WHEN OTHER ISN’T ENOUGH: CHALLENGING HEGEMONIC RACIAL
DISCOURSE ON INTERRACIAL INTIMACY AND MULTIRACIAL IDENTITIES

By

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This thesis is dedicated to my partner and our family. I have this conversation so our children might not have to.
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This current research examines the experiences, thoughts and concerns of
interracial couples concerning reproduction. The researcher is also interested in the
specific experiences of the individuals within interracial relationships, and how these
individual experiences shape or affect their ideas regarding reproduction. Although
literature examines the experiences of interracial couples, as of yet, none have looked
specifically towards the reproductive realm. The researcher draws from literature
addressing interracial intimacy, biracial children, and interracial adoption, as topics
directly related to the research question here. Themes drawn from recent research are
used to guide current methodology and interviewing techniques. Such themes include the
marginalization of individuals who are in interracial relationships, the experiences of
biracial children, both in private and institutional settings, as well as the controversies
surrounding interracial adoption. Research methodologies include qualitative
interviewing as well as grounded theory analysis techniques. All interviews used a semi-
structured interview guide. All of the couples spoke of experiences specific to interracial intimacy, and there is some evidence to suggest that being in an interracial couple increases awareness of racial systems that privilege whites. Most of the couples expressed concern for the experience of prospective children, as a result of being biracial. It was also important to each couple to raise their child within both cultures of their respective racial communities, often thinking in depth how to best socialize their child bilingually and biculturally.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

For years research has highlighted reproductive differences that exist across racial lines, but as of yet, little research has looked at the marginalized experience of interracial couples in conceptualizing family planning. Individuals within interracial relationships have been the targets of severe prejudice and discrimination, often resulting in rejection from the couple’s racial communities. This experience of stigma, compounded with the coexistence of differing cultural and racial experiences creates unique intricacies that researchers have ignored (Solsberry, 1994). In order to understand these intricacies it is necessary to understand the social and spatial meanings of race within the relationship and how these meanings manifest within the context of intimacy (Wright, Houston, Ellis, Holloway, & Hudson, 2003). It may be possible that these distinct racial identities and their cohesion create specific concerns for the couple in family planning processes.

Although rates of interracial intimacy are increasing (Yancey, 2002), racial discrimination continues to maintain these relationships as deviant, outside of a social norm. Often those who chose to marry interracially are labeled as problematic, or rebellious, treating intimacy across racial lines as a consequence of psychological disorder or unrest (Davidson, 1992). This experience of stigma may be extended to children produced of interracial unions, dually marginalized from both races. A growing
body of literature explores the experiences of biracial\textsuperscript{1} and multiracial children, often citing the inability of schools and other institutions to incorporate the identity and or experiences of biracial and multiracial persons into a multicultural curriculum. Does this anticipation of racial discrimination and marginalization alter the planning of reproductive activities for an interracial couple? Furthermore, how do these individuals conceptualize their own identities as an interracial couple, as well as the biracial or multiracial identity of hypothetical children? This research will explore encounters and ideas surrounding interracial intimacy and how these experiences or anticipated experiences shape how an interracial couple conceptualizes the expected event of having and raising children.

Being that biracial and multiracial children are currently the fastest growing segment of the population (Robinson 2001), it becomes urgent to incorporate the needs of biracial individuals and families into the social science literature regarding race. Historically the US racial classification system has identified stringent racial lines in identifying oneself and community. It is now necessary to change how we conceptualize race along definitions and continuums between Black and White. No longer is the idea of being one or the other adequate for discussing race and ethnicity, if it ever was. As social scientists we find ourselves left with a deficiency of language in which to speak in. Biracial and multiracial children bear the brunt of this ineptitude.

\textsuperscript{1} The terms biracial and multiracial are inadequate to discuss the heritage of the children explored here. Biracial emphasizes only two cultures, and both terms ignore all of the child’s cultures to identify them only as being from more than racial or ethnic background. It is used in this research for lack of existing expressive language to talk about these intersections of race, however the purpose of this research is to challenge this lack of language.
Challenging this system of racial classification is in essence challenging hegemonic definitions of race that strengthen US institutionalized racism and notions of White cultural supremacy. As the next section will explore, the historical significance of this classification is grounded in the US racial system, taking root in a violent history of slavery and oppression.

**Historical Background and Significance**

Throughout American history the existence of interracial intimacy has prompted controversy, fear, and in many cases hatred manifested through violence. The mixing of Whites and Non-Whites was often met with strong and irrational emotions, displayed through taboos and laws against interracial sex and marriage (Feagin, 2000). The first law against interracial sex was established in 1691 by the colony of Virginia, followed shortly after in 1692 by laws prohibiting interracial marriage, punishable by banishment (Feagin, 2000). In spite of such laws, instances of interracial marriage and sex, often resulting in children of mixed race, were apparent throughout these early colonial years, most notably throughout the years of slavery.

It was slavery that facilitated the majority of interactions and encounters between Blacks and Whites within the years of 1660 and 1860. Historical and social researchers assert this to be a period of more interracial sex between Blacks and Whites than at any time throughout American history (Kennedy, 2003). However, this assertion is based on speculation due to the difficult nature of measuring such sexual activity. Although the literature does not state the connection, this was logically accompanied by the highest instance of interracial reproduction, due to lack of contraceptive options compounded with the prevalence of interracial sex. The majority of this sex was unwanted, the result of years of exploitation and the rape of Black women at the hands of White males. These
sexual encounters were often violent, and always characterized by a power differential present between Blacks and Whites at the time (Kennedy, 2003). Although this exploitation is difficult to define as intimacy or to create parallels with voluntary decision making processes concerning reproduction, the social reaction to these sexual encounters, as well as the response to and treatment of children created from these encounters is pertinent to this research.

Upon victimization Black women were allowed no recourse with which to respond to this violence. The children of these violent sex acts were often born into slavery as a child of their mother, regardless of their White male parentage. It was not uncommon for these children to be sold, in order to avoid the discomfort arising from having Black slaves who looked amazingly similar to the White children of the slave owner and his wife (Kennedy, 2003). The children were considered Black, awarded no more White privilege than children born of two African American slaves. There is some evidence suggesting attempts of White males to provide care for these children through gifts of land or money, however legislation governing the rights of Blacks to own property often thwarted these efforts (Kennedy, 2003).

In the years after emancipation America showed a marked decline in the rates of interracial sex. Segregation at every level attempted to ensure against the racial mixing of Whites and Non-Whites. The early term of amalgamation, used to describe the intimate mixing of Whites and Non-Whites, was replaced be a more menacing term, miscegenation, meaning mistaken mixture (Hollinger, 2003). Anti miscegenation laws continued to exist, prohibiting the marriage of Whites and Blacks, as well as certain other groups of color. This system was based on a stringent racial classification scheme in
attempts to keep strong clear lines between the races. The one drop rule developed as a result of this scheme, stating that if a person were to have one drop of Black blood in them they were classified as Black, and therefore not allowed to marry individuals racially classified as White. As a result, it was impossible for a Black woman to give birth to a White child, however a White woman could give birth to a Black child (Hollinger, 2003). This historical reality is loaded with implications for the current racial classification of biracial and multiracial children to be explored later.

The introduction of new immigrant groups was problematic for this system of racial classification. European immigrants became “less ambiguously White” by becoming “more and more definitely not Black” (Hollinger, 2003). Other new immigrant groups, specifically Latino and Asians were often classified as White, Latinos more often than Asians, for the lack of other definition at the time. Upon entering a system so defined by identities of Black and White, these Asian and Latino immigrants were forcibly pushed into one of such existing spectrums. Regardless, these groups were prime targets of discrimination and racism, not being treated in accordance with their “White” classification. Due to this classification scheme, controversies and intricacies within miscegenation laws arose, often not having a definitive stance regarding marriages between people of color. This ambiguity regarding such marriages prompted controversies in the racial classification for the children of these marriages (Hollinger, 2003).

Miscegenation laws enforced harsh penalties, “…on par with incest, imposing sentences of up to ten years for adultery or fornication prohibited by reasons of race or blood” (Williams 2004). It was not until 1967 the Supreme Court case; Loving vs.
Virginia, that miscegenation laws were determined to be unconstitutional. Although this case decriminalized interracial relationships, the social stigma, discrimination towards, and fear of interracial relationships continue to exist. Enforcement of laws governing sexuality continues to demonstrate a fear and loathing of interracial relationships. The history of lynching can be traced to violence of White mobs acting on alleged assertions of a Black male making romantic or sexual advances towards a White woman. White males painted portrayals of Black males as sexual predators. In cases of a Black perpetrator and White victim, the Black male was almost always violently punished, often resulting in lynching (Takaki, 2000). These inaccurate racial portrayals of rape influence societies’ perceptions and beliefs regarding rape, often developing severe racial bias. Continuing today, Black men receive more severe sentencing recommendations than White men. In addition, victims of any race are blamed more for the rape if they had been raped inter-racially as opposed to intra-racially (George, 2001). Both Black and White defendants are found guilty more often when they are accused of raping someone of another race (Hymes, 1993).

Evidence of this discrimination and fear is clear in the current treatment of biracial or multiracial children, and the partners in such relationships. Understanding this discriminatory treatment is central to contextualizing the research question here.

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2 See Loving vs. Virginia for full case
CHAPTER 2
RECENT RESEARCH AND THEORY

Interracial Intimacy

There is a significant lack of research concerning the reproductive experiences and family planning of individuals within interracial relationships. A growing body of literature however explores the experiences of interracial couples, specific needs of biracial or multiracial children and interracial families, and the controversy surrounding interracial adoption. It is from this literature that I will attempt to create parallels upon which to infer valuable content that has implications for the current research project.

Media images in recent years have expanded to include interracial couples among others, often showing images of intimacy across racial lines. Various mainstream outlets have engaged characters in interracial relationships, and although not common, no longer unseen. Ross, a primary character of “Friends,” a hit comedy show, dated a Black woman who was a fellow PhD. Ally McBeal also crossed this racial line, accompanied by Miranda of “Sex and the City.” What is most striking about these relationships is that they do not represent a caricature like presence. African American women are often victims of stereotyping in encounters with Whites (Feagin, 2000). Historically Whites have perpetuated images of exaggerated sexuality in African Americans; often portrayed naked with exaggerated sexual organs. "The White world drew the Black woman's body as excessively and fragrantly sexual, quite different from the emerging ideology of purity and modesty which defined the White women's body" (Feagin, 2000: 113). These examples were not fraught with images of over-sexualization, promiscuity, or deviance.
In fact in all mentioned examples, the individual was portrayed as educated and successful, much different from stereotypical images of African Americans too often portrayed on television and in movies. Although such shows may continue to be critiqued in how few and far between these relationships occurred, it continues to be worthwhile to examine those available.

Although these images seem promising, there is evidence suggesting the American public is not quite “ready” to see even the mere suggestion of interracial sexual contact. Public outrage flared after the 2004 Superbowl, in which Justin Timberlake, a White pop icon, ripped the bustier of Janet Jackson, a Black female r& b artist. Although much of the attention was blanketed in discussions of overt sexuality in the public arena of the Superbowl, many suggested there was more to understanding the backlash. Critical questions were being asked, what if they were both White, or both Black, would the American public be so offended? These concerns proved again legitimate after a second incident when “Desperate housewife,” Nicolette Sheridan, jumped naked on Terrell Owens, Eagles wide receiver, during a Monday night football commercial on ABC. Like history repeating itself, accusations of inappropriate sexual displays went flying. Again the commercial suggested an interracial sexual relationship. The few interracial sex scenes we are confronted with on the big screen usually show images of violent rape-like encounters, passed off as consensual sex. The scenes are not the love-making Hollywood

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1 Friends and Sex in the City were often critiqued for their lack of diversity on the show. All of the primary characters throughout all running seasons were White. Dave Chapelle in his comedy show asked, “when are they going to get a Black friend?”
scenes of intra-racial couples, but instead the violence and shock value of these scenes reinforce the taboos associated with interracial sex. ²

Recent statistics cite that 56.5% of all African Americans, 55.4% of Latino Americans, and 57.1% of Asian Americans have dated interracially. Much lower is the rate at which Whites date interracially, 35.7%(Yancey, 2002). These statistics do sound encouraging. However, it is impossible to make comparisons between those who are willing to date across racial and ethnic lines and those who are willing to marry or reproduce across such lines, as these activities are seen as much more long term and serious. Dating in America is often seen as casual and not necessarily linked to marriage (Yancey, 2002). A survey of 620 never married college students reported that one fourth of the students had dated a person of another race and almost 50% were open to the possibility of dating interracially (Knox, Zusman, Buffington, & Hemphill, 2000).

The national frequency of interracial marriage has been estimated at about 2000 per year, being 1 out of every 1200 marriages (Solsberry, 1994). Whites are significantly more likely to marry persons of ethnic origin other than African American, suggesting that these unions are significantly more stigmatized than other interracial relationships (Solsberry, 1994). This however ignores the differences between the experiences of Black Americans and ethnic minorities explored in growing fields of research explaining ideas of ethno-racism. This idea of ethno-racism emphasizes the racism towards Latinos and other immigrants that is unique in its history of colonization and racism based on language and culture (Martinez 1998).

² For examples, see Monster’s Ball (2002) or Alexander (2004).
While it is clear that rates of interracial marriage are increasing yet we lack the dialogue in which to explore this. The majority of theories addressing interracial marriage and relationships are infused with racial bias, many reflecting the disdain or hostility present in society towards such relationships. Such theories suggest that those who choose to marry interracially have ulterior motives in these decisions, that these decisions somehow differ from those who choose marry within their own race. Proponents of these theories attempt to display pathological deviance, or abnormal levels of rebellion present in those who choose to marry interracially (Davidson, 1992). Although there is no empirical evidence supporting that individuals within interracial relationships are unstable or overly rebellious, these ideas permeate not only public opinion, but also clinical applications within the realm of counseling or therapeutic approaches to interracial coupling.

Many interracial couples experience feelings of social isolation through work, family, and leisure. The majority of this social isolation is reported as being linked to experiences of racism, creating discomfort for the couple when participating in leisure activities in public places. This discomfort often caused distinct decision making processes of the couple prior to engaging in such activities (Hibbler & Shinew 2002). This evidence of a distinct decision making process when choosing or planning leisure activities suggests support for the hypothesis in the current study, that interracial couples will be faced with additional concerns that will influence their ideas and conceptualizations regarding reproduction, than those couples who are part of intra-racial couples.
Further demonstrating this experience of isolation is the rejection and hostility felt by interracial couples from their families, magnified by the distaste of possibly having a biracial or multiracial grandchild. This hostility often decreased over time, ironically finding resolution in the birth of children. Individuals as part of interracial couples also report the loss of friendships over such relationships. These friendships are often replaced over time by associations with other interracial couples (Luke & Carrington, 2000). Another type of estrangement includes workplace experiences manifested as prejudice and racism from coworkers who do not approve of the relationship, as well as difficulties finding jobs. Interracial relationships challenge attempts to locate homogeneous definitions of race, thus creating a type of third space in which race matters to the experience of the couple (Luke & Carrington, 2000). This third space, or over-awareness of racial issues may distinctly shape the experiences of the couple in the reproductive realm.

Couples share a feeling of involuntarily shouldering the burden of a political statement. A recent article that appeared in *Off Our Backs* traces one woman’s experience as a White woman in love with a Black man…

…when it comes time for us to leave our own personal universe and become part of the world around us, it is as if our transparent partnership is instantly colored in shades burned with meaning and legacy. Suddenly we must process the inevitable assumption by hostesses at restaurants and ticket takers at movie theaters that we are not together. We are forced to let go of one another’s hands repeatedly as we walk down the street, because in the quick, perhaps unconscious judgement of our fellow New Yorkers we are two separate entities, fair game to weave in between. With the parallel stares I get in his neighborhood and he gets in mine, we are reminded over and over again that we are inherently politicized; even in the intimate gesture of a kiss goodbye or a hand on my back, we are bound into making a public statement. (42: Martin 2004)

Carmen Luke argues in Feminist Issues that perhaps even White women in interracial relationships embody a foreign place on a racial continuum, “located in
particular sets of social relationships and socio-cultural practices which White women and children in monoracial White families do not experience” (Luke, 1994: 50). These experiences however are not comparable to the “colonized” and “othered” racial experiences of women of color. She does assert however that White women in interracial families “daily negotiate a range of conflicting and contradictory identity politics hinged on the categories of gender and race” (Luke, 1994: 50). Perhaps it may be inferred that being seen as intimately linked to a person of color, or parenting children of color may actually somehow tarnish one’s White privilege.3 These politics of identity are complicated by the complexities of racial identity.

The large influx of immigrants to the US over the past century has forced the US system of racial classification and racism to adjust. No longer appropriated to simply a Black White continuum, ethnicity, nationality, and language have become standards upon which new modes of racial classification are created. Gerald Torres (1998) explores the way in which ethnicity becomes translated to a question of race in US society. An ethnic category is produced for the incoming immigrants, which then becomes translated into a racial classification (Torres 1998). Other explorations of this racialization locate concepts of ethno-racism as new standards by which the US discriminates, shifting its system to not only incorporate a rejection of Blackness, but also include issues of culture, language and country of origin (Aranda & Rebollo-Gil 2004).

Although the US racial classification system utilizes umbrella terms of race to identity racial and ethic groups, it is necessary to note the racial differences within these

groups. For example, although the US has created racial categories such as Latino and Asian, these categories include within them many different national and racial identities.

For example, within umbrella terms an interethnic relationship may be a relationship between someone who is Japanese and Chinese. Even within national identities there may be interracial dating, for example a Black Puerto Rican man and a White Puerto Rican women. The racial classification system of the US tends to ignore these differences and intricacies of race creating the appearance of one-dimensional categories, White and Non-White persons.

**Biracial and Multiracial Identities**

Directly related to the reproductive experiences of interracial couples’ is the treatment of biracial and multiracial children in the United States today. This experience seems to be located within two realms, the first one being the biracial or multiracial child as an individual and their experiences of being identified as biracial or multiracial. The second realm being the relation of this child to the parent, for example looking racially similar to one or no parents, and being identified as the product of interracial coupling. Biracial and multiracial children are the fastest growing segment of children in the United States today, challenging current trends of racial categorization and assignments of social stigmas (Robinson, 2001). Current controversy surrounds issues of classification for biracial and multiracial individuals as it relates to census bureau racial classification, as well as provisions within affirmative action type legislation as to its application for persons who are biracial and multiracial (Perlmann, 1997). The 2000 Census was the first ever to offer a *multiracial* option when selecting race supplementing the existing option of *other*. Seven million people classified themselves as multiracial, highlighting the need for such an inclusion (Schmitt, 2001). “A society that has policed the color line
with terror now registers a more relaxed fascination with the crossing of that line, even widespread acceptance of that crossing” (Hollinger, 2003). Popular culture has even cited examples of “mixed race” celebrities, for example Tiger Woods, as America’s son. This idea is often critiqued however in its ignorance of the specific differences between racial identities and the historical significance of these differences (Yu, 2003). In addition, this idea ignores the continued racism and discrimination that biracial and multiracial individuals experience as a result of their “mixed race” status. On December 17th, 2004, Essie Mae Washington-Williams announced at a press conference that she is the illegitimate daughter of Strom Thurmond, former North Carolina senator and segregationist. This child was the daughter of a 16-year old maid that worked in the house of his parents. After she gave birth, Essie was sent away to live with her aunt and uncle (Tresniowski et al. 2004). Although Thurmond represented fanatic like resistance towards accepting Blacks into White society, for example, “All the bayonets in of the army cannot force the Negro into our homes” he was quoted at a 1948 anti-civil rights rally, rumors circulated for years that he was the father of an illegitimate biracial child. After her first public announcement of this parentage, newspapers repeatedly referred to the story as Black woman claims Strom Thurmond to be her father. It was not until Thurmond’s family acknowledged the relationship that papers began referring to Essie as biracial. This perhaps reflects that the label of “biracial” in US application is indeed a social label rather than actual biological heritage. In addition, the term seems to be used to refer to the children of recent interracial couplings, specifically when living in a country in which most histories can be traced to biracial and multi-racial backgrounds (Williams 2004).
Interviews with biracial and multiracial individuals have uncovered feelings of not belonging; feeling like faceless individuals whose mixed heritage is not recognized or represented. Often the respondents told of being forced to identify with one racial category, some governed by ideas of “if you are not White, you are something else” or “you are not this, you are not that, and you are certainly not White” (Cruz-Jansen, 1999). In addition the respondents reported being taught distrust by parents as a strategy of survival, or being raised as American Whites if they were physically able to fit in. Being raised as American Whites was a direct result of the parent wanting the best treatment possible for their children in a racist society in which Whites are awarded preferential treatment (Cruz-Jansen, 1999). In observations of preschool age children, the stigmatization of biracial and multiracial children as different is already apparent. Biracial and multiracial children are often submitted to name-calling, pokes regarding the different races of the child’s parents, or the refusal to identify the child with the parent as a result of different skin colors. This abuse is not perpetrated only by other students, but as well from teachers and counselors. This is often a result of their refusal to recognize the child’s “mixed race” heritage (VanAusdale & Feagin, 2001).

The incorporation of biracial and multiracial children into educational programs is a common theme throughout educational literature and school counseling literature. Studies cite the necessity to educate counselors on the specific needs and experiences of biracial and multiracial children (Wardle, 2000) (Harris, 2002) (Herring, 1992) (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). This literature suggests the installation of multiracial curriculums (Wardle, 2000) as well as increased awareness, communication, and
exposure of school counselors and students to multiracial and multiethnic experience (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001) (Herring, 1992) as pathways towards the inclusion of biracial and multiracial identities.

**Interracial Families and Adoption**

The treatment of biracial and multiracial children may have direct implications for the decision making process within interracial couples regarding reproduction. The prospect of having a biracial or multiracial child could spark increased awareness about racial issues, increased child visions in attempting to interpret the possible experiences of a child as a result of being biracial or multiracial, in addition to exploring overemphasized socialization strategies designed to prepare the child for possible experiences of racism. Instances of interracial adoption suggest it is necessary for parents who are of different racial and/or ethnic groups from their children to compensate for this difference. There is controversy as to whether this compensation is possible. This controversy is most obviously manifested in discussions surrounding interracial and trans-national adoption.

Child welfare professionals have long promoted the idea of racial matching in adoption due to concerns that trans-racial placements are detrimental to child’s well being, adjustment, and racial and ethnic identity (Brooks, Barth, Bussiere & Patterson, 1999). The over-representation of children of color within the foster care system however created a necessity to review this prevailing idea of racial matching and its long reaching implications. African American children typically remain in foster care twice as long as White American children (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002), composing 42% of all children currently in foster care. Approximately 59% of children awaiting adoption
are children of color, prompting the placement of these children into White families (DeHaymes & Simon, 2003).

In 1994 The Multiethnic Placement Act was passed in order to end racial and ethnic matching in adoption proceedings. Shortly after in 1996 the provisions on Removal of Barriers to interethnic adoption was passed, attempting to strengthen this elimination of racial matching. The primary goal of this legislation was to increase the number of children of color who are adopted, as well as decrease the amount of time that children of color spend in the social welfare system before being adopted (Brooks et. al. 1999).

Although MEPA and IEP are removing the barriers set against interracial adoption, they have offered little resources in the area of supporting families who choose to adopt interracially. Interviews with both parents and children of these families yielded specific results as to the experiences of the family and the needed support systems. Participants report mixed responses from family members, as well as concern regarding their child or family’s ability to succeed or be a part of community. Some children experience taunting from peers and many are unable to form bonds with the cultural community of their own race. These children also express being forced to choose a racial identity by peers, either their own or their adoptive families’ (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002).

Parents report minimal support from social workers when attempting to adopt trans-racially and a lack of resources when attempting to learn about child’s race or culture. An awareness of race and racism seemed to be a prevailing theme. Many of the parents were aware of racial issues prior to adopting, while others began to encounter
racial issues through being the parent of a child of color (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002).

The issues encountered by adoptive parents who choose to adopt interrationally are similar to those involved in interracial reproduction. In many cases the child would appear to be of a visibly different race than the parents, generating possible questions and stigma regarding the relationship. In addition biracial and multiracial children report similar taunting to that experienced by children in interracial adoptive homes, often being forced to identify with one race or ethnicity.

Leading the opposition towards interracial adoption, The National Association of Black Social Workers has issued statements in support of racial matching (Hollingsworth, 1999). In November of 1972 the NASBW passed a resolution reading in part

Black children should be placed only with Black families, whether in foster care or adoption. Black children belong physically, and psychologically, and culturally in Black families in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future. Human beings are the products of their environment and develop their sense of values, attitudes and self-concepts within their own family structure. Black children in White homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as Black people.

This opposition has not been restricted to NASBW but has been echoed in part by social work practices over the past 30 years. Ideas regarding the inability of White families in raising children of color stem from the absence of racial socialization present for the children. African American families have developed unique methods of socialization for both counteracting societal pressures by exposing their children to accurate and positive representations of African American people and their history as well warning them of the racial dangers apparent in being a person of color in a racist society (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon 2002).
These concerns may mirror those possibly experienced by interracial couples in raising a child who will be not exclusively of either partners’ racial or ethnic demographic, but instead in which race may take on a new dimension recreating the child as biracial or multiracial. Socialization processes as well as institutional treatment of both the children and parents in interracial adoptive families may provide insight into the racial negotiations and concerns present concerning reproduction within interracial relationships.

As outlined through the literature, the nature of interracial relations in America and related issues has been characterized by controversy, combined with a prominent lack of understanding and fair treatment. This reality suggests a differential between the reproductive perceptions of interracial and intra-racial couples. This expected differential drives this current research to fill a gap in the existing body of literature in an effort to bring recognition to the concerns and experiences of interracial couples within the reproductive realm. The researcher hypothesizes that those involved in interracial couples will partake in a distinct conceptualization process when deciding to reproduce, fraught with the societal implications imposed upon the union. Indicative of this process may be increased envisioning of one’s child, negotiations of one’s own and their partner’s racial and ethnic identities, as well as an increased perception of the racial dynamic present in reproducing interracially.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Symbolic interaction refers to the interaction taking place between two persons, in which each individual interprets and defines the action of the other and adjusts their own behavior accordingly. It is this process of indication, interpretation, reflection, projection, and construction, that shapes the behaviors of individuals (Blumer, 1969).
This framework will allow a foundation upon which to build how individuals identify themselves within interracial relationships, and how their actions and decisions are constructed through their partners as well as societal reactions to such intimacy.

Building upon this symbolic interactionist approach, Stryker recognizes structures that exist independent of individuals that work to constrain the actions of these individuals. This approach takes into consideration the social structures that designate interracial intimacy as deviant, thus influencing the five processes shaping behavior (Stryker, 1980). Elaborating further on this idea, Bonilla-Silva suggests the presence of not only a larger structural component, but as well a larger ideological component that dictates racist attitudes within society. He expands on Allport’s suggestion of 3-stage formation of racist attitudes; prejudice- attitude- discrimination, and insists that we must look beyond only the individual interaction and attitudes towards a permeating ideological component that infiltrates how people form racist ideologies as well as racial identities (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). It is from here this research will recognize the large ideological racist presence in society and recognize this presence as real influence affecting how the couples shape their own identities as well as how this shapes their concern about childbearing.

Even in working within an interactionist framework, it is imperative to realize the structural implications of race. Although race is culturally constructed it carries with it “severe structural consequences.”

Conscious and deliberate actions have institutionalized group identity in the United States, not just through the dissemination of cultural stories, but also through systematic efforts from colonial times to the present to create economic advantages through a possessive investment in Whiteness for European Americans. Studies of culture to far removed from studies of social structure leave us with inadequate explanations for understanding racism and inadequate remedies for combating it. (Lipsitz 2002: 62)
As Lipsitz emphasizes, the structural manifestations of racism must be recognized in order to make a move to towards challenging inequalities of race. Although symbolic interactionists have paid sizeable attention to the construction of race, class, and gender, their constructionist and negotiation of meaning approach for the most part does not do well to understand inequalities and power (Hollander & Howard 2000). Therefore, critical race theory is used in this research to supplement SI marking the importance of institutionalized racist structures in the stigmatization of interracial couples as well as the ignorance and resistance to biracial or multiracial identities.

Critical Race Theory asserts that historically race has been an organizing principle of society and continues to be. This challenges multicultural color-blind type ideas that downplay the importance of race, and deny the deep infiltration of racism. This perspective refuses to ignore the significance of colonization, immigration, and acculturation, three primary realities to this research. In addition it challenges monolithic racial identities recognizing various social positions, identities, and loyalties of race (Delgado & Stefancic 2001). Racism is not constructed as the exception but rather a deep permeating issue of systematic racism.

White Supremacy is something so ingrained in society that it becomes almost invisible. This leads to the realization that many “empirical theories” regarding race actually reflect “socially constructed ideas of reality that socially and materially benefited Whites over those of color” (McDowell & Jeris 82: 2004).

This emphasizes a need for racially marginalized persons to share their stories, to challenge existing narratives using their own situated voice (Delgado & Stefancic 2001). This premise is the foundation of the interviews conducted in this research; to take
conceptualizing interracial relationships and biracial or multiracial children out of the hands of socially biased theorists, most who construct ideas from a perspective of Whiteness and problematize these relationships as deviant for the purpose, whether unconsciously or consciously, of reinforcing a racist hierarchal system. Instead we hear the needs, experiences, desires and motivations of these individuals, and work from this starting point to develop racial dialogue that benefits these people and their children.
The researcher recruited 11 participants of diverse racial backgrounds between the ages of 20 and 40 who currently identify themselves as being involved in a committed interracial intimate relationship. Although the study focuses partly on the concerns and intricacies of biracial or multiracial identities, the researcher addressed these intricacies through conceptualizations of interracial couples in anticipated parenting situations. The study included seven women and four men. One respondent identified herself as Afro-Caribbean, four as White, one as half Puerto Rican and White, one as Chinese, one as Afro-Asian, three as Puerto Rican, although within these three, one identified his race as White and the other two as Latino. This is somewhat simplifying the process by which most identified their racial and ethnic background, which will be discussed at length in the findings of the research. This is not a representative or comprehensive sample of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Future research may expand upon this sample, representing additional groups and possibly focusing on specific groups. Some of those identifying themselves within interracial couples also identified themselves as biracial or multiracial. In this case the active interview allowed the participant to explore not only how they conceptualize themselves as the parent of a biracial or multiracial child in the future, but as well how their own experiences within an interracial household shaped these perceived experiences. The researcher recognizes that their own experiences with identity can not be separated from their experiences in their own relationship. In
addition, how they came to that identity may relate to anticipated experiences with their own children.

It is important to the nature of the study for those interviewed to be involved in committed relationships due to the types of data planned to be collected. In this study, all of the participants were currently involved in heterosexual couples. Although future research plans to include same sex couples, I felt that this current project as it stands was not equipped to comprehend how same sex couples conceptualize children and marginalization, being that the majority of related literature is drawn from fields of racial and ethnic studies. Therefore I would not be able to critically understand nor do justice to the voices of these participants.

I focused primarily on committed relationships, rather than casual dating relationships. Because the research examines the ideas, concerns and experiences associated with reproduction, it is ideal to isolate relationships in which these conversations may have occurred either between partners or within a partner’s consciousness. None of the participants currently had children at the time of the study. All of the couples had been together for longer than one year. Of the participants 3 were married, 2 engaged and 6 identified their relationship as a committed dating relationship. Based on this and using the idea of the active interview, at times the interviews developed in different directions dependent upon the individuals’ experiences and their experience of commitment. All included participants reported conversations with their partner about having children, although not all participants were sure that they wanted to have children. Neither of these were requisites for participation. When possible, both partners were interviewed separately.
Being that this study is of an exploratory nature and no previous research has looked at how within the context of interracial relationships individuals conceptualize reproduction, the sample will include various types of interracial relationships, not focused primarily on relationships between two specific racial or ethnic classifications. This may become problematic in the dissonance between the way in which the society defines race and the way that an individual defines their own race. Although I understand that using institutional definitions of race ignores ethnicity and the intricacy of one's identity, at times it was necessary to apply such umbrella terms as Latino and Asian in accordance with U.S. census racial and ethnic classifications when classifying the participants. However, these terms were only when the participant used these terms to identify themselves. Research suggests that, for instance, the experiences of an interracial couple who are both of Asian descent, but differing in their country of origin, may experience less isolation and stigmatization than a couple who is of a visible racial or ethnic difference (e.g. a couple in which one partner is of Asian descent and the other partner is of Latino descent).

This is not to suggest, however, that I ignored the differences of race within these terms or histories of national groups that affect how they function within and conceptualize themselves within the context of an interracial relationship. For example, class, color, and political backgrounds of country of origin are expected to shape such interactions and the researcher was sensitive to these complexities in the analysis of data. Recognizing this complexity was necessary for thoughtful and critical analysis of the data. Although I have included these umbrella terms of race, at no time during analysis or discussion was the participant identified only as Latino, or Asian, ignoring their
country(ies) of origin. In addition, these terms were only used when the participant themselves identified as this race.

For the purposes of this research racial and ethnic classification was through the self-identification of the participants. Following initial interviews the racial and ethnic classification system utilized evolved based on the insights of the participants as the researcher's perception of race and ethnicity expanded to incorporate the stated racial and ethnic identities of individual participants. At no time did I assign a race to any participant.

Recruitment consisted entirely of snowball sampling, in which participants were recruited through their associations with other interracial couples. Many interracial couples form associations and friendships with other interracial couples replacing prior friendships that may have suffered as a result of their current relationship status (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002). Initial contacts were made through prior associations with individuals who are currently involved in interracial relationships. Flyers were also designed for recruitment purposes, however for the target sample number for this paper this recruitment tool was not utilized. Future participants will also be recruited thorough the posting of flyers around common community areas in Gainesville. These common areas include shopping centers, community centers, as well as office type settings. The flyer states the criteria for participation as being involved in a committed interracial relationship as well as being over the age of 18. My contact information, email and phone number are displayed on the flyer. Upon contact, the potential participant will be informed of the nature of the study and subjected to a short screening interview ensuring that the potential participant falls within the target population discussed earlier.
Contingent upon this screening, the potential participant will then be asked if they are still interested in participating, and if so, I will collect contact information in order to set up a face to face interview at a later time. See appendix for flyer.

The use of only snowball sampling may have biased the sample due to possible similarities between networks such as SES, occupation, and education. For example all but one participant had completed at least two years of college. It is reasonable to expect that this affects how they perceive themselves and what environments they are subjected to.

**Interviews**

Upon recruitment, arrangements were made to conduct in depth, face to face interviews. The interviews used a semi-structured format following a predetermined interview guide. Interviews took place in multiple settings depending on the participant's convenience. Such settings included homes of the participants, participants' work offices, coffee shops, and UF offices because they were accessible. All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participant, and all tapes will be destroyed within one year of the interview to protect the participant. All interviews were kept confidential and pseudonyms have been used to identify each participant. Interviews ranged between one half-hour and one hour.

During the interview the participants were encouraged to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences through detailed narratives. Although an interview guideline was being used deviations from the interview guide were expected and actually occurred. I altered the interview guide based on both the participants' and my own perceptions of the quality of the interview, as well as to incorporate critical issues that arose through the interview process.
Being that race was a primary aspect of each interview, it was necessary to situate myself as the researcher. As a White female conducting these interviews at times I noticed some hesitation of respondents, specifically people of color, to speak openly about some issues of race. Often they skirted around such terms as racism and discrimination. Language such as this would not enter the interview until I specifically used these terms, for example, if I labeled an experience as discrimination. Although many would critique this work for offering participants information regarding my personal anti-racist ideologies, at times I felt it was necessary to do so. Because we were discussing issues that are not often discussed cross racially, I needed to create a safe space, one in which I communicated to participants my belief in the importance of race, and the legitimacy of their experience. For years feminist methodologies have critiqued the idea of a neutral investigator or interviewer, recognizing that this treats to a large degree the participant as a scientific subject or data, and is especially inadequate when understanding the experience of marginalized or silenced persons. Also, “no presentation of self is completely neutral” (Frankenberg 1993, 31). Prior to even speaking, the respondents have for themselves located in me a list of characteristics; and these characteristics are simultaneously labeled as either different than or same as themselves (Frankenberg, 1993).

In addition, at times I also discussed with participants that I am in an interracial relationship. This facilitated discussion and opened up the conservation. It also provided valuable probes. Again this information was shared to increase the comfort level of participants. I needed the participants to know that contrary to the majority of questions they have answered before in regards to their relationship, I was in no way placing
judgment upon, nor problematizing them in any way. It was extremely important that the participants understood the motivation of this research was to expand and change existing ideologies about race, not to reinforce the stigma associated with interracial relationships.

This however does not mean that I offered opinions or judgments about their statements. When analyzing race talk it seems important to understand the participants’ perceptions of race, not to assess whether or not these perceptions are correct. For example, one respondent, a White woman, expressed in our interview that she did not believe racism still existed outside of isolated instances. This was not the opinion nor findings of my research, but this perception was not challenged. This example is used to highlight that although my personal experiences were at times shared to create rapport and safe space, the respondent was not led or judged in their statements.

The participants were not offered any compensation for their participation and each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent form prior to beginning the interview.

The interview guideline provided an arena for the participant to discuss their experiences in being part of an interracial couple and how these experiences have impacted their ideas and decisions regarding reproduction. All interviews began by asking the participant to self identify their race or ethnicity and asking them to identify their partners’ race or ethnicity. Based on the individual, at times this identification was followed or pre-empted by a long process. Most did not offer one word or one sentence racial identification. The only four who did were those who identified as White. This highlights how important it was for the researcher to consider the complexities and intricacies of race and identity.
I then asked participants about their experiences being in an interracial relationship. Specific questions highlighted family experiences, work experiences, experiences with friends, and experiences within public settings. How much time was spent on each of the mentioned areas depended entirely upon the individuals’ responses, each respondent having extremely different experiences, and each assigned varying levels of importance to these experiences. Following the participants’ description of their individual experiences, I asked them to share their thoughts about having children, and decisions made about reproduction. This topic was approached from an individualistic perspective concerning their own feelings, as well as from a relational perspective concerning discussions or decisions that have occurred between the participant and their current or past partners. Included in this discussion were the racial and ethnic factors involved in these ideas or discussions, and how the racial ethnic composition of their relationship has affected their thoughts and outcomes. The major research questions broached through this research are

What are the individual and relational experiences of interracial couples?

How has being in an interracial couple affected where the couple has chosen to live or how and with whom the couple has chosen to socialize?

How do these experiences shape or affect a couple's feelings towards reproduction and their decisions surrounding reproduction?

What are the specific concerns that arise for the couple in conceptualizing the possibility of interracial reproduction? For example:

* Integration of cultures

* Intricacies of raising a biracial or multiracial child
* Family and friends acceptance issues

The interview concluded with the researcher asking each participant for suggestions as to what may be important to ask or discuss in future interviews, as well as if there are any topics or concerns that they feel they would like to share that had not been touched on during the interview. (Refer to appendix A for full interview guide.)

**Analysis**

Following each interview I transcribed the interview verbatim using the audio-tapes. Each transcription was identified only using pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participant. The transcriptions were typed in double-spaced format to allow space to make notes and code directly on the transcripts. Immediately after each interview, I transcribed interview notes based on the setting, appearance, physical language and location of the participant, information that could not be captured on the audio-tape.

After transcription each interview was read multiple times to identify common themes throughout. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, the process began by coding incidents within the data into categories. Analysis was not begun with a predetermined coding scheme. This is integral to the process of qualitative research to ensure that the coding scheme is created by the data. As analysis continued data were coded into themes that occurred several times throughout analysis. This coding occurred within the margins of each transcription, using identifying characteristics of the theme that had been noted. By utilizing a constant comparison method the analysis uncovered theoretical properties of each category. In uncovering these theoretical ideas the originally identified categories were combined to form higher order concepts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
This coding process consisted of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Once open coding identified categories, axial coding was used to find connections between categories. At times, open and axial coding occurred simultaneously. When certain categories were found to be undeveloped the researcher again used open coding to identify other elements of categories. Once the links between categories were established creating concepts, selective coding was used to contextualize the data. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Identifying major themes throughout based on basic categories highlighted the concerns and experiences of each couple within the reproductive realm. Saturation occurred after each transcription was read multiple times and the researcher felt that all possible categories and themes had been extracted from the data (Glasser, 1967). After saturation has occurred the conclusions and themes identified were then compared to existing literature exploring interracial intimacy, expanding this literature by examining specifically the reproductive experience.
CHAPTER 4
A “SIMPLE” QUESTION OF RACE

For many of the participants racial classification was not the simple check one type identification of the US racial system. In fact, all of the participants, except for those who identified their race as White, did not use one word or one sentence US racial labels to identify their race or ethnicity.

Some identified their race or ethnicity as their country of origin, others through an intricate connection between skin color and nationality. Many of the respondents challenged the idea of being placed under umbrella terms by defining themselves in their own language. Julia, a dark-skinned Dominican woman, located her own racial identity in the following manner:

It’s interesting you know, I used to mark Hispanic…but recently in most forms that I have needed to fill out, have a feature, the option “other” so I’m taking advantage of that. And I’m claiming the identity that I really have, which is Afro-Carribean. So I like to describe myself as Afro-Carribean.

Julia’s dialogue represents a type of resistance to hegemonic ideas of race, claiming the “identity that I really have” rejecting the imposed racial label of Hispanic or Latino.

On the other hand, Paul, a light skinned Puerto Rican man born and raised on the Island told me: “I define my race by the color of my skin” and his ethnicity by, “Where I’m from, Puerto Rico.” When I asked him if he considers himself Latino he responded, “yeah, I do, but if somebody asks for my race I’d say White, cause that’s the color of skin.”
Interestingly, although Paul identified his race as White, his fiancé, Melissa, labeled Paul’s race as “Hispanic.” Melissa identified herself as White American. This may represent the disconnect between how race is identified in the US and how it is constructed in Latin America. In Puerto Rico Paul is White, Latino is only used to identify himself as part of a larger Latin American community. However, in the US, where Melissa has been socialized on ideas of race, Latino has come to represent a racial category that has little to do with skin color and everything to do with language, culture and conceptions of immigration.

John, who is both African American and Filipino, identified himself according to all aspects of his background:

(I’m) Half African American, half Filipino. My mom is Filipino, my dad was born here, he’s African American. So, to identify myself, I’m a mixed person, I’m African American and Asian, so Afro-Asian.

His use of the term Afro-Asian, as opposed to simply biracial, highlights his desire recognize his racial and ethnic background, not simply the fact that he is from more than one racial heritage. Using terms such as biracial in the absence of more adequate language ignores the specific heritage and background of an individual. In fact, it highlights only that they are “mixed race”, making their experience one dimensional. To more critically challenge limited racial classification, we must recognize complete identities, such as John does in his terminology. It is this language that needs to be developed into discussions of race in order to incorporate biracial and multiracial people.
Consistent with the literature, many respondents voiced a concern with or shared their perceptions of treatment by others. The degree to which each individual felt marginalized or perceived discrimination and racism varied greatly between participants. Some reported not experiencing any discrimination; others found this treatment inescapable at times.

The perceptions of outsiders were discussed at length during the interview. Questions such as “how do you feel with your partner in public?” and various additional probes illuminated the individuals awareness of others reactions to them and their partner. A few themes arose through the analysis of these dialogues.

**Perceptions of Otherness**

Consistent with the literature, some described feeling as though people, “thought they knew something about them.” Joanna, a White woman who is currently involved in a committed relationship with Bryan, an African American man, described this impression:

…and sometimes I feel like people look at us and they think they know something about me, and they think they know something about him. But they'll jump into the stereotypical ideas about interracial couples. Like, they'll assume that I'm just some, you know, wussie White girl who takes a lot of shit, and like, will do anything to please her man. Really sort of, what's the word I'm looking for? Really sort of, you know, submissive in the relationship. And they'll assume that he's sort of a "Tom." Doesn't really care about, you know, his race. He's not, like he has self-hate issues, like race issues. So that kind of bothers me. 'Cause, you know, I don't know that people are thinking that, but I can only assume that people are thinking that sometimes.
Joanna resented this idea of her and her partner being judged in terms of stereotypical ideas of interracial couples. Notice also she recognizes that she doesn’t “know” that people are perceiving her this way, but she assumes it. It is important here not to assess how correct or incorrect her observation might be, but instead her perceptions of this stigma. “The interest is in how the how the effect of truth is created in discourse and how certain discursive mobilizations become powerful- so powerful that they are the orthodoxy, almost entirely persuasive, beyond which we can barely think” {Wetherell, 2004: 14}.

Julia also experienced this pigeon-holing. She and partner met while he was working in the Dominican Republic, Julia’s homeland. The political, economic, and cultural history between the US and the Dominican Republic placed legacy on their shoulders. Julia discussed the mixed experiences she and her partner had because of being in an inter-ethnic, inter-racial couple in her homeland:

…we meet in the Dominican Republic and married there. So, it was an interesting experience because you know on the one hand, being linked to a White American, in the (Dominican Republic), could be good for you, meaning that you can have a higher status… On the other hand, in other environments, it’s just the opposite. Because, for a lot of reasons. For some people they may think that I’m with this American just for the status, just because I want a Visa to come to the United States. Or just because I’m not nationalist enough, you know “these Americans have invaded us, twice, occupied the country; so what are doing?”

Julia’s relationship takes on a political meaning, leaving her between two contradicting ideologies of race and power. In addition, her motivations for being with a White American are construed as somehow different than motivations of those who are intra-racial couples. For instance, she is with him to gain status, or a visa, whereas if he were also Dominican these constructions of ulterior motives might be absent, understanding the relationship in terms of mutual trust or love and caring. Compounded
upon this, her national loyalty evolves into a matter of speculation, dating outside her race painting her perhaps as a race traitor and/or traitor to her country. This was similar to Joanna’s perceptions of how her partner Bryan was perceived. She resented the idea that because he is in a relationship with a White woman, he is then assumed to have self-hate issues, or be labeled a Tom. For both Julia and Bryan, outsiders perceived them as being somehow deficient in their own culture or race because of dating cross racially.

This intersection of race and power becomes further complicated by patriarchal assumptions of sexuality. For many, the sight of Julia and her husband reflected what they construed as prostitution.

…because the sex industry and tourism is so big in my country, a woman, a dark Dominican woman with a White man, it doesn’t matter where he comes from, is prostitution. You know, he is with her for sex and she is with him because money or gifts or advantages she is expecting to get from the relationship.

She is perceived here as occupying one the most marginal positions one can assign to a woman. Her marital intimacy becomes a commodity that is bought and sold, under the auspices of sexual deviance and crime. This demoralization of women of color in their associations with white men, has a long historical background of exploitation.

She discussed her own battle against this perception: “…in some environments I tried very hard to emphasize my class background, my educational background, you know, so people wouldn’t think of me as completely a disempowered, uneducated woman…”

The Locale of Perception

To understand this experience it is necessary to account for the varying ideologies of race between the US and Latin America. Manuel mentions this disconnect in how race is conceptualized in the US compared to his experience in Puerto Rico:
In the United States…if you’re not White you’re Black. You can be Puerto Rican, you can be Chinese, you can be anything, but you’re Black. You’re a minority. That’s that period.

These stringent lines are often challenging to many arriving from Latin America where a mixture of racial heritage is celebrated. Puerto Ricans who are considered light-skinned on the Island are no longer judged by the same standards of Whiteness on the mainland, quickly forcing them into the Non-White categorization of the US. The Black versus White racial polarity of the US system divides and confuses the status of Puerto Ricans (Flores 1993). Racism in Puerto Rico exists within a covert ideology often cloaked in discussions of social class and colonial status. Instead in the US they experience the change to an openly racist society where discussions of race take place in language of color and ethnicity (Jorge 1979).

Manuel makes distinctions between how other Puerto Ricans react to him dating a White woman based on if they are Island born or born in the US. He says:

Here (in the US) Puerto Ricans date Puerto Ricans. There’s a stereotype for every race…but they can’t see that you know, she is not White or Black or whatever. She’s just unique and they can’t see that. They can’t see through it.

Both Reese and Beth reported having different perceptions of others reactions in Puerto Rico as opposed to here. Beth emphasized that here she doesn’t think that people visibly notice their ethnic differences, however she emphasized that her experience varied when visiting Manuel’s family in Puerto Rico:

…when I went to Puerto Rico, I did feel like people were staring, you know. But I could kinda understand. ‘Cause I’m in their territory, you know? You understand what I’m saying? So I could kinda understand. But here, no. Not at all.

Reese extended this perception, citing a difference between her experience with Puerto men and Puerto Rican women:
She talks about how Joseph’s “guy friends” are more accepting because they think it’s cute or fun. She reduces this to a flirty type of acceptance, based on sexuality or attractiveness. The inability to appeal to Puerto Rican women in this manner leaves her feeling outside of the community. In fact, patriarchal ideals of competing for sexual attention acts as a divisive factor between her and other women. This is not uncommon in the beauty contest sexist ideology that pits women against other women, ignoring the patriarchal power that placed all of them in that position of judging value through beauty and sexuality.

For John, how he felt others perceived him and his partner differed between races:

Definitely there’s a lot more challenges in an interracial relationship. Me and her have observed that when we’re out, just walking or holding hands, people like kinda give us different looks, we just know that they’re thinking that being in an interracial couple is just kinda weird or something, like whenever we go to the mall we just see, usually older people, and usually older Asian people and older Black people, they just kinda look at us. It’s mostly the older ones, not so much them (White people), it’s people from my race and people from her race. Yeah, White people don’t say much.

I asked John why he felt people with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds reacted more severely when seeing him and Kelly together than other groups, for example, Whites. He responded:

I don’t have a real answer to that. As far as Asian people, they are very traditional, and they want their culture to survive. They see a nice looking Asian girl and they want a nice looking Asian guy with her and they want to see nice looking Asian kids. I think they see that (us) as a challenge.

He elaborates later on this in relation to African Americans:

I talked with my dad about certain things like this before and he told me from his experience and from what older people think, that they don’t like to see change. Even if it
was, even if I was doing something totally out of place of what a stereotypical Black person would do, like they would see that as me kinda abandoning my identity of being African American. I think that they see us together and they think that I’m abandoning their whole cultural thing, they think I’m abandoning or neglecting their culture cause I’m with an Asian girl. It’s not true.

Interestingly, this may suggest that the reactions of various racial groups changes according the identities in the relationship. For instance, White participants whose partners are from a racial background of color did discuss feeling more of a reaction from other Whites. This is not surprising considering how racism functions in the US. Rooted in the legacy of anti-miscegenation laws, marriages between people of color were never policed as violently as those between Whites and people of color. Maybe there is a lack of vested interest; these relationships do not challenge the survival of Whiteness.

Discussing John’s observation more in depth, specifically the resistance of other African Americans and Asians, it seems this may represent a resistance, as he states, to losing their culture. Refusal of assimilation or incorporation represents a resistance to White cultural supremacy. John himself is biracial as mentioned earlier, coming from both an African American and Filipino background. His appearance reflects largely his African American heritage and he and his partner are easily identified as interracial. I state this physical appearance to contextualize the reactions he discusses.

John’s partner, Kelly reinforced John’s sentiments. She felt most marginalized from other Chinese people or Asians because of her relationship:

(Being seen in public is) Fine except for if I see middle aged Oriental adults, if we’re holding hands or anything, I automatically let go. Even if they haven’t seen me yet, I will let go if I see them first because I know that traditional Orientals, they have this big view on dating white or black, especially black people.

Throughout the interview Kelly felt very constrained and affected by not only what she describes as her “traditional Chinese family” but also by what the larger Asian
community communicates about their relationship. Emphasized in this quote is not only the stigmatization of dating someone who is white or black, but “especially blacks.” It is obvious the acceptance of each is different. This is discussed later in depth as she explores the issue of skin color in her culture. She talks about letting go of his hand when seeing older Asian people, even people she does not know.

Coming to (name of university) I was afraid of what Asians would say. I grew up with mostly white people so I was afraid of Asians, I mean I usually don’t care what others think but I was just scared of what their perception was, that they wouldn’t accept me because I was with him. But otherwise everybody else is ok with it, now Asians are Ok with it too.

Kelly contradicts how much she is affected by this. Often she reaffirms that she does not care what others think, but then repeatedly shares her fears of others perceptions. For Kelly, this stigma or alienation was an internal battle of marginalization she continued to fight with. She felt John was more prepared:

He’s been warned about what society’s going to think of him, he’s experienced it, and he’s gone back to his parents asking them why things happen, why people have prejudice against them. He’s used to it per say, so when I had my problems coming into the relationship he understood, he didn’t get mad at me for it, and he knew it was going to happen. His parents warned him about it so he’s very understanding.

She related John’s understanding directly to him being biracial, and his parents having experienced similar experiences to them. John has shared with her his experience as a starting point for them:

John’s taught me a lot about not caring about other people’s perceptions, what other people think, he’s opened my eyes more than other relationship. I knew about racism and I knew how big it was but I didn’t know to what effect he had it until I met him and we went through our relationship problems solely based on our color. I mean every relationship has their problems, but half of our problems deal with our color

Although Kelly emphasized here the problems in their relationship due to the difference in their races, she mentions these problems as external problems, such as
hiding their relationship from her family, or dealing with looks from others. She located these experiences as part of a racist system.

Other couples differed in feeling this stigma. Christy, a White woman dating an African American male, shared that she had never perceived any looks or attention from others around them. She did however speculate whether or not her partner would give the same answer. Similarly, Paul and Melissa both expressed never having felt marginalized publicly. As mentioned, Paul is very light skinned and not visibly identifiable as Puerto Rican, in fact in our discussion he shared that he labels his race as White “cause that’s the color of my skin.” This issue of skin color came up for Paul later in the interview. He expressed curiosity about whether his and Melissa’s experiences of discrimination would be different if he were more visibly Puerto Rican:

I always wonder if, if I looked like a Puerto Rican. You know, like the typical, what a Puerto Rican should look like… You know that’s what people say…And like if I were more darker skinned and things like that. I wonder if, if, maybe people would look at us and we would see those stares… I never (know) whether people know I’m Puerto Rican by sight or not; or whether they suspect.

This seemed to be the trend found through the interviews. The more visibly different racially the couple was, the more they perceived stares and negative or curious reactions. Unlike Paul, Julia and her husband are visibly marked as interracial. Julia describes her husband as “he’s a White as you can come” and herself as very “African looking.” Because of this visible identification they receive many looks and stares from others, although Julia describes these looks as not always looks of distaste but at times of apparent curiosity or interest.
It’s a Family Thing

This is not intended however to reduce the experiences of the couples to a question of skin color. Interactions within the couples as well as with their friends and their families were much more intricate and cannot be understood only in terms of skin color. To do so ignores the many dimensions of these individuals, families, and backgrounds. Language, culture, and religion had a significant place in how they conceptualized themselves and their partners. Manuel found this language barrier both difficult and comforting when introducing Beth into his family, “It was quite a culture shock having her in the family, ‘cause of the language barrier.”

He also says later:

…it first kind of brought them together, because they couldn’t actually speak the language. They had to act it out. At the beginning, you know, so instead of telling her, you know, we really like you, they’d give her a hug or a kiss or something like that.

We see here how cultural differences were in fact used to build intimacy and understanding between Beth and his family. Contrary to how society problematizes this experience, the situation of Beth and Manuel actually illustrates the building of a space between, neither comprising whom they are, but instead finding a third expression to communicate how they feel. When cultural or linguistic differences hamper communication, a person’s physicality somehow sidesteps this possible “barrier” and through intimacy and affection enables a relationship. Beth built upon this:

…His family was here from Puerto Rico and they were all speaking Spanish and, at times, yeah, I did feel uncomfortable, but you know, like in a way I felt like that was my fault and I should learn the language. I love him and I love his family so why not?

Many of the couples shared beautiful stories of their families such as these, stories of creating space and acceptance. Although each felt some tensions with at least one side
of their families, most of these tensions seemed transitional. This was not the situation of all interracial couples found in the literature; many experience severe isolation as a result of whom they have chosen for a partner. The respondents here thus far have seen problems with their families as struggles not deciding factors of their relationship.

Kelly also attributed her families lack of acceptance largely to cultural issues:

I’m sure they’d prefer me to stick with Chinese but the next best would be somewhere in the oriental region, not like Filipino or Louse, but like Japanese, Korean. But it’s preferably if they are within the Chinese culture and the Chinese race because my parents want me to have a background that I am related with and black people have been the least liked, culturally by all Orientals... It’s not as much as a race thing as it is a cultural thing, like he won’t adapt or fit in. My mom said that she wants someone who speaks Chinese. He started learning Chinese last year but it didn’t go to well.

She mentions here that a large part of her parent’s lack of acceptance is directly related to the continuance of culture, someone who would speak Chinese, or have a similar cultural background. This doesn’t deny the earlier perceptions of African Americans that she voices or the importance of skin color in her culture:

Being from a traditional Chinese family I am not allowed to date until after college and since I was little girl black people would be the ones that would joke about us to marry because they wouldn’t really prefer us to marry black people..

Later in the interview she expands on this undesirability:

I know that it is difficult for oriental people because there is this idea in the oriental race of whitening the race, so it’s not only that he’s African American, but that he’s darker and we want the race to be as light as possible. So, I know my parents aren’t racist at all but there is this issue that’s he’s dark, we think our women should be as light as possible.

Throughout the US and all over the world, there has been this privileging of light skin over dark skin, a desire of whitening the race. Notice Kelly doesn’t label her parents as racist, she reflects this as a larger system of privilege, one privileging white skin.

Joanna had various experiences with her mother when introducing her at first to the idea of dating interracial. Her current partner who is African American is not the first
Black man she has dated. She recalled an experience from high school when telling her mother she was going to a dance with an African American boy:

I think she said something like, you know, she sounded disappointed that we were thinking about going, and then she said something about, you know, "It's not fair to children," or something, "It's not fair to the children," something like that. Eventually that came out, which I thought was ridiculous, because obviously we had just met each other. We weren't, you know, we were in high school. That wasn't even something on our radar at all. And that was I think, her way of expressing her concern, in a more acceptable way, other than saying: "I don't want you to date him." Because she definitely thinks of herself as, you know, somebody who doesn't care about people's color, so that was a way to say it without looking like a racist, I guess. Um, but she eventually accepted it.

She characterizes the situation now with her current partner as at times having racial misunderstandings:

I would say the problem with my family is more that they're kind of, um, ignorant in terms of what makes our life experiences different by way of being White versus being a person of color. They kind of get that racism exists, but they think of maybe extreme examples. They probably don't understand everyday implications of race. They don't understand their own privilege as White people. So it's more, it more ends up in sort of, cross-racial interaction that is maybe a little confused at times. But in general they're accepting of the relationship.

All of the couples, without exception, have had to at some point in their relationship challenge these racial misperceptions, or misunderstandings. Their families and others around them demonstrated varying levels of acceptance, but this acceptance or lack of did not hinder their feelings for one another. None of the couples found this stigmatization as a “problem” of their relationship, but rather as a problem of others inability to understand or look past racist ideologies. Most important however, is to note that these couples did not define their intimacy accordingly. Instead, they recognized this marginalization and how their feelings surpassed them.
“Among the most important of the myths to which Whites cling is the United States is a land of equal opportunity for all racial and ethnic groups” (Feagin, Vera & Batur, 2001:194).

It is a privilege of Whiteness to deny the continued existence of racism in the US, a privilege that is not available to people of color who on a daily basis are confronted with very real consequences of race. How does this change when a White person is in a relationship with a person of color? Are they forced to see how racist structures influence not only their partner but also their relationship with their partner?

In these interviews the topics of discrimination and racism were frequently discussed, although using different language at times. Some evidence from the interviews suggests that being in an interracial relationship interrupted beliefs of a color-blind society. It seemed that a few of the White respondents discussed and talked about issues of race not from a perspective citing the declining significance of race, but instead from very critical perspectives, questioning institutionalized racism. Dating cross-racially forced them to face up to assumptions about race they had held their entire lives, seeing things and asking questions that arose as a direct result of this intimacy. Other respondents shared how their White partner has expanded racial perceptions since their relationship. Julia discussed in depth the experiences of her and her husband, a White male. Often her husband has been challenged in his own ideas about race because of his relationship with Julia. Although he himself prior to his marriage had some awareness of
the importance of race in American history, Julia believes that their relationship has forced him to see and understand things that he would not have to otherwise:

…I think he’s had to learn in the relationship more. He's more on the liberal side so he's very aware of the importance of race in American history. But I think he has to become more radical. More aware, as we have, you know, since we married and since he, we have had to interact together. Because I think there are things that he has not seen or even perceived or questions that he would have never asked himself about, you know, like three years ago when we purchased our car, it was so evident to him that, for some reason, I mean, they were taking our credit record. And of course, at that point I didn't have any credit record in this country….I had had a credit card probably for, like, six months or so. You know, when we actually went to buy a second car. And these people, they didn't want to put me in the, in the contract. And, and he, he was troubled by it. Like, why was that their first response? I mean, like, why, because - I even at that moment didn't - even didn't understand the system very well. How, you know, credit reports and all those - of course, I was clean, because for six months I had the credit card. But I think he was troubled by, I guess, the way he thought I was treated. Like, he expected probably, in the worst case scenario, I was his wife, and he expected some, you know -- "This is my wife," or "How are you gonna work this out for us?" He didn't feel that, and I think he was troubled. So little incidents like that have, I think, promoted in him some, you know, "What's going on here?" And I don't think he would necessarily have asked himself even, you know, those type of questions …So I think he had raised consciousness before, but now by being with me, he has had to deal with situations that has made some things, at least, troubling in his head.

Her husband has been confronted with situations that defied his perceptions of Whiteness, racism, and people of color, such as she recounted in their experience buying a car. Interestingly, Julia recounts how he expected, even in the worst-case scenario, for them to understand Julia was his wife and apparently treat her accordingly. It almost seems as though for that moment he felt his Whiteness should cover them both, that Julia would receive treatment not consistent with the racist treatment people of color often encounter in situations such as this, but consistent with her being the wife of a White man. This was obviously not the result he found. Often times he has witnessed and been forced to realize how Julia is treated differently than himself by others. Julia shared that these encounters were not only isolated to this event:

We haven't seen each other since we left in the morning, and we decide, "Why don't we have dinner in, you know, in ------," or something like that. In many occasions, I arrive first. You know, I'm in the table, you know, just waiting for him. And I have felt people being less nice. You know, I don't know, it's just like, less cordial. Once he comes, the treatment
improves immediately. In fact, we joke about it. I say, "You see the wages of Whiteness?" And he's like, "Don't come with that again!" But he actually has witnessed that.

Stories such as these permeated the consciousness of other couples as well. Joanna, a White woman who is dating an African American male, also has had similar conscious raising experiences. In the following recollection her mother, who was discussed earlier in the interview, also witnessed this troubling occurrence:

One instance I remember is my mom and he and I came down to Florida and we were driving back home, and we were gonna stop overnight, and we were hoping to get to this sort of larger town, Paduka, Kentucky; but my mom was really tired, and she wanted to get off. She didn't, we had driven a long way already, and she's older, and she gets really uncomfortable, and it's not good for her to drive so long. So she wanted to pull off at this really small town, and we did. And it was just, that was the most awful experience, probably of my life. We went to dinner at this sort of little family restaurant and I distinctly remember this White couple, the man in particular, staring at our table the whole night with this just kind of blank look on his face. And Bryan, you know, was very uncomfortable in that situation. He really didn't talk at dinner. Like, he only spoke when spoken to, pretty much. My mom was trying to sort of pretend like everything was fine and keep the conversation light. It was just very, very tense. And, when we got back to our room, she and I were in a room and he was in a room, and she was just, she said something to me like, you know, "You're just gonna have to explain this to me." Like, "I just don't get it," pretty much, you know, just - and he was really upset because, you know, he felt, literally, you know, afraid of being there. And, it was very uncomfortable for me, because I was in the middle of that whole situation, too.

These experiences confront individuals, and at times their families, with questions about race that, because of being White, they have never asked. If Joanna’s partner had not been with them, where to stop would not have been a concern for either of the two women, at least not for reasons concerning their race. Joanna was extremely affected by Bryan’s fear. Their intimacy made it impossible for her to ignore and not give legitimacy to his uncomfortable feeling. Other respondents had similar recollections, and for the most part seemed critical of these experiences. For others these situations caused slight disconnect between couples. In one case, Paul discussed this disconnect as it related to his own experience of discrimination and Melissa’s lack of understanding:
I had the worst boss you could ever imagine… The day he found out I was Puerto Rican he was kinda joking but he was saying, “If I woulda found out you were Puerto Rican, I wouldn’t have even hired you in the first place.” And that just started a whole…everyday he’d say something…I hated going there…I ended up quitting like a month later, but it was pretty bad. (Melissa) she knew about it. She could tell I was upset…some of the things I would tell her she would be like “Oh wow that was bad” but other things, you know, she couldn’t figure out why that would be offensive.

Melissa didn’t seem to reflect the critical views of American racism that some White women in the sample did. Others shared a kind of awakening, realizing the treatment of their non-White partners and internalizing these feelings, making them challenge their own assumptions. There was no evidence of this negotiation in their relationship. When discussing the possibility of children Melissa stated “…we both agree that we want them to know, you know, to really be aware of their culture, like Paul's, you know from Puerto Rico, we want them to be really aware of that and to be, to know a lot about it, and to be a little Spanish and that kind of thing.” Although she emphasizes to some degree here Paul’s background she talks about her proposed children as being “a little Spanish.” It is critical to question her use of the word Spanish, to locate the ethnicity of proposed children. She identifies this background according to language, also speaking of it as if it was something extra, tacked on. In addition, by using the word Spanish to identify Paul’s Puerto Ricanness, she is able to leave out the colonized history of being Puerto Rican, instead emphasizing Europeanness (Frankenberg, 1993).

One respondent, Christy, a white woman dating Jim, an African American male, did support the thesis of a color-blind society. She herself did not feel that racism was still a large part of the US and relegated it to isolated incidents. She had however experienced isolation from her family because of her relationship: “They told me growing up, you better never bring home a Black man.”
Her partner of almost two years is African American and she shared that her family continues to maintain them at distance, for example they will not ask about him or invite him to their home, although they are polite to him. She however did not label this experience as racism.

The respondents each handled this challenging of privilege differently. Whereas some became critically aware of racism and the significance of race in the US, others somewhat ignored how race was negotiated within their relationship and outside of it. This was related to the extent that one’s culture was welcomed into the relationship. For example, in the situation of Melissa and Paul, Paul has to a large degree “left his culture at the door.” Although a pseudonym is used here, Paul’s actual name is a Puerto Rican name, able to be translated or pronounced in English. Melissa uses the English pronunciation of his name to refer to him. At times she also refers to Salsa music as “your music” for “you people.” In doing this she separates from her life, or their life, parts of his culture. Although I am not able to thoroughly understand how this cultural space was negotiated from the interviews or the process by which Paul and Melissa’s household began to function as an American household, this space between their lives and Paul’s culture was obvious from the interview.
CHAPTER 7
WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

It seemed prior to beginning the interviews that it may be difficult to discuss with the couples not only their current perceptions of race, but especially the projected experiences of their children’s situated race. I underestimated the degree to which couples would project future expectations for their children. Many of the couples had engaged each other in comprehensive conversations regarding the culture, appearance, and possible experiences of racism of their children. This section of analysis focuses primarily on how couples discussed and negotiated their expectations for their child’s appearance and their “protective strategies” for socializing their children not only as children of color, but also as biracial or multiracial, understanding this as something specific and unique.

You Look Just Like…

Having biracial or multiracial children challenges to a small degree the idea of having children “that look just like you” for the couples. This seemed more prevalent among White women, however was not isolated to them. Joanna touched on some issues of having a biracial child as a White woman, one discussed here being the disconnect perhaps between her skin and theirs:

Race has not really negatively impacted our relationship with each other, but this is just, like, the first time where I felt like there was a disconnect there. But I was talking about, you know, if you have biracial children, because of the way out society is set up, um, you know when you're White, you're taught to see anything that isn't White like you as something else. And so, for me, I was trying to explain to him what it would be like as a White mother to look at, you know, children who had brown skin. Not in a way that it wouldn't feel like they were mine, but just in a way that kind of disconnects that in my head for some - I was trying - and I still don't feel like I can exactly articulate that, what that feeling is, that I, that I thought would happen. But he got really offended at that. Like, I would think that they...
weren't mine, or -- not literally, but, um, he didn't really understand what I was saying in that moment, um, so --

Joanna labels this feeling as a physical perception that is the result of her socialization into Whiteness. Later she elaborates, recognizing that this in no way would discourage her ability to be a mother or to love her children:

I just think - and, of course, you know, I, I can't even anticipate what it would be like to have a child, you know, because people talk about having just this intense connection immediately. Of course, I know I would feel that with my children. I know that I would be a good mother. Protective, take care of them, like fulfill -- take care of all their needs. All of that. It's not about that. Or it's not about something that would be a problem in our relationship with them. It's more just a way of seeing them as not, like, I wouldn't think they looked like me. You know what I'm saying? It's more so the physicalness of their appearance, versus my own. And, I guess, his.

Christy also voiced this perception of a physical difference between her children and herself, “I wonder if when people see us, you know people we don’t know, like in the supermarket, I feel like they won’t think my kids look like me…”

Other couples discussed with each other how their children may look, Julia and her husband at times joke with one another “We, we joke, you know, make jokes, but I don't know how good they are, but, um, you might say, I don't want your skin, I mean, I want my children to have my skin color….”

Julia went on to discuss the possibility of her child having White skin, and cited this as perhaps somewhat beneficial to them. She pointed out that in the Dominican Republic White skin is privileged so being lighter than herself might be an advantage to the child.

In this, Julia is recognizing the racial hierarchal structure, and assessing her child’s well-being on that ranking. Julia contradicts her earlier statement, jokingly stating she
wants her children to have her skin, and distinguishes between this desire and the benefits of having lighter skin. Kelly also discussed this contradiction of skin color:

(We talk about) What our children will look like, whether they’re going to be more black, if their more black or darker in skin how much prejudice, how they’re looked upon by my family members mostly because I know people other than my family members aren’t as important to me in their perspectives. I know that if the children were less dark than he is, then they’d be more accepting than if they were more dark.

Her partner, John who himself is Afro-Asian also wondered what his children would look like:

…we discuss a lot about if we were to have kids what they would look like. I’m not sure about that, like it’s weird, a lot of my mom’s friends, some of them are mixed, interracial relationships, their kids vary so much, some kids look more Asian, you can’t even tell that they are African American, some look more African American you can’t tell that their Asian immediately. I really don’t know, I guess, it’s undecided, I have no idea.

John and Kelly differ in how they conceptualize these conversations. Whereas John relates this to wondering if the child would look more Asian or African American, Kelly concerns this with how dark or light the skin color of her children may be. Again this reflects the privileging of white skin within her culture that she discussed earlier.

**Heads Up to My Kids**

A few of the couples also mentioned looking at pictures of biracial children with their partner pointing them out and sharing them. Christy specifically illustrated this experience with her partner and discussed how cute she and partner thought biracial children were. Joanna also talks about looking at these pictures with her partner, although she includes a quite critical analysis of the repercussions in doing this:

…one of the kind of funny things that we do is if we see a cute picture, maybe in an advertisement of a biracial kid, we’ll point it out to each other. You know, I mean, I hate to, I don't want to fall into that whole, "Oh, biracial kids are just beautiful, 'cause they're the best of both worlds." You know, that to me sounds a little cliche and kind of silly. And I think
you have to be careful of that 'cause you don't want to, um, you don't want to get in the habit of like, sort of diminishing the beauty of Blackness just by itself without, you know, this while light skin/dark skin kind of thing that people have fallen into, with a privileged light skin and a disadvantaged dark skin.

She cites in this a possible disadvantaging of Black skin, that by emphasizing the light skin component of being biracial, one may again be privileging light skin. She later shared a story of a friend of hers:

I have a friend. She's Black and her husband is White, and she told me that when she was in the hospital having her son, um, that people weren't connecting that as a family. Like, wouldn't connect her husband with her. And that was part of her decision of why to change her last name to his last name. Because she needed people to see them as a family unit, because it wasn't always automatically apparent to people. And so, even down to something like that. Like maybe as a feminist you wouldn't want to change your last name, but for the sake of, you know, your family, you, just safety-wise, you might need to. Uh, like she was worried that -- I don't know if she was worried that somebody would lose her maybe or like that. But it was just, it was something on her mind that people weren't connecting, that's her baby and he was her husband, in the hospital. So I guess in terms of birthing, that could be an impact. I mean, if they, again, if people look at you and they decide that, you know, they're opposed to your lifestyle, that can always impact the treatment that you get. You know, my doctors will ask - they could treat me like crap because of that. Going to day care, same thing…. Like I would have to be on constant watch for any time my children left my home. Constant watch for, um, making sure that they were not being abused because of their, um, color. So I think, you know, as a White parent, if I was raising White kids, I know that I would raise White kids a lot differently knowing about racism the way I do now, too. So you should be as on watch. But it's just not as imperative. It's not about survival for your child in the same way that it is when you have a child of color.

It seems she uses this story to discuss not only the physical appearances of mother and child, but also connects this first to possible experiences with discrimination she may encounter, and finally to those of her children. Although awareness of racism is something that she states would be a part of what she would teach any child, she recognizes that for her children it is a matter of survival. This was a concern of many respondents, teaching their children about racism, being prepared to deal with their children’s experiences.

Manuel showed the most concern about having and raising children in the US.
“I don’t want any kids if you ask me, ‘cause I’m too concerned with what’s going on in the world to, I know what I went through growing up Puerto Rican….It’s just hard because I know he’s gonna go through so many rough times, if he, if we decided to have a kid here because of the mentality of people.” These feelings caused him confusion in decisions about children although Beth was adamant in her desire to have children:

I read an article that by the year 2050 Whites are going to be a minority in this, that kinda gives me hope…I’m kinda torn about the whole situation. Because I just don’t want them to suffer because of stupid fucking people…I don’t want my kid coming home and saying “Daddy some kid called me a s---.” You know what I'm saying? 'Cause all I'm gonna do, is gonna probably end up going to jail because I'm gonna go there and kill their Daddy.

He also felt these concerns would be further amplified by having a biracial child.

Disadvantage is gonna be ignorant people are gonna think less because he's not. And it can be the other way. It can be that he is not pure Puerto Rican, therefore the Puerto Ricans are not gonna like him. You know what I'm saying? Or, or maybe he doesn't speak Spanish as well as, you know, Jose in the corner, therefore he won't be able to hang out with the Puerto Ricans on the corner. Or, you know, maybe he has a different, slight accent because he knows Spanish and, you know, little Joey here, now won't want to play with him because, you know, he doesn't like the things that, like -- so those are the things.

This reflects a concern for not only being a Puerto Rican child but specifically a Puerto Rican and White child. He voices this fear of his child not fitting in to both places, being marked by both racial and ethnic backgrounds therefore not belonging in either. It becomes a question of authenticity, their child not being authentically Puerto Rican or White. However he felt this experience would be different if he were to raise his children in Puerto Rico as opposed to the US:

Because it's one less factor that I have to deal with. Not only I have to, you know, try to get my kids off the drugs and make sure he goes to school and all that kind of shit, but then I gotta make sure that he, you know, understands and knows his roots. Because people are gonna pick with him, pick on him, and you gotta be strong enough to be, I guess, strong
about it. You know what I'm saying? You can't let it get to you. ... Cause going back to one of the first points that I made: One of the first things that I noticed was when I moved here, was how Black and White things are. Completely differently.

Manuel again differentiates between the US racial system and Puerto Rico. He does not perceive these possible experiences of discrimination in Puerto Rico.

Other couples discussed this fear of racism and discrimination, however all of the couples made it clear that although they were concerned with these issues, it did not affect their decision whether or not to have children, only what kind of parent they would have to be as Joanna divulges:

Sure. Yeah. Um, I mean, no parents wants their children to go through painful experiences and I think I can be probably pretty certain that my child will have painful experiences. Both by the fact that he or she will be, you know, a person color and by the fact that they're biracial, that can post out some unique challenges of its own. People sort of questioning, um, you know their Blackness or their, they think they're too - you know, that can put them in a sort of like awkward liminal position between White and Black. Um, so, yeah, I guess it's both from that aspect of them being biracial and that aspect of them being, you know, non-White, quote/unquote, um, that, you know, White people will discriminate and maybe do hurtful things to them…But I - but that wouldn't stop me from having kids because I feel like you don't - I don't want to judge. I don't want to determine what my life actions will be on the basis of somebody else's ignorance and racism. You know, to me that's like, um, that's like getting into a system that you whole hearted - everything in your being is against. So, it wouldn't stop me…I guess I would say the major change would be just knowing that there's gonna be other considerations for me, um, as a parent of a biracial child. Feeling committed to know about, um, you know, Black culture, issues about racism. Not only for my partner's sake, but for, you know, if I have a child, for that child's sake. Like, for me that would be a must. That's not an option. That's a "you have to." You have to care, 'cause it's important. Um, down to things like, you know, I've seen so many times when people will, like, jack up their kids' hair, White parents jack up their kids' hair because they don't know about, you know, you shouldn't wash it every day, or the kind of product that you should put in it to take care of it, or the best way to style it.

Although Joanna communicates the importance and legitimacy of the child’s experiences being biracial, she does not allow this change her decisions but that there would be “other considerations.” She mentions how this commitment would surpass just the well-being of her partner and extend to a need for her child.
Raising a biracial child for many is an intricate negotiation between two cultures and races. John discusses here his perceptions of raising children in relationship to his own experiences:

The experiences I’ve gone through, if I were to have kids I’d probably want to go through the same actions and conversations that my dad has chosen for me. He’s tried really hard to explain I’m special, I’m unique, I’m the culture of two different ethnicities, and I should be really proud of that. And if I were to have kids, I know my dad, he didn’t come outright and say like these people are bad, he just said, John, there’s alot of things in the world that are unfair, and people are gonna try to hurt you behind your back, he just gave me a fore warning of what was going to happen. He told me if I had any problems I could go and talk to him. He always kept that line of communication open. I believe that I can tell my son or my daughter that they can expect these things, and I think just telling them is a big heads up, because they won’t feel surprised or shocked, or hurt as badly. And if they were hurt they could always come to me and talk to me about it. And I think the experiences that I’ve gone through, I don’t think that it was really hurtful or damaging, I think a lot of the stuff that I’ve been through was really a learning experience. I can just take it and assess it and use it later on. I’ll take those experiences and give them to my children to help them. And like I said, I think just kind of keeping the communication open and letting them, I know for a fact that I can’t be there to watch them if their hurt, and there are gonna be things that they are going to experience. I can’t shield them forever. But it’s getting better; my dad has told me that he’s seen it. Discrimination is dying and eventually it’s gonna come to a point where there’s gonna be a real minority(of discrimination). But you know, if they did come into contact with it, I would just try to help them along with dealing with it, making it more of a constructive thing than a destructive thing that could really hurt them. I wouldn’t be able to protect than and try to shield them, that would be really naive.

He uses his own experiences and conversations with his father to plan conversations with his children. His detailed narrative demonstrates how being biracial has forced him to consider race in a way that differs from those who are not from multiracial backgrounds. Also, he identifies himself as “the culture of two ethnicities.” By doing this he emphasizes a oneness in himself, that these two ethnicities have combined to form one third culture that is him. By using this language he refutes ideas of being incomplete or having a scattered identity.

Not One or the Other, But Completely of Both

One of the most consistent themes that concerned the participants was the issue of culture. Cultures being different, cultures being the same, losing or holding on to culture,
and most of all, sharing their cultures with their children. How does a couple help their child to realize that they are of two places, ethnicities, and races? These backgrounds are more than a history lesson for most, more than a place to visit in the summer, or cousins that talk differently. For many, their race or ethnicity carries with it important pieces of who they are, pieces they want their children to hold onto.

Almost all of the couples wanted their children to grow up knowing both cultures of their ethnicity or race. Most explored this as positive, bringing to the child a more complete world. Beth thought that if they could get past the hardships Manuel foreshadowed, they would give their child an experience that is all their own:

...if you pass through that all, that superficial stuff and you actually get to have a child -That child's gonna be blessed. That child, honestly, 'cause he's gonna have -The best of both worlds, if you ask me.

John also voiced how this completeness was important:

I totally believe that they should be accepting of whatever cultures they come from if they were biracial. I love experiencing those parts of my culture, African American, Asian. I talk to my mom and dad about my ancestors and how they came about …If I were to have a kid that was biracial I would want him to explore all aspects. I think it’s important, eventually they would be curious about it, and they’d want to feel like they can relate to not just one or other but to the whole thing. It makes you feel more like a unique person I guess. I would want them to open to all their cultures and ethnicities.

He cites the importance of children relating to the whole thing not just one or the other. This defies or objects to the current treatment of biracial children, the treatment that asks that child to pick. Instead he suggests a third space to exist in.
Kelly however differed from John in how she felt their children would be brought up:

They’re going to be raised up Chinese, because he’s more Asian since he’s half/ half. His sister’s more black cultured than Asian cultured. That’s why we get along so well because we’re both Asian cultured. And so we both discussed that in the culture issue it would be better if they were raised Chinese.

Contrary to the other interviews, Kelly places her child in one of the cultures, hers. She draws a distinction between John and his sister, calling his sister more “black cultured.” She assumes John is more like her, and that they will raise their children like her. Kelly found her culture constraining but at the same time wishes to continue this tradition for her next generation. These traditions are a centerpiece of Kelly’s life, one that she is not negotiating.

Joanna and her partner have verbalized this argument with one another:

Bryan and I, I remember, once had sort of a little argument. ’Cause my initial thought about having biracial children was that I was gonna teach them that they were black, and he was, like, ”No, you teach them that they’re white and black, like you are just as much a part of them as I am.” And so he was really more so, like, helping them understand their total identity. I understand that the intricacies of that, you know, having a sense of their own identity that’s not imposed from the outside.

Similar to Kelly, Joanna felt the child should be raised in one culture, however that culture was not her own. Joanna’s willingness to ignore the whiteness in her child might be attributed to feeling the lack of a culture in whiteness and directly disputing the privilege if whiteness. Melissa also believed it was more important to share with her children Paul’s culture but her thoughts demonstrated different sentiments than Joanna.

It’s more important I guess to share his culture with them with them than it is mine just because, it doesn’t seem like being American is as, um, like important, you know, to people as other people. People that are from other cultures I guess.
This statement is loaded with implications not only for how Melissa understands herself and culture, but also her understanding of Paul’s. First, she does not associate her culture with being white or from a specific European background, instead she associates it as being American. This suggests that Paul’s culture is not American, although Paul technically is an American citizen by birth, as is everyone in his family. By emphasizing a national affiliation she downplays the racial differences or ethnic differences. Also she demonstrates that she associates Americans with whiteness, by differentiating other cultures as something other than American.

She parallels somewhat Joanna feeling of a lack of whiteness and culture. She mentions that “being American” is as important to people as being from another culture. This suggests she perceives a lack of a White American culture. This is a consistent theme throughout the literature, however evidence also suggests that while many whites feel a lack of culture, the importance of whiteness is repeatedly enforced.

All of the respondents whose relationships consisted of different linguistic backgrounds, repeatedly voiced the importance of holding on to those languages. As with the other respondents, Julia voiced a strong desire for her child to retain her Spanish language, as well as spend summers in her country.

If we have a child here it will first be an American, whether we like it or not… I think if It’s born here and has a white American father from the Midwest with family in the Midwest that will definitely be shaping the action of the child. And if I marry a Dominican from New York for example, it’s a very different situation… we will both speak Spanish…and we will both be immigrants, having an American born child here. But even how people look at us and how that influences our own behavior is different, you know, two Dominicans as opposed to a Dominican and an American. In fact by law it’s different too.

When she states “by law it’s different too” she is referring to the granting of citizenship and rights to the child in the United States. The couples repeatedly discussed
how this attempted retention of culture would be difficult. As Julia states, the child will first be American whether they like it or not. This attempt to keep culture sacred and continued in the face of a larger push to assimilate is a battle. A battle fought everyday, saying that there are other ways. This battle denies one-dimensional ideologies of race and ethnicity and challenges us to change our thinking about identity. These couples negotiate this space every day.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

The lack of research and deficiency of language makes clear the importance of rethinking and expanding conceptions and definitions of race. By excluding biracial and multiracial identities from our focus we inadvertently reinforce racial classification systems based on exclusivity and one-dimensional identities. The voices of the respondents in this study highlight their need to talk about issues of race in complex, critical dialogues. For many, issues within their relationships and the perceived trials of their children shaped to large degree how they conceptualized themselves, not only as individuals, but as partners, and parents.

Using the symbolic interactionist paradigm, I emphasize how these individuals internalize their experiences, assign meaning to these experiences, and adjust their own self concepts accordingly. How the respondents developed their identities within their relationships was directly related to their perceptions of discrimination and marginalization. Furthermore, how they foresaw issues of childhood and raising children most notably was influenced by this perception. The anticipated marginalization of their children’s was often inextricably linked to their own marginalization. In addition, most recognized that the kind of parents they would be could not be separated from the reality of raising biracial and multiracial children.

The importance of race, both historically through legacy and daily implications of, can not be ignored in this research. Each participant entered not only this interview, but their relationship with a situated privilege or lack of privilege based on their own
racial or ethnic background. Critical Race Theory highlights the necessity of recognizing
the importance race continues to maintain in understanding the experiences of each
couple.

Many of the respondents challenged hegemonic definitions of race either through
their own racial identification or in discussing the identification of their children. For
none was this a simple issue, congruent to existing notions. It seemed that challenging
those notions was necessary to negotiating racial space within themselves and in their
relationships.

Most resented the politicized meaning or assumptions that others had regarding
them and their partners. They talked at length about their encounters with family,
friends, acquaintances and even strangers. The importance they assigned to these
encounters was obvious through their dialogues, however all emphasized that this was
not a problem of the couple, but rather a problem with others’ discrimination. Although
these created “hurdles” they assumed would not be part of an intra-racial relationship,
their reasons for being together were no different than these counterparts.

Love, understanding, trust, and comfort were the foundations of these couples. It
is not until they stepped outside of their intimacy that legacy and political meaning
became attached. This is not to suggest however that “color” was not an issue. With the
exception of one participant, I did not hear from the couples that they don’t see race, or
that their love was color-blind. Race was a very real entity within their relationship,
negotiated, constructed, and adjusted constantly. Repeatedly, their own racial ideologies
were being challenged through interactions with their partners and the interactions of
themselves and their partners with others.
Furthermore, this negotiation was multiplied in conceptualizing themselves as parents of a biracial or multiracial child. The degree to which couples conceptualized not only having children, but the appearance and experiences of these children was remarkable. All had thought at times about how their children would look, what culture they would retain, and how they would prepare their children for possible discrimination. More so, these discussions took place between partners, verbally and often. They did not identify their children separate from either of their backgrounds and navigated this space intertwined within themselves as individuals and as a couple. Although none reported that their own marginalization as a couple would change their minds about having children, they recognized that this would shape what kind of parent they would have to be.

The perspective of biracial and multiracial identities needs to be not only included into our critical race literature but also into the studies of families. For years feminism has been backtracking, attempting to reconcile its earlier ignorance of women of color and the exclusive nature of “white women’s feminism.” We must also cite this deficiency within the family literature. It is not adequate to explore families of color and interracial families as slight variations of the hegemonic family or as transitory states. This needs to be at the center of our agenda.

This research is needed to inform policy regarding interracial families and the treatment of biracial and multiracial individuals. In addition, school curriculums, anti-racist and anti-sexist education can not be developed ignoring these identities. Pushing these families and individuals into one or the other classifications is detrimental not only to their own identities but also to anti-racist agendas.
This study has several limitations worth mentioning. First, the sample group is relatively small. Although each interview was very rich in dialogue, expanding the number of respondents could only add insight. In addition, this is not a comprehensive cross sample of all races and ethnicities. Given a larger sample and more diversity, I could probably begin to isolate trends of various couples.

Many of the couples interviewed also tended to be younger. Although the age range was between twenty and forty many more were towards the younger side of this spectrum. Taking into consideration the changing nature of US racism, older interracial couples would possibly be able to expand the understanding of marginalization and discrimination in a way that younger couples can not.

I only started to begin to feel like I knew how to conduct these interviews after they were finished. Talking about these intersections of race, intimacy, gender and family was extremely difficult. Often the way I would phrase questions or use probes was ineffective, missing entirely the issues most important to the couples.

Future research should include this larger sample as suggested here, while simultaneously ensuring an adequate diversity in the respondents. Also, conversations with biracial and multiracial individuals about their experiences inside and outside of their home may provide a different perspective than restricting conversation to that of potential parents. Also, the families of interracial couples and biracial and multiracial people would provide valuable insight into the pressures that the individuals might be subjected to, as well as the possible backlash of racism that may be inflicted upon those who are close to the couple. In addition, the terms upon which acceptance is offered by
the family in the face of childbirth or not is extremely important to the implications for the well-being of interracial families.

These changing families are our past, present and future. It now becomes imperative that we recognize them.
APPENDIX A
SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

How do you define your race? How do you identify your partner’s race?

Do you identify yourself as being part of an interracial intimate relationship?

Can you talk to me about your experiences with your family or your partner’s family as a result of being part of an interracial relationship?
*Experiences with friends
*Coworkers

How do you feel when you are with your partner in public?

How has being in an interracial couple affected where the couple has chosen to live or how and with whom the couple has chosen to socialize?

Do you have any children? If yes, are these children with your current partner? How do you identify the race or ethnicity of your children?

What are your thoughts about having children? Can you tell me about your desire to or not to have children?

What discussions have you and your partner had regarding reproduction? What are the decisions you have made? What about decisions and discussions regarding reproduction in past experiences or relationships?

Do the racial identities in your relationship affect your and your partner’s decision to have children, not to have children? Can you tell me about this?
*Do you have concerns regarding the child’s experience as biracial? Does this affect your decision.
*Does your experience as an interracial couple affect these decisions?
Experiences with family and friends?

To what extent have your intentions regarding reproduction changed as a result of being in an interracial relationship?

In what ways, if any, do you feel that your reproductive experience within an interracial couple would differ from the experience in an intra-racial couple, both partners are of the same race?
This is a new area of discussion and not much research has been done within these issues. I have asked you questions that I thought might be pertinent to the experiences of reproductive issues as part of an interracial relationship. Are there any suggestions you may have as to what might be important to ask or discuss? Would you like to discuss with me any other concerns or thoughts, perhaps something that we have not touched upon that you feel is important?
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a study exploring the experiences of interracial couples in America by Amanda Moras, Department of Sociology, at the University of Florida. The purpose of this research is to explore concerns and decision making within interracial couples with regards to reproduction.

If you decide to participate in the study, I would like to talk with you about your experience as a partner in an interracial relationship and how these experience have affected your decisions about and feelings regarding reproduction.

The interview is planned to last for approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped. You are free to stop the interview and cease participation in the study at any time without penalty.

Any information obtained in connection with the study that can be identified with you will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The following steps will be taken to protect the identity of all participants: a) Names in the transcripts of the audiotapes will be replaced by aliases and questionnaires will bear only aliases as identifiers b) All audiotapes will be erased within one year after they have been transcribed and after the transcriptions have been checked for errors.

There are no anticipated risks to your participation in this study and there will be no compensation or other direct benefits to you as a participant. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in this study and that you have read and understood the information in this informed consent form. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relations with the researcher, the Department of Sociology, or the University of Florida. If you decide to participate, you are completely free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without any penalty.

If you have additional questions, please contact Amanda Moras, Department of Sociology, 3307 Turlington Hall, 392-0251 ext. 135. You may also contact Dr. William Marsiglio at (352) 392-0251 ext. 233. Questions and concerns about the research participants rights can be directed to the University of Florida Institutional Review Board office PO Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611-2250.

Thank you very much!

I have read the procedure described above and I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ________________
Principal Investigator Signature _________________ Date ________________
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Beth Moras is currently continuing her education at the University of Florida, pursuing a PhD in sociology. Her areas of study include racial and ethnic relations, with specific sensitivities to issues of families and genders.