was how they wanted to answer the question.

Two participants assigned a numerical value as part of their initial response to the question. I followed up with these individuals to determine why they selected the specific numerical values that they did. For example, Desmond assigned the number seven (on a scale from one to ten) to the strength of his racial identity. When I asked him to elaborate on why he selected that specific number, he responded:

> Because usually what it means to identify with a particular racial group means that you adhere to particular norms of that group, and I feel like I've been beyond those norms for a long time. So, while there are things I can identify with because there's things society presses upon me that makes me part of that group, and there's things I can adhere to in terms of traditions that, you know, help to define me, there are things well beyond that scope.

Christina, who is Hispanic and Asian and married to Desmond, also answered the question using a scale from one to ten. She responded with the number eight. When asked why, she said: "I think for me, it's umm, my own personal identification has to do with my cultural identity." Since she selected two racial/ethnic groups on the demographic questionnaire, Christina was also asked which group she identified with more (see the follow-up item on the interview schedule in Appendix). She said, "I would say the Mexican culture because I can speak Spanish and that's kind of pushed more in my family."

Hannah, a white woman, assigned the number ten to the strength of her racial identity. Whereas I had to ask for Desmond and Christina to elaborate on why they selected the numbers they did, Hannah quickly articulated why she used that value without my asking. Hannah said, "Well…both of my parents are white…I don't identify

as anything else." While Desmond and Christina articulated their racial/ethnic identity in terms of physical appearance and norms or behavioral expectations based on physical appearance (Desmond) or cultural identification (Christina), Hannah seemed to attribute her racial identity and the strength of her identity to the fact that she is the biological offspring of two white people.

Eight white respondents (57 percent of all white respondents) indicated they identified "very strongly" or "strongly" as white or Caucasian; however only two of these respondents were able to articulate without further questioning why they strongly identified as white or Caucasian. These two respondents mentioned the role of phenotypical appearance and/or white privilege played in identifying with whiteness. For instance, Heather said, "I am phenotypically white, I understand I benefit from white privilege…" Eric said, "I understand race is socially constructed and when people look at me, I'm a white guy and I get white privilege. So, I identify with whiteness…" It seems that, at least for Heather and Eric, part of identifying with whiteness means understanding and being aware of white privilege.

Two other respondents who strongly identified as white or Caucasian attributed their identity in terms of their friendship circles or where they thought their place in the world is based on their racial group position (i.e., group position in the racial hierarchy). Ryan thought about racial identity in terms of forming social groups based on racial sameness. Ryan said, "I mean, a lot of my friends are the same race [as I am]." Ryan seems to suggest that racial identity (in his case, identifying as white) is related to with whom one decides to build and maintain friendships. Another respondent, Jennifer, said, "Umm, I would just say strongly…I feel like growing up in America where most

people are white, or I feel like most people are white…the majority of people, so I'm just used to that being how I grew up…I wouldn't say I'm super absorbed in the fact that I'm white…" Here, Jennifer suggests that her white identity is attached to the position of whites in the racial hierarchy in the United States. The other respondents who identified "very strongly" or "strongly" as white or Caucasian either did not want to state or lacked the language to articulate the strength of their racial identity, that is, they did not even try to explain the strength of their racial identification. Overall, it seemed as if white respondents had a bit more difficulty answering this question than non-white respondents.

Four black respondents (50 percent of all black respondents) and four Hispanic respondents (50 percent of all Hispanic respondents) indicated they identified "very strongly" or "strongly" with their racial or ethnic group. Five respondents were able to articulate why they strongly identified as black or Hispanic. What is more, these minority respondents usually were able to articulate or explain their response without being asked to do so. Respondents often provided responses that suggested their racial/ethnic identity was based on externally imposed classifications. For example, Portia stated, "I (laughs) well, I mean, I identify based on how others see me – as African American, and you know, based on – you know, based on my experiences interacting with others as an African American." Portia's response was very similar to her husband's (Eric's) response about being seen as a white guy and having white privilege, but Portia implies that while Eric gets white privilege because of his skin color, she gets differential (worse) treatment interacting with others as a black woman. So, for some of these respondents, racial/ethnic identity was very much attached to their

understanding of how they would be treated because of the color of their skin. As I discuss later, respondents with children often expected their children to identify with the racial/ethnic category others (will) use for them.

Gabriel (Hispanic) provided a response that was similar to Portia's and Jennifer's in that he talked about his racial/ethnic identity in terms of group position in the racial/ethnic hierarchy. Gabriel said: "I'm not really culturally Hispanic, but I just know that that is my place in the world…" Just as Jennifer made reference to understanding that whites were the dominant group in society, Gabriel also references the position of Hispanics in the racial/ethnic hierarchy. For these respondents, having an understanding of group position was the main determinant of racial/ethnic identity.

Interestingly, the interviewees who provided responses that indicated they "somewhat" (my categorization) identified with their racial or ethnic group were all black or Hispanic males. For example, David (black), indicated, "I just see it basically as a way of categorizing people. I identify, yes, that's how I identify myself, but for the most part I don't really put a whole lot of eggs into the basket." Similar to Eric, who mentioned race being a social construction, David also seems to have this understanding as he suggests he does not put much importance on his racial identity because race is not real. While David points out that race is not real (biologically), unlike some other respondents he did not mention the very real consequences associated with skin color (e.g., negative treatment, disadvantages). Jacques (black) who was raised in a country in Central Africa, responded that he did not attach himself to "do[ing] things a black way," but rather that he was aware of how he was viewed by other members in American society:

> I think my answer should be that I'm aware of it, I can give you a lot of examples where I'm aware that I'm a black man with an accent [he was born in a Western European country and raised in a country that had been colonized by Europeans] … to say I see myself as black only or do things a black way – that would be no, however, I'm well aware of this kind of situation.

Jacques was aware that he is grouped with native-born American blacks because of the color of his skin, but he seemed to reject some of the things Desmond mentioned as being part of group identity (recall that Desmond said, "…what it means to identify with a particular racial group means that you adhere to particular norms of that group…") But Jacques also was similar to Desmond because Desmond noted that he had been deviating from behavioral norms associated with blacks for a long time and Jacques seemed to think he had never followed the norms at all.

Also of importance, four interviewees said they really did not identify with the race or ethnicity they selected on the questionnaire. Of these respondents, three were white and one was Hispanic. The white respondents who said they really did not identify with being white were more likely to talk about white in terms of ethnicity. Though, it should be noted that one white respondent, Jessica, provided a response that indicated she did not identify with a specific white ethnic group: "…I don't speak German, I guess I am very minimal to my German ancestry." It seems that Jessica did not identify because she was thinking more in terms of a specific European ethnicity. In contrast, Steven (white) said he identified more with his European heritage than as just white. Steven said:

> I mean, I don't [identify as white]. The reason I don't is because the category is so broad if it's just white and Caucasian. Now, my actual background is Polish, German, and some of the Slavic

> states. I do identify more with that because my grandparents who were Polish and German.

Steven seems to completely ignore his whiteness and instead opts to identify more with European ethnic groups instead. Because Steven might not even see himself as white, he potentially does not understand the privileges he experiences because of the color of his skin.

Summary

The study participants' responses suggest that racial/ethnic identity and how attached people feel to it can be complex and nuanced. For the most part, participants seemed to identify to at least some degree with the racial/ethnic group(s) they selected on the demographic questionnaire, though three respondents (10 percent of all respondents) did not. It was interesting that respondents seemed to struggle with my interview question about identity, to the point that some were unsure how to answer the question. In hindsight, I probably should have used a numerical scale to the assess strength of racial/ethnic identity, if not for anything else than for the sake of consistency in responses. Though, I did not anticipate respondents would struggle as they did. Also of importance were the explanations respondents provided when they elaborated on the strength of the racial/ethnic identity. They based the strength of their identity on behavioral norms and expectations, culture, white privilege, disadvantages because of skin color, and group position in the racial/ethnic hierarchy in the U.S. These responses suggest that social factors (public issues) have an impact on an individual's racial/ethnic identity (a private issue).

Chapter Eight: Findings for Early Life Experiences

Neighborhoods and Schools

Through the interviews, I wanted to get an understanding of how much exposure to different racial/ethnic groups respondents had when they were growing up. I asked the respondents to describe the racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhoods they lived in and the schools they attended when they were young. As shown below, some interview participants used the words "integrated" and "diverse" somewhat haphazardly. The words seemed to have different meanings to different participants.

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Neighborhoods

When respondents were asked about their exposure to other racial/ethnic groups when they were young, some provided answers about the town they lived in when they were young, while others spoke specifically about their neighborhoods. Of the 14 white individuals who participated in the interviews, 12 indicated they grew up in racially homogenous (or nearly racially homogenous) towns and/or neighborhoods. Of these respondents, four (Sarah, Emily, Jessica, and Kevin) specifically stated that the town or neighborhood they grew up in was exclusively white. Some white respondents spoke about the limited exposure they had to other racial/ethnic groups while growing up and attributed it to the racial/ethnic characteristics of their hometowns. For instance, Heather and Michelle (both white participants) stated that they did not have much exposure to other racial/ethnic groups while growing up due to the racial/ethnic composition of the towns in which they lived. Heather said, "I grew up in a really small town, very rural. Umm, 97 percent white." Michelle replied, "Umm, I had hardly any experiences growing up around other races or ethnicities. The town I'm from is almost

all white – it's like 95 percent white." Based on the descriptions provided by Heather and Michelle, most, if not all of their social interactions while growing up seemed to be with people who looked like them (in terms of skin tone). In fact, Heather and Michelle mentioned later in their interviews that they did not have exposure to other racial/ethnic groups until they went to college. Thus, their exposure to other racial/ethnic groups was determined by the social space they occupied at different stages in their lives.

Other white respondents described their residential environments as "almost all white," "predominately white," or "not very diverse." Amanda noted that, while there were racial/ethnic minority groups in her hometown, they were socially isolated from the white population. She stated:

> And where I'm from, which would be [western Oklahoma], obviously it is no longer segregated, but it was segregated at one point in time. So a lot of my friends who were black and whatnot, lived in the old segregation parts of town, mostly because they just have never moved.

Though Amanda stated that de jure segregation was no longer an issue, she ignored the consequences of de facto segregation and its role in keeping racial/ethnic groups isolated from one another. Furthermore, Amanda seems to cryptically insinuate that her neighborhood was mostly white and that this was largely because the racial/ethnic minorities had never bothered to move because they preferred to live in the "old segregation" neighborhoods, not because whites in her hometown did not want to live around racial/ethnic minorities.

Seven non-white respondents indicated they grew up in racially homogenous neighborhoods. David (black) indicated that he grew up in an all-black neighborhood, while Maria and Anna (both Hispanic) said they grew up in neighborhoods in which all

of the residents were Hispanic (specifically, Mexican). Though Jorge (Hispanic) responded that he also grew up in a social environment where "everyone looked the same," it should be noted that he grew up in Mexico. Two black respondents (Daniel and Portia) used the phrase, "predominately black (or African American)," to describe the communities they lived in while growing up. Christina did not explicitly describe her neighborhood as numerically dominated by Mexicans; instead, she described it as "very Mexican-based," which has some cultural overtones attached to it. The common theme in these responses is that most (19) participants did not have a lot of contact with other racial/ethnic groups in their neighborhoods while growing up, but what is even more telling is that their comments reflect the residential segregation and isolation present in many of America's neighborhoods.

Three non-white respondents did describe their towns or neighborhoods as racially diverse. Brandon (black) specifically used the term "diverse" when describing his neighborhood. Brandon said, "In my neighborhood there was [sic] four black families, I think like two Asian families, and the rest of them were white, and Hispanic, too." Brandon was one of the few respondents that used this much description when discussing the neighborhood he lived in while growing up; however, I had to encourage Brandon to say more than, "it was diverse," to describe his neighborhood. Brandon mentioned only a limited number of non-white families (note that he did not provide a specific number of Hispanic families), so while Brandon definitely grew up exposed to other racial/ethnic groups, he was probably exposed more to white non-Hispanics than to non-white and Hispanic individuals.

Three other respondents were less direct, but nevertheless, described non-racially homogenous social environments. For instance, at first Sophia (black) said her neighborhood was a "black neighborhood." However, she seemed to backtrack on that as she provided a more detailed description of the racial boundaries of neighborhoods where she lived while growing up. Sophia replied:

> I grew up in a black neighborhood, and well, our neighborhood was probably a little more – when I was growing up it was a little bit more diverse – it was black, but there where white people that lived in our neighborhood as well. The neighborhoods in [redacted] are very…they blend right along certain parts of, you know, depending on where it divides, like you see an Italian/black mix, or a Hispanic, like a Puerto Rican/black mix in some sides of the city.

Sophia seems to acknowledge that there was a large presence of black residents in her neighborhood, but she points out that there was a noticeable representation of non-black residents in her neighborhood as well. However, Sophia specifically mentioned Italians and Puerto Ricans in her response. It may be that the parts of these neighborhoods that blended were ethnic enclaves for white ethnic groups, as well as other ethnic groups. Therefore, while these neighborhoods seemed to blend at the peripheries, otherwise they seem to have been racially segregated based on Sophia's description.

Desmond (black) also said he had exposure to various racial/ethnic groups in his neighborhood, which was in a large metropolitan area on the West Coast: "So, where I'm from [on the West Coast] – it was a little more of a mix where we had primarily black and Hispanic, but then you have some South Pacific Islanders, we even had a small representation of Native Americans…" Desmond's description of his neighborhood suggests he had exposure to various racial/ethnic groups while he was

young; however, Desmond's description included only racial/ethnic minorities. Even though Desmond said his neighborhood had "a little more of a mix," which implies a diverse representation of residents, he did not acknowledge if there were any white residents in his neighborhood. Desmond's response, as well as the responses provided by other interview participants, suggests that "diversity" is not necessarily based on some objective criteria.

Some respondents said they had a lot of exposure to individuals from other racial/ethnic groups when they were younger, largely because they grew up in neighborhoods where they were the numerical minority. Six respondents (three Hispanic males, two white males, and one black female) indicated this was their experience. However, for four of the six respondents, exposure to other racial groups translated to exposure to whites, but not other non-white racial groups.

Two of the Hispanic males, Andrew and Aaron, both said they grew up in neighborhoods that were vastly white, while another Hispanic male, Simon, said his neighborhood was racially/ethnically mixed. Andrew did have some exposure to a more integrated/diverse setting while living on a military base in Germany as a child, but he also described living around mostly white people. When asked about his exposure to different racial/ethnic groups while growing up, Andrew replied, "[Pauses] I guess I never really thought about it, because we did – no, we associated more with and lived by like, normal Caucasian people." However, when I asked more specifically about the neighborhood Andrew grew up in, he said:

> I think Germany was a little more diverse because everyone lived on base, so you couldn't have a divide there because there was the one housing area where everyone lived. Other than that, like in [redacted], everyone was pretty much white.

Even though Andrew was exposed to other racial/ethnic groups while he was young, his response suggests that the majority of his formative years were spent around "normal Caucasian people." A couple aspects of Andrew's initial comments are troubling. First, Andrew suggests that he did not really think about the racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhoods he lived in while growing up. Andrew has a very light skin tone and can probably easily pass as white, which means that he likely did not have any negative experiences due to race/ethnicity while growing up. Also, since he benefited from passing as white, it could be that Andrew internalized this (being able to pass) to an extent and did not really have to think about race/ethnicity (or the absence of other racial/ethnic groups), which has been identified as an element of white privilege (McIntosh 1988). Second, Andrew's phrasing of "normal Caucasian people" is disconcerting. While it may have been an innocent slip, it may also be a reflection of the adopted white privilege (i.e., honorary white status) Andrew seems to possess as a result of not appearing to be Hispanic.

Eric, (white), had a unique experience in that he had a lot of contact with black children as he lived in a black neighborhood. Eric even mentioned that he was aware of his numerical minority status and even asked his parents why they made the decision to live where they did. Eric stated:

> Umm, so I was raised in the kind of mid-South, in Virginia, during the era of Reaganomics and the War on Drugs. So, where I was raised in Virginia was a predominately black neighborhood, and I remember at a certain age I asked my parents, "Why did you decide to move in here, where we were the minority of this neighborhood?" And they said, "Well, we wanted you to know what it feels like to be different." So, it was a very conscious choice on their part, and my parents are pretty progressive, and they were involved in the Civil Rights and Human Rights movements, and so forth. So, I think it was really abnormal for

> white Americans at that time to make a decision like that – that we're going to move into a black neighborhood so our white son can grow up not being racially unconscious.

Here, Eric discussed that his parents purposefully made the decision to raise him in an environment that would give him an idea of what it felt like to be a racial or ethnic minority. However, Eric noted that he did not believe many whites were making decisions to raise their children so they would be sensitive to issues of race during this time, or to actively decide to live in a neighborhood with black neighbors. While this is likely true, Eric seemed to imply that this was an anomaly for the mid-1980s. Based on the most recent black-white segregation indices (indices of dissimilarity) for metropolitan areas, this does not seem like a decision many whites are making now either (Frey 2011). The index of dissimilarity measures the evenness of two groups across a geographic area, in this case, neighborhoods. Specifically, the index provides the percentage of blacks that would have to move for blacks and whites to be evenly distributed in neighborhoods across a metropolitan area (Massey and Denton 1993). While segregation had decreased somewhat between 1980 and 2000 (Farley and Squires 2005), 39 metropolitan areas out of 102 had indices in the 60s or higher in 2010 (that is, over 60 percent of blacks would have to move for an even distribution to be achieved), which means there is still a fair number of cities with high levels of segregation (Frey 2011). Even though segregation indices have declined, this is not likely due to whites consciously deciding to move into black neighborhoods. As Douglas Massey stated in a *New York Times* article, decreases in residential segregation are likely due to formerly all-white neighborhoods becoming more populated by Hispanics and Asians (*The New York Times* 2012). And, as Ellen (2000) notes, some whites will even go so far as

avoiding integrated neighborhoods because they fear that these neighborhoods will rapidly fill with even more black households.

While Eric's situation was certainly an anomaly, he went on to say that growing up in an environment in which he was the racial minority (in numerical terms) heavily influenced his life. Furthermore, he explained that while he had some difficulties navigating the color line, he ultimately developed a racial awareness and an understanding of white privilege because of his experiences:

> So, I don't think I would be a professor or any of this stuff if I hadn't been raised where I was raised. Umm, that said, I felt like I was constantly navigating this line where I didn't fit. Because I was the minority in the neighborhood I was always being told, "Well, (says his name) can't play basketball because white people don't know how to play basketball." So, I tried really hard to play basketball because that was one way of fitting in then. Or, you know, "white people can't do this, or white people can't do that." Whatever racial stereotype black Southerners had about whites, I tried to somehow disprove. I [think] that's a great deal of mental and emotional angst and effort to be put on someone who is like 10 years old and trying to figure out how these things work. At the same time, I was learning that whenever we left the neighborhood and went out, all of the sudden I had all these privileges and rights, and people treated me like I was wonderful, which was very different I would say from how my black peers were treated. And when police would come into our neighborhood, and me and a group of guys would be walking down the street, and the police just wanted to mess with us or whatever, they would take all my black friends and throw them on the ground and tell me to walk home. So, there was this incredible racial consciousness I had growing up and living on the color line – receiving white privileges on the one hand and also trying to constantly trying to fit in to the southern black community, where I was kind of accepted, but never 100 percent.

Although Eric mentioned that psychological anguish he experienced while trying to dispel myths about white people in his neighborhood, he also mentioned that because of white privilege he was able to escape that burden at times. Therefore, even though he

was the numerical minority in his neighborhood, he had white privilege on his side. It is as if he is suggesting here that only whites can easily escape a situation where they are the minority and still be able to reaffirm their status in society. Though, Eric indicates that his experiences as a numerical minority were especially important for his choice of profession and for his racial attitudes. The contact hypothesis proposed by Gordon Allport (1954) suggests that social contact effectively reduces prejudices. In Eric's case, it seems that the interpersonal contact he had in his neighborhood had a profound impact on the decisions he made later in life (e.g., joining a black fraternity in college, interracial dating, interracial marriage).

Though Laura (black, married to Kevin) shared Eric's experience as being a numerical minority where she grew up, her situation was the opposite in that she was raised in a white neighborhood. What is more, Laura, indicated that most of her interactions when she was young were with whites. Laura responded, "Umm, almost all of my interactions were with Caucasian children in my town and in school. And my mom is white, and my entire family I grew up with is white…I think the non-Caucasian population in Vermont is about two percent…" Despite stating that she had at least two Puerto Rican friends who lived in her neighborhood, Laura conveyed that she mostly interacted with white people while growing up. Therefore, Laura's personal interactions were largely shaped by the demographics of the larger social setting, the state she lived in when she was a child.

While the participants' responses regarding exposure to other racial/ethnic groups in the neighborhoods they grew up in were varied, the responses they provided

about exposure to other racial/ethnic groups in the schools they attended, which is discussed next, were less varied.

Racial Composition of Schools[13]

Based on the responses regarding neighborhood composition, it seems that white interview participants had limited opportunities for interracial contact in their neighborhoods (as they had a tendency to describe their neighborhoods as "predominately white"). Research participants were asked to discuss the racial/ethnic composition of the schools they attended. Twenty-eight respondents said they had exposure to other racial/ethnic groups in their schools. However, fourteen (11 white, two black, and one Hispanic) participants said that they had attended schools where the majority of the student body was white. One respondent, Sophia, did not directly state that her schooling was predominately with whites, but she suggested it was mostly with whites. She said:

> Oh! I had quite a bit of contact with different racial and ethnic groups growing up, particularly ethnic whites, so not just Protestant whites, but Italian, Irish, umm, Eastern European. So yeah, considerable. I went to school at a Catholic school where I got to meet a lot of different people.

While Sophia mentioned her exposure to "different racial and ethnic groups," she only mentioned exposure to whites of European descent, but not Hispanics, Asians, or any other racial/ethnic minority groups. While it should not be assumed that Sophia did not have any exposure to these groups at her school, based on her response, it seems likely the school Sophia referred to was predominately white.

[13] With respect to "school" while growing up, respondents variously mentioned elementary school, middle (junior high) school, and/or secondary school experiences. The interview question did not refer to any of these levels specifically.

There were variations in how descriptive participants were when they talked about the racial/ethnic composition of the schools they attended. Phrases, such as, "predominately white" were sometimes used to describe the racial composition of participants' schools. Though, some respondents were not very detailed when describing the racial/ethnic composition of their schools. For example, Amanda described the racial composition of the school she attended as mostly white, but also indicated that there were at least some non-white students as well. Amanda said, "Umm, I went to a predominately white school; however, we did have a lot of integrated diversity and whatnot." Even though Amanda was not particularly descriptive about the racial composition of non-white students at her school, she acknowledged later that she had black and Native American friends from her school. What is particularly interesting about Amanda's comments are her use of the words "integrated" and "diversity." Clearly, by law public schools have to be integrated. That is, public schools cannot prevent non-white children who live in the school district from attending that school. What is more, Amanda seems to be using the term "diverse" to affirm that there were non-white students who attended her school, but she did not provide an estimate of the number or percentage of non-white students. This might have been a way of subtly suggesting that while there were racial/ethnic minority students who attended her school, they actually might have been small in numbers.

Instead of describing their schools in general terms as Amanda did, Emily and Hannah, opted to describe the racial/ethnic composition of their schools by indicating what they believed to be the percentages of students in each racial/ethnic group present at their schools. Emily (white) said, "Um, I had a large Hispanic population, so I would

say 60 percent white, 30 percent Hispanic, and the rest black." Hannah (white) also acknowledged that her school was mostly white, but she also mentioned Hispanic students outnumbered black students at her school and she used percentages to describe the racial composition:

> I think the school was representative of the town…umm, we did have a few African Americans in our school. I actually grew up with one of them from kindergarten. I was in a very small school, like I graduated with 25 people, so I grew up with one African American in our class all through school. We had more Hispanics, and I would say there were more Hispanics… than African Americans, but it was I would say three-quarters, 75 percent were probably white.

Emily and Hannah both discussed the larger representation of Hispanic than black students at their schools, but they also made it clear that white students were still the majority. This is important partly because when Emily and Hannah discussed their friendship circles, they both said most of their friends were white. Therefore, even though Hispanic students were represented to a greater degree than at some other participants' schools, that did not necessarily translate into building and maintaining friendships across an ethnic line. Although Hispanic students attended school with Emily and Hannah, they were still surrounded by white students from which they could ensure that most of their friends looked like them.

Five white participants, Sarah, Jessica, Jeremy, Michelle and Heather, had little exposure to racial/ethnic minorities in their schools. One participant, Sarah, suggested that non-white racial groups only made up one percent of the student body at her school (presumably, this was Sarah's high school, as she indicated she did not have friends outside of her racial group until she was in high school). When Sarah was asked about

the racial composition of her school, she stated, “Mine was about 99 percent white.” Even though Sarah did not mention what group made up this one percent, the fact remains that she did not have much exposure to other racial groups in the school she attended while growing up.

Just as Jessica had described the town she lived in while growing up as exclusively white, she described the school she attended in the exact same way. In fact, she mentioned that there was only one person of a different race who attended her school. Jessica responded, “My grade school was all white children. My high school…I think I was a sophomore or junior in high school before we had our first African American student. I don’t think we had any Hispanics or Asians in our school.” Jessica only had exposure to one person of a different race while she attended school (elementary school through high school), and this exposure to a non-white student did not happen until Jessica was in high school. It is not surprising then, that Jessica stated she was very “sheltered” while growing up.

Jeremy also mentioned he did not experience a lot of diversity while attending school in a small Midwestern town. He said, “In my grade school, there were three or four black kids, there were no black or non-white teachers. My first black teacher was when I was in sixth grade when we moved to a different town. Um, so it was not very diverse.” Jeremy, like Jessica, recognized that such a small numerical representation of individuals (three or four) from non-white racial groups does not equate to a racially diverse social environment.

Similarly, both Michelle and Heather responded to the interview question using very specific numbers to describe the exposure to other racial/ethnic groups they had in

their schools. Michelle, who graduated from high school in a class of over 400 people, recalled that there were very few non-whites in her graduating class: "I think there were four minorities in my graduating class – out of 426." Though individuals from other racial/ethnic groups attended school with Heather, her response made it quite clear that she was almost entirely surrounded by white students: "Umm, we had two kids in our class that were non-white." Heather and Michelle did not elaborate on which minority groups were present at their schools, but early in the interviews when Michelle and Heather were asked about the racial/ethnic composition of their towns, they both said the towns they grew up in were overwhelmingly white. Just as Hannah said the racial/ethnic composition of her school was probably a reflection of the town she grew up in, it also seems to be the case for Michelle and Heather. Therefore, Michelle and Heather also had limited (if any) contact with other racial/ethnic groups in their schools while growing up.

Ten participants said their schools were diverse, which likely increased opportunities for having contact in school with individuals outside of their racial/ethnic groups. Six of these participants, David (black), Brandon (black), Maria (Hispanic), Christina (Hispanic/Asian), Desmond (black), and Steven (white), all said the schools they attended were diverse, although they did not elaborate on what racial/ethnic groups were present at their schools. Steven, however, mentioned that he went to elementary and junior high with a large number of African Americans, who he was bussed with to a different school in town (i.e., instead of attending the elementary and junior high located closest to where he lived). Steven said:

> I was bussed from our African American [school]… So we went from the southwest side to the north side of [a town in southwest

> Oklahoma], where all the rich, affluent, Caucasians went. We were bussed there when they were trying to integrate the schools back in the day.

As Steven put it, efforts were made to integrate the schools in his hometown, but he also implies that the town was racially segregated (since affluent white children went to one school and lower socioeconomic white and black children went to another school). Steven later stated that everyone went to the same high school, no matter where they lived. He said, "The high school… though, we were forced to be in school together." There was only one high school in Steven's hometown that everyone had to attend regardless of their neighborhood.

Daniel (black) said his high school was diverse, but based on his description, it would seem that some racial/ethnic groups had more representation than others. Daniel stated, "I would say mixed black and white, and we had some Hispanics and some Asian, but mostly white and black." Therefore, Daniel probably had more contact with white and black students than with Hispanic and Asian students in his school, since there were only "some" Hispanics and Asians according to him. But it should be kept in mind that Daniel's school might not have been as diverse as Daniel indicated.

Similar to Daniel (and other respondents), Simon (Hispanic) mentioned certain racial/ethnic groups represented at the school he attended while growing up: "It was mostly Hispanics in our school… but we did have blacks and Asians mixed in." Based on the description Simon provided, it would seem there were no white students at his school. Either Simon just did not mention that there were white students at his school or he had little to no exposure to them.

Two participants, Portia (black) and Ryan (white), stated they went to several schools when they were young. As a result, they sometimes had little exposure to different racial/ethnic groups and other times had a lot of exposure to different racial/ethnic groups. Portia said:

> Yeah, so I would say up until high school, maybe half the schools I went to were majority or all black, and the other half were diverse, maybe a pretty even mix or mostly white. We moved around a lot, and some were public, some were private. My high school was probably 50 percent African American and the rest was a diverse group.

Ryan also noted that changing schools while growing up had an impact on his exposure to other racial/ethnic groups. Ryan replied:

> I went to three different high schools and all three were different. One was… it was a lot of whites. Then, [the next school] was pretty diverse. Whites, mainly whites and blacks. Then I went to Oak Hill, and it was like she [Anna] said, black, white, Hispanic.

Although Ryan and his wife [Anna] somewhat disagreed on the meaning of "diverse" (Anna's experiences are discussed later), Ryan's and Portia's experiences both show that where they lived dictated if they were exposed to other racial/ethnic groups via the racial/ethnic groups that made up the student bodies at their schools.

Four participants, Eric (white), Aaron (Hispanic), Gabriel (Hispanic), and Anna (Hispanic), indicated that racial/ethnic groups besides their own attended their schools, but that their schools were not very diverse overall. Aaron, Gabriel, and Anna mentioned their exposure to individuals outside their ethnic group while growing up was mostly limited to non-Hispanic whites; however, they also mentioned that their schools were not very diverse. When Aaron was asked if his school was diverse, he

replied, “I would say no. I would say 50/50. Half Caucasian, half Hispanic.” Essentially, Aaron said there were not any other racial/ethnic groups present at his school besides whites and Hispanics. Gabriel was more verbal in describing the racial groups present and not present in his school. Gabriel said, “I did notice the lack of black families around more so than anything else. We could count the black families on our hands.” Anna also experienced a social environment that was mostly made up of two racial/ethnic groups, until her family moved. Anna said, “Umm, my school was really just Mexicans and whites. We didn’t really have too many blacks. I really did [not] start to see blacks in school until we moved to Oklahoma.” It is as if Aaron, Gabriel, and Anna understood that while they were exposed to other racial/ethnic groups in their schools, just having two racial/ethnic groups as the majority of the student body at their schools did not mean their schools were diverse.

Finally, Eric was a unique case in that he is white, but he attended a predominately black high school. So, while Eric had a lot of exposure to blacks in his neighborhood and in his school, it seems as though his exposure to other non-white racial groups and to non-white Hispanic groups was limited.

In conclusion, it seems that the majority of participants had some exposure to racial/ethnic groups besides their own at the schools they attended, but the exposure usually was limited. In general, the exposure a participant had to other racial/ethnic groups in their schools was largely shaped by the racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhood or town the participant lived in while growing up. However, the neighborhoods the participants grew up in seemed a bit more segregated or racially isolated than their schools were. Almost all of the participants said they attended

schools where other racial/ethnic groups were present to some degree, but this does not necessarily mean that those who participated in this study were crossing racial/ethnic lines and forming friendships with those of a different race/ethnicity. Of course, some participants did (as discussed later in the section on interracial friendships), but just because a school is integrated does not mean that the students will not self-segregate. It is often the case that boundaries are drawn based on race/ethnicity, and those boundaries determine inclusion or exclusion from social groups (Lewis 2003). Therefore, while participants may have had exposure to other racial/ethnic groups simply because they attended the same school, it does not necessarily mean that there will be meaningful interpersonal contact between racial/ethnic majority and racial/ethnic minority students.

Interracial Friendships

Interviewees were asked if, while growing up, they had any friends outside of their own racial/ethnic group. Twenty-three respondents (76.7 percent) indicated they did have friends outside of their own racial/ethnic group, five respondents (16.7 percent) said they did not have interracial friendships while growing up, and, because of an oversight, two respondents (6.7 percent) were not asked if they had friends outside of their racial/ethnic group when they were young. Although the majority of interview participants said they had interracial friendships while growing up, these respondents seemed to vary in how close they were to their friends outside of their racial/ethnic group. Based upon the responses provided by the interviewees, three categories were used to describe how close they were to their friends from other racial/ethnic groups. The categories that emerged were “best or close friends,” “acquaintances,” and

"situational friends." Of those who said they had interracial friendships, twelve respondents (52 percent) described those friends as being "best or close friends." Two respondents (9 percent) described their friends from other racial/ethnic groups as "acquaintances," and six respondents (26 percent) described friendships that were "situational" in nature (i.e., interracial friends were physically situated near the respondents, though not always superficial friendships as some situational friends can end up becoming close friends). Three respondents (13 percent) did not articulate how close they were to their friends outside of their racial/ethnic group.

Interracial friendships were often formed because of shared interests and/or the social environment (i.e., the racial/ethnic neighborhoods and schools) in which the respondents were a part of during their youth. Amanda, a white participant, who said she had a non-white[14] "best friend" while growing up, noted how a shared interest in certain school activities brought about interactions with students outside of her racial group: "I would say I did [have friends outside of her racial group] because I had a lot of, umm, a lot of Native American friends, I had black friends…[S]o yeah, I would say I had a pretty diverse [set of friends]." When asked how close she was to her non-white friends, Amanda said, "I think at one point in time I had…one that was considered one of my best friends. I would say yeah, I had some pretty really close friends, because a lot of people I was friends with participated in the activities I was in, so…it just kind of brought us together." Based on what Amanda said, it seems possible that when people are placed in an environment (e.g., schools) where they are exposed to other racial/ethnic groups, they might be more likely to form friendships with people of a

[14] "White" is used to refer to someone who is white and not Hispanic and "non-white" is used to refer to someone who is either Hispanic or not Caucasian.

different race/ethnicity if they have similar interests and participate in the same activities.

Similar to Amanda, Portia, a black interviewee, described how her friendships were formed around having similar interests:

> [I]n high school, umm, the student body was very diverse, but still there was a lot of segregation on campus. But, my friends were multicultural, umm, I guess in that sense we were sort of misfits because we didn't stick with our own racial groups. I guess we all shared common interests that brought us together. So we were the little multicultural group, umm, and I guess that kind of shaped my social preferences in terms of forming friendships. I prefer to have a multicultural group of friends…

Portia's comments describing her friendship network during high school suggest several important characteristics of interracial friendships. First, Portia noted that her high school was diverse, but suggested that many students interacted within their own racial groups. This implies that proximity does not necessarily lead to interracial friendships. Second, she noted that for her, building friendships on common interest was more salient than building friendships solely on race. That is, she did not want to have a white friend with whom she had nothing in common. Third, it seems that forming multicultural friendships in high school has had a lasting impact on Portia, as she said her preference is to have a diverse group of friends. Portia was the only participant to indicate a multicultural preference for friendships as an adult. Though not stated, other participants could also have this preference, as no one said they wanted all black friends or all white friends, either.

Of course, for some respondents it was social environment more than shared interests that resulted in forming friendships with individuals outside their racial/ethnic

group. Eric, a white respondent, described his interracial friendship circles during childhood and how they were dependent on racial/ethnic composition of a particular social environment:

> It [friendships] was all over the place. There were my neighborhood friends, who were predominantly black. There were friends in my religious community, who were…gosh…that was a multicultural cornucopia…umm, yeah, I kind of had friends all over the place. But, it was still very segregated. Even though I had all these friend groups, they rarely overlapped, and that was the thing that was always interesting. When I went to Boy Scouts – that was very white. When I was in my neighborhood, it was very black. So, it was diverse, but it was a diverse segregation.

Eric's comments clearly show the importance of the racial/ethnic composition of the social environment for developing (or at least creating the opportunity for) interracial friendships. But his term "diverse segregation" indicates how segregated his friendship groups were, and how the racial/ethnic composition of social groups dictated if he was around his non-white friends or white friends. Furthermore, Eric's term "diverse segregation" also demonstrates the de facto segregation that continues to exist in neighborhoods, schools, and social organizations (e.g., the Boy Scouts). The only place Eric described not being segregated was his religious community, but that was probably more of a product of the progressiveness of the Bahá'í faith that he grew up in, since most churches are racially segregated (Emerson 2006). Also, based on what Eric described at other points in the interview, when he was with his black friends in his neighborhood, he was the only white kid present.

It should be noted that at least two respondents did not have any interracial friendships until they reached their teenage years. Two white participants said they lived in overwhelmingly white social environments as children; however, their social

environment changed later and they gained more exposure to people outside of their racial group. For Rachel (white), who grew up in England, her family moved when she was 14, causing her to be around and meet people who were not white and form at least one interracial friendship. The family of Sarah (white) did not move, but part of her social environment changed when she reached high school, which resulted in her having more interaction with non-whites. Sarah's elementary and junior high schools were entirely white. But, when asked about interracial friendships, Sarah explained, "I did once I got to high school, but not prior to that." When I asked Sarah to explain what led her to become friends with people outside of her racial/ethnic group, she said, "The town I lived in, some black people had moved in by that point, and, umm, I think we had one Hispanic person in our school…it was like…where I grew up…other little towns came there in high school, but not for middle or elementary [school]." Thus, Sarah's contact and interactions with non-whites was largely shaped by the changes of racial/ethnic dynamics and social environment at her school.

White respondents Kevin and Emily both said most of the interactions they had while growing up were with white people. However, both respondents noted they formed situational friendships with non-whites. For Kevin, his interactions with non-whites came at summer camp: "Umm, I didn't have any black friends, except for occasionally at summer camp…and a few Mexican friends…and a few Asian…" Kevin's statement indicates that he would not have had much, if any, interactions with non-whites had he not got to summer camp, as he noted that he did not have any non-white friends outside of his experience at summer camp. Even though Kevin went on the say he had as much fun with his friends at summer camp as he had with his friends

in his neighborhood, he also noted that his interracial friendships were temporary. Therefore, his interracial friendships probably were not as deep as his same-race friendships. In contrast to other respondents who developed close interracial friendships because of situations/environment, Kevin did not seem to build enduring interracial friendships with the non-white or Hispanic kids from summer camp.

Emily mentioned that she had black friends, but she seemed to indicate that they were only her friends when she was involved in athletics. When asked if she had interracial friendships, Emily responded, "[W]ell, it depends on how you define friend…I played basketball and the team was predominantly black…so, they were my friends, but if you would say like a friend you would hang out with on the weekends, then I think I only hung out with white people." Emily's response suggests she called her black teammates her "friends" when it was situationally appropriate to do so, but outside of basketball her interactions with non-whites were nonexistent. Therefore, common interests can result in interactions (and some individuals call those with whom they merely interact with their "friends"), though these interactions do not always translate into close friendships.

For some participants, interracial friendships might have been superficial because of the messages about race/ethnicity their parents conveyed. At least that seemed to be the case for Emily, Anna (Hispanic) and Ryan (white) and their friendships with blacks. Anna and Ryan both said they had interracial friendships and that they were close to some of their friends outside of their racial/ethnic group; however, Anna noted that she had black friends, but had limited time to interact with them – mostly because of her father's anti-black sentiments: "I had some black friends,

but I was only allowed to hang out with them at school functions and stuff like that. Anna was not allowed to have black friends at her house. Despite her father's anti-black messages, Anna still formed friendships with black students at her school. Ryan also reported that he had black friends (and "Mexican" ones too). But neither Anna nor Ryan described their friendships with blacks as "close." Ryan indicated that the friends he was closest to were white, but he also described his "Mexican" friends as also being close friends: "Probably my close friends were white…I did have black friends that would come over and hang out…the Mexican friends I had…they were just as close as any other ones." Ryan uses the term "close" to describe his white and "Mexican" friends, but he did not use that term to describe his black friends. Instead, Ryan indicates that he merely "hung out" with some black people. That is, they were probably more acquaintances of Ryan's than actual friends. When I asked Anna how close she was to her black friends, she said, "[O]ut of 100 percent, I would say 45 percent because we never got to do anything outside of school." Anna went on the say, "…but my white friends, we hung out often…" Because Anna was not allowed to hang out with her black friends outside of school, she had more interactions with and formed closer friendships with her white friends. As noted earlier, Anna clearly received messages about friendships from a parent that were anti-black in nature. Emily also had been told by her parents to "avoid blacks," which might have had something to do with Emily associating only with white people in every social situation except basketball, where she had many black teammates.

Ryan never directly received anti-black messages from his parents; however, he did say he did not think his father would be too happy if he had dated or married a black

woman. In sum, while Emily, Anna, and Ryan had black friends growing up, it seems that the anti-black sentiments in their households influenced how often they interacted with, and the intensity of, their friendships with blacks.

There was a big difference in the number of non-white respondents who described their friendships from outside their racial/ethnic group as their "best or close friends" compared to the number of white respondents who used this label. Non-white respondents were more likely to describe their friends from other racial/ethnic groups as "best or close friends." Whereas three white respondents (21 percent of white respondents) described their non-white friends as "best or close friends," nine black and Hispanic respondents (56 percent of non-white respondents) described their friends of other races/ethnicities as "best or close friends." However, just the opposite was observed in who labeled their friends from outside their racial/ethnic group as "acquaintances" or "situational." Five white respondents (36 percent of white respondents) described their non-white friends as "acquaintances" or friendships of a "situational" nature. Comparatively, two Hispanic and one black respondent (19 percent of non-white respondents) described their interracial friendships as "situational."

In summary, a large majority of interviewees said they had friends outside of their racial/ethnic group when they were young. Social environments (i.e., the racial/ethnic composition of one's schools and neighborhoods), of course, were a tremendously important factor for respondents who formed interracial friendships during their youth. Interracial friendships varied in level of closeness. A few distinct categories of closeness emerged in my analysis, including "best or close friends," "acquaintances," and "situational friends." For those who described their friends outside

of their racial/ethnic group as "best or close friends," it seems that common interest was somewhat of a driving force behind forming interracial friendships. Though, as was the case with Emily, shared interest did not necessarily result in close friendships. However, parents likely played a part in keeping some interviewees' (Emily's, Anna's, and Ryan's) friendships with blacks from becoming close.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that racial/ethnic differences also emerged in how respondents described their interracial friendships. White respondents were less likely to describe non-white friends as "best or close friends," but were more likely to describe non-white friends as "acquaintances," or have had experienced situational friendships with non-whites. Conversely, black and Hispanic respondents were more likely to describe friends outside of their race/ethnicity as "best or close friends," and less likely to describe interracial friendships as "acquaintance" or "situational" friendships. However, these respondents did not clarify if the "best or close friend" title was reciprocated by their friends of a different race/ethnicity. It does seem possible, that since whites tend to be mostly surrounded by other whites, they would have more opportunities to form meaningful friendships with other whites. What is more, if racial/ethnic minorities are mostly surrounded by whites in social spaces, as was the case with some of the participants in this study, they may have no other choice but to form friendships with whites (or whatever racial/ethnic group dominates their social space). Whatever the case may be, most of those who participated in this research had friends of a different race/ethnicity, but as I have demonstrated, there are many nuances attached to who is or is not considered a friend and the basis of these friendships.

Messages about Marriage

Interviewees were asked what messages they received about whom they should marry with respect to race/ethnicity. Twelve respondents (40 percent of respondents) said they did not receive any messages (direct or indirect) while growing up about whom they should marry. Though, others said they did not receive messages about the race/ethnicity of the people they should date or marry until they started dating interracially. The messages that started once an interracial relationship began ranged from implicit to explicit. Other participants either received implicit or subtle messages while they were growing up (before they started dating) about whom they could not date or marry, while others received explicit or direct messages about it.

No Messages Until an Interracial Relationship Happened

Two interviewees told me that they did not receive any messages regarding the race/ethnicity of the person they should marry until they started dating each other. However, there was some divergence between the two spouses in the types of messages and in how the messages were delivered. Christina (Hispanic and Asian) received more explicit messages compared to Desmond (Christina's black spouse), who received more implicit messages. For instance, Christina recalled that she was told, "Oh, maybe you need to be with someone who is Mexican." She also noted the irony of this message, given that her parents are an interracial couple as well, "Even though I am a biracial child, so I was like, 'What?' I was very confused by that message because my dad married a woman who is Japanese."

On the other hand, the messages Desmond received when he started dating Christina were more implicit. Desmond told me about how his mother would subtly

express messages about whom he should date and marry: "So, she [his mother] tried to say things in subtler ways and hint at things, you know. Like, 'Well, maybe you should look for someone more like…like your cousin's girlfriend.' [S]he [his cousin's girlfriend] happened to be African American. So, it never was an issue until we got very serious." The messages Desmond received, although implicit, suggest that his mother thought he should not be with Christina, and furthermore, that he should marry someone from his own racial group.

David (black), mentioned he never received messages regarding the race of the person he should marry while growing up, until he married his first wife (who was white):

> Well, with my family…they really never made no mention of race being an issue, because my grandfather – he was a very religious man and he had the view that basically we are all human being, and race was nothing but differences in pigmentation. Now my mother, on the other hand, uh, that was different. Even with my first marriage she had some issues. Yeah, so, my mother had some issues, so it took a while for her to come around [to his first marriage].

In David's case, it seems like interracial dating or marriage was not a problem until it actually happened. David's response suggests he thought the race of the person he married was never going to be an issue to his family, primarily because they never told him otherwise while he was growing up. However, when he married his first wife, his mother started to express her issues with his partner. Later in the interview, David explained why his mother delivered messages of disapproval of his first marriage to a white woman: "She explained it, umm, but part of the reason was when they [his mother] were growing up, they were treated so poorly by white people, and she kind of

hung on to that." While David expressed that his mother did not have an issue with his current wife, who also is white, he made it clear that his mother's experiences with whites while she was a child shaped the messages she delivered to David when he first married a white woman.

Subtle or Implicit Messages

Other respondents said they received messages that were subtle or implicit. Jennifer and Ryan (both white) said they did not get direct messages pertaining to what racial/ethnic groups they could date while growing up. That is, no one even said to them, "Do not date blacks." However, subtle or implied messages in the form of racist comments about certain racial groups (blacks) that were expressed in the households Jennifer and Ryan grew up in let them know that dating or marrying someone from that racial group would not be acceptable. Jennifer stated, "I didn't receive any messages. I mean…they're like…my dad's racist…a little bit racist, but he definitely never has said anything about marriage, so…" Jennifer acknowledged that her father had expressed something to signify he held racist views, but also that he never directly told her she could not marry a minority; however, Jennifer went on to say, "My dad is mostly racist against black people, like that's what he was the most racist [toward], so I am sure if I did [date a black man], it would have been an issue." Similar to Jennifer, Ryan told me, "My parents didn't talk about it [whom he should marry]. Umm, honestly, my dad probably wouldn't have been too thrilled if I said I was going to marry a black girl." It seems something like this may have been the case for Jessica as well. She stated, "It wasn't that I had to date or marry anyone of a certain race, but they didn't want me dating or marrying anyone black." Jessica did not say exactly how she knew her family

did not want her to date or marry anyone black, but it seems that anti-black sentiments were expressed in the home. Jennifer and Ryan were never told directly that they could not marry a person from a different racial group, but messages were clearly conveyed that their fathers did not view blacks favorably, and therefore, Jennifer and Ryan could assume that it would have been problematic to date or marry a black person.

Gabriel, a Hispanic, noted that while his mother never overtly said she wanted him to marry a Hispanic woman, she implied that it was what she ultimately wanted for Gabriel, "[W]hen I was younger, my mom would ask me who I was dating. Then, the second question would be, 'Is she Hispanic?' So, she never gave me advice on that, but I knew it was important to her." Parents may send messages about whom they do or do not want their children dating or marrying by asking about the race/ethnicity of the person the child is dating at the time. Such was the case for Gabriel when his mother asked if he was dating a Hispanic girl.

Aaron, a Hispanic, also told me how his mother implied he should marry another Hispanic, but it seemed that she was even less direct than Gabriel's mother:

> [M]y mom always said, jokingly, that she wanted me to marry a Hispanic woman. I do have an older brother who married a Caucasian…so I think my mom always, jokingly, wanted me to do that [marry a Hispanic woman], but she kind of knew what I would end up doing…probably marrying a Caucasian person.

Just as Gabriel's mother had used questions as a device to convey that she did not want him to date someone who was not Hispanic, humor might be another way parents convey their preferences that their child date and marry within their racial/ethnic group (i.e. the situation with Aaron).

Explicit and Direct Messages about Interracial Dating and Marriage

Other respondents had parents who were clear and direct in their messages about whom to date and marry. Two female respondents were explicitly told that they were not to date or marry black men. One of these respondents was a white female, while one was a Hispanic female. Anna, the Hispanic female respondent who received this message, said, "That was something my dad…he grew up working around them [black people] and stuff, and he didn't understand how some of them…he'd always considered them to be, like, lazy. He would tell us, 'They're no good.'" Anna could not invite black friends to her house (as she told me, "We weren't allowed to bring black friends over") and dating or marrying a black man was certainly off the table. Anna noted that she had actually been interested in dating a young black man, but decided not to do so because of her father's anti-black statements: "I actually, probably the second kiss I ever had was with a black guy. My dad would never have known…I think we could have dated at one point, but I knew in the back of my mind that my dad wouldn't have been up for that." The messages Anna received clearly seem to have resonated with her to the extent that Anna took pause when considering how her father would have reacted when she wanted to date a black guy. However, it is obvious that Anna's father seemed to only have issues with blacks despite the contact he had with them.

Emily (white) also received an explicit, direct message that she should "avoid black men." When I asked about the messages she received about whom she should marry, Emily first asked, "Is this confidential?" After being assured that her responses would in no way be tied back to her true identity, Emily said, "It was definitely 100 percent understood that I could not marry a black guy. That was made clear when I tried

to date one. So, there were many talks on that." Emily's parents made their feelings quite clear that it was not an option to date black men, although they did not say why.

Simon, a Hispanic, also told me he was expected to marry within his racial/ethnic group, and that his family made sure he knew that was an expectation for him: "My family was pretty vocal about marrying within the race…they were pretty vocal and not so much shunning us, but there were like, 'Hey, you should marry…,' comments like, 'Hey, you should marry a little Hispanic girl,' or "What about this person?'" Simon's experience illustrates that parents may go so far as to suggest specific people who fit their racial/ethnic criteria when it comes to whom they want their children to date and marry.

Jacques (black) said he had direct messages to marry within his race, but the expectation came from his extended family and not from his parents. It should also be remembered that Jacques was raised in a country in central Africa, and the expectation of whom he should marry was much more specific than he should marry a black woman:

> The expectation from my African family was that I would marry a black woman, not only does she have to be black, but she has to be from a specific tribe. So, she has to be black, she has to be from a specific tribe – so we had a list of tribes we were supposed to marry. My parents never necessarily set that expectation, but my extended family did. My parents really didn't care too much.

Interestingly, the direct messages Jacques received were from his extended family and not from his parents. This is also interesting because it suggests how widespread giving messages about whom one can or cannot marry might be.

Gender Differences

There seemed to be gender differences in the types of messages given about whom to date and marry. Female respondents seemed to receive more explicit messages, but male respondents often received more implicit messages. This is probably due to how different behaviors are expected of males and females. Among the respondents who said they did not receive any messages about the race/ethnicity of the person they should marry, I noticed that seven men reported that they did not receive a single message while growing up about the race/ethnicity of their future spouse, but only five women indicated that they were never told when they were young whom they could, or could not, marry.

Only twelve respondents said they did not receive messages about whom to date or marry when they were growing up. Respondents who received messages fell into one of three categories: they did not receive messages while growing up about interracial dating or marriage, until they started dating someone of a different race/ethnicity; they received subtle or implicit messages while growing up about whom they could or could not date or marry; or while growing up they were told explicitly which racial/ethnic groups they could or could not date or marry. One of the key findings in this section is that some parents really had a problem with their children dating and marrying blacks. I noticed that the respondents who discussed these "anti-black" messages never said it was all racial/ethnic groups outside of their own that their parents had problems with, but specifically blacks that their parents implicitly or explicitly discouraged their children from dating and marrying. Perhaps these parents, especially white parents, had less of an issue with the idea of their child dating or marrying someone from a

racial/ethnic group that was closer to white or their own race/ethnicity on the color line. Interestingly, all of the white respondents who said they were told implicitly or explicitly to "avoid blacks" ended up marrying Hispanics.

Interactions with Interracial Married Couples While Growing Up

As part of my investigation on how experiences early in life might have shaped the participants' experiences with interracial marriage, I asked the participants if they knew interracial married couples while they were growing up. Twenty-three respondents, or about 77 percent of all the interviewees, reported that they knew at least one interracial married couple while they were growing up. Of these respondents, eleven (48 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) mentioned knowing more than one interracial couple. In 60 percent of all the couples (nine of the 15 couples who participated in this research), both spouses knew an interracial married couple while growing up; there was only one couple in which neither spouse knew an interracial couple while they were growing up. Interestingly, all of the respondents who said they did not know any interracial married couples while they were growing up were white females (five out of the nine, or 80 percent of the white female interviewees).

Of the 23 respondents who said they knew interracial married couples, twelve respondents (52 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) indicated they only knew one interracial married couple. Eleven respondents (48 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) indicated they knew more than interracial married couple or listed several couple combinations or several interracial couples they knew while growing up. When respondents were asked during the interview if they

knew any interracial married couples while they were growing up, 13 indicated the racial/ethnic combination of the couples they knew (without my asking them to elaborate), with black-white and Hispanic-white combinations mentioned most often All but two respondents were able to recall how they were connected to the interracial married couple(s) they knew while they were growing up. Though, in five interviews I had to ask how the respondent knew these interracial couples. Six respondents just volunteered the information on their own.

Overall, eight respondents (34 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) provided responses indicating they were superficially connected (e.g., through church attendance, parents, other friends,) to the interracial married couples they knew while growing up. For example, David recalled that he attended church with an interracial married couple when he was young. Andrew noted that the interracial couples he knew were his father's military friends who had married Asian women, "I'm sure we knew some…I think some of my dad's military friends. I remember going to parties…I remember, like, umm, like Asian…or, umm, Filipino…there was a group of them and they would be at the holiday parties…" David and Andrew's responses suggest that although he saw interracial married couples while growing up, he was not particularly close to them. Therefore, given that these instances were more observational in nature, it is likely that seeing interracial couples in social settings probably did not have too much of an impact on these respondents and their future decision regarding their own interracial marriage.

Several respondents mentioned they were related to the interracial married couples they knew. Five respondents (22 percent of respondents who knew interracial

couples) said the interracial married couples they knew were close relatives (e.g., their biological parents, one parent and a step-parent, or a sibling and his/her spouse), while four respondents (17 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) said the interracial married couples they knew were from their extended families (e.g., cousins, aunts, and uncles). Interestingly, another three respondents (13 percent of respondents who knew interracial couples) mentioned the interracial married couples they knew were part of their families, but they did not elaborate on how they were related to these couples (in these instances, respondents often said something similar to the following: "I had family members who were in interracial marriages." These respondents did not elaborate further, so their family member could have potentially been a distant relative).

Finally, I was surprised by how several respondents seemed to struggle to remember if they knew interracial married couples when they were young. In contrast, those who participated in this research seemed to remember if they had any interracial friends with more ease. This may have been because I asked them to recall experiences in which the respondents were a part of (their friendships), but they had some difficulty remembering interracial couples who were older than the respondents and likely did not have a lot of interaction with the respondents. One of these respondents, Hannah, struggled to remember, then responded, "I'm personally not remembering any right now." Kevin also struggled to remember and initially said after a long pause, "I don't think so." Then, Kevin stated, "I'm reaching back…maybe one…" While it might be expected that some respondents would have trouble remembering if they knew any interracial married couple 20 or 30 plus years ago, I was taken aback that one respondent seemingly forgot that his father had been in an interracial marriage when he

was asked about knowing any interracial married couples while he was growing up. It was not until later in the interview, when I asked Brandon and Rachel about how they met, that they both remembered that Brandon's father had been married to a white woman. As Rachel was telling me how they were driving to California for her to meet Brandon's dad and stepmom, she said, "Umm…it just crossed my mind…your dad was black and your stepmom was white." At that point of the interview, Brandon exclaimed, "That's right…thank you for reminding me!" Again, while it seems reasonable that other respondents would have difficulty remembering interracial married couples when they were young, it would be expected that one would remember a parent's interracial marriage. Perhaps Brandon forgot about his father's interracial marriage since his father had passed away, or maybe Brandon was not particularly close to his father (as his father lived in California and Brandon lived in Oklahoma, but had been deployed to Iraq). Whatever the reason, it was somewhat peculiar that Brandon did not remember his father was in an interracial marriage when he was initially asked during the interview if he knew any interracial couples while growing up.

In conclusion, it does not seem like knowing interracial couples while growing up was particularly influential on the future life experiences of those who participated in this research. Despite the fact that 23 respondents said they knew interracial couples when they were young, eight of the respondents indicated they were superficially connected to these interracial couples, and from what they described, they seemed to have merely made observations of interracial couples in social settings (e.g., church, holiday parties, etc.). While the interracial couples who were actually related to the respondents might have had a bigger impact on the respondents' future life experiences,

no one indicated that this was the case. Finally, the fact that respondents seemed to struggle to remember if they knew any interracial couples when they were growing up, but did not experience any difficulties when asked about interracial friendships suggests that their own experiences across the race line may be more influential on their future life experiences.

Interracial Dating

In order to gain further insight into the early life experiences of individuals who later entered into interracial marriages, I asked my study participants if they had ever dated interracially prior to dating their current spouse. At the individual level, twenty-three respondents (77 percent) had dated interracially prior to dating their current spouse. At the couple level, 53 percent (n=16) of couples indicated both spouses had dated outside of their racial/ethnic group. Commonalities regarding the point in the life course when interracial dating first occurred, social environment, racial/ethnic identity, and the race/ethnicity of the people they dated were found among respondents.

When Interracial Dating Began and the Significance of Social Environment

High school and college seemed to be significant starting points in the life course for interracial dating. Seven respondents (six non-white and one white) said they had dated interracially beginning in high school and continued to do so throughout the young adult years (e.g., during college), while three respondents did not start dating interracially until after they entered college. (Here, I am specifically discussing those who dated interracially beginning in high school and into college. Below, I illustrate the importance of social environment in opportunities for interracial dating that began in high school. However, it should also be noted that some of the respondents mentioned

below only dated interracially in high school because they met their current spouse while in high school and married them soon after high school.) (Five respondents who said they had dated interracially prior to their current relationship did not indicate when it began). However, spouses David (black) and Amanda (white) noted that joining the military was an important experience that exposed them to different people, and ultimately, to interracial dating. David described how joining the military impacted who he dated: "I dated (only) in my race prior to the military. Then, when I got in the military, you know, I guess you can say the opportunity opened up a little bit more…more diversity…so I ended up dating outside my race." Even though Amanda had dated a biracial male during high school, she echoed David's stance on opportunities for interracial dating in the military, "It is just kind of the same answer as him. I kind of got a different diverse background once I got into the military. So, there's just more opportunities for different races." David's and Amanda's responses emphasized the role that increased diversity and exposure to other racial groups in their social environment played in shaping their opportunities for interracial dating. As discussed earlier, social environment was also important for developing interracial friendships.

Some respondents did not date interracially before college because there were few (if any) peers outside of their racial/ethnic group in their high school or town. For example, Jeremy, Michelle, and Heather (all white respondents) indicated they did not date outside of their racial or ethnic groups until they were in college and all had quite limited exposure to or no interactions with individuals from racial/ethnic groups besides their own when they were in high school. As noted elsewhere, these respondents

mentioned that the towns they grew up in were vastly white and they were surrounded mostly by whites during elementary and secondary school.

However, minority respondents generally had more exposure than white respondents to other racial/ethnic groups in their high schools and towns, which provided more opportunities for interracial dating. Five minority male respondents (three Hispanic and two black males) said they started dating interracially during high school, while three minority female respondents (one Hispanic and two black females) started dating interracially during high school (It should be noted that some of these respondents only dated interracially during high school because they met their current spouse while in high school and married them soon after high school. However, some of these respondents continued to date interracially into college). All of these respondents had experiences in mixed social environments (e.g., attended schools with white or other non-white students); however, other important factors influenced the dating patterns of two Hispanic respondents, Andrew and Anna. These two respondents felt that their racial/ethnic identity played a role in their inclination to date interracially. When ask about his racial/ethnic identity during the interview, Andrew said he is not "super enthusiastic about it [being Hispanic]." When asked about interracial dating, Andrew went on to say: "I'm kind of weird about Hispanic because I don't strongly identify [as Hispanic], but if I consider myself Hispanic, then yeah, I have only dated white people. So, I guess yes, because I do consider myself Hispanic, but just white" [referring to people he has dated]. While Andrew considered himself Hispanic, he did not strongly identify as Hispanic. This could have been because Andrew did not consider himself to be "culturally" Hispanic (That is, he did not seem to engage in any

cultural practices, such as celebrating Mexican holidays or following Mexican traditions.) Another reason Andrew did not strongly identify as Hispanic may have been because of assumptions others might make about his race/ethnicity based on his skin tone. Drawing on the skin tone observations I made during the interview, I suspect that Andrew has the ability to "pass" as white. If Andrew may have appeared white to outsiders, he may have had more opportunities to date interracially, meaning that whites may have been more willing to date him if they thought he was white (non-Hispanic).

When Anna was asked about interracial dating while growing up, she answered, "I just dated white males usually." Anna also stated that as she got older, "the Mexicans were more not wanting to hang out with me because I never classified, to them I wasn't Mexican (looking) enough." In addition, Anna did not identify as Hispanic or Mexican, and noted she had white friends that she, "hung out with often." In addition, Anna might not have wanted to date or marry a Hispanic man because of other experiences she had growing up: "I didn't, I mean when my father like would abuse my mom, I never wanted, like ever…I didn't care how great they were, I didn't want to be with a Mexican male." It would seem that, in Anna's mind, ending up with a Mexican man would result in her becoming the victim of domestic violence, which likely contributed to her purposely dating outside of her ethnicity.

Regarding Andrew's and Anna's social environments, Andrew pointed out that the town he lived in during high school was "probably 90 percent" white, which made it easier for Andrew to only date whites. Although Anna reported that she lived in an, "all Mexican environment," her responses suggest she found herself fitting in more with her white friends. Anna's response suggest that it is possible to interact with individuals

outside of one's racial/ethnic group, even if that group was the majority within a particular social environment (e.g., neighborhoods, schools), so more than social environment can be at play (in Anna's case, it was her sense of racial/ethnic identity and growing up in an abusive home).

Aaron, a Hispanic respondent, noted he attended a school that was racially mixed (half Caucasian, half Hispanic), and he lived in a neighborhood that was predominantly white ("My family was probably the only Hispanic family on the whole block," he said). Aaron stated, "I always grew up in a Caucasian atmosphere, based on where we lived…" Growing up in an environment that was primarily white seemed to have had some influence on Aaron's dating outside of his race/ethnicity, which began when he was in high school and involved dating white women. He said the only women he has been "serious" with (a former girlfriend and his wife Hannah) are both white.

Respondents Who Did Not Date Interracially Prior to their Current Spouse

Seven respondents did not date outside of their racial/ethnic group before marrying their current spouse. Of these respondents, five were white and two were Hispanic. These respondents had various reasons for not dating outside their race/ethnicity; for instance, Maria (Hispanic) never dated at all prior to dating her husband. Maria's reason for never dating had nothing to do with racial/ethnic identity or social environment, but was because of religious convictions. "Umm, I never dated because I just always in my mind, being a Christian and stuff, [I] always had these really strict rules for myself." Maria felt that if she dated anyone she would be breaking her self-imposed rules that were based on her strong attachment to her faith.

Social environment was mentioned by multiple respondents. Jorge, a Hispanic male from Mexico, grew up in a very racially/ethnically homogenous environment, where opportunities for interracial dating were, at best, limited. Among white respondents who did not date interracially prior to their current relationship, most grew up in neighborhoods and attended schools that were primarily white. Kevin noted that his neighborhood and school were "almost all white," and even though Sarah talked about how she was, "always taught to be very open to different cultures and races in my family," she also discussed how she did not have much exposure to different racial/ethnic groups. When asked about her experiences growing up, she stated, "I didn't have a lot of it. I grew up in a predominantly white, small town." Sarah also mentioned that it was not until she was in high school that she had contact with peers outside of her race, but these peers were described as "acquaintances" and not "friends."

Parental approval or disapproval of potential romantic partners was another factor. For instance, when Emily [Emily and her parents were discussed in the section on interracial friendship] a white female who grew up in an all-white neighborhood, but attended a racially diverse school, was asked if she had dated outside of her race, she said, "I tried to in high school, and that didn't work." She related the following story:

> I was in a quinceanera for one of my friends…you're matched up kind of like a groomsman and you do this dance, it is like a big dance. The person I was matched up with was a black guy and that bothered my parents, and it was just for a small little dance portion. I knew growing up, *that* was not okay.

For Emily's experience, it was not necessarily that she was attempting to date outside of her race that was not allowed by her parents; Emily's parents were solely bothered by her attempts to date young black men. Emily stated, "I think, in my family, dating a

Hispanic guy was more acceptable than dating a black guy…I went to homecoming with an Asian guy in 10th grade, and he's a doctor now, so that's why I think Asians were acceptable (to my parents)." Emily's responses show how powerful messages from parents can be for shaping their children's romantic partner choices.

Chapter Nine: Findings for Experiences of Getting Together and Getting Married

How Couples Met

During the interviews, couples were asked when, where, and how they met. Most participants met in a seemingly conventional manner. Three couples (20 percent of couples) said they met each other at work. Another three couples said they met one another during college or while attending graduate school. Two couples (approximately 13.3 percent of couples) met each other while serving in the military, and another two couples were introduced to one another through mutual friends.

Several couples provided responses that indicated that they met in a less conventional manner. One couple met at a casino, and it is worth noting that they tell people who inquire about where they met that they met at a convenience store. Apparently, this couple recognizes the unusual manner in which they met. Two couples met online. Brandon (white) and Rachel (black) met in an online chat room for interracial dating in the early 2000s. While all of the other couples met in a way that does not necessarily suggest that they were seeking out interracial relationships, it seems that Brandon and Rachel were purposely pursuing interracial dating. Eric (white) and Portia (black) also met online; however, they met through an online dating site for Bahá'í singles. Thus, it seems that Eric and Portia were not intentionally seeking an interracial relationship, but rather seeking a partner who practiced the same religion. Overall, couples did not seem to actively seek out a partner from a different race/ethnicity (except for one couple).

Length of Courtship

One interview question addressed how long the participating couples had dated before they got married. Two couples (13.3 percent of all couples) told me they had dated for less than one year. (David and Amanda dated for one month prior to their marriage, while Eric and Portia dated for eight months.) Two couples dated between one and two years before getting married. Four couples (about 26 percent of participating couples), told me they dated for two to two-and-a-half years before getting married. Another three couples (20 percent of all couples) told me they dated for three years before they got married. Finally, four couples said they dated for four years prior to their marriage.

Cohabitation

Only three couples did not cohabitate prior to marriage. On the interview schedule (see Appendix), the questions about cohabitation were worded as follows, "Did you live together before you were married? If so, for how long?" There was quite a bit of variation in the responses of the 80 percent (12 couples) who did live together prior to their marriage, including instances where one spouse provided a different estimate of the cohabitation period than the other spouse. Usually when this occurred, the other spouse would present how he or she remembered the events surrounding when the couple moved in together. Three of the 12 couples who lived together had at least one spouse who misremembered how long the couple had cohabited. Also worth noting, two couples had some trouble pinpointing when they actually or "officially" moved in together – which suggests a subjective element in defining cohabitation. According to research conducted by Manning and Smock (2005), sometimes couples "slide" or

"drift" into cohabitation without making a mutual decision to live together. Manning and Smock found that a partner might begin staying over one night per week, but gradually increase the number of nights they stay until the couple, for all intents and purposes, is cohabiting without discussing the topic. This seems to be what occurred for at least two of the couples who participated in this research.

On the whole, responses regarding how long couples had lived together before marriage ranged from two weeks to three years. Of those who said they had cohabitated, four couples fell into the "less than one year" and the "one-and-a-half to two years" categories. Three couples said they lived together for a year prior to their marriage, and only one couple lived together for three years before they got married. There is nothing to suggest that these couples were atypical in terms of dating and cohabitation patterns.

Reactions from Family and Friends to Interracial Dating

During each interview, the couples were asked to describe how their family and friends responded when they found out the couple was dating. Six couples explicitly discussed their immediate family members' (e.g., parents' and siblings') reactions to their relationship, five couples mentioned the responses they received from friends and family members (including immediate and extended family), and four couples did not elaborate whether they were referring to the responses they received from family or from friends.

Reactions described by the interview respondents ranged from their family and friends not caring or being indifferent about their relationship to being upset about it. Seventeen respondents (about 57 percent of all respondents) said that their family or friends did not care or were indifferent to their interracial dating. Of these respondents,

seven said that no one really cared about them dating a person of a different race/ethnicity, and if anything, their family and friends probably expected them to date someone outside of their own racial/ethnic group because these respondents had past experiences of interracial dating. Four of these 17 respondents said that most of their family did not care they were dating interracially, but some family members were opposed to their relationships. For example, Jacques (black) and Michelle (white) both said that their parents did not care or were indifferent when they revealed they were dating someone of a different race, but they received less than positive responses from other family members. Michelle said she was especially worried about how her grandparents might react. Michelle noted that her grandparent's racial attitudes were "archaic" and, thus, she determined it would be best to tread lightly when introducing her grandparents to Jacques. Michelle said:

> Umm, and like, my grandparents, it wasn't like they ever said anything, it was just…they're so far off (a) normal way of thinking, in my opinion. We kind of eased our way into introducing them, and I think we had been married a year and we decided to go to Christmas at my grandma's for the first time in…well, five years.

Michelle was worried enough about her grandparents' reaction to their relationship that it seems she never disclosed to her grandparents that she was dating a black man, and she waited a year after marrying Jacques to introduce him to her grandparents (which indicates that her grandparents were not at their wedding). Michelle behaved this way presumably because of her grandparent's racial attitudes and the issues that could arise from them. So, those in interracial marriages may avoid being around family members

who they know are not progressive in their racial/ethnic attitudes out of fear that those family members will be close-minded about their relationship or marriage.

Christina (Hispanic/Asian) also said her friends did not care when she was dating Desmond (black), but she disclosed that her parents made some comments discouraging their relationship, while other family members expressed some worry and apprehension. Lastly, Sarah (white) explained that her mother did not care that she was dating a black man (Daniel), but her stepfather was not indifferent to the situation. Sarah explained:

> My mom didn't really have a problem, but my stepfather…he had a problem with it. He was 20 years older than my mom, so of course, he grew up in a different time. And he was also under the impression that just because Daniel was black, that he might come from a bad background and be involved in bad behaviors. And, of course, once he met him he learned he grew up in the same lifestyle I did…I mean, growing up in the country our whole life. So I mean, at that point once he met him, it wasn't much of an issue.

Sarah did not seem upset when she described how her stepfather felt about Daniel prior to meeting him; in fact, she almost excuses him ("he grew up in a different time" and "that's just how things were"). Based on her comment, Sarah did not seem to challenge her stepfather's beliefs about black men or his assumption Daniel was not a good guy just because he is black. The last part of her comment, though, somewhat supports the contact hypothesis. The contact hypothesis argues that group relations improve as social contact between groups increases (Allport 1954). As Sarah put it, her stepfather's opinion of Daniel changed once he met him and realized Daniel did not fit his assumption about black men. However, Sarah only mentioned that her stepfather's opinion of Daniel changed, but she did not say if her stepfather's racial attitudes overall

became more progressive or if (and how) his opinion of black men changed after meeting Daniel.

One black female respondent, Laura, noted that her family was indifferent about Kevin's race (white); though, she did say it was an issue that he was not from Vermont: "That he's not from Vermont was a bigger issue than anything." Kevin explained that most of Laura's family lives relatively close to Vermont, "Everyone on her mom's side of the family – only one other person has moved further away than New York." Similarly, Gabriel (Hispanic) received some negative feedback when he told his family and friends he was dating Jennifer; however, it had nothing to do with her race: "I, umm, didn't get anything because most of the people I had dated were white, but I did get negative feedback about her age because she was really young, but it had nothing to do with her color."

Eleven respondents (about 37 percent of all respondents) said their family and friends were supportive or "fine" with them dating outside of their racial group. One respondent, Emily (white), told me that she was not even sure her family realized Andrew was Hispanic: "I don't think they really knew that Andrew identified as Hispanic. I mean he was in the Hispanic Engineering Society and all that stuff. I think it was like, 'Oh, I had no idea.' But, they were supportive of us." Emily said her family was supportive of her relationship with Andrew, but also that her family could not really tell that he was Hispanic (which suggests that Andrew can easily pass as a white man). Based on skin tone observations made during the interviews, I could see how Emily's family may not have realized Andrew was Hispanic. However, relative to Emily's skin tone, it is clear that he is not entirely white. At any rate, it is possible that

Andrew and Emily might not have received the same level of support if his skin tone was darker.

Kevin said his family was supportive but also curious; Kevin's family inquired if interracial dating was different from intraracial dating. Desmond said his cousin was "elated" when he told him he was dating Christina, and his friends were supportive as well. However, similar to the responses Christina received from relatives, Desmond said his parents – especially his mother – had less than positive reactions to his relationship with Christina.

Other interview participants mentioned that they received responses that they did not consider to be positive or supportive. Many of these responses were expressed verbally, but not all were. For example, Jennifer said she did not receive any verbal feedback, but she did tell the story of when Gabriel first met her family. Jennifer stated:

> Umm, I definitely didn't get any negative verbal feedback, so… umm, he [Gabriel] likes to put out that the first time he came over to eat at my house, they served hotdogs. So, they didn't really go to that much effort, but that was like the biggest thing (laughs).

Since Jennifer mentioned that she did not receive any negative verbal feedback, I pressed the subject and asked if she thought her family was indifferent that she was dating a man that was not white. Jennifer responded to this question with the following remark, "Yeah, I don't know if they were necessarily indifferent, but they never said anything. Like, I don't think they showed it that much." Jennifer never said that her family had an explicit adverse reaction to her dating Gabriel, though the "hotdog incident" made Jennifer and Gabriel suspect that there were some ill feelings in her family toward Jennifer dating a Hispanic man.

Of the six participants who either received actual negative reactions or perceived negative reactions from their families, two described the reactions as ones of apprehension or concern. Sarah (white), who noted that her mother was indifferent to her interracial relationship with Daniel (black), told me that her stepfather did have some concerns. Sarah recalled her stepfather's reaction: "…[H]e was also under the impression that just because Daniel was black, that he might come from a bad background and be involved in bad behaviors." Though Sarah's stepfather assumed that Daniel would engage in certain behaviors or that he was automatically not from a good family because of his race, Sara went on the say that all of these preconceived opinions of Daniel vanished once her stepfather got to know him, "…of course, once he met him he learned he grew up in the same lifestyle I did – I mean – growing up in the country our whole life. So, I mean, at that point once he met him, it wasn't much of an issue." Sarah indicated that once her stepfather "just got to know Daniel" then any issues or concerns he had about her dating a black man just suddenly disappeared. Similar to Sarah's experience, Christina also mentioned that some of her family members were apprehensive or concerned about her relationship with Desmond:

> So, I'm pretty close to my aunts and uncles, and I think for the most part – there was one that was kind of apprehensive, and I don't know if it was because of his race or because I'm the baby– you know, the girl of the family and they were just worried about me. But, for the most part, no one really showed…well, except for Grandma…Grandma can have some really weird racial views. She too was apprehensive and I do think it was because he is black. She wouldn't come out and say it, but my gut feeling was that she was uncomfortable.

Although Christina was unsure if her aunt's apprehension to her relationship with Desmond was based on race, she seems certain that her grandmother was not

comfortable with the relationship – even though her grandmother never directly said she was uncomfortable – because of racial views that it seems her grandmother had expressed at some point.

Just like Sarah and Christina had some relatives who were apprehensive about their interracial relationships because they held stereotypes of certain racial groups, Amanda told me that the response she received from her family members was also based on a stereotype, but also that her father used stereotypes to makes inquiries about what David was like. Amanda recalled her father's response: "[T]he response I got – my dad had asked me…not where he was from, not what kind of family he had, but umm, 'how did he dress?' So my father really depicted him as maybe somewhat as…basically called him a thug." Amanda's response shows that her father thought just because David was black that he would be dress a certain way – despite the fact that David served in the military. Though Amanda's family had a picture in their heads of what they expected David to dress like, Amanda told me that all of their hesitation surrounding David's race went away once her family met him: "But in all actually, when they met him and whatnot, they just really fell in love with him." Amanda, and other respondents, seem to suggest that racial/ethnic stereotypes can be challenged – and maybe even changed – through contact with members of other racial/ethnic groups.

Three interview participants said they received negative or unsupportive verbal comments from family members about their relationships. Desmond and Christina received some unsupportive verbal comments from their parents that were attempts to discourage their relationship. (As discussed previously, Desmond's and Christina's parents provided verbal comments indicating they did not approve of their relationship.)

The reactions Christina received were more direct in nature, such as, "Oh, maybe you need to be with someone who is Mexican." However, Desmond received more subtle comments from his mother (e.g., "Well, maybe you should look for someone more like…your cousin's girlfriend."). Michelle (white) also said she received a negative comment from her sister regarding her relationship with Jacques (black). Though Michelle did not divulge exactly what the negative comment was, she did say that the comment added stress to her and her sister's already strained relationship: "Like my sister and I didn't speak for quite a long time because she said something that was just really out of place, and so – we didn't really have a very good relationship anyway – so we just stopped talking." Whatever her sister said about her dating Jacques, it was bad enough for Michelle to sever contact with her sister for a long period of time.

Only one interview participant said he had family members who blatantly voiced their opposition to him dating outside of his racial group. Jacques noted that some of his cousins were not happy that he was dating and considering marrying a white woman: "I had some cousins telling me, 'We don't like you marrying a white girl.' I was like, 'Fine, don't call me no more. If that's what you want to talk about, then we don't need to talk – there's nothing to discuss.'" Clearly, Jacques became upset enough by his family members voicing their discontent about who he was dating and intended to marry that he was willing to discontinue contact with those relatives.

I attempted to determine if the reported reactions to their interracial dating "matched" the messages participants said they received about whom they should marry. Five interview participants provided answers that reactions to their interracial dating largely corresponded to the messages they received about interracial marriage. Two of

the five who received similar messages and responses said they were told that the race/ethnicity of the person they married did not matter and they received indifferent responses because their family expected them to end up in an interracial relationship.

Three of the five participants with corresponding messages and reactions seemed to be deterred from interracial dating (based on the messages and reactions they received). For instance, Desmond and Christina received messages about whom they should (or should not) marry. These messages were a direct reaction to Desmond and Christina's relationship with each other. That is, they did not receive any messages about interracial dating until they started dating each other, so the messages they received were attempts to deter interracial dating altogether.

Eight interview participants provided responses about the reactions of their family and friends that did not match the messages they said they received about whom they should or should not marry. For instance, Jacques and Michelle said their parents never expected them to marry outside of their racial groups; however, both participants said they thought their parents were generally indifferent about their relationship. Aaron and Gabriel both said they received implicit messages about not dating and marrying Hispanic women; however, Aaron said his family was supportive and Gabriel said his family did not care when they dated interracially. Though, they both said that their families were probably accustomed to their dating outside their race at that point.

I noticed that three respondents who received messages to not date or marry blacks are all married to people who identify as Hispanic. Two of these respondents said their families were supportive of their relationships. Though, I noticed while making skin tone observations during the interviews, that at least two of these Hispanic

spouses have very fair skin tones – meaning they might easily pass as white (Emily even said that her family did not know Andrew was Hispanic when they started dating). Based on the messages these participants received about not dating or marrying blacks, I wondered whether their families would have been less supportive if Andrew and Anna had darker skin tones and could not pass as white (that is, would the families have been as supportive if the interracial relationship was more obvious?).

Reactions about Intentions to Marry

Interview participants were asked to describe how their friends and family responded when they told them they intended to marry. Eight couples (53 percent) said that their families were supportive, happy, or exited when they first told them they were going to be married. Of these couples, two said their families were just glad they were finally getting married, as they were in their early 30s at the time. There was at least one couple who said their families were happy, but the way the female participant answered the question caused the spouse to question her response, or at least insinuate that more went on than what she was saying. Specifically, when Jessica (white) responded to the question she said, "My family was [pause] pretty happy." The way in which Jessica answered this question caused Simon (Hispanic) to say, "But, what?" Jessica replied, "I don't think there was a 'but.' They were fine and happy about it." I did not press the matter so as to not create any conflict or tension between the couple, but the couple's exchange made me think that Jessica did not feel completely comfortable sharing some of her relatives' initial feelings regarding her marriage to Simon. From the interview, it was unclear whether Jessica's and Simon's different racial/ethnic backgrounds affected her family's reactions to their plans to marry.

Two couples said that there were some issues that came up when they told their families they intended to be married; however, these issues had nothing to do with race. Brandon (black) and Rachel (white) told me that their plans to marry were hard on Rachel's parents because that meant Rachel would live far away from her parents once she and Brandon were married. Rachel made a point of mentioning several times that they did not have issues with her marrying a black man:

> Probably different for mine because that meant I was leaving England, so that was a whole – that had nothing to do with the racial thing. But, that was hard and still is. That's it – nothing to do with us being married, just to do with that they couldn't be there, my mom couldn't be there, my dad couldn't be there – just that type of thing. That's just to do with the – if we were in the same country or the same place, they would have been there. Yeah, and they would have been fine.

Rachel was adamant that her family's reaction was due to the fact that they could not be at her wedding or live close to her afterwards, and she also pointed out that it was difficult emotionally – and remains difficult – for her parents that she is not geographically close to them.

Steven (white) and Maria (Hispanic) also said there was some concern when they first told their families they intended to marry, especially from Maria's family. Though, once again, these concerns did not have to do with race/ethnicity. Maria told me that her parents had passed away by the time she and Steven planned to marry. Because her parents were gone, Maria's siblings stepped into something of a protective role:

> My parents were deceased, so it was the siblings. The hard part was not that they didn't support us, or that they didn't like Steven. It was my female siblings wanted to make sure I was still able to do what I wanted or needed to do in life, to fulfill my destiny or

> my passion. And for my brothers, it was for them to know that he would completely support everything 100 percent that I needed.

Maria's siblings were not worried or concerned that she was marrying a white man; however, they were concerned and wanted to make sure that Steven would support her as she worked to accomplish the goals she set for herself.

Three couples told me they did not receive supportive reactions initially from their families when they told them they were going to marry. But there was some variation among these couples as to whether the unsupportive reactions were due to race/ethnicity or to something else. Jennifer related the unsupportive comment she received from her father when she and Gabriel told him about their plans to wed:

> We went out to dinner. He [Gabriel] was joining the Navy, so we took him [Jennifer's father] out to dinner, and umm, basically we [Jennifer and Gabriel] told them [Jennifer's father and mother], and my dad said he would believe it whenever he saw it. That's pretty much it. And then we got married a couple days later.

Jennifer's response suggests that her father did not believe that Gabriel intended to make good on his intentions to marry Jennifer. Gabriel also disclosed that he had had some negative interactions with Jennifer's father before they told him about their wedding plans, "Yeah, me and her dad had some confrontations…verbal only. But, I knew he wasn't pleased with it. So, I don't know if that changed from when we were just dating because I'm sure he was never pleased with it, in my opinion." Though Gabriel said he never thought Jennifer's father was happy she was dating him, Gabriel did not indicate why he felt her father did not approve of him.

I asked Jennifer if she thought her father was upset that she was making plans to marry Gabriel, to which she replied, "I don't…I guess he was upset, but it was a weird

reaction because it was like he didn't believe me when even I said it. So, I just…I guess it was just weird." It was at this point that Gabriel implied that perhaps the reaction Jennifer's father had was less about race/ethnicity and more about her getting married and leaving home:

> You've got to understand the situation, though. When you go to boot camp, you don't know where you're going. I got orders to Hawaii. So, I came home to Chicago, then I went to my school in Mississippi, then I got orders to Hawaii. Then I went to Texas, and the third time I sit down to meet her dad, I can understand his anger regardless of the race of the guy sitting across him. If your daughter is moving Hawaii, and she's dropping out of school. I think that had a lot to do with why he was angry. I don't think he was angrier that you were marrying a Hispanic more than you getting married and leaving.

Gabriel felt that maybe Jennifer's father was not necessarily upset that he was Hispanic, but rather that Jennifer was ultimately making multiple life decision and that he was receiving the news about all of them at the same time. As mentioned earlier, Jennifer was pretty young when she and Gabriel got married, and there is an age gap of seven years between Gabriel and Jennifer. Therefore, it seems possible the response from Jennifer's father may have been about these factors rather than about Gabriel being Hispanic.

The unsupportive reactions Desmond and Christina received are particularly interesting and complex. Desmond and Christina also said they received some unfavorable responses when they first told their families they intended to marry; however, Christina told me that her father became increasingly supportive of their relationship as time progressed, and especially after the nonmarital birth of Desmond

and Christina's daughter. Christina told me about the change in her father's attitude toward their relationship after the birth:

> Yeah, my dad at that point had changed some of his views because, like, we had had a child out of wedlock. He was really just traditional Hispanic male: 'You need to get married at this point.' He wasn't concerned anymore that his was a black guy, it was just like, 'Get married – he needs to take care of you!'

Christina's father completely changed his opinion regarding their relationship and actually wanted Desmond and Christina to get married because they had a child together. Desmond's mother, on the other hand, remained unsupportive of their relationship.

As previously mentioned, Desmond said he received subtle messages from his mother that he should not date or marry outside of his race when he and Christina started dating. He also said that some family members were supportive of their relationship. When I asked about the responses he received when he told his family and friends that he and Christina intended to marry, Desmond answered, "The favorable responses on my end were still the same. They were even strong. My mom was even more opposed…she was the only person." I asked Desmond if his mother said anything indicating that she was not in favor of their marriage. He replied, "Right before we got married, she was going to Oklahoma for their annual trip they make during the summer…umm, right before she left, she hugged me and kissed me and told me that I didn't have her blessing getting married." Even though Desmond acknowledged that his mother did not think it was a good idea for him to get married, it was at this point that he suggested her disapproval was not about race:

> But, I don't know that her reason was purely motivated by race. I think by then…the race thing isn't a huge thing for my mom, anyway. It was more or less that she was trying to find anything she could latch on to – because on the one hand, she's that mother where I was that close child to her, and the male that did all the things that she would like and represented a lot of things she… my mom has a little more…you know, things she likes to control. So, those issues were more her motivating factors than anything else, because I know her well. She is a person that is actually educated and takes issue with racism and all kinds of stuff. That's why she never said anything blatantly racist or said, "Would you marry a black girl?" She never said anything like that. She said, "Well, why don't you consider dating someone like this?"

Desmond suggests that his mother's disapproval of marriage was not really about race, but actually more about her wanting to have some sort of control over Desmond, as he was pretty young when he a Christina got married. He seemingly insinuates that his mother thought Desmond would not go through with the marriage if he did not have his mother's approval. What is more, Desmond also notes that his mother subtly suggested that he date within his race, but also told me that those messages stopped after a certain point – mostly because he pointed out her hypocrisy:

> By the time that happened (getting married) she had never said anything else anymore, because I called her on it, I said something like, 'You can't be contradictory to what you really stand for, that's not what you're about. So let's get rid of that really quickly.' And you could kind of see, because she would have these lectures, you know, 'I groomed you to be this academic, and you've got these offers to go away for college. It would be better for your family, and your daughter and your future wife.' She wasn't opposed to me marrying her, but her thing was…she wanted me to go away to college.

Though Desmond mentions that he felt like his mother was being a hypocrite about the interracial nature of his relationship, he also makes it known that he believes that it was not necessarily the reason his mother did not want him to get married. Instead,

Desmond believes that his mother wanted him to attend college and perhaps wait until he was a little older before he got married. He believes that her refusal to give her blessing was because he was deviating from the plans she had for him, not because of Christina's race/ethnicity.

Jacques and Michelle also said they had some unfavorable responses when they announced their plans to marry; however, these responses were interesting and complex mostly for reasons other than race/ethnicity. It was mainly Jacques that mentioned he had faced increased opposition to his relationship with Michelle when he first told his family about their plans to wed:

> I think, for me, I saw the resistance intensify, but I also saw opinions change. You know, when I told them I really liked her and we were getting serious, they were all, 'Oh, you'll get over that.' But, others saw that we were serious and they were all, 'Oh, this is serious,' and their opinions changed [became supportive]. Now, that's when we really saw what people were made of, so to speak.

Although Jacques had family members come to accept his relationship with Michelle, he also had family members become more opposed to an interracial marriage. Though, it is interesting that some of Jacques' family members told him, "Oh, you'll get over that" which suggests that families may think interracial dating is just a phase that will eventually pass. What is also interesting about Jacques' story was, when some of his family members realized that this relationship was not just a phase, their resistance became greater (the responses from Jacques' cousins mentioned above).

Michelle's experience was less intense, as she noted more people expressed their true feelings about her marrying a black man. Michelle did not say if these comments were negative, or if they were said directly to her (as opposed to a family member

telling her about them), but her cadence and tone in the audio recording suggests these were not positive comments. But, she also suspects her family was surprised that she was getting married at all:

> I think, for me, it wasn't a shock that I was marrying someone who was black, it was that I was getting married in general…because that was just something that no one thought I would ever do. So, yeah, it intensified somewhat, I got more…the true comments started to come out. Umm, but I think on top of that, just the fact that I was getting married in general was a shock to people.

Michelle did not go into detail about what the exact comments were, but it can be assumed from the line, "the true comments started to come out," and the manner in which she delivered those words, that these were not comments of support or approval. However, despite these comments, she seemed to think her family was mostly stunned that she had intentions to get married at all.

Finally, one respondent, Amanda, told me that she did not tell her family that she and David planned to marry, let alone that they were actually married. However, Amanda noted that she became pregnant rather quickly after she and David were married and she then had to make a decision as to which news to deliver to her family:

> So, we didn't tell [them we were married] …when I found out I was pregnant with my son, I was told previously, prior to meeting him that I would not be able to have children from multiple doctors. Umm, so when I told my family I had the choice. I was like I can tell them I'm married and pregnant, or I can just tell them one or the other. And so I was like I can hide a marriage, but I can't hide a pregnancy. I think I was more so worried about the sheer fact of telling them I'm both at the same time, I don't want the…I wouldn't want them to be upset and whatnot…so I waited, and I waited because I didn't want to stress out and end up losing him [the baby] kind of thing, so even though I was already married before I conceived him I divulged the information [about the marriage] about a month before he was born, but I said, "Hey, you know we just got married." So they didn't know, they still don't

> know the true marriage date. I'm like that's just something I'll reveal later. Umm, but they got, I just wanted them to know we were married before he was born. That was a big thing for me.

I found it particularly interesting that Amanda made the decision not to tell her family about her marriage, and even more so, I found it interesting that Amanda seemed to think her family would become upset about this news. Whether Amanda was afraid that her family would be upset that she married a black man, that she got married after only a month of dating David, or that she was pregnant (or a combination of all three) was not made entirely clear; though, based on comments Amanda made elsewhere regarding her family (the messages she received about whom she should marry and her father's reaction when she told him she was dating David), it seems possible Amanda felt her family would become upset about her marrying a black man, but they would not necessarily become upset about an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. But, Amanda really wanted her family to know that she and David were married before their son was born, perhaps that was to squash any stereotypes (other than stereotypes about how black men dress) her family held about black men and family responsibilities.

Some gender differences in response patterns to the interview question about relatives' and friends' reactions to the marriage plans should be noted. At least two male participants, including David and Daniel, did not provide responses. In ten of the interviews (including the two that the male respondents did not provide any feedback), the female respondents were the first to answer the question regarding the reactions when friends and family found out they intended to marry. This could possibly be because women are socialized to think more about marriage and weddings. Finally, I also discovered that I neglected to ask this question about reactions to marriage plans to

one couple, Sophia and Jeremy. I suspect from responses these participants provided elsewhere in their interviews that they were not met with negative or unsupportive reactions when they told their families about their intentions to wed.

It should be reiterated that among the couples who experienced negative reactions, in many instances it was not because the couple was interracial, but because of age, geographic distance they would be from parents once they married, and other factors not related to race/ethnicity. It seems that the negative reactions due to race/ethnicity were fairly minimal, as Jacques seemed to be the only participant that experienced negative reactions just because of race/ethnicity. In one instance, it was suggested that there might have been some negative reactions, but more insight to these reactions were not articulated in the interviews (e.g., Jessica).

Thoughts about Becoming an Interracial Married Couple

During the interviews, participants were asked if they gave any thought to being an interracial married couple when they decided to get married. Eighteen participants said they did not think about being an interracial married couple when they decided to get married (spouses in eight couples were in agreement about this). Interestingly, four of these participants (two couples) indicated that they were oblivious to their status as an interracial couple. That is, they did not even think of themselves as an interracial couple, even though they do not self-identify as the same race/ethnicity. Jessica (white) noted that she really did not realize she and Simon (Hispanic) were in an interracial marriage until they were contacted about participating in this research. Jessica said: "I didn't really think we were in an interracial marriage until [our mutual contact] told me about your project. I was like, 'Oh, we are interracial, aren't we! (laughs)'" Simon even

noted later during the interview: "I mean, luckily for me, I look white. So…(laughs)." It is also important to note here that Simon and Jessica said they had not experienced any reactions from strangers when in public (though, as mentioned above, Jessica hinted at some opposition from her family). Therefore, because of Simon's light skin privilege (that is, his ability to pass as white), he and Jessica do not have to experience the reactions that other (obviously) interracial couples experience. Additionally, based on skin tone observations I made at the time of the interview, I think Simon and Jessica would easily pass as a same-race/ethnicity couple. But, even though Simon is fair enough to pass as white, he still identifies as Hispanic. So, technically, Simon and Jessica are in an interracial marriage.

As far as the other couple who did not recognize their status as interracial, the only reason I can think of that would explain why they were unaware of being in an interracial marriage is they are color-blind, specifically to skin color. When I asked the question, Maria replied: "The funny thing is, [to Steven] I know we joked about this… when we were contacted to participate in this interview, we were like, 'wait a minute, we're interracial?'" Though, it seems that based on their racial/ethnic identity alone, Maria (Hispanic) and Steven (white) should not have been blind to their status as an interracial couple. Furthermore, it seems that Maria and Steven had experiences that should have heightened their awareness that they are in an interracial marriage. Lastly, based on the skin tone observations I made, I do not believe I would have assumed they are a same-race/ethnicity couple. I feel like Maria and Steven were suggesting that they do not see skin color, at least not their spouse's skin color, in a blatant manner.

In contrast, participants (like Jeremy) indicated they were aware of their status as an interracial couple, but Jeremy (white) also said that he did not think about it much because he had dated interracially prior to meeting Sophia (black):

> No, I think the experience of dating earlier was more when I, you know, processed those sorts of things, like dealing with the fact that people would never think you are together. They would always ask, you know, if you go to a hotel and check in, like they would ask me for my information…you know, 'Are you ready to check in?' Then they will ask her if she's ready to check in. Whereas, they wouldn't if we walked up as a white couple. They would assume that we were together, but they always assume that we're not together, but so, it's just stuff like that that we had to kind of experience for a long time before, so there wasn't much discussion to be had on it.

Jeremy explained that he had become accustomed to how reactions from others were different for those in interracial relationships compared to those in same-race relationships due to prior interracial dating; therefore, he really did not give a lot of thought to about being an interracial couple when he and Sophia decided to get married – he knew what to expect. This suggests that perhaps those in interracial marriages who had previous experience with interracial dating (as opposed to those who married the person in which they first experienced an interracial relationship) may be desensitized to some of the reactions they receive by the time they get married. They might not have to think about it because they have accepted reactions (like those described by Jeremy) as part of the reality of being in an interracial marriage.

Portia (black) mentioned that she really did not think about being in an interracial marriage before marrying Eric (white), but she attributed this to not having the same social awareness that she has now:

> Umm, for me, I can't say I thought a whole lot about it. I didn't really think that…you know, I think in the last few years, I think I've become a lot more aware of social and institutional racism...now that I've kind of changed in terms of how I relate to the world in terms of being a black woman, but at the time I married Eric, I wasn't really aware as I am now. So I didn't really think a lot about how being in an interracial relationship would change my life. I just didn't think it would make that big of a difference.

Portia felt at the time that she and Eric were married that there really was not a lot to think about or consider in terms of being an interracial married couple. However, over the last few years, Portia has become more aware of social issues related to race and seems to think about how being in an interracial marriage is impacted by these issues.

Twelve participants said they did think about being an interracial married couple when they decided to get married; however, responses were varied as to why they gave thought to being in an interracial marriage. For example, Desmond and Christina said they did not think about being an interracial married couple, until they started to notice reactions from strangers. Christina recalled how they really did not think about it until they were forced to think about it: "We could be shopping or go to the mall and people would call under their breath, 'Sellout.' And that's when we would experience that kind of stuff and it would bring it to our attention, like, 'Oh, we're really different.' For us it was fine…" Christina emphasized that she and Desmond did not really think about their racial/ethnic difference so much before they were married; however, they did think about it when they started to receive comments from complete strangers.

Of the respondents who thought about being in an interracial marriage, nine participants thought about it with respect to their future children. One participant made light of the situation – Anna said she thought: "'Wow, our kids are going to look

great!'" Andrew and Emily, but mostly Emily, said they thought about maximizing educational opportunities for their child:

> I did think about it because, this is going to sound really bad, but I know that if you identify as other than white, like if our child identified as Hispanic, I think he would have more scholarship opportunities because schools are seeking diversity. So, I thought about it in regards to any future children we had, and I thought about it, and you know this actually came up to the day he was born. In the hospital, you know when you have to check the box for the ethnicity of the child, I thought about it in regards to better opportunities to our child if he identifies as Hispanic.

It might be expected that Emily would think about disadvantages her child would experience being multiracial/ethnic instead of the advantages she thought her children would receive if they were to identify as Hispanic (her husband's ethnicity). Emily's white privilege could explain some of her thinking. That is, whites do not necessarily think about race/ethnicity in terms of experiencing disadvantage (since whites do not experience disadvantage due to their race). Therefore, since Emily is not accustomed to thinking in terms of racial/ethnic disadvantage, she likely did not even consider difficulties her future children might experience as a result of their ethnicity.

Six participants (Jacques, Michelle, Brandon, Kevin, Laura, and Eric) who thought about being an interracial couple in terms of their future children mentioned how they were going to have to discuss with their children such topics as racial identity, dealing with discrimination, and fitting in and relating to the world based upon their appearance. At least one couple, Michelle and Jacques, indicated that these issues were having a major impact on if and when they decided to have children. Since Jacques did not grow up in the United States, he does not have experiences of growing up black in the United States to share with his child(ren). And Michelle was open about her white

privilege, noting that since she has never had to deal with racial discrimination herself, she is not exactly sure how she would relate to any of her children's life experiences. Many of the couples I interviewed did have children, and as I will discuss in a later section, some were beginning to have conversations about racial/ethnic identity, racism and discrimination with their children around the time these interviews were conducted.

To summarize, being in an interracial marriage usually did not seem to be at the forefront of respondents' minds when they decided to get married. From what these respondents discussed, they either did not think about being in an interracial marriage at all or they did not think about it until they had a specific reason to think about it (e.g., they noticed they were treated differently because of their interracial relationship status). For those participants who did think about it, they seemed to not think about themselves as an interracial couple or even as an individual within an interracial marriage, but rather about how issues of race/ethnicity would be handled with any children they had.

Length of Engagement

Many of the couples who participated in the interviews did not have long engagement periods. Four couples (about 27 percent) had an engagement period that was longer than one year, while five couples (33 percent) were engaged between six months and one year. Another five couples (33 percent) reported that they were engaged for less than six months. One couple said that they really did not have an engagement period. Racial/ethnic issues, including being in an interracial relationship, did not seem to affect the engagement length of these couples.

The Wedding

Participants were asked during the interview to describe what their wedding was like. Five couples (33 percent of all couples) stated that they eloped; however, no one said that they eloped because their family had negative attitudes toward interracial marriage. Rather, most of the couples seemed to elope because of other life events (military deployments, homeowner requirements, etc.) that were occurring when they decided to get married. Ten couples (67 percent) indicated that they had traditional wedding ceremonies. I asked the couples if they were worried about and if they noticed any racial/ethnic tensions at their wedding, regardless of whether the couple indicated they had eloped or had a traditional wedding ceremony. While I did not expect any of the couples who eloped to have any tensions due to race/ethnicity at their weddings, I wanted to clarify with these couples there were no racial/ethnic tensions with wedding officiates or witnesses.

Only one couple experienced an incident related to race/ethnicity on their wedding day; this did not occur at their wedding ceremony, however. Desmond and Christina were married in Las Vegas when he was 18 and she was 17. Desmond told me how a group of strangers made some derogatory comments regarding their relationship:

> The day we got married in Las Vegas we were walking around in the casino, and it was a group of eight to 12 blacks that happened to be around our area. And we were walking, they were approaching us and we were approaching them, and they had to say cowardice things as they were passing us.

Desmond and Christina did not make it clear to me if the strangers actually knew it was their wedding day, so it is not clear if the strangers were merely reacting to an interracial couple, or to an interracial couple who were about to be married (that is, in

wedding attire and going to the wedding chapel). Desmond and Christina said that their actual wedding ceremony was free from any racial/ethnic tensions.

Couples who had traditional wedding ceremonies reported that they worried about or noticed "tension" among their wedding guests. Two couples said they were a little worried about tensions. Emily (white) reported feeling a little uneasy about some of her family members: "Maybe my extended family. They are the only ones I can think of that would have a reaction like that." Emily was specifically worried that one of her extended family members might say something about Andrew (Hispanic), or his family; however, Emily and Andrew said that despite Emily's worry, they did not remember anything negative occurring at their wedding related to race/ethnicity. Laura also mentioned that she was concerned about racial/ethnic tensions at her wedding:

> Well, most of the tension that I felt…umm, the family I am closest with and identify with the most was not concerned about Kevin. I suspected that my father would not approve of interracial marriage, but I did not know that for sure. He was invited to the wedding and I was concerned, but that has more to do with…a little bit more of the black side of my family not accepting a white husband, or at the very least giving me a hard time for it. Even in a joking way or a passive aggressive way, or an outright confrontational way. I wasn't sure.

Laura apparently had experienced some negative reactions from her father's family that caused her to believe that her father would not be happy about her marriage and might even say something to that effect at Laura and Kevin's wedding – had he attended. These negative experiences produced worry about racial tensions on their wedding day.

Interestingly, when I asked Kevin and Laura if they actually noticed any tensions on their wedding day, Kevin said, "Differences, but not tensions…" Laura elaborated on what occurred at their wedding reception: "Everybody that was black was

at one…you know…were at tables together…so yeah, I would say no, no real tensions, but differences for sure." Kevin and Laura use the term "differences" to describe the self-segregation that occurred at their wedding, which also occurred at Eric and Portia's wedding. Eric responded to the question regarding what their wedding was like by telling me how they were married in California, but that they also had a reception in North Carolina for their East Coast friends and family to attend. At the reception in North Carolina was where Eric actually noticed issues of race come up:

> That was the only time [in North Carolina] I saw some type of racial stuff, because I have a lot of white North Carolina family that's fairly conservative and stuff and they came and they were friendly, but they just kind of sat amongst themselves and didn't really talk to other people. Then, a lot of my black friends came…and you could definitely see that the room racially divided. It wasn't tense, but it was that same old division that we see everywhere…

Similar to Kevin and Laura's experience, Eric also notes that what he observed was not tension, but certainly "division."

In contrast, Jacques and Michelle described the events that transpired at their wedding reception as "tensions." When I asked Jacques and Michelle if they noticed any racial tensions at their wedding, Jacques immediately exclaimed that he did notice racial tensions at their wedding ceremony. The couple also explained that they purposely had white bridesmaids and black groomsmen (Michelle is white and Jacques is black). However, it was the events that occurred at the wedding reception that the couple described as tensions. Michelle described how the wedding guests had self-segregated by race, even though they had assigned the guests seats at specific tables in order to integrate their guests: "We even tried to set up tables and I don't know what

happened to the table arrangement when we were taking pictures, but when we went in there it was totally divided." Since their wedding guests had disregarded their wishes, Jacques and Michelle quickly changed the song played when they entered the reception hall. Michelle continued, "So…we decided we would enter to Michael Jackson's 'Black or White,' and we did!" Despite the couple's efforts to integrate their black and white wedding guests, they found that their wishes were entirely ignored and the room became racially divided. Though Michelle noted that her and Jacques's response to the "tensions" (i.e., the Michael Jackson song) was well received by their friends, she also stated that not everyone in attendance appreciated what they had done:

> So, all of our friends thought it was amazing, but he had some family that were offended by it and told us that our marriage was not going to last, that it wasn't blessed by God, that since we didn't play Christian music at our wedding and we drank at our wedding, that our marriage was doomed.

It seems that Jacques and Michelle were attempting to use the song they played to send a message to their guests that they were not too pleased about the self-segregation that had occurred, but some guests did not approve and used it as an opportunity to verbally attack Jacques and Michelle. While Jacques and Michelle attributed these reactions to their choice of entrance music at their wedding reception, it should be made clear that the family member did not mention race, but rather focused on religion (specifically the absence of Christian music and the consumption of alcohol). Though, it could be possible that these family members had racial issues that they did not articulate.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the experiences of getting together and getting married for the couples who took part in this research. Aside from one couple, it seems

that most of these couples met in conventional ways that do not suggest they were seeking out an interracial relationship. Furthermore, there was nothing that stood out about the dating and cohabiting practices of these couples. Six respondents said they received negative reactions when they told their families they were dating someone of a different race/ethnicity; however, by the time these couples told their families they were getting married, much of the opposition seemed to be attached to issues other than race/ethnicity. The engagement period for these respondents did not seem to be out of the ordinary. Finally, in describing their weddings, about one-third of the couples eloped; however, no one said this was due to racial/ethnic issues. For those who had a traditional wedding, most did not seem to be extremely worried about racial/ethnic tensions to the extent it became their primary concern about their wedding. Though, Emily and Laura mentioned a few concerns related to racial/ethnic tensions; however, is seems that these concerns did not transpire. Other respondents mentioned they noticed their wedding guests self-segregated at their weddings, with white guests on one side of the room and black guests on the other side of the room.

Chapter Ten: Findings for Experiences as Married Couples

Emphasis on Interracial Marriage

Couples were asked during the interview if they put a lot of emphasis on the fact that they were in an interracial marriage, or if they gave it a lot of thought. Jacques (black), Michelle (white), and Heather (white) said they did. Furthermore, their responses to the question focused on unpleasant experiences these couples have endured, which caused them to place an emphasis[15] on their interracial marriage or to think about it often.

Jacques said he placed a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage; however, he also replied that he did not see or talk about his wife, Michelle, as a white woman, "From my perspective, um, I do. But, when I talk about my wife, I don't talk about my wife as a white girl. Like if I'm talking to my friends or at work, I don't see…I don't see her like a white girl. I don't know…my mind doesn't function that way." While it is unclear from this comment whether Jacques does not tell his friends that he is married to a white woman or whether he was saying that when it came to his wife he was color-blind, he did go on to say that he did think about how others might react when he and Michelle were out in public:

> But, at the same time, when we go do things and we hang out with people, or are at an event – I'm very aware of that. So, because, what happens is if you're going somewhere or doing something because you want to have a good time or you want to socialize, why would you go to a place that is going to make you or your wife upset. So, I'm very aware of the situation I'm getting into every time, and I'm aware of that.

[15] By "emphasis," I mean something they place a lot of importance on being in an interracial marriage, or something that is given priority over other aspects of their marriage.

Thus, Jacques is aware that hostile situations could arise from being in public as an interracial married couple. Additionally, Jacques makes a distinction between public and private issues (also mentioned later in this chapter) in his comment which a number of other participants did as well. It would seem that, on a personal level (privately), spouses in interracial marriages might not emphasize they are married to someone of a different race/ethnicity – they do not place much importance on the fact that their spouse's skin color is different from theirs. Jacques is one of the participants who seems to suggest that they do not even notice it on the private level. However, because of potentially hostile situations in public, interracial couples ultimately must acknowledge differences in skin color.

Michelle's comments echoed Jacques's sense of awareness of being an interracial married couple, but Michelle also provided a specific incident she and Jacques experienced that caused her to think even more about being in an interracial marriage:

> Umm, if you asked me this at this time last year, I would have a different answer for you. Umm, for me, I used to think that living in the United States we had more issues, but umm, I actually didn't become extremely aware of our interracial status until we were in Paris for our five-year wedding anniversary – that's the most racist city I've ever been to, more so than the town I grew up in. Umm, so I thought in an international city like Paris, it wouldn't be as noticeable, but we actually had trouble getting service sometimes. Umm, especially because he's a French speaker, the natives probably didn't know that necessarily at first, but when they would talk about us, he knew exactly what they were saying. Whereas, if you were an interracial couple in Paris and you didn't speak the language, then you would think they were just being rude, but you wouldn't know how rude they really are. Umm, so I think it became more on my mind after that. So, I have seen some experiences that were very different, umm, in the past year. I normally wouldn't have associated with the fact that we're an

> interracial couple, but now that I'm more observant, I feel like it is because we are an interracial couple.

Michelle also mentioned that she became more aware of being in an interracial marriage after someone questioned how fit Michelle was to be a teacher because someone incorrectly assumed that Michelle was romantically involved and living with Jacques, but not married to him:

> I teach third grade and one of my student's mothers – I go by Ms. Michelle at school. I didn't take his (Jacques's) last name, so even if I did, a third grader can't say that [Jacques's last name is difficult for Americans to pronounce] – so, that's just to preface this. One of the parents, at a church cookie exchange right before Christmas, was talking about me to another teacher and how she didn't think I was fit to teach third grade because I couldn't even be honest about the fact that I was shacking up with my boyfriend. Literally! And so, first of all, this is how little this lady knows about me…if I was living with my boyfriend I would be proud of that…okay, so, I really honestly think that if my husband was white, it never would have been an issue … a lot of people know I'm in an interracial marriage and they naturally assume that we're cohabitating rather than married. There's like this stigma to black men and how they have a commitment phobia, and they don't marry white women. Well, this one did. Yeah, I have a wedding certificate to prove it!

Michelle recalled this story to demonstrate why she places a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, but her story says a lot about contemporary racism in the United States. First, there is the element that this person feels Michelle is not fit to be around children because of her interracial relationship status. This person makes it seem as if Michelle has no moral compass, and Michelle is pretty much demonized for being with a black man. There is also the stereotype that, as a black man, Jacques has issues with marriage (commitment phobia or aversion). Embedded in that stereotype is the image of the hypersexualized black male, who is more interested in the physical aspects of a

relationship (sex) than in other aspects of a relationship. From Michelle's story, we can see that, despite the growth in progressive racial attitudes (Bobo and Smith 1998; Yancey and Lewis 2008) and increased acceptance of interracial marriage (e.g., *New York Times* 2001), contemporary interracial married couples (especially black/white couples) continue to have their motives for being in an interracial marriage questioned and continue to be publicly scrutinized for marrying outside of their racial group.

When I asked Heather and Jorge whether they emphasized that they are in an interracial marriage or whether it was something they thought about often, Jorge said he never really thought about it, but Heather said she did put a lot of thought into being in an interracial marriage. However, at first Heather said the emphasis was not intentional and mostly centered around food preferences or the fact that Jorge can stay outside in the sun while she has to stay indoors due to her fair skin tone. Here, Heather combines two very different things, one based on physical differences (skin color) and one rooted in culture (food preferences). While differences in skin color seem to be the most obvious factor interracial(ethnic) couples would emphasize, Heather's comment suggests that cultural differences between spouses of different races/ethnicities also can be a factor in their marriages. But, Heather also noted that she gave a lot of thought to being in an interracial marriage when she and Jorge interacted with strangers:

> Sometimes, when I see interactions with other people, I become more aware of it when things happen that upset me that are either inherently racist or intentionally racist. Umm, at those times I am very aware of it and place a very high emphasis on it (being in an interracial marriage).

Similar to Jacques and Michelle, Heather stated the racist interactions caused her to think about being in an interracial marriage. Again, it seems that some interracial

couples might not think (much) about being in an interracial marriage until they experience a racist situation in public.

One couple, Eric and Portia, responded that they both did and did not put a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage. Just like Jacques, Michelle, and Heather, Eric said that he mostly thinks about being in an interracial marriage when he notices how others respond to him and Portia in public:

> I'm very cognizant of it when we're out and about, it could be anywhere when we're out. I'm always wondering when people look at me, and I perceive that look as strange. I'm like, "Are you looking at me strange because I'm with her…is it not?" Again, you can drive yourself crazy with this racial guesswork. Then I'm going through the stats in my mind of what I know of racial attitudes…so I'm constantly trying to figure out something that can't be figured out.

Portia also said that it was the reactions from others in public that caused her to think about being in an interracial marriage: "…the only time I think about it when we're out is when we are interacting with other people. You know, sometimes I will see that look or a slight difference in how people will treat us." Even though Eric concedes that he engages in "racial guesswork" and tries to figure out why strangers give him odd looks when they see him with his wife, he and Portia admit that these responses lead them to think more about being in an interracial marriage.

Similar to Jacques's response about not seeing his wife "as a white girl," Eric also did not seem to place much emphasis on the fact that Portia is black:

> But, a lot of the time I really don't think about it. I don't go home and say, "Oh, there's my black wife." It's just her. A lot of the time I really don't think about it…I don't really think about it unless I'm in a social space.

Similarly, Portia said, “Like, I don’t think about it usually when we’re alone, and I rarely think about it (being in an interracial marriage)." But again, both Eric and Portia said they were more aware of being in an interracial marriage when they are in public settings because of the looks and treatment they receive. Based on these responses, it seems that interracial couples can be color-blind; spouses do not seem to place a lot of importance on each other’s race/ethnicity. But, they do notice the responses they elicit from strangers. Clearly, there are public/private dynamics at play. In private, skin color did not seem to matter much – perhaps as little as hair color. But, publicly, skin color seemed to matter much more.

Three couples said it was their status as parents that increased the emphasis they place on being in an interracial marriage. For instance, Laura said that having inquisitive children caused her to pay more attention to being in an interracial marriage, “Yes, because we have children and they are right at the age where they are starting to ask those questions. Otherwise, I don’t think I would.” Immediately following Laura’s response, her husband Kevin stated, “I might phrase it as because we are interracial parents, but not an interracial husband and wife. That’s splitting hairs maybe, but…” For Kevin and Laura, the emphasis they placed on their marriage being interracial had much more to do with their status as interracial parents than being an interracial couple, though Kevin thought maybe he was being a bit petty about differentiating between interracial marriage and interracial parenthood. On the other hand, Laura did not think she would place the same emphasis on being in an interracial marriage without having children who asked questions about skin tone and race.

Similarly, Andrew (Hispanic) and Emily (non-Hispanic white) put less emphasis on being spouses of different ethnicities and more, albeit somewhat different, emphasis on being parents of different ethnicities. Andrew said that he placed more emphasis on his son's ethnic identity: "I guess maybe more now with (redacted), because you know about our discussion about how he identifies…" However, Emily put more emphasis on passing down ethnic traditions to their child:

> It did become important to me, because I grew up with the Polish traditions, so it became important to ask Andrew and his family about any Hispanic traditions they do…so that was important to me to continue that throughout our marriage and with our children.

Thus, there was some divergence in what each spouse emphasized about having an interracial/ethnic child. Andrew emphasized identity issues while Emily emphasized exposing their child to the traditions of both sides of the family.

Anna (Hispanic) also explained that she placed an emphasis on being interethnic parents more so than on being in an interracial(ethnic) marriage since she and Ryan adopted their daughter. Specifically, Anna discussed how Ryan (non-Hispanic white) encouraged her to speak Spanish to their daughter, "I think ever since our child was brought into this relationship, there's more of an emphasis because Ryan stays on me about, 'Why aren't you talking [*sic*] Spanish to her? Why aren't you…?'" It is interesting to note that Ryan, who is not Hispanic, is the spouse who emphasizes Anna sharing the Spanish language with their daughter.

One other couple plus one other wife said they did not place a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage per se, but did think about being an interracial(ethnic) married couple with respect to their (future) children. One couple, Maria (Hispanic) and

Steven (white), admitted to talking about what names they might choose for future children, and how the future children might be treated as a mixed-ethnicity child. Additionally, Jennifer said she did not place a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, but thought about it sometimes in terms of the exposure her son has to both sides (black and white) of his racial identity.

Two couples avoided using the term "emphasis" in their responses to my question and instead said they "acknowledged that they were in an interracial marriage," or "celebrated the diversity created through their marriage." But these couples also mentioned their children as the main reason for acknowledging that they are an interracial family or for celebrating the diversity created as a result of their marriage. When I asked Sarah (white) and Daniel (black) if they put a lot of emphasis on their marriage being interracial, Sarah stated, "Not a lot of emphasis, but we do acknowledge it and teach our children that we are an interracial family and that they should acknowledge that they are more than one race, not just one or the other." Based on Sarah's response, it would seem that being an interracial family with interracial children is more important to her and Daniel than being an interracial married couple, and they want their children to have an awareness of their biracial identity.

Desmond and Christina's response was similar to Sarah and Daniel's in that they did not necessarily emphasize per se being in an interracial marriage, but instead celebrated their family's diversity, especially with their children. When I asked Desmond and Christina if they put a lot of emphasis on their marriage being interracial, Desmond replied, "No. But, we do celebrate the difference at times." Christina agreed with Desmond's response, and mentioned how she thought their children benefited from

their celebration of diversity, "Yeah. I think we celebrate it. I think our kids get a chance to experience it a lot. They are really excited about being interracial [*sic*] children. They love it because they have so many different cultures, and that's kind of what we meant by celebrating it." Desmond also mentioned that he and Christina wanted their children to be aware and proud of their diverse heritage:

> Yeah, on the one hand I want to admit that it's intentional…because when we were younger we explicitly talked about that. We made sure that their entire lives that we intentionally celebrated all of our diversity, so they could be proud of all their different heritage that makes them who they are.

Though Desmond and Christina said they did not put a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, they certainly were intentional in celebrating their diversity and making sure that they children were cognizant and proud of their identity as multiracial (black, Hispanic, and Asian) children.

Interestingly, Brandon and Rachel responded that if they put any emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, they did so in what Rachel called "a joking way." I wanted to know more about the jokes Brandon and Rachel made about being in an interracial marriage, so I asked for examples. Rachel mentioned that she jokes about styling her sons' hair: "Like we will say in jest, like if the boys go out, I always make sure that their hair is always looking great. Because I don't want people to go, "Oh look, they've got a white mom." That's like a whole stereotype, and I'll say it in jest, I'm just joking." Brandon, in contrast, stated that they put a lot more emphasis on their different nationalities than their different races: "We think more of our nationalities – American and British." Brandon also suggested the college town they lived in somehow protected the couple from many issues related to interracial marriage, "So, being in [the

college town], it is a lot easier…" Rachel thought living in a college town with a diverse population made it unnecessary to focus on being in an interracial marriage:

> I think because we're near a college, because it's a college town, there's a lot of different races here anyway. Because when we were in [the college town] and when I've been anywhere else, I would always get lots of looks from black women usually – usually that's the way that it goes.

Brandon and Rachel's responses indicate that they felt they were somewhat insulated from negative responses like the ones they experienced elsewhere by now living in a college town with a diverse population. Because of this, they did not put any serious emphasis on being in an interracial marriage; instead, they make jokes about it, like Rachel joking about not being able to style her sons' hair because she is white.

Within at least two marriages, spouses were in disagreement as to whether they placed a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage. Heather (white) put a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial(ethnic) marriage, though, Jorge (Hispanic) said he never really thought about it. In a similar vein, Simon (Hispanic) did put a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial(ethnic) marriage, while his wife Jessica (white) did not. Simon explained why his response differed from his wife's when he stated, "Yeah, I think I come from a slightly different stance because I get so many of the comments that people make that Jessica sometimes overlooks. It makes it a big deal to me." Simon did not say it, but his phrasing suggests he is hearing positive things in public about their marriage. Derogatory comments (maybe about Hispanics), might not weigh as heavily on Jessica, perhaps because white privilege allows her to disregard or ignore them. In other words, it is possible Jessica does not place a lot of importance on being in an interracial(ethnic) marriage because of the white privilege she likely experiences.

Though, it would be remiss to imply that this is the case for all white/minority couples. However, it may be that this is the experience for white/non-white couples when the white partner is not aware of their white privilege or does not have a heightened racial awareness.

Here I have described the extent to which interracial couples placed an emphasis on their marriage being interracial. Six respondents (20 percent) said they placed an emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, while eight respondents (27 percent) placed an emphasis on being current or future interracial parents. Four respondents (13 percent) emphasized the diversity in their families, and two respondents (7 percent) mentioned if they placed an emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, they did so to joke about it. Ten respondents (33 percent) did not emphasize being in an interracial marriage. The major themes that emerged from the responses provided by the couples who participated in this research included how most couples did not think much about it during their home life but sometimes did in their public life (i.e., public/private dynamics) because of reactions from strangers. Having interracial children also made spouses think more about being an interracial couple. But some couples really did not think about being in an interracial marriage very often and did not place much emphasis, or any emphasis, on being in an interracial marriage.

Feeling Different from Married Couples of the Same Race

As a follow-up to the question for those who said they did not place an emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, I asked if they thought their marriage was different from that of a same-race/ethnicity couple. Four couples did think their marriages were different from couples of the same race/ethnicity. Conversely, five couples did not

believe their marriage was different from that of couples of the same race/ethnicity. It should also be mentioned that there were some couples who were not in agreement. Three couples were not in agreement, with one spouse usually seeing the marriage as different and the other not seeing it as different, or one spouse seeing both similarities and differences.

The couples who said they thought their marriages were different from same-race/ethnicity couples mentioned one of the following as reasons: their individual experiences as racial/ethnic minorities, being interracial parents with biracial or multiracial children, and racist reactions they received that same-race couples do not experience. For example, Sophia (black) explained that same-race couples have shared experiences, while interracial couples have to gain an understanding of each other's experiences due to race/ethnicity. That is, interracial couples have divergent experiences because of the color of their skin. Sophia said:

> I think, umm, experientially it is definitely going to be different. I think that I kind of, you know, experience things differently as a black woman. Well, I'm a female number one, and in a heterosexual relationship, so as a female I experience different – as a black woman I experience things differently, of course. And I think that we – race is still really significant in society…[Y]eah, I think it's more like we just have different experiences, and we have to teach one another…I think you have to teach one another about how you walk through the world in your race body.

Sophia's response makes an important point that because of spouses' dissimilar experiences due to skin color, these marriages are different from same-race marriages. Heterosexual couples of the same race might have shared experiences based on race, but Sophia states that her experiences are very different from those of her white husband. Furthermore, Sophia noted that she and her husband, Jeremy, have to educate one

another about their experiences as a black woman or white man. That is, Sophia and Jeremy have to explain to each other how their race and gender intersect (intersectionality) to form more privileges for Jeremy or fewer privileges for Sophia. Since same-race couples have the same experiences (based on race), they do not have to teach each other about intersectionality.

Though Jeremy agreed that their marriage was different from couples of the same race, his reasoning was different from that of Sophia's. Jeremy thought their marriage was different because it was difficult to build social connections: "I think it is a little bit more socially difficult to umm, you know, connect with other couples and families. Umm, not everyone, but I think it's limited more than if you were in a same-race marriage." Jeremy pointed out that he felt being in an interracial marriage restricted the connections available with other couples and families and that couples of the same race may have an easier time making connections with other couples and families. It is possible that Jeremy is implying one of two things here. First, he might be suggesting that interracial couples are inherently different just by virtue of being different races; therefore, they do not easily connect with couples in a same-race marriage. However, it is possible that Jeremy was merely noting that the experiences of an interracial couple are different from those of a same-race couple, so not having common experiences makes it harder to for an interracial couple and a same-race couple to connect with each other.

Laura and Kevin also thought their marriage was different from couples of the same race; however, they mostly attributed this difference to raising biracial children. Laura initially said, "Yes. Well, we have different challenges I think, so fundamentally

we are very different, but we have an extra something we have to deal with as a family." I asked Laura to explain what she meant by "challenges." Laura explained that some questions children ask were difficult to answer and that her three-year-old son was beginning to become aware of skin tone differences and asking questions about it:

> It's challenging to answer children's questions about life, and umm, so everybody has to answer questions about how babies are made, we also have to answer the questions about, you know. I don't know, like, one of our children, our son, is a little bit darker than our daughter, so he asks a lot about why and answering those questions are a challenge to me.

Laura described her experience of her son becoming aware that his skin tone was darker than his sister's and asking his parents to explain why this was the case as something she and Kevin have to deal with that same-race couples will likely not have to experience – thus, interracial couples might have an additional "challenge" in that they have to explain skin tone differences to their children. I should note that Kevin agreed with Laura's assessment, but believed it could be a lot worse if they lived elsewhere (e.g., Mississippi).

Like the other two couples, Desmond and Christina also said they thought their marriage was different from a same-race couple's; they mentioned that their experiences with racial/ethnic tensions in their family and reactions from strangers are what separated them from same-race/ethnicity couples. As Christina noted:

> I would say there's some aspects that should be the same, like, you know, we share household duties, we share anything that other couples would experience - just like day to day decision making, that kind of thing. As far as like, because we're interracial, I'm sure there's thing like, if there's racial tensions in the families…we've experienced some of that, and we experience some of that with strangers. So that comes up, you know. But, I

> would say that's what makes it different from couples of the same ethnic group getting married.

Christina believed there are characteristics of their marriage that are the same as for a couple of the same race, though she also pointed out that she and Desmond have had to deal with racial/ethnic tensions in their families (especially when they became a serious couple) and they also have experienced reactions from strangers when they are out in public – both of which are not experienced by same-race/ethnicity couples. Embedded in Christina's response is that the reactions interracial(ethnic) couples experience can also be examples of the public (reactions from strangers)/private (racial/ethnic tensions in their families) dynamic.

Desmond told me about how he came to realize his marriage was different from that of couples of the same race/ethnicity. He explained that when he was telling a white friend about an experience he and Christina had due to being in an interracial marriage, his friend was surprised to hear about the incident. Desmond said:

> The only time that anything remotely, like any thought has crossed my mind, is when I've shared our experiences with an individual who is married to someone of the same race, and they're shocked. Then for a moment, a very fleeting moment, I realize, "Oh yeah…" I had a professor, [he] was my philosophy professor before I went to [a different university] …so, I'm up at his house and I'm sharing an interesting story that had just happened with Christina and I, you know, the basic scenario was we were out in public and someone was extremely racist, and he was so taken aback by it. Then, it dawned on me, I think for the first time ever I thought about it, 'Wow, people in same race marriage may not experience anything like what we experience out in public.' You know, with people having issues with us being of different ethnic makeup. But, when he made me realize, 'Oh, wow, there's differences,' at least in terms of what couple of the same race and couples of mixed race experience.

For Desmond, it was the reaction of his friend [the philosophy professor mentioned above] that put things into perspective for him as he realized that people in racially homogenous marriages do not have experiences similar to those in interracial marriages.

Gabriel (married to Jennifer) and David (married to Amanda) both thought there were similarities and differences between their marriages and marriages in which the couples were of the same race/ethnicity. Gabriel said:

> Well no, as far as the goals that we have for our marriage and the things we value, but yes, in a sense that we have different upbringing and I did not consider that. So we don't have shared experiences, in general, that I think couples of the same race do. Like, my expectations were different based on the women I…you know what I'm saying?

Gabriel acknowledged that he and Jennifer did not have similar life experiences because they are not the same race/ethnicity, but he also discussed how cultural differences shaped his expectations in his marriage – something same-race/ethnicity couples are not likely to experience. Of course, same-race/ethnicity couples can have different upbringings and experiences (similar to what Gabriel described) based on coming from different places in terms of geography, social class, or family structures. Certainly, other factors besides race/ethnicity can shape one's upbringing.

David (black) thought that his marriage had some aspects in common with couples of the same race, though he mentioned that he and Amanda (white) have to think about how they might be treated if they were to travel to certain parts of the country:

> I see it as a marriage just like any other marriage, but at the same time I do realize there are certain places we can go in the country that we won't be treated the same. People will, you know, give us dirty looks and things like that. I know when we travel and

> especially if I'm driving, if I'm driving we go through some of the old former confederate states, and I see those confederate flags over there and I say, "Okay, well just how far will these people express their negativity?" You know, some of them may be flying confederate flags to just, umm, just to you know, out of tradition or whatever, and then some of them may be doing it out of racism. But that's one thing I've always tried to make myself aware of when I travel…especially traveling through places like Tennessee. I always try to stay alert as opposed to when I lived up in Washington, I mean I didn't necessarily give that a second thought.

David focused more on public issues instead of private issues in his response. David's response is similar to other respondents in that he notes he and Amanda experience negative reactions or are treated differently when they are together in public. But, David goes beyond that by suggesting that he thinks of his marriage differently because of the treatment he and Amanda received in a certain part of the county. David somewhat touches on how living in certain parts of the country can result in certain experiences that might influence whether interracial couples see their marriages as similar to or different from the way same-race couples see their marriages.

In this section, I have discussed how interracial couples view their marriages, specifically, whether they see their marriages as different from couples of the same race/ethnicity. Not all of the couples who participated in the interviews were asked this question; but most of the couples were asked it in an effort to gain further detail about their experiences as an interracial couple. Of the couples who were asked the question, four couples believed their marriages were different from couples with spouses of the same race/ethnicity, but five couples did not think their marriages were any different from those of same-race/ethnicity couples. In three interviews, the couples were not in agreement about how they viewed their marriages (i.e., whether it being interracial had

an effect). Therefore, a total of 11 respondents (a little over one-third) thought being in an interracial marriage was different from a same-race/ethnicity marriage. The issues that were mentioned as these respondents answered the question include: their individual experiences as racial/ethnic minorities, being interracial parents with biracial or multiracial children, and racist reactions they received that same-race/ethnicity couples do not experience. It is somewhat surprising that two-thirds of the respondents did not see their marriage as different from that of a same-race/ethnicity couple. I think some respondents may have interpreted this question as asking if their relationship as husband and wife is different because they are in an interracial marriage, and not necessarily in terms of differences due to how they are treated or not treated as an interracial couple by others.

Reactions from Strangers

While some of the couples mentioned reactions from strangers when I asked them such questions as whether they put a lot of emphasis on being in an interracial marriage, other couples did not discuss reactions from strangers in public settings until I specifically asked them a question about it. Ten couples (about 67 percent of all couples) said they had noticed reactions from strangers when they were seen together in public settings. But it should be mentioned that at least four of the couples who said they had never noticed any reactions from strangers might have been able to "pass" as a same-race couple; in fact, these four couples alluded to it during their interviews. For example, Simon (Hispanic), married to Jessica (white), said, "I mean, luckily for me, I look white." Additionally, Anna (Hispanic), married to Ryan (white), said, "They don't really know that I speak Spanish or that I am Mexican or anything." Therefore, it is

possible that these four couples have not experienced any reactions because they are not immediately recognized as an interracial couple. It also should be noted that David and Amanda said they noticed reactions from strangers, but they attributed those reactions to their being Muslim and Amanda's hijab rather than because they were in an interracial marriage.

Eric was one respondent who said he had noticed reactions from strangers to his and Portia's marriage. He called these reactions "microaggressions." According to Sue et al. (2007), "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (271). Although this definition applies more specifically to the daily experiences of racial/ethnic minorities, based on what was described by many of the couples who participated in my interviews, the definition certainly can fit the experiences of a white person in an interracial marriage as well. Even though many of the couples mentioned microaggressions they had experienced, there was some variation in what the couples described. The microaggressions described by the research participants could be put on a scale of increasing intensity that ranged from lingering stares (lowest intensity) to verbal altercations or insults (highest intensity). Several couples noted that they experienced more than one type of reaction and at least three respondents mentioned that their children were at the center of (or were the target of) some of the reactions.

Microaggressions

Disapproving looks. Six couples said they had noticed lingering stares from strangers when they were in public settings. Christina (Hispanic/Asian) even compared the stares she and Desmond (black) experienced to zoo animals on exhibit: "A lot of gawking and staring, as if we're animals in a zoo. That's how I put it." She also jokingly commented, "I mean, they could at least give me peanuts!" Christina's comment demonstrates how some people react when they see an interracial couple in public, almost as if interracial couples are some sort of novelty that strangers find fascinating. Though, Christina was not amused by the lingering stares and clearly felt annoyed.

Lingering stares from strangers do not just make interracial couples feel like they are being gawked at as if on display at a zoo. These responses also can be an annoyance for interracial couples. Sophia (black) and Jeremy (white) recalled one incident where Sophia became so annoyed by relentless staring that she thinks she might have even demanded aloud to know what everyone was looking at:

> Sophia: Yeah. I…I... yes. I think about Missouri, when we were driving through Missouri that one summer. It was really weird. Jeremy: We had…what was that place? Sophia: Golden Corral. Jeremy: Golden Corral, yeah. People were just, like, sitting at their tables, eating all the food, and just looking at us. Sophia: They were just…staring! Jeremy: Like we were something to stare at, and they just stare at you and just watch you! Sophia: People just look at you…[I]t was like, "What the hell are you people looking at?" …I think I may have actually said that, "What the hell are you people looking at?" (Laughter) But, they came over and talked to us, so we got out of Missouri pretty quickly.

Sophia and Jeremy, particularly Sophia, were bothered by the lingering stares to the point that Sophia believes she might have asked aloud why everyone was staring at

them. However, they also described the stares as *weird*. This seems to indicate that prolonged staring either was something they were not accustomed to experiencing or they were not aware of before this incident. Either way, this incident demonstrates how extended staring can anger and upset interracial couples.

Heather (white) and Jorge (Hispanic), who also said they noticed stares, told me about an incident in which they decided to engage in behavior to cause discomfort for a person staring at them. But in spite of the couple's behavior, the person continued to stare at Heather and Jorge. Heather remarked:

> Yeah, we went… out to eat and we were both dressed – we had just gotten off work, and I leaned over and kissed him because I could see the old woman staring at us (laughs), and I did that intentionally because she just wouldn't stop… so when I leaned over to kiss him she went (makes a surprised face followed by a mad face). So I waited a minute, then I did it again (laughing). She went (makes frustrated/mad face) and covered her mouth and turned her head away. Umm, so then I very nearly sat on his lap and kissed him again, at which point she got up and walked away.

Heather seemed pretty pleased that the woman became so uncomfortable with Heather and Jorge kissing that she eventually left. Although Heather and Jorge did not receive disapproving looks from this woman until they kissed, some couples receive disapproving looks for merely being in public together.

Just as there appears to be a continuum of increasing intensity for the microaggressions experienced by interracial couples, it seems that there is a similar continuum for the disapproving looks given to some interracial couples who participated in this research. Four couples said they had noticed disapproving looks, but there was some variation in the types of disapproving looks. On the low or subtle end of the continuum, there are disapproving looks like those described by Christina, who said,

"Sometimes it can be as subtle as a frown." Desmond mentioned "eye rolling." At the opposite end of the continuum, other respondents experienced disapproving looks that were described as "death stares." Portia (black) said she noticed "hostile stares" – especially from black men around her age. Similarly, Kevin (white) and Laura (black) also said they noticed disapproving looks from black men, although in once instance they were directed at Kevin and from a different age group than his. These particular young black men were part of Laura's extended family. Kevin and Laura recalled the specific incident when they noticed the reactions:

> Kevin: One experience that I do remember…her dad's family reunion, getting death stares from – it was a tight age range, but very distinctive about 12 to 17 or something like that – they just… Laura: They did not approve! Kevin: …just sour, disapproving – yeah, I'm remembering that now, but when you're 30-something it is difficult to take a 14-year-old's death stare seriously (laughs).

The stares Kevin and Laura discussed were different from the stares described by other couples. First, they were not from complete strangers, but from Laura's extended family. Also, they were different in that they were rather hostile expressions from black, teenage males at a private family event, a reunion. None of these young men verbally expressed disapproval of Kevin or Kevin and Laura's interracial marriage, but according to Laura, their facial expressions conveyed that they did not approve of Kevin. In sum, their experiences, as well as the experiences of other respondents, shows that disapproving looks can range from subtleties, like frowning, to extremities, such as contemptuous looks that clearly convey disapproval of an interracial marriage.

"Rude" behaviors. Disapproving looks were just one type of microaggression experienced by interracial couples. Another common microaggression experienced by

the couples who said they noticed reactions from strangers was overtly rude, dismissive or aggressive behavior. Gabriel (Hispanic) discussed an incident in which he was completely dismissed by a stranger because he is married to a white woman:

> I took her to see Mary Chapin Carpenter at [redacted]…and some older white guy there – I can tell that he has a problem that I am there with her, because later on in the evening we had chances to have discourse as gentlemen, and he was intentionally rude to me and dismissive. It had to be only, in my opinion, because he saw me there with a pretty young white woman. That just happened to me a month ago and it's a true story. (to female respondent) Remember, I told you when it happened that that white guy was mad because I was there with you?

This man had such a problem with Gabriel being with Jennifer that he would not even engage in a polite discussion with him or even direct him to the restroom. This stranger was dismissive of Gabriel and treated Gabriel as if he was invisible. This is also how Eric (white) described being treated at times when people see him with Portia (black): "I find that people here [in the Northeast] ignore you, or are cold to you, they treat you like you are invisible." While these couples were dismissed or treated as if they were invisible, other couples were the recipients of overtly rude reactions from people when they were seen together in public.

Michelle (white) and Jacques (black) recalled that they had experienced blatantly rude behavior when they were seen together in public. Michelle described the incident:

> We were eating dinner at this sushi place and this couple asked to be moved away from us. It was an older couple, but they could still see us, they were still in eyesight. So, because I heard this, I just thought I would mess with them…so I asked him to come sit on the same side of the table with me, and we were kept kissing each other, I even fed him. This lady actually asked for a to-go box and left. The other thing, we had told the waiter what the issue was and

> so the waiter was like, "That's bullshit!" Then he [the waiter] kind of helped in on it. It was hilarious! Because how do you make that situation, I mean, you can't let it get to you because it will just really start to bother you.

Michelle's description of how she made light of a potentially upsetting situation, even mentioning that it was "hilarious," suggests some interracial couples will make jokes out of hurtful reactions they receive in public as a coping mechanism.

"Challenging" behaviors. Non-verbal aggressive or "challenging" behavior was a microaggression experienced by Eric and Portia. They noted this occurred with white and black men but mostly with black men. Eric stated, "[B]lack men will look me up and down as if like, 'I challenge you' type of thing." Eric also described how other men will exhibit physical and psychological slights in an effort to challenge him:

> They will brush by me…especially men, because it's this masculine gendered thing. They'll kind of brush by me and knock my shoulder or something…things like that. Umm, they are like little challenges. like the other day when we were coming out of the store. You said those guys were saying…kind of like ogling you, and then when I tried to back out of the parking space, they came and put their car behind mine so I couldn't do that. So, we were staring back at them and they revved the engine and ran off.

According to Collins (2004), endogamy is considered a significant norm of racial solidarity within the African American community; therefore, black men may consider an interracial marriage as a threat or challenge to black racial solidarity. Black men might think Eric has "taken one of their women," and view him as an adversary. In contrast, when white men challenge Eric it might be because they see him as deficient or weak, as if he was not good enough to marry a white woman.

Verbal comments and attacks. Four couples said they experienced what might be considered the most intense possible microaggression: verbal comments and attacks from strangers because they are in an interracial marriage. However, even the comments described by the couples seemed to vary in intensity. For instance, Eric remarked, "Yeah, people will say things under their breath." Desmond also mentioned he and Christina received such comments, but also more overt ones: "You get the comments under their breath, to the actually explicit comments someone makes – trying to get your attention, so you'll say something." Christina elaborated without my asking:

> One time someone told me I was a disgrace to my race. Well, that's kind of interesting, because I don't think they know what my race is! People automatically associate me as Hispanic or Asian depending on my hair and make-up that day. Some guy was like, "You're a disgrace to our race." I was like, "Because I married outside of my race? Okay…whatever!"

Similar to the non-verbal microaggressions in a parking lot that Eric described, this man likely viewed Christina as a race traitor, or that she did not view men from her own race as desirable marriage partners. However, instead of directing his disapproval and attempting to emasculate Desmond, who was with Christina when this incident occurred, he directed his disapproval toward Christina.

Even though Christina and Desmond had experiences with explicit negative comments about their interracial(ethnic) marriage, Rachel (white) described an experience when she was verbally attacked and called something derogatory because she was with Brandon (black):

> Rachel: Do you [Brandon] remember that time we were driving through Memphis and – and we didn't have any kids at the time – we were free, young. Umm, we had just passed Elvis Presley's house, and umm, we stopped at the traffic lights, and I was sat

> back so nobody could see me and you [Brandon] were driving, and there were two females in a car opposite… Brandon: Black females.
> Rachel: …and they were looking at Brandon, and I didn't lean forward on purpose, but I leaned forward and I just turned around – just to smile – and oh my god, still…she said, "You white bitch." [Brandon is laughing.] Rachel: Well, I was distraught, right. I was distraught and all I could think was, "Oh my god, black people have been through years of this." And here's me distraught of one woman saying, "You white bitch." You know, I couldn't believe it because I had never been called it. I had had looks, to maybe I knew what they were thinking, but not to say it. So that type of thing…that's the worst thing I've had.

There are a few important things about Rachel's experience to note. First, she acknowledges that black Americans have experienced racial hostilities in the United States for years, although she was quite taken aback by the unfriendly encounter. Second, based on Rachel's experience and those of other respondents (e.g., Eric), it appears that some of the more antagonistic microaggressions have been from minorities and directed at the white spouse in the interracial marriage. It seems that these reactions could be because racial/ethnic minorities, particularly blacks, might view black/white marriages as a threat to their community, and the reactions might be directed at whites because of years of oppression at the hands of whites.

Reactions When Their Children Were Present

All of the experiences described above were interactions directly between the couples and the strangers who reacted to their marriages. But one couple and two other respondents mentioned reactions that involved their children. Just as with the other reactions, these reactions also varied in intensity. For instance, Gabriel discussed how strangers did not think he was his son's father when he was in public settings with him:

> When I'm alone with him (their son), like when he was first born, before he started getting older and resembling me more, I got a lot of weird looks. He's a lot lighter skinned than me, and I have been asked before if I am babysitting. I'm like, "My own child…yes!"

This also happened to Laura, who mentioned that she was warned about this when her daughter was born. Laura said:

> I'm remembering when my daughter was born and my sister said this because she's so light. She said, "They are going to think you're the nanny if you're just out with her. They're going to think you're her nanny." And that did happen once and often people say, "Is she your daughter? She has blue eyes…"

Gabriel's and Laura's accounts demonstrate how some people in interracial marriages can experience reactions from strangers when it is assumed that they are not biologically related to a child because of skin tone differences.

Some respondents told me how they experienced reactions to their interracial marriage centered on their children that were shocking and infuriating. Sophia and Jeremy shared an encounter with a woman who used their child as an example of what biracial children look like when one parent is black and the other is white:

> Jeremy: And there was that one time, like in [redacted]. That one… Sophia: Oh, the crazy lady! Jeremy: The lady came up… Sophia: Oh, it was so rude! Jeremy: Yeah, the lady came up, and we had, uh, it was our first child and we had him out – we were at an outdoor concert or something. She had a young child and she came up and was like, trying to teach her child about race and stuff… Sophia: "This is what happens when two people…" Jeremy: …and she was just describing this… Sophia: Then she was looking at our child – didn't even ask us, of course – but started looking at our child like a science experiment. Jeremy: Yeah, "see how his skin color is in between those two…

Sophia was clearly upset when she recalled this experience. She even attributed this woman's ignorant response to her "being mentally ill." Sophia also mentioned that she and Jeremy were so taken aback by the experience at the time that they did not confront the woman about her comments: "I think we were just too young, like heaven forbid that she did that [to us] today, right? Because it would have gone far differently (laughs). I think we were just too in shock!" However, the event described by Jeremy and Sophia is quite similar to how Christina described being stared at like an animal on exhibit at the zoo. Jeremy and Sophia's experience further demonstrates how both interracial couples and their children are subjected to responses and reactions that same-race families would not experience. Regarding Jeremy and Sophia's experience, I also asked Sophia if the woman who was behind it was white. Sophia replied, "Yes. Black ladies just don't do stuff like that!" More on the demographics of the strangers who reacted will be discussed in the next section.

Demographics of Strangers Who Reacted

Many of the interviewees mentioned the demographic characteristics of strangers who reacted to their marriages. Table 3 indicates the race/ethnicity and gender of the strangers the couples said usually reacted to their marriages. The "X" represents when both spouses experienced a reaction from a person of that particular race/ethnicity and gender. Instances where the respondent's name is listed under the "X" indicates that only that spouse mentioned experiencing a reaction from a person of that particular race/ethnicity and gender. As apparent from the results in Table 3, couples in which one spouse is white and the other is black received far more reactions from strangers than

couples of other racial/ethnic combinations (i.e., white/Hispanic). This finding suggest that the skin color of those in interracial marriages matters.

Table 3. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of Strangers Who Reacted to Interracial Marriages

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Hispanic men	Hispanic women
Jeremy (white) and Sophia (black)		X				
Jacques (black) and Michelle (white)		X				
Brandon (black) and Rachel (white)	X (Brandon)		X (Brandon)	X (Rachel)		
Kevin (white) and Laura (black)			X (Kevin)			
Steven (white) and Maria (Hispanic)	X	X				
Desmond (black) and Christina (Hispanic/Asian)				X	X	
Daniel (black) and Sarah (white)			X (Daniel)			
Eric (white) and Portia (black)	X	X	X			
Gabriel (Hispanic) and Jennifer (white)	X (Gabriel)				X (Gabriel)	X (Gabriel)
Jorge (Hispanic) and Heather (white)	X	X (Heather)				

Some of the couples initially discussed only the reactions they had with strangers of a race/ethnicity different from their own (i.e., Brandon and Rachel, Daniel and Sarah, Gabriel and Jennifer), but other couples (e.g., Desmond and Christina, Eric and Portia) mentioned the reactions they received both from strangers of a racial /ethnic group different from their own, as well as strangers from the same racial/ethnic group as theirs.

Brandon said that he had some experiences with other black men asking him about being married to a white woman, "Yeah…yeah. There's some black guys that were like, 'Hey, what are you doing dating a white woman?'" However, Brandon seemed to dismiss this line of questioning. Brandon said, "But, it doesn't matter. I

mean, they are insignificant to me. So, I don't care about that [reactions from other people]." Though Brandon did not find being asked why he was dating a white woman to be bothersome, Daniel might have been a little defensive when he experienced similar inquisitions. Daniel said, "I would say I get most of the reactions, if anything. Umm, I think from the black perspective, they are like, 'Oh, you got you a white woman.' I'm like, 'Yeah! What's the matter with that?' You know?" Daniel acknowledged that he gets more reactions than Sarah, and the reactions he gets from people from his racial group tend to be remarks insinuating that there might be something wrong with him being married to someone outside of his racial group. Though, it seems Daniel is willing to defend his marriage to those who make comments about it.

Gabriel also mentioned receiving reactions from Hispanics when they realize he is married to a white woman, "Okay, so anyone from my race that has gone to school is not going to have an issue with it, but people straight from Mexico – I can tell – their eyes get a little big. You know what I'm saying?" In his statement, Gabriel not only points out that he gets responses from Hispanics, but he also suggests that there might be some socioeconomic differences (due to having "gone to school") in responses to his marriage. Gabriel explained why he thought this was the case: "There are things, I don't want to say unattainable, but that are foreign to them. She's definitely foreign." Though Gabriel mentions the word "unattainable," he is hesitant to use it and opts for "foreign" instead; he could be getting at that foreign-born Hispanics might see his interracial marriage (specifically, that he is married to a white woman) as a result of fully assimilating to American cultural norms and customs. Additionally, those who react as

Gabriel described might think Gabriel has achieved "the American dream" of sorts. Though, Gabriel could be assuming that Hispanics who have "gone to school" are not "straight from Mexico." Gabriel even mentioned, however, that being married to a white woman elevates his status: "So, in that way, I think my status is elevated some." Gabriel's comment suggests that he is aware that the responses he receives are likely due to foreign-born Hispanics' perceptions that he has assimilated and that he benefits from being in an interracial marriage.

Race/Ethnicity and Status

Similar to Gabriel's point about his interracial marriage elevating his status among foreign-born Hispanics, Eric and Portia also mentioned how their statuses were impacted by being an interracial couple. Specifically, Portia said she noticed how people treated her differently when she was with Eric in public compared to when she was not:

> You know, sometimes I will see that look or a slight difference in how people will treat us. Or, another thing is when I'm alone and I go out, sometimes people will treat me totally differently or worse than they will treat me when I'm with him.

Though Portia reaps social benefits because of Eric's whiteness, Eric loses some of his social standing when he is seen in public with Portia. Eric remarked, "And when I'm with her, I notice I lose status. But, when I'm alone it's 'professor, doctor, sir…' When I'm with her, it's kind of like, 'Oh, whatever…' Although she had already alluded to it, Portia quickly added, "Right, and I gain status when I'm with him…" These comments from Eric and Portia go back to Eric's comments (mentioned earlier) about being

invisible when he is with his wife or white men looking at him as if he were deficient in some way.

The comments from Eric, Portia, and Gabriel highlight how minorities gain status from being married to whites but whites lose status by marrying outside of their racial/ethnic group – which essentially means spouses in interracial marriages are exchanging their social statuses. Introduced by Davis (1941) and Merton (1941), exchange theory suggests that if a white person of low socioeconomic status marries a black person of high socioeconomic status, then the white spouse will lose status for marrying outside of their race. However, because the black spouse has a higher socioeconomic status, the white spouse will experience the benefits of being married to someone of higher socioeconomic status. While Eric's Portia's, and Gabriel's experiences do not fit perfectly with Davis and Merton's exchange theory (their experiences have little to do with socioeconomic status), they certainly experience reactions (mostly non-verbal) that make it clear that they are either increasing or decreasing their social status depending on how they are treated by being in an interracial marriage. Of course, there could be multiple reasons for the reactions, and another plausible explanation could be the perception that group solidarity is at stake and those who feel threatened by seeing an interracial couple may outwardly express this feeling.

Which Spouse Has Noticed Reactions

In three of the interviews I conducted, I became aware that one spouse (the spouse who was the racial/ethnic minority) usually noticed reactions from strangers more than the other spouse or spoke more about the reactions from strangers when in

public settings. For instance, even though Jeremy initially brought up the incident with the woman who treated their child like a science experiment, Sophia spoke about the incident much more, and her voice tone and body language showed more anger than Jeremy's did. Even though this occurred in three of the interviews, I will focus on only two interviews (as issues came up in these interviews that were not addressed in other interviews).

Gabriel also spoke more about the reactions he and Jennifer experienced when in public. Jennifer said she could not think of any reactions from others the couple had experienced while in public as the result of their interracial marriage. However, Gabriel pointed out that he might notice more reactions from strangers because, as he put it, "I am always looking for the slight." He further commented that Jennifer does not have to necessarily be aware of negative reactions: "I don't think you walk around looking for it." Gabriel implied that, because he is a minority, he is more likely to be looking for reactions from others because it is a frequent life experience for him. Jennifer, on the other hand, has likely benefitted from white privilege and does not automatically notice the reactions they receive as a couple or the reactions directed at Gabriel because he is married to her.

Much later in their interview, Gabriel noted that Jennifer does not entirely understand the experiences he and other minority group members have faced. Gabriel said:

> I would just say this, just like you can never know what's going on in a person's head, truly, it doesn't matter how many times I could explain to her the situation, just the experiences, that even me just as a Hispanic – much less an African American – that we've had in this world. You'll [Jennifer] never understand. I mean, you kind of did one time. Like, one time we were golfing and like this guy

> made a point…she went in to pay for the golfing and she paid and only signed her name. She's been playing golf for 15 years, and she told me that never once has anyone asked her if she's paid, except when I was with her. The guy came out there, and see, I brushed it off because I've had that happen before, but it was the only time that I've seen her shaking, like so angry that she wanted to cry. And I was like, "See, you finally get it. You get to see how angry we are and how much strength it takes to be passive."

Gabriel makes it quite clear that since Jennifer (and other whites) do not have shared experiences of racism that minority group members deal with on frequent occasions, they might be able to sympathize but never truly know what it is like to be a racial/ethnic minority in the United States. It is important to note that Gabriel opened up a little more and expressed what it is like to be married to someone who does not share his experiences of being a racial/ethnic minority and cannot personally relate to them. Even though Gabriel and Jennifer did not indicate that they had any conflict in their marriage because of these differences, it does seem that being an interracial couple might affect the dynamics or "internal workings" of their marriage.

Gabriel's comment contrasts somewhat with comments Sophia made when I asked her if she thought being in an interracial marriage was different from being in a marriage with someone of the same race. Sophia said, "I think that I kind of, you know, experience things differently as a black woman…so, we have to teach one another. I think you have to teach one another about how you walk through the world in your race body." In contrast to Sophia, Gabriel seemed to think that Jennifer would not be able to fully understand his plight as a Hispanic man. However, recognizing that Jeremy has experiences completely different from her own due to his race (and gender), Sophia seemed more willing to bridge the divide by teaching Jeremy about the multiple

oppressions she experiences as a black woman, and by giving him the opportunity to teach her about the privileges he experiences as a white man.

In sum, Gabriel and Sophia made important points not only about how an interracial marriage can be different from a same-race/ethnicity marriage but also about how spouses from different racial/ethnic groups relate to one another. They also point out that when a marriage consists of a white spouse and a non-white or Hispanic spouse, the white spouse might not fully understand the experiences of the other spouse in a society where race/ethnicity remain a salient and divisive issue.

Conclusion

In this section, I discussed the negative reactions from strangers experienced by two-thirds of the couples I interviewed. These were discussed as different types of microaggressions ranging from disapproving looks and rude and challenging behaviors to verbal comments and attacks. Furthermore, I described how the reactions from strangers with respect to these microaggressions can vary in intensity. For example, the disapproving looks from strangers could vary in intensity. Some of the respondents also mentioned how their children were the focus of some of the reactions they received from strangers.

In addition, it was clear that several respondents had reactions from strangers in certain demographic categories, such as those from their own racial/ethnic group. Of course, there could be multiple reasons for this, but one plausible explanation could be the perception that group solidarity is at stake and those who feel threatened by seeing an interracial couple may outwardly express this feeling. Lastly, I also mentioned that there were at least a few instances when I noticed that minority respondents spoke more

about reactions in public than their white spouses did. As discussed above, minorities may have more to say about reactions from strangers because they are more aware that they can and do happen, given their prior experiences with prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

Challenges to Interracial Marriages Caused by Public Reactions

I asked the couples if they considered the reactions they received from others to present a challenge to their marriage. There were not any couples who said the reactions and responses they received caused any serious marital tension between the two spouses. However, of the ten couples who had noticed reactions in public settings, only one couple (Eric and Portia) agreed that the responses they dealt with caused them to feel stress and emotional strife. Two other respondents (Laura and Heather) stated that reactions from strangers created challenges.

Laura (black) mentioned that strangers sometimes question if she is her daughter's mother, and these questions present a challenge to her personally and to her marriage. Laura said:

> I'm remembering when my daughter was born and my sister said this because she's so light. She said, "They are going to think you're the nanny if you're just out with her. They're going to think you're her nanny." And that did happen once and often people say, "Is she your daughter? She has blue eyes." And it's fine. Umm, but the challenge is I have to deal with that and it affects our marriage because it affects my identity. You know, I have to, uh, address my identity as a mother and a wife, so it feels like a challenge to me.

I asked Laura if she could explain how she dealt with these challenges. Laura replied, "As I deal with any challenge, first, with books (laughs). I get as many books as I can to get language for myself and for my kids. Umm, therapy, talking to family and friends,

and Kevin. Umm, exercise (laughs)." I then asked Laura to describe how successful she thought she had been at negotiating these challenges. Laura asked Kevin (white) to make that assessment before offering her own. Kevin said, "I don't think it is anything less than, I mean I don't think it keeps you from being a good mom or from feeling part of the family or community." Even though Kevin did not think Laura was hindered by the challenges she faced due to the reactions she received from having biracial children or from being in an interracial marriage, Laura provided her own assessment of how successful she believed she was in negotiating the challenges she faced. Laura remarked:

> I think it adds stress. I mean, especially just last weekend. We were in (redacted) at the music festival, and (her son) I think we were just going to the bathroom, and (her son) said, "You have dark skin, I have dark skin. Most of the people here don't have dark skin. Most of the people here have light skin." And, I think just like any parenting thing, that adds stress, like, "Am I going to answer right? Am I going to give him an identity issue? Am I going to send him out with confidence? Am I going to help him know who he is?" So, umm, that's a lot of pressure for me…umm…since that was last weekend I would say I do fairly well, but umm…but I don't feel like completely rid of the challenge.

Even though Laura shifted the focus a bit, I got the sense Laura felt stress from such situations as having to explain skin tone differences to her son or having her status as her daughter's mother questioned by strangers. Laura felt she was fairly successful in negotiating the challenges these situations presented; however, it was clear from her comments that she was not completely successful in ridding herself of the stress she felt. Furthermore, it seemed like Laura's burden to bear, as Kevin did not seem to have the same experiences. Kevin did not tell me about strangers questioning his status as the

father of his children, nor did he say he had to have a conversation with his son about skin tone differences (or not looking like most people in their immediate surroundings). Since Laura was the spouse of minority status, she confronted issues of race on a regular basis that her husband did not.

Portia (black) and Eric (white) were the only couple where both spouses agreed that the reactions they experienced as an interracial couple added stress to their lives. They did not say the reactions they encountered presented a challenge or created conflict in their marriage, but they did acknowledge that the reactions they experienced had an emotional impact on them personally. Portia remarked:

> I just find it more annoying, more than anything. Umm, but I do find it challenging in terms of – just what it does to me emotionally. Like, you know, just being aware now of how I'm treated as a black woman compared to how he's treated, and how we're treated when we're together, and just how so much of how society treats us has to do with, you know, what they see on the outside – even if we put our best foot forward and are presentable and, you know, well spoken. None of that really matters, so I guess just emotionally, I have felt threatened. You know, just by the constant – just a barrage of (sighs)…I don't know…just negativity… Yeah, I feel like it impacts me individually, just like in terms of my emotional health. It's a difficult thing to deal with and to try to overcome. Yeah, so that's what I'm working on.

Portia's comments show that even when blacks attempt to conform to white expectations of behavior and appearance, they will always be viewed as "lacking" because of the color of their skin and the established racial hierarchy in the United States that places blacks at the bottom. The negative treatment Portia receives presents a challenge to her, although she states she is learning how to deal with it.

Eric gave a somewhat different response. Similar to Portia, he stated that negative treatment had an impact on him personally. But he also stated that it had an impact on their marriage as well. He said:

> Yeah, I feel like it's a catch-22, because if you ignore it, I feel like you are ignoring something that's real and happening and should at least be thought about and processed or something… And then, if I fixate on it, it does become this emotional, draining thing. I would say that it has never been a central part of an argument or a tension in our marriage, but it's definitely one of those things that has an impact, because it stresses her out or stresses me out, then we bring that stress into our interactions with one another, and maybe one of us is short-tempered with the other person because of something they've dealt with, so it definitely impacts our marriage… that has been something that has been part of our marriage. Because there will be a conversation between [Portia] and I when you'll [Portia] say, "I felt like I was treated really disrespectfully today, and I wonder if it is because of…race, gender, or did I do something wrong?" So, sure, yeah, it definitely comes into the marriage and takes up space and time and energy – yeah. I think we would be really naïve to say we've somehow built a marriage that keeps white supremacy out of it.

Eric's response suggests that, for at least some interracial couples, the stress a spouse experiences from negative treatment can spill over into the marriage (e.g., spouses being short-tempered with each other). Eric's comments also suggest that, for him and Portia, there have not been serious arguments or tensions stemming from negative treatment they experience as an interracial couple. (It is important to keep in mind that couples who do have serious problems in their marriage because it is interracial or couples who divorced over problems created by being in an interracial marriage are not represented in this study.) Eric mentioned that he and Portia discuss negative experiences with one another and doing so is likely helpful to their marriage.

Nonetheless, these experiences present them with challenges that couples of the same race/ethnicity (especially non-Hispanic white couples) do not encounter.

Changes in Attitudes of Family and Friends

Early in the interviews, I asked couples how their family and friends reacted to their relationship when they first learned about it. Later in the interviews, I asked the couples if they had noticed any changes over time in the attitudes of their friends and family toward their relationship. In four marriages (27 percent of all marriages in this sample), respondents indicated they had noticed changes. Interestingly, one of these respondents said she noticed positive changes in the attitudes of their friends and family, but earlier she had said their friends and family did not have any issues when initially told about the relationship (i.e., the responses did not seem to match). Brandon (black) and Rachel (white) initially noted that their friends and family did not have any negative reactions due to race when they found out they were going to be married. (Rachel did mention that her family was a bit disappointed they could not attend the wedding, and Brandon said his family was even more upset than that over their elopement.) But Rachel replied that she noticed a positive change over time in Brandon's family members' attitudes toward their relationship. Rachel said:

> I have noticed a change in your (Brandon's) family toward me. Not that there was any resentment in the first place, but definitely over the years. They know how happy he is, and his kids, and the house – we're about to move – they can see a progression. Definitely a positive change.

Rachel was quick to mention that she did not feel that Brandon's family ever resented her, but the fact that she said she noticed a positive change from his family suggests that perhaps Brandon's family was neutral instead of warm toward her earlier in the

marriage. Additionally, Rachel may have been hesitant to suggest in front of Brandon that his family had not been entirely accepting of her at first. (Spouses were interviewed together.) Brandon did not become defensive, but he did respond in order to put into context Rachel's observations about his family:

> This is the way I see it. I think of my family as essentially an agrarian family. We come from farmers and stuff like that. So throughout time, any time there's a relationship – they've always known the person, they lived around the corner… and before somebody got married there was a huge opportunity to get to know [the person], but that wasn't true with us. So, there's always been like this…because of that, there's always been this standoffish, just wait and see type of thing, you know, because it didn't fit the normal pattern [of forming relationships] …

It could be assumed that Brandon did not want me to get the impression that his family was not particularly warm toward Rachel because of her race (which seem probable since Rachel said after Brandon's explanation: "It wasn't a race thing; it was just me being from somewhere else.") With his comment, though, Brandon suggests that in-group/out-group dynamics explain his family's behavior. Since Rachel was not from the area in which Brandon's family lived, they did not immediately see her as part of the family just because she was married to Brandon. However, once they got to know Rachel, Brandon's family started to change how they responded to her for the better.

Two respondents, who at earlier points in the interview mentioned some reluctance from family members about their relationship, said the attitudes of family had improved over time. Amanda (white) implied that her family was not entirely accepting of her marriage to David (black) at first, mostly because they never expected her to marry outside of her race and David's appearance did not meet her father's expectations. Early in the interview, Amanda said:

> When I did get married to my husband they came around to it fairly quickly. Like, quicker than I thought they would – and then it all changed to the better when he [their son] was born… so once he was born all racial anything just kind of left the picture… and they were fine with it. And my grandparents that had an issue with it, they're fine now.

Later, I reminded her she had said that things seemed to change when their son was born. Amanda replied, "Oh, yeah, for sure, yeah. Umm, everyone is extremely accepting." In Amanda and David's case, it appears that any reservations her family had about her interracial relationship ended once their son was born.

Along these lines, Christina said her relationship with her mother-in-law improved over time. Earlier in the interview, she and Desmond described the reaction from Desmond's mother when they got together and got married. Desmond said:

> My mom, she was always wonderful about it [attitudes toward interracial dating] …until we got together and got serious. And for the first time she expressed this…. So, she tried to say things in more subtle ways and hint at things, you know, like, "Well, maybe you should look for someone more like…" and she'd use physical examples –" like your cousin's girlfriend." You know, and she happened to be African American. So it never was an issue until we got very serious and you could tell we were going to be together, then it came out…Right before we got married, she was going for their annual trip [to an out-of-state family reunion] they make during the summer…she's been an educator for the last 40 years. Umm, right before she left, she hugged me and kissed me and told me that I didn't have her blessing getting married.

When I asked Desmond and Christina if they had noticed any changes over time in his mother's attitudes toward their relationship, Christina said: "Yes, I would say that it's in a good way. His mom loves me now. We have a great relationship and we've even had the chance to talk about what it's like to be an interracial couple. So, it has gotten a lot better – everything."

Lastly, Sophia and Jeremy said they had noticed some differences over time among Jeremy's family members. When I asked Sophia and Jeremy what were the reactions of their family and friends when they got together and got married, they mentioned that their family generally had been indifferent toward their relationship. Though, they thought Jeremy's family had become more sensitive to issues of race since Sophia and Jeremy had been together and had children. Jeremy said, "I think it probably has sensitized them to the issue of race more than they would of [been] before." In Sophia and Jeremy's case, it was not necessarily that Jeremy's family changed their attitudes toward their relationship, but that they gained an awareness of race and racial issues because of it.

In sum, in four marriages, one or both spouses reported changes in the attitudes of family and friends regarding the relationships, and the changes were positive in nature. In one of the marriages, positive changes were mentioned even though the couple initially stated that their families did not have any negative reactions to the relationship. For two of the couples, the birth of a child/children led to some sort of change, with one respondent reporting greater acceptance of her marriage, and one couple reporting their family members had become more sensitive to issues of race.

Successes within Marriage

One interview question for the participating couples asked what they believed to be the successes within their marriages. Interestingly, many couples said little about race/ethnicity when responding to this question. Rather, couples mentioned as success within their marriages such things as being friends with their spouse, supporting one

another, personal growth, communication, coming from similar backgrounds, their children, or that they were still married.

One particular response from Laura stood out amongst those mentioned. Laura said, "We eat together as a family – we eat dinner [together] at least five times a week. So, I would say eating together – I would say, um, um – we carve out time to be together, the four of us, and those to me are successes." While the success mentioned by Laura did not have anything to do with race, research shows there are benefits for children whose families frequently eat dinner together in terms of communication, mental health, and nutritional health (Hammons and Fiese 2011; Elgar, Craig, and Trites 2013). It was not exactly clear why Laura singled this out as a success. Perhaps she felt actually finding time in their busy schedules to have meals with each other was a success. Having grown up in a single-parent family also might have contributed to Laura thinking that children having frequent meals with both of their parents is a success.

Two respondents did provide answers to the interview question that were connected to race. David (black) responded that he thought the multiple racial backgrounds his son could draw upon was a success within his marriage. David said:

> I see the diversity. I mean, the thing is, my son can grow up and say that he has a multiracial, multiethnic, or whatever you want to call it – background. And he can learn from both sides, both cultural experiences and all that stuff.

Eric also mentioned race in his answer, but his response centered more on how witnessing and discussing Portia's experiences as a black woman increased his

awareness of race and racial issues, thereby making him feel like a better person. Eric said:

> Yeah, and I guess for me one of the biggest things that has come out of being married that touches all on race would be that I'm getting a really, really personal, intimate, interaction with the affect – the feelings, the emotional weight of white supremacy – that in a way, even with black friendships, and growing up in a black neighborhood, and being in a black fraternity – being in an interracial marriage is just another thing all together on its own that really isn't comparable. So, the weight of how that feels and thinking if we have children, and if I have a son who is going to be identified as black in this society most likely – at least not white – and knowing everything that's going on with police brutality and violence and everything…that scares the hell out of me in a way that, emotionally that – even though I've… have good friends who have been victims of police violence – that hits me on a completely different level. Umm, and so, having a partner to discuss all that with and then working through those emotions and everything has been really wonderful – I think in terms of making me a better, fuller human.

Eric pointed out that despite growing up in a black neighborhood and joining a black fraternity, being in an interracial marriage has provided him with an even more intimate perspective on what it is like to be a minority in the United States. Furthermore, Eric seems to believe that being married to Portia has contributed to his growth and development as a human being, which Eric considered to be a success within his marriage.

In sum, only two respondents mentioned successes within their marriages related to race/ethnicity. The findings in this section relate to the "private" side of the public/private dynamic. In terms of success within the marriages of these couples (the private side of their relationship), race/ethnicity did not seem to matter for many of the couples. If anything, these interracial couples probably mentioned what any married

couple (regardless of the racial/ethnic composition of their marriage) would have said were successes within their marriage (e.g., communication, being friends, support).

Changing Experiences of Interracial Couples

Two questions on the interview schedule were designed for couples who had been married for 10 or more years at the time of their interview. However, only three couples had been married that long. For these three couples, I first asked if the experience of being in an interracial marriage changed over time and if it has become easier or more difficult. The second question dealt with the impact of historical, societal, or national events on their marriages. Depending on how the couples responded to that question, I asked them to identify the events and if these events made being in an interracial marriage more or less challenging.

The couples who were eligible to answer these questions were Sophia and Jeremy (married 15 years), Christina and Desmond (married 23 years), and Daniel and Sarah (married 13 years). Two of the couples thought being in an interracial marriage had changed over time. Sophia and Jeremy commented on how the number of interracial couples had increased from when they got married. Sophia said, "There are more of them (interracial couples) … it is definitely more prevalent." Jeremy agreed, "Yeah, you see more interracial couples… Yeah, it's more visible." However, Sophia pointed out that she saw more interracial couples like her and Jeremy. Sophia replied, "I always saw, like white women married to black men, but I [now] see a lot of black women, like married to…white men, right…I see that a lot more of that, and I usually didn't see that a lot before."

I asked Christina and Desmond the same questions, and they mentioned that over the course of their marriage they have become more open-minded regarding different types of relationships. Christina said:

> I would say open-minded and less judgmental about other people's experiences, whether it's their race… same-sex couples getting married, transgender couples, like they should be able to have that opportunity to get married as well. It's really…opened my mind about people's experiences as couples.

Desmond said that he agreed with Christina's comment that experiencing an interracial marriage has made him more progressive in his views on couples that do not necessarily fall into restrictive social norms.

Lastly, Daniel and Sarah did not think their experience of being in an interracial marriage had changed over time. Sarah's response seemed to minimize the role of race in their relationship. Sarah said, "Well, no. I don't know, we just – we don't take our race into the relationship a lot." This seemed to be Sarah's code for "race does not matter."

I asked Sophia and Jeremy if it was easier or more difficult to be in an interracial marriage, given the increased prevalence. Sophia said, "I think when you start getting a critical mass of people dating across racial lines, then you don't feel as alone… like you don't feel as singled out any longer, you're just like, "I'm one of many." (laughs) You know? And that feels pretty good, I think." Jeremy agreed, stating, "Yeah, takes some of the pressure of the shock value out of it…" For Sophia and Jeremy, then, the increased prevalence of interracial relationships they have noticed over the course of their marriage may have made it a bit easier for them to be in an interracial marriage because they feel it is less of a shock for others to see an interracial couple.

Desmond and Christina also mentioned it has become a little easier to be in an interracial marriage now than it was in the past. Christina mentioned progressive attitudes, as well as the growth of a more diverse population, as easing the social response to interracial marriage. Christina replied:

> The younger generations around here, they just seem to not ever – race is so not a factor to them, and (redacted) is even more diverse than it was when we were kids... Where we grew up was very diverse then and it has a lot of diversity, but it's even more spread out now. And the kids now, they are so different than we were – and we were pretty, we were very progressive… We still experience the smirks, but I think those are from the older generation. Younger kids kind of like – expect it… It's just a part of their life, but the older generation still seems to be more reactionary.

Desmond agreed with Christina's assessment: "Yeah, so it is definitely easier for an interracial couple now than it was when we got married."

When I asked these three couples about the possible impact of historical, societal, or national events on their marriage, Sarah (white) mentioned how not that long ago her marriage would have been illegal. Sarah stated:

> I mean I take into consideration and stuff how before it became legal, like in 1967 [the year in which the Supreme Court struck down miscegenation laws with the *Loving v. Virginia* decision] …you know it wouldn't have even been possible for us to get married. You know, it's sad and happy at the same time. And you know, especially with some of the racial tension that has gone on even this year in other cities, and it does make you more aware that other people aren't as accepting as a lot of people in our circle are that we're around.

Sarah seems to acknowledge that less than 50 years before her interview was conducted, she and Daniel (black) would not have been allowed to marry in some states. She further acknowledges that she has bittersweet feelings about the racial/ethnic situation

in the contemporary United States. She is happy that there are no longer laws barring interracial marriage, but she was saddened by the race-related events around the time of her interview (i.e., the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the death of Eric Garner, and the shooting of Michael Brown). Sarah mentioned, though, that these events made her aware that everyone still would not be accepting of an interracial marriage. Daniel, in contrast, did not believe any events had an impact on their marriage.

Sophia and Jeremy mentioned that current events gave them the opportunity to discuss important issues with their children, but that historical, societal, or national events did not really have an impact on their marriage – at least not negatively. Jeremy said:

> Well, we do discuss political events and social events all the time, and with our kids a lot. She [Sophia] does a lot with trying to sort of help the kids to process stuff that's going on, or to see the significance, or to show the other side of the story that isn't getting told, or to get them to see how in a film how the characters get raced and stuff like that. So, that would be one, but it doesn't really impact our marriage, but it's how we interact with the things going on. Definitely – the presidential election, like with Obama, that was a big deal for us, but for a lot of people of course. And I think just kind of, you know, discussing that with our kids, because, you know, well, that's something they need to be aware of.

Jeremy did not think that any event necessarily had an impact on his and Sophia's marriage one way or another, but he did mention that they (specifically, Sophia) discussed racial discrimination with their children. Sophia echoed Jeremy's response and noted other national events that have occurred during their marriage that they have discussed with their children. Sophia stated:

> I think Hurricane Katrina was pretty significant. It didn't impact us, but I think it, you know, kind of reinforced the relevancy of race in society. I think Trayvon (Martin) that was pretty big deal…

> the shooting in Oklahoma City of that little boy by the pharmacist; we followed that pretty closely…Yeah, for sure. You don't not talk…we talk about these things in our home all the time.

Sophia mentioned that events such as Hurricane Katrina and the shooting of Trayvon Martin have been discussed with her children because they have demonstrated that race is still a salient issue that needs to be addressed. Though, just as Jeremy noted, Sophia did not believe these events had much of an impact on their marriage.

Similarly, Christina mentioned in her response to the interview question that current events involving race/ethnicity give her and Desmond a chance to discuss issues of race/ethnicity, but these events do not have a negative impact on their marriage. If anything, as Christina notes, she considered discussing these events to be a positive experience. Christina said:

> I think sometimes when there are societal or national events it just opens a dialogue for us, but impacting our marriage in either a negatively – no, positively, always – because we're learning from our conversations. So, we've been talking about Ferguson and stuff like that. We'll talk about it, but not in a negative way.

As Christina mentioned, she did not think there were any negative impacts on her marriage because of historical, national, or social events, but she thinks there are some positive learning experiences she and Desmond have had because they talk about the events. Desmond echoed Christina's comment. He said, "Sometimes we're just blowing off steam too, because you get so… You realize it's [a racial/ethnic-related event] not necessary, it's just a byproduct of… a lot of ignorant factors, and they all pile on top of each other." Like Christina, Desmond did not seem to think that certain events impacted

their marriage, but he noted that discussing the factors allowed him to express his frustrations with some of these events.

Here I have described the responses provided by couples who were married for 10 or more years to questions concerning changes in their marriages over time and the impact of macro-level events on their marriages. Only three couples were eligible to respond to these interview questions. Two couples seemed to think being in an interracial marriage was easier over time because of the increased number of interracial couples, and the social response to interracial relationships from younger generations does not seem to be as hostile as the social response from older generations. All three couples (or at least one spouse in each of the couples) discussed certain historical, national, or social events, though these events seemed to not have a tremendous impact on their marriages. Instead, they gave spouses an opportunity to discuss race/ethnicity with each other and their children.

Dynamics of Marriage

During the interviews, participating couples were asked to describe the division of household labor in their marriages. I also asked several couples (if they did not bring it up on their own) who did what chores. Seven couples described a division of household chores in which the wife did most of the labor, four said that the husband did the majority of the chores, three said there was a 50/50 split (or used the word "egalitarian"), and one couple said the wife did 100 percent of the inside chores, but the husband did 100 percent of the outdoor chores. What was interesting about the couples' descriptions of their division of housework were the justifications that usually followed responses that indicated unequal divisions. Usually, the couples justified unequal

distributions by describing situations in which one spouse worked outside of the home more, so the other spouse would handle more of the domestic responsibilities, which supports the time availability explanation for the division of household labor (e.g., Shelton and John 1996). Another explanation was preferences, where one spouse either liked or did not mind performing certain tasks while the other spouse strongly disliked performing certain tasks (e.g., vacuuming, laundry, dishes). Overall, responses seemed to reflect societal norms and trends regarding the gendered division of domestic labor.

A second question was asked as part of the discussion on the dynamics of the marriages of participating couples. The question asked couples who was responsible for making major household decisions. During the interviews, I used major purchases as an example of what I meant by major household decisions. Every single respondent said they discussed major household decisions with their spouse before following through with the decision, which implied that decisions are largely made together, but similar to the division of domestic tasks, I noticed many female respondents did additional work. Specifically, the women often said they came up with the ideas and conducted the research associated with the purchase. Then, they would present the information to their spouse. Finally, while on the surface it may seem like these couples were equally sharing in the decision-making process, it also seemed to me that many of the male respondents were getting the final say about major decisions.

To summarize, several of the couples described situations in which females were completing a greater portion of the domestic chores. However, these disproportionate divisions did not seem to be a byproduct of being in an interracial marriage, but rather of being in a heterosexual marriage in the contemporary United States. That is, these

differences were likely the reflection of societal gender expectations regarding who is primarily responsible for completing the bulk of domestic tasks and indoor tasks in particular. The influence of societal gender expectations on the couples also was suggested by the spouses who said they discussed major household decisions with each other, but that a wife usually did all of the research needed to make the decision, while a husband seemingly made the final decision based on the wife's research.

Chapter Eleven: Findings for Planning for Children and the Race-Related Experiences of Children of Interracial Couples

How Couples Expect Children Will Change Their Marriage

Six of the 15 couples who participated in this research did not have children, but planned on having them. As part of the interview, I asked these six couples how children might change things within the context of their marriage. However, I should note that I did not ask one couple this question directly, as they had discussed their thoughts on this topic at an earlier point in the interview.

Four of the five couples who were directly asked about having children in the future provided responses that centered around taking on a new type of caregiving (parenting), altering work and family commitments, and how their social life might be impacted once they became parents. For example, Eric mentioned he would have to take leave from work to be home, but he also anticipated that he would not be sleeping much with a newborn: "No one sleeps and no one gets any rest, and it is just unreal!" Hannah also expected having a child would impact her and Aaron's social life: "It will affect it a little bit. We're pretty social… Umm, having a child is likely to change that, whether it be having to hire a babysitter or getting take out and taking it home…" However, Heather (white) addressed how cultural differences might have an influence on the role expectations within her marriage once she and Jorge (Hispanic) became parents. When I asked about having children in the future, Heather replied:

> Umm, I think that the cultural differences will come into play there. Umm, I'm not sure what the norms are as far as what he sees as a family structure and division of labor with a child, versus what I see as the division of labor with a child. But, I don't think all that much would change…we're both fairly helpful…

Heather seemed to be aware that there might be some cultural differences that could come into play and these differences might impact what Jorge expects from her as a mother. Though, she also seemed to suggest that the contributions she and Jorge make to household labor is not necessarily divided by gender and this might be the case with child care too. But Heather also noted that cultural differences had the potential to be an issue when it came to the gender socialization of their future child. Heather remarked:

> I think having a child, I think the biggest thing is going to be, umm, what we see as the role for gender. Umm, because I know that culturally there are certain things for girls and certain things that are for boys, and I want more of a gender neutral. Umm, but aside from that, I don't think it would be much of a challenge.

Once again, Heather stated that cultural differences could potentially be an issue once she and Jorge became parents. Specifically, Jorge might want to practice traditional gender socialization, but Heather indicated that she did not want to adhere to traditional gender socialization with their future children. While Heather and Jorge will have to negotiate differences in gender socialization if and/or as they arise, Heather did not think it would be too problematic to resolve any differences.

As mentioned, I did not directly ask one couple how children might change things within the context of their marriage. At an early point in the interview with Michelle (white) and Jacques (black), Michelle mentioned their hesitancy to have children because they did not think they would be able to completely relate to their children in terms of their life experiences and racial identity because their children would be biracial. Michelle said:

> [I]t's one of the deciding factors for us to not have children. Umm, because we're both in a very unique situation. He was raised in Belgium and African, so he's more of an immigrant, black man –

> he identifies more as an African than an African American. Umm, I'm white, so I wouldn't be able to relate to my children and their life experiences, and neither will he. Umm, he'll have some experiences, but you know, growing up as an African American child in the U.S. – neither one of us can even relate to that. So, it's kind of a unique situation we're in. I'm not saying that's ever going to keep us from having kids, but it is one of the reasons right now that we don't want to deal with it.

Though Michelle was not responding specifically to my question regarding how children might change things within the context of her marriage, she did say, "(W)e don't want to deal with it," implying that they would either have to struggle with not being able to relate to their children or they would have to find a way to guide their children through their experiences. Therefore, it seems that this couple believes children truly would change things within the context of their marriage.

When I specifically asked Eric (white) and Portia (black) my question regarding how children would change things within the context of their marriage, their answers were the same as the other couples (i.e., they focused on time commitments, work and family responsibilities, etc.). However, at other points in the interview, Eric made comments that hinted at how things might change in their marriage with regard to helping their future children navigate their racial identity and how he fears for the safety of his future children. For example, when I asked Eric if he gave any thought to being an interracial married couple when they decided to get married, he said, "Oh, lots. I mean studying race and knowing a lot about race, and thinking about having interracial children and how they would fit…" Eric also discussed future children when I asked what they considered to be the specific successes within their marriage. Eric remarked:

> [I]f we have children, and if I have a son who is going to be identified as black in this society most likely – at least not white –

> and knowing everything that's going on with police brutality and violence and everything…that scares the hell out of me in a way that, emotionally that – even though I've studied that for years and have good friends who have been victims of police violence – that hits me on a completely different level.

Eric and Portia's interview was conducted in April 2015. Several high-profile incidents of police violence against black men, including police shooting unarmed black men, had occurred prior to their interview. According to the *Washington Post*, unarmed black men accounted for 40 percent of unarmed men shot and killed by police in 2015 (*Washington Post* 2016). This continues to be an issue as of this writing: black men account for about 36 percent of unarmed men killed by police so far in 2016 (*Washington Post* 2016). Therefore, these concerns may be even greater for Eric today given that there does not seem to be a significant decreasing trend in the percentage of unarmed black men being killed by police, despite the media attention these incidents are receiving. In short, it is apparent that Eric has an awareness of the race-related topics and issues that will arise and have to be addressed once he and Portia have children.

For the most part, couples who were not parents at the time of their interview mentioned how children would change things in terms of experiencing a new type of caregiving, juggling work and family obligations, and their social lives. While it was not a direct response to the question, one couple mentioned during their interview that they were hesitant to have a child because of concerns about relating to their child's experiences in terms of race. Finally, another respondent, Eric, suggested having a child (specifically a son) would change things because of fear related to the treatment of racial/ethnic minorities, particularly black men.

Racial/Ethnic Identity of Children

Nine of the fifteen couples who participated in this research had children. The age range of these children was one to 23 [two were one-year-olds, two were preschool age (two to four years-old), seven were elementary school age (five to 10 years-old), two were middle school age (11 to 13 years-old), one was high school age (16 years-old), and one was college age (23 years-old)]. Couples with children usually were asked several questions about their child or children's experiences dealing with race/ethnicity. In some interviews these questions were not asked because the child(ren) were very young or the questions were slightly rephrased to accommodate couples who had younger children. (Slightly modifying the questions enabled me to capture how couples with very young children plan to address issues related to race/ethnicity as their children mature.)

Couples with children were asked if they felt their child or children would identify with one race/ethnicity more than another. At least one spouse from eight of the nine couples said they thought their child(ren) would identify with one race/ethnicity more than the other. Three of the eight couples stated they thought their children would identify mostly with their minority status because they will not be "allowed" to identify as anything else (meaning how the child ultimately is identified will be externally imposed). However, couples indicated that they want their children to be aware that they are biracial or multiracial (even though they may only be seen as black or Hispanic by the public). In addition, one couple made distinctions about how their children would describe themselves based on physical appearance and their cultural identity, while another couple drew parallels between a child's racial identification and her friendship

circles. It is also important to note that one couple said they did not think their children identified with one race/ethnicity more than another, they have discussed identity with their children, and they have corrected their children when their behavior suggested they were "leaning too much" toward one race/ethnicity. Lastly, because many of these couples' children were very young, race/ethnicity was a concept that the children did not really understand. However, many couples remarked that their children, including very young ones, had made comments regarding skin tone.

Eight couples said they thought their children (or at least one of their children) would ultimately identify, or had the potential to identify, with one race/ethnicity more than another. These couples thought their children's identification would be based on their physical appearance and the feedback they received from others about it. That is, if they appeared to be black, Hispanic, or white and were identified by others as being from one of those groups, then they expected their children to identify as that particular race/ethnicity. However, there also were some couples that strongly wanted their children to be aware of their biracial status. For instance, Sophia (black) and Jeremy (white) agreed that each of their three children (ages 13, 11, and nine) had a self-identity that did not necessarily match physical appearance. Sophia stated:

> I think that, you know, I think that they have…that they see themselves as biracial children, right? I think that they clearly see that, but I also think they see how they get typed as black, and I think they are very aware of that, and hopefully prepared, but I think they…so internally…yeah, but they see how society sees them…as children of color.

Sophia recognized that even though her children see themselves as biracial, she was also aware that her children would primarily be viewed and labeled as black children.

Sophia and Jeremy were not the only couple to have this realization. Brandon (black) and Rachel (white) also believed that their sons (ages six and four) would primarily identify as black even though they are biracial. However, Rachel seemed to question why her sons would have to identify as black instead of as biracial. When I asked Brandon and Rachel about this, Brandon replied, "I think it would be easier to say black than it would to say white. Here in Oklahoma, they wouldn't be seen as that." Rachel questioned Brandon's assessment, and after Brandon reaffirmed his belief, Rachel said:

> I know this is one of those things that's a *whole* different thing. This is the question you bring up about the boys and growing up that I don't see. Because to me (redacted) is a super light skinned mixed race kid. Our littler one is a little bit darker. I find it difficult not being around that growing up, not growing up around any racism or anything like that. I find it difficult thinking someone is going to say something bad to them, you know. To me, I'm like, "What, that's crazy!"

Rachel and Brandon did not seem to be in agreement about how their sons would identify racially, so I asked them about it. Rachel explained that in England (where she was raised) people who were mixed race did not have to identify with one race over another. Rachel said:

> [Explaining her reluctance] Just because it's so foreign to me. Like, I don't know, it's really weird. Because in England, when I grew up with people who were mixed race saying that they were half-caste…and over there that's how – half-caste or quarter-caste – that's how people say it. It's just normal. So it's one of those things. If I was in England and I had kids, like, in the same situation, they would have been half-caste…you know, it would just be a normal thing. The reason I'm like worried about it and don't necessarily agree with the…I don't agree or disagree that they should say they're black. I have no experience of it, so as I go along and these little situations come up…it's like, I'm constantly learning about the differences of an interracial relationship with

> biracial kids. Umm, it's not blatantly obvious every day, but sometimes…like you're asking me straight out the question, and I'm going, "Oh, yeah, well I suppose they have to say they're black." But, to me, that wouldn't necessarily be the case, because they're so light skinned.

Rachel's comments suggest racial identity in other parts of the world (particularly in England) is perhaps more fluid than it is in the United States. Furthermore, Rachel discussed how strange it is to her that biracial children here are seemingly forced to identify with one racial group over another because of externally imposed expectations about race categorization that are not done elsewhere. However, she seems to concede that this is how racial categorization is done in the United States. Though, Rachel continued to express her belief that her sons would not have to inevitably identify only as black by noting they have a lighter skin tone. It did not seem like Rachel was implying that she did not want her sons identifying as black. It was clear, however, that Rachel was still coming to terms with the fact that her sons would not necessarily be afforded the opportunity to identify with more than one race in the United States, and what is more, they might not have the option of identifying as anything other than black.

Along these lines, Gabriel thought his six-year-old son would identify as Hispanic, namely because his identity would be externally imposed. Gabriel stated, "I would say he's going to identify with the Hispanic culture because the world's going to make that decision for him." Gabriel noted that his son had a strong Hispanic name that Gabriel felt would be a marker of his ethnicity, ultimately resulting in others deciding his identity for him.

Interestingly, Laura (black) thought her children (ages six and three) would likely describe themselves as black, but would be more likely to identify as white culturally. Also in contrast to other couples, Laura and her husband Kevin (white) did not discuss identity in terms of being externally imposed, but rather in terms of self-description or self-identification. When I asked Kevin and Laura about the racial identity of their children, after a nine-second pause Kevin said to Laura, "I know my answer; I am waiting for you." Laura replied, "Yes, but I'm not sure which one (laughs)." Evidently surprised by Laura's response, Kevin said, "You really think so? You really think there's a chance they would identify with black more than white?" At this point, Kevin and Laura started to make distinctions between identification based on physical appearance and identification based on culture. Laura is multiracial (black, white, and Native American). Early in the interview when I asked Laura which group she identified with the most, she responded, "I would say black." Then, she quickly corrected herself and said, "Well, yeah. I would say 50/50 [black and white]."[16] Laura's self-identification was very apparent in the response she provided to Kevin's question about how she expected her children would ultimately identify. Laura replied:

> Well, I mean she asked me what I identified with, and I said black first because I – if I describe myself I would say I'm black. But culturally – I mean I grew up in a white family and a white town – I would identify with the white culture there, so, umm, yeah. I think they have the potential to identify as black. I don't know how they would describe themselves when they're our age.

[16] It should be noted that I refer to Laura as black throughout the discussion of the results. My decision to do this was largely based on Laura's comment above ("Well, I mean she asked me what I identified with, and I said black first because I – if I describe myself I would say I'm black."). In contrast, Christina, whom I refer to here as Hispanic/Asian, usually mentioned belonging to both racial/ethnic groups.

Laura did not provide any solid predictions as to whether she thought her children would ultimately identify with one race over another, but she did draw on her own experiences of racial identification in her answer to my question. Even though she described herself as black (an identity based on physical appearance), she identified as white culturally (an identity based on her upbringing) and thought there was the potential for her children to identify in a similar way.

Kevin seemed to think his and Laura's children would identify as white – he even offered a prediction to the extent to which they would identify as white. Kevin stated, "I'm guessing they would identify with white, at least 75 percent…" However, he made a comment that suggests he thinks one of their children would identify more as white than the other child. Kevin discussed his daughter's skin tone and eye color, mentioning that he thought these features influenced his prediction. Kevin said:

> When she was first born, I thought she was going to be a lot darker and her hair a lot curlier, and at that point I would have said maybe black more than white. But, uh, when the hair got so light, and the eyes stayed blue, and the skin got lighter than we expected – um, I don't know if I'm right, but that affects my prediction.

Kevin thought that because his daughter had such a light skin tone and blue eyes, she would perhaps be more inclined to identify as white. Interestingly, in Kevin's initial comment, he mentioned that he thought both children would be more likely to identify as white, but in his later comment he only mentioned his daughter identifying as white. I did not ask Kevin to elaborate on the distinction he seemed to be making between his son's and daughter's racial identification, but I suspect he felt his son might be more likely to describe himself as black physically, but identify as white culturally (similar to Laura). But given that his daughter has a lighter skin tone and blue eyes while his son

has a darker skin tone, dark hair, and dark eyes, maybe Kevin thought there was a potential his daughter would identify both physically and culturally as white. But again, while Kevin and Laura acknowledged the role physical appearance plays in racial identification, they did not explicitly mention anything about the possibility of externally imposed racial identifications for their children.

In contrast to those couples who based their assessments of the eventual racial/ethnic identification of their children on externally imposed labels, physical description, or cultural identification, Daniel (black) based his prediction about the racial identity of one of his daughters on her social network. Daniel predicted that at least one of his daughters would identify as black, but his wife Sarah (white) did not think their two daughters would identify with one race over another. Daniel remarked:

> I think [older daughter] kind of does [identify as black]. I mean, if you look at her friends, they are predominately black. I think [younger daughter] probably not, because she does have a mixture of friends, but [older daughter] most of her friends that come over here for play dates are mostly black.

It is interesting that Daniel thought about the race of the children in his nine-year-old daughter's friendship circle as a gauge of her racial identity while Sarah did not. Daniel assumed that because his daughter was building social networks of people with whom she shared physical characteristics, she must feel like she is part of this group. Presumably, Daniel thought that if his older daughter did not identify as black, then she would have a racially diverse friendship group (similar to his younger daughter).

Desmond (black) and Christina (Hispanic/Asian) said they did not think their daughter and son would ultimately identify with one race/ethnicity over another. It should be noted that Desmond and Christina had the oldest children (ages 23 and 16);

therefore, their children presumably have done more "identity work" than the children of the other couples I interviewed. However, Desmond noted that he and Christina have corrected their children if they noticed them identifying with one race/ethnicity over the other. Desmond stated:

> I remind them constantly. I've done that their entire lives, so they're so accustomed to it that each time they've done it when they are younger, because most of the time it's coming from external pressure… So, I would tell them all the time, you're sliding on my side of the family, you're sliding on your mother's side of the family. Yeah, we talk about it all and engrain that in them.

While Desmond mentioned that he thought external pressure caused his children to identify with one race/ethnicity over another at times, he and Christina seemed to be the only couple that wanted their children to publicly and privately identify as multiracial/ethnic, rather than having an awareness of their multiracial/ethnic status, but having a singular racial/ethnic identity that was externally imposed. Desmond and Christina were quite vigilant about this. But again, their children were the oldest children of any of the couples who took part in this research (more will be discussed later about the racial/ethnic identity experiences of Desmond and Christina's children).

As mentioned earlier, most of the children of these couples were quite young at the time of the interviews. Therefore, the children did not necessarily have a conceptualization of race/ethnicity, but three couples discussed how their very young children had made comments to their parents about skin tone differences. For instance, David mentioned that his and Amanda's five-year-old son had commented on the skin tone differences between himself and his father. David said, "One thing he asked me the other day, he said, "Daddy, you're brown and I'm gold (Laughs)." Jennifer also

mentioned that her and Gabriel's six-year-old son was observant of differences in skin tone. Jennifer remarked:

> Even right now if you ask him what color he is, he will say tan, and then we'll ask him what color his mom is, and he'll say tan. Then we'll ask him what color his dad is, and he'll say brown. We'll say, "You're brown," and he'll say, "Noooo." So, right now he's doing it, like, based on color.

Jennifer's comment demonstrated that even young children are quite aware of differences in skin tone, but they only understand these differences in terms of color and nothing more. Laura also mentioned that her son was aware of skin tone differences. While at a music festival, Laura's son noticed that he and his mother were some of the only people in attendance to have "dark skin." Laura said, I think we were just going to the bathroom, and (redacted) said, 'You have dark skin, I have dark skin. Most of the people here don't have dark skin. Most of the people here have light skin.'" This shows that, these young children may not only notice skin tone differences between themselves and one or both parents but also between themselves and others in social situations.

To summarize, I have described the predictions parents made regarding the racial/ethnic identity of their children. Some parents believe their children will have an understanding that they are biracial or multiracial, but they will identify with one race/ethnicity that is externally imposed. One set of parents thought their children would describe themselves as black, but would identify as white culturally. And another parent made the connection between friendship circles and racial identity, predicting a child would identify as black because most of her friends were black. Only one couple said they really tried to remind their children they were multiracial/ethnic and wanted

their children to identify as such. But it should be kept in mind that this couple's children were older. Most of the young children were not aware of race/ethnicity as a social construct and/or had yet to learn that how they are treated could depend on the color of their skin. At least some young children, however, were aware of skin tone differences between themselves and their parents and others.

Racial/Ethnic Identification Preferences

Interview participants with children were asked if they preferred their children to identify with one race/ethnicity more than the other. The majority said they did not have any preference. Among other interview participants, three said they did not have a preference, but they wanted their children to have an awareness of how they would be regarded in society, and one couple said they would be okay with their children identifying with one race/ethnicity more than another when applying for scholarships.

One theme that emerged from the responses of at least three interviewees was they did not have a preference for how their children identified, but they wanted their children to understand and be aware of how they would be viewed and treated. Sophia (black) said:

> Umm, I really don't have a preference one way or another, but I don't want anyone walking through the world blindly, you know (laughs). And I think they need to know that their biracial identity does not save them, that they will get typed as black or people of color, which is what I think biracial identity – it is, right, you're a person of color, so you have to be prepared for that – don't be diluted.

Sophia felt that it was important, if not necessary, for her children to not be ignorant to the fact that because they appear to be black they will be viewed and treated as such. So, while Sophia did not have a strong preference about how her children ultimately

identified, she made it clear that she did not think their biracial identity would offer them any protection from the difficulties racial/ethnic minorities in the United States often face.

David (white, married to Amanda) also did not have any preference for how his son ultimately identified, but similar to Sophia, he thought it would be necessary for his son to have an understanding about race and how he would be treated. David remarked, "It doesn't really matter to me. It is important that he understand how he is going to be regarded in society." David did not have a preference for how his son identifies, but he was also quite realistic about the fact that regardless of how his son identified, he would be viewed as black and there could be some negative experiences resulting from that label.

As I mentioned earlier, one couple said they would prefer their children to identify with one race/ethnicity over another in one specific situation. Desmond stated, "The only thing I was going to say was – for funding purposes. Umm, there may be times when they're pursuing something academic and they can apply for that." Christina affirmed Desmond's comment: "Mark the black box (laughs) or Hispanic for funding." Desmond also mentioned that this would be the only time they felt identifying with one race/ethnicity over another would be appropriate. Desmond said, "Right, that's the only time they're doing that." However, Christina stated, "Yeah, there's no "multiracial" scholarship that we know of."

With respect to his children identifying as black, Kevin stated, "I guess the only reason I wouldn't want them to identify with black is if they were doing it to really stand out in a way I felt was forced and attention seeking." That is, Kevin does not want

his children to identify as black if they truly did not identify as such, and they were only identifying as black to get a reaction. Emily (white, married to Andrew) clearly had a preference for how she wanted her son to identify, and interestingly, this preference did not match her prediction about how her son would ultimately identify. Since Emily said she thought her son would identify as white, I asked if she preferred him to identify as white. Emily replied, "Prefer, that's an interesting word. Umm, I would think it would almost be the opposite. I would prefer he identified as Hispanic, but I don't think that's going to happen." Emily's response made sense, especially considering an earlier response she made when I asked if she gave any thought to being an interracial married couple when she and Andrew decided to get married. Part of Emily's earlier response included the following: "…but I know if you identify as other than white – like if our child identified as Hispanic – I think he would have more scholarship opportunities because schools are seeking diversity." However, as Andrew pointed out, "with his appearance (pasty skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes) and his name, everyone will assume he is white anyway." Therefore, despite Emily's preference, it might be unlikely that her son will identify as Hispanic.

In sum, it seems that most parents do not have a preference for the race/ethnicity with which their child ultimately identifies. One couple noted that they preferred their children to identify as multiracial, but they would be alright with their children only selecting black or Hispanic in order to apply for scholarships. Emily really wanted her son to identify as Hispanic, also for scholarship opportunities, but Emily also knew her son probably would not identify as such. Lastly, Kevin was comfortable with his children identifying as black, but only if they were not forcing themselves to do so.

Discussions of Racial/Ethnic Identity with Children

The couples with children were asked during the interviews if they discussed race/ethnicity and racial/ethnic identity with their children. In some cases, the question was slightly reworded so couples with very young children were asked whether they planned on having these discussions at a later point. Most couples already had discussed race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic identity with their children or they want and intend to do so when their children get a bit older. Of those who had not yet discussed race and racial identity with their children, one black father, Brandon, made the comment, "I'm already preparing to shepherd them through life." Brandon wanted his sons, who were six-years-old and four-years-old, to have a strong sense of self. When I asked Brandon what he planned to discuss with his sons regarding race and racial identity, he replied, "More about who they are. That's it. If you let them know who they are, where they come from, where they stand – then it really doesn't matter what other people say…" In contrast, another black father, David, wanted his five-year-old son to be prepared for how he would be treated by others because of his race. While David wanted his son to be prepared for the experiences he was likely to have as a black man, Brandon seemed to want his sons to have a strong racial identity and not pay attention to possible external influences regarding their race and racial identity.

Three couples mentioned that they already had talked about race/ethnicity and racial/ethnic identity with their children. Typically, these children were older, either adolescents or just about to enter into adolescence. However, I noticed that these parents varied in terms of the specific issues they discussed with their children. The differences may be explained by the educational level (socioeconomic status) of the

parents and the extent to which they have a language for discussing issues of race/ethnicity. For example, Sarah (white), who had completed some college, mentioned that she discussed race and racial identity with her daughters, but minimally and somewhat simplistically. Sarah remarked, "Umm, I just do [it] when it comes to acknowledging what race they are, that they should acknowledge that they are black and white. They're not just one or the other. That's about it." Conversely, Sophia and Jeremy both have doctorates and have a language for race/ethnicity and related topics. When I asked Sophia and Jeremy this interview question, Jeremy replied:

> There's a lot of different things that we talk about, but I think earlier when we talked about things we talk about like current events that happen and about the racial dynamics of those. I think we also try to expose them to history and culture, you know, so they have an understanding of black history, and also Panamanian identity as well. Umm, and so, and just in addition to wanting them to know history, like a special emphasis on that.

Jeremy mentioned that he and Sophia discussed racial identity with their children, but he also noted that they discussed the racial components of current events, and the historical and cultural aspects of specific ethnic groups (e.g., Panamanian). Teaching their children about Panamanian culture was important because it was part of Sophia's racial/ethnic background. Furthermore, Sophia mentioned that their children often hear their parents discussing race. Sophia stated, "…the conversations of our own research, they hear us talking about that. I think that they're there – they hear it all the time." Because Sophia and Jeremy discuss with one another their race-related research projects, their children are exposed to discussions of race that other children are not.

While some parents had superficial and/or deeper conversations with their children regarding race and racial identity, other parents seemed to slightly shy away

from discussing these topics with their children. When I asked Kevin and Laura if they discussed race and racial identity with their young children, Laura specified that they discussed skin color. Laura said:

> …So skin color, yes I talk about that to them, and usually I do it through books, I get kids' books that talk about the colors of different people all over the world, and how they, you know, how they're all slightly different and umm, all beautiful and all, you know, and in Oklahoma a lot of people have Kevin's color skin…

Laura's focus seems to be more on explaining racial diversity to her children, rather than discussing their own racial identity or even other issues related to race. While Laura seemed to directly address issues of diversity with her children, Kevin admitted that there were times in which they deliberately diverted from discussing some race issues with their children. Kevin stated:

> I would say any question they ask we answer straight up, right then as best we can, and maybe revisit later. I am guilty of though, trying to predict if it's going to head in a way of I can't answer in a way that I'll be happy with. For instance, right before bedtime, our six-year-old brings a biography of Abraham Lincoln (female respondent begins to laugh) and the first page is talking about his bad experiences in Kentucky. It was like, "Oh, it is too late for this." You know? Like, she didn't ask anything, but for sure it was coming and I didn't want to deal with it at bedtime – like half past bedtime. And then, okay, the next book – this was two weeks ago – then the next book she pulls off the shelf… has this picture of this happy black girl on the front and we opened it up and it's, "In 1824…" And I'm like, "Oh, no, no, no… (both respondents laugh) I'm going to get more questions that I'm not ready for." Um, so, anytime they bring it up we'll deal with it as directly as possible, but I do try to [divert], and I said, "Let's read this book after mom and I can talk about it a little bit, and it's in the afternoon, and we have time for your questions." Which makes them more interested.

Though Kevin said he and Laura try to answer the questions they get from their children as directly as they can, he also admitted that at times he attempts to gauge where their

conversations are heading. It did not seem like Kevin was avoiding ever having seemingly difficult conversations with his children, but that he wanted to carefully think about the issues and potential questions so he could provide satisfying responses and at an appropriate time (e.g., not at bedtime). Kevin and Laura may have opted for this approach due to the young ages (six and three) of their children.

Only one couple, Gabriel (Hispanic) and Jennifer (white), said they have not had any discussions about race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic identity with their son not because they were attempting to avoid these subjects but because their son's communication is delayed. Gabriel noted, "He's communication delayed, like big time. We don't really talk about much anyway. So that's years off – we are just trying to get him to tell us what he did at school today." Thus, Gabriel and Jennifer did not have conversations with their son about race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic identity not because they did not want to but because of factors beyond their control.

Discussions of Discrimination with Children

Participants with children were asked during the interview if they discussed racial/ethnic discrimination with their children. One couple and two other respondents said they did discuss these issues with their children. David indicated that he would be preparing his son to deal with racism, although he mentioned this in response to another interview question. Regarding the discussions she has had with her daughters, Sarah said:

> I have had talks with them about that. That there's people out there that are not – that they aren't accepting of people being biracial or of interracial couples. That, of course they always do black history projects and things at school, so they are aware that things were not like they are now. So, but, what they're exposed to – they don't

> deal with a lot of discrimination – they're really not in that type of setting.

While Sarah said she had had informative or preparatory conversations about discrimination with her daughters, she also mentioned that her daughters were not really in a setting in which they would be exposed to instances of discrimination. Therefore, while Sarah is having very basic conversations with her daughters regarding discrimination, it just might be that the opportunity to have deeper conversations on this topic had not presented itself as of the time of the interview.

Other respondents indicated they had conversations with their children regarding discrimination and how to deal with it not to prepare them for discrimination they might experience someday but because they already were experiencing it. Sophia stated that she and Jeremy talk to their children about these issues and make sure their children know they can always call their mother and father should they have an incident in which they experience discrimination. Then, Sophia shared an incident her oldest son experienced. Sophia said:

> It's always – um, if it happens at school, then I guess it is kind of the context. If it happens at school then we tell them, "You can always call mom or dad." You know, "if something happens at school, you just say, 'I'm calling my parents.'" You know, it's just like that last summer, our oldest son was at a camp and he was with another boy, and he and the other boy, who was Asian I think, umm, they both had their pockets turned out. Yeah a teacher had them turn their pockets out because she thought they stole something. You know? And I said, "Just let the person know you will be calling your parents if that ever happens again, and one of us will be there." But, I think I called immediately, like when he told me, because I pulled the car over and I just called and kind of just dealt with some things. And, it makes them feel bad, you know? You kind of have the accusation hanging in the air that you stole something when you didn't, and there's never an apology.

At this point in the interview, I thought I should ask Sophia why she believed her son was asked to turn out his pockets. I started to say, "Do you think the accusation was made because…" as I intended to ask if Sophia thought her son was accused of stealing something because he is black; however, before I could finish the question, Sophia replied, "Yes! Absolutely! I do – absolutely, absolutely!" Sophia finished her responses by reiterating that she and Jeremy make certain their children know they support them and they can call them if they have these experiences: "Umm, and we handle it, but I think they should feel empowered, and I think they know that we are there and we have their backs – they can always call us."

I could not help but notice that Jeremy was extremely quiet while Sophia spoke about what their son had experienced. Therefore, I asked Jeremy, "Have you had any incidents or anything?" Jeremy replied, "Those are good examples, I think." At that point, I followed up with the question, "So you all deal with these [situations] as a couple?" Sophia and Jeremy affirmed that they did handle these situations as a couple. Though, something about Jeremy's silence made me realize that while Jeremy could certainly empathize with the experiences of his children in terms of racism and discrimination, as a white male he would never share experiences of racism and discrimination with them. Because Sophia is the parent who holds the racial/ethnic minority status in the marriage, she can share certain experiences with her children that Jeremy cannot and have a deeper understanding of certain situations than Jeremy can.

This was not the only case in which I noticed the parent who was the racial/ethnic minority responding to questions about racial/ethnic discrimination or speaking in terms of being able to relate to their children with respect to other

race/ethnicity issues more than the non-minority parent. For example, Brandon (black) was "already preparing to shepherd" his sons through life (mentioned earlier) and David (black) also assumed responsibility for explaining race and race relations to his son. This racial/ethnic difference made me wonder about the dynamics of interracial families. Specifically, it made me wonder if the children feel the non-minority parent can comfort them when they have unpleasant experiences because of their race/ethnicity but cannot truly know what they are going through since non-minority parents have never experienced negative treatment due to the color of their skin (with such exceptions as negative reactions when in public with their racial/ethnic minority spouse). Furthermore, how these non-minority parents feel knowing they have not had these experiences their minority children have had and they may have to rely on their minority spouse to guide their children through them also made me wonder if any "we versus them" dynamics are created within families when a minority parent can share experiences with children that a non-minority parent cannot.

Experiences of Children as Biracial or Multiracial

Respondents also were asked if they thought their children were treated differently because their parents are an interracial couple and about negative and positive experiences their children had being biracial/ethnic or multiracial/ethnic. Five couples said their children had not experienced anything negative or did not perceive their experiences as negative, though these children were quite young and therefore had limited life experiences. For example, when I asked Rachel (white) and Brandon (black) about any positive or negative experiences their six-year-old and four-year-old boys had because they are biracial, Rachel responded:

> Constant positive comments about their hair. All the time – all the time! So the way they look, they always get positive reactions, because I think mixed race kids are just gorgeous anyway. But, yeah, always about their hair. People will say, "Oh, their hair!" And I'll say, "Oh, they got them from their dad." But, that's all – just material things.

I asked if anyone has ever asked to touch her sons' hair. Rachel replied, "They do." At that point, Brandon commented, "I think I know what you're talking about–people intruding on their personal space thinking they have the right to touch it. But, that's not the situation. I think that happens more to black women than to black boys or men." While it is not exactly clear why Brandon did not view people asking to touch his sons' hair as a violation of their personal space, it was clear that Rachel and Brandon perceived this as a positive experience for their sons. Rachel had mentioned earlier in the interview how important it was to her to make sure her sons' hair looked nice, saying:

> Like we will say in jest, like if the boys go out, I always make sure that their hair is always looking great. Because I don't want people to go, "Oh look, they've got a white mom." That's like a whole stereotype, and I'll say it in jest, I'm just joking. But, I obviously do think it because, I know – I've seen it. That sounds bad, but it's true.

Even though Rachel mentioned that she was making this comment to be humorous or make light of a common stereotype that white mothers of biracial children (specifically black and white children) do not know how to style the children's hair, it is possible that Rachel viewed these comments as compliments of her ability to fix the hair of her biracial children.

Comments about physical appearance and violations of personal space were not exclusive to Brandon and Rachel's children. Kevin and Laura also mentioned comments about the appearance of their children, including their hair. While Kevin and Laura acknowledged the complementary nature of these comments, Kevin felt these statements were subtle messages that their marriage and children were accepted. Kevin stated, "We have beautiful kids and everything, but umm, sometimes they say it in a way to make sure that we're comfortable with their beliefs or cultural biases, and that's just a subtle way as opposed to an awkward way – 'We accept you!'" For Kevin, these comments were perceived as supportive, but they were less about the appearance of his children. Rather, Kevin felt these comments were subtle message indicating the person making the comment was comfortable with an interracial married couple and/or biracial children.

While other couples had interpreted comments about physical appearance, or even requests to touch their children's hair, as positive experiences, Sophia and Jeremy did not. They (more so Sophia) did not like the idea of someone touching her daughter's hair. Sophia responded, "Yeah, like with (redacted) hair, right, emphasizing her curly hair and people just touching it constantly…" Sophia further described what she tells her daughter to do in this situation. She said, "'No one is allowed to touch your hair, they don't get to do that to you – violate your space.' They say, 'You're so cute, I want to touch your hair.' And you say, No, you don't!" (laughs) You really don't, because that's impolite (laughs). She's not your toy!"

Sophia's exclamation that her daughter was not a toy may indicate that she finds the violation of her daughter's personal space in order to feel her hair is dehumanizing.

Also, while Sophia did not specify the race of the people asking to touch her daughter's hair, I would assume that it is mostly white people. If it is indeed white people requesting to feel Sophia's daughter's hair, then perhaps Sophia thinks they are using white privilege to invade her daughter's personal space and objectify her, especially since Sophia and Jeremy had multiple experiences of their children being dehumanized and objectified (as their oldest son was when he was treated as if he were a science experiment).

Sophia and Jeremy also discussed some positive experiences their children have had being biracial, although Sophia was hesitant to call these experiences "positive." Instead Sophia called these experiences "preferenced." She stated:

> I wouldn't call them positive, I would call them preferenced – they get preferenced because there's this whole kind of theory of light skin privilege, or I think they do get light skin privilege – definitely. But I think that's – that's a privilege. So they are able to experience privilege in ways darker skin black people can't.

Though Sophia did not say exactly how she believes her children benefit from light skin privilege, research on this topic shows that blacks with darker skin tones experience less privilege than their lighter skinned counterparts (Frazier 1957). Furthermore, Keith and Herring (1991) found that blacks with very light skin tones had higher levels of education, were more likely to hold professional or technical occupations, and have higher individual and household incomes than blacks with very dark skin tones. Therefore, a system of stratification based on skin tone differences exists among blacks, with those who have very light skin tones clearly reaping more benefits. However, while Sophia clearly notices that her children receive light skin privilege, she also mentioned early on in the interview that she wants her children to know that their status

as biracial is not going to necessarily protect them from dealing with negative experiences. She said, "I think they need to know that their biracial identity does not save them, that they will get typed as black or people of color." Sophia clearly sees that her children have better experiences than darker black children, but she also knows that they still will have their racial identity externally imposed and they will be viewed and treated as black.

Sophia and Jeremy also brought up how they thought their children benefited from being biracial because they receive, as Sophia put it, "a deeper telling of the story," (as opposed to a whitewashed version of history). Sophia and Jeremy mentioned they had visited Mount Vernon with their children. Sophia said:

> We went to George Washington's house a couple years ago. We went down to the slave cabins as well and talked about that as well, and there was no one down there except for us – because everyone just goes to Washington's house, right.

Jeremy noted that the family deviated from the actual tour. He said, "We went on the official tour, but we lost it and went around the grounds and stuff." Sophia said, "I think some kids may have missed that part of the tour (slightly laughs), our kids don't ever miss that part of the tour!" Sophia and Jeremy implied that their children get "more of the story" than children who are not biracial, and Sophia and Jeremy's advanced educational status may be a salient factor in their children receiving in-depth historical lessons, as opposed to the white-centric version.

Desmond and Christina also discussed the positive and negative experiences of their children with respect to race/ethnicity. They did say, however, that they thought their son had more positive experiences as a multiracial child, while their daughter had

more negative experiences. Christina mentioned that people will point out certain physical attributes about her daughter. She said, "Now she's light skinned and her hair's a nicer texture." Then Desmond mentioned how these attributes bring about negative experiences for their daughter. He said:

> If you have particular characteristics that make you get too much attention in a group, then they find things that they pick at. So, she's experiences stuff that's more about the dynamics of being female in a female group, and competition between females… competition to get young men's attention.

Desmond and Christina believed their daughter's negative experiences were related to other females' discontent with the attention she receives from young men due to her physical appearance. They thought their son received attention too, but it did not have the same adverse side effects. Desmond said:

> Boys don't compete the same way. So, things have happened and the young men seem to give him more props because he gets more attention, and embrace him more and want to be around him more. She gets more attention (from boys) and young ladies give her more flack.

In sum, Desmond and Christina's son had positive experiences, in the sense that other young men did not mind that he received more attention from young women. In fact, according to Desmond and Christina, other young men applauded the attention. However, the attention their daughter received from young men was not applauded by other young women. Based on what Desmond and Christina said, other young women seemed to feel like their daughter was a threat when it came to receiving the attention of young males. Therefore, this resulted in their daughter having more negative experiences relative to their son's experiences with respect to being multiracial.

Preferences for Whom Their Children Date and Marry

During the interviews, the couples were asked if they had any preferences for the race/ethnicity of the person a child dates or marries. Only two respondents said they did have a preference. Laura did have preferences for the racial group of the persons her daughter and son date and marry someday. Laura replied, "They're different, they aren't the same. Umm, for each of them – so, for my daughter, uh, I would prefer non-black, and for my son I would prefer non-white." Although I did not follow up with Laura as to why she felt this way, there are of course several possible reasons. Perhaps Laura wanted her children to date and marry individuals similar to themselves in skin tone. As mentioned by Kevin, their daughter had a lighter skin tone and blue eyes; however, their son had dark skin and eyes. Therefore, Laura might think it would be easier for her children to date and marry someone who looked more like them.

Another explanation might be that Laura perceives there will be a greater pool of white men from which her daughter may find a suitable partner compared to the pool of eligible black men. Or Laura might not view black males as suitable partners, drawing upon the stereotype of the missing black father (see Coles and Green 2010) and the fact that her own father, a black man, was absent for a large part of her life. With Laura's permission, Kevin told me earlier in the interview about Laura's childhood:

> So, her mom had her at 18, a month or two after high school graduation. Her dad wasn't a part of her life very much until…ever. Never a big part of her life, but I mean completely disconnected from the age of six months to about 12 years old or something like that.

Again, because I failed to ask why Laura had the preferences she had, I can only speculate as to whether they were because of stereotypes, her own experiences, or skin tone.

Emily (white, married to a Hispanic man) also said she had a preference for the race of her son's dating and marriage partners. Emily replied to the question, "I would prefer if he didn't date an African American girl… Oh, and Asian – no Asians." I asked Emily why she had these preferences. She responded:

> Umm, I just don't like Asian girls and I feel like Asian families, they like to stick to their own races too, and don't want them to date outside. I don't want (redacted) to experience – I think Asian families are really tough on a different race, and I don't want him to experience that… And then black – I don't know. I haven't met – this sounds so bad. Maybe I would let him have – I don't know. I just think it would be rough.

Emily did not want her son to date Asian girls because of her own biases toward them, and also because she thought there would be extremely high expectations placed on her son that she did not want him to experience. As far as her opposition to her son being involved with a black girl, at several points during the interview it seemed like Emily was going to say something potentially derogatory or over-generalizing about blacks, but she backed off and just stated that she thought it would be a hardship.

Most respondents said they did not have a preference for the race/ethnicity of the individual a child dates or marries. However, two respondents did have preferences. It is clear that Emily had these preferences due to racial stereotypes, and I would guess that racial stereotypes had something to do with Laura's preferences as well.

Differences in Child Rearing Techniques

During the interviews, the couples with children were asked if they differed in their childrearing techniques. While most couples noted slight differences in their childrearing techniques, no one really attributed these differences to race/ethnicity. Instead, most of the couples who did have differences in their childrearing techniques attributed these differences to how they were raised. Sophia and Jeremy said they differed in their childrearing styles, and Jeremy noted that how he was raised impacted his parenting style. He said, "Yeah, we have different styles. I think our styles differ based on our experiences with parenting growing up. My parents were very, umm, involved – controlling, but I'm not that way." Sophia also noted how her childhood experiences impacted her childrearing techniques. She replied, "My parents were very uninvolved (laughs). I like structure." Essentially, Sophia and Jeremy seemed to have different childrearing techniques based on how hands-on or hands-off their own parents were when they were children.

Something else that stood out about the slight differences some couples had in their childrearing techniques was that male respondents seemed to be the disciplinarian more than female respondents. For instance, Brandon seemed much more comfortable using corporal punishment than Rachel. Brandon said:

> She's not consistent with it, though. You know, and of course, I think one of the nice things about that type of punishment…it's quick…it's clean…and you move on. Whereas, when it becomes verbal, it starts to drag on and that has a tendency to start creating doubt, and doubt goes against self-esteem.

Brandon not only thought that the use of corporal punishment was superior to verbal discipline, he also seemed to be more comfortable actually using corporal punishment

than Rachel. This is consistent with research showing men have more positive attitudes toward spanking than women (e.g., Child Trends 2015) and are more likely to be disciplinarians, at least of sons (Starrels 1994). Other male respondents also described themselves as the disciplinarian. For instance, when I asked Daniel and Sarah if they differed in their childrearing techniques, Daniel replied, "Discipline!" Sarah echoed this difference when she said, "Yeah, I'm more laid back and he likes to be more disciplinary." However, neither couple attributed these differences to race, but more so to the techniques their parents had used while growing up: Brandon and Daniel both mentioned receiving corporal punishment as children, while Rachel and Sarah did not. Therefore, Brandon and Daniel's own experiences, and some prior research, suggest a relationship between gender and discipline.

Summary

In this section, I have discussed whether the couples who participated in this research think their children will ultimately identify with one race/ethnicity more than another, as well as the preferences these couples had for how their children identify. I also discussed how these couples engage their children in conversations about race/ethnicity, racial/ethnic identity, and racial/ethnic discrimination. In addition, I also focused on negative and positive experiences of the couples' children. Finally, I explored the preferences of these couples for the race/ethnicity of their children's dating and marriage partners, as well as their childrearing techniques.

Chapter Twelve: Findings for Research Participants' Interpretations of Interracial Couples in the Media

The interviews ended with a question regarding interracial marriages and the media. That is, I asked the couples how they felt about the portrayal of interracial couples in the media, specifically on television and in movies. Considering that in 2010, 8.4 percent of all marriages were intermarriages (Wang 2012), it might be expected that media such as television shows would have a similar proportion of representation of interracial relationships as well. However, according to work such as Childs (2009), interracial couples are still largely missing on television. While all but two respondents (Ryan and Aaron) had something to say in response to the interview question about the media, most respondents provided only a superficial evaluation of how interracial couples are or were portrayed on television and in movies.

When this question was asked of the participants, almost everyone provided some sort of an analysis (again, with the exception of Ryan and Aaron, who provided responses that indicated they noticed interracial couples in the media, but did not think about how they were portrayed). However, there were some variations in the responses. Twenty-five of the 30 participants provided responses that were superficial in nature, that is, they discussed the portrayals of racial/ethnic minorities in the media, though not necessarily interracial couples; or they discussed the increased number of interracial couples, but not the portrayals; or they discussed portrayals of interracial couples, but did not go into much detail. Five respondents (Eric, Portia, Brandon, Rachel, and Heather) provided critical, in-depth analyses of the portrayal of interracial couples in the media.

General Observations

The following discussion in this section reviews responses that could be considered superficial, meaning they were general observations about racial/ethnic minorities or interracial couples on television and in movies. There are some possible reasons for the large number of superficial responses provided by participants. This question was near the end of the interview and perhaps participants were experiencing "interview fatigue." Though, it could have been because the majority of the participants just lacked the language or knowledge to provide a comprehensive analysis of this topic, and some respondents indicated they did not watch enough television or movies to provide an in-depth analysis. Whatever the reason, most of these responses were usually about stereotypical portrayals of certain racial/ethnic groups or increased representations of interracial couples on television programs. For example, Gabriel (Hispanic) mentioned that he did not appreciate the portrayal of racial/ethnic minority groups on television. He said, "I just don't like how minorities are portrayed on TV, in general…" I encouraged Gabriel to say more about what he did not specifically like about minorities on television. He replied, "I don't think they are portrayed enough, and it's someone else's version of what our culture is like." As a follow-up question to that reply, I asked if he thought the portrayals of minorities on television are taken to extremes to portray them as whites see them. Gabriel responded, "Yes, exactly!" Gabriel did not mention any particular television programs or movies, but in discussing the representation of minorities in the media more generally, Gabriel was bothered by the marginal representation of minorities (relative to whites) in the media. However, when racial/ethnic minorities are present on television and in movies, they are often

portrayed as an over-characterization of themselves, and as Gabriel indicated, in a manner that fulfills stereotypes of the groups.

Married couple Andrew (Hispanic) and Emily (white) also provided responses to this question that were more about stereotypical portrayals of racial/ethnic minorities on television, rather than about portrayals of interracial couples specifically. Andrew replied, "I think it is always the stereotype… It's always the extremes… When TV does it, they want to exaggerate it…" Adding to Andrew's analysis, Emily said, "And I don't think they do it positively, I think they do it negatively." Andrew and Emily did not discuss specific television programs they believed to be responsible for stereotypical depictions of minorities, but their analysis was similar to Gabriel's in stating that what is seen on television is often not real, but an exaggerated image that often results in a negative image of racial/ethnic minorities.

Even though Sophia (black) did not provide much analysis regarding the portrayal of interracial marriage in the media, she did mention the portrayal of a racial minority character on a specific television show. Sophia specifically mentioned a character on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (ABC) being portrayed as a strong Asian female, which counters how Asian females are usually depicted in the media. Sophia said, "I like it because you know she's not submissive, like how Asian women tend to get cast, and so she is not that at all." Sophia mentioned that this character is portrayed in a manner that is counter to manner in which Asian women are often depicted. She is referring to the two common depictions of Asian women on television and in film – the "lotus flower" or the "dragon lady." According to Shimizu (2007) the lotus flower is "self-sacrificing, servile, and suicidal…killing herself and threatening to overwhelm the

white man with her devotion and loyalty" (59). On the other hand, the dragon lady portrays a dangerous, hypersexualized woman, who uses her femininity to deceive white men as a representative of devious, conspiratorial Asian men. Sophia seemed quite happy to see an Asian female character on a prime-time television program breaking from these two portrayals.

Hannah (white) said she thought there were more interracial couples shown on television now than in the past. Hannah said: "Um, I think it is becoming more normal, so you see it more often… probably the kids now see it on TV more often than we did in the early 80s, but I don't know…I don't think about it!" Hannah's comment implies that she is aware that there are more interracial couples shown on television now than when she was growing up, but she did not mention any specific television shows and furthermore, she implied that she did not analyze the increased representation of interracial couples. This may suggest that some people merely care that interracial couples are being represented, but not necessarily how they are being portrayed. Along these lines, Desmond (black) noted that the number of interracial couples have increased on television programs and in movies. Desmond said:

> So, the Willises was the interracial couple (on TV) when we were growing up. Umm, that's the only example I can remember. So, as an example off the top of my head, I can think of the Cheerios commercial, I can think of this movie I can't remember the name of, and a few sitcoms that even if I'm just flipping through the stations that I've seen with interracial couples. So, I've seen at least more representation of diverse couples than before.

The only representation of an interracial couple on television (a white man married to a black woman) Desmond could remember from his childhood was from a comedy called *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985, CBS). For Desmond, it was more notable that the

representation of interracial couples in the media has increased, but his wife Christina (Hispanic/Asian) did not think increased numbers of interracial couples necessarily translated to a positive representation. Christina said, "I still don't think they do a good job." At this point in the interview, Desmond seemed to acknowledge that there was room for improvement in the portrayals, but he also maintained that the issues were mutually exclusive. Desmond said:

> …but that's a difference statement. So the statement if they do a good enough job or not, versus the difference between in our lifetime where we've come. There's been a progression, but like anything else, how far have we come? Well, you know, that is the question. So, in terms of prevalence of that particular type of portrayal in the media, it has increased. In terms of how good of a job we do it and show the beauty of diversity, we're still behind. So, we could make some improvements there, but I think at least to some extent, there has been some progress, even if minimum.

Based on a quick count I made of television shows, including primetime shows on the three major networks (NBC, ABC, CBS) and those available on streaming services (Hulu and Netflix), there are *at least* 20 television shows that include *any* characters in interracial relationships. However, considering the overall number of shows on network television and streaming services, 20 shows really is not that many. For many people, like Desmond, the increased numbers of these couples is a step in the right direction. However, as Desmond quickly came to realize, while it is good that television is more racially/ethnically diverse than in the past, it is also critical to consider how interracial relationships are portrayed, especially in terms of race/ethnic relations, as Eric pointed out (see below). That is, there's a difference between representation and portrayal.

In-depth Observations

Married couple Eric (white) and Portia (black) agreed with Christina's assessment that the portrayals of interracial couples in the media were not necessarily good or positive. Though, Eric and Portia provided a more in-depth and critical assessment of the portrayal of interracial couples in the media than Christina did. Eric noted that not every racial/ethnic group is represented in interracial couples on television programs or in movies; furthermore, he noticed that when certain racial/ethnic groups are represented, they are portrayed in one of two ways. Eric said:

> Well, first, it is really interesting who gets to be an interracial couple. Like Latinos are hardly ever shown in the mass media at all. They are like 13 or 14 percent of the population and I think they make up less than two percent of racial representations in television and film. And, then, when they are represented, they are represented almost like this passing, assimilated character, or as this weird kind of thug, gangster – Latino threat. Umm, so when they are put in interracial relationships, it is either as that threat or as that almost white assimilated character. Umm, but interracial couples in general almost get treated like umm, almost like themselves are the tragic mulatto trope, as if they are this unfortunate kind of couple that stumbled into the color line, and you know, "Oh well, what are they going to do?" And if there is an interracial couple portrayed, they either don't talk about race or they make race this central type of thing that they overcome just to acknowledge that we're all the same anyway. These kind of really stupid Disneyesque narratives (laughs) really bother me a lot.

Similar to what other respondents mentioned, Eric also noted that certain racial/ethnic groups are stereotyped, but he also implies that it is usually at the discretion of white executives in the mass media (his reference to Disney) to make the determination of which stereotype other whites will be most comfortable viewing. Also embedded in this comment from Eric is the notion that whites are only comfortable viewing Latinos (specifically Latin males) in the media if they are portrayed as a threat (e.g., drug

dealers, criminals, illegal immigrants etc.), or if they are as close to white as possible (e.g., if they speak English, dress and "act" white essentially), that is, have "honorary whiteness." While Eric focused on the stereotypical portrayals of Latinos (Latin men), Portia noted how she thought Latinas (Latin women) are often portrayed. She used a specific example from a television show in which a Latina is married to a white man "Umm, I think another stereotype you see on TV a lot is the saucy Latin American wife. Kind of like on *Modern Family*." Portia was referring to Gloria (played by Sophia Vergara) on ABC's *Modern Family*. Gloria is an example of the extreme stereotypes Gabriel discussed in his analysis. She often dresses in tight, revealing clothing and usually wears heavy makeup. Portia described Gloria as "saucy," but she is also hypersexualized. The character is also married to Jay, a white man (played by Ed O'Neill). Gloria's hypersexuality might allow viewers to "look past" any issue they had with the portrayal of an interracial couple on television.

Returning to Eric's comments, they also convey the notion that the media steers away from issues of race/ethnicity, which correlates to the idea of living in a "color-blind" or "post-racial" society. (That is, we no longer need to acknowledge race because it is no longer an issue.) However, he also pointed out that the alternative to not acknowledging race/ethnicity at all is to make race/ethnicity (e.g., problems due to race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic tensions) the central issue of the storyline. When race/ethnicity is central to the storyline, the message is conveyed that somehow all of the issues surrounding race/ethnicity can be magically resolved in 90 minutes (in the case of a movie). Other participants also noticed this pattern in movies with interracial

couples. Brandon (black) and Rachel (white) mentioned this happens in some Tyler Perry movies. They provided the following discussion:

> Rachel: …so like Tyler Perry where the cast is mainly black and then there may be a white woman in there, and obviously she's portrayed as, you know…
> Brandon: Ditzy.
> Rachel: (laughs) Yeah. And then you get the whole the black women talking about the white woman, so that stereotype is always portrayed. Not usually in a black family if there is a white woman is she portrayed just like the rest of the women.
> Brandon: But, then and also in all fairness, at the end of the movie she ends up getting it and everybody gets along (laughs). Yeah, they'll suddenly create this sisterhood.
> Rachel: Yeah, she'll make a sweet potato pie or something stereotypical like that, and they'll be, "Oh, she can cook!"
> Brandon: (laughs) Yeah, "She got it, we're sisters now."

Eric, Brandon, and, Rachel all indicate that the portrayal of interracial relationships in the media makes it seem like racial tensions are easy to solve and that it really does not take much effort to solve them. Such portrayals imply that someone in an interracial relationship who is not accepted by the other partner's/spouse's family can easily solve this situation through some trivial action, such as successfully baking a sweet potato pie. Also of importance here is the stereotypical image of white women mentioned by Brandon. He noted that white women (specifically in Tyler Perry movies) are portrayed as "ditzy." This is interesting for two reasons. First, it subtly suggests that black men may be attracted more to white women who are not intellectually gifted. But this portrayal also may suggest that white women who are not intelligent are attracted to and date black men. In other words, the problems with the portrayals of a black man-white woman relationship can cut both ways.

When I discussed the portrayal of interracial couples in the media with Heather, I mentioned to her that there seems to still be some taboo on showing interracial marriages on television. I asked her if she thought there would have been a point in time when people would have completely rejected a television show with an interracial couple. Heather replied:

> I always think about *I Love Lucy*…that was an interracial marriage, but they slept in separate beds. Umm, they never showed her during her pregnancy, and they were actually married in real life. Umm, the amount of time that they actually show affection was rare. They were showing kissing, but never more than a two second kiss, there was very little affection between them. Umm, I would say definitely during the Civil Rights Era, even showing interracial relationships at all would have made people freak out.

Ricky and Lucy Ricardo have long been considered the first interracial (interethnic) couple on television in the United States, but Heather was the only participant to mention that an interracial couple appeared on America's television during the 1950s. It seems that viewers at the time did not strongly object to an interracial couple on their television screens, as the series was quite popular and lasted for six seasons (1951-1957) on CBS (Bramlett-Solomon 2007; Childs 2009). There could have been for a variety of reasons for the show's success, though. For example, *I Love Lucy* aired in black and white; therefore, maybe Desi Arnaz looked less Hispanic (despite his heavy accent) on screen. Perhaps viewers did not mind an interracial marriage being portrayed on television because the specific couple (Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz) was actually married. While Heather mentioned that Ricky and Lucy rarely showed affection or kissed and slept in separate beds, this likely was a result of strict moral codes (similar to the Hays Code) upheld by television studios during this time rather than the interracial

marriage itself. Further, Heather might not have known that network executives recommended a white man be cast for the role of Lucy's husband on the show, but Lucille Ball wanted her husband to be cast (Bramlett-Solomon 2007; Childs 2009). Finally, Heather referred to public response to interracial relationships on television during the Civil Rights Era. An example of this was when Captain Kirk (played by William Shatner) kissed Lieutenant Ohura (played by Nichelle Nichols) on an episode of *Star Trek*. Airing on November 22, 1968, on the heels of passage the Civil Rights Act, this kiss is often credited as being the first (nonmarital) interracial kiss on television. However, there was a large public outcry following the episode, which almost resulted in Nichols leaving the show (Bramlett-Solomon 2007; Childs 2009). So, as Heather pointed out, there was a point in time when seeing an interracial relationship (even something as simple as a kiss between people of different races/ethnicities) would incite a public response. Television viewers probably would not react the same way now because they might be more accustomed to seeing interracial couples, or it could be that it is not socially acceptable to condemn interracial relationships. Thus, while there have been changes, they have been relatively small. Issues of underrepresentation of interracial couples and stereotypes of racial/ethnic minorities on television and in the movies remain.

In conclusion, most of the responses provided to this question were not as in-depth as I had expected they would be. While there are several possible reasons why participants did not or could not provide critical assessments, the responses that were provided (even though they usually were superficial in nature) gave insight into how participants thought particular racial/ethnic minority groups are portrayed in the media.

Some participants decided to focus on the increased number of interracial couples on television programs and in movies, and at least one respondent (Christina) indicated that the media was not doing a particularly good job with their portrayals of interracial couples, but she did not go into more detail. Other participants (Eric, Portia, Brandon, Rachel, and Heather) provided more in-depth responses about the portrayal of interracial couples in the media. Typically, these respondents made mention of the exaggerated, usually negative, portrayals (e.g., whites as ditzy, Latinos as a threat or overly assimilated to dominant culture) of racial/ethnic minorities and interracial couples in the media. Therefore, the interracial couples in this study did not feel as if the interracial couples in the media are accurate portrayals of what being in an interracial marriage is really like.

Chapter Thirteen: Discussion and Conclusion

Research on interracial couples tends to be limited to the demographics of interracial marriage or experiences of black/white couples in limited geographic regions of the United States. My research addressed two questions: what are the experiences of interracial (interethnic) couples in a so-called "post-racial" society and how much does race/ethnicity matter in interracial marriages in the contemporary United States? That is, I wanted to examine the experiences of interracial couples at a point in time when some contend that society is "post racial" and race/ethnicity no longer matters in the United States (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2015). In particular, I wanted to examine earlier life experiences pertaining to race/ethnicity, such as the racial/ethnic composition of social environments while growing up, of individuals who later entered into an interracial marriage. Another particular interest was the children of interracial couples, including the formation of their racial/ethnic identity and their experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination. To answer my research questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 interracial couples. I was able to identify several themes that appeared in the interview data. Here, I summarize and discuss the findings from the research. I then discuss the limitations and strengths of my research, and I provide suggestions for future research on interracial marriage.

Summary of Results

Regarding the experiences of interracial married couples in a so-called "post-racial" society (first research question), the findings suggest that not only do interracial couples continue to have negative and complicated experiences, but there are variations in those experiences depending on the racial/ethnic make-up of the marriage with black-

white couples having more difficult experiences than other couples (especially couples where a minority spouse is light-skinned). Given what the participants described in the prior chapters, it is clear that race/ethnicity mattered a great deal in these marriages (second research question); even when some participants attempted to make race/ethnicity seem less important, it still mattered. Six specific lines of inquiry (i.e., participants' racial/ethnic identity, their early life experiences, their experiences of getting together and getting married, their experiences as a married couple, their plans for future children and the race/ethnic-related experiences of their children, and their perceptions of interracial couples in the media) and the driving forces behind these lines of inquiry (e.g., perspectives on life history/life course, social status, homogamy; see Chapter Five) were instrumental to answering my research questions.

Six major themes emerged from the data I collected: experiences of diversity, public/private dynamics, children's experiences with race/ethnicity, white privilege, subtleties in responses from family members, and the continuing salience of race and ethnicity. Below I discuss each of these themes. It is important to note that multiple themes sometimes applied to a particular set of findings, that is, themes could "overlap." Below I also point out some of the instances where this occurred.

Diversity Experienced

First, a major theme that emerged in the data collected from the early interview questions (i.e., questions concerning experiences while growing up) was the diversity experienced by most of the research participants during childhood and adolescence. The majority of participants indicated they had at least some exposure to racial/ethnic groups besides their own while they were growing up; however, there were differences

in the extent to which participants had exposure to other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., some participants mentioned that they were exposed to other racial/ethnic groups, but they were only exposed to a few people of other races/ethnicities), as well as where they were exposed to other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., schools versus neighborhoods). Additionally, while some participants had exposure to other racial/ethnic groups as children, others did not have exposure until later, in their teenage years. Though, it is not clear whether the exposure, as minimal as it was in some cases, helps to explain why my study participants married someone of a different race/ethnicity. According to Allport's contact hypothesis (1954), increased contact should result in more progressive racial attitudes. Testing the contact hypothesis in relation to approval of interracial marriage, Johnson (2004) and Jacobson and Johnson (2006) found that contact between blacks and whites leads to increased approval of interracial marriage; however, the context of the contact mattered (e.g., close contact versus superficial contact) and those with close contact held more progressive attitudes toward interracial marriage. Attitudes do not always translate into behaviors, though. As found in Bonilla-Silva's research (2006), even when people (specifically, whites) say they approve of interracial marriage, they also may indicate that they would not marry someone of a different race ("They can do it, but it is not for me.") Thus, while those who participated in this research had married outside of their race/ethnicity, it is not clear if the exposure to other racial/ethnic groups that many of the participants had when they were younger influenced their interracial dating and interracial marriage.

Public/Private Dynamics

Next, public/private dynamics were often alluded to by the participants. It did not seem like many of the couples thought about being in an interracial marriage all that often in private, but in public they faced reactions from strangers that usually were negative. However, there did seem to be something of a feedback loop here. In some instances, interview participants mentioned that negative responses from strangers (public) caused them to feel stress (private). So, the public microaggressions experienced by some of the couples caused emotional distress on a private level. An additional private dynamic was feelings stemming from the public microaggressions spilling over into the marriage (e.g., spouses having discussions about what happened and their feelings about it, short-term flaring of spouses' tempers following a negative incident in public). Additionally, the public/private dynamic was apparent when participants discussed the racial/ethnic identity of their child or children. While most spoke of a racial/ethnic identity that others imposed on their kids as their only racial/ethnic identity, a few respondents believed their children would likely have an identity others imposed on their children (a public racial/ethnic identity), as well as a racial/ethnic identity that was self-imposed and reflective of being biracial/multiracial children (a private racial/ethnic identity). Similar to their parents, interracial children had experiences or received reactions in public that they and their parents often worked through in private. This overlaps with the third theme, children's experiences with race/ethnicity.

Children's Experiences with Race/Ethnicity

Regarding the third theme, couples who already had children, especially those with older children, discussed the experiences their children had with racism and

discrimination, such as Sophia and Jeremy's son being asked to turn out his pockets to prove he had not stolen anything. Sophia and Jeremy also had the "science experiment" incident (when the woman approached Sophia, Jeremy, and their oldest son with her own small child and began telling her child that the skin color of Sophia and Jeremy's oldest son was what happened when a black person and a white person have a child together). Also, some participants who were parents discussed how current events, such as unarmed black men being killed by police, made them afraid for their children. There was evidence that some participants who were not yet parents were thinking about the experiences their future children might have. For example, Eric discussed how current political and social events (specifically, the high-profile shootings of black men by white police officers) made him think about how any children he and Portia had, especially sons, would be treated. Real (and anticipated) experiences were public issues that caused participants to feel anxiety and fear for their children on a private level. Both public/private dynamics and children's experiences of race/ethnicity overlap with another major theme found in the data, which is the continuing salience of race/ethnicity in the United States (see below for a discussion).

White Privilege

White privilege was another theme that emerged from the data. Some white interview participants mentioned white privilege when discussing their racial identity. That is, they were aware of the social privileges they received as a result of being white. As discussed by McIntosh (1989), most whites are never taught about white privilege or acknowledge that they are the recipients of advantages in our society due to the color of their skin. Other evidence of white privilege was present, but not brought up as such by

the participants. For example, Gabriel (Hispanic) pointed out that Jennifer (white) would never be able to truly understand what it is like to be a minority, and Sophia (black) mentioned having to teach Jeremy (white) about her experiences as a black woman (she also said he had to teach her about his experiences as a white man). This implies that due to white privilege, whites do not necessarily understand the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities and racial/ethnic minorities may not fully understand the experiences of whites. However, there was another aspect in which the white privilege theme appeared. When discussing the experiences of their children, it was often the minority respondent who did most of the talking about racial/ethnic identity and experiences of racism and discrimination. Usually the white participant did not say much when these experiences were being discussed. This may suggest that some white parents cannot fully understand, relate to, or express what their biracial children experience.

Subtleties in Responses from Family Members

Another theme derived from the data collected in this research was the subtleties in the responses of family members to an interracial marriage. Families of the study participants were not necessarily as accepting of the relationships, at least initially, as it sometimes was made to seem. Several participants told me that there were no real problems with their families when they found out they were dating or planned to marry outside of their race/ethnicity. However, later in the interviews, these participants said something along the lines of "It got a lot better." This suggests that perhaps the early reactions they received from family members were not as positive as participants said

they were. It also suggests that participants did not want to make their family members appear to be racist.

The Continuing Salience of Race/Ethnicity

The final major theme identified was the continuing salience of race/ethnicity in the United States. Granted, this research is about interracial marriage, so it is a given that race/ethnicity would be a key consideration. In contrast to the common argument of those aligned with a color-blind ideology that race no longer matters (see Bonilla-Silva 2006), there is no strong evidence from my interviews that race/ethnicity is not a salient issue in the United States. Even though some of the participants suggested at points during the interviews that race/ethnicity does not matter (it was rare, but it happened), they also provided responses during the interviews that showed race/ethnicity is still quite important. If race/ethnicity was no longer a salient issue, then several participants would not have discussed being scared for their (future) children or they would not have noted the importance they placed on teaching their children that despite being biracial or multiracial, they would be typed as black children (overlap with the theme of children's experiences of race/ethnicity). Furthermore, if race/ethnicity was not important, then seeing an interracial couple in public would not incite the responses that were described by the people I interviewed (overlap with the public/private dynamics theme). Though, it seems that some interracial couples receive more attention than others. For example, skin color seems to be a determinant of the experiences of interracial couples. Even though two of the respondents who took part in this research identified with a racial/ethnic minority group (Hispanic), their light skin tones make it difficult to identify them visually as such. Basically, they did not appear to be Hispanic.

Because of this, I do not think they would even stand out as an interracial couple, at least not in the same way a darker-skinned Hispanic and a white couple or a black and white couple would stand out. In short, the findings of this research demonstrate that race/ethnicity in general and skin color in particular still matter.

Limitations of Research

Even though this research adds to the literature on the experiences of interracial couples (discussed below), there are several limitations to it. For example, the couples who participated in this research were interviewed together, which may have affected how they answered some of the questions asked during the interviews. Some participants may have censored themselves in front of their spouse, and some respondents may have been more open on some topics had I interviewed the spouses separately (e.g., Jessica describing the response her family had to her marrying a Hispanic man that was brought up in Chapter Nine). Also, my sample was limited to black/white and Hispanic/white couples, with the exception of Desmond (black) and Christina (Hispanic/Asian). Ideally, this research would have included white/Asian couples, as well as Native American/white couples, and more interracial couples in which neither spouse identifies as white. I had more trouble gathering a sample than I had anticipated. In three instances, I contacted (via e-mail) couples who were recommended to me, but my e-mails were not returned. In one instance, I had an interview scheduled with a couple, but the couple never showed up at the agreed-upon interview location. Additionally, I would have liked to have interviewed more couples who had been married for at least ten years. The average number of years my participants had been married was 8.3 at the time of their interviews; only three couples

had been married for ten years or more. Some of the interview questions were designed to assess how or if being in an interracial marriage has changed over time and were intended for couples married for at least ten years. Unfortunately, only three couples could answer these questions. Given the relatively short duration of my participants' marriages, my research could not fully address whether there were any changes over time in interracial marriages. Another limitation is that most of the interviews with black participants were conducted before the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which first began as a hashtag used on social media, but expanded to an in-person protest in Ferguson, Missouri (many in-person protests have followed since). Some interviews took place following the expansion of BLM, and the participants in these interviews discussed police violence against blacks and other issues associated with the movement. It would have been interesting to know whether BLM might have impacted the responses of black respondents who participated in earlier interviews.

Finally, in some cases I failed to push participants to provide more detailed responses or to explain why they answered certain questions the way they did. For instance, when Laura said she did have a preference for the race/ethnicity of the persons her son and daughter date and marry, I did not ask Laura to explain why she had these preferences (non-white for her son and non-black for her daughter). I was somewhat surprised to hear Laura's response, given that she is in an interracial marriage herself and she was the first participant to have a specific preference. My feeling of surprise at that moment might have kept me from asking follow-up questions. However, in other instances, I was hesitant to ask for further explanation from respondents when I sensed (from tone of voice or non-verbal actions) that I was teetering on a sensitive issue. I did

not want the respondents to feel as if they were being badgered, and I certainly did not want them to abruptly end the interview because they became upset and/or felt I went "too far." At any rate, there are some responses where I should have or might have probed for more explanation, but I did not do so.

Strengths of Research

Even though there are limitations to this research, there are also some strengths. First, although my sample could have been more diverse, eight of my couples (over half) were not black/white. Seven couples were Hispanic/white and one was black/Hispanic and Asian. This is in contrast to much of the research on interracial marriage, which tends to focus on one couple combination (black/white).

Additionally, this research was not limited to couples in one geographic area. Although eight couples (53.3 percent) lived in Oklahoma at the time of the interviews, seven (47.7 percent) were living in other states. Taken together, these strengths allowed for a greater array of experiences to be shared with me and included here than in some prior work on interracial marriage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this interview study of 15 couples demonstrates the importance of experiences of diversity, public/private dynamics, children's experiences with race/ethnicity, white privilege, subtleties in the responses of family members to interracial relationships, and the continuing salience of race and ethnicity. While more research on the frequency of interracial marriage and which racial/ethnic groups are marrying out should be conducted in the future, research in the future also should strive

to understand the lived experiences of interracial couples (including those that do not include a white spouse) in our so-called “post-racial” society.

References

Afful, Stephanie E. Corinne Wohlford, and Suzanne M. Stoelting. 2015. "Beyond 'Difference': Examining the Process and Flexibility of Racial Identity in Interracial Marriages." *Journal of Social Issues* 71 (4):659-674.

Allport. Gordon W. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York: Perseus Books Publishing.

Berry, Brent. 2006. "Friends for Better or for Worse: Interracial Friendships in the United States as Seen Through Wedding Party Photos." *Demography* 43 (3):491-510.

Bobo, Lawrence and Ryan A. Smith. 1998. "From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez Faire Racism: The Transformation of Racial Attitudes." Pp. 182-220 in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, edited by Wendy F. Katkin, Ned Landsman, and Andrea Tyree. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Bogardus, Emory S. 1925. "Social Distance and Its Origins." *Journal of Applied Sociology* 9:216-226.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2001. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. "Racial Attitudes or Racial Ideology?: An Alternative Paradigm for Examining Actors' Racial Views." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8 (1):63-82.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2015. "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, 'Post-Racial' America." *American Behavioral Scientist* 59 (11):1358-1376.

Bramlett-Solomon, Sharon. 2007. "Interracial Love on Television: What's Taboo Still and What's Not." Pp. 97-106 in *Critical Thinking about Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media*, edited by Mary-Lou Galician and Debra L. Merskin. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bratter, Jennifer L. and Rosalind B. King. 2008. "'But Will It Last?': Marital Instability Among Interracial and Same-Race Couples." *Family Relations* 57:160-171.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483. (1954).

Charles, Camille Zubrinsky. 2003. "The Dynamics of Racial Residential Segregation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:167-207.

Child Trends Databank. 2015. "Attitudes toward Spanking." (Revised November 2015.) Retrieved November 18, 2016 (http://www.childtrends.org/indicators/attitudes-toward-spanking/).

Childs, Erica Chito. 2005. "Looking Behind the Stereotypes of the 'Angry Black Woman': An Exploration of Black Women's Response to Interracial Relationships." *Gender & Society* 19 (4):544-561.

Childs, Erica Chito. 2009. *Fade to Black and White: Interracial Images in Popular Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Choi, Kate H. and Marta Tienda. 2016. "Marriage-Market Constraints and Mate-Selection Behavior: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in Intermarriage." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Retrieved December 6, 2016. (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12346/full).

Coles, Roberta L. and Charles Green. 2010. *The Myth of the Missing Black Father*. New York: Colombia University Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.

Correspondents of the New York Times. 2001. *How Race is Lived in America: Pulling Together, Pulling Apart*. New York: Henry Holt.

Crowder, Kyle D. and Stewart E. Tolnay. 2000. "A New Marriage Squeeze for Black Women: The Role of Racial Intermarriage by Black Men." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62 (3):792-807.

Dalmage, Heather. 2000. *Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Davis, Allison, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner. 1941. *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Davis, Kingsley. 1941. "Intermarriage in Caste Societies." *American Anthropologist* 43:376-395.

Deitch, Elizabeth A., Adam Barsky, Rebecca M. Butz, Suzanne Chan, and Arthur P. Brief. 2003. "Subtle Yet Significant: The Existence and Impact of Everyday Racial Discrimination in the Workplace." *Human Relations* 56 (11):1299-1324.

Eagles, Charles W. 1986. "Introduction." Pp. ix-xii in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, edited by Charles W. Eagles. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Edmonds, Christina and Melanie Killen. 2009. "Do Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Racial Attitudes Relate to Their Intergroup Contact and Cross-Race Relationships." *Group Process & Intergroup Relations* 12 (1):5-21.

Elgar, Frank J., Wendy Craig, and Stephen Trites. 2013. "Family Dinners, Communication, and Mental Health in Canadian Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 52 (4):433-438.

Ellen, Ingrid Gould. 2000. *Sharing America's Neighborhoods: The Prospects for Stable Racial Integration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Emerson, Michael O. 2006. *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Emerson, Michael O., Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, and George Yancey. 2002. "Contact Theory Extended: The Effects of Prior Racial Contact on Current Social Ties." *Social Science Quarterly* 83 (3):745-761.

Farley, John E. and Gregory D. Squires. 2005. "Fences and Neighborhoods: Segregation in 21st-Century America." *Contexts* 4 (1):33-39.

Feagin, Joe R. 1991. "The Continuing Significance of Race: Antiblack Discrimination in Public Places." *American Sociological Review* 56:101-116.

Feagin, Joe R. 1994. "A House is Not a Home: White Racism and U.S. Housing Practices." Pp. in *Residential Apartheid: The American Legacy*, edited by Robert Bullard. Los Angeles: UCLA.

Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen. 1975. *Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Frazier, E. Franklin. 1957. *Black Bourgeoisie*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Frey, William H. 2011. "Largest Metros (Total Population of 500,000 or More): Black White Segregation Indices Sorted by 2010 Segregation." Retrieved October 23, 2016 (http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/dis/census/segregation2010.html).

Fryer, Roland G. 2007. "Guess Who's Been Coming to Dinner?: Trends in Interracial Marriage over the 20th Century." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21 (2):71-90.

Gallagher, Charles A. 2003. "Color-blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post Race America." *Race, Gender, & Class* 10 (4):22-37.

Giele, Janet Z. 2009. "Life Stories to Understand Diversity: Variations by Class, Race and Gender." Pp. 236-257 in *The Craft of Life Course Research*, edited by Glen H. Elder Jr. and Janet Z. Giele. New York: Guilford Press.

Gullickson, Aaron. 2006 "Black-White Interracial Marriage Trends,1850-2000." Paper presented at the Population Association of American annual meeting, March 2006, Los Angeles, CA.

Hammons, Amber J. and Barbara H. Fiese. 2011. "Is Frequency of Shared Family Meals Related to the Nutritional Health of Children and Adolescents?" *Pediatrics* 127 (6):1565-1574.

Herman, Melissa A. and Mary E. Campbell. 2011. "I Wouldn't, but You Can: Attitudes Toward Interracial Relationships." *Social Science Research* 42 (2):343-358.

Herring, Cedric and Charles Amissah. 1997. "Advance and Retreat: Racially Based Attitudes and Public Policy." Pp. 121-143 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s*, edited by Steven A. Tuch and Jack K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Hill, Miriam R. and Volker Thomas. 2000. "Strategies for Racial Identity Development: Narratives of Black and White Women in Interracial Partner Relationships." *Family Relations* 49 (2):193-200.

Hodes, Martha. 1997. *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hughes, Michael and Steven A. Tuch. 2003. "Gender Differences in Whites' Racial Attitudes: Are Women's Attitudes Really More Favorable?" *Social Psychology Quarterly* 66 (4):384-401.

Jacobson, Cardell K. and Bryan R. Johnson. 2006. "Interracial Friendship and African American Attitudes about Interracial Marriage." *Journal of Black Studies* 36 (4):570-584.

Johnson, Bryan R. 2004. "The Context of Contact: White Attitudes Toward Interracial Marriage." Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Johnson, Bryan R. and Cardell K. Jacobson. 2005. "Contact in Context: An Examination of Social Settings on Whites' Attitudes Toward Interracial Marriage." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68 (4):387-399.

Johnson, Monica Kirkpatrick and Margaret Mooney Marini. 1998. "Bridging the Racial Divide in the United States: The Effect of Gender." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 61 (3):247-258.

Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1993. "Trends in Black/White Intermarriage." *Social Forces* 72:119-146.

Kao, Grace and Jennifer S. Thompson. 2003. "Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Educational Achievement and Attainment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:417-442.

Keith, Verna M. and Cedric Herring. 1991. "Skin Tone and Stratification in the Black Community." *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (3):760-778.

Kennedy, Randall. 2003. *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*. New York: Pantheon.

King, Rosaling Berkowitz and Jennifer L. Bratter. 2007. "A Path toward Interracial Marriage: Women's First Partners and Husbands across Racial Lines." *The Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2):343-369.

Kohli, Martin. 1981. "Biography: Account, Text, Method." Pp. 61-75 in *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, edited by Daniel Betaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown.

Kreider, Rose M. 2000. "Interracial Marriage: Social Connection, Marital Conflict, and Divorce." Paper presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting, August 2000, Washington D.C.

Krysan, Maria and Sarah Patton Moberg. 2016. *Trends in Racial Attitudes*. University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Retrieved December 11, 2016 (http://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes#section-7).

Lewis, Amanda E. 2003. *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Lewis, Amanda E. and John B. Diamond. 2015. *Despite the Best of Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, Richard Jr. and George Yancey. 1995. "Biracial Marriages in the United States: An Analysis of Variation in Family Member Support." *Sociological Spectrum* 15 (4):443-462.

Logan, John R. Stults, Brian J., and Reynolds Farley. 2004. "Segregation of Minorities in the Two Decades of Change." *Demography* 41 (1):1-22.

Loving v. the Common Wealth of Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

Manning, Wendy D. and Pamela J. Smock. 2005. "Measuring and Modeling Cohabitation: New Perspectives from Qualitative Data. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 (4):989-1002.

Martin, Waldo E. 1998. *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston, MA: Bedford.

Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McClain, Carol Shepherd. 2011. "Family Stories: Black/White Marriage During the 1960s." *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 35 (1):9-21.

McClelland, Katherine and Erika Linnander. 2006. "The Role of Contact and Information in Racial Attitude Change among White College Students." *Sociological Inquiry* 76 (1):81-115.

McIntosh, Peggy. 1988. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Retrieved November 18, 2016 (https://www.deanza.edu/faculty/lewisjulie/White%20Priviledge%20Unpacking%20the%20Invisible%20Knapsack.pdf).

McNamara, Robert P., Maria Tempenis, and Beth Walton. 1999. *Crossing the Line: Interracial Couples in the South*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Merton, Robert K. 1941. "Intermarriage and the Social Structure: Fact and Theory." *Psychiatry* 4:361-374.

Mills, Gary B. 1981. "Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum 'Anglo' Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations." *The Journal of American History* 68 (1):16-34.

Moran, Rachel. 2001. *The Regulation of Race and Romance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Muhsam, Helmut. 1990. "Social Distance and Asymmetry in Intermarriage Patterns." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 21 (3):307-324.

Newbeck, Phyl. 2008. "*Loving v. Virginia* (1967)." In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved July 16, 2012 (http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Loving_v_Virginia_1967).

Norment, Lynn. 1985. “A Probing Look at Children of Interracial Marriage.” *Ebony* 40 (11):156-162.

Pager, Devah and Hana Shepherd. 2008. “The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:181-209.

Passel, Jeffrey S., Wendy Wang, and Paul Taylor. 2010. “Marrying Out: One-in-Seven New U.S. Marriages is Interracial or Interethnic.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Petroni, Frank A. 1971. “Teen-age Interracial Dating.” *Trans-action* 8 (11):54-59.

Pettit, Becky and Bruce Western. 2004. “Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration.” *American Sociological Review* 69 (2):151-169.

Pew Research Center. 2016. “On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart.” Retrieved December 11, 2016 (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/on-views-of-race-and-inequality-blacks-and-whites-are-worlds-apart/).

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

Qian, Zhenchao. 1997. “Breaking the Racial Barriers: Variations in Interracial Marriage between 1980 and 1990.” *Demography* 34 (2):263-276.

Qian, Zhenchao. 2005. “Breaking the Last Taboo: Interracial Marriage in America.” *Context* 4 (4):33-37.

Qian, Zhenchao and Daniel T. Lichter. 2007. “Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage.” *American Sociological Review* 72 (1):68-94.

Roberts, Sam. 2012. “Segregation Curtailed in U.S. Cities, Study Finds.” *New York Times*, January 30. Retrieved October 22, 2016 (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/31/us/Segregation-Curtailed-in-US-Cities-Study-Finds.html).

Robinson, James Lee Jr. 1980. “Physical Distance and Racial Attitudes: A Further Examination of the Contact Hypothesis.” *Phylon* 41 (4):325-332.

Romano, Renee. 2003. *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Root, Maria P.P. 2001. *Love's Revolution: Interracial Marriage*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Rosenblatt, Paul C., Terri Karis, and Richard R. Powell. 1995. *Multiracial Couples: Black and White Voices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Schuman, Howard and Michael P. Johnson. 1976. "Attitudes and Behaviors." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2:161-207.

Schuman, Howard, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo. 1985. *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schwartz, Christine R., and Robert D. Mare. 2005. "Trends in Educational Assortative Marriage from 1940 to 2003." *Demography* 42(4): 621-646.

Shelton, Beth A. and Daphne John. 1996. "The Division of Household Labor." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22:299-322.

Smedley, Audrey. 1999. *Race in North America: Origins and Evolution of a Worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Shimizu, Celine Parreñas. 2007. *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Spickard, Paul R. 1989. *Mixed Blood Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Staples, Robert. 1985. "Changes in Black Family Structure: The Conflict Between Family Ideology and Structural Conditions." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 47 (4):1005-1013.

Starrels, Marjorie E. 1994. "Gender Differences in Parent-Child Relations." *Journal of Family Issues* 15 (1):148-165.

Sue, Derald Wing, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M.B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin. 2007. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice." *The American Psychologist* 62 (4):271-286.

Tatum, Beverly D. 1997. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books.

Tischauser, Leslie V. 2012. *Jim Crow Laws*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Twine, France Winddance. 1999. "Bearing Blackness in Britain: The Meaning of Racial Difference for White Mothers of African Descent Children." *Social Identities* 5(2):185-210.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1998. *Interracial Married Couples: 1960-Present*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2004. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2004-2005*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2012. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2015. "Quick Facts: United States." Retrieved December 11, 2016 (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00).

U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. 2016. "Degrees Conferred by Race and Sex." Retrieved December 11, 2016 (https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72).

U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2016. *Crime in the United States, 2015: Uniform Crime Reports.* Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Wang, Wendy. 2012. "The Rise of Intermarriage: Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Washington Post. 2016. "Fatal Force, 2015." Retrieved November 10, 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings/).

Washington Post. 2016. "Fatal Force, 2016." Retrieved November 10, 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/).

Wilson, William Julius. 1978. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Yancey, George. 2003. *Who is White?: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Yancey, George. 2007. "Experiencing Racism: Differences in the Experiences of Whites Married to Blacks and Non-Black Racial Minorities." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38 (2):197-213.

Yancey, George and Richard Lewis. 2008. *Interracial Families: Current Concepts and Controversies*. New York: Routledge.

Zhang, Yuanting and Jennifer Van Hook. 2009. “Marital Dissolution Among Interracial Couples.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71:95-107.

Appendix: Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Schedule

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please complete the following questions by either writing in the correct information or circling the answer that best describes you.

1. **What is your current age? _____**

2. **What is your gender?**

   Male Female

3. **Which of the following races and ethnicities describe you? (Choose all that apply.)**

   American Indian, Native American, or Alaskan Native
   Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
   Black or African American
   Hispanic or Latino/Latina
   Middle Eastern
   White or Caucasian
   Other (please specify): _____

4. **What was your religion while growing up?**

   Evangelical Protestant (e.g., Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God)
   Mainline Protestant (e.g., American Baptist Churches, United Methodist Church)
   Catholic
   Jewish
   Muslim
   Non-denominational Christian
   None
   Other (please specify): _____

5. **What is your current religion?**

   Evangelical Protestant (e.g., Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God)
   Mainline Protestant (e.g., American Baptist Churches, United Methodist Church)
   Catholic
   Jewish
   Muslim
   Non-denominational Christian
   None
   Other (please specify): _____

6. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

   Less than high school
   High School or GED
   Skilled trade, vocational program
   Some college (no degree)
   Associate's degree
   College degree (4 year)
   Some graduate school or professional school (but no graduate or professional degree)
   Graduate or professional degree

7. **What is/was your current (or most recent) occupation?**

   _____

8. **What is your *individual* annual income?**

   $0 - $19,999
   $20,000 - $39,999
   $40,000 - $59,999
   $60,000 - $79,999
   $80,000 or above

9. **What is your *household* annual income?**

   $0 - $19,999
   $20,000 - $39,999
   $40,000 - $59,999
   $60,000 - $79,999
   $80,000 or above

10. **What percentage of the household chores would you say you complete?**

    _____

11. **Write in the number of hours per week you normally spend doing the following household chores.**

    Preparing meals _____
    Washing dishes/meal clean-up _____
    Cleaning house _____
    Lawn maintenance _____
    Grocery shopping _____
    Laundry, ironing _____
    Paying bills _____
    Auto maintenance _____

12. **Do you and your spouse have any children together (i.e., born to the two of you or adopted by both of you)?**

    Yes No **(If no, go to question 13)**

    If so, how many? _____

    Please indicate the age and gender of each child.

    Child #1 _____

    Child #2 _____

    Child #3 _____

    Child #4 _____

    Child #5 _____

13. **If you do not have children with your current spouse, do you plan to have children together?**

    Yes No Not sure/Don't know

Interview Schedule

LET'S GO OVER SOME OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS YOU JUST ANSWERED.

1. Do either of you have any children from previous relationships? (Probe as needed.)

2. For couples who have children together: Are any of the children you have together adopted? (Probe as needed.)

3. Are you presently expecting any children? (Probe as needed.)

4. Do you have more than five children together? (This question is just to clarify for those who list having at least five children on the demographic questionnaire.)

5. Finally, how strongly do you identify with your racial group(s)/ethnic group(s)? (If multiple racial groups/ethnicities were selected: With which of these do you most identify? (Probe as needed.)

TRANSITION: LET'S NOW TALK ABOUT SOME OF YOUR EXPERIENCES WHILE GROWING UP.

6. How would you describe your experiences with, if any, to different racial/ethnic backgrounds while you were while growing up? (Probe as needed, for example, where did respondents grow up, did respondents grow up in racially/ethnically diverse neighborhoods or attend racially/ethnically diverse schools? Also probe for experiences during adolescence.)

7. While growing up, did either of you have friends outside of your own racial/ethnic group? (Probe as needed, for example, how close respondents were to those friends.)

8. While growing up, what messages did you receive from your family and peers about whom you should marry? (e.g., the person's occupation? Class? Race?) (Probe as needed.)

9. While growing up, did either of you know any interracial married couples? (e.g., relatives, family friends, neighbors) (Probe as needed.)

10. Did you ever date outside of your own racial/ethnic group prior to marrying each other? (E.g., during high school, college) (Probe as needed.)

TRANSITION: OKAY, LET'S TALK NOW ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES GETTING TOGETHER AND GETTING MARRIED

11. When, where, and how did you two meet? (Probe as needed.)

12. How long did you date before you were married? (Probe as needed.)

13. Did you live together before you were married? If so, for how long? (Probe as needed.)

14. How did your family and friends respond when they found out you were dating someone of a different race? (Probe as needed for what their reactions were. e.g., Indifferent? Angry? Upset? Supportive?)

15. How did your family and friends respond when they found out you intended to be married? (Probe as needed for what their reactions were. e.g., Indifferent? Angry? Upset? Supportive?)

16. Did you give any thought to being an interracial married couple when you decided to get married? (Probe as needed.)

17. How long was your engagement? (Probe as needed about the engagement period.)

18. In what year did you marry? What was the process of getting married like? (Probe as needed with additional questions, for example: If you had a wedding, what was your wedding like? Who was at it? Were you worried about any racial/ethnic tensions at your wedding? Did you notice any tensions over race/ethnicity at your wedding?)

19. Where did you get married? That is, in what city?

TRANSITION: OKAY, NOW THAT WE'VE TALKED ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO YOUR MARRIAGE AND YOUR EXPERIENCES GETTING MARRIED, LET'S NOW MOVE ON TO TALKING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A MARRIED COUPLE.

20. Do you two put a lot of emphasis on the fact that you are in an interracial marriage? Is it something you give a lot of thought to or think about often? Probe as needed. Possible probes include: a. Do you see your marriage as different from that of couples of the same race/ethnicity? b. If different, in what ways is it different?

21. Starting with when you were dating and continuing to the present day, have you ever noticed any reactions from strangers when they see you together in public settings? If so, what did you notice/have you noticed about their reactions? How did/do strangers from your own racial/ethnic group respond to seeing you as a couple in public settings? Have you noticed any changes in reactions over time? (Probe as needed.)

22. Some may consider reactions or responses from others (e.g., family, friends, coworkers, even strangers) as a challenge to an interracial marriage. Do you consider those responses to present a challenge to your marriage? (Probe as needed. Possible probes include: a. Has any marital conflict occurred as a result of any challenges you have experienced as an interracial couple, that is, due to being an interracial couple? b.

How have you dealt with these challenges? c. How successful do you think you have been at negotiating these challenges?)

23. You stated earlier that your family and friends were accepting/unaccepting of your relationship. Have you noticed any changes in their attitudes toward your relationship over time? (Probe as needed.)

24. What do you see as specific successes within your marriage? (Probe as needed.)
ASK 25 AND 26 ONLY TO COUPLES WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED 10 OR MORE YEARS:

25. Has the experience of being in an interracial marriage changed over time? In your opinion, has it become easier or more difficult? (Probe as needed.)

26. Have any historical/societal/national events impacted your marriage? If so, which ones? Have they made being in an interracial marriage more challenging or less challenging? (Probe as needed.)

TRANSITION: OKAY, NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR MARRIAGE.

27. How would you describe the division of household chores in your marriage? Who does what percentage of the household chores? Who does what chores? How often are these tasks completed by each partner? (Probe as needed.)

28. Who is responsible for making major household decisions (e.g., major purchases, etc.)? (Probe as needed about whether one makes more major decisions than the other or if they equally share in the decision making process.)

(QUESTION 29 IS FOR COUPLES WITHOUT CHILDREN BUT PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN OR DON'T KNOW IF THEY WANT CHILDREN.)

TRANSITION: YOU STATED EARLIER THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE CHILDREN, BUT PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN OR THAT YOU MIGHT WANT CHILDREN:

29. How might children change things within the context of your marriage? (Probe as needed.)

(QUESTIONS 30 IS FOR COUPLES WHO HAVE CHILDREN TOGETHER OR WHO PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN TOGETHER OR DON'T KNOW IF THEY WANT CHILDREN) TRANSITION: YOU STATED EARLIER THAT YOU TWO HAD _____ CHILD(REN) TOGETHER/EXPECTING A CHILD/PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN OR MIGHT HAVE CHILDREN. OKAY, WE ARE NOW GOING TO TALK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS DEALING WITH RACE/ETHNICITY.

30. Do you ultimately feel that your child(ren) will identify with one race/ethnicity more than another? Do you prefer your child(ren) or future children identify with one race/ethnicity to the other? (Possible probes: are you in agreement about your preferences? Do your parents and other relatives agree?)

QUESTION 31 WILL BE ASKED DEPENDING ON THE AGE OF CHILD(REN) AND ONLY OF THOSE WHO ALREADY HAVE CHILDREN TOGETHER.

31. Do you think your child/any of your children identify with one race/ethnicity more than the other? (If more than one child, probe for whether or not all the children identify the same way.) With which racial/ethnicity do you think your child(ren) identifies with/identify the most? (Probe as needed; possible probes: What evidence do you see that confirms this, for example, what your child(ren) say about race/ethnicity, the racial/ethnic composition of friendship groups?)

32. Do you talk to your child(ren) about race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic identity? (Probe as needed.)

33. Do you discuss racial/ethnic discrimination or how to deal with racial/ethnic discrimination with your child(ren)? (Probe as needed.)

34. What have been the experiences of your child(ren) as a bi-racial/multi-racial/multi-ethnic child? Probe as needed; possible probes include: a. Do you think your child(ren) is (are) treated differently from other children because you are an interracial couple? b. Has (have) your child(ren) had any negative experiences being bi-racial/multi-racial/multiethnic? c. What about positive experiences?

35. Do you have a preference for the race/ethnicity of the individuals your child(ren) dates? What about the person s/he marries? (Probe as needed.)

36. Do you two differ in your child rearing techniques? If so, how so? (If they differ probe for they think that is the case and whether they differ with regard to racial/ethnic identification of the child[ren].)

TRANSITION: OKAY, WE ARE GOING TO MOVE ON NOW AND I AM GOING TO ASK YOU A QUESTION ABOUT INTERRCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE MORE GENERALLY.

37. How do you feel the media, specifically television and movies, portrays interracial couples? (Probe depending on answer. E.g., what do you see as specifically good/bad about those portrayals?)

38. Okay, we have covered all of the questions I have for you. Do you have any questions for me, or is there anything else about your marriage that you think it is important for me to know?

NOTE: INTERVIEWER WILL BE MAKING NOTE OF EACH SPOUSE'S SKIN TONE BUT WILL NOT ASK ABOUT IT.